

lines of the Underground Railroad alone carried between 40,000 and 50,000 passengers into Canada” (p. 230).

In this 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War, we will hear about the battlefield heroics of our ancestors. But it is important to remember that emancipation of the nation’s four million slaves would never have come about without the quiet, nonviolent work of men and women like Jonathan Walker, whose stories and sacrifices ought to be as familiar to us—and as well honored—as those of the men who fought at Shiloh, Gettysburg, and Cold Harbor. Walker’s branded hand was, for a time, one of antislavery’s most potent weapons. As Frederick Douglass declared, “I well remember the sensation produced by the exhibition of the branded hand. It was one of the few atrocities of slavery that aroused the justice and humanity of the North to a death struggle with slavery” (p. x).

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*The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature.*

By Justine S. Murison. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. x, 218. \$90.00.)

In this fascinating study, Justine Murison investigates the various discourses surrounding the workings of and roles played by the nervous system in nineteenth-century literature and culture. In the course of tracing circuits of exchange between body and mind, individual and surrounding environment, she calls attention to a variety of applications for new, oftentimes contested, understandings of physiological integrity and vulnerability in the era’s cultural, national, and political movements. From discussions of abolitionism, democracy, and domestic ideology to motivations for associationalist reform, religious revivals, and the science of spiritualism, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* examines the ways in which authors, doctors, and reformers turned to the nervous system in their quests to make sense of the “open” body. “Because both body and mind were open to environmental pressures,” Murison explains, “they proved vulnerable to the political climate and the social world” (p. 2). Their attempts to parse the relationship of brain, spinal cord, and nerves and, more broadly, their relationships to internal organs and outer surroundings effectively reproduced and

even heightened the very mystery and opacity they ostensibly were trying to explain away.

In chapters that treat Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee*, Edgar Allan Poe's satires, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, George Lippard's *The Quaker City* and *The Memoirs of a Preacher*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*, Epes Sargent's *Peculiar; A Tale of the Great Transition*, George Miller Beard's *American Nervousness*, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Gates Ajar* series, Murison demonstrates that fictional narratives helped cast the United States as a "nation of nerves" (p. 10) between 1830 and 1880. Her attention to oft-overlooked literary texts and her impressive microreadings of archival sources (from literature, medicine, politics, and popular culture) in the service of a larger argument about changing conceptions of the nervous system and the nervous individual/society contribute to an engaging study that will appeal to readers from a wide array of critical backgrounds and interests.

Murison's title is somewhat misleading, however, for the book seeks to complicate contemporary reliance on psychological discussions of "anxiety" to access the term's somatic literary and historical underpinnings. As she articulates her purpose in the epilogue, "The wager of this book has been that in reviving the nineteenth-century physiological language of nerves we will find an unexpectedly rich debate about the intersection of self and society that exceeds the explanatory power of 'anxiety'" (p. 172). Although her study explores the role of literature in the absorption, dissemination, and critique of what she calls "the medical language of the nerves" (p. 1) with perceptiveness and depth, I found myself wishing that she had traced more overtly the path by which language itself shaped understandings of the nervous system. The central five chapters invoke a myriad of terms for what we now might call "anxiety," from "neurological medicine," "sympathy," and "hypocondria" to "the reflex arc," "animal magnetism," and "electrical psychology." The sense of messiness evoked by these categorizations, which Murison characterizes early on as "a flexible vocabulary" (p. 3), and the various resonances and histories of individual inflections serve as manifold evidence of her central assertion that Freud's psychologization of anxiety's seat in the unconscious effectively erased a prehistory that was much more invested in embodied visions of experience. All the more reason, then, to foreground linguistic formulations as actively shaping formal expectations and pronouncements.

Furthermore, although Murison's in-depth readings of fictional texts are rich and suggestive, the rationale for their inclusion over

others that she mentions in passing is not immediately clear, despite early reference to a shared literary investment in “[r]epresenting the ‘romance’ of the nervous system thoughtfully and, at times, critically” (p. 6) through “the balance between romance and realism” (p. 5). Her invitation to consider the meaning of “sympathy” as a “physiological process” (p. 18) in chapter 1 has the potential to reinvigorate the critical readings of sympathy in nineteenth-century literature more broadly, but the implications of her claims remain somewhat buried in the context of an extended reading of *Sheppard Lee*.

In the end, my desire for more readings and bigger claims should indicate the intelligence, perceptiveness, and passion on display in this book. Brief references to representations of sympathy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, invocations of the electrical body in Whitman’s poetry, and considerations of Ahab’s control over the *Pequod* in terms of mesmeric trance left me invigorated and ready to re-read in light of Murison’s findings. As much as she is interested in how and why literature registers the process by which “[n]ervous physiology, from Benjamin Rush to *American Nervousness*, makes of the self an energized yet susceptible body, poised at the vulnerable border between one’s inner domains and the social landscape of the nineteenth century” (p. 170), she is also invested in the act of “clarif[ying] [the] psychological stakes of literary historicism by placing ‘anxiety’—and the broader theory of the nervous system it registers—as the historical subject of analysis rather than its structuring frame” (p. 8). In that sense, Murison’s attention to “the role of embodiment in constructing social, historical, and most of all, fictional narratives” (p. 12) reflects the fact that her project is part of a very big, field-changing, post-“neuroscientific turn” (p. 175) methodological approach, and it’s exciting work to watch unfold.

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*Lucretia Mott’s Heresy: Abolition and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. By Carol Faulkner. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp. 292. \$45.00.)

Quaker abolitionist Lucretia Mott was one of the most important figures in the American and transatlantic women’s rights movements. Carol Faulkner’s new biography examines Mott’s public life and her willingness to challenge the received wisdom of conventional society