

L'usage du sexe: Lettres au Dr Tissot, auteur de *L'onanisme* (1760). Edited by Patrick Singy. Sources en perspective. Lausanne: Éditions BHMS, 2014. Pp. x+276. €39.00.

Les mots du corps: Expérience de la maladie dans les lettres de patients à un médecin du 18^e siècle; Samuel Auguste Tissot. By Séverine Pilloud. Bibliothèque d'histoire de la médecine et de la santé. Lausanne: Éditions BHMS, 2013. Pp. xviii+373. €45.00.

Chances are that if you Google the name of Samuel Auguste Tissot, you'll be led to a string of sites that refer (none too kindly) to his 1760 book on the dangers of onanism. But there is more to Tissot than the role he played in the peculiar eighteenth-century campaign to pathologize masturbation. In addition to enjoying enormous success as a medical popularizer, he was a renowned practitioner who attracted patients from all over Europe, including hundreds with whom he communicated solely by letter. Medical consultation by letter was widespread during the Enlightenment, in part because, as Séverine Pilloud and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier note, "doctors did not always feel it was necessary to see patients, or to touch their bodies, diagnosis primarily being based on a narrative or a written account of symptoms" ("The Intimate Experience of the Body in the Eighteenth Century: Between Interiority and Exteriority," *Medical History* 47 [2003]: 451–72, at 453). Patient letters, including those written to Tissot, have attracted scholars interested in the cultural history of illness for the past three decades or so. Until now, however, research on these sources was hampered by the simple problem of access: Tissot's consultation letters could be read by visiting the archives of the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne. Happily, that problem has now been solved, thanks to a database built by Pilloud, Louis-Courvoisier, and Vincent Barras, which has made the approximately 1,300 letters contained in those archives publicly available and searchable online (see http://www.chuv.ch/iuhmsp/ihm_bhms).

In different but complementary ways, Patrick Singy's *L'usage du sexe* and Pilloud's *Les mots du corps* provided guided tours through those letters, accompanied in each case by an incisive analysis of the ideas, beliefs, and practices they reflect. Whereas Singy's edited volume illuminates a particular set of the "icebergs" jutting up from the past through Tissot's consultation letters (44), Pilloud's study offers a grand tour of the conceptual and cultural universe from which they arose.

The bulk of *L'usage du sexe* is devoted to a transcription of ninety-eight consultation letters in the Fonds Tissot that pertain to sex. The letters, organized chronologically from 1765 to 1796, are each introduced by a data sheet specifying details like the sex, age, and profession of the patient, and they are followed by a glossary that explains the meaning of now-obscure terms such as "pandiculation" (252). Read on their own, as illness narratives written by actual patients or people writing on a patient's behalf, the letters provide fascinating glimpses of many aspects of eighteenth-century life. We learn not just about these patients' sexual problems but also about their diets, habits, moods, stomach and nervous ailments, and life circumstances, and we get a sense of how intently some laypeople read *L'onanisme*.

One would, however, miss much of the point of *L'usage du sexe* if one overlooked its opening historiographical essay. Here, Singy offers a new interpretation of *L'onanisme* that doubles as a critique of existing approaches to the history of sexuality. His first target is the "ambiguous lesson" of Michel Foucault, who, although often credited with having historicized sexuality, sometimes treated it as an invariant defined essentially by its association with identity and desire (3–7). The people who wrote to Tissot about sexual matters did not, Singy emphasizes, "have" sexuality in that sense, and neither they nor Tissot were preoccupied with the putative sinful aspects of masturbation, as is assumed by historians who compare *L'onanisme* too casually to the religiously motivated 1716 work *Onania* (19–22). Rather, they were mainly concerned with excess, that is, the immoderate loss of semen, held at the time to be one of the body's precious fluids (23). Moreover, Tissot's correspondents "did not isolate sex from other problems that we, as modern people, would tend to keep clearly separated. . . . Bertrand Duclaux, who wrote for a sick friend, grouped together 'venereal acts,' the study of abstract sciences, and food" (29–30; my translation). The organizing framework for this way of thinking was the ancient doctrine of the nonnaturals, defined as air, food and drink, exercise and sleep, bodily retentions and evacuations, and the passions of the soul. Its driving logic was more quantitative than qualitative, in that all the nonnaturals had the same mechanical effects on the body: depletion or restoration of a necessary vital resource (30–33). By this logic, the key to staying in good health was to exercise moderation, and overdoing it in one area could be remedied by cutting back in another. Excessive sexual activity—whether it involved masturbation or "the use of women" (37)—could therefore be compensated by giving up coffee and following soothing therapies like drinking *petit lait* and taking tepid baths (51). Tissot did seek to instill fear in *L'onanisme*'s readers through graphic descriptions of the illnesses he tied to masturbation (19); he also exhorted those readers to admit their sexual behavior to their physician. However, his purpose was not to get them to confess their hidden thoughts or desires but to give their doctor an accurate idea of the quantity of semen ejaculated—an order with which some of his consulting patients dutifully complied (35, 118–21).

Pilloud's mission in *Les mots du corps* is broader and more ambitious than Singy's. Drawing both on Tissot's consultation letters and on his published books, she aims to reconstruct the world of health care and illness experience that existed around Tissot—a world that involved not merely his native Switzerland but also France and other places in Europe (the impressive geographical reach of his medical correspondence is shown on the maps provided in the book's annexes, 313–14). She identifies some striking patterns in the letters, including the involvement of networks of family and community members in the care, diagnosis, and treatment of the ailing; the varied strategies which people used to navigate the eighteenth-century medical marketplace; the eclectic mix of terms, theories, and explanatory models—some from dominant medical discourse, and some from popular culture—on which laypeople drew to make sense of disease, pain, and cures; and the care with which they narrated the personal histories underlying a disease. While it is true that other scholars have treated those patterns (for example, Michael Stolberg in *Experiencing Illness and the Sick Body in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Leonard Unglaub and Logan Kennedy [Basingstoke and New York, 2011]), Pilloud is the first to offer a meticulous study of the forms they took in Tissot's consultation letters. She also illuminates the intriguingly close intertextual relationship which existed between Tissot's consultation letters and his health advice books—not simply *L'onanisme*, but also *L'avis au peuple sur sa santé* (1761), *De la santé des gens de lettres* (1768), and other then-famous works.

The deep knowledge of the Fonds Tissot that Pilloud has acquired as one of the architects of the Lausanne University database is amply apparent in this panoramic study. So, too, is her mastery of existing studies pertinent to epistolary medical consultation, pa-

tients' experience of illness, the marketing of medical knowledge, and the discursive construction of disease. All of these threads, and more, are woven into the historiographical framework presented in the book's introduction. Chapters 2–4 describe in great detail the concrete ways in which health care was sought and delivered in eighteenth-century Europe—including, but not limited to, epistolary consultation. Equally thoroughgoing is the overview provided in chapter 5 of the views that Tissot's correspondents held about the body, which intermingled elements of humoralism, temperament theory, and the "body-machine" model with newer ideas about irritability, nervous sensibility, and the mutual reciprocity between the physiological and psychological sides of human existence. Finally, chapter 6 offers an intriguing synthesis of the narrative accounts that Tissot's correspondents crafted of their ailments, with the ailments grouped into the major nosological categories reflected in his books: childhood illnesses, sexual disorders, ailments and health conditions specific to women, hypochondria and hysteria, "religious" madness and other nervous ailments, and the diseases deemed particular to intellectuals, people of fashion, or the rural population. Pilloud is particularly intent here on showing how Tissot's health advice books shaped the experience of illness as reported by his correspondents. For example, M. Gringet, a fabric designer, referred explicitly to *De la santé des gens de lettres* in his consulting letter and perceived his own symptoms in those that Tissot had ascribed to scholars laid low by overstudy and sedentariness (279).

There are a couple of minor citational glitches in Pilloud's book: some passages that appeared in Tissot's *Essai sur les maladies des gens du monde* (1770) are misattributed to *De la santé des gens de lettres* or to *L'onanisme* (223, 283); but that is a minor quibble, given the precision that Pilloud brings to all other aspects of her study. And whereas some readers might regret the absence of an index, they will find several—for names, geographical locations, and subjects ranging from age and illness to violence—in the database that Pilloud helped to build. Like *L'usage du sexe*, *Les mots du corps* succeeds in demonstrating the exciting possibilities for future research afforded by that database, while also standing as a major scholarly achievement on its own terms.

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