

Book Reviews

George Cheyne, author of the influential *English malady* (1733), to the Napoleon of the neuroses, Jean-Martin Charcot, the towering French neurologist of the nineteenth century, whose Salpêtrière clinic became a virtual hysterical circus, undermining his ambitions of conquering hysteria through science.

In nine brisk yet comprehensive chapters, Scull sketches the history of hysteria and nervous illness, covering the major (and familiar) highlights. He justifiably pays considerable attention to gender and follows the identification of hysteria with women's bodies and their allegedly fragile constitution, even after respectable science had abandoned belief in the pathological wandering of the uterus. Other chapters are devoted to the rise of neurasthenia in late-nineteenth-century America, the place of hysteria in Freud's elaboration of psychoanalysis and the crisis of shell shock, or male hysteria, during and after the First World War.

Scull's survey provides a welcome addition to the sizable historical literature on hysteria and nervous illness, and this slim volume manages to cover its topic well, placing outbreaks of hysteria in their social, cultural and medical-historical contexts, and highlighting major trends and turning points in the history of psychiatry, all in fewer than 200 pages. To be sure, most of the material presented will be familiar to historians of psychiatry or medicine, and specialists will recognize that Scull leans, at times quite heavily, on the approaches and findings of other scholars, such as Roy Porter, Elaine Showalter and even Edward Shorter. It would have been interesting if Scull had pushed this account beyond the familiar doctors and the famous hysterics, and perhaps ventured further out from the centres of London, Paris, Vienna and New York. But this book was not written for the specialist. Indeed, it offers an excellent introduction to the subject for a general audience, and its bibliography usefully guides interested readers on to more in-depth

exploration of particular subjects. Finally, this work will provide a great service to teachers of undergraduate courses in the history of medicine and psychiatry, and students will appreciate that Scull writes with lucidity, grace and wit.

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Mariola Espinosa, *Epidemic invasions: yellow fever and the limits of Cuban independence, 1878–1930*, University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. x, 189, \$22.50, £15.50 (paperback 978-0-226-21812-0).

For centuries yellow fever was the most dreaded disease in the Americas. Its mysterious origin, rapid course (death in a week), terrifying symptoms (black vomit), and high mortality rate (10 to 75 per cent) created mass panic and paralysed commerce. From 1702 to 1879, North America experienced more than 110 yellow fever epidemics, the most notorious of which decimated Philadelphia (1793), New Orleans (1853), and Memphis (1878). The Tennessee outbreak was part of a larger calamity, which started in New Orleans and spread by riverboats and railways to more than 200 towns throughout the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. The enormous loss of life (20,000 fatalities) and sheer cost (\$200 million) proved so unnerving to people that a Memphis newspaper dubbed yellow fever "The King of Terrors".

What set yellow fever apart from other diseases was its staggering social impact—most noticeably in the subtropical climate of the US South. Once the disease became rooted in a community, people shunned one another and seemed driven only by the instinct of self-preservation. Those who could afford it, fled to safer locations. As corpses piled up, local governments and businesses came to a standstill, and acres of farmland lay fallow.

Most of the nineteenth-century yellow fever epidemics were traced to Cuba, where the disease was endemic. The 1878 epidemic, for example, originated aboard the Havana steamer *Emily Souder*. Within days of the ship's arrival in New Orleans two crewmen, who were ill before disembarking, succumbed to yellow fever. The extensive contacts between Cuba and the United States were seen by American government officials, sanitarians, and newspaper editors as a threat to the health and economy of the southern states. They argued that the perpetually unsanitary conditions in Havana left them no choice but to intervene in Cuban affairs to end the Antillean menace. In reality, southerners themselves shouldered some blame, because they neglected sanitation and relied solely on quarantines to avoid yellow fever even after the mosquito-vector theory was established in 1900.

Epidemic invasions is a groundbreaking argument for the central role of yellow fever in US–Cuba relations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Espinosa contends that a hitherto overlooked public health factor underlay the tensions between these two countries. “US sanitation efforts in Cuba . . . primarily served the interests of the United States, and Cubans resented this fact” (p. 123). Compelling evidence supports her eye-opening conclusions: first, the principal reason for Congress declaring war on Spain in 1898 was to alleviate unsanitary conditions in Cuba that threatened the US South. Second, the primary concern of the post-war US Army Yellow Fever Board, headed by Major Walter Reed, was to remove the danger yellow fever posed for the southern United States, not to protect occupation forces or help the Cuban people. Even though malaria was known to be a greater threat to US troops and tuberculosis was the major killer of Cubans, American scientists still focused on yellow fever. Third, the US justified its domination of Cuba by attributing success against yellow fever to Americans

alone. The Cuban physician, Carlos Finlay, was never given due credit for originating the concept that the yellow fever pathogen was transmitted to humans by the bite of the female *Culex* (now *Aedes aegypti*) mosquito. Fourth, keeping the island free of yellow fever was essential to maintaining Cuba's independence. The US could legally take control of the Cuban government—and did so in September 1906—if the country once again became a haven for yellow fever.

American historians, in general, and diplomatic historians have treated the Spanish-American War in terms of expansionism and the influence of yellow journalism, to cite just a few interpretations. The element of disease has been entirely absent. Espinosa, by contrast, has provided an entirely new dimension; namely, the influence of disease on foreign policy. It will be interesting to see if diplomatic scholars, most of whom have completely ignored the role of disease in international relations, are receptive to her novel interpretation.

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Teemu Sakari Rymmin, *Smitte, språk og kultur: tuberkulosearbeidet i Finnmark*, Oslo, Scandinavian Academic Press/Spartacus Forlag, 2009, pp. 368, Kr 298.00 (paperback 978-82-304-0044-9).

In simple terms, the history of tuberculosis in Norway, as in other western countries, is the whiggish tale of the reduction of the country's most frequent killer in the late nineteenth century to a nearly insignificant affliction by the 1960s. This transformation was not achieved without effort. In 1900 the Norwegian parliament adopted the world's first national tuberculosis law, and for the next half-century