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978-1-107-01001-7 - Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century

Anne Stiles

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IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the 1860s and 1870s, leading neurologists used animal experimentation to establish that discrete sections of the brain regulate specific mental and physical functions. These discoveries had immediate medical benefits: David Ferrier's detailed cortical maps, for example, saved lives by helping surgeons locate brain tumors and hemorrhages without first opening up the skull. These experiments both incited controversy and stimulated creative thought, because they challenged the possibility of an extra-corporeal soul. This book examines the cultural impact of neurological experiments on late-Victorian Gothic romances by Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker, H. G. Wells, and others. Novels like *Dracula* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* expressed the deep-seated fears and visionary possibilities suggested by cerebral localization research, and offered a corrective to the linearity and objectivity of late-Victorian neurology.

ANNE STILES is Assistant Professor of English at Saint Louis University.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

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Paul Cézanne's "Still Life with Skull" (1865/7), is reproduced courtesy of the Kunsthhaus Zürich.

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