

Book Reviews

Mark Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: historical perspectives on child murder and concealment, 1550–2000*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, pp. xiii, 292, illus., £47.50 (hardback 0-7546-0318-0).

The killing of one's own child is seen as one of the most terrible of crimes. Luc Racaut, in this volume, argues that accusations of infanticide against Protestants on the eve of the French wars of religion reflected the prevailing view of infanticide as "a universal mark of infamy" (p. 34), and only recently infanticide was described as "the ultimate evil" (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 2003). However, this attitude stands at odds with the intense pity and sympathy also invoked by the act, which is usually either the desperate finale to a concealed pregnancy or the result of severe post-natal depression. The essays in this multi-authored volume derive from different academic genres and approach the subject in different ways, but together they reflect continuities and changes in the social and legal construction and treatment of infanticide over the last four and a half centuries.

One recurring theme in the book is the social and cultural context that forced single women into infanticide. Johanna Geyer-Kordesch uses legal and literary sources to argue that infanticide must be seen in relation to the "erotic plot" and the "marriage plot". Both Patricia van der Spuy, for South Africa, and Margaret Arnot, for England, use case-studies to reveal the particular vulnerability of nineteenth-century pregnant women who lacked the support of the father of the child, and Julie Wheelwright's analysis of recent cases brings home the fact that social instability and insecurity continue to play a large role in the pressures towards infanticide.

Another common subject is the evolving attitude towards the psychology of the mother. J R Dickinson and J A Sharpe argue that the eighteenth-century decline in both prosecutions and the severity of sentencing shown by the Court of Great Sessions at Chester reflected a growing understanding of the social circumstances surrounding infanticide. Dana Rabin argues that this leniency was the product of a culture of sensibility as demonstrated by a gradual increase in psychological defences for unmarried women

(previously the conserve of the married), and Hilary Marland goes on to suggest that puerperal insanity became a much more acceptable defence for infanticide in the nineteenth century, allowing women to be treated with compassion while holding them criminally culpable. This tension between the criminal responsibility of infanticidal women and a compassionate view that acknowledges both the special phenomenon of puerperal mania and the social forces shaping such desperate acts is apparent in many chapters, and Tony Ward addresses its implications in relation to British legal reforms of the early twentieth century. Women committing infanticide due to puerperal mania were expected to recover quickly after the post-partum period, and Cath Quinn uses photographs of the accused to draw out attitudes to the rehabilitation of such women. Jonathan Andrews illustrates that officials took a large range of factors, particularly those relating to the domestic situation of such women, into account when determining their dates of discharge from criminal lunatic asylums.

What attitudes to infanticidal women reflect about other cultural attitudes is also brought out in several chapters. Amy Masciola demonstrates what reactions to such women revealed about the fears of the eighteenth-century middle classes in relation to the growing ranks of servants, while Hilary Marland and Cath Quinn argue that the insanity defence implied that the potential for maternity was the potential for insanity.

The essays relate to different countries, derive from different academic standpoints and are heavily weighted towards the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While this can detract from comparability, the development of common themes and changes over time is emphasized by the chronological ordering and the introductory chapter by Mark Jackson. Overall, the volume is an important contribution to the understanding of infanticide in a historical perspective.

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Leslie Klenerman (ed.), *The evolution of orthopaedic surgery*, London, Royal Society of

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Medicine Press, 2002, pp. x, 246, illus. £20.00 (paperback 1-85315-469-5).

This volume, edited by an orthopaedic surgeon, contains contributions from fellow surgeons as well as practitioners of neighbouring fields such as radiology and engineering. The chapters are organized into four sections: after a survey chapter on orthopaedic surgery from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, section one on 'Major advances in the twentieth century' deals with arthroplasty of the hip and the knee, arthroscopic surgery and orthopaedic trauma. The second section, entitled 'The scientific background', contains chapters on biomechanics, biomaterials, and orthopaedic radiology, whereas the third section under the title 'Fragmentation of orthopaedic surgery' covers various specialized subfields, such as hand and spine surgery. The last section consists of only one chapter, 'Orthopaedics in 2050', and is devoted to the field's future.

The editor and authors have clearly spent a lot of time and energy on this book, their specialized knowledge and experience being an invaluable resource. The amount of material accumulated is daunting, the degree of medical expertise used to evaluate it impressive. Medical historians who are interested in the technical aspects of orthopaedic surgery will thus be delighted to find so many useful leads collected in one place.

However, doctors are not historians and one should not expect this book to meet the standards of professional historical practice. Problems arise when the authors depart from their fields of expertise and turn to more general historical subjects. This is most obvious in the survey chapter, which contains a number of factual errors and historical misjudgements. Thus, the importance of Lister's work does not really lie in the application of Pasteur's discoveries, nor was Johannes Müller the founder of scientific medicine in Germany. In both instances it is easy to see how the misconceptions came about and how they could have been prevented by a conversation with a medical historian. Similarly, consultation of an expert in medical history could have steered the authors away from their reliance

on encyclopaedia articles and general textbook chapters toward relevant literature on the subject. To mention one example, Roger Cooter's seminal work on *Surgery and society in peace and war: orthopaedics and the organization of modern medicine, 1880–1948* (Basingstoke, 1993) is not quoted anywhere in the volume.

The evolution of orthopaedic surgery shows the degree to which historians and medical practitioners live in different intellectual worlds. Like most medical practitioners, the authors of this volume assess past events according to present standards. This is what scientists and doctors usually do in the introductory section of their scientific articles. There they comment on previous work, evaluating it as to its strengths and weaknesses in order to create a suitable context for presenting their own work. It is in this sense, then, that books like the present one are best understood.

Such contributions by medical practitioners are certainly useful and deserve to be praised: on the factual level, they offer a lot of information to the historian. Moreover, they provide a source for understanding practitioners' aims and objectives. However, as long as the agendas differ so much between historians and doctors, and as long as there is so little co-operation between them, volumes like this one cannot be seen as a meaningful contribution to the critical analysis of past developments that historians of medicine are striving for.

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Steve Sturdy (ed.), *Medicine, health and the public sphere in Britain, 1600–2000*, Routledge Studies in the Social History of Medicine, London and New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. xiii, 290, £60.00 (hardback 0-415-27906-2).

This volume derives, for the most part, from papers given at the Society for the Social History of Medicine's annual conference in 1998. It consists of an 'Introduction', by the editor Steve Sturdy, and a further thirteen chapters. The latter are grouped together in three parts. The first