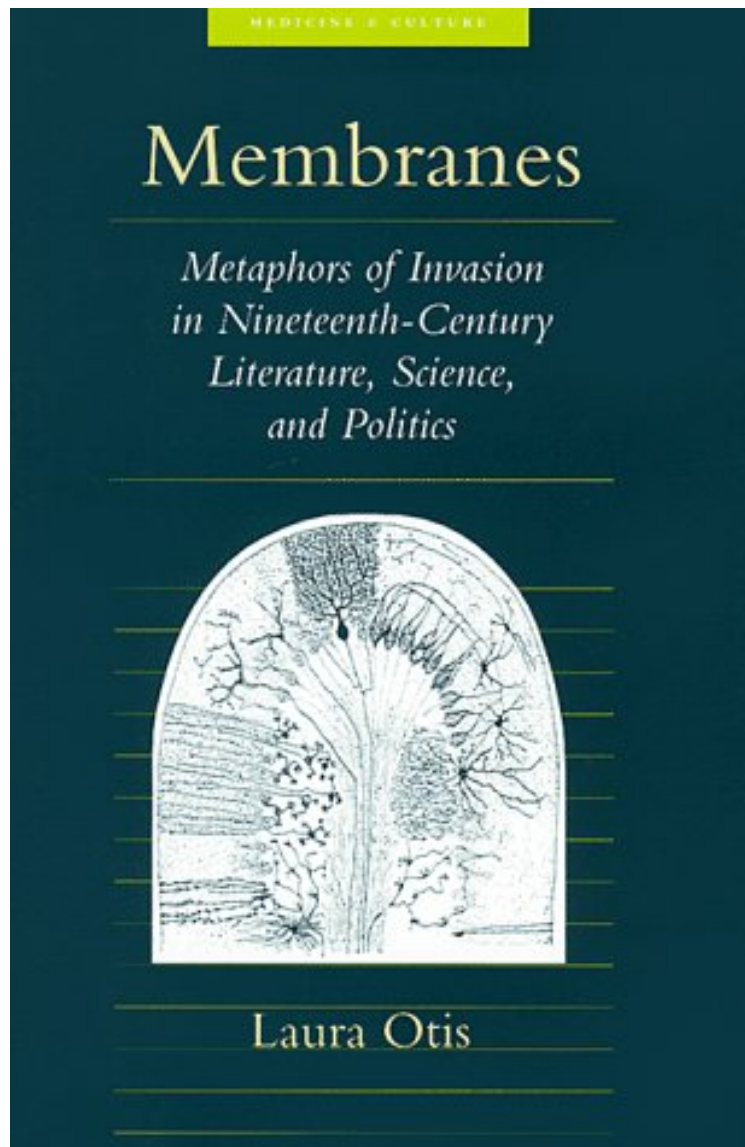


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## Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics (Medicine and Culture)

*Professor Laura Otis*

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**Professor Laura Otis : Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics (Medicine and Culture)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics (Medicine and

Culture):

In *Membranes*, Laura Otis examines how the image of the biological cell became one of the reigning metaphors of the nineteenth century. At the heart of her story is the rise of a fundamental assumption about human identity: the idea that selfhood requires boundaries showing where the individual ends and the rest of the world begins. Otis focuses on the scientific and creative writing of four physician-authors: American neurologist S. Weir Mitchell; Spanish neurobiologist Santiago Ramoacute;n y Cajal, who won the Nobel prize in 1906 for proving that neurons were intact, independent cells; British author Arthur Conan Doyle; and Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler, a contemporary of Sigmund Freud in fin-de-siegrave;cle Vienna. *Membranes* also compares the scientific and political thinking of German scientists Rudolf Virchow, the founder of cellular pathology and an active liberal politician, and Robert Koch, who discovered the bacteria that cause cholera and tuberculosis and whose studies of foreign bacteria provided a scientific veneer for German colonialism. Finally, the book presents a unique reading of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Otis argues that belief in impermeable personal and national borders is increasingly dangerous. Defying the traditional boundary between science and the humanities, she concludes by proposing a notion of identity based on relations and connections.

"Otis has done a great service in broadening traditional accounts of modern cell theory." -- Manfred D. Laubichler, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*"Otis uses the membrane that defines the borders of cells as a metaphor of separation -- national, social, and individual... The book stands in a long tradition of works such as Paul De Kruif's *Microbe Hunters* and Theodor Rosebury's more recent *Life on Man*. But Otis's is really a book about the medical dimension of societal interaction -- or the lack of it -- and it ends with a cri de coeur for human unity against current threats, particularly AIDS." -- Choice"A fine and informative study." -- Stephen Arata, *Modern Philology*"Laura Otis has pioneered the influence of microorganisms on nineteenth-century literature. While *Membranes* covers the later half of the eighteenth hundreds extending to 1930, its implications should resound for studies in Romantic science and culture." -- Ron Broglio, *The Wordsworth Circle*"A well-crafted multidisciplinary study." -- Peter W. Graham, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*"This is an imaginative as well as concrete proposition, and the results are quite satisfying." -- John Neubauer, *Comparative Literature Studies*About the Author Laura Otis is an associate professor of English at Hofstra University. She is the author of *Organic Memory*, an analysis of heredity and memory in literature and science, and *Networking* (forthcoming). She received an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fellowship to support her research at the Max Planck Institut in Berlin, and was recently granted a MacArthur Fellowship to study the relations between science, literature, and culture.