

des ancêtres, le terre du grand repos, est le lieu privilégié où le dernier rejeton issu de la lignée doit faire ses premiers pas » (472).

Comme le montre ce livre, la société paysanne perdra le pouvoir sur elle-même par l'influence de l'Église, de l'État et de la médecine. Les formalisations idéologiques et juridiques qui émaneront de ces systèmes produiront l'éclatement des solidarités locales. L'autosuffisance apparente des individus remplacera le sentiment clair d'appartenir à un cosmos vivant. Ainsi, préférons-nous actuellement choisir des prénoms originaux, plutôt que représentatifs des continuités des lignages, du lieu et du temps, c'est-à-dire des fondements ontologiques de la personne. Autrefois « le prénom familial ne se contentait pas de marquer la filiation; il témoignait aussi de l'appartenance à un territoire, à une terre des ancêtres; il était alors l'un des symboles de l'autochtonie » (543).

Pour un lecteur moderne, membre d'une société qui privilégie l'aspect immédiat et interchangeable des choses, l'*homo magus*, que nous présente si clairement Jacques Gélis, agit comme contraste révélateur. Il devient autant une formule de transparence qu'un maillon d'une chaîne historique; en somme, il se révèle comme ancêtre.

Jean Bernabé  
Université d'Ottawa

\* \* \*

Robert S. Gottfried — *Doctors and Medicine in Medieval England, 1340-1530*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pp. xvi, 359.

Professor Gottfried is a natural choice for a book of this kind. He has already produced works on the Black Death in Europe and more pertinently for this study on the effects of disease and its medical implications in fifteenth-century England, as well as a book on the late medieval English urban situation (specifically Bury St. Edmunds). Since most medical people of the time lived in towns and cities the range of experience that Gottfried holds in both medical and urban concerns in late medieval England is ideal. This particular book also attempts a much more systematic analysis of the subject than has hitherto been attempted. And it has a strong and controversial thesis to advance, in that it argues that the late medieval period was a "golden age" for medicine in England, led especially by war-trained surgeons rather than physicians. In contrast, according to Gottfried, the increasing domination by physicians in the sixteenth century subsequently brought about a stagnant period for medicine.

Taking all this into consideration, it is disappointing, therefore, that the book delivers far less than it promises. As with its predecessors, especially Charles Talbot's book on medieval English medicine, it is still primarily an institutional and biographical history. The various medical corporation and their members in late medieval England dominate the book, and such space is taken up by a sterile reign-by-reign account of the physicians and surgeons who were prominent at court and elsewhere. The practice of medicine, as opposed to its practitioners, gets much less attention and is essentially limited to two of the eight chapters; even then, these two chapters (V and VI) are dominated by the innovations of particular people (such as John Arderne) rather than applying to the profession as a whole.

When Gottfried breaks away from the strictly biographical approach, the book becomes much more interesting and challenging, as in his chapter (VII) on the nature of late medieval English medicine. Here the statistical focus is on the medical profession as a whole rather than on individuals, and Gottfried has many interesting things to say, not least in regard to the sheer number of people practising medicine at the time. Gottfried claims in fact that there was a more favourable doctor to patient ratio in the early sixteenth century than in England today (253)! Much of Gottfried's concern

at this point is to stress the middle-class nature of English medicine at this time, which he does in a convincing way, although the attempt to fit this into the larger controversy regarding the rise of the English middle class as a whole seems irrelevant and overdrawn.

Also, it is not clear whether the statistical methodology which Gottfried employs is sufficiently stringent. It is readily apparent that the data he uses are based upon a tremendous range of sources each with their own limitations and biases. Whether this conglomeration of sources can be lumped together in one statistical package is debatable and needs much more discussion than the book gives it.

The most disappointing feature of the book — at least to this reviewer — is the almost total lack of consideration concerning the social impact of medicine at this time. For example, what effect did medicine have on mortality? What access did people have to medical treatment? Was it limited essentially to the upper classes or to urban society? In some instances Gottfried supplies clues to illuminate these issues, such as the comment that “country doctors” were seemingly scarce (250-51), but nowhere are these threads brought together in the book, where they might well have merited a separate chapter. This was particularly evident in relation to that event that year in and year out probably took more lives than any other cause of death - childbirth. What, for instance, was the relationship of midwives to doctors, a problem that still exercises medicine today? Did doctors really involve themselves that much in childbirth, or, if they did was it only in a desultory fashion? Again, Gottfried scarcely touches on these problems.

In conclusion, Gottfried's book is a useful contribution to the study of late medieval medicine, but it does leave considerable room for further research. In particular, much more needs to be done to assess the impact of medicine upon English medieval society, especially for such events as childbirth. The exploration of issues such as these is essential to the understanding of medicine in medieval England and elsewhere.

John Langdon  
*University of Alberta*

\* \* \*

Harvey J. Graff — *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Pp. x, 493.

The study of literacy has been one of the most fascinating and frustrating components of socio-historical research since the 1960s. For 15 years, Harvey J. Graff has been the most prolific contributor to this research as well as the field's most attentive critic and bibliographer. *The Legacies of Literacy* is the culmination of this work and it displays all the characteristics for which Graff has become well-known. The tone of the book is aggressively revisionist, the discussion is theoretically and methodologically rigorous, and the footnoting is massive. Unlike previous work, however, this study offers the Big Sweep from early Athens to the twenty-first century. Graff strives to make sense of the great outpouring of research during the past two decades which has focussed on literacy in specific times and places. His goal is not to present a general model in which the historical importance of literacy is uniformly defined and consistently interpreted. Rather, the book rejects this possibility as an ahistorical and inappropriate ambition of certain simple-minded social scientists and policy-makers deluded by myths and misperceptions. Graff argues that literacy can only be understood as the social construction of particular historical settings. Thus, the meaning of any ability to read and write is context-dependent, and timeless and placeless generalizations can be rejected out-of-hand. There is no single history of literacy; rather, there are innumerable histories of literacy as reading and writing have interrelated with specific social, economic, and political webs defining discrete population groups in constant evolution. This perspective means that Graff continually situates literacy within the larger historical process. The result is a book which brings together the supposedly