Book Reviews

Jonathan Andrews and **Andrew Scull**,
*Customers and patrons of the mad-trade: the
management of lunacy in eighteenth century
London with the complete text of John Monro's
1766 case book*, Medicine and Society, Berkeley
and London, University of California Press,
2003, pp. xvi, 209, illus., £29.95, US$44.95
(hardback 0-520-22660-7).

Psychiatry today has three salient features:
first, the profound uncertainties and ambiguities
in the scientific knowledge base which
masquerade as facts; second, the pervasiveness
of conflicting ideas and values; and third, the
complexity of the group process involving
professionals, family, the state and the individual
by which we come to an agreement about
what to do. Evidence, paradox and consensus
are the stuff of modern practice. How reassuring
then to discover that John Monro's 1766 case
book, his jottings or "*aide-memoire*" about new
and returning patients, suggests that the practice
of eighteenth-century mad-doctoring was
beguilingly similar in its pragmatic eclecticism
and yet fascinatingly different in the detail.
The reviewer was reminded of the psychiatric
house officers' shorthand "admission notes"
from twenty years ago, when detailed description
of symptoms and signs took precedence over
personal comment on the status of delusional
ideas and aetiological origins.

But the modern shrink reading Monro's
jottings has to beware the diverting but
ultimately sterile pleasure of translating
eighteenth-century symptoms into DSM-IV
diagnoses. Far more important is what his
case book tells us about the practice of one of
the best known mad-doctors of his day and
about the world in which he operated. These
then are the themes explored by Jonathan
Andrews and Andrew Scull in this second
volume about John Monro. The first, *Undertaker
of the mind: John Monro and mad-doctoring
in eighteenth-century England* (2001),
established the context and professional
history of a man who sat at the pinnacle of

mainstream, solidly successful, middle-class
practice. The John Monro who emerges from
this second book is not the Bethlem physician,
a post he held from 1751 for four decades, which
tenure conferred professional prominence but
relatively modest financial reward, nor the
wealthy mad-house proprietor who secured the
prosperity of his descendants for the next
century, but rather the private physician to
respectable moneyed, but not necessarily
exceptionally wealthy, families who consulted
him on a day to day basis. Monro's complex
web of business relations with madhouses at
Hoxton and elsewhere, his roaming
domiciliary visits, the patients who returned
with recurrent episodes of psychosis and the
significance of his approach to case management
and treatment are scrutinized here by
Andrews and Scull in a highly readable and
refreshingly immediate narrative. The essential
foundations of the critical authority of
medical practitioners like Monro, the social
roots of their economic success and their
subsequent intellectual imperialism over the
lives of the mad emerges successfully but so
too do the origins of the stigmatized social
position of those associated with the dread
lunatic. Monro's fame made him the target of
lampooning cartoons and the butt of high society
jokes as well as a lucrative practice. Fear and
revulsion of the insane still affects the status of
professionals in the trade.

The book has relevance for anyone
interested in the later and until now rather better
researched nineteenth-century alienists and the
Victorian asylum, and also in the origins of
twentieth-century office psychiatric practice.
Much has been written about John Monro and
other Monros before but never in this detail and
never with Monro's own rather stolid clinical
self speaking directly to us. The authors'
impeccable scholarship in the detail is singularly
impressive. This and its companion volume
are essential reading for social historians of the
eighteenth century. My only quibble is, why
on earth two books when one would have

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done? The case book lies at the heart of both and without it the first to be published was rather like a birthday party without the cake. But that aside, the value of these two complementary volumes is without a doubt the confirmation that within the social class milieu in which he worked, an eighteenth-century mad-doctor's management objectives for his patients and their families were in many respects similar to his nineteenth- and twentieth-century counterparts. No sudden ideological leap separates the approaches to personal mad-doctoring this past three centuries.

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Pamela Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales 1800–2000*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003, pp. ix, 252, illus., £14.99 (0-7083-1740-5).

This scholarly and sensitive history of the Denbigh mental hospital in North Wales makes a valuable contribution to the history of psychiatry in its British context. It is not a study that makes a fanfare about its arguments, though briefly in the introduction it is acknowledged that the encounter with this institution has steered the author away from expectations fostered in a reading of Foucault towards an admiration for humanitarian effort and achievement in the face of considerable odds. Thereafter, it slips into a primarily descriptive mode. But this is not to denigrate: it is here that genuine insight and new understanding does constantly emerge, often springing from the smallest detail. With obvious sympathy for history from below, Pamela Michael frames her approach to the history of an institution as one that will place the patient at the centre of things. And there is the intriguing and original ambition to demonstrate how the culture of the patients helped to shape the institution. She does get some way in achieving such objectives. Intriguing stories of patients and their lives are scattered throughout, though

often at the end of chapters rather than as central or even integral parts of the main story. Instead, at the centre, animating and holding together the narrative, is what one might call the character of the institution itself. Sitting in its archives, immersing herself in its architecture, and getting to know a staff past and present, who are committed historians in their own right, Pamela Michael has developed an empathy and quality of historical imagination that is often lacking in this type of institutional history. So it is her ability to describe the noise of asylum, for instance, her attention to the minute detail of the "daily round" and "underlife", not the patient narratives for all their interest, which saves this from being another empty asylum.

The coverage of such a long period, from nineteenth-century roots to twentieth-century dissolution, means that we also have here in miniature a history of modern British mental health care. Since no historian of recent years has managed to put this whole story together, and since Pamela Michael's command of this long sweep of history is so convincing, the value of the book goes beyond that of a mere case study. This is particularly so when it comes to the less familiar territory of the twentieth century where there are a series of important findings and the demonstration of what policy meant in practice. To some extent, this runs counter to what initially appears to be the book's central claim for significance: its development of what one might call a Welsh way in lunacy. Such an agenda follows a body of work over the last decade that has qualified an Anglocentric vision of British mental health care with work on Scotland and Ireland, but until now very little on Wales. Denbigh is certainly a good choice with this agenda in mind, not least because of the importance of the Welsh language in the North. Throughout, there is an attempt to probe the significance of the Welsh context, with the opening up of a Welsh social epidemiology shaped in particular by religion perhaps most intriguing. But for much of the time it is far from clear that this was a "Welsh system", rather than a case study for thinking about provinciality more generally, and