Physician Heal Thyself: Medical Practitioners of Eighteenth-Century New York (review)

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extraordinary ability to bring ideas from widely different domains into fruitful dialogue with one another constitutes one of the most exciting things about his thought" (p. 166). In terms of the historical relationship between contemporary medical knowledge and creative thought, the story is just beginning.

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Marynita Anderson. *Physician Heal Thyself: Medical Practitioners of Eighteenth-Century New York*. American University Studies, series 9 (History), vol. 170. New York: Peter Lang, 2004. x + 267 pp. Ill. $63.95 (0-8204-2580-X).

Early New York medicine has long been of interest—partly, no doubt, because there were many notable practitioners, and also because the country's second school of medicine began to receive students in 1767. In fact, New Yorkers liked to believe that they had the first full medical school faculty, as Byron Stookey pointed out more than forty years ago. The Doctor's Mob and the anatomy riots of 1788, and the opening of the New York Hospital after a protracted building period, a fire, and interruption by the Revolution, all make for an interesting historical story that has been told several times. The challenge for the present-day historian is to tell a new story, to find new sources, or to revise old interpretations. As long ago as 1919, Dr. James Walsh published his history of New York medicine in five volumes, and the state's main metropolis loomed large in his work. In 1962 Dr. Stookey devoted a monograph to the early medical schools; the story of King's College has been the subject of several books; and John Shrady edited a two-volume history of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is not cited by Marynita Anderson.

Because Dr. Anderson searched the eighteenth-century popular as well as the medical literature, she was able to compile what appears to be a fairly complete list of 497 practitioners in New York City and its environs from 1690 to 1800. This extensive census of nearly sixty pages is a valuable contribution, and will doubtless be of use to future historians. In the 130-page text of the book, however, there is not much that cannot be found in the older sources—some of which Anderson seems reluctant to cite, while she ignores (or worse, does not know) the others. There is a nice chapter on the medical apprenticeship, but it does not break new ground. Nor does the story of the medical school, or of the anatomy riots of 1788. It is correct, of course, to view much of the story of early New York medicine in terms of a struggle to achieve professionalization—but here, too, there is not much new.

I am also sorry to have to say that this is one of the worst-vetted books that I have encountered. From its strange title, to the author's seeming lack of familiarity with the secondary sources and her dismissive approach to much of the earlier

work, this turns out to be a very annoying book. No one with any knowledge of the history of medicine could have let this book see the light of print. Anderson dismisses much of the earlier historical work as "a narrow, colorless, crude portrayal of eighteenth century New York practitioners" (p. 1). And just as egregiously, she claims that "many modern historians used the word 'quack' to describe all medical practitioners without a formal degree" (p. 15). Lack of familiarity with the sources allowed her to give John Morgan a middle initial of A, and to cite Moulte for Moultrie, Laurence for Lawrence, Freedman and Lorben for Freidson and Lorber, Humphries for Humphrey, Playfair Lyon for Lyon Playfair, and so on.

If this book is any indication, is it any wonder that in our uncertain economic world publishers, both commercial and academic, are more and more wary of publishing recent dissertations? Surely a better vetting and more revision are the least we should expect.

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Jacob Bigelow. *American Medical Botany (Boston, 1817–1820).* Oakland, Calif.: Octavo, 2004. CD-ROM. $30.00 (1-891788-23-X).

Just what can be said in usefully reviewing a reprint, in this case a CD-ROM? I ask and respond to four questions:

(1) Is it worth reissuing? Yes. Jacob Bigelow's *American Medical Botany* is accepted as a "classic," in large part through its promotion of native remedies. ("In the present state of our knowledge [wrote Bigelow] we could not well dispense with opium and ipecacuanha, yet a great number of foreign drugs . . . for which we pay a large annual tax to other countries might in all probability be superseded by the indigenous products of our own" [p. viii].)

(2) Does the work have additional special features? Yes. As Philip Weimerkirch's introduction states, it is "notable as one of the first fully color-printed books published in America, whose innovative technology continues to merit investigation" (p. 1).

(3) Is it a rare book? Yes. Although Bigelow's accounts of sixty plants in three volumes are available in major historical libraries, the work is not readily accessible to scholars. Its greater availability will serve a range of historians: Bigelow's interests extended beyond medicinal uses to diet and the arts.

(4) Do bonuses exist with the CD-ROM version? Yes. Offsetting the joy that everyone must find in turning the pages by hand, we now have the ability to search rapidly. Various questions can be readily pursued. For instance, in view of Bigelow's reputation for promoting native remedies, did he derive much of his information from aboriginal people? In fact, a word search for "Indian" and