

He modestly expresses the hope that it will, nonetheless: 'serve as a stimulus to interest professional historians of science in a deeper analysis of this period' (p. 237).

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**Elizabeth Stephens**, *Anatomy as Spectacle: Public Exhibitions of the Body from 1700 to the Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 166, \$35, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-8463-1644-9.

Standing at eight feet two inches, Charles Byrne first arrived in London in 1782 and quickly captured the imagination of a city eager to part with its money in order to glimpse the man who became known as the Irish Giant. Over two hundred years later, Byrne's skeleton is still fascinating onlookers, boasting pride of place in the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons. It is this longstanding fascination with looking at anatomy, whether alive or dead, normal or pathological, fake or flesh, that occupies Elizabeth Stephens' book. Organised into four chapters on, respectively, eighteenth-century anatomical wax Venuses, nineteenth-century museums of 'lost manhood', twentieth-century freak shows, and Gunther von Hagens' current exhibitions of plastinated bodies, *Anatomy as Spectacle*, it is an ambitious investigation into the coalescence of medical and spectacular discourses that such anatomical exhibitions present, asserting that they are a key element in producing an emphatically modern idea of the body as one that requires continuous and careful self-management.

Stephens' case studies allow her to go into some historical depth when investigating each exhibition. This works particularly well in the chapter 'The Docile Subject of Anatomy', focusing on wax Venuses exhibited in Europe from the eighteenth century. Here Stephens first introduces such exhibitions as legitimising enterprises for the newly emergent discipline of anatomy, demonstrating how medical practitioners employed earlier artistic traditions such as portraying female nudes as Venus, and the use of wax models as votive offerings, in order to gain a rapid public acceptance for their anatomised bodies. This chapter also explores changing attitudes to femininity and motherhood during the heyday of these Venuses, situating the exhibitions as crucial sites for new cultural conceptualisations of these roles, as well as crucial factors in a bourgeois self-fashioning that emphasised the importance of individuals paying careful attention to their own bodies.

However, in parts, the long chronology covered by the book undermines the compact focus of the case studies, leaving historical context feeling underexplored. In chapter three 'From the Freak to the Disabled Person', Stephens devotes the majority of the study to debunking the idea that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw an increasingly medicalised and less spectacularised way of viewing the body by highlighting the shared theatricality of promotional photographs of professional freaks and ostensibly medical photographs of the insane. Following this, the final section of the chapter, which Stephens devotes to focusing on the modern day freak show and its performers, feels disconnected from the earlier argument.

Likewise, in the final chapter on Gunther von Hagens' *Bodyworlds* exhibitions it is the contemporary discussion that takes centre stage with Stephens dissecting the notion that plastinated bodies are, as von Hagens claims, 'real' bodies that reveal the truth of our anatomy. Though fascinating this leaves the historical aspect feeling superficial. For instance Stephens asserts that the late seventeenth century saw a shift in understanding of the

body from a medieval notion of one characterised by fluidity and amorphous boundaries, to our modern conception of an individuated body bounded by our skin. This idea is accepted uncritically with surprisingly little consideration of the complexity of theories about the body that abounded during the early modern period, including the humoral theory, which placed individual self-knowledge of one's own bodily complexion as central to the maintenance of health. The historical contextualisation here feels perfunctory and potentially undermines one of Stephens' main arguments, that anatomical exhibitions propagated a view of the body as one that required constant self-monitoring, and that this view was decidedly modern.

Though at times frustratingly light on historical detail, *Anatomy as Spectacle* succeeds in presenting the history of anatomy as one of the spectacular as much as the medical, demonstrating the vital role that exhibitions played in the history of the discipline. Stephens' work fits into the phalanx of academics working on visual and material cultures of medicine, arguing that these exhibitions were never mere illustration, but that they played vital roles in the production, as well as transmission, of contemporary ideas and understandings of the body.

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**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: 978-1-5955-8395-6.

Mary Cappello's fourth book is self-described as a work of 'literary nonfiction': a tag which barely seems to scratch at the surface of the author's multi-disciplinary approach. The intimate anecdotal style, frequent departures into philosophical reflection and postmodern 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 'fbdies' (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.