

*Medicine and Narration in the Eighteenth Century*. Edited by SOPHIE VASSET. (SVEC, 2013:04.) Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013. viii + 260 pp., ill.

The eleven essays in this book are about the role of narration in European medicine and literature of the eighteenth century, and draw on primary sources in French, English, and German, such as Samuel Auguste Tissot's, William Cullen's, and Johann Caspar Lavater's treatises. The titles of the book's four parts designate common themes but there are no systematic connections within each section. The second part 'Epistolary

narration' features Philip Rieder's essay on the tensions between faithful accounts of personal experience and new attempts at health taxonomies in Louis Odier's manuscript letters; David Shuttleton's history of the copy book of parts of Samuel Richardson's correspondence with George Cheyne; and H  l  ne Dachez and Sophie Vasset's analysis of bloodletting in the construction of gender roles in Richardson's epistolary novel *Sir Charles Grandison*. The editor's Introduction creates a sense of thematic coherence but fails to provide a systematic framework. For example, the Introduction mentions an important link between medical cases and letters in passing: the 'validation [of cases] by a group [...] in epistolary exchanges' (p. 5). This parenthetical remark skims over the conceptual interdependence of case and letter. Scholarship has shown that the epistemic value of the single medical case depends, among other factors, on the seriality and pooling of cases; yet Gianna Pomata's 'Sharing Cases: The Observations in Early Modern Medicine' (*Early Science and Medicine*, 15 (2010), 193–236), and Andrew Mendelsohn and Volker Hess's 'Case and Series: Medical Knowledge and Paper Technology' (*History of Science*, 48 (2010), 287–315) are not mentioned. Indeed, case histories are not such a lacuna as the editor suggests. Although Vasset states that 'case histories [...] lie at the heart of this study' (p. 5), the reflections on medical cases are wanting in some respects: Vasset bases the convergence of literature and medicine conceptually on Simon Shaffer and Steven Shapin's study of 'experimental practices' (pp. 1–3). This focus on experiment disregards the epistemic rootedness of medical writings in observation – a distinct scientific practice during the period (*Histories of Scientific Observation*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)). Vasset omits some of the seminal publications on cases published before 2013, which has consequences for her further discussion since this scholarship could have provided a more thorough conceptual basis and a missing link for her analysis of John Ranby's case history of Walpole's fatal illness, especially with regard to the role of casuistry and exemplarity. Despite these deficiencies, the collection contains excellent contributions, of which Gavin Budge's is the most thought provoking. Budge reads Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom* as an illustration for his persuasive contention that the notion of irritability (based on Albrecht von Haller) represents not a subcategory of, but an alternative to, the discourse of sensibility. For Budge, the discourse of irritability provides a pathway for the study of the mind as actively constructing sense experience. Scholars of eighteenth century literature and medicine will find the individual essays informative and, in some cases, inspiring.