

this point as he takes his readers on an eclectic and enjoyable journey through topics as various as early modern stage properties, the drug trade, pornography, and vivisection.

The first two chapters investigate anatomy's links to aggression as expressed through revenge and cannibalism. Through vivid examples, Sugg explores how writers used extreme violence not only as a means of representing spectacular physical torture, but also as a device through which a victim's soul could be controlled and conquered. The following two chapters pursue questions of body–soul sympathy more explicitly, suggesting that while anatomy initially reinforced religious ideas about the soul, over time it came to endorse a view of the body as separate, secular, and mechanistic. In the final chapter, Sugg returns to the subject of violence, considering how the practice of vivisection or “live anatomy” in this period was both entangled in ontological questions about personal identity and otherness, and also influential in the development of modern medical science.

Though engagingly written throughout, one of the limitations of the book is its failure to set out and stick to what parts of anatomical discourse it wishes to explore. Sugg covers an admirable list of topics as they relate to anatomy, but at times his discursiveness weakens his argument, resulting in a sense that everything, from knowledge to power to violence to sexuality, can be read as an expression of anatomy. Furthermore, given the vast amount of scholarship in the past fifteen years that has concerned itself with unravelling the relationships among anatomy, literature, and the body, it is unfortunate that Sugg does not introduce his book with a review of the field and his place in it. Such an undertaking might have helped stave off the inevitable suggestion that the work follows too closely in the wake of Jonathan Sawday's *The body emblazoned* (1995), which over a decade ago made similar claims about the affiliation between literary and dissective enquiry in early modern English culture.

Still, Sugg's work offers its own insights, mining lesser-known dramas like Henry Chettle's *The tragedy of Hoffman* and John Stephens's *Cynthia's revenge* for new

explorations of anatomy and its metaphorical and literal uses. His chapter on cannibalism keenly probes the incongruity between early modern tales of New World savagery and the Old World belief that the consumption of mummified human flesh was a useful medical treatment. Finally, his detailed appendices illustrate the scope for anatomical rhetoric in early modern writings and will be of great use to other scholars in the field.

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François Martin Mai, *Diagnosing genius: the life and death of Beethoven*, Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007, pp. xviii, 270, illus., £17.99, CA \$34.95, US \$29.95 (hardback 978-0-7735-3190-4).

The events of Beethoven's life have captured the popular imagination, making him the subject of innumerable biographies and at least two recent bio-pics. One question which has puzzled his biographers is how Beethoven could compose sublime music while labouring under ill health, particularly his deafness. François Mai, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Ottawa, offers some answers. Drawing on material from a wide range of sources, Mai makes good use of both primary and secondary works. Contemporary accounts of the composer's health are accessible in Beethoven's own writings, as well as those of his many physicians. To these Mai adds modern diagnostic tools, such as a toxicological analysis of a lock of Beethoven's hair.

Despite the wide range of evidence presented, much of Mai's analysis is likely to frustrate the medical historian. In *Diagnosing genius* Mai is principally concerned with the description and interpretation of the medical evidence. Aiming at comprehensiveness, Mai endeavours to provide a more complete interpretation of the symptoms than has previously been achieved. He ranges over a wealth of conditions, from alcoholism, to syphilis, to lead poisoning, to

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assess the role each may have played in the cause of Beethoven's death. But such analysis cries out for historical contextualization. At several points throughout the book, for instance, Mai provides descriptions of Beethoven's relations with his many physicians. Famously irascible, Beethoven hired and fired physicians with an impressive regularity, largely depending on whether or not he approved of the treatment they prescribed. Yet Mai provides no discussion of the extensive historiography on the doctor–patient relationship—a central context for understanding Beethoven's behaviour.

In his final chapter, Mai broadens his discussion to encompass the links between illness and creativity. Summarizing many of the insights of other authors on the subject, he systematically considers the effects that isolation, psychopathology, substance dependency and medical health problems may have on an individual's creativity. He suggests that conditions which Beethoven, and others, suffered may have fed their creativity, though the effect becomes deleterious if the illness is severe. Whilst careful in rehearsing the research of others, it is a pity that Mai seldom offers his own opinion.

In the same chapter Mai asserts that though Beethoven was not a child prodigy like Mozart, he did display “exceptional talent” (p. 179). But this raises an interesting question, one which

Mai does not address: to what extent is genius a social construction? In a fascinating aside, which sadly Mai does not capitalize upon, he reveals that the construction of the composer's reputation had a helping hand from his alcoholic father. Determined that his young son should be seen as a child prodigy, Beethoven's father concealed Beethoven's real birth date, putting it about that his son was two years younger than he actually was. This was a fact Beethoven himself only learned in his mid-forties, when circumstances required him to send for his birth certificate. But child prodigy or not, Mai's interpretation reveals a deep reverence for the composer, one which will brook no opposition to Beethoven's claims to eminence.

Mai's careful research is a worthy addition to the genre of medical biography, a field of scholarship which seeks to establish what individuals “really” suffered from. For the medical historian, however, the value of the book is diminished by its emphasis on retrospective diagnosis and its disregard for contemporary historiography. Like its subject, *Diagnosing genius* displays a deafness of its own—a deafness to historical context.

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