

of the Board of Health, and the wrong location. Undaunted, he then proceeds to misspell the names of three of the seven men who attended. The minutes of this meeting are held in the State archives, and can easily be checked. These egregious errors may be the result of careless research, possibly by a clerical assistant, but they diminish the credibility of the whole work because every statement needs to be verified against original sources. But it gets worse. There are frequent typographic errors in names and dates that could have been detected during proofreading. The editors of the electronic version have made some minor changes including altered capitalisation, but have also managed to transpose parts of the text into the footnotes, rendering both incomprehensible (e.g., p. 73).

Perhaps the most rewarding feature of the book in both formats is Cummins' account of the machinations of his colleagues. He admits readily that his opinions were coloured by his belief that there was a campaign by politicians and bureaucrats to remove him from office by disbanding the department.

Cummins' analysis is an interesting historical document in its own right, written from the perspective of an aggrieved former employee twenty-five years ago. The Department of Health must be congratulated on republishing it in user-friendly format, but it is pity that it should be presented as a definitive account of the development of health services in NSA when later research has disclosed its weaknesses. This is particularly unfortunate given that in 1998 the department commissioned an experienced professional historian (Rosemary Broomham) to write a comprehensive history, with more apposite illustrations, but did not publish the resulting manuscript. We can hope that this work will eventually appear on the website to give a more balanced view.

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Paracelsus, the Man who Defied Medicine: His Real Contribution to Medicine and Science. By Hugh Crone (The Albarello Press, Melbourne, 2004, \$29.95, ISBN 0-646-43327-X)

CRONE'S BOOK IS THE LATEST ADDITION TO THE RATHER MODEST COLLECTION of English works on Paracelsus. It is a broad look at the man and his medical work, and not only places Paracelsus in historical context but examines his contribution to the science of the time. Crone is not a historian. He is a scientist, and this background is utilised in his review of the impact and importance of Paracelsus' theories.

Paracelsus was an eccentric man who found it difficult to get along with acquaintances, wrote prolifically, but published virtually nothing during his lifetime. It was only after his death that his ideas were taken up and became popular. His writing was abstract, difficult to follow and often contradictory. Crone is frank about his subject's personal shortcomings, and refers to recent evidence suggesting that Paracelsus' unusual personality may have been largely the result of a hormonal disorder. Crone is also explicit regarding the vague and contradictory nature of Paracelsus' writings. He compares specific Paracelsian works with those written by other writers dealing with the same subjects at approximately the same time. In doing so, Paracelsus' idiosyncratic style—low on details and high on metaphor—can be clearly seen.

Despite this dose of realism, Crone remains reluctant to criticise Paracelsus very strongly, and this may be frustrating to the reader who holds a less sympathetic view. It is rightly pointed out that Paracelsus' personality probably created a barrier to establishing a publishing relationship during his lifetime, and that his writings were eventually edited and printed without their author's guidance. The limitations within which he was working are also emphasised. Crone points out that Paracelsus was often restricted to documenting personal observations without an established, functional theoretical framework within which to interpret them. All of these factors surely contributed to the vague, unstructured and often unintelligible work that survives today. But the possibility remains that Paracelsus' primary concern was a commitment to a mystical, obscurantist cosmology and that the 'scientific' details in his writing are incidental, or even accidental. The reader who is tempted by this scenario may be disappointed.

On the other hand, some interesting contradictions from the secondary literature are presented. Various details of Paracelsus' life are in dispute and conflicting versions discussed. Crone helpfully explodes the unsupported myths others have put forward as fact. As a scientist, Crone is writing for an audience with an interest in his own field. The book is not intended as a purely historical account, and contrasts and similarities with modern science are drawn throughout. Paracelsus' alchemical remarks are explained in modern terms and archaic terminology defined. This approach is fascinating for those with an interest in science, who will enjoy understanding intriguing terms such as *oleum vitrioli*. A particularly rewarding chapter is that on homeopathy, a discipline that claims Paracelsus as an early scholar. It provides a delightful look at the origin of this claim and the many aspects of Paracelsus' work that highlight its falsity. From this point of view, Crone has given us a bridging work between modern science and history.

Crone's final appraisal of Paracelsus is quite balanced. He accepts the quirks and eccentricities of both the man and his work but seeks

to highlight the few 'gems' to be found. In doing so, Crone is honest in pointing out how some of his supposedly great innovations were either entirely unoriginal or simply incidental, in other words, nowhere near as important to their author as people may believe. Crone cogently concludes that the one unquestionably valuable contribution of Paracelsus was his stimulation of an atmosphere of inquiry. He may not have converted the scientific world to his own position, but at least he made it consider where it wanted to go.

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Blood Matters: A Social History of the Victorian Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service. By Matthew Klugman (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004, \$39.95, ISBN: 1-74097-066-7) 236 pp.

BLOOD, AS MATTHEW KLUGMAN TELLS US, IS BOTH VITAL TO LIFE AND INFUSED with notions of risk, danger and death. Growing up in the 1960s we mimicked Native Americans and played at becoming blood brothers (but never blood sisters). Now we reach for the latex gloves before willingly coming into contact with a stranger's blood. Prior to the 1980s, and the identification of HIV in the Australian blood supply, the Victorian Red Cross Blood Service was constructed as a triumph of volunteerism and community service. Now a more business-like, State-regulated, national blood service manufactures a range of 'therapeutic goods' from blood donated by a more restricted and closely monitored group of donors.

Blood Matters charts a history of the Victorian Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service from its inception in 1929 to the formation of a national service in 1996. It is a social history of the first major Australian blood transfusion service, and who better to write this narrative than Matthew Klugman, who has, for some time, written and spoken engagingly and informatively on the social history and philosophy of blood and blood donation for both academic and general audiences. The verso of the title page declares that the book is 'an independent history of the Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service'. But maintaining good relationships with past and present blood bank personnel was clearly essential to the writing of this history. If there were tensions between historian and blood bank staff, readers are not privy to them. *Blood Matters* maintains a critical, investigative edge but is a measured, well-mannered and sympathetic history. Klugman has written a supply side history that focused on the public good, the social