

Orders' historiography, questions concerning liturgy and fiction, and heraldry and piety. Furthermore, the major part of the contributions concentrate on the settlement of the Orders in different regions of Europe and the Holy Land, or on special aspects regarding the history of a single commandery and its dignitaries. Most of the papers do not pay any attention to medicine, healthcare or the functioning of the Orders' hospitals at all. It is, therefore, surprising that the book contains two studies of outstanding interest for medical historians.

Ann Williams' article (pp. 55–62) examines the final illnesses of the Grand Masters of the Order of St John from Pierre de Aubusson (d. 1503) to Nicolas Cotoner (d. 1680) and the development of funerary rites surrounding the burial of the Order's highest ranking dignitaries, who at the same time occupied the islands of Rhodes and Malta as 'rulers in their own rights' (p. 55). In some cases the accounts allow a detailed reconstruction of the Grand Masters' last days, burial practice and the reaction of the public. The author is conscious of the fact that on the basis of Hippocratic/Galenic traditions the descriptions of the mortal illnesses of the Grand Masters cannot be clearly identified. Yet, it is interesting to see what the sources reveal about the symptoms and the roles of the medical practitioners. Moreover, Ann Williams reveals that the double function of the Order's Grand Master as head of a religious community as well as head of state becomes particularly obvious in the way the burial ceremony is performed. The descriptions of the mourning inhabitants of Rhodes and Malta in the Order's accounts do not differ from those in royal records.

A more than valuable complement to the written source is the erudite bioarchaeological analysis of latrine soil from the thirteenth-century hospital of St John at Acre (pp. 213–23) presented by Piers D. Mitchell, Jacqui P. Huntley and Eliezer Stern. The authors demonstrate that the examination of latrine soil not only proves what kind of foods people were eating, but also what kind

of parasitic helminthes infested their intestines. In the special case of a hospital latrine such as that in Acre it is even possible to gain further information about the medical treatment of the patients. One of the remarkable results of the analysis is that the fish bones and scales present in the latrine soil confirm that the patients observed a diet. Fish tapeworm ova have been identified by the researchers in the same samples. A number of figures additionally exemplify the information given in the text. Among the altogether brilliant articles of the volume this one is really trend-setting.

**Kay Peter Jankrift,**

Institut für Europäische Kulturgeschichte  
Universität Augsburg

**Louis Schwartz,** *Milton and Maternal Mortality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. xi + 269, £50.00/\$90.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-521-89638-2.

John Milton is not a poet well known for his kindness towards women. Despite his engaging, arguably feminist rendering of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, the historical Milton and his well-documented antagonisms with the women in his life have often clouded readers' perceptions of this difficult, though brilliant, early modern writer. There is the fact that his first wife, Mary Powell, moved back in with her parents for three years after just two months of marriage with him; the long and bitter legal suit that he pursued with Mary's mother concerning a debt between her late husband and his father; his unclear stance on women's education (he taught his daughters to read several foreign languages, but not to understand them); and finally his famously vexed relationships with his surviving children, all women, each of whom he excluded from his will.

Given these much-discussed biographical issues, a book on Milton's interest in female childbed suffering may come as somewhat of a surprise. Indeed, Louis Schwartz is careful at

the outset of his monograph to indicate that, while it is probably true that 'Milton did not really care about women's *oppression*, he did care about women's *suffering*' (p. 2). This suffering, Schwartz claims, linked directly to Milton's interest in theodicy, a subject that would preoccupy him for much of his writing life and become one of the central concerns of his great Christian epic, *Paradise Lost*. Though all forms of human suffering, Schwartz suggests, could be seen within Milton's religious worldview as just punishment for mankind's sins, he convincingly argues that childbed suffering and its all too frequent result in maternal mortality particularly troubled Milton. That women suffered so much more than men in the fulfilment of God's commandment to 'be fruitful and multiply', even considering Eve's role in the Fall, was difficult for the writer to understand and accept.

Such unease, Schwartz claims, emerged both from Milton's intellectual engagement with theological questions, as well as from his more personal experience of maternal death. Two of his wives, Mary Powell and Katherine Woodcock, died after complications in childbirth, with their children dying in quick succession after them (in the case of Katherine, the child to which she had just given birth died shortly after her, while Mary's new baby survived, but her one-year-old son John did not, allegedly as a result of being placed with a negligent nurse; Schwartz suggests that John's death would also have been seen as a consequence of his mother's passing, albeit indirectly). Such experiences, Schwartz argues, exposed Milton to the sorrows of childbed suffering as well as to the world of female medicine and obstetrics, all of which he maintains feature centrally in several key passages of Milton's poetry.

Schwartz contends that Milton was unusual in making childbirth and maternal mortality a subject for poetry, and, in his analysis of this literature, he identifies a distinctive shift from Milton's early writing to his later literary endeavours; while works like 'On Shakespear' and 'An Epitaph on the Marchioness of

Winchester' in some ways idealise maternal suffering, reading it as powerful metaphor for the act of creativity and corporeal transcendence, later treatments, including Sonnet 23 and *Paradise Lost*, offer more ambiguous conclusions. Such works, Schwartz frequently emphasises, were written after the deaths of Milton's wives, and he argues that grief as well as guilt shape the scope and vision of these later literary efforts. Here poetry and childbirth are not presented as quite so similar: though both are creative, generative activities, which may very well move the human subject towards the divine, the dangers associated with writing are understood to be far less immediate and persistent than those linked to maternity (a realisation that Schwartz argues resulted in 'guilt-laden relief' for Milton [p. 193]).

Such conclusions are of interest not only to Milton scholars, but also to those working more generally on early modern gender relations, reproduction, life cycles, and the relationship between literary, medical, and religious practices. Historians may find some of Schwartz's close readings a bit ponderous (he is heavy on detailed philological analysis), but they should also find his integrated study of medical and religious beliefs highly informative and carefully argued. Though centrally interested in Milton and his literary output, Schwartz's book highlights both the worldly and spiritual crises maternal mortality posed for all early modern families, helping readers understand how the presence of suffering in life both reinforced religious explanations as well as resisted them.

Erin Sullivan,  
University College London

Craig Ashley Hanson, *The English Virtuoso: Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), pp. xv + 316, \$50.00/£34.50, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-226-31587-4.