

Meadow's projects and methodologies. Readers will be impressed by her extraordinary combination of thoughtful insight, experimental ingenuity and immense persistence and dedication to the search for knowledge. She and her co-workers are currently researching such applied issues as the need to interpret children's gestures alongside speech in legal and psychiatric questioning, and also the degree to which adult questioners' gestures influence children's output.

Fully recognizing the vast unknown areas awaiting gesture researchers' attention, Goldin-Meadow presents multiple viewpoints where there is disagreement, in the examination of signed language gesture, for example, or the connection between gesture and lexical access. And she continues to push the boundaries of her field, raising new questions alongside the ones she answers.

*Hearing Gesture* stands beside McNeill's *Hand and Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1992) and *Language and Gesture* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) as a milestone in the study of gesture's relationship with language and thought. It may help to reshape the basic premises and methods of psychologists, linguists and other social scientists. ■  
*Eve Sweetser is in the Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720-2650, USA.*

## Bedside stories

### The Body in the Library: A Literary History of Modern Medicine

edited by Iain Bamforth  
Verso: 2003. 418 pp. £16, \$25

#### John Carmody

Ever since C. P. Snow's *ex cathedra* declaration of the constraining existence of two cultures — the unbridgeable separation of the sciences and the humanities — scientists have been forced on to the defensive. It rarely seems to matter greatly that 'liberal' and 'literate' people know little of science. And it rarely seems to be appreciated how creative and profound science can be — or how torpid and turgid many humanities texts are.

Medicine should bestride both of Snow's cultures, binding them with imagination and the truest humanity. At its best it can do this: in the divine hierarchy of classical Greece, Apollo was a god of both medicine and music. Iain Bamforth is a medical doctor as well as an essayist and poet, and his new anthology, *The Body in the Library* — despite a title that suggests crime and malfeasance — is a superb reminder that the creativity of physicians flows beautifully beyond the consulting room or laboratory. Not all of the authors in his "history of medicine as told through literature" are doctors or medical scientists,

#### Exhibition

### Living with luminescence

Frazzled by the frenetic lifestyle of the future? No problem, a luxury lounge bathed in soft, calming bioluminescence will soothe your worries away. That's the art concept created by Sydney-based microbiologist Kathy Takayama and artist John Nicholson, who unveiled their exhibit — entitled *LuxCorp* — at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space on 14 May.

With their prototype light-emitting furniture (right), they present a vision of a future in which human-bacterial interactions are taken to a new dimension. The light emitted is a simulation of the bioluminescent by-product of bacterial communication. The exhibit is part of *Metis*, the



Australian festival of art meets science, and runs until 18 June.  
**Carina Dennis**

but I found the pieces that were written from the inside to be telling and touching.

Bamforth has confined his selection to material that was "produced after the event which turned medicine into a public utility — the French Revolution". Although the "modern medicine" mentioned comes from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Bamforth does seem to share my view that modern medicine really began in 1543 with the publication of the great anatomical text *De humani corporis fabrica* by Andreas Vesalius. More important, though, is the scope of Bamforth's trawl, which has gathered together some lovely work that would normally escape the attention of anglophone readers (or any who are monolingual). If I note a lacuna, it is a lack of direct, rather than narrative, writing about medical science: surely a Nobel prize address or two would have been worthy of our attention?

After an exhilarating and provocative introduction, and a debatable beginning with Dickens, this collection plunges us into a banquet of many delights. One of the earliest (from 1812) is an urgently written letter by Fanny Burney, recounting a dreadful operation. This is matched by the wonderfully ironic *The Cure* from 1810 by Johann Peter Hebel, and we are then brought abruptly to earth by the episode of the botched Talipes (club-foot) operation in *Madame Bovary*. The worldly wise Lytton Strachey shows us Florence Nightingale in her great days in the Crimea: it is chastening to be reminded of the old (but enduring) strife between doctors and nurses. Léon Daudet reverses that mirror to show us the *mélange* of the magnificent and the malicious in the nineteenth-century neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, putting me edgily in mind of one of my own pedantic and francophile clinical professors.

Not everything here is a success, though. There is a wooden-headed piece by G. K. Chesterton, a rather pointless letter by Anton Chekhov, some self-importance (*Illness*) from Virginia Woolf and vacuity from Alain, the pseudonym of philosopher Emile-Auguste

Chartier. Set against those stumbles are a surreal story by Franz Kafka, its tone utterly unexpected from its bland title, *A Country Doctor*; a chilling medical-social narrative commentary by William Carlos Williams (*Jean Beicke*), the droll *My Double* by Alfred Döblin and the dazzlingly cynical *Oedipus in Danger* by Robert Musil.

In *Irrationalism and Modern Medicine*, Gottfried Benn coolly and prophetically asks about the point of extending an unexamined and spiritless life. This, surely, is a daily question for contemporary medicine, but when we do die — no matter how long we delay that fatal event — is it important to do it "well"? Can we achieve that, and does it matter? After reading George Orwell's *How the Poor Die* we have to wonder about the manner of our death as a reflection or an inevitability of our life. Like Dezső Kosztolányi's *The Stranger*, Orwell's dispiriting story should refocus the physician's mind on to the challenge of thinking of the patient as a brother. For all his empathic fame, R. D. Laing's *Clinical Vignettes* made little impression on me and certainly did not achieve a comparable insight, in marked contrast to the honest human bewilderment of the extracts from Miguel Torga's *Diary*.

The episode that I treasure most in this inspiring and yet unsettling anthology is *Heart Suture* by Ernst Weiss. With the deftness of an accomplished surgeon, it whips us from the set-piece detachment of classical 'grand rounds' to an emotional wrench when a young anaesthetist realizes that the God-Professor's emergency patient is his former lover. The professional and the personal are balanced with admirable finesse, with a cogent resonance for the reader of bitter experience or the relief of a "There but for the grace of God..."

I am left, then, with an aphorism (which Bamforth quotes): "Perhaps one day we will realize there was no art but only Medicine." ■  
*John Carmody is in the Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales 2052, Australia.*