

Abraham's biography achieves success in still further ways. She opens, for example, substantive new ground on the varieties of intellectual dualism that existed in the twentieth century. Study of McCulloch's life makes clear the eclectic natures of idealism, psycho-physical parallelism, psychosomatic medicine and psychoanalysis in America mid-century. It also makes clear that these forms of dualism exerted something of a structuring effect on figures like McCulloch, who sought (unsuccessfully it seems) to overcome them in mathematical formulation, model or physiological theory.

Similarly, Abraham's volume also engages with the broader question of how ideological commitments and scientific theory are knit together. McCulloch's neurophysiology drew upon an assemblage of scientific ideas – multiple generations in the making – that cast the nervous system's function in terms of integrative action. The languages of integration, she describes, permitted substantial rhetorical artifice, allowing figures like McCulloch to translate their languages of the nervous system into, for instance, theories in the human sciences. In turn, that rhetoric of integration may have easily transposed onto the ideologies seeking unity in science, which became commonplace in the post-war period and with which McCulloch actively engaged. Indeed, McCulloch's life perhaps makes visible a cultural chronology of the mind and brain sciences. The Victorian naturalism of his youth gave way to a similarly styled desire for integration in his middle years, which in turn gave way to an analogous pursuit of scientific unity in the closing decades of his career. In its own way, each cultural style was transdisciplinary. Each also aimed for transcendence. Accordingly, they reveal their own internal contradictions and limitations. They were necessarily predicated on trust, expertise and language. They were held together by social convention, performances of cosmopolitanism and paternalistic understandings of merit and democracy. Of course, as Abraham's biography shows so clearly such adhesive is poor at glueing scientific communities and theories together. In part, the reason why appears foregrounded in the title of her study: a genius is hard to understand. A rebel has no interest in being understood.

Stephen T. Casper

Clarkson University, USA

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Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), pp. xxii+314, \$85.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-4696-3086-1.

Over the last two decades, medicine, health and healing have become increasingly prominent subjects in histories of the Atlantic world. The result has been a proliferation of new approaches. Some studies have grown from the tradition of Atlantic environmental history, influentially pioneered by Alfred Crosby, and link environmental and epidemiological shifts to the expansion of European settlement. Teams of historians and paleopathologists have capitalised on the emerging body of DNA evidence to chart with new precision the ever-shifting disease ecologies of the pre- and post-Columbian Americas. Histories of Atlantic slavery have drawn increasing attention to the cultural and intellectual dynamism of healers of African and Native American ancestry who, it now seems, were the healers of first resort for most colonial inhabitants. Studies of the relationship between science and empire have explored the colonial bioprospecting campaigns that emerged in part to deal with the new epidemiological realities. Some

in this vein have gone further, arguing that such prospecting – at once biological and commercial, and underwritten by the evidence of the senses rather than the authority of ancient texts – propelled a European scientific revolution.

In *The Experiential Caribbean*, Pablo Gómez takes up these multiple Atlantic histories of health, medicine and epistemological transformation. The result is a highly original cross-disciplinary contribution. Gómez's main argument is that over the course of the long seventeenth century, as a scientific revolution is supposed to have unfolded in London and Paris, black ritual healers in the Caribbean were leading an epistemological revolution of their own. Much like European virtuosi, the work of black ritual healers in places like Havana and Cartagena installed the evidence of the senses as the foundation for truth claims about the inner working of the natural world. How things felt, tasted, smelled, looked and sounded became the basis for assertions about the cause and treatment of disease. Gómez not only places black healing specialists at the centre of a sensorially rich Caribbean world, he makes them central to the very production of that world. Because claims about disease implied claims about the inner workings of the natural world more broadly (including the very constituents of that world), what are at stake, for Gómez in *The Experiential Caribbean* are not just novel epistemologies but Caribbean ontologies.

With the partial exception of the first two chapters, the book is organised thematically rather than chronologically. Chapter 1 sketches the cultural landscape of the seventeenth-century Spanish Caribbean – a world in which people of African descent predominated. Slave or free, persons of African descent were not isolated and few of them laboured for life on plantations. Theirs was instead a thoroughly commercial world. Havana and Cartagena were important regional centres of gravity in global networks of trade and association. Some seventy languages and uncounted confessional identities populated the Spanish Caribbean. Castilian and Spanish Catholicism were among them, of course, but neither the Iberian language nor the religion was essential to plying a successful trade as a midwife, healer, mason or carpenter.

Chapter 2 surveys the epidemiological landscape and the varied spaces in which black healers practised. Global connections meant the convergence of a range of maladies. Intermittent fevers, dysenteries, respiratory diseases and plague combined with clouds of mosquitos and 'creepy-crawlies' (p. 41) of many kinds to imperil Caribbean bodies. Slavery and sickness, bodily mutilation (whippings, hangings) and bodily inspections (for sale or transfer) meant curative specialists were crucial for survival. Medical authorities like the *protomedico* were largely inattentive to the multiplicity of available curative approaches. Forests, shanties, hospitals, convents, plazas and private houses, were all sites in which free and enslaved black healers, women and men alike, mingled and propagated novel and highly functional beliefs about the causes and treatment of disease.

It was the pervasive presence of itinerant black Caribeños – culturally and intellectually, no less than demographically – that made the Spanish Caribbean into a coherent space. The Caribbean itineraries of patients and healers, bodies and their knowers are the subjects of Chapter 3. Black ritual healers, Gómez demonstrates, were cosmopolitan, curious and culturally savvy. Much as physicians steeped in Galenic medicine used urine and the pulse to render the hidden conditions of bodily humours visible, so black ritual practitioners invented ways to expose internal, hidden, bodily processes through publicly available and sensorially evident tastes, sounds, scents and sights. Chapter 4 variously dramatises the ways in which they did so. Chapter 5 stresses the ways in which black healers, like their university-trained counterparts, took into account

the social relationships that made medicine efficacious. Marvels, which were so central to the ostensibly revolutionary epistemologies taking shape in Europe, appear in Chapter 6 as central to the work of black Caribbean healers. Here too, wonders helped propel a turn to the experiential. Black Caribbean healers manufactured unexpected, visible, sensible experiences to establish their authority. Chapter 7 broadens the discussion from patients and practitioners to explore the ways in which all Caribbeños participated in the sensorium that black ritual practitioners fashioned.

The contributions here are many and significant. Most narrowly, Gómez shows that the racial and epistemological hierarchies that historians so often use to examine the region had not yet come into being. Like other historians concerned with the traps of retrospective diagnosis, Gómez argues that not only were modern medical ontologies not operable but they are unhelpful to understanding medical practice in the seventeenth-century Spanish Caribbean. Gómez suggests that the heavily theorised and much debated concept of hybridity (*mestizaje*) suggests a linearity and a coherence that cannot capture the fragmentary, multiple, simultaneous and short-lived nosologies and curative techniques that characterised the Caribbean.

More broadly, Gómez avoids the tendency to subsume the history of curative practice within more conventional historical frameworks. From a post-colonial perspective, the practices of healing appear as subaltern strategies of resistance and appropriation. In African diasporan frameworks, healing appears as a part of a wider debate on the character of African diasporic culture (at issue is whether curative techniques represent atomised cultural survivals blended into hybrid colonial forms, or whether they indicate the importation of whole cosmologies that survived the Atlantic crossing more or less intact).

But, Gómez suggests, where histories of science and medicine are concerned, post-colonial and diasporic analytical frames are limiting. They portray curative practices as important only insofar as they challenged authority, buttressed diasporic identities or enabled community survival. Consequently, the history of epistemic innovation, and of intellectual creativity more broadly, appears as the exclusive preserve of Europeans and their descendants abroad. Whether or not black ritual specialists participated in a modernist project (pace studies of the scientific revolution) is, for Gómez, somewhat beside the point. Their curative labour is critically important to historical inquiry now because it was vitally important to the lived experience of the Spanish Caribbean in the seventeenth century. We lose much about that world if we privilege Eurocentric historical narratives and modern ontologies.

It is this last point that makes *The Caribbean Experiential* so profoundly imaginative. The book takes up questions more common to the history of science (questions of evidence, epistemology, credibility and authority) and the history of medicine (the bodily experience of disease, the outlook of patients and the co-creation of the meaning of disease through the clinical encounter) but renounces the modernism and the presentism so common in such studies – and especially in histories of Iberian science.

Readers who follow Gómez into the *Experiential Caribbean* will draw their own conclusions about the strength of his argumentation and the value of his approach on any one of these issues. The book's conceptual breadth and imagination make it a valuable contribution to literatures ranging from Atlantic slavery to science studies and the history of medicine.

Hugh Cagle
University of Utah, USA