

sustained is by omitting any reference to the sensation novels thronged with palpably nervous middle-class bodies which gave rise during the 1860s to a fury of indignation. "The reader's nerves are affected like the hero's", Margaret Oliphant stridently complained in a review of the most famous of them all, Wilkie Collins's *The woman in white* (1860). Such omissions make *Nerves and narratives*, admirable though it is in the terms announced by its title, something less than a "cultural history of hysteria in nineteenth-century British prose".

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Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary: captive to the public's health*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996, pp. xviii, 331, illus., \$14.00 (paperback 0-8070-2103-2).

This book is about liberty, more especially about liberty and responsibility, about the rights and liberties of apparently healthy people who can transmit deadly diseases. It is a theme with very modern resonances, for it encapsulates current problems surrounding human immuno-deficiency virus and drug-resistant tuberculosis, but it is also a theme with a solid history based in the treatment of healthy carriers of typhoid fever. Typhoid is transmitted by the faecal-oral route, often in contaminated water supplies, but also through food and soiled clothing among other routes. It has apparently just one natural reservoir, the human body, and a certain proportion of sufferers continue to excrete pathogenic typhoid bacilli in their faeces and/or urine for months or years after the original illness has passed. The existence of the healthy carrier was first suggested by Robert Koch in 1902; a few years later it was confirmed during a campaign to eradicate typhoid from south-west Germany. Historically the most notorious example of a carrier comes from the United States: in March 1907, a New York cook of Irish parentage, Mary Mallon, became the first person in the United States to be identified as a

healthy typhoid carrier. As Typhoid Mary, Mallon achieved lasting fame and notoriety (in the English-speaking world at least), partly as a potent symbol of harm, partly for the practical and ethical dilemmas raised by her condition. Mallon's story, as both symbol and dilemma, is the focus of this book, not just for the window it provides on history, but because of its relevance to modern public health dilemmas relating to AIDS, to drug-resistant tuberculosis, and perhaps also to problems as yet unrecognized with other emerging infections.

Mallon's identification as a carrier, her vigorous rejection of co-operation with the public health authorities, and her continued insistence that she was perfectly healthy and so could not be a disseminator of disease, led her to virtually a life-time's incarceration on North Brother Island. She was a woman, she was single, she was a servant, she was an Irish Catholic: other carriers—male bread-winners, in particular—were not so treated, although attempts were made to keep tabs on them. Mallon's case was special, and around it Leavitt has constructed a thoughtful analysis of the problems associated with the management of "healthy" carriers in general, and of Mallon in particular. Themes of conflict and contrasting values run through this analysis: the liberty of the individual versus the welfare of the community; acceptance versus rejection of modern scientific methods and knowledge; co-operation versus rejection of bureaucratic intervention; middle-class, American-born, Protestant, attitudes towards servants, single women, Catholics and the Irish. While Mallon's story and its details are interwoven with the text throughout the book, Leavitt has chosen to emphasize how differently such a story may appear according to the perspective from which it is viewed. Thus the laboratory scientists, Leavitt argues, saw Mallon's identification and incarceration as demonstrating science's ability to conquer disease, while the health authority saw her as a justification for an increase in its own power, and the lawyers saw a case that hinged on individual rights and issues of justice. The American middle class judged Mallon by the

known facts of her background; the press constructed her dramatically, as a danger to society; history has tried to separate the symbolism and the human tragedy. Each of these constructions helped to shape the collective memory of Typhoid Mary, each contributed to the distortion of Mary Mallon's life as she herself experienced it.

In retrieving and re-analysing these different stories, Leavitt aims both to reconstruct a story "rich with past memory", and to present a context and an illumination of current public health problems. She has succeeded in both: this is an admirable micro-history, lucidly written, carefully crafted, sensitive to Mallon's personal situation, and illuminating on the wider issues. On the downside, the reader may become so immersed in the minute history of early twentieth-century New York as to be left wondering if it was the only place in America; Leavitt's attempt to paint in the wider impact of the Mallon case on American public health practice becomes rather submerged in the micro-history. The inevitable repetition of factual elements which follows on Leavitt's separate treatment of the different aspects of the case and its context, does become faintly irritating, however much one may sympathize with the necessity for such a device. In all, though, this is an not just an interesting exercise in historical writing and in the linkage of past and present, but a readable, enjoyable, story.

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Tony Gould, *A summer plague: polio and its survivors*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, pp. xvi, 366, illus., £19.95 (hardback 0-300-06292-3); £12.95 (paperback (1997) 0-300-07276-7).

Books on polio have proliferated in the past several years, reflecting in part a growing concern with "post-polio syndrome"—the reappearance of symptoms among people who had believed that they had conquered their polio paralysis some decades earlier. English

journalist Tony Gould's idiosyncratic history is inspired by an awareness that the history of polio did not end with the Salk and Sabin vaccines, and by the publicized activism of the disabled. In his preface, Gould acknowledges that, through writing this book, he discovered that he had both "overvalued" his own experience with polio "in the sense of regarding my experience of polio as somehow unique" and undervalued it "by not allowing that it had made any substantial difference to my way of life and thinking" (p. xvi).

A summer plague is a story full of colourful people and moments. It is a breezy, engaging social history of epidemic polio in the United States and—more briefly—in Britain. In the first two-thirds of the book Gould retells the familiar elements of polio in twentieth-century America: the 1916 epidemic, Franklin Roosevelt's experience, his role in founding the polio rehabilitation centre Warm Springs in Georgia, the controversial efforts by nurse Elizabeth Kenny to alter medical thinking about polio therapy, the March of Dimes campaigns by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, the Foundation's support of polio research, and the subsequent development and testing of the polio vaccines developed by Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin. Gould's first seven chapters, although interspersed with the recollections of polio survivors, draw heavily on (without engaging with) the work of historians Saul Benison, Allan Brandt, Hugh Gallagher, John Paul, Jane Smith, and Geoffrey Ward, among others. Because at its peak in the 1940s and 1950s polio attracted numerous science writers including Paul de Kruif, Richard Carter, Victor Cohn, and Aaron Klein, Gould has been able to use their work extensively as well. But these science writers had particular reasons for trying to define the "true story" of polio, and Gould has used them rather uncritically.

Gould's sharp eye and passion for his subject, however, allow him to raise issues historians of polio have too often neglected. He points to the racism within American polio care, and notes that Warm Springs remained a segregated facility as long as it was funded by