

## *Media Reviews*

### *Introducing the new Media Reviews section...*

We are pleased to introduce the media review section of *Medical History*. As new technologies and a growing desire to engage with global audiences have led many historians to change and adapt their scholarship in a variety of novel ways, we believe that it is of great value to look critically at, and to engage with, the wide variety of media that illuminate the history of medicine.

The internet, of course, has created innumerable innovative opportunities for sharing information. Electronic archives and databases make original documents vastly more available to scholars and students. Online distribution also ensures that films and documentaries are more easily accessible. However, the sheer volume of material that the internet has brought within our reach has made it all the more difficult to identify valuable resources amidst the dross. Moreover, there are reasons for concern that even the valuable resources being brought to light are not being represented in ways that are wholly adequate to their original material context.

At the same time, traditional forms of public outreach, such as displays and exhibits, too frequently serve only a local audience. Long distances and short exhibition runs prevent many who would be interested from viewing these efforts first-hand. As a result, the spotlight they bring to rare documents and artefacts as well as to innovative techniques for contextualising historical objects often shines unnoticed by the broader profession.

It is our aim to provide within these pages a remedy for both of these issues, helping the journal's readers to evaluate the virtual materials that may be most useful to their research and teaching, and to learn more of those physical presentations that may have the most potential to inspire new efforts. At the same time, we seek to provide comment from experts familiar with the resources we review that commend scholarly effort, rigour and professional sophistication while also constructively expressing the limitations presented by such works.

We encourage submissions and inquiries from institutions, film and documentary directors, curators and creators of media of all types.

**Stephen Casper**

Clarkson University, USA

**Mariola Espinosa**

Yale University, USA

doi:10.1017/mdh.2012.71

**The Mütter Museum**, College of Physicians of Philadelphia, 19 South 22nd Street,  
Philadelphia, PA 19303, USA

For students and scholars inhabiting the twenty-first-century world of digital humanities, unable to go more than 30 minutes without checking their smart phones, and able to download museum apps and podcasts with ease, what possible reasons are there to

visit the Mütter Museum at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia? Are its physical presentations of normal and pathological human development more interesting than what can be found online? Unquestionably yes. Is the material presented in an informative way that is easily viewed? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. The museum, reconfigured in the 1980s to resemble a nineteenth-century teaching installation of a 'pre-bacteriological, pre-genetic conception of disease and pathology', has both an amazing collection and cases that are brimming with objects needing further description. (For the record, this reviewer worked at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia from 1983 to 1987 and is a member of its section on Medical History.)

The permanent exhibit is located on two floors. The large cases contain wax models, wet specimens of organs and body parts (both diseased and healthy), as well as skeletons and bones, instruments and unique items such as the 'soap lady' and skeletons of a giant and an achondroplastic dwarf. One can see diseases of the skin, fetal skeletons, Dr Chevalier Jackson's collection of swallowed objects, Dr Joseph Hyrtl's skull collection, wax models of diseases of the eye and a myriad of other organs and pathologies. For sheer breadth, the collection is unbeatable.

And it is fascinating. We see these materials as a nineteenth-century medical student might see them. However, the printed descriptive material, including an introduction to the museum's history and its original donor, Dr Thomas Dent Mütter, is insufficient. Museum visitors who desire to know more about the artefacts on view must turn to their cell phones. There is a free and quite detailed audio description of approximately twenty-eight items or subjects on display. Presidential history fans, for example, will learn from the recorded descriptions about such items as Grover Cleveland's tumour and the brain of presidential assassin Charles Guiteau. The Museum website (<http://www.collegeofphysicians.org/mutter-museum/>) proclaims its goal to be 'to help the public understand the mysteries and beauty of the human body while appreciating the history of diagnosis and treatment of disease'. Without a broader presentation of medical history within the exhibit cases, however, visitors without a background in medicine or medical history are more likely to be impressed by the mystery and beauty (and horror) of what they see than to gain much fundamental understanding of what they are viewing.

Fortunately, the Mütter Museum is the sum of many parts. There are two temporary exhibits, both drawing from the over 20 000 items in the permanent collection. 'Through the Weeping Glass: Reflections on the Mütter Museum by the Quay Brothers' includes their film about the museum holdings that drew their interest. There is a small exhibit showing how early students of medicine learned about the body. Included are some photographs of the manifestations of disease and of anomalies, and also a few anatomical flap books with leaves that open to show the internal layers of the body. Johan Remmelin's marvellous seventeenth-century *Catoptrum Microcosmicum* is on display. It might lack the colour and ease of use of present-day anatomy apps, but it is a historical object that shows the care that Dr Remmelin, an Ulm physician, took in examining the body revealing its mysteries to others. This is, ultimately, the message conveyed by the museum: take time to look and stop to think what can be learned from the objects and images.

This is exemplified in the stunningly beautiful exhibit 'Bones, Books, and Bell Jars'. It showcases forty-four silver gelatin photographs of items in the collection taken by photographer and former practicing physician Andrea Baldeck. She deftly juxtaposed books with anatomical drawings, instruments and skeletal parts to create still life photographs that, in the words of the curator, fuse 'art and medicine, recalling an era when artists and physicians collaborated to educate aspiring medical students'. There is,

for example, a print showing two fetal skulls arranged with an anatomy text showing a fetus *in utero*. Another print displays a scoliotic spine and rib cage, a dissection kit and Vesalius' anatomy text of a skeleton. This exhibit closes at the end of 2012 and anyone who plans to be in Philadelphia before then should make a point of seeing it. (Some of the images can be viewed here: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrea-baldeck/mutter-museum-photographs\\_b\\_1335927.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrea-baldeck/mutter-museum-photographs_b_1335927.html).) Opening in 2013 will be a new permanent exhibit: 'Broken Bones, Suffering Spirits: Injury, Death and Healing in Civil War Philadelphia'.

Seeing the artefacts of medical history in this self-described cabinet museum, visitors will encounter the human form in all its parts. They will view the tools used to explore the body as healers worked to cure or mitigate disease and defects. They will also understand what can be learned from post-mortem examinations. The Mütter Museum displays do not ask us to celebrate medical science or doctors but to understand how much practitioners learned by looking – at drawings, photographs and models as well as actual patients. The virtual world gives us access; museums give us objects. We ought not to forget the latter even as we embrace the former.

**Janet Golden**

Rutgers University Camden

doi:10.1017/mdh.2012.72

**Julia E. Rodriguez** (ed.), *History of Science in Latin America and the Caribbean Digital Archive* (Durham: University of New Hampshire, 2010) ([www.hoslac.org](http://www.hoslac.org))

The History of Science in Latin America and the Caribbean Digital Archive is an exciting contribution to the growing field it represents and to the digital archive enterprise more broadly. A US National Science Foundation funded project under the supervision of Julia E. Rodriguez at the University of New Hampshire, the website, launched in January 2010, now contains over 200 primary sources representing media as diverse as videos, maps, cartoons, images and text documents of various kinds. The chronological, thematic and geographical scope of the material is equally ambitious. Many topics – among them 'Scientific Expeditions', 'Slavery and Science', and 'Museums and Collections' – roam heterogeneously across several centuries and continents. With thirty topics and seven to eight items per topic, the coverage is vast indeed.

The introduction to the site highlights unifying themes within the collection. These include: the 'richness and diversity of experience' within the Latin American and Caribbean scientific context; knowledge production as the result of a sometimes coercive and violent 'cross-cultural and international engagement'; and a more holistic vision of science incorporating the role of 'native and local actors' in the 'construction, interpretation, and application of scientific knowledge'. These thematic convergences also characterise current historical and historiographical work on the history of science and medicine in the region. The introductory remarks accompanying these topics provide useful framing in line with the overarching thematic commonalities, but they are mostly brief and unobtrusive, leaving ample room and flexibility to explore. Each topical section benefits from a helpful review essay with 'Questions for future exploration' and recommendations for further reading. A more extensive bibliography incorporating