

explanation and more evidence than the one paragraph the book provides.

Ultimately, *The knife man* is a welcome addition to our understanding of John Hunter, but its overall subjectivity still leaves plenty of room for development in the historiography of his life and legacy.

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Anne Stiles (ed.), *Neurology and literature, 1860–1920*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. x, 229, £45.00 (hardback 978-0-230-52094-3).

The editor of this collection maintains in her Introduction that, between 1860 and 1920, scientists and artists were “paying very close attention to one another”. Indeed, a “mutually responsive” dialogue occurred during this period that was founded upon a set of shared concerns. Stiles maintains that, whatever differences might have divided them, intellectuals engaged in different disciplines shared a common ambivalence about “the philosophical ramifications of scientific materialism and physiological reductionism” (p. 2). These are sweeping claims. None the less, it is the case that the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth did see an exceptional level of interaction between the scientific and literary worlds. This was, as Stiles points out, no one-way traffic, with science influencing literature or vice versa. There was rather a set of “two-way conversations between disciplines” (p. 13). This invites the kind of interdisciplinary enquiry that the essays in the present volume attempt, one that seeks to detail the complex interactions between medicine, biology, and literature around the turn of the twentieth century. Stiles claims that the present is a particularly auspicious moment for such an exercise because of what she alleges are strong similarities between the early twentieth and

the early twenty-first centuries’ approaches to the issues surrounding mental disease.

The eight papers that make up the volume are neatly divided into four sections. ‘Catalysts’ deals with key events that drew the attention of literary figures to aspects of neurology. Thus Laura Otis discusses how H G Wells and Wilkie Collins “retried” David Ferrier in their novels *The island of Dr. Moreau* and *Heart and science*. She maintains that these works of fiction “offer critiques of science far more complex and insightful than those of Ferrier’s prosecutors”. (p. 28) Her analysis is interesting and insightful. But her assertion that “Ferrier’s researches aroused the public for the same reason that audiences shuddered [*sic*] at *The Matrix*” (p. 31) seems a little far-fetched.

Part II—‘Diagnostic categories’—deals with the emergence of new clinical entities and with how these found representation in works of fiction. Andrew Mangham seeks the origins of the contemporary diagnostic category of Body Dysmorphic Disorder in the psychiatric thought of the late nineteenth century. He maintains, moreover, that the emergence of the category of “dysmorphophobia” owed much to earlier fictional narratives. By 1891, “psychiatry had a backlog of works, both literary and scientific, on which it could draw in order to identify and label the concept of a looks-related neurosis” (p. 87). Presumably, some such critical mass of exemplary material must accumulate before a term for condition can emerge.

In a third part on ‘Sex and the brain’ Randall Knoper maintains that in his novel, *A mortal antipathy*, Oliver Wendell Holmes made the connection between childhood trauma and sexual inversion at least a decade before the publication of Freud and Breuer’s studies in hysteria. This might seem at first glance a variation on the theme of establishing priority of discovery that preoccupied medical historians of yore. However, Knoper’s paper does problematize the conventional distinction between fictional and scientific writing in stimulating ways.

In a final section on ‘The traumatized brain’, Jill Matus attempts to historicize the emergence in the nineteenth century of the notion of psychic shock through a study of a range of both fictional and non-fictional texts. Her contention is that the literary work should be viewed not only as “an index of cultural reactions to scientific concepts, but also as an agent in developing discourses of the mind and body” (p. 165). Mark Micale gives a more straightforward account of the (largely unrecognized) existence of psychological trauma among many of those who fought in the American Civil War. The fact that Silas Weir Mitchell, the most prominent American neurologist of the epoch, was also a successful novelist provides a somewhat tenuous link to the main themes of the volume.

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Daniel Lord Smail, *On deep history and the brain*, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 2008, pp. xiv, 271, £12.95, 21.95 (hardback 978-0-520-25289-9), £9.95, \$15.95 (paperback 978-0-520-25812-9).

These days an entrepreneur seeking his or her fortune in academia would be wise to attach the prefix “neuro” to the most conservative sounding academic speciality. Some recent successful examples include the new Oxford Centre for Neuroethics, where neuroethicists study whether the neurosciences ought to manipulate moral judgements, and the neuroeconomists at Duke University, who investigate whether emotional states influence consumer choices. Neurolawyers at Vanderbilt University Law School have begun analysing the cerebral structure of criminal thought and intent, while neurophilosophy has been around since the 1980s. And now we have the newest “neurospecies” in Daniel Lord Smail’s essay *On deep history and the brain*—a book that not only promises a “grand historical narrative that links the Paleolithic to the Postlithic” but

does so by inaugurating neurohistory.

Ordinarily, readers might take umbrage when a book attempts to answer questions such as: how did the cultural evolution of the clitoris allow women to experience sexual pleasure (p. 128)? Why is gossip more addictive for women than for men (p. 178)? And why did the Inuit, master furriers that they were, become short in stature (p. 194)? Yet, Smail’s desires to end the chronology of sacred history, to account for Neolithic peoples, to include Africa in the story of human history, to use science to challenge biblical literalism, to give a voice to the speechless past of prehistory, and to engage multiple audiences with his interdisciplinary argument, will likely win him many enthusiasts and disciples. Even if the thrust of Smail’s argument is scarily reminiscent of the “neurotyrannies” found in Philip K Dick novels, it is nevertheless quite certain that most reviewers will laud his achievement in extending the recent insights of the neurosciences to history. Though I cannot count myself among their laudatory numbers, those reviewers are right that this neurohistory has an argument worth contemplating.

Premodern history, Smail suggests, is not only fascinating in its own right but has played a role in everything that came afterwards. Patterns of biological evolution, changes in the global environment, the spread of disease, and other naturally occurring calamities must have played a role in the emergence of premodern societies. Of those emergences, however, there is little more than the geological record and slight archaeological evidence. Without documents, one might think that a deep history—a history that bridges the Palaeolithic and Postlithic divide—would be impossible. Recent developments, Smail asserts, in neurobiology, neurophysiology and genetics not only suggest otherwise but also have implications for study of the more recent past.

The assumption at the heart of Smail’s argument is that certain ideas “can ‘possess’ the brain” (p. 97). In a broader sense, culture is a “biological phenomenon” that can literally