

BOOK REVIEW

Casanova's Guide to Medicine. 18th Century Medical Practice *by Lisa Lovett*

Hardback and other formats, 328 pages
Pen & Sword History, ISBN 9781526779212
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This is a revealing and instructive book and a pleasure to read. The work is written by a well-published Psychiatrist. Psychiatrists are perhaps the specialists who relate most closely to the social structures and problems of their patients. This is a most important aspect of researching the illness and wellness, problems and solutions, of a bygone era where much is supposition.

The jacket blurb starts with 'Forget the Stereotype! Giacomo Casanova's (1725-1798) reputation as libertine has sadly eclipsed his talents as a scholar, linguist, prolific writer and manqué doctor. He wrote his memoirs at the end of his life, on the advice of his doctor to control his propensity to depression'. We have come to associate Casanova's life with lots of racy bits, and some are included here, but, overall, this work provides a delightful analysis of aspects of eighteenth century medical practice. We learn of the hidden life of Casanova and of nuns at that time, of the pox and women's health problems, of sexual practices and diseases that spread, and many other afflictions which we still recognise today.

The monochrome illustrations include, this reviewer's favourite, James Parkinson's design for a truss. References are substantial so that the reader can explore further and they indicate too that the author has researched her subject well.

Some publishers have not addressed the issue of readers' ease in navigating references, endnotes and bibliography, by not including, within the text, pointers to these important points. Time is wasted trying to relate page, chapter and reference that are at the end of the volume. The answer is to include references and endnotes at the bottom of each page and numbered consecutively throughout each chapter; bibliography can come at the end of each chapter.

This work is highly recommended to update us on a neglected epoch of medical history and should appeal to a wide audience.

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