BOOK REVIEWS

Matthew Warner Osborn. *Rum Maniacs: Alcoholic Insanity in the Early American Republic.* Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 2014. vii, 268 pp., illus., \$45.00.

KEYWORDS: addiction, delirium tremens, temperance, medicalization, Romanticism

Matthew Warner Osborn offers a much needed update to the historiography of early-American temperance, revealing the central role played by the medical profession in furthering the movement. Responding to the consequences of drinking in the Early Republic, physicians crafted a new disease category of alcoholic insanity, delirium tremens. It was the derangement brought on by heavy alcohol consumption, not nascent concern about the loss of control over drinking, that most gravely concerned the medical profession before the Civil War. Focusing on Philadelphia because it was the center of the medical establishment as well as a model of early American urbanization, Osborn tracks how medical conceptions of alcohol and drinking shifted in response to the market revolution during the first half of the nineteenth century. The medical, social, and cultural analyses contained within *Rum Maniacs* demonstrate that the diagnosis of delirium tremens represented far more than a particular clinical reality. “Through delirium tremens,” Osborn argues, “alcohol addiction became a psychological and physiological disease that reaffirmed middle-class values and exerted a perverse fascination born of status anxiety, repression, and desire” (11). A diagnosis of delirium tremens, as opposed to the more general concept of intemperance, also served political, social, and cultural needs by shaping the construction of a biological and physiological basis for class difference.

Osborn’s chronology begins with Benjamin Rush, whose lectures and papers reveal that his initial revolutionary republican idealism was later tempered by a growing pessimism that reflected a more general shift from Enlightenment ideals to Romanticism. Medical theory, practice, and education in the United States shed its republican roots and quickly began to adapt to the realities of an open and unpredictable marketplace. The young physicians who had to make their way in this new, uncertain market economy were themselves a part of the wider formation of a new middle class and

therefore subject to the same anxieties about failure. Concern about heavy drinking and delirium tremens was expressed “in the disinterested language of science” and “in the universal terms of human health” which gave medical professionals conceptual tools to construct a “physiological basis of an emerging middle-class ethos” (10–11). Delirium tremens signified fallen manhood in a society obsessed with rugged individualism and the self-made man.

At the same time, temperance did not escape the medical fascination with anatomy and pathology inspired by French medical empiricism. This shift, Osborn argues, articulated “a new brain science that departed from . . . mechanistic models . . . by describing the mind in increasingly biological terms” (35–6). But it was not the brain that American anatomists focused on when describing the dangers of alcohol consumption. Presaging the twentieth-century images of smokers’ hardened lungs, physicians like Thomas Sewall publicly displayed the diseased stomachs of those who had died from delirium tremens. Such anatomical theater reflected the context of Romantic fascination with the perverse that included the growing popularity of Gothic literature and the invention of phantasmagoria, lighted lantern shows that often invoked lurid themes and demonic imagery. Moreover, medical writing, especially case histories of delirium tremens patients, exhibited similar linguistic, literary, and descriptive conventions employed by Charles Brockden Brown and Edgar Allan Poe, iconic authors of the American Gothic genre. These similarities reveal “the porous boundary between medical inquiry and popular culture” (56). How delirium tremens continued to resonate in American culture after addiction supplanted alcoholic insanity as a medical concern is well illustrated in Osborn’s excellent analysis of Disney’s animated film *Dumbo* (1941) and his brief discussion about how latent fascination with hallucination shaped responses to LSD in the 1960s.

However, some of Osborn’s assertions could be interpreted differently. For instance, the description of the shift from Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals to Romantic pessimism is too rigid. Republican idealism certainly persisted through the Age of Jackson. And while many American physicians abandoned Scottish reason in favor of French empiricism, the individual’s capacity for reason as a marker of male free agency does not disappear in the Early Republic. Lyman Beecher’s *Six Sermons on . . . Intemperance* (1827), a text Osborn cites, is full of references about reason in service of the republic. As well, because Osborn looks so hard for difference between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is not entirely clear how the new brain science differed from Gin Craze references regarding alcohol’s effects on the brain. Finally, on a minor note, the claim that temperance represented the “most popular social reform movement” in the Early Republic ignores established scholarship about the centrality of antislavery (107). Both movements shared the same membership, similar goals, and interchangeable rhetoric.

Despite my differing perspective on these points, Osborn’s analysis greatly enhances the historical literature on temperance by revealing the movement’s distinctly medical dimension, a feature that has hitherto remained obscured in the background of the political, social, and economic interpretations that dominate the historiography of alcohol and drugs in this period. But, *Rum Maniacs* is more than just a significant addition to the historiography of American temperance. As a social history of medicine, it also explains

how the construction of a new disease underpinned the response of an emergent American middle class to the demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural realities of the market revolution. Delirium tremens came to represent an alcoholic nightmare at a historical moment when the dreams of an aspiring middle class were so uncertain.

David Korostyshevsky

*Program in the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine, University of Minnesota,
420 Delaware Street SE, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455*

doi:10.1093/jhmas/jrv046

Advance Access Publication: October 13, 2015

Saurabh Mishra. *Beastly Encounters of the Raj: Livelihoods, Livestock and Veterinary Health in North India, 1790–1920*. Manchester, UK, University of Manchester Press, 2015. ix, 208 pp., illus., GBP £70.00.

KEYWORDS: famine, colonialism, epizootics, military animals, *Chamars*

Many and varied themes about the relationships between domesticated animals and humans in India are to be found within the six chapters that constitute *Beastly Encounters of the Raj*, but sacred cows are not among them. Rightly pointing out that cattle and religion are inextricably linked, especially in the popular western imagination but also in histories of South Asia (145), Saurabh Mishra has consciously moved beyond the religious to examine different aspects of the integral role of livestock in military, rural, and urban life in India from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, to provide what he calls a “social history of livestock” during the British Raj (4).

Why livestock? In part, argues Mishra, because livestock is relevant for but has been ignored by, agrarian scholars, economic historians, historians of medicine, and other branches of historical scholarship. Mishra’s own project began primarily as a medical history, but as his research progressed, “it became clear that medical issues could not be divorced or completely separated from other themes” (3). Examples include horse-breeding and military history, which reared up when Mishra was examining the concerns of early veterinarians (chapters 1 and 2) and famines, which captured Mishra’s attention when he was investigating animal mortality and epizootics (Chapter 4). Embedded as it is in the India of the British Raj, this book is also a colonial history. Indeed, one of Mishra’s expressed aims was to demonstrate the strong links between veterinary health and the public health policies instituted by the British in India. Furthermore, financial concerns proved to be a strong thread throughout his narrative, making the end product as much a work of economic history as medical or social.

With so many threads to control, *Beastly Encounters* might seem a trifle too ambitious for a book of just over 200 pages. As the author himself admits, the book exhibits “a certain lack of unity” in the narrative (145). But the pay-off is the sheer number of exciting themes that are opened up in each of its chapters. Indeed, a reader might be better off approaching this book not as a single read but as a series of case histories, each of which illuminates a different aspect of the relationship between animal health