

merciful method of winding up a concern which, from her point of view, has ceased to be profitable" (p. 213).

Even if Ellis's views were not quite as liberated, nor as liberating as Crozier would have us believe, Ellis was certainly a strong campaigner against severe social and legal penalties. Homosexuality, for Ellis, was a medical abnormality but not a crime. With reference to the recent Wilde trials, Ellis wrote that in the modern era the predominant negative reaction to homosexuality was based not on economics, theology, or even morality, but on an aesthetic reaction of disgust. Such a feeling might be understandable, Ellis wrote, but "it scarcely lends itself to legal purposes". To eat excrement, Ellis noted, "is extremely disgusting, but it is not criminal" (p. 221). Crozier shows how the reception of Ellis's own writings on homosexuality also bore out this point, with critics describing the subject matter as "disgusting", "nauseous" and "revolting".

We cannot know whether John Addington Symonds, if he had lived, would have approved of everything Havelock Ellis wrote in the published version of *Sexual inversion*, but Ivan Crozier's excellent edition gives us ample scholarly materials with which to engage with this and many other questions about the interlocking histories of homosexuality, medicine and science.

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Diane Mason, *The secret vice: masturbation in Victorian fiction and medical culture*, Manchester University Press, 2008, pp. viii, 184, £50.00 (hardback 978-0-7190-7714-2).

Diane Mason's exploration into Victorian masturbatory discourses is an intriguing interpretation of the paranoia at the heart of the

nineteenth century's preoccupation with autoeroticism. From the outset she endeavours to release masturbation from the dominance of restrictive discursive frameworks centred upon the history and culture of medicine, and the privileging of material written for trained medical audiences, which have dominated discussions of sexuality. She examines the masturbatory content of widely available home medical guides and cyclopaedias by physicians such as J H Kellogg and E B Foote and from these extrapolates a symptomatology of masturbation; languor, sunken eyes and pallor are three of the highly visible signifiers of self-abuse familiar to Victorian society. An examination of the presentation of the masturbator in works of popular fiction produced by Bram Stoker, Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde in light of such symptoms reveals the extent to which contemporary theories of autoeroticism pervaded Victorian literature. Only by casting it as a symptomological vice that could be "read" by those with an entry to the discourse does its presence become apparent. This in turn begs a reconsideration of whether masturbation had a greater cultural significance than has yet been considered.

What raises *The secret vice* above the recent slough of works dealing with autoeroticism and sexuality is Diane Mason's adept interdisciplinary approach. By acknowledging the role of external signifiers in medical diagnosis and a reader's initial assessment of a fiction character, she highlights the importance of understanding the fluidity of the boundaries that separate medical writing from fiction. The format of the chapters makes the process of textual analysis explicit by outlining how medical texts constructed masturbation within the framework of a particular social fear, such as male impotence, non-reproductive female sexual activity, or same-sex erotic encounters, which was then made visible in literary texts through bodily and linguistic signifiers, coded

language and metaphorical allusions. Because medical writings explicate a multiplicity of symptoms associated with masturbation—physical, mental, and moral—they can be mapped onto a variety of complaints, with the result that taxonomic boundaries between diseases break down. The result is a reciprocal relationship where theories of disease and masturbation reinforce one another. Masturbation, like consumption, can be caught from those already familiar with its practices; individuals such as Lucy Westenra in *Dracula* and Laura in J S Le Fanu's *Carmilla* are congenitally predisposed towards destructive female sexuality through family weakness; like opium addiction it consumes the individual with “mad hungers” (p. 123).

Diane Mason's sheer tenacity in combing her texts for signifiers of autoerotic behaviour does at times give the impression that her arguments are somewhat overwrought, and it is possible to lose the thread of her argument in such detailed discussions of Victorian language and metaphor. Yet these minor quibbles are far outweighed by the issues she raises concerning the centrality of masturbation as a cultural phenomenon in the Victorian era. Too detailed for someone looking for an introduction to Victorian views of sexuality, the text would be an excellent point of reference for someone looking to continue work on the role of masturbation in cultural perceptions of sexuality. At a time when historians and practitioners of medicine are increasingly aware of the value of close textual readings, of case studies or fictional medical encounters, a work such as this is a striking example of what can be found if stories are examined thoroughly and with the right tools.

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Lee-Ann Monk, *Attending madness: at work in the Australian colonial asylum*, Clio Medica 84, Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2008, pp. 266, €55.00 (hardback 978-90-420-2419-9).

Lee-Ann Monk has chosen an intriguing and little studied topic from the history of madness. The lay attendants, who worked directly with those admitted to nineteenth-century lunatic asylums, are the focus of her research, which centres on the archives of the insane institutions set up in the Australian colony of Victoria. Whereas the educated medical elite, who ran the asylums, and the patients themselves, have received extensive attention from contemporary historians, the attendants have remained largely in the shadows. In her book, *Attending madness: at work in the Australian colonial asylum*, Monk attempts to revise the “popular mythology of the lunatic asylum” which has “repressed the memory of asylum workers' occupation and their sense of themselves as attendants” (p. 8). Her overarching thesis is that, prior to the return of these institutions to medical control at the end of the nineteenth century, by the late 1870s and early 1880s the attendants had acquired an “occupational authority . . . sufficiently strong to rival that of asylum doctors” (p. 221).

On the surface this seems a commendable historical project, but in practice her specific aims, which speak to a contemporary obsession with “identity”, leave the reader feeling unsatisfied and unconvinced. The sections on gender are a case in point. Monk explains that “establishing an occupational status consistent with gender identity was difficult for [the attendants] because the gender definition of asylum work . . . was uncertain” (p. 61). And with this contention in mind she discusses, in chapter 8, a series of wage protests by the attendants at the Ararat Asylum, who claimed that their income was insufficient to support themselves and their families in the local area. Affordable accommodation was scarce and the