

Egyptian mummy as a sexual fetish. The “erotics of the unwrapped mummy” (p. 180) is an intriguing subject, and the mummy as inspiration for Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray* is an interesting one. In the final essay, Jane Stevenson lucidly discusses the reception or “encoding” of the Greek male figure in late Victorian and Edwardian England.

In assembling this collection, Montserrat states that “the source material was analysed using very different theoretical perspectives, ranging from Lacanian psychoanalysis to post-processual archaeology” (p. 6). It shows in places. The scholarship that animates this book cannot be denied, and several of the essays I have outlined are very good indeed; but the postmodern position of some others plays an exasperating threnody. Montserrat also states that “Modern discourse on the ancient body should be serious, but it need not always be solemn” (p. 8). Indeed. But it should always seek to inform, not obfuscate, to speak clearly, not hide behind fashionable clichés posited by some analytical schools. Less of “The Other”, please.

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Troels Kardel, *Steno: life, science, philosophy, with Niels Stensen’s Prooemium or Preface to a demonstration in the Copenhagen anatomic theater in the year 1673 and Holger Jacobaeus, Niels Stensen’s Anatomical demonstration no. XVI and other texts translated from the Latin*, Acta Historica Scientiarum Naturalium et Medicinalium, vol. 42, Copenhagen, The Danish National Library of Science and Medicine, 1994, pp. 147, DKK 200.00 (87-16-15100-3). Distributed by Munksgaard, 35 Nørre Søgade, DK-1016 Copenhagen K, Denmark (Fax: +45 3312 9387).

Niels Stensen’s reputation continues to be well served by his present-day Danish compatriots. This volume’s first component is a major and thorough essay describing his life and scientific achievements, and what later

generations made of him (never enough, Kardel contends). It depicts him too as a philosopher of science, who pondered the principles underlying his work, and generated doubts which he could then seek to resolve, instead of the previously time-honoured practice of retailing lists of past authorities. Kardel regards Stensen as even now inadequately recognized by the English-speaking world. It was not always so. Michael Foster, who probably could read Stensen’s Latin, in his *Lectures on the history of physiology during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries* (1901), wrote of Stensen’s physiological achievements repeatedly in terms of detailed deep respect, and Foster’s judgement was as acute as his lack of any references is frustrating. Incidentally, he evidently regarded Stensen’s geometrical conception of the shape of muscle fibres as of little moment, and I think he is still right, although Kardel argues otherwise here.

The next component is Stensen’s prelude to a dissection he conducted in 1673. His Latin is provided in facsimile, with an English translation. He argues that within the repulsive corpse lie treasures of great appeal to our sense of beauty; the anatomist can reveal them, but any credit must go to the Creator. Anatomy’s prime function is therefore to lead us towards a knowledge of God Himself.

Stensen’s earnestness on this topic makes his Latin here tortuous, much more so than when his subject is anatomy itself. Hence here and there the translation goes awry: twice, surprisingly, theologically awry. “The clumsiness of his [the anatomist’s] hands . . . would rather offend . . . if skillful craft did not rivet all the attention of the spectators” inevitably and confusingly implies that the “craft” is the anatomist’s (p. 115). But surely “rerum artificium” means the product of the Divine hand, and then the passage becomes sense. Similarly, “a knowledge of things appropriate to man’s purpose” (p. 121) suggests a *human* intention. But “fini hominis” is surely the Divine intention for man, “man’s chief end”; a mere human intention might in Latin be “consilio hominis”. And the translator’s “The

world only promises more than it offers; Nature offers more and greater things than it promises" (p. 115) is baffling—but not if “yields” is substituted for “offers” (the Latin is “praestat”); then we learn that the world—that world which in Wordsworth’s words “is too much with us; getting and spending, we lay waste our powers”—comes up with less than it promises; but anatomy comes up with much from its unpromising source material.

This Prelude is followed here by an English translation of an account of the dissection Stensen then performed, written in Latin by his student Holger Jakobsen; the Latin manuscript is reproduced facsimile. The dissection extended over parts of nine days in mid-winter, and one day is omitted—presumably a Sunday. There was an admirable comparative exhibition of the gut of various vertebrates, and intriguing speculations throughout about function. The final item is a translation from a Latin essay from the last years of Stensen’s life, when he was a bishop; the scientist in him was evidently still thinking, even if not experimenting any longer. The phrase “reflex action” appears, along with diagrams of neural connections. Were the “reflex” words in this context then originated by Stensen? Not so; it seems clear that it was Willis who first used them freely (in Latin), being much preoccupied with the analogy of the reflection of light and sound, and no doubt Stensen found them in Willis’s work. The evidence is in Georges Canguilhem’s *La formation du concept de réflexe aux 17e et 18e siècles* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1955, pp. 65–8).

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William C Gibson, *Medical comets: scholarly contributions by medical undergraduates*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Alumni Association, 1997, pp. xii, 282 (0-88865-541-X).

The author, “doctor, teacher, soldier, mentor, civic leader, chancellor, academic, researcher”,

has a well known and long-standing fascination with discoveries made by medical students. His first book on the subject was published forty years ago with a title which was explicit and easily understood: *Young endeavour, contributions to science by medical students over the last four centuries*. The present more obscure title comes from a saying of Linnaeus—“a professor can never better distinguish himself in his work than by encouraging a clever pupil, for the true discoverers are among them, as comets among stars”. On the colourful front cover of the book, William Harvey is portrayed gazing from the firmament and is identified with the brightest of all stars as well as with a comet which sweeps across the sky. Between the covers at least 250 doctors merit mention as “medical comets”, qualifying on account of their youthful scholarly contributions, though in later life many gained prominence and found fame in ways which were unconnected with their early interests. The style is racy and chatty and many of the cameo sketches are full of charm. An anecdotal approach often concentrates on unusual and unfamiliar aspects of the lives and achievements of the individuals chosen. Though death was a prerequisite for inclusion in *Young endeavour*, several contemporary “medical comets” are now accommodated. Many new entries are included, and the range of chapter headings has been expanded; the new book, also incorporates the material used in *Young endeavour* with few changes, to the extent that, in some cases, errors have been transposed. Some individuals appear in more than one category. For instance, William Osler’s boyhood interests as a budding microscopist are described in the chapter on anatomy; he also finds a home in the chapter on pathology and infection. More extensive consideration is given to those who have contributed to research on the nervous system than to other specialities, with Charles Sherrington accorded the longest entry in the book. Throughout the book quotations are given as marginalia, seemingly as likely to be inserted randomly as directly relevant to the text.