

Book Reviews

medical specialization, and gender politics shaped events of drama and spectacle.

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Alphonse Daudet, *In the land of pain*, ed. and transl. Julian Barnes, London, Jonathan Cape, 2002, pp. xv, 87, £10.00 (hardback 0-224-06267-0).

It is sixty years since penicillin was first used to treat syphilis and, as a consequence, the ravages of its tertiary stage have faded from medical memory. All the more enlightening then to read this excellent first English translation of *La Doulou* (1930), a personal account of neurosyphilis written by the French novelist, playwright and journalist, Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897). Although largely forgotten today, Daudet made his name (and his fortune) with gentle stories and novels portraying life in the French provinces. Hailed as “the happiest novelist of his day”, he was admired by Dickens and Henry James, and moved in the same literary circle as Turgenev, Flaubert, Proust, Zola and Edmond de Goncourt. Daudet caught syphilis shortly after his arrival in Paris at the age of seventeen, from a *lectrice de la cour*, a woman employed to read aloud at the Imperial court. Following treatment with mercury, the infection lay dormant for twenty years, during which time Daudet married (in 1867), fathered three children, maintained a “villainous” extramarital sex life, and became famous. By the early 1880s, however, the symptoms of progressive nervous system degeneration known as *tabes dorsalis* or *locomotor ataxia* were undeniable. For the last twelve years of his life Daudet experienced most of the “atrocious surprises” sprung by the disease—difficulty walking, especially in the dark, a girdle sensation around the abdomen and chest, double vision, urination problems, progressive paralysis and excruciating paroxysmal attacks, which he described as “great flames of pain furrowing my body, cutting it to pieces, lighting it up”. All this should make for depressing reading, but

Daudet, sociable, courageous and entirely devoid of self-pity, wrote with humour and perception of his visits to hydrotherapy baths and spa towns where patients “danced” the “ataxic polka” and gave each other useless advice; of being suspended in mid-air by the jaw for minutes on end in vain attempts to stretch his spine; of the hopeless efforts to balance benefits against side effects of morphine, bromide and chloral hydrate, and his body’s increasing resistance to their sedative and pain-relieving properties.

Whilst maintaining a cynically realistic view of doctors, Daudet could afford the best. Guyon probed his bladder, Fournier linked his *tabes* to syphilis, Charcot told him he was incurable, and Gilles de la Tourette tried to resuscitate him with electricity after his death. In the event, Daudet avoided the descent into madness that he feared and was the fate of other French literary syphilitics including Maupassant, who spent his final eighteen months in a lunatic asylum. Daudet’s intimate and insightful account of what has been regarded as “textbook” *tabes* is enhanced by Julian Barnes’ informative and entertaining footnotes, which set the narrative in context. This is a valuable book not least because neurosyphilis, like AIDS today, was such a devastating chronic, incurable disease, destroying the useful lives of men in their prime (the disease was relatively rare in women) and consistently accounting for a quarter of all male asylum deaths in England and Wales. Read it and you will appreciate Ehrlich’s use of the term “magic bullet”.

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Paul Wood (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment: essays in reinterpretation*, Rochester Studies in Philosophy, Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk, University of Rochester Press, 2000, pp. xi, 399, £50.00 (hardback 1-58046-065-8).

This fine collection of essays is dedicated to Roger L Emerson on the occasion of his retirement. Emerson has devoted much of his

Book Reviews

career to demonstrating the centrality of natural science to the remarkable burst of intellectual activity that placed Scotland in the vanguard of the forces of the European Enlightenment. "What the enlightened seem to me to have had in common", Emerson wrote in 1988, "were relatively clear and precise views about natural knowledge, its value and uses. Rationally-grounded natural knowledge could be found and was to be sought. It was to be acted upon to improve the human condition in this world". This view was meant as a corrective to an older one that had put moral philosophy, history, and political economy at the heart of the Scottish Enlightenment, and had found little place for natural science in a movement led by David Hume, William Robertson, and Adam Smith. Paul Wood, the editor of this volume, has done much excellent work in the service of Emerson's cause, but among the scholars he has asked to contribute to this *Festschrift* are some of those who have been most critical of the Emersonian interpretation of the Scottish Enlightenment. The collection under review thus provides an occasion for a taking of stock in the ongoing debate about how to make sense of what happened in eighteenth-century Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. Wood opens the book with an examination of the influence of Dugald Stewart's early-nineteenth-century characterization of the "metaphysical philosophy of Scotland", and lays at Stewart's door much of the blame for the invisibility of the scientific aspect of the Scottish Enlightenment. There follows an essay by John Robertson reaffirming the view that moral philosophy, history, and political economy are "at the intellectual core" of the movement. The question inevitably arises whether we really have to choose between these two approaches. Richard Sher argues that "There is simply no satisfactory justification for singling out any one school or approach, subject matter or methodology, as *the* defining intellectual activity of the Scottish Enlightenment".

Behind the dispute as to what may be the "intellectual core" of the Scottish Enlightenment there is a large measure of agreement among scholars as to the unacceptability of an approach

to the movement that deals only in the history of disembodied, decontextualized ideas. Roger Emerson has shown the value of close attention to, in Sher's phrase, "the ways in which Scottish intellectual life was organized". The essays by Sher and Charles Withers, in particular, illustrate the virtues of this approach, Sher concentrating upon what can be learned from study of book history, Withers calling for "a more precise and situated institutional geography of Enlightenment than extant studies allow, a geography of Enlightenment that emphasizes the importance of particular local sites in the conduct and making of knowledge". In much the same vein, James Moore contributes an essay that finds an Irish intellectual context for Francis Hutcheson's *System of moral philosophy*. Taking a slightly different tack, M A Stewart proves that attention to such things as water marks and changes in handwriting can illuminate the development, and even help with the interpretation, of a text such as Hume's *Dialogues concerning natural religion*. Other contributions are exercises in a more traditional way of studying the history of philosophy (and are none the worse for that): Christopher Berry on the widespread belief that the earliest forms of religion were polytheistic, Ian Ross on Lord Kames's style of natural theology, and Alexander Broadie on the disagreement between George Campbell and Thomas Reid about the existence of a universal grammar. Perhaps likely to be of most interest to readers of this journal are essays by Anita Guerrini on the career of the Scottish doctor Alexander Stuart, by John Wright on Scottish physiological debates about whether matter can support life, and by Fiona Macdonald on patient care in the Glasgow infirmary between 1733 and 1800. This last essay, in particular, serves as a reminder that there was more to the Scottish Enlightenment than the having of polite conversations and the writing of elegant books.

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