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writing often appears on the surface to be concerned with esoteric conflicts about the relations of mind and body. Dowbiggin attends more to the content of belief about the nature, causes and asylum treatment of madness, than to the institutional and factional detail of social groupings. All the same, there is much here on the shifting preoccupations of the Société Médico-psychologique and such matters as the distinctive role of Philippe Buchez as an intermediary between the Society's members and the forces of reaction in the 1850s.

Dowbiggin's argument significantly redirects historians interested in degeneration theory away from the post-1870 period and into the previous thirty years. He argues for a "crisis of somaticism" in the mid-century when a failure to validate expertise in mental medicine through uncovering physical lesions or providing physical treatments became obvious. François Leuret, who renewed interest in moral treatment in the 1840s, particularly provoked his colleagues into a defence of their medical identity. Under the Second Empire, strengthened criticism from Catholics and psychologists (sometimes university philosophers, but the social reference of such labels is not always made clear) forced alienists onto the defensive. This discussion is especially helpful in providing a context for the work of Leuret and Jacques Moreau de Tours and for explaining the strong contemporary interest in dreaming and hallucinations, people and interests known but poorly integrated into the history of psychiatry.

By the 1860s, having struggled to achieve respectability and a position of authority with the state, alienists then had to face "anti-psychiatry" criticism from politicians and press on both the left and the right. Degeneration theory, it is argued, proved overwhelmingly attractive to doctors as a way of preserving their medical identity while balancing all these pressures. "Human reproduction was the biological truth that succeeded where the pathoanatomical and psychological viewpoints had failed . . ." (p. 73). Degeneration theory reconciled roles as moral entrepreneur, asylum manager, and specialist in disease. Hereditarianism was both positive science and moral discourse, and its practitioners were both doctors and public servants. The best-known theorist, B. A. Morel, who was both a Catholic and a student friend of Claude Bernard, used hereditarian argument to reconcile faith in free will and the soul with the demands of empirical science. This combination then served his position as asylum manager and expert in a conservative state. There is also a hint that hereditarian ideas had long been a commonplace of popular belief, providing doctors with a ready audience, and this suggests a dimension of professional-interest arguments worth further exploration. In conclusion, there is an all too brief discussion of the reasons for the decline in degeneration theory. Dowbiggin's book sets all these arguments in a broad, informative and undogmatic framework, and it has obvious relevance to the current resurgence of hereditarian ideas in psychological medicine.

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HERMIONE DE ALMEIDA, *Romantic medicine and John Keats*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. x, 418, £35.00 (0-19-506307-4).

Though Hermione de Almeida has produced a study that is, beyond doubt, dense with erudition, the disoriented reader may feel that the wood has been lost for the trees. The author's aim, broadly stated, is to challenge the nineteenth-century literary vision of Keats as a "pure poet", spontaneously overflowing with extreme sensibility, even to a pathological degree. Keats's preoccupations with the modulations of the body under intense emotion, his super-sensitivity to pain and pleasure, were schooled, she argues, and surely correctly, in large measure by his involvement with medicine: by his early training as an apprentice to the Edmonton surgeon, Thomas Hammond, and his time at Guy's; by his appetite for medical books; and, possibly most crucially, by his own tubercular condition. This project is a laudable one, but the links between the general culture of medicine, Keats's personal intellectual career, and the fine texture of his poetry have already been frequently explored at length, most recently and sensibly in D. C. Goellnicht's *The poet-physician: Keats and medical science* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984); it is unclear precisely what this study adds to our understanding of the medical input into Keats's imaginative work.

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Assuredly, Hermione de Almeida dots the i's and crosses the t's more indefatigably than any previous scholar; but in doing so, she runs the risk of descending into self-parodic pedantry. Keats has only to mention an ailment or a herb to provoke learned disquisitions upon nosological or pharmaceutical beliefs found in writings with which Keats may have been familiar. Thus, on p. 77, the observation that in *The eve of St Agnes*, Porphyro "listened to [Madeline's] breathing" is the cue for a protracted discussion of respiration theory ("The close connection between life and respiration has been noticed by ordinary observers since antiquity . . ."). All too often it is obscure what purpose such amassing of contexts or influences is meant to serve. One *could* argue, for instance, that Keats's vision would have been inconceivable in any but in a medically trained author (a view hypothetically sustainable in the case of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, a generation later). But Hermione de Almeida does not define her contentions with any precision: indeed this book is conspicuous for its lack of a fully argued conclusion. And so many questions go unanswered: how much of Keats's outlook, one wonders, is attributable to his involvement, not with medicine *per se*, but with Burton's *Anatomy of melancholy*?

What is here undertaken very copiously, however, is a delineation of the turn of the century background of "Romantic medicine" that pays paramount attention to *Naturphilosophie* and the new vitalistic metaphysics becoming powerful after John Hunter. Yet the aptness of this framework for explaining the case of Keats remains doubtful. Rather as might be predicted, much of the textual analysis of the interlinkage between Romantic medicine and literary expression concentrates not directly on Keats, but on Schiller and Humboldt, Coleridge and Green. And with regard to the depiction of Romantic medicine itself, it is a pity that Hermione de Almeida obviously completed the book too early to make use of *Romanticism and the sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), edited by Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine; but her failure to draw upon Russell C. Maulitz's *Morbid appearances: the anatomy of pathology in the early nineteenth century* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) is rather mystifying.

Finally, it needs to be said that this book does not meet the standards of accuracy one expects of the Oxford University Press. Peculiar lapses of language occur ("vertex" and "vortex" seem to be confused, for instance), and misprints are numerous, especially in the bibliography, where downright howlers appear. For example, the co-author with Daniel M. Fox of *Photographing medicine: images and power in Britain and America since 1840* (1988) is twice given as a mysterious "Gilbert T. Gall" rather than, as it should be, Christopher Lawrence; and Owsei Temkin's "The concept of infection" is said to have appeared in G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter's *The ferment of knowledge*—would that it had! This seems to be a volume that will be used more for its fund of information than for its interpretation.

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MARIE BOAS HALL, *Promoting experimental learning: experiment and the Royal Society 1660—1727*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. xiv, 207, £35.00, \$59.95 (0–521–40503–3).

Although in general the history of medical and scientific institutions is a rather neglected topic, the Royal Society has attracted a great number of historians since the seventeenth century. The Society's prominent role in English science, the prestige of its Fellows, as well as the wealth of source-material available to historians—chiefly the information contained in Thomas Birch's *History* (1756–7)—are some of the main reasons for the unparalleled flow of publications on its early history.

This book focuses on the experimental activity of the Society from the time of its foundation until the death of its most prestigious President, Sir Isaac Newton, in 1727. In the preliminary meeting of 28 November 1660 the founders stated that their design lay in "founding a Colledge for the promoting of Physico-Mathematicall Experimentall Learning". Exactly what they meant by "Experimentall Learning" is, however, a matter of some obscurity, and has aroused controversy. The activities of the Society were not confined to physics, chemistry, and medicine; they also included topics—such as meteorology, archaeology, numismatics and