

focus on individual smoking. Its great strength lies in its wonderful illustrations, which range from Mayan art through to Lucky Strike advertisements and the Bogart/Bacall film stills. For these alone, the book is worth having on your coffee table—although, of course, there will not be a box of cigarettes and an ashtray alongside it.

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Lianne McTavish, *Childbirth and the display of authority in early modern France*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World series, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005, pp. xiv, 257, illus., £45.00 (hardback 0-7546-3619-4).

Of perennial interest to historians of medicine and gender are the power relationships that exist between men and women, patients and practitioners. Such questions as how did men gain control over women in the birthing chamber (or even banish them entirely) and what the character of that ascendancy was have produced a series of works ranging from frenzied polemics to sophisticated scholarship on the broader cultural issues involved in disciplining (or medicalizing) society. Lianne McTavish raises a related issue, examining “how men-midwives began to *appear* at deliveries” (emphasis the reviewer’s, p. 1). But if one expects to find here yet another study of the victimization of women through “the development of male medical knowledge and the use of instruments” (p. 1) one will be pleasantly surprised to discover that McTavish has no such facile explanations in mind. Hers is a more profound set of questions centring less on the putative male suppression of female practitioners and more on the subtler question of how men came to be recognized as experts “embodying obstetrical authority, instead of threatening intruders” (p. 1). Although she hardly neglects issues of power and struggles over authority, the purpose of the book is to reveal how the body—and its display—“participated in the negotiation of social status, gender roles, and medical hierarchies” in seventeenth-century France (p. 16).

McTavish draws on traditional sources—primarily obstetrical texts (twenty-four produced in France between 1550 and 1730)—to demonstrate how these “sites [functioned] for both the production and contestation . . . of authoritative knowledge in childbirth” (p. 2). Drawing on the perspectives of medical and cultural historians, anthropologists, philosophers, and, in particular, on her own expertise in art history (in “thinking visually”), McTavish concludes that images did not inevitably or reliably mirror reality. Images in these works were often at variance with textual elements or even ran counter to them. As she points out in her tightly-argued analysis of the frontispiece to Louise Bourgeois’s *Observations diverses*, . . . (1626), such portraits are “complex and contradictory” (p. 91). Thus, appearances often deceive. For instance, apparently awkward visual representations of unborn figures did not denote an unfamiliarity with anatomy but rather conveyed relational essences. Relying on the philosopher, Charles S Peirce, McTavish presents these images as diagrams and iconic signs. Engravings of the unborn, therefore, were not supposed to show real cherubs *in utero*, but rather were schematics “meant to provide support for surgeon men-midwives’ haptic acquisition of knowledge of the womb” (p. 190). This is only one example of how McTavish’s visual readings of texts and images illuminate the cruciality of “display” in the process though which men-midwives acquired the standing of experts in the birthing chamber. Refreshingly, this “triumph” is not envisioned as the outcome of a nasty struggle between men and women or between male and female forms of knowledge in which women were predestined to fail. McTavish sees reflected in these texts (as well as constructed through them) a more flexible system of gender than generally acknowledged; men-midwives and skilled (women)-midwives were to possess many similar characteristics; men were to demonstrate tenderness and feeling, and women were expected to exhibit a masculine character and physical strength. The demonstration of all these things fits—and had to fit—with the culture of display fundamental to seventeenth-century French society as a whole.

The *Frenchness* of this development makes *Childbirth and the display of authority* an inherently national study (if one can safely use the word “national” in an early modern context). McTavish diligently compares (when possible) French texts with those of other countries, but emphasizes that she is concerned overwhelmingly with Gallic conventions. Indeed, one wishes she had pursued the French connection a little more boldly; perhaps the story of medicine is more localized (nationalized?) than we generally have been led to believe.

It remains to consider McTavish’s method. Like many scholars reliant on interdisciplinary perspectives, her conclusions often make the historical empiricist squirm. “Yes,” we muse, “it *might* have been that way, but then again, perhaps not.” And McTavish is eclectic in her use of theory—picking from history, anthropology, and semiotics. Sometimes one feels that theory is conjured up to support a point for which evidence is otherwise thin or ambiguous. Still, one cannot but admire her ability to bring into our sightline possibilities that had previously—like the child in the womb—remained unseen. It struck this reviewer, however, as slightly peculiar that despite her plea for visual sensitivity to sources, she relies more heavily on words than images. But these are quibbles. McTavish offers us a stimulating range of interpretations to ponder and explore.

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Christine Hillam (ed.), *Dental practice in Europe at the end of the 18th century*, *Clio Medica* 72, Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2003, pp. 518, €135.00, US\$150.00 (hardback 90-420-1268-4); €55.00, US\$61.00 (paperback 90-420-1258-7).

This book represents the culmination of a project which started with the author’s early doctoral research into the development of dental practice in the English provinces from the late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. During this work she discovered, as

others have since, that this is not a story which can focus unblinkingly on England alone. The clue is in the job title: in Britain, we have “dentists” rather than “toothists”, just as we have “opticians” rather than eye-doctors. Traditional, often practitioner-led studies in the history of dentistry have usually failed to make this connection, and routinely failed to investigate it with any degree of thoroughness. Recent years have seen a change, however, and Christine Hillam helped to pull together both professional historians and practitioners from across Europe to assist her in expanding the view of treatment for the teeth most effectively before her untimely death in 2000.

Dental practice in Europe opens with a twenty-page introduction by Hillam, which addresses a number of issues that should be considered to be of central importance to any history of dentistry. The biggest, and thorniest, of these is the use of the words “dentist” and “dentistry”. The writer makes the point that “denter” or “toothist” may be a more appropriate term for those treating teeth, as “dentist” now carries implications and connotations which can gravely distort the picture being viewed. At the other end of the scale of perception, she argues that the terms “charlatan” and “empiric” do not correspond to a scale of competence—to use these terms for practitioners of the period is to risk implications of ignorance whilst ignoring potential knowledge, and perpetuating myths of incompetence and bungling. The introduction offers a clear and concise view of the problems facing historians working in this field, as well as linking the technical activities of those involved with elements of motivation, the desire for treatment as an expression of consumerism and the shape and character of the marketplace.

Part I of the book focuses, perhaps appropriately, on France, via a team of researchers led by Pierre Baron. An introductory chapter examines those offering to treat teeth, placing them within the political, medical and academic contexts of the period. Following this, selected areas of France provide material from a wide range of sources including advertisements, licences and publications. Practitioners are