

Book Reviews

English-language account of fossils (Parkinson was a reconciler of palaeontology with the Scriptures), and his *Observations on the nature and cure of gout* (1805)—a work largely derived from personal experience—astutely treated the disease as a constitutional disorder due to excessive acidity. Morris's accounts of Parkinson's medical and scientific ideas are well-informed, and avoid claiming too much for his subject's achievements.

The true strength of this admirable biography, however, lies in its contextualization of Parkinson's medical practice within his wider outlooks and activities. As Dr Morris's researches reveal, in the 1790s in particular, Parkinson was a leading metropolitan political radical, a doughty member of the London Corresponding Society, a campaigner for universal suffrage and annual parliaments, and a valiant defence witness in some of the show trials of the decade. Surely as a consequence of these political sympathies, Parkinson devoted much of his life to conscientious performance of the office of parish doctor for Hoxton, and the great bulk of his medical writings comprise advice books directed at the laity (from the barely literate up to the middle classes), instructing them, in plain language and with graphic illustration, on health maintenance and simple medical self-care.

Here Dr Morris might have drawn more attention to a certain ambiguity in Parkinson's stance. As a political reformer, Parkinson was undoubtedly a democrat and a man of the people. As a dispenser of medical advice, a strand of professional authoritarianism may, by contrast, be detected. For Parkinson deplored the excessive confidence in lay self-treatment that he believed William Buchan's *Domestic medicine* dangerously instilled; Parkinson wanted the common people to develop skills in symptom-identification, not so they could *treat* their own disorders, but primarily so that they might more speedily consult a practitioner. The one minor scandal that blotted Parkinson's career reveals the same cast of mind. In 1810, Mary Daintree took out a writ for wrongful confinement in a madhouse; Parkinson had been the certifying doctor. Parkinson successfully defended himself against the charge that he had taken her insanity solely on trust from her relatives, but, in defending himself in print, insisted rather vehemently that physicians must be accepted as the sole competent judges of mental health. The interplay of social radicalism and professional élitism found in Parkinson's writings would repay further study.

This is a well-researched and rich-textured study of a neglected figure. Aside from a plethora of misprints (we find W. H. Bynum and W. B. Bynum but never W. F. Bynum), it is well-produced and nicely illustrated.

Roy Porter, Wellcome Institute

LUDMILLA JORDANOVA, *Sexual visions: images of gender in science and medicine between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries*, New York, etc., Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, 8vo. pp. xiii, 207, illus., £19.95.

"The relationship between the anatomist and the anatomized" Ludmilla Jordanova writes in this provocative and stimulating book "is quintessentially gendered" (p. 104). The observation is only one of a number of striking claims that readers will be forced to take seriously. *Sexual visions* is an exercise in cultural history in which Dr Jordanova explores how gender is something rather more than a series of culturally-endorsed sexual differences. For this familiar category is itself constructed from a number of assumptions which pervade and create all sorts of other human activities. To simplify somewhat, these assumptions are dichotomous, for example, male/female, culture/nature, powerful/powerless, and subject/object. Dr Jordanova takes these assumptions and shows how through the mediation of science and medicine they underpin fairly obvious distinctions, such as eighteenth-century concepts of sex roles in which women are equated with, for instance, custom, learning from kin and daily care, and men with philosophic knowledge, learning from experience and superintendence. Dr Jordanova goes on from this, however, to tease out the gendered nature of matters rather less obviously sexual: dissection, the historical writing of Jules Michelet and *Metropolis*. A final chapter explores 'Medical images of the female body'. It is here Dr Jordanova allows herself her one joke. The

Book Reviews

depressed marionette in the medical advertisement discussed by Dr Jordanova is brought back to life by a daily dose of Ludiomil.

For the most part the analyses are compelling, even if at times the reader might want rather more evidence and slightly less speculation. The gendered nature of anatomizing crops up several times in the book, culminating in a section in the final chapter in which Dr Jordanova quotes surgeons describing the pleasure of their work in terms of sexual intercourse. Such sentiments, she argues, and to some extent shows, cannot be dismissed as whimsy. They have deep roots in western culture. There is, of course, the problem of reading too much into such identifications. Sexual intercourse is regularly drawn on in our culture as a comparative standard of hedonistic excellence. The operatic singer Leontyne Price likened it to applause, and only slightly inferior. Dr Jordanova's challenging and, I think, convincing interpretation of the history of anatomy provokes further questions. If, in recent Western society, gendered assumptions have been a prerequisite of anatomizing, the argument might have been made more descriptively thick by a reconsideration of hostility to dissection. After all, dissection is an acceptable practice now but it was not always so, especially for certain groups in society. What, in other words, is the relation between the structuring assumptions and local custom and belief? Did the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century opponents of dissection have to learn to see it as gendered in order to accept it, or was it already gendered for them (because of the universality of the category) but responses to it determined by local factors, say, kinship or religion? This is simply part of the broader question which is not addressed by the author, possibly because of the temporal constraints of the volume. It would have been intriguing to have had Dr Jordanova tell us how far she sees the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture in terms of the creation of new assumptions and how far was it simply the redeployment of very ancient ones. Like all good books this one pushes us on to ask the second order question by correctly framing those of the first.

Christopher Lawrence, Wellcome Institute

JOHN CHRISTIE and SALLY SHUTTLEWORTH (eds.), *Nature transfigured: science and literature, 1700–1900*, Manchester University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. 225, £29.95.

The editors of this collection of essays on aspects of the relations between science and literature, argue in their polemical Introduction that “What we take as ‘creative imagination’, ‘rationality’, ‘method’, ‘objectivity’, located as internal human faculties, are historical artefacts produced by institutionally located practices and their communicative forms” (p. 3). Yet their wish is less to throw down the barriers between the different intellectual faculties, thereby laying open the land of knowledge, than to secure a firm ground for what they call “the transgressive practice of literature and science study” (p. 12) within the faculties of academic institutions. Many of their contributors have already distinguished themselves in this field; Simon Schaffer, Roy Porter and Gillian Beer, for example, are hardly marginal figures, and all of the contributors acknowledge eminent predecessors in what is a growing discipline.

Most of these essays focus on prose fiction, and in particular on the influence of science on the portrayal of character. Porter on embodied experience in *Tristram Shandy*, David Van Leer on matter and spirit in *The scarlet letter*, and Shuttleworth on phrenology in the novels of Charlotte Brontë confirm that character is still the spoilt child of art, even in its deconstructed guise as subjectivity, what Christie with his characteristic inelegance terms “the spirit-body set” (p. 7). Other essays explore different areas: Trevor H. Levere argues that Samuel Taylor Coleridge conflated science and poetry because he believed that both stood in the same relation to nature; Greg Myers discusses how traditional stereotypes were reinforced in the literature that brought science to the unscientific (women and children). Beer broadens the discussion by examining the cross-fertilization of Darwinian and linguistic theories, an area she has brought into the domain of literary criticism and has made her own.

Different critical styles are represented here, though the underlying assumption is that ideology informs all writing. It is noteworthy that the essays are less concerned with the “hard”