

Subsequent chapters examine significant medico-social events and shifts over the following decades. These range from the ‘asylum revolution’ (Chapter 3) to the much-studied and widespread outbreak of Asiatic cholera in 1832 (Chapter 5). Through these episodes, Brown argues that the cultural outlook of gentlemanly medical practitioners shifted: they increasingly saw themselves, and were seen by society more widely, as medico-scientists. We learn that the work of the medical officers of the York Lunatic Asylum was subjugated to the wider political and social agendas of various publics. In this regard, the York Asylum paralleled the case of Bedlam, and other medical institutions were not exempted from self-styled social reformers. Despite the apparent wider geographical reach of these themes, hinted at throughout the chapter, the reader is left craving deeper contextualization, particularly with other provincial centres. Brown himself notes in the conclusion to this chapter that ‘events at the Asylum can only be fully understood as constitutive of a much wider transformation’ (p. 104), yet the feeling remains that these broader changes are left untouched.

By contrast, in Chapter 5, the social and medical responses to cholera – which frame the emergence of medical societies across Britain – are used to illustrate the wider significance of York’s cultural milieu. It is here that *Performing Medicine* is at its strongest, taking in aspects of public health, infectious disease, medical professionalism and legislation alongside the central narratives of culture and medical authority.

The epilogue gives a whistlestop tour of the centrality of culture to medical practice and organization from around 1850 onwards, taking in topics as diverse as *Middlemarch*, the Dangerous Drugs Act (1920) and Labour’s landslide victory in the 1997 general election. Although it is interesting to see how the themes of the book continued over subsequent decades and indeed up to, and potentially beyond, the present, it could perhaps have been equally valuable to include some summative thematic material, drawing strands together from across the chapters and reflecting in more general terms on the period in question. More extensive comparative analysis with other, related professions, particularly during the early nineteenth century, would also have been welcome; the question whether medicine as a culture-dependent, performative and increasingly institutionalized activity was alone or somehow unique in this period is one which feels unanswered.

Although Brown explicitly concentrates on York as the subject of his study, this geographical specificity is, in the opinion of this reviewer, a positive rather than detrimental aspect of the book. The fact that one yearns for more extensive comparisons with other localities outside London is testament to the lack of attention which this subject has received from historians, rather than to authorial oversight. Brown is an inventive and entertaining writer, and the book has broad appeal beyond historians of medicine; it offers an approach which is of significant value for cultural historians, as well as historians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain more generally. In summary, then, the minor shortcomings of *Performing Medicine* are more than offset by its nuanced and sophisticated argument for a fundamental role for culture within the community of medical practitioners in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century provincial Britain.

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JOHN G. McEVROY, *The Historiography of the Chemical Revolution: Patterns of Interpretation in the History of Science*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010. Pp. xiii + 328. ISBN 978-1-84893-030-8. £60.00/\$99.00 (hardback).

doi:10.1017/S000708741200088X

Following Herbert Butterfield’s famous 1950s allusion to the ‘postponed scientific revolution in chemistry’, McEvoy’s study can be seen as the ‘postponed’ counterpart to H. Floris Cohen’s *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry* (1994), published nearly two decades ago. But whereas the latter was predominantly concerned with (the increasingly pressing) questions relating

to the constitution of the 'Scientific Revolution', the former 'offers an exegetical and critical survey of past and present interpretations of the Chemical Revolution, designed to lend clarity and direction to the current ferment of views and perspectives in the historiography of science' (p. 20). The first book-length study of its kind, McEvoy's wide-ranging and penetrating analysis provides a review of the variety of interpretive strategies employed in studies of the Chemical Revolution, from the Second World War to the present. As such, it forms an insightful and informative survey of the evolution of the history and philosophy of science, in its intellectual and institutional contexts, its various strands, its diverse methodologies and ideologies, and their interrelations.

Within this framework, McEvoy singles out three historiographically distinct and sequential interpretive styles – positivism, postpositivism and the sociology of scientific knowledge – which are discussed in the first six chapters. The first chapter traces the evolution of the positivist–Whig historiography of science, from its early nineteenth-century origins, through the seminal works of Sarton and Singer, to its later applications to the history of eighteenth-century chemistry, especially by historians like Conant, Partington and McKie. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the rise of postpositivistic sensibilities – expounded by Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos and Feyerabend – and analyse their influence on the historiography of the Chemical Revolution through the accounts of Kuhn, Musgrave, Toulmin and others. Chapters 4 to 6 chart the shift from modernism to postmodernism, the rise of pragmatism and post-structuralism, and the emergence of the sociology of scientific knowledge in the 1970s and 1980s, as developed by scholars like Pickering, Collins, Latour, Shapin and Schaffer. The works of Golinski, Roberts and Bensaude-Vincent, among others, exemplify the use of SSK methods to interpret the Chemical Revolution.

In Chapter 7, McEvoy advances what he terms 'robust contextualism' as an alternative historiography, undermining 'the formalism of philosophers and the relativism of sociologists in favour of a realist and materialist sense of its historicity' (p. 17). Centring on 'the need to develop a clear sense of the priority and irreducibility of history and the methods used to study it', McEvoy's corrective approach privileges not a notion of historical complexity rooted in the multiplicity of historical details and circumstances, but a fundamental one, 'irreducible to the unfolding of scientific experience, the instantiation of formal structures, the realization of material interests, or any simple conjunction thereof' (pp. 11–12). Seeking to transcend both the methodological emphasis on unifying theories in science and the focus on disparate local practices, robust contextualism draws on Marxist 'historical materialism' and Althusserian 'decentered totality' – underscoring 'the complexity involved in the ontological priority and autonomy of history' – to shed light on the long-standing problems of continuity versus discontinuity and unity versus diversity in the Chemical Revolution (p. 234). Thus McEvoy situates the Revolution within the broader sociocultural context of the Enlightenment, paying particular attention to the dissolution of European feudalism, the rise of capitalism and Priestley's and Lavoisier's shared goals to free science from metaphysics, or their respective commitments to the use of analysis in chemical practice.

True to its title, this is a study of the various ways in which the Chemical Revolution has been investigated, understood and construed. Thus it will be of great interest to scholars of the Chemical Revolution, but will prove of less use to those seeking to gain familiarity with the historical details, locales, events and *dramatis personae* commonly associated with this revolutionary episode and its chief product, modern chemistry. Still, this is a work of high scholarly order: although dense and occasionally verbose, the text is well written and well organized. It is a welcome contribution to the history and philosophy of science and should appeal to anyone interested in the history of chemistry or Enlightenment science. More broadly, it will be useful to historians, sociologists and philosophers of science, including those interested in the history of the philosophy of science and the philosophy of history in general.

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