

urban *fin de siècle* setting. Charcot's Salpêtrière no more: offering insight into an unorthodox medical treatment in an early nineteenth-century spa town, Goldstein invites the reader into unfamiliar territory. Whether or not one fully agrees with the author's analyses, the book provides a distinctive glimpse into the life and cure of an 1820s 'hysterical' patient – a woman, in sum, resolutely modern.

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David McLean, *Surgeons of the Fleet: The Royal Navy and its Medics from Trafalgar to Jutland* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. xiv + 296, £27.50/\$55.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84885-284-6.

Taking the period between Trafalgar and the Great War as its focal point, a time when 'the navy was a sprawling institution influencing and influenced by changes at home and abroad' (p. xiii), *Surgeons of the Fleet* is David McLean's meticulously researched account of this significant era in British naval medicine. As has been established by earlier works such as John Keevil's *Medicine and the Navy: 1200–1900*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Livingstone, 1957–8) – a starting point for any exploration of the subject, as McLean acknowledges – it was disease, not combat-related injuries, that accounted for the bulk of a navy surgeon's work, both at sea and at the numerous naval hospitals that dotted the south coast and international ports. Thus, a surgeon's primary task was rarely surgery, but more usually that of preventing or controlling disease outbreaks which could seize a vessel in a matter of days; *Britannia*, stationed at Sebastopol in 1854 as part of the naval action in the Black Sea, was a particularly tragic example, with 112 men lost to cholera in the space of two weeks, including a single day when fifty men died. The harsh reality of naval life played havoc with sailors' bodies,

and the crumbs of comfort that could be provided by drink and sex meant that alcoholism and venereal disease ran rampant throughout the lower ranks of the Navy.

Yet McLean also peels away some of the more familiar stories of life at sea to draw out an illuminating picture of the bureaucratic nightmare involved in organising the medical care of the Navy. Naval surgeons lived in the shadow of the unknown; hospitals could be virtually empty at times of peace but an outbreak of war meant that an institution could abruptly find itself filled to the rafters. The fluctuating patient numbers were troublesome; hospitals attempting to negotiate an increased budget or an extra surgeon were less likely to have success if the number of patients was low, and matters were not helped by the scarcity of available doctors. In stark contrast to the oversubscribed army medical service, the inferior rank of medical men within the Navy, combined with the poor pay and unappealing lifestyle, meant that recruitment was frequently difficult. This would prove to be a constant source of irritation to the Admiralty, who reluctantly resorted to recruiting young and inexperienced student dressers to fill vacancies during both the Crimean and Great War. Those who did apply were often deemed to be poor quality candidates, the Director-General of the medical division, Sir James Porter, waspishly contending in 1890 that they were the 'waifs and strays' (p. 227).

McLean, however, argues that the labelling of naval medicine as an inferior cousin to both its army and civilian counterparts was somewhat unfair. The appointment of medical commissioner William Burnett in 1822 had been a major turning point. A kindly man, despite the constant strain under which he worked, Burnett spent thirty-three years acting as the go-between for the Admiralty and the hundreds of navy surgeons that he represented, negotiating stores, pay rises and new hospitals. Burnett oversaw significant improvements in the medical service, from promoting the value of rigorous record keeping in his staff, to

encouraging a sturdy research tradition, imploring naval surgeons to pursue scientific interests whenever they had a chance.

Improvements in nursing and hospital facilities mirrored advancements in civilian medicine during the latter part of the century, and successful attempts in reducing (although not eradicating) the drunkenness problem meant that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, naval medicine was no longer the grim business it had once been, even though its reputation continued to lag behind.

Surgeons of the Fleet both confirms stereotypes and reveals new dimensions to the men who became naval surgeons and the work they undertook. That their lives were tough and their work erratic will not be surprising to readers; but by drawing out the context they were operating in, economically and professionally, McLean breathes new life into an area of medical history which has long been associated with macho and triumphant histories of old. Written to appeal beyond an academic audience, it is a clear and accessible read – although there is a tendency throughout for the reader to be rather bombarded with names, dates and statistics. Additionally, given McLean's assertion that 'naval surgeons were certainly required to be ingenious' (p. 46), the interplay between innovation in military and civilian medical cultures might have been more closely interrogated, particularly the impact of the former upon the latter. However, any unanswered questions are not necessarily flaws in McLean's work, instead they are an invitation for other medical historians to embark on their own journeys into this still relatively unexplored, but intriguing historical field.

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Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,

2010), pp. xiii + 273, £27.95/\$39.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-520-25768-9.

Historiographically speaking, the study of freak shows morphs from that of monsters (teratology) to the identity politics of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and disability of the late twentieth century. The trope – with freaks as 'key to the production of the categories of "the self" and "the other"' (p. 17) – is by now fairly worn, but Nadja Durbach makes a good show of it in five engaging and illustrated chapters focused on, in turn, 'the Elephant Man', 'the Double-Bodied Hindoo Boy', 'the Hairy Belle', the would-be 'primitive' Aztecs and 'Earthmen', and finally, 'Cannibal King' (for the further locating of the freak show within the larger history of Victorian and Edwardian entertainment and commercialised leisure, as well as British labour, social and economic history). Durbach has nothing to say on the etymology of 'freaks', but she makes it clear how in nineteenth-century British culture they became a potent source for the making up and corseting of what it was to be 'human' – be it in terms of body shape and size, colour, sexuality, and distinctiveness from those further down the chain of animal forms. Hence, freaks also served powerfully for the emerging-as-dominant evolutionary discourses of the second half of the century – of humans, races, and civilisations. Middle-class scrapbooks were lovingly filled with their photographs, suggesting how the nomativities were recreated and consolidated in domestic settings.

Durbach suggests that the images sold something else as well: the very idea of images as a means of mass communication. As intriguing is the material she provides on the culture of the freak show itself – its rise and decline, and the various fates and fortunes of the impresarios and 'freaks' alike: for example, if, like me, you uncritically consumed Frederick Treves' famous essay on the Elephant Man – and had it compounded, oddly enough, in David Lynch's film version – Durbach's first chapter will lift the scales from