

world of irreducible disharmony, while Romantic physicians found that new anatomical knowledge, even when gained by personal experience, did not transform their power to cure. In this sense the Poet-Physicians were called upon to confront the limits of their world and their own mortality, an encounter epitomized by Beddoes' *Death's jest-book*, published only after his suicide in 1849.

Allard's work is not without its difficulties. This is a dense text, composed of long paragraphs and sentences, often fashioned from equally long quotes. It raises, but does not settle, old questions over whether "body studies" is anything more than a convenient and fashionable hook on which historians and critics can hang their work. By focusing on a small number of writers, not much read in their own lifetimes, Allard might make his readers wonder whether it is possible to over-problematize the body. To put it bluntly, how many Romantic bodies or Poet-Physicians were wandering around England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Despite these minor criticisms, *Romanticism, medicine and the poet's body* offers an inspiring and original take on the history of the body. Allard has put the Romantic ghost back in the corporeal machine, reminding us that poetic voices find their roots in poetic bodies. How about a companion volume on the Gothic body in nineteenth-century life science?

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**Christopher E Forth and Bertrand Taithe** (eds), *French masculinities: history, culture and politics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. xi, 249, illus., £50.00 (hardback 978-0-230-00661-4).

Christopher E Forth and Bertrand Taithe's edited volume is a welcome addition to a growing corpus of collected articles on the history of masculinity. What this selection does especially well is provide an overview of

the history. Though there are a few essays in the collection that have a very limited research focus, most authors attempt to give an overview of their period and topic. This is especially useful as a starting point for discussing both the scope of the history as well as seeing what still needs to be done.

The volume covers only modern history, starting with the late eighteenth century elite and ending with a contemporary piece on the suburbs, the veil and recent rioting by disaffected youths. The majority of the essays focus on the post-1870 period, when both imperialism and the Third Republic redefined and solidified the French male, only to have him questioned and perverted after 1940. The first three chapters cover the Old Regime, the Revolution and the Napoleonic period. What we see here is the shift away from the Old Regime masculine emphasis on civility and refinement (traits which were made fun of by the Germans and the British as effeminate) towards a militarization of society. By the height of the Revolution all able-bodied men were to be treated as property of the state through military service.

As Christopher Forth shows, by the late nineteenth century, physicians and anthropologists worried about the softening of the physical body in modern society. The imperial project and the Franco-Prussian war were key moments in defining an unstable and highly criticized version of French masculinity. The French male was weak and overly intellectual and some even suggested that African colonials be recruited into the French army to reinvigorate it. Robert Aldrich's chapter on colonial masculinities reinforces this idea by arguing that colonial domination made up for masculine weakness in France. The First World War did not help quell the sense of threat to the men of the metropole. Judith Surkis uses the example of venereal disease between the wars to illustrate both the precariousness of the French male's ability to protect the family as well as the menace of foreign men who were blamed for spreading the infections. Michael Sibalís, in his masterful overview of French homosexuality and

effeminacy, is the only other author to use medical history prominently.

For the Second World War, Miranda Pollard investigates the various competing forms of masculinity after the French defeat in 1940 represented by Pétain, De Gaulle and the Resistance. Three much more specific topics represent the post-war period: the *roman noir*, masculine stardom and a discussion of the writer Serge Doubrovsky. André Rauch's final chapter on recent violence in the suburbs focuses on the women who are abused and controlled by the disaffected immigrant youths, as much as on the men themselves. Rauch's piece is the most powerful, but also the most problematic. He jumps from topic to topic, not distinguishing between the Muslim youths whose sisters wear veils, and immigrant and French youth from other religious backgrounds.

In the Afterword, Robert Nye, one of the leading historians on the topic, points to the continued vision of France as hyper-civilized and thus feminized, especially by Americans post-9/11. France has gone from a great nation to a declining one, both militarily and demographically. French (elite) men have had 200 years of failing to live up to the iconic masculinities created by the Revolution and Napoleon, while hanging on to the Old Regime vision of the civilized, intellectual gentleman.

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**Thomas Söderqvist** (ed.), *The history and poetics of scientific biography*, Science, Technology and Culture, 1700–1945 series, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2007, pp. xv, 270, illus., £55.00, (hardback 978-0-7546-5181-9).

This volume of collected essays, the product of a conference held in 2002, is an enthusiastic defence of scientific biography and the possibilities it presents to historians. The first three essays look at how biographical

writing constructs identity, and its purposes. Liba Taub's opening chapter on ancient *bioi* of Pythagoras concludes that such works contributed to the history of a philosophical tradition and also served as guides on how to live. Stephen Gaukroger examines the ways in which Bacon and Descartes constructed a new identity for the philosopher through the manner in which they presented their own intellectual personae. David Aubin and Charlotte Bigg discuss the self-fashioning as exceptional scientists of Norman Lockyer and Jules Janssen, using parallel biography to re-engage with ideas of genius and context in a manner that avoids placing these in binary opposition.

In chapter four, Patricia Fara is also interested in self-presentation but through the visual medium, analysing the ways in which scientific subjects like Newton interacted with their portrait painters to fashion themselves as role models, arguing that the triangular relationship between sitter, painter and viewer can be analysed to produce biographical insights.

Chapters five and six each take an unorthodox angle. Thomas L Hankins' chapter compares rewards in science with patents, pointing to the fact that biographies often rely, as do patents, on the idea of individual genius. This conceit allows a fresh approach to the question of the importance of context in an examination of a scientific life and its achievements. Christopher Chilvers in chapter six, however, fails to convince in a discussion of the life of the Russian physicist Boris Hessen (or Gessen, the author seems unable to decide on one spelling) in terms of Aristotelian tragedy.

Chapters seven, eight and nine all trace the biographical histories of particular subjects, Helge Kragh of Tycho Brahe, Signe Lindskov Hansen of Niels Stensen, and Rebekah Higgitt of Newton. Each of these demonstrates ways in which it is biographers and their own agendas that determine the presentation of the past, as is true of all historical authors.

The next four chapters are all personal reflections by biographers on the particular