
H-France Review Vol. 12 (February 2012), No. 20

Harry W. Paul, *Henri de Rothschild, 1872-1947: Medicine and Theater*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. 322 pp. £70 hb. ISBN 978-1-4094-0515-3.

Review by Lisa O'Sullivan, University of Sydney.

The charming caricature on the jacket of this biography shows a somewhat rotund Henri de Rothschild looking out from a stage, theatrical mask in one hand, bottled fetus in the other, chest festooned with implements from boxing gloves to a syringe, and writing quill behind his ear. It is captioned as "the famous doctor, grand sportsman, celebrated author, Baron Henri De Rothschild." It is these multifaceted and exuberant aspects to Henri De Rothschild's personality that Harry W. Paul's biography aims to encompass. As Paul makes clear in his introduction, he considers Henri De Rothschild to be both a neglected and misunderstood figure in the current literature, a tendency this volume aims to correct. In two parts, the book covers Henri's and his family's medical and philanthropic work, and his work as a playwright, informed in turn by his clinical experience.

The Rothschild family's philanthropic activities saw them establish hospitals, subsidize canteens and food cooperatives, finance scientific research, and establish prizes for clinical advances. Henri was unusual in extending this interest in medicine and public health to professional training as a physician, as well as an active research and clinical career. The first part of the book explores the medical activities of the Rothschild family, the hospitals they established in Paris and Berck-sur-Mer, and Henri's medical career. Henri was particularly involved with paediatrics and puericulture (maternal and infant health) and active in research on methods for the sterilization of milk and strategies for its distribution and acceptance by mothers. Paul also explores Henri's work on syphilis, burns and the application of new technologies using radiation and electricity in medicine. There is much of interest here for historians of France and medicine and, for the most part, the volume balances the challenge of remaining accessible while not alienating specialist readers in either field. However, given the lack of explanation for many medical and technical terms, it is undoubtedly readers with knowledge in both French history and the history of medicine who will get the most out of this book.

The volume is full of anecdotes and asides that evoke the medical culture of the period, from debates within the Society of Surgery over new radical approaches to cancer surgery and the subsequent success of new pioneers when operating on celebrities (pp. 75-76), to dinnertime entertainments at which Fournier, one of the leading lights of the Salpêtrière Hospital, had his dog gulp down sugar cubes named after his arch-rival, Charcot (p. 97). Yet for all its colorful detail, this volume presents in many ways a rather internalist and uncritically progressive account of developments in medical science. It is an approach in which the main value of history of medicine is taken as its ability to illuminate contemporary medical science and "reveal the path of progress taken by the art as well as the insight of the great men into the cure of diseases" (p. 84).

Paul moves between highly detailed analyses of new developments in medical science and macro-level analysis privileging websites and popular works above more specialist literature in French medical history. Many of Paul's micro-histories provide very useful accounts of new institutions, techniques and therapies. Their comprehensive nature makes the book a valuable resource for developments in late

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French medicine, but at times distract from the narrative, especially as in some cases they cover almost the entire chronological period of the book.

The scope of research on which Paul has drawn is clearly enormous and he meticulously lists statistics and figures on numerous occasions: from the running costs for Henri's Parisian clinics; a full page of costs including scientific instruments, photography, washing, salaries and plumbing (p. 87); statistics comparing maternity leave, breast feeding and infant mortality (p. 119); to figures comparing the ratios between doctors, soldiers and civilians across France, Germany and the UK during the First World War (p. 185). At times, the level of detail provided can be overwhelming; more synthesis and explanation would help readers understand and contextualize the significance of this data.

Also surprisingly lacking, given the amount of detail Paul presents, is a sustained sense of the broader cultural and historical contexts in which the events he describes are taking place. For instance, chapters on "The science of infant feeding" and "A new medical specialty: pediatrics" present a rich discussion of the development of infant health, but makes only limited reference to the acute medical and political concern in France at the turn of the century over population decrease, high levels of infant mortality, and the distinct forms of eugenic thinking, especially in relation to maternal and child health, which emerged in response to these—issues upon which there is a well-established secondary literature to draw.

The second, much briefer part of the book deals with Henri's activities as a prolific and popular playwright. Writing under the pseudonym 'André Pascal,' Henri wrote thirty-eight plays, many drawing on his medical experience. He addressed topics including medical ethics and malpractice (*Le Caducée*, written 1900-1912, first performed 1921), the attempt of women to establish medical careers (*La Vocation*, 1926) and charlatanism and corruption (*Le Grand Patron*, 1931). Paul analyses these, the best known of Henri's plays, with extensive descriptions of their plots and some consideration of their reception. However, as with earlier chapters on Henri's medical work, this analysis sometimes misses the opportunity to link these works with larger developments in the world of theatre, and the art's role as a platform for social critique.

Given the larger-than-life persona Paul attributes to Henri, it is surprisingly the man himself who becomes obscured in the text. We are told, for example that the official military records of Henri's WWI service are "skeletal," but probably "more accurate" than Henri's later recollections (p. 190), details of which are frustratingly absent. Henri's plays offer a way into analyzing his beliefs and preoccupations, but aside from Henri's early relationship with his mother, the reader gets little insight into his personal and family life, or the larger socio-political milieu in which he operated. While Paul's conclusion includes a consideration of French anti-Semitism in the first decades of the twentieth century, this feels cursory. Neither the Dreyfus Affair nor the events of World War II are mentioned more than fleetingly, leaving the impression that the Rothschilds operated in a sphere apart, a conclusion very much contrary to the impression Paul has otherwise done so much to convey, of a family deeply immersed in, and concerned with, the pressing social and political issues of the day. This does not detract from the wealth of historical detail the book offers readers interested in the medicine and culture of France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but does mean that at the end of the volume Henri de Rothschild remains a somewhat elusive figure.

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ISSN 1553-9172