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Fedora Gould Fisher. *Raphael Cilento, a Biography.* St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994. xiii + 356 pp. A$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7022-2438-6.

Reviewed by Joe Morrissey (James Cook University of North Queensland)
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This biography provides a taste of the subject without totally satisfying the appetite. In a meticulously documented account of the life of Sir Raphael Cilento Fisher documents the many facets of this distinguished physician, lawyer and public servant. Yet in critical areas of his work she leaves crucial questions unanswered.

There is no doubt from this biography that Cilento was a driven man. The origins of ambition appear to lie in his early childhood and his relations with his father. Later the struggle to make his way through university on scholarships explains some of the insecurities evident through his relentless pursuit of the high goals he set himself. It is as if he were never able to feel that he had proved.

Cilento's career as an early promoter of public health, particularly in the context of the tropics, is well documented with one major exception. The relationship between Anton Breinl and Cilento is glossed over in three brief references, thus virtually ignoring the impact of Breinl on health in Northern Australia. Fisher's represents Cilento as the most influential figure in the evolution of Australian tropical medicine, at times to the point where hagiography obscures historical analysis.

More positively, Cilento's talents as a public servant are comprehensively documented. Particularly well covered is how Cilento with considerable political skill established publicly provided health services in Queensland, while minimising well- organised opposition from the ranks of the medical profession. The portrait of Cilento which emerges from this section of the book is of a man of considerable achievement, acheiving in his working lifetime what many others would be satisfied to do in three.

Cilento's activities in the international arena are also well laid out. Yet in this area also Fisher skates none too easily over a long-standing controversy. Was Cilento a supporter of fascism? Was he a racist? Fisher's conclusion that he was not a supporter of fascism is at best equivocal. He clearly had close links with declared admirers of fascism. Her conclusion that he was not a racist also seems hard to square with what is known about his contribution to the prevailing racialist and eugenic ideas of the time. Indeed, she herself quotes Cilento's son, to the effect that Cilento senior feared that Australia would decline into a 'nation of coolies' by the end of the century.

Overall, this is a very useful and well-written book, based on considerable archival research. However, this reader closed the book with the impression that while Cilento's achievments might lead some to think him worthy of being Australia's second candidate for Catholic sainthood, he still awaits a biography which presents his life and thought in all its evident complexity.

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