

Mary Cappello, *Swallow: Foreign Bodies, Their Ingestion, Inspiration, and the Curious Doctor who Extracted Them* (New York: The New Press, 2011), pp. xi + 292, \$27.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-59558-395-6.

Mary Cappello's fourth book is self-described as a work of 'literary nonfiction': a tag that barely seems to scratch at the surface of the author's multi-disciplinary approach. The intimate anecdotal style, frequent departures into philosophical reflection and post-modern narrative combine to make a work as unorthodox as the collection (and, perhaps, the collector) it describes. Yet such a term also threatens to denigrate the work, hinting that it does not quite fit the bill for either field. Nonetheless, historians and literary critics alike should find much of interest here.

Part-biography, *Swallow* details the life and career of an American laryngologist, through a collection of objects housed in Philadelphia's Mütter Museum: the Chevalier Jackson Foreign Body Collection. Jackson collected and stored over two thousand 'fbodies' (as he called them), leaving a legacy as contradictory as it is compelling. As Cappello notes, Jackson dedicated his life to convincing other doctors that ingested foreign bodies were commonplace: yet his collection is regularly interpreted as a curiosity, an assortment of strange and unusual surgical cases.

This contradiction forms the crux of Cappello's analysis, as she delves into publications, letters, case notes and sketches in an effort to explain how such a collection came into being. Why were these objects collected? What significance did they hold to the man who collected them, and what other stories can they tell? The juxtaposition of commonplace to marvellous, medical to miraculous, is never far away; for example, it transpires that early endoscopists were inspired by the technique used by sword-swallowers: throwing back the head to create a straight channel down which an instrument might be passed. Cappello takes such analogy

further, relating the sword-swallower's mastery of the reflexes to the surgeon's efforts to gain control of the body through an operation.

Yet Jackson's collection, in which the objects are inserted into a system whereby they figure as 'evidence of mastery and control' (p. 106), highlights yet another issue, bringing us into the realm of psychobiography. What did these repeated efforts to tame the body mean for Chevalier Jackson himself? Cappello sees a puzzling contradiction between Jackson's account of his life in his autobiography and his collection. The surgeon had a troubled childhood as a victim of severe bullying, making his later insistence that the presence of a foreign body was invariably the result of 'carelessness' surprising. Thus, Cappello suggests that a focus on the surgeon himself can mask other important issues raised by the collection: the acts of violence glimpsed in cases such as the nine-month-old baby, whose sister fed him four open safety pins, or Joseph B., force-fed over thirty objects by his babysitter.

Thus, in addition to relating the life of an innovative surgeon, Cappello also uses the Chevalier Jackson collection to explore the human dramas within the cabinet. What does it mean, she asks, to swallow something that is not food? What does the foreign body become, once it has been swallowed? What significance does it hold for the individual after its removal? In her analysis, Cappello deftly weaves anecdotal accounts – her own and those of others – into historical research. Correspondence from Margaret Derryberry, searching for a hatpin aspirated nearly eighty years before, provokes reflection on the way a foreign body might be absorbed into the individual, for Margaret still speaks of the pin as a part of her, telling Cappello that: 'We're in drawer number seventy' (p. 200). There are occasional problems with this approach, most often in the author's tendency to privilege psychoanalytic readings of objects and acts. This suggests that there is, somehow, a 'real' meaning to be uncovered behind the

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swallowing of foreign bodies, an idea which undermines some of the more complex questions asked: for instance, what does the foreign body suggest to us about the ways in which self-concepts are created and revised?

Thought-provoking, affecting and stimulating by turns, *Swallow* is a highly readable work. Nonetheless, Cappello's eclectic style will take some getting used to for many historians. There is no linear story here: like the objects and cases she investigates, the book is fragmented into ideas, anecdotes, and episodes in Jackson's life. Anyone wanting to use the volume to flick through Jackson's life story, uncovering key dates and episodes, will be sadly frustrated in their search. Yet, *Swallow* raises many pertinent questions, and the reader who perseveres from cover to cover will be well rewarded.

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Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xv + 346, £65.00/\$125.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-19-957582-4.

Two decades ago, historians of military medicine started asking, 'Is war good for medicine?' Mark Harrison has made important conceptual and methodological contributions towards answering this question. In particular, he has helped develop a Weberian approach, which examines the complex interchange between industrial, military and medical discourses, practices and institutions in the prosecution of modern warfare. *The Medical War* marks the culmination of this project, which has already yielded a monograph on the Second World War and two pioneering collections. Bringing to bear a sociological history on the organisation, development, and role of British military medicine in the First

World War, Harrison shifts concern from war as a vehicle for medical modernisation, to argue that, between 1914–18, modern medicine became crucial to waging modern war. This book redresses the relative lack of historical work on this relationship and, in rich empirical detail, explains how it was forged. Harrison convincingly shows that British military success (and failure) cannot be fully understood without taking into account organisational and technical innovations in military medicine. The book's broad scope, examining the workings of the medical machine in different theatres, represents a major rewriting of the official medical history of the War.

As late as 1914, British military planners resisted the idea that medicine was crucial to the war machine. Harrison attributes this situation to the recalcitrance of Victorian military attitudes, poor professional relations between medical and military officials, and a general lack of foresight about the unique demands of modern warfare. The shock of the Western Front prompted the reconstruction of military medicine based on a highly integrated, hierarchical, and increasingly specialised system of forward medical provision and casualty evacuation. This system became the benchmark for the organisation of medicine in other theatres, and Harrison justly devotes almost half the book to its development, highlighting innovations and changes in surgery, wound treatment, disease prevention, orthopaedics, cardiology, physiology, and psychiatry. Much of this story is well known, but Harrison's synthesis of existing studies should be welcomed. What he also provides is an explanatory framework that traces the roots of the new system to the conditions of trench warfare and changing battlefield tactics; the demands of manpower economy and keeping soldiers fighting fit; and the increasingly important role of medicine in maintaining morale among troops and civilians. This last point is especially important, as it sheds light on how medicine was mobilised as a vital symbolic resource for humanising the War, and also how it became