



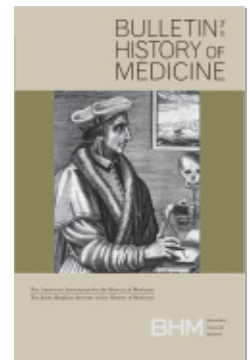
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Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune by Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart (review)

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found in other studies. "The scapegoating of women and the elderly constituted a much broader exclusionary movement than one based merely on xenophobia," the author states (p. 88).

Of necessity, these other discriminations are drowned out by the large-scale persecutions of the Vichy period, primarily of the Jews, which the author discusses meticulously and at length. There is a whole chapter on the *Ordre des Médecins*, the corporatist body founded by the Vichy government in October 1940 that implemented the antforeigner and anti-Semitic exclusion laws passed and in the final accounting was responsible for French doctors excluding their colleagues.

The author has done extensive research. Her primary sources include material from the Archives du Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, the Archives Nationales, the Archives de Paris, the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, numerous periodicals of the era, and medical, law, and student publications. She also provides a twenty-two-page bibliography of published works. It provides a basic historiography of the professions of law and medicine from the nineteenth century on, as well as studies, both contemporary and recent, of the groups discriminated against.

This book will be useful to anyone interested in the professions of law or medicine, and in the problems faced by various minorities trying to practice them in mid-twentieth-century France.

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Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart. *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011. xiii + 479 pp. Ill. \$39.95 (978-0-7735-3819-1).

The basic outline of Dr. Norman Bethune's life is well known. During the 1930s, he became a leading innovator in the surgical struggle against tuberculosis. He joined the Communist Party and generated a plan for socialized medicine that later became the blueprint for the Canadian government health service. When Franco, in collaboration with Hitler and Mussolini, led an assault against the legitimate government of Spain, Bethune went to Madrid, where he developed a mobile blood transfusion unit to assist the antifascist forces. He died in China serving Mao's army in its resistance against the Japanese invasion.

For many years Allan and Gordon's *The Scalpel, the Sword* was considered the definitive biography of Bethune. It was originally published in 1952, and by 1971 it had been translated into nineteen languages and sold over a million copies. It was reprinted as recently as 2009. It can still be read with enjoyment since the authors have grasped something important of the complex nature of Bethune. The problem with their book is that it is not in any real sense a biography, nor is

historical accuracy its strong suit. Their book is best described as a historical novel, and from that perspective it is quite fine. But it is in no sense a work of scholarship.

Nothing better was available until Roderick Stewart wrote *Bethune* in 1973. It was certainly far more accurate than its predecessor, but it suffered from excessive brevity and what often appeared to be a lack of feeling and empathy for its subject.

Bethune scholarship has improved immensely in recent years. Larry Han-nant's *The Politics of Passion: Norman Bethune's Writing and Art* (1998) and my own *Bethune: The Secret Police File* (2003) and *Norman Bethune in Spain* (2013), for example, have provided specialized studies into various aspects of Bethune's life. Finally, we have Stewart and Stewart's new book, *Phoenix*, which will undoubtedly become the standard biography.

Phoenix is the result of several decades of research; the authors appear to have interviewed almost everyone who had any knowledge of Bethune and to have engaged in meticulous research in every relevant archive. It seems that there is nothing they do not know and nothing they feel is not worth sharing. For example, not only are we told in detail of all the various amenities available aboard the ship that took Bethune from Vancouver to Shanghai, but a full list of the titles of the films shown to the passengers is provided! Does this massive accumulation of information simply become overwhelming? Not at all. Does it slow down the pace of the narrative? On the contrary. *Phoenix* takes its time to tell its story, but it accomplishes in magisterial fashion what any good biography should do: it reveals the complexity of its subject.

Much that had formerly remained obscure about Bethune's life is here clarified. This is undoubtedly the result of a dogged search for the facts, and the disclosure of a number of previously unavailable documents. For example, although a relatively small matter in itself, the identity of the wealthy patron who subsidized Bethune's interest in art while he was living in London at the end of World War I, and may or may not have been Bethune's lover, had been the subject of much interest among Bethune scholars. The Stewarts have at last succeeded in uncovering her name: Isabelle Humphreys-Owen. Of far more consequence, the China section of the book benefits enormously from the discovery of Bethune's hitherto unknown *Memorandum Presented to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party 20 April 1938*, and the extensive unpublished memoir of Jean Ewen, a nurse who accompanied Bethune during his initial months in China.

Finally—and here I will allow myself a criticism—although the style of the book seems to be detached and objective, rarely interrogating the facts it presents, it appears not to engage in any overall interpretation. And yet it does; much like Stewart's earlier 1973 biography, it makes the claim—as the very title itself suggests—that Bethune moved from failure to failure, essentially alone and lonely. This *is* indeed an interpretation, and one that I would dispute and reject. But this is not the venue to engage in such an argument. That aside, *Phoenix* is altogether a stunning achievement.

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