



Editorial: Introducing “Biology in Culture” Reviews

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For longer than biology has been a word, creative mediums provided major channels to communicate knowledge about the living world as well as its history to a diverse audience. Novels, essays, plays, museum exhibits, films, and eventually TV series, comics, even computer games form a large oeuvre of resources that continue to inform and entertain scholars and the public alike. Beginning with volume 51, the *Journal of the History of Biology* will selectively review recent creative productions and science popularizations closely related to the history of biology broadly conceived. The section will focus on reviewing works that communicate about the history of biology, yet its purview will be open to a wider variety of topics, such as reflections on biology in popular culture. We will call this new review section “Biology in Culture,” reflecting our belief that serious cultural manifestations of biological sciences in all forms deserve attention, as social objects akin to bacterial cultures—always growing and unpredictably evolving over time.

Historians and other STS scholars often include such creative productions in our classrooms. Many of us, for example, have used Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

(1896), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and their numerous adaptations in films as favorite materials for teaching the history of physiology, reproductive technology, bioethics, as well as representations of science and scientists. They offer historical imagination and perspectives that both elicit interest from students and potentially inspire renewed discussions about emerging biotechnologies. Other works, such as Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* (1925), based on the careers of Frederick George Novy and Jacques Loeb, and David Lebrun's film *Proteus* (2004), exploring Ernst Haeckel's life and work, have often been chosen because of the unique capability of such literary or visual forms to relate experiences of particular historical moments, and to convey either familiarity or strangeness. Many of us may have come to the field through the sparks ignited by such creative renderings of science and society, even while they may lie outside the confines of questions and conventions delineated by our scholarly discipline. We hope that "Biology in Culture" will perpetuate this tradition of pedagogical discussions of scientific imaginaries.

As the pace and positioning of academic production give limited space to reflect on the vast world of literature and media, we believe short reviews of works suggested by our community of readers will provide space, both desirable and affordable, for sharing their impressions. These reviews will not only serve to inform our community, but also facilitate more "experimental" efforts in our field. Scholars have tapped the liberating potentials inherited by creative genres for bettering and diversifying scholarship in the history of biology. For example, J. Andrew Mendelsohn's article "Lives of the Cell," published in this journal in 2003, rendered the philosophical relations between things – cork, cartilage, eggs, and muscle – and theories of the cell formulated around them, into a play consisting of dialogues between scientists (C. O. Whitman, Robert Remak) and imagined interlocutors (Clio, Phil, and Sophie).¹ Several among us have also ventured into more substantial cultural expressions related to academic endeavors.² Such productions signal the important place our scholarship is assuming outside its traditional bounds, and so it is appropriate that journals create a richer infrastructure to support these enterprises and engage

¹ J. Andrew Mendelsohn, "Lives of the Cell," *Journal of the History of Biology* 36 (2003): 1–37.

² See, for example, the documentary films "Merchants of Doubt" (2014), based on the 2010 book of the same name by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway; "Containment" (2015), coproduced and directed by Peter Galison and Robb Moss; and "The Land Beneath Our Feet" (2016), written, directed, and produced by Gregg Mitman. For examples of fiction, see the many works by Richard Slotkin and Deborah Harkness.

critically with them. In this regard, *JHB*'s "Biology in Culture" opens up review space regarding the life sciences, although we are not the first, or even the only, journal to embrace a more expansive view of scholarship.³

The first two reviews presented in this issue arose serendipitously from the insightful suggestions of reviewers. Last fall, Hillary Mohaupt, a historian and freelance writer then working as the social media editor of the Chemical Heritage Foundation (now the Science History Institute), published an intriguing blog post for the magazine of the institute, *Distillations*, discussing how fiction has explored possible ways science intersects with culture.⁴ Asked about books that would be appropriate for possible reviews, Mohaupt suggested Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013), which weaves histories of psychology, twin studies, linguistics, and studies of chimpanzee ethology and human behavior into the fictional lived experiences of a scientist's daughter, Rosemary Cooke. Another proposal came from historian Jenna Tonn, whose research focuses on women and gender in modern science. Tonn pitched the 2017 Hulu TV series *The Handmaid's Tale* (based on Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel) as an important touchstone in popular culture whose themes demand engagement by historians of biology. As her elegant review makes clear, the TV series is not only a dystopic fantasy of how eugenic ideologies and patriarchal control of women's reproduction could be used to respond to an environmental crisis, but also offers a timely political commentary about abortion restrictions and other challenges to reproductive justice under the current presidential administration in the United States.

Looking ahead, the editors invite recommendations for future "Biology in Culture" reviews. We hope this feature will offer readers additional opportunities for edification and enjoyment, and that it will become an "embodied analytical"⁵ space for historians to play with other forms of biological knowledge making.

³ See, for instance, reviews of museum exhibits that have been appearing in *Technology and Culture* since the 1980s, and reviews of films and documentaries that have appeared in *Science*. Richard Bellon and Joseph Martin have further lamented the "hyperprofessionalism" of our field in their introduction of *Endeavour's* dedicated section for experimental scholarship. See "Introducing *In Vivo*," *Endeavour* 40 (2016): 140–141.

⁴ Hillary Mohaupt, "The Elements of Fiction: How Fiction Helps Science Intersect with Culture," *Distillations Blog*, 15 December 2017, <https://www.sciencehistory.org/distillations/blog/the-elements-of-fiction>, accessed 6 April 2018.

⁵ Donna Haraway, "A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies," *Configurations* I (1994): 59–71, quote p. 70.