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**Francesca Scott, Kate Scarth and Ji Won Chung (eds.), *Picturing Women's Health*, Pickering & Chatto: London, 2014; xiv + 208 pp.: 9781848934245, £60 (hbk)**

**Reviewed by:** Sarah Edwards, *University of Strathclyde*

This fourth volume from the Warwick Series in the Humanities focuses on the medical humanities and the 'long nineteenth century', and aims to 'picture many women, types of (ill) health, social contexts and sources' (p. 9). In the introduction, the trope of the picture is utilised to explain and unify the collection's focus on cultural representations. The editors outline the varied ways in which authors 'frame' their subjects, drawing on theories of visual representation, creation and consumption and depictions in medical photography, travel writing, the novel and student magazines. While this discursive context is well-illustrated by an analysis of the passage in chapter 5 of Jane Austen's *Emma* - to which the book's title alludes (and Austen's associations between health, beauty, the gaze and socio-economic status reverberate throughout this collection) - the introduction provides a fairly limited account of medical, political and cultural attitudes to women's health during this period. This brief, 10-page essay cites the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay, and developments in women's reproductive medicine, in the eighteenth century, and the control of female sexuality in the later period through legislation (such as the Contagious Diseases Act), the development of psychology and the asylum threat. The essays are quickly summarised in half a page. As the collection is so inclusive, it might have been useful to write a longer piece which engaged more fully with discursive effects on the wide range of genres and contexts that are represented here. Nevertheless, the editors provide an overarching narrative focused on the mind-body dualism and scopic control and the essays provide varied and convincing examples of the ways that writers, doctors and travellers employed a range of cultural practices to challenge and re-define these concepts at particular historical moments. Furthermore, the collection's authors often refer to each other's work, and also allude to contemporary texts and

debates beyond the scope of their essays, which creates a productive, wide-ranging and interdisciplinary discussion.

The first essay, Joseph Morrissey's 'Sensibility and Good Health in Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde*', considers how Smith's criticises the popular theory of sensibility and constructions of femininity through her use of narrative technique. While this essay provides some acute stylistic analysis, the ostensible focus on women's health is somewhat laboured during its first half and the introduction of a picture as a plot device could have been harnessed to the book's theme more effectively. By contrast, Andrew McInnes' 'Amazonian Fashions: Lady Delacour's (Re)Dress in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', provides a fascinating account of the ways in which Edgeworth interrogates attitudes to breast-feeding and motherhood in the 1790s, drawing on the visual satires of James Gillray. Sarah Richardson's essay deals with the essays, letters and lectures of feminist food reformers Anna Kingsford and Annie Cobden-Sanderson who thus appealed to many audiences to reform the 'body politic'. Here, the chronological structure of the book seemed questionable: Richardson's work on medicine and print cultures might have been better situated alongside the later essays of Brock and Marland. Instead, it is followed by Alexandra Lewis' complex essay on Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*, miasma and trauma which considers how Bronte develops an 'innovative poetics' (p. 60) of visual imagery and narrative framing derived from contemporary theories of physiognomy and physiologic sympathy. Susannah Wilson's equally outstanding essay on the iconography of anorexia nervosa examines 15 clinical portraits and the control of the anorexic body by analysing the gazes of patients and doctors, and shifting visual and written narratives of the condition. Tabitha Sparks' work on the nurse Kate Marsden's Siberian leper project and travel memoir examines her mixing of genres and the cultural resonances of leprosy in relation to the construction of the Victorian nurse. This subtle essay engages with a range of texts including journalism, novels and medical journals, but engages less fully with the motif of the picture than many other contributions. Katherine Ford's case study of a lunatic asylum at the *fin-de-siecle* compares the treatment, and depiction of, male and female patients, drawing on extensive

medical records and three photographs. While the written records provide a valuable corrective to some famous fictional depictions of insanity, which are cited in the essay, the limited number of visual images undermines the validity of Ford's arguments about gendered 'pictures' of madness. Claire Brock's essay turns to the emerging figure of the female doctor, and she also focuses on a single institution through a close reading of the magazine of the London School of Medicine for Women from 1895-1910. Brock provides a brilliant account of the magazine's role in representing and shaping the collective identity of present and former students, and contemporary perceptions of women's physical and mental fitness for medicine, through the juxtaposition of letters, articles, poems, humorous illustrations of 'types' of lady medicals, and photographs. Finally, Hilary Marland's essay draws together many of the collection's themes. Her work on the health of adolescent girls around 1900 examines a range of sources – literary magazines, medical periodicals, women's magazines, the *Girls' Own Paper* – to explore diverse medical and lay debates about the factors that impacted on women's health. These factors included reproductive 'limitations' such as hysteria and menstruation, and, increasingly, the benefits of academic education and physical exercise.

More generally, the copious illustrations are always embedded perfectly within the analyses and are generally well-reproduced (although the copy-editing leaves a great deal to be desired). The book's focus on words and images, and on a range of disciplines and audiences, ultimately generates a stimulating and nicely indeterminate picture of debates on women's health during this period.

*Picturing Women's Health* is a timely and important work for scholars and students within and beyond the medical humanities.