

book reviews

energetic doer — a successful man of science. In the exhibition of portraits of scientists at the National Portrait Gallery in London (running until 17 September), which provided the occasion for Jordanova's book, the point is made even more clearly. Underneath the original Herschel print is a legend, written in swirling copperplate script. It tells us that the background shows, specifically, "part of the constellation of Gemini, with a telescopic aspect of the Georgium Sidus as it was discovered by Dr Herschel at Bath the 13th of March 1781 in consequence of which he was soon introduced to the most gracious patronage of His Majesty King George III".

The "Georgium Sidus" was the name Herschel gave — a compliment to his patron George III of England — to the new planet Uranus, which he discovered in the constellation Gemini using a seven-foot reflecting telescope that he had designed and built himself. This, then, is a tribute to the astronomer's greatest discovery, as well as a record of his features. And he is celebrated here as much for his mundane fund-raising success with the king — a keen amateur enthusiast for science — as for the spiritual high-mindedness of his astronomy.

Throughout history, people have been fascinated by what famous people look like. Before television, the portrait and the print satisfied this curiosity. Jordanova draws on the Wellcome Institute's extensive collection of Edward Jenner memorabilia to show how the face of the man who discovered inoculation against smallpox graced the walls and mantelpieces of even the humblest of a grateful public's homes. As in Herschel's case, what distinguishes the scientist from other celebrities in this respect is that, where the politician might hold a pen and the musician his instrument, the scientist's portrait is likely to allude to the scientific breakthrough itself. In Jenner's case, a cow and a milkmaid figure in almost every picture.

In what is probably the most interesting part of Jordanova's sometimes rather basic study, she discusses some of the more dubious ways in which women scientists have been portrayed for posterity. Here the tension between scientific achievement and the conventions of female virtue — passivity, docility and acquiescence, represented by demure dress and downcast eyes — is acute. Herschel's sister and scientific collaborator, Caroline, is represented demurely handing her brother a cup of tea, or primly bonneted, without a scientific instrument in sight.

Among the arresting portraits of Nobel prizewinner Dorothy Hodgkin that Jordanova reproduces, only Maggi Hambling's powerful 1985 oil painting shows the distinguished chemist and crystallographer with the tools of her trade. The others show her in film-star pose — her beauty apparently more significant than her scientific brilliance.

Even that most celebrated of women



Portrait of the scientist: Tom Phillips' video-based study of Royal Institution president Susan Greenfield.

ambassadors for the scientific profession (as current president of Britain's Royal Institution), the neuropharmacologist Susan Greenfield, is portrayed with emphasis on her good looks rather than her scientific expertise. Which makes the new portrait commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery, and forming the centrepiece of the current exhibition, all the more interesting.

For Greenfield's portrait, Royal Academy portraitist Tom Phillips, whose conventional portrait of mathematician Peter Goddard also features in the exhibition and book, has moved into new media. The portrait consists of a 15-minute loop, run on a Macintosh G4 computer, with a DVD driver. Its 22,500 frames are based on 169 drawings on paper, graphics onto screen, and short video sequences. The result is a compelling, elusive portrait that conveys physical traits and

mental innovativeness simultaneously. Here is a scientist whose gender is irrelevant, but whose intellectual curiosity is captured in the semi-abstract, constantly changing representation. Greenfield's shadowy face comes in and out of view through a filmy curtain of thought-provoking visual allusions.

The reproductions in this beautifully produced book capture much of the spirit of the exhibition it accompanies. Jordanova's text is occasionally ponderous, and she has lost some of the exhibition's buzz. But she succeeds in stimulating a fresh discussion of scientific portraiture. After this, we will all look with keener eyes at those familiar portraits that adorn the walls of the Royal Society or hang in splendour, tier upon tier, in the Royal College of Physicians. ■

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New Journals

This year, *Nature's* annual new journals review supplement will appear in the issue of 21 September. Publishers and learned societies are invited to submit journals for review, taking note of the following criteria:

- Journals must have first appeared during or after June 1998 and have published at least four separate numbers by the end of May 2000.
- Journals covering any aspect of science are eligible, although those dealing with clinical medicine and pure mathematics are excluded, as are newsletters and

publications of abstracts.

- Frequency of publication must be at least three times a year.
- The main language must be English.
- The deadline for submission is 5 June.

Please send at least four different issues (the first, the most recent and any two others) of each eligible title, or access details of any eligible electronic journal, together with full details of subscription rates, to: Isobel Flanagan, *Nature*, Porters South, Crinan Street, London N1 9XW, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7843 4542. e-mail: i.flanagan@nature.com