

Book Reviews

Unicornis has featured widely as a mythical animal and has given rise to many fantasies. There has been much speculation about its identity, but the oryx must be the favourite . . . In Africa and Arabia there are several species of oryx. The Arabian oryx is about the size of the ibex, has big feet for walking on sand and long slender annulated horns. The horns are soft in the young oryx and often get damaged or deformed during growth. The result can be the reduction of one horn to a curly insignificant stump. Thus the oryx becomes the unicorn. (p. 87.)

While some mention is made of its mythology, the wonder of the unicorn and the richness of the traditions associated with it, for example that it was a symbol of Christ hunted from heaven by the angel Gabriel, is lost among the details about the way the creature is depicted by the artists of the different families of bestiaries. At other points the discussions are heavily literal and chiefly paraphrases and translations of the bestiary entries about the animal:

Bos according to the texts, is an amicable beast, the friend of its companion under the yoke. If the companion is absent, *Bos* moos. It can predict the weather: if rain is coming, it knows that it is wise to stay in the shed, but if it can sense an improvement it sticks its head out of the shed to show that it is ready to emerge. And, as the text says, *Bos* has a heavy dewlap. (p.104.)

Elsewhere, however, novel information is provided, such as about the camel, apparently brought to England during the Middle Ages—indeed, one was kept at King's Langley in 1290. But birds—Yapp's obvious passion—dominate the whole book, and show his careful observation and wide reading. This wealth of detail about real birds: "the brood patch, a highly vascular area of the breast free of feathers developed by most species of birds during incubation" (p. 175), is not matched with regard to those mythical ones like the phoenix, whose entry seems a bit thin.

Other weaknesses of this kind are evident in the authors' ignorance of the midrash and its importance for the conception of the serpent as originally upright and having arms and legs and of such creatures which derive from midrashic explanations of scripture, like the draconopede.

There is a detailed index of Latin names of creatures as well as a general index. In the main, the book is carefully presented and free from error. Though readers with a literary interest in the bestiary may be disappointed, most users will appreciate the many illustrations and the careful matching of the actual animal to its bestiary description or depiction.

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IAN DOWBIGGIN, *Inheriting madness: professionalization and psychiatric knowledge in nineteenth-century France*, *Medicine and Society* 4, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 1991, pp. x, 217, \$34.95 (0-52006937-4).

France in the second half of the nineteenth century has provided a rich setting for historians discussing the interrelations of medicine, social policy, popular culture, the arts, and political life generally. No one could mistake the concern in all these areas, especially after the events of 1870–71, with degeneration, the representation in individual inheritance of everything that appeared wrong in society. Ian Dowbiggin's interesting and readable book extends the historical literature in a very specific way, to argue that the professionalising interest of alienists was the primary reason for these doctors' enthusiasm for degeneration theory. He does not ignore other factors but they are kept subsidiary to the main thesis: "Hereditarianism was primarily a defensive ideology that enabled alienists to mitigate the perennial embarrassment and sociopolitical difficulties stemming from the impasse in which asylum psychiatry found itself at midcentury" (p. 160). The professionalisation argument is then worked out in terms of the detail of the published literature addressing both alienists and their publics, though this

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writing often appears on the surface to be concerned with esoteric conflicts about the relations of mind and body. Dowbiggin attends more to the content of belief about the nature, causes and asylum treatment of madness, than to the institutional and factional detail of social groupings. All the same, there is much here on the shifting preoccupations of the Société Médico-psychologique and such matters as the distinctive role of Philippe Buchez as an intermediary between the Society's members and the forces of reaction in the 1850s.

Dowbiggin's argument significantly redirects historians interested in degeneration theory away from the post-1870 period and into the previous thirty years. He argues for a "crisis of somaticism" in the mid-century when a failure to validate expertise in mental medicine through uncovering physical lesions or providing physical treatments became obvious. François Leuret, who renewed interest in moral treatment in the 1840s, particularly provoked his colleagues into a defence of their medical identity. Under the Second Empire, strengthened criticism from Catholics and psychologists (sometimes university philosophers, but the social reference of such labels is not always made clear) forced alienists onto the defensive. This discussion is especially helpful in providing a context for the work of Leuret and Jacques Moreau de Tours and for explaining the strong contemporary interest in dreaming and hallucinations, people and interests known but poorly integrated into the history of psychiatry.

By the 1860s, having struggled to achieve respectability and a position of authority with the state, alienists then had to face "anti-psychiatry" criticism from politicians and press on both the left and the right. Degeneration theory, it is argued, proved overwhelmingly attractive to doctors as a way of preserving their medical identity while balancing all these pressures. "Human reproduction was the biological truth that succeeded where the pathoanatomical and psychological viewpoints had failed . . ." (p. 73). Degeneration theory reconciled roles as moral entrepreneur, asylum manager, and specialist in disease. Hereditarianism was both positive science and moral discourse, and its practitioners were both doctors and public servants. The best-known theorist, B. A. Morel, who was both a Catholic and a student friend of Claude Bernard, used hereditarian argument to reconcile faith in free will and the soul with the demands of empirical science. This combination then served his position as asylum manager and expert in a conservative state. There is also a hint that hereditarian ideas had long been a commonplace of popular belief, providing doctors with a ready audience, and this suggests a dimension of professional-interest arguments worth further exploration. In conclusion, there is an all too brief discussion of the reasons for the decline in degeneration theory. Dowbiggin's book sets all these arguments in a broad, informative and undogmatic framework, and it has obvious relevance to the current resurgence of hereditarian ideas in psychological medicine.

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HERMIONE DE ALMEIDA, *Romantic medicine and John Keats*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. x, 418, £35.00 (0-19-506307-4).

Though Hermione de Almeida has produced a study that is, beyond doubt, dense with erudition, the disoriented reader may feel that the wood has been lost for the trees. The author's aim, broadly stated, is to challenge the nineteenth-century literary vision of Keats as a "pure poet", spontaneously overflowing with extreme sensibility, even to a pathological degree. Keats's preoccupations with the modulations of the body under intense emotion, his super-sensitivity to pain and pleasure, were schooled, she argues, and surely correctly, in large measure by his involvement with medicine: by his early training as an apprentice to the Edmonton surgeon, Thomas Hammond, and his time at Guy's; by his appetite for medical books; and, possibly most crucially, by his own tubercular condition. This project is a laudable one, but the links between the general culture of medicine, Keats's personal intellectual career, and the fine texture of his poetry have already been frequently explored at length, most recently and sensibly in D. C. Goellnicht's *The poet-physician: Keats and medical science* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984); it is unclear precisely what this study adds to our understanding of the medical input into Keats's imaginative work.