



Elena Carrera, ed., *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013). Print, xii + 247 pp., \$147 / €107, ISBN: 9789004250826.

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*Review*

As the 'affective turn' in the humanities stimulates a growing body of interdisciplinary research into the minutiae of emotional experience in past societies, *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700* is a timely reappraisal of pre-modern beliefs about the mind-body relation in medieval and early modern European societies. Editor Elena Carrera has brought together eight diverse essays, which probe the relatively underexplored links between the passions and notions of physiological health and wellbeing in the Aristotelo-Galenic medical canon.

Moving past the rigid, or systemic, interpretations of the passions and humoral body found in much of the existing literature, the contributing authors outline a more fluid and reciprocal relationship between states of mind, bodily health, and disorder in the classical medical corpus. The humoral body, as Erin Sullivan elaborates, 'was a holistic system that stressed correspondences and sympathies across physical, mental, and spiritual functioning, as well as connections between the internal world'(163). Promptings of the intellectual and receptive faculties could, it was thought, agitate the body's humours and vital spirits, causing them to circulate or subside, heat, or dry out the corporeal frame. Vivid temperamental states were, thus, met with anxiety in pre-modern societies, considered as markers of psychological or corporeal disorders, or pathologised as debilitating physiological states in themselves. Maintaining a temperamental equilibrium was thought essential for the healthy functioning of both body and mind, and, as the essays in this collection illustrate, the management of emotional states received the constant attention of early moderns, who devised an array of moral and medical interventions so as to quell disordered passions – or promote potentially revitalising ones – in the search for physical vitality.

The individual chapters examine a variety of novel issues relating to the passions and emotions in specific cultural contexts, which, taken collectively, offer a broad survey of the distinct emotional communities of early modern Europe. Most, like Sullivan's study of grief in Jacobean English literary culture, or Angus Gowland's exemplary study of Renaissance melancholy, address relatively specific subjects, and will be of particular interest to scholars in specialist fields.

Given these diverse topics of enquiry, there are, understandably, some slight contradictions between the works, and the volume does not make any definitive claim about the nature of emotional experience or expression in past societies. However, in examining the implications of the mind-body connection for pre-modern conceptualisations of health, the essays do challenge widely-held assumptions about the evaluation of the passions in contemporary intellectual traditions, which will be of general interest to cultural historians and literary scholars alike.

Nicholas Lombardo, for example, offers a reinterpretation of Thomas Aquinas's writings, which places the experience of the passions at the centre of his ethical project. Rejecting conventional assessments of Aquinas's writings, which, he suggests, overwhelmingly depict the passions as 'negative' affects, Lombardo contends that Aquinas held a decidedly more optimistic view of emotional experience. While the passions were considered dangerous when allowed to run to excess, Aquinas maintained that, when ordered by reason and properly directed, they could also be regarded as virtuous affects, prompting the individual towards a spiritual or moral *telos*. Indeed, intense passion could be, in itself, 'a mark of intense virtue,' an indication 'that the will is powerfully inclined toward the good, and that the sense appetite has been thoroughly suffused with right reason'(40). Thus when operating according to their correct inner structure, even seemingly harmful passions, such as anger and grief, could be evaluated as markers of moral virtue and psychological health.

Addressing a different intellectual tradition, Elena Carrera, in a comprehensive study of pre-modern attitudes to anger, turns to contemporary medical texts to explore the perceived effects of passions on the body in the classical medical corpus. Contesting the rigid humoural paradigm that dominates much of the scholarly literature, which attributes particular emotions or mood states to each of four, fixed humoural habits, Carrera argues that medieval and early modern medical theorists considered the effects of the passions in relation to an individual's unique, but fluctuating, 'physiological disposition' (99). Depending on the 'primary qualities' of their particular temperament (hot, cold, wet, or dry), individuals were thought to have 'distinct ways of experiencing each passion' that would influence the evaluation of their emotional state (108). Further, in states of temperamental imbalance or disorder, it was believed that individuals could restore a healthy balance of the body's spirits by stimulating passions thought to be beneficial to their particular physiological makeup. Thus medical writers could recommend the cultivation of even seemingly irascible passions, such as anger, so as to counter physiological debilities and weaknesses with the heat, strength, and vitality afforded by the body's spirits.

Such reappraisals call into question conventional assumptions about the reception of the emotions in pre-modern cultural thought, which has further implications for our understandings of contemporary evaluations of health and physiological wellbeing. By highlighting the complex moral and physiological meanings attributed to the passions in different cultural traditions, these essays broaden the scope for inquiry into the subjective appraisals of the emotions in past societies, and present a new direction for historians of the emotions to consider what it meant to feel healthy.

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