

## Book Reviews

Finn's book also brings out the best in the modern biographies (Painter, Tadié) and foregrounds Proust's father—the famous professor of hygiene in the faculty of medicine in Paris, Dr Adrien Proust—in new light. Under this treatment, creative writing becomes more than the indulgence of desire or the rejuvenation of will. Cure of the disease of volition elevates neurasthenia to an aesthetic, when properly indulged, and provides a successful antidote to the malady in an era when medicine could offer none. The marshalling of the writer's attention thereby relates directly to the struggle to create a new form. The artistic consequence of such existence “between literature and medicine”, as Finn suggests, is that it permits the author to confront the Other; that is, not merely to give voice to the dominant psychosocial maladies of the era—hysteria, neurasthenia, in Freud's nomenclature “the actual neuroses”—but to discover the self's voices and thereby redefine subjectivity more accurately.

Hence Finn's compass demonstrates several things: literary, medical, bodily, linguistic, novelistic. Among all, he shows how actual flesh-and-blood body never lies far from artistic leap. He has also mastered the art of compression, and says more in a few pages than others would in three times the number. His book may be short yet it opens up new avenues crucial in contemporary Proust studies.

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**B Innes Williams,** *The matter of motion and Galvani's frogs*, Bletchingdon, Rana, 2000, pp. vi, 298, illus., £25.00 (hardback 0-9538092-0X). Orders to: Rana, Courtyard House, Church End, Bletchingdon, Oxfordshire OX5 3DL.

Here is a tribute to the very best tradition in the history of ideas. After a career in medicine and raising children, Billie Williams turned to the history of science

and medicine. She was trained in the 1960s at Imperial College, London, by Rupert and Marie Boas Hall and the book is testimony to their inspiring teaching. The core of the volume is a reworking of Billie Williams' 1976 thesis on Luigi Galvani (1737–98), edited by her husband, Peter Williams, Billie herself having been unwell in recent years. Peter adopts an unnecessarily defensive tone in his Preface, writing about the uncommercial nature of the volume and the small market for it. One would be grateful if many of the books published commercially in the history of science and medicine these days had some of the scholarship that is in here. True to the tradition from which it stems, this book is not just about Galvani, rather it is a history of the problem of motion since the Greeks, particularly as regards the apparent fact that living things can initiate their own motion and inanimate things cannot. For half the book, Williams traces this question from the pre-Socratics, through Galen, the scholastics, Thomas Willis and Newton to name but a few. This is all impressively done, yet the book's lasting quality will remain the chapters on Galvani. Here the reader is treated to the year by year, sometimes day by day, development of Galvani's thought. As one would expect, Galvani's concepts of animate motion are embedded in the general context of Newton's various speculations and the work of the electricians, notably Franklin. More specifically Haller's work on irritability and its rejection by Robert Whytt form a narrower context.

The key and most original chapter in the book is on Galvani's work from 1780 to 1783. After a series of experiments on frogs (note the volume's publisher), Galvani was convinced that the nervous juice was inherently electrical and did not derive its power from the brain or the atmosphere. Perhaps historians these days might be a little more sceptical of how far experiment led and theory followed but Williams' detailed storytelling and mastery of the

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sources in print and manuscript command respect. The final two chapters deal with Galvani's publication of his definitive views on animal electricity in 1791 and their reception. Stimulating here is Williams' view that Galvani thought about electricity in anatomical terms (although his model was the Leyden jar) whereas Volta, coming from a different direction, saw it quite otherwise. There are suggestions here for historical interpretations quite at variance with the tradition from which they stemmed. Billie Williams has made an important contribution to late eighteenth-century physiological studies. Peter Williams is to be thanked for getting it to the light of day.

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**John R Hinnells and Roy Porter** (eds),  
*Religion, health and suffering*, London,  
Kegan Paul International, 1999, pp. xviii,  
495, illus., £65.00, \$110.00 (0-7103-0611-3).

This is an interesting but also a most curious collection. It is interesting because the subject matter is important and most of the contributions are serious reviews. Yet it is as if two different sets of papers were stitched together: one, a group of papers on the place of suffering in the world's different religious traditions; the other, papers on the history of pain in the Western medical tradition. The latter, though smaller in number, are more effective because they anchor their subject in particular historical contexts (e.g., medicine in ancient Greece, suffering as a religious phenomenon in medieval English hospitals, fear of plague in early modern England). The former amounts to eight papers that survey, too often superficially and woodenly, suffering in each of the world's major religions.

In addition there are several papers on health and medicine in non-Western

traditions that fit in awkwardly, which is even more curious because they come closer to the interaction suggested by the title. There are also several papers that fit in not at all. Roland Littlewood's account of psychosis in contemporary British hospital services is neither about suffering nor about pain, nor does it have much to say about religion, which is a shame because it would have been useful to read Littlewood's ideas on how pain and suffering are figured in both medical and religious approaches to mental illness and its treatment. (One wonders if Littlewood, by accident, submitted the wrong paper.)

John Cohen's otherwise interesting piece on general practitioners in the inner city does not engage the central themes either. And yet, for all their diversity, David Parkin does an admirable (indeed almost miraculous) job of commenting on each contribution as if they formed a whole and, while he too does not privilege the main themes to sustained scrutiny, he has useful things to say in passing about language, materiality and moral reasoning.

The absence of an inner colloquy among the religious papers and the ones on medicine is unfortunate because that nexus is where readers are likely to project their questions, and also because each of the very distinguished editors contributes an interesting piece on one of the themes that largely avoids the other—adding to the sense that two rather different purposes have been accommodated under one book jacket.

How are pain and suffering differently configured within religious and medical traditions in the same and among different societies? What are the historical and comparative cross-cultural *types* of relationships between religion and medicine? What are the grounds for intellectual *rapprochement* between biomedicine and religious traditions? What, in particular, does the study of religions add to medical history and medical anthropology that