

knowledge, legitimating professional practice, shoring up bourgeois values and cultivating an aesthetic sense of scientific work. Because Bömelburg fails to recognize these alternatives and resistances, hers is an implausible story of portrait photography's role and significance in psychiatric practice.

**Eric J Engstrom,**  
Humboldt University, Berlin

**Bengt Jangfeldt, *Axel Munthe: the road to San Michele***, translated by Harry Watson, London and New York, I B Tauris, 2008, pp. ix, 383, illus., £25.00 (hardback 978-1-84511-720-7).

Dr Axel Munthe (1857–1949) is best known as the author of *The story of San Michele* (London, John Murray, 1929), a book translated into some forty languages, which has fascinated readers across the world. In a semi-fictional autobiography the elderly Munthe presented himself as an old hermit, retired from medical practice to a mystical retreat on the isle of Capri. The adventures and sentiments of the hero in *The story of San Michele* were a construction of an alternative life, that of an ideal physician, ever available to his patients, never charging for his services, modelling his life on St Francis, and a benevolent protector of animals. This book and probably also Munthe's earlier *Letters from a mourning city* (London, John Murray, 1887, 1899) about volunteer work during a cholera epidemic in Naples inspired many men and women to good deeds in medical service. Munthe did not publish in medical journals. His early fiction, however, provides some interesting glimpses into the practice of medicine a century ago.

Bengt Jangfeldt's biography *Axel Munthe: the road to San Michele* is a valuable contribution to the publications in English about the medical man Axel Munthe, who developed into a literary personality. Drawing on a treasure trove of Munthe's preserved private correspondence and other sources,

Jangfeldt has meticulously traced his life's journey and professional career. The younger son of an apothecary in Sweden, Munthe's brief medical education in Montpellier and Paris prepared him for work as an obstetrician, but he fashioned himself as a nerve doctor, claiming that he had trained under Jean-Martin Charcot at La Salpêtrière. His attempts to build a medical practice in Paris in the 1880s failed, but he was assisted to set up practice at Piazza di Spagna in Rome and became a sought-after physician among English, American and Scandinavian expatriates in the 1890s.

Munthe retired, a wealthy man, to the isle of Capri, where he would have his main residence for forty years. On Capri he had already built the Villa San Michele, presently a popular tourist attraction. In the private realm, Munthe experienced two failed marriages. With his English second wife Hilda, *née* Pennington Mellor, Munthe had two sons. For thirty years he maintained a close relationship with Queen Victoria of Sweden, a relationship lasting until her death in 1930. Munthe left Capri in 1943 and spent the remaining years of his life in an apartment at the Royal Palace in Stockholm. Jangfeldt's main focus is on the Anglophile, cosmopolitan Munthe's personal life and the social milieu in which he moved. Jangfeldt's fascination with Munthe's ascent into high society—diplomatic circles, nobility, and the network of royal families in Europe a hundred years ago—and Munthe's stance in the two world wars conveys empathy and thrill.

Sweden does not have a great biographical tradition on a par with France or Britain. Jangfeldt's work in this genre is therefore a first. Lytton Strachey pointed out in his preface to *Eminent Victorians* that a biographer has two duties: to preserve, and to lay bare, to expose. Jangfeldt excels in the first task, but he is not a critical historian who cynically examines his findings to uncover a truth less seductive to a romantic imagination than the first, fresh impressions. Nevertheless, a reader interested to learn about the life of a high society physician a hundred years ago

will be well entertained by Jangfeldt's rendition of Axel Munthe's story.

**Ingar Palmlund,**

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the  
History of Medicine at UCL

**Nicolas Rasmussen,** *On speed: the many lives of amphetamine*, New York and London, New York University Press, 2008, pp. ix, 352, \$29.95 (hardback 978-0-8147-7601-8).

Rasmussen's book joins a host of recent social histories of psycho-active substances in the twentieth century, emphasizing how drugs have shaped our modern medical and political circumstances. This growing field of drug biographies merges social and cultural history with the history of sci-tech-med, and in that vein Rasmussen offers a detailed description of the science behind amphetamine production, but he also shows the impact of amphetamines on US consumers.

Drawing primarily on legal records dealing with pharmaceutical companies, medical publications and personal papers of such personnel, and military sources, *On speed* explores America's fascination with amphetamines. As the book title suggests, "speed" has had many incarnations, from military applications, such as increasing wakefulness and alertness on long flight missions, to treatments for depression-related disorders, to mainstream diet pills, to an abused recreational substance, to pep tonics, to Attention Deficit Disorder medications, to creativity enhancers. Considerable tension existed between the legally sanctioned uses and recreational abuses, but the drug and its advocates continually refashioned speed and found new ways to keep it in legal circulation. Some of the repackaging came from pharmaceutical companies competing for new patent rights, but Rasmussen suggests that consumers also influenced the characterization of speed, especially with off-label use.

In addition to tracing the various patterns of consumption, Rasmussen attempts to quantify

amphetamine use in the United States, in part to bolster his overall argument that American culture itself is addicted to the idea of "speed". He articulates the different threads of amphetamine use, illustrating both a widespread appetite and diverse rationales for taking speed. But, considerable overlap exists across categories of users and interpreting the reasons why people take amphetamines becomes complicated. For example, while Benzedrine was eventually marketed as a drug for mild or minor depression (anhedonia), its mood-elevating qualities soon attracted a different group of off-label users who sought it for its ability to produce "pep". Similarly, the Benzedrine inhaler, offering an amphetamine-based decongestant, became a "cash cow" for its producers, Smith Kline and French, not as much for its legitimate uses but because recreational consumers discovered that an adulterated inhaler could provide hours of exhilaration. Allegedly this practice appealed to famous beatniks, including Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, which added considerable cultural appeal to this practice by associating it with an elite social group. Recreational use probably inflated sales figures and therefore distorts information about the marketed, intended and actual uses. It also raises suspicions about the pharmaceutical company's knowledge of such drug abuses, which proved quite lucrative to the industry.

Ultimately the numbers argument seems to fall apart due to these kinds of complexities, but Rasmussen's general claim that by the end of the twentieth-century speed is intimately woven into American culture is convincing. For a combination of reasons, the thirst for more pep or increased levels of concentration and efficiency, combined with the growing tendency to medicalize behaviour means that amphetamines in their various guises have become well entrenched in America. Confronting this reality in a rather bold conclusion, Rasmussen turns to a critique of the American health care system. He suggests that the combined forces of medical science, pharmaceutical marketers and partisan governments conspired to establish an