

**Regina Morantz-Sanchez, *Conduct unbecoming a woman: medicine on trial in turn-of-the-century Brooklyn*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. xi, 292, £9.99 (paperback 0-19-513928-3).**

In 1889, the *Brooklyn Eagle* published a series of sensationalist reports on Dr Mary Amanda Dixon Jones, a leading gynaecological surgeon, painting a picture of a conniving woman guilty of malpractice and financial and medical fraud. The *Citizen*, another Brooklyn newspaper, entered the fray in defence of the doctor, depicting her as a paragon of the late-nineteenth-century womanly virtue of caring. This publicity led to two trials, one for manslaughter and one for libel. Regina Morantz-Sanchez explores how the drama swirling around Dixon Jones discloses geographical, professional, and gender tensions that were becoming more apparent in the period.

Morantz-Sanchez follows her colourful summary of the articles in the *Eagle* and the *Citizen* with a history of the development of US newspapers in the period, from mouthpieces of political parties to independent, profit-seeking enterprises, and an examination of Brooklyn's relationship with New York City in the years before and after the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. This is important background for understanding the various political and social factors that fuelled the Dixon Jones case. The heart of the book analyses nineteenth-century medical education, especially the medical training of women; the history of gynaecology as a surgical specialty; and the role of medical science and medical practitioners in defining women's health. Most interesting are the sections that draw out the relationship between Dixon Jones's pathological studies and surgical practice and the development of her understanding of the origins of women's ill health. Each of these chapters highlights the evident generational differences that arose among medical practitioners and within the larger society, and they delineate the basic lines of Morantz-Sanchez's analysis, namely that the *Eagle's* diatribes were not rooted in sex discrimination

*per se* but rather in Dixon Jones's defence of radical, and controversial, gynaecological surgery. The relationships between Dixon Jones and her patients, at least the ones who have left some form of historical record, suggest that patients came to the doctor with some sense of their problem and the potential of a surgical solution. Dixon Jones, in effect, reinforced their beliefs, while they legitimated her therapies. Other patients were less sure of the need for surgery and were often told they had only a short time to live unless they submitted to the procedure. Evaluating the evidence, Morantz-Sanchez concludes that "Dixon Jones took a kind, but decisively authoritative stance with her patients" (p. 155).

So, what happened? Was Dixon Jones guilty of manslaughter? After days of listening to testimony from family members and neighbours of the deceased as well as medical experts, a jury exonerated Dixon Jones. But, the situation did not end there as Dixon Jones pursued a libel case against the *Eagle* in a court action that, in Morantz-Sanchez's words, "milked the dramatic, the sensational, and the sentimental for all it was worth" (p. 166). This trial was much longer than the previous one and delved into more aspects of Dixon Jones's career. On the one hand, New York physicians who met her through formalized, professional contacts regarded her highly, perhaps, Morantz-Sanchez concludes, because they were more interested in defending the emerging specialty than in supporting an individual practitioner. On the other hand, Brooklyn physicians who worked directly with her regarded her as an aggressive practitioner with a grating personality, a characterization that the jury found persuasive. Patients too testified both in her favour and against her. After arduous deliberation, the jury returned a verdict for the defendant.

*Conduct unbecoming a woman* makes compelling reading. Dixon Jones was a "difficult woman" because she dared to challenge gender stereotypes and traditional ideals of medical professionals. Morantz-Sanchez uses the story of Dixon Jones as a window on a wider world in which professionalism, local boosterism,

## Book Reviews

medical specialization, and gender politics shaped events of drama and spectacle.

**Rima D Apple,**  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Alphonse Daudet**, *In the land of pain*, ed. and transl. Julian Barnes, London, Jonathan Cape, 2002, pp. xv, 87, £10.00 (hardback 0-224-06267-0).

It is sixty years since penicillin was first used to treat syphilis and, as a consequence, the ravages of its tertiary stage have faded from medical memory. All the more enlightening then to read this excellent first English translation of *La Doulou* (1930), a personal account of neurosyphilis written by the French novelist, playwright and journalist, Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897). Although largely forgotten today, Daudet made his name (and his fortune) with gentle stories and novels portraying life in the French provinces. Hailed as “the happiest novelist of his day”, he was admired by Dickens and Henry James, and moved in the same literary circle as Turgenev, Flaubert, Proust, Zola and Edmond de Goncourt. Daudet caught syphilis shortly after his arrival in Paris at the age of seventeen, from a *lectrice de la cour*, a woman employed to read aloud at the Imperial court. Following treatment with mercury, the infection lay dormant for twenty years, during which time Daudet married (in 1867), fathered three children, maintained a “villainous” extramarital sex life, and became famous. By the early 1880s, however, the symptoms of progressive nervous system degeneration known as *tabes dorsalis* or *locomotor ataxia* were undeniable. For the last twelve years of his life Daudet experienced most of the “atrocious surprises” sprung by the disease—difficulty walking, especially in the dark, a girdle sensation around the abdomen and chest, double vision, urination problems, progressive paralysis and excruciating paroxysmal attacks, which he described as “great flames of pain furrowing my body, cutting it to pieces, lighting it up”. All this should make for depressing reading, but

Daudet, sociable, courageous and entirely devoid of self-pity, wrote with humour and perception of his visits to hydrotherapy baths and spa towns where patients “danced” the “ataxic polka” and gave each other useless advice; of being suspended in mid-air by the jaw for minutes on end in vain attempts to stretch his spine; of the hopeless efforts to balance benefits against side effects of morphine, bromide and chloral hydrate, and his body’s increasing resistance to their sedative and pain-relieving properties.

Whilst maintaining a cynically realistic view of doctors, Daudet could afford the best. Guyon probed his bladder, Fournier linked his *tabes* to syphilis, Charcot told him he was incurable, and Gilles de la Tourette tried to resuscitate him with electricity after his death. In the event, Daudet avoided the descent into madness that he feared and was the fate of other French literary syphilitics including Maupassant, who spent his final eighteen months in a lunatic asylum. Daudet’s intimate and insightful account of what has been regarded as “textbook” *tabes* is enhanced by Julian Barnes’ informative and entertaining footnotes, which set the narrative in context. This is a valuable book not least because neurosyphilis, like AIDS today, was such a devastating chronic, incurable disease, destroying the useful lives of men in their prime (the disease was relatively rare in women) and consistently accounting for a quarter of all male asylum deaths in England and Wales. Read it and you will appreciate Ehrlich’s use of the term “magic bullet”.

**Carole Reeves,**  
Richmond, Surrey

**Paul Wood** (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment: essays in reinterpretation*, Rochester Studies in Philosophy, Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk, University of Rochester Press, 2000, pp. xi, 399, £50.00 (hardback 1-58046-065-8).

This fine collection of essays is dedicated to Roger L Emerson on the occasion of his retirement. Emerson has devoted much of his