Pseudo-epileptic seizures, originally known as hysterical seizures, are important not only because of the need to differentiate them clinically from true epileptic attacks but also because of their presumed psychogenic aetiology. It is rather too simple to describe them as paroxysmal events which bear a superficial resemblance to true epileptic seizures but lack the typical EEG epileptic changes, since in almost 50% of such attacks the patient will suffer from epilepsy. Why a patient should display such extraordinary behaviour with its similarity to epilepsy is unknown. Epileptic patients who suffer from hysteria and pseudoseizures may perhaps develop it because of their previous experience with the real illness. Others may have a pseudo-seizure as a single isolated symptom, or more usually as part of hysteria, or as a form of malingering for compensation.

In this small book the authors, mainly from Scandinavia, attempt "to bring attention to the differential diagnosis of epileptic seizures". They consider that pseudo-epileptic seizures "are not manifestations of disordered electrical activity of the brain but usually of a complicated pathopsychological background". In a few pages, we are given views on aggression, rape and epilepsy and Münchhausen's syndrome by proxy. Psychological aspects of treatment are covered and there is a chapter on aetiological models as a basis for treatment of the individual. The inevitable chapter on pseudo-seizures and sexual abuse is included. The idea that the pseudo-epileptic attack is actually a re-enactment of being pinned down and choked during sexual assault is far-fetched. Furthermore, there is little science in the statement that sexual abuse is high in the causation of pseudo-seizures of the "swon" type. It is difficult to know whom this speculative and provocative work is aimed at.

TAHIR MAJEED
PO BEHAN


To bring out a second and fully revised edition of a single author textbook within six years of the first denotes a man with qualities of self-discipline, conviction and optimism beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Fortunately Louis Caplan is such a man; he is widely known and respected for his clinical studies in cerebrovascular disease and this book accurately reflects his interests and talents. Single authorship has many advantages, one of which is that the author's interests encompass the whole field; if not, it can be a disadvantage. Much of this book is excellent, particularly the clinical chapters, but it does lack balance and some important aspects of the subject receive scant attention.

When writing on pathogenesis or clinical diagnosis Dr Caplan is authoritative, illuminating and wholly convincing. On contentious issues such as the significance of minor degrees of stenosis of the internal carotid artery he states clearly his current practice and explains succinctly his reasons and evidence. On the vexed question of lacunar infarction and subcortical leucoencephalopathy his views are traditional and clear—in contrast to much of the recent literature on the subject. He avoids the complication, complications and rehabilitation do these high standards falter. The brevity of these chapters, the lack of discussion of controversial issues and the omission of data on epidemiological issues or clinical trials suggest that these are topics of relatively little interest to the author. This, in a condition where prevention has already been achieved, is a depressing thought.

Nevertheless in spite of these minor sins of omission, which will arise from clinicians, the next edition, this is a valuable and admirably written book which will be studied with profit and enjoyment and deserves a wide readership.

RW ROSS RUSSELL


This is a lengthy and highly detailed biography of Paul Broca. Each of the 16 chapters is copiously referenced and there is a list of Broca's publications, which total over 500. Many associated advances and names will doubtless be familiar in the next edition, this is a valuable and admirably written book which will be studied with profit and enjoyment and deserves a wide readership.

CH HAWKES


This is an excellent book for neurosurgeons, although other neuroscientists may usefully dip into it. One must hope that the inexperienced neurosurgeon will not be paralysed into inactivity because of the frank descriptions of the serious hazards associated potentially with every brain operation and by lack of any universally agreed consensus about how to avoid them. Instead the trainee should take heart that so many experts have analysed the key ways to minimise neurosurgical complications and incorporate this thoughtful and critical faculty into their own developing surgical armamentarium.

The book may be recommended highly to neurosurgeons in general. Sadly, the price is expensive and this work will become an indispensable reference in all neurosurgical departmental libraries.

DGT THOMAS