Throughout her book, Chico reiterates the significance of ‘literariness’. Rather like falling back on ‘scientist’, this seems to me to assume in advance precisely the distinction whose history she is trying to trace. Today’s scientific texts are full of figurative imagery – genetic engineering, black holes, flavoured quarks – while some modernist authors (William Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury (1929), for example) deliberately aim to provide unmediated responses to the world, as if they were Baconian observers.

For historians of science, one virtue of this book is that, as a specialist in literature, Chico analyses works that lie outside their normal repertoire. Although the obvious candidates – Margaret Cavendish, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift – are all knowledgeably discussed, so too are some less familiar names. For example, to support her emphasis on gender as a keyword (claimed to be based on Raymond Williams), she discusses Eliza Haywood’s novel Eovaai (1736) about a deposed Lockean queen who is handed a sacred telescope enabling her to perceive the grim reality of her deceptive suitor. As well as exploring the connotations of Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, who features in Thomas Shadwell’s The Virtuoso (1676), Chico also examines a female stereotype – the coquette, as exemplified by Haywood’s lead character in The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless and in Mr Spectator’s dream about the microscopic dissection of Lady Credit’s heart and brain. And although Anon is not in the index, s/he wrote an erotic poem about two sisters who purloin their father’s microscope to carry out some intimate examinations on each other and their sleeping brother.

Chico’s central chapter is ostensibly on education through dialogue, although its title – ‘Scientific seduction’ – correctly suggests that her emphasis is on the reinforcement and construction of gender roles. She has chosen to analyse in some detail two texts that were translated by English women from foreign languages – Aphra Behn’s version of the French Conversation on the Plurality of Worlds (1688) and Elizabeth Carter’s more faithful translation of the Italian Newtonianism for the Ladies (1739). These are both intriguing books, and Chico’s commentaries are interesting, but they seem odd choices to highlight in a scholarly study of Great Britain. Her justification for this decision is that they were widely read, but as she points out, home-based writers were also creating their own genre of educational dialogue. Rather than setting up soft-porn conversations between silver-tongued aristocrats and sharp-tongued women, they were locating their protagonists within domestic situations. For instance, through his condescending instructions to his sister Euphrosyne, Benjamin Martin’s Cleonicus reinforces male superiority, but also implies that if even a woman can understand these new ideas, then so too can a man.

This national contrast in approaches surely merits further exploration as an important aspect of the many distinguishing features between the various manifestations of the Enlightenment in Europe and its divided offshore island – for, despite its title, Chico’s study concerns England, not Britain. Many of her examples refer to the period before the Act of Union in 1707, and she makes no attempt to explore the substantial differences between intellectual life in Edinburgh and London during her period. Other inaccuracies include placing Newton’s last home in Winchester, promoting Thomas Sprat to Bishop of Rochester some twenty years too early, and calling James Hodgson the Astronomer Royal.

Chico’s The Experimental Imagination is solidly researched with an extensive bibliography, and it includes sensitive discussions of some fascinating Enlightenment prose and poetry.

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The Spirit of Inquiry sets out to reveal the role of the Cambridge Philosophical Society in the making of Cambridge as a core centre of science and its indelible influence on modern science.
March 2019 marks the two-hundredth anniversary of the society and Gibson’s work aptly engages with and brings to light the trials, tribulations, achievements and accomplishments that encapsulate the two-hundred-year life of the society.

The beginning chapters illustrate the formative early years in which the society acted as a standalone forum free from the constraints of the archaic university that the society’s founders, Adam Sedgwick and John Stevens Henslow, felt were stagnating in their scientific developments and teaching. Cambridge University, at this point, was cautious in its intellectual pursuits and drew heavily from the Bible, Classics and the work of Isaac Newton (which on the Continent had already been digested and reworked). As Sedgwick and Henslow were enthusiastically pottering around on the Isle of Wight, in 1819, collecting geological samples, exploring the scars of the land and conjuring up elaborate theories under the new branch of science named ‘geology’, they recognized that their efforts might go in vain against the impermeable boundaries of Cambridge curricula. Thus they sought to develop a forum independent of the university in which scholars (only those holding degrees from Cambridge, nonetheless) could meet, debate and share research in an environment that encouraged creativity and freedom, going beyond that of the restrictive and single-tracked walls of the Cambridge University that chiefly prepared young gentlemen for lives in the clergy of the Church of England. In their attempts to do so, Gibson outlines how the society secured its own house and within it constructed the beginnings of a museum and began to prepare a library.

The society was not only here to shake up Cambridge science; it also desired longevity, and securing permanency through a royal charter awarded by King William IV ratified this. As the society gained members, it also developed its own journal, Transactions of the Cambridge Philosophical Society, which circulated within and beyond Cambridge. Gibson also guides us through the society’s journey as it received and discussed voyage observation letters from a young Charles Darwin, and how the society became an important centre of knowledge accumulation and circulation, as it began exchanging periodicals with other organizations in the beginnings of a transnational sharing of scientific knowledge.

As the society gained popularity, it began to influence the way in which science was conducted in the university and beyond. More students began to attend Sedgwick’s lectures and the university began (albeit slowly) to increase money and space for the teaching of sciences. New triposes were also developed to match the new enthusiasm percolating through the corridors of the university. Further, new scientific spaces were created and the university became embellished with emerging societies. The university and colleges were beginning to catch up. As Gibson rightly points out, the society became ‘a victim of its own success’ (p. 148) as its uniqueness had diminished and membership subscription began to dwindle. The society became imbrued with financial issues on more than one occasion. The first required the society to give up ownership of their own property, necessitating that the university subsume the society within its surrounding compound.

As time passed, the society became less explicitly influential in shaping science as the university began to secure itself as a prominent centre of science, but the society retained its core feature of presenting papers, holding lectures and publishing within the university. Consequently, the latter stages of the book tend to be implicit in detail of the society and focus on other areas in which the society played a role in the periphery, such as being a member of such but working in the Cavendish Lab. As a result, this leads to rather tenuous links between the society and ‘shaping modern science’, as the title suggests. Rather, then, the society acted as a crucial stepping stone for scientists and as an organization that mobilized the university into embracing the new sciences. These are the events that would then go on to transform modern, Western science.

Moving away from the content, the narrative was difficult to follow at times. Broadly, Gibson traces the history from conception to the contemporary, but in the finer-grained accounts, we follow a range of events that chronologically do not fit seamlessly with other events illustrated.
The continual reiteration of individuals’ roles (e.g., the many people who became president) in the society may add to the richness of the account but occasionally can confuse the narrative with no clear timeline to keep hold of. In a thematic history, this may not have been such an issue, but given that the work follows a two-hundred-year time span it can become difficult for the reader to keep hold of the many events whilst also envisaging the contexts in which they emerged.

Nonetheless, *The Spirit of Inquiry* is a book that should be of interest to any scholars interested in the role of science in society, to students and to the general public. It offers rich detail and intriguing accounts of the society that are, overall, a joy to read. In the main, by demonstrating that Cambridge had not always been the illustrious centre of science it is today, Gibson helps us recognize the crucial role that particular visions or imaginaries can play in transforming science, both in a historical context and in futures. In this case, Sedgwick, Henslow and their peers, and their desire ‘to keep alive the spirit of inquiry’, rejuvenated the stagnant, falling-behind curricula of Cambridge University that is now at the forefront of contemporary science.

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As much as we strive collectively to avoid anachronism and ahistorical thinking, reconstructions of past events ultimately bear the mark of the historian’s present. Past attempts to historicize, then, provide the historian with privileged access to the mores and sensibilities of bygone times. Especially rich fruit is promised when the object that past thinkers were attempting to historicize was humankind itself.

This collection of essays begins to deliver on the promise of insight into nineteenth-century understandings of history and humanity, by examining past attempts to piece together the story of our species (or, as it was for many of those discussed in this volume, the stories of the various human species). The so-called polygenism-versus-monogenism debate – concerning whether humankind represents one unified species with a single origin, or a multitude of closely related species, capable of interbreeding but arising from multiple pre-human progenitors – pervades *Historicizing Humans*. Few chapters fail to mention this social, political, religious, scientific spate as at least key background, whilst in several contributions the controversy occupies centre stage. Charles Darwin’s staunch monogenist commitment, buoyed by his familial abhorrence of slavery, provides Greg Radick (Chapter 6) with the key to understanding Darwin’s strangely un-Darwinian account of the development of emotional expression, in which natural selection was ruled out as a cause by its own author. Darwin, Radick shows, set great store in showing that emotional expressions were non-adaptive but nonetheless universal across the various races, a state of affairs which in turn pointed to their being commonly inherited from a single ancestor. The human story is thus a monogenist one, meaning that slavers could not cite separate origins to uphold their barbarous and dehumanizing treatment of other races.

Radick’s account sheds new light on an aspect of Darwin’s oeuvre that has long puzzled historians. Helen Kingstone (Chapter 7) continues the fresh approaches to ‘great men’ in her exploration of the comparative historical methodologies of Thomas Carlyle – himself so influential in formulating the ‘great-man theory of history’ – Walter Scott and Darwin’s notorious polymath cousin Francis Galton. But as well as providing new perspectives on leading figures in the nineteenth-century historicization of humans, this volume serves also to broaden the cast of characters. Nanna Kaalund (Chapter 2), for instance, introduces us to the respected Canadian geologist John William Dawson, whose 1860 popular work *Archaia* attempted to reconcile biblical and