

## Book Reviews

political unrest. Lunacy can hardly be said to have been perceived as a pressing problem: required by the 1806 Select Committee of the House of Commons to report lunatics in the county, the Bedfordshire magistrates made a “nil” return!

Bernard Cashman’s excellent history of the asylum (which was closed in 1860 to make way for a bigger one) offers a wholly convincing solution to this conundrum: the under-used energies of the local bigwig, Samuel Whitbread II (heir to the brewery fortune). A Whig politician, he failed ever to gain office and so directed his frustrated national reformist ambitions to local improvement. In short order, and chiefly through Whitbread’s exertions, Bedford acquired a new house of industry (1794), and a new prison (1801) and infirmary—to say nothing of the rebuilding of the town bridge (1811). The County Lunatic Asylum was a showpiece in a quasi-utilitarian scheme of rational Whig reform designed to shame the corrupt aristocracy while disciplining the poor. Doctors played little part in founding or shaping the institution. Nor was there, initially, much “demand” to fill the Asylum (and hence make its management economic); recalcitrant parochial overseers of the poor had to be bullied into parting with harmless local lunatics long looked after by family and friends. Mr Cashman’s study is thus welcome for the striking light it throws upon the deeply ambiguous role of the “reformer”; who knows what further enormities Whitbread’s suicide three years later spared the county.

In the forty-eight years of its existence, Bedford Asylum operated in a manner probably typical of small county institutions. It grew, became overcrowded, lurched predictably from administrative crisis to crisis, and (equally predictably) found its cure rates disappointingly low. Making admirable use of hospital and other local records, Mr Cashman discusses admissions policy, finances, therapeutic preferences, building extensions, and the occasional exposure of brutality to patients. Bedford Asylum never committed itself wholeheartedly to “non-restraint” or any other modish therapeutic system. No eminent psychiatric doctor was ever involved with it. It suffered no special scandals. It quickly became a routine institution.

The era when historians pronounced with assurance on asylum history on the basis of scanty knowledge of Bethlem and the York Retreat is over. We are now beginning to gain a grasp of ordinary institutions as well as the exceptions. Mr Cashman’s well-researched and clearly written history makes a valuable addition to this sounder grasp of the everyday institutionalization of the insane.

Roy Porter, Wellcome Institute

K. B. ROBERTS and J. D. W. TOMLINSON, *The fabric of the body: European traditions of anatomical illustration*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, pp. xx, 638, illus., £95.00 (019-261198-4).

The elaborately produced flyer for this book tells us that it is “lavishly illustrated” with “over 250 fascinating plates and figures” and that it is “beautifully produced with a handsome slip case”. So it ought to be at £95.00. We come well prepared to expect a splendid picture book which exploits the modern technology of reproduction to provide a visual feast of the kind that was impossible in 1852 when Ludwig Choulant published his classic *Geschichte und Bibliographie der anatomischen Abbildung*. . . Roberts and Tomlinson have not attempted to replace Choulant as a reference book but have produced an informative commentary on a fine visual panorama of anatomical illustrations from the Middle Ages to the present day.

I have begun by emphasizing the visual aspects of the production because the history of anatomical illustration cannot be adequately understood without a study of the history of the books *as books*—in terms of patronage, production, distribution, audience, technologies of reproduction, artistic style, division of labour between text and illustration, the relative responsibilities of anatomist, artist, printmaker and publisher, and so on. Roberts justly writes in his concluding chapter on “Some themes in this book”: “in retrospect we can see that the anatomical knowledge conveyed by illustrations becomes more refined, more precise and more accurate. This does not mean that representations shown in anatomy books are uninfluenced

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by contemporary circumstance, by social, economic, artistic, technical and cultural conventions, emphases, inhibitions and restraints". Indeed, the double negative, "not... uninfluenced" is too weak. The acquisition and conveying of anatomical knowledge and the factors behind book production are expressions of the same complex sets of motivations in each era. One does not "influence" the other.

The idea that progress in conveying anatomical knowledge is "influenced" by contextual factors does indicate quite accurately that the old triumphalist history still stands at the heart of Roberts' and Tomlinson's enterprise. The heading of chapter 5, "The great leap forward" (Vesalius and co., of course) leaves no doubt on that score. In spite of apposite remarks on the factors that affect the nature of anatomical illustration in the various discursive sections by Roberts, the general tone of the historical narrative (particularly in the commentaries to the plates by Tomlinson) is dismissive of intellectual motivations which lead to illustrations giving expression to concepts which the authors deem to be incompatible with progress in "factual anatomical illustration". Early illustrations thus come in for particularly rough treatment. Medieval representations come into the category "pre-scientific"; early *gravid*a illuminations are said to be "no better than symbolic"; the artist who illustrated Guido da Vigevano's *Anathomia* "would, of course, have been aware of the ludicrous nature" of his representation of a "miniscule" penis and scrotum. Even later products are censored for not conforming to present notions of representational utility. Thus the obsessively detailed and particularizing obstetrical atlases of the eighteenth century, which illustrate forms life size, are described as "cumbersome and, indeed useless"—but this is a judgement made from the standpoint of the modern structures of anatomical learning. In the production of the great eighteenth-century atlases in Britain, often sold by subscription, the manically detailed representation of an individual specimen, the insistent striving to perfect techniques of engraving, and the regal magnificence of the volumes are all of a piece with the promotion of British science's remorseless progress towards the goal of empirical truth—within a system of noble and institutional patronage.

Roberts and Tomlinson have on their own account produced a book which will be of considerable use as an instructive and visually impressive survey. However, its somewhat schizophrenic agenda, which tends to leave social context and empirical knowledge at war with each other, prevents it from providing the great re-alignment in the telling of the conventional story that is really needed.

Martin Kemp, University of St Andrews

BARBARA MARIA STAFFORD, *Body criticism: imaging the unseen in Enlightenment art and medicine*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT Press, 1991, pp. xxi, 587, illus., £49.50 (0-262-19304-3).

The body has traditionally been the focus of artistic and medical attention; for each discipline it has carried complex meanings. How such meanings were conveyed in the Enlightenment is the subject of this physically and polemically heavy book.

Art historian Barbara Maria Stafford's concern is to show how logocentrism—theory in general and the privileging of language (p. 34)—has devalued the visual, the immediately felt, the sensual. In medicine, as in art: "Individual execution or handling," she tells us, "precluded being exclusively wedded to abstract or general principles" (p. 40). For Stafford, painting, sculpture and architecture are rooted in "body performance". She supposes that: "Since the eighteenth century, one trend in Modernism has been to eliminate touch and other signs of manual construction" (p. 131).

Logocentrism, she suggests, in its ordering, its dismembering, its rationalizing, is essentially a masculine concern (p. 33), and logocentric physiognomics "was 'neoclassical' and male in its linguistic and singleminded will to impose sequence and logic on experiential confusion. Pathognomics, however, was 'Rococo' and female in its tolerance of optical indirection and refusal to subjugate baffling inconsistencies" (p. 127). Yet she does not make clear whether