

Book Reviews

Karen Brown, *Mad Dogs and Meerkats: A History of Resurgent Rabies in Southern Africa*, Series in Ecology and History (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. xiv + 234, \$32.00, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8214-1953-3.

Dr Karen Brown, an expert in Southern African veterinary and environmental history, has produced an engaging, highly readable account of rabies in the region. Like most recent, historically informed biographies of disease, it uses its subject as a lens through which to examine broader historical issues and contexts. Six recurring themes are identified: the nature of human–animal interactions; the impact of rabies on South African views of wildlife; how colonialism affected the distribution of the disease; what it reveals about concurrent social and cultural tensions; the evolution of western knowledge about rabies; the state’s role in its control. These are explored through a series of case studies that trace the different manifestations and impacts of rabies from the early nineteenth century to the present-day.

The jumping-off point for Brown’s account is Pemberton and Worboys’ history of rabies in Britain, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* (London: Routledge, 2007). She identifies many similarities with Britain in scientists’ ideas about the causes of rabies, its epidemiological transmission through urban dog populations, and its control through post-exposure vaccination and the destruction, control, and eventual vaccination, of dogs. But there were also many stark differences. Unsurprisingly, rabies in South Africa had a racial and a colonial element: Africans were both the main victims of rabies and the main object of policies for its control, and their views of the disease were rarely sought or recorded. In addition, for much of the twentieth century, rabies in South Africa was not an urban dog problem, but a predominantly rural and often unreported disease that circulated and spread through domestic livestock and wildlife in addition to dogs. This made it an economic problem for farmers as well as a terrifying, deadly disease of humans, and inspired unsuccessful attempts to eradicate the main animal vectors: meerkats and jackals.

Brown’s analysis of the geography, epidemiology, understanding and response to rabies reveals her firm grasp of the science of the disease, the existing literature on colonial animal and public health, and the social, political and environmental history of Southern Africa. She skilfully interweaves insights drawn from this literature with a description of unfolding events, to reveal how the history of rabies was influenced by poverty, colonial priorities, civil unrest, racial attitudes, uneven provision of medical and veterinary services, and changing patterns of trade and land use.

While this is all highly convincing, one wishes that she could have been a little more ambitious in terms of the book’s historiographical goals. It is framed as a contribution to the history of rabies, of which little is known. But given the range of literature she draws upon to explain that history, it is a pity that she does not use her findings to speak more directly to it. A concluding section that explained how the history of rabies altered or enhanced existing historiographical understandings of the six themes it explores would have heightened the intellectual impact of this book, and potentially broadened its appeal among medical, veterinary, environmental and colonial historians. However this comment should not detract from the fact that Brown has produced a well-rounded history that

explains, in an accessible and persuasive fashion, the historical manifestations of rabies in Southern Africa and why it is still a problem today.

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Catherine Cox and Maria Luddy (eds), *Cultures of Care in Irish Medical History, 1750–1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. xii + 258, £55.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-230-53586-2.

The eleven papers in this volume, which were originally presented at a workshop at the University of Warwick in 2005, traverse more than two hundred years of Irish medical history, with the focus firmly on the period that followed the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. The rubric under which the collection is presented, ‘cultures of care’, is never defined or explained but suggests a cohesiveness which, in fact, does not exist. The volume does not have a single or overriding theme – other than the Irish dimension – although some of the chapters are thematically linked.

Ireland was not a single political entity during the entire period covered in this work and in their introduction the editors draw attention to early twentieth century political developments, to partition, and to the emergence of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. The volume is framed chronologically and the first seven chapters deal with the island as a whole, the remaining four with Ireland after partition, although only one deals specifically with the northern jurisdiction, Leanne McCormick’s ‘Venereal disease in interwar Northern Ireland’. After 1922, legislation and practices relating to medicine and healthcare evolved separately in the two states, the most obvious difference, as the editors remind us, was the introduction of the National Health Service to Northern Ireland in 1949.

The volume’s chronological structure offers a linear perspective over the period 1750–1970. The editors might have opted for a different approach, distinguishing discrete studies and linking those that addressed similar themes or areas of study. The individually distinct chapters are James Kelly’s accessible and well-rounded analysis of healthcare provision and therapeutics in eighteenth-century Ireland; Michael J. Clark’s elegant exploration of the difficult relationship between general medical practice and coroners’ practice, not least the thorny question of the payment of fees for medico-legal work, in the period from the 1830s to the 1890s; Catherine Cox’s evaluation of the post-Famine medical dispensary service, one that focuses on the organisation and administration of the service rather than on the patient or patient entitlement. Many of the features referred to in this chapter did not emerge *sui generis* after the Great Famine but featured just as strongly before that event, perhaps even more so, given the country’s greater population and rural impoverishment; James McGeachie’s engaging attempt to restore the ‘late Victorian phenomenon’ Dr George Sigerson to public memory and to reassess his contribution to Irish medical, scientific, literary and political life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Caitríona Foley’s examination of the impact on Ireland of the influenza outbreak of the early 1890s and of the far more destructive 1918/9 pandemic; and Mary E. Daly’s incisive analysis of disease and mortality in the independent Irish state in the half century after its foundation.

A number of connecting threads – medico-legal and a broadly defined sexuality – run through the remaining chapters: the legal implications of suicide, the insanity plea in