

in such an encyclopaedic survey seems reliable and helpful, though it is puzzling why some, but not all, footnotes are indexed. While the volume does not offer a comprehensive survey and analysis of the medical sciences in the eighteenth century (the lack of a chapter on pharmaceutical developments is a serious omission), historians of medicine will undoubtedly find this a useful reference book for help in contextualizing their teaching and research. It achieves Porter's intention of providing a stable platform upon which scholarship on the nineteenth-century can be built. At the same time it shows how the eighteenth century was much more than the consolidation of the revolutionary changes that had taken place in the century before.

**William H Brock,**  
University of Kent at Canterbury

**Andrea A Rusnock,** *Vital accounts: quantifying health and population in eighteenth-century England and France*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. xvi, 249, illus., £45.00, US\$65.00 (hardback 0-521-80374-8).

The history of early modern population arithmetic is the central chapter in the gradual process by which European cultures came to understand themselves as numerically constituted and as structured by recurring mathematical relationships. Rusnock's *Vital accounts* provides an admirably clear and unruffled narrative of the evolution of numerical aspects of this development during the eighteenth century, with particular attention to medical topics. Understanding the quantitative reasoning of this period is of particular interest as it precedes the rise of statistics in the early nineteenth century and its ubiquitous spread ever since. Whilst in retrospect we can say that early modern population thinking anticipated statistics in some ways, it was neither conceived nor developed as statistics. Describing the quantitative reasoning of this period without succumbing to the anachronism of statistical terminologies we now take for granted thus poses

some difficult problems of interpretation. Rusnock's approach, which pays careful attention to early modern procedures and terms of reference, is indicated by her title, and solves this problem neatly. Population arithmetic was *vital* in three senses subsequently taken over into vital statistics. First, and obviously, its main chosen objects were vital events (births, deaths, diseases) differentiated by observed life characteristics (age, sex, natural environment, and various physiological, epidemic and other causes). Second, following upon political and mercantile writings of the time, the health and numbers of people were understood as main constituents of the wealth and power of states, the basis of collective vitality. By extension, then, information about populations was knowledge vital to policy. *Accounts* is likewise a term of contemporary parlance with multiple significance, but here differences to later statistical developments begin to emerge clearly. The earliest population arithmetic in the seventeenth century adopted the term "accounts" from merchant book-keeping, employing it to refer to its method and as a term of general social reference. Eighteenth-century professionals who came to have a close interest in the health of populations, notably physicians, actuaries, and ministers of church and state, saw the compilation and interpretation of "accounts" in moral terms; to give an account meant providing a measure or assessment of relative salubrity that went beyond strictly medical matters. Inevitably, the third and closely related implication of numerical accounts was that any such compilation raises difficult issues of what standards of comparison are legitimate. As Rusnock observes, "numbers allow for comparison, even if the grounds of comparison are not always level" (p. 13). It was these issues that nineteenth-century statisticians believed would be solved by national census and vital registration systems.

Attempts to provide a level playing field began when John Graunt annexed his merchant book-keeping to a numerical reworking of Francis Bacon's tabular method for presenting recorded observations. As Rusnock notes, this approach was promoted, often uncritically, by William

Petty under the label “political arithmetic”. Some of the most sophisticated treatises of the later eighteenth century, like Jean-Baptiste Moheau’s *Recherches* (1778), still looked back to Bacon. Following a brief survey of the earliest formulations, Rusnock charts the evolution of this tabular method as the basis of a *soi-disant* “medical arithmetic” in a series of eighteenth-century controversies: debates over the merits of smallpox inoculation; attempts to refine tabular methods (sometimes in conjunction with meteorological records) as measures of the healthiness of particular places; and attempts to extrapolate from incomplete local records to estimates of national population. None of the many and various tabular syntheses introduced in the course of these debates ever succeeded in resolving them. Yet, as Rusnock shows, via such controversies quantitative representation of society and its health became a widespread convention; it was established as a telling (if not conclusive) source of evidence of the effects of medical and political administration; and it came to underpin wider discourses on political and economic equity. The last subject is not, however, Rusnock’s primary object in this book. Focusing closely on the sequence of health issues to which tabular arithmetics were applied, she demonstrates the effectiveness and limits of new methods as they developed, and the significant professional differences that often shaped divergent French and English approaches. The book is well illustrated by reproductions of tabular methods. It provides a very welcome and thoughtful introduction to an area of medical knowledge that was livelier and more topical than is now generally appreciated.

**Philip Kreager,**  
Somerville College, Oxford

**Julie Peakman,** *Mighty lewd books: the development of pornography in eighteenth-century England*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. xii, 263, illus., £25.00 (hardback 1-4039-1500-8)

This work significantly develops our understanding of obscene and erotic literature

and its development as a genre during the eighteenth century in Britain. It is particularly valuable to have the analysis of the production and distribution of obscene materials. Although mechanisms by which obscene literature circulated through the provinces are mentioned, the concentration of the trade in London means that the metropolis forms the chief focus. A number of persistent trends were already in place by the early eighteenth century. Peakman notes the connection between the production and marketing of risqué works and of informative manuals about sex which was to persist well into the twentieth century, as well as the persistent recycling and recirculation of material which became so characteristic.

Peakman also analyses various genre themes and their relationship to popular and scientific understandings of the body and reproductive physiology of the period. The motif of the eroticized landscape and what one might call botanical or horticultural porn is particularly suggestive. Was this perhaps a uniquely English (nation of gardeners, pastoral trope already well-established in mainstream literature) phenomenon? A rather different resort to fruit and flowers encoded sexual information in later works of sex education, while 1920s Lawrentian sexualizing of the landscape was satirized by Stella Gibbons’ 1932 *Cold Comfort Farm*: Mr Mybug’s ‘God! Those buds had an urgent, phallic, look.’

Peakman indicates the associations of erotic literature with the foreign, specifically Italy and France, as well as with the more generally exotic. Many significant early texts were simply translations and adaptations of continental originals. If the notion of Italy as the decadent site of bloody and perverse happenings where anything might go looks back to Renaissance drama, the increasing importance of France would result in French standing as a metonym for obscenity in early twentieth century “French postcards” and advertisements for “French lessons”.

A particularly illuminating discovery is that the archetypal *vice anglais*, flagellation, did not appear as a particular motif in British erotic writing until fairly late in the eighteenth