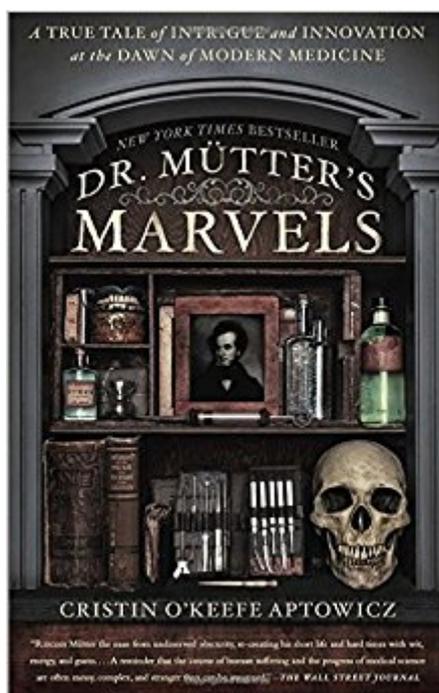


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# Dr. Mutter's Marvels: A True Tale Of Intrigue And Innovation At The Dawn Of Modern Medicine



## Synopsis

A mesmerizing biography of the brilliant and eccentric medical innovator who revolutionized American surgery and founded the country's most famous museum of medical oddities. Imagine undergoing an operation without anesthesia, performed by a surgeon who refuses to sterilize his tools or even wash his hands. This was the world of medicine when Thomas Dent Mütter began his trailblazing career as a plastic surgeon in Philadelphia during the mid-nineteenth century. Although he died at just forty-eight, Mütter was an audacious medical innovator who pioneered the use of ether as anesthesia, the sterilization of surgical tools, and a compassion-based vision for helping the severely deformed, which clashed spectacularly with the sentiments of his time. Brilliant, outspoken, and brazenly handsome, Mütter was flamboyant in every aspect of his life. He wore pink silk suits to perform surgery, added an umlaut to his last name just because he could, and amassed an immense collection of medical oddities that would later form the basis of Philadelphia's renowned Mütter Museum. Award-winning writer Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz vividly chronicles how Mütter's efforts helped establish Philadelphia as a global mecca for medical innovation despite intense resistance from his numerous rivals. (Foremost among them: Charles D. Meigs, an influential obstetrician who loathed Mütter's overly modern medical opinions.) In the narrative spirit of *The Devil in the White City*, Dr. Mütter's *Marvels* interweaves an eye-opening portrait of nineteenth-century medicine with the riveting biography of a man once described as the "[P. T.] Barnum of the surgery room."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you have ever been to the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, which houses one of the largest collections of medical oddities in America, it is more likely you will walk out of the museum with your head full of questions such as "Why did that woman turn into soap?" and "How did that guy walk around with a 300 pound colon?" However, you might not ask yourself, "Who collected all of this weird, freaky stuff and why?" and that's what Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz's new book seeks to answer. Who was Thomas Dent Mutter? Turns out he was one of the most innovative characters in early medical history who revolutionized the practice of plastic surgery, the use of ether and clean instruments during surgery and pretty much the concept of outpatient care! The author does a great job taking us back to the pre-Civil War era of medicine in Philadelphia and to the founding of the Jefferson Medical College where Mutter lectured and performed his surgeries. It's amazing how crude and primitive seems compared to the state of the medical advances we have today. I don't want to spoil too much of the book here, but I found it to be a very engaging read. If you like David McCullough or Erik Larson's books, you are going to enjoy the fascinating story of Mutter! Also, there are lots of pictures scattered throughout the book and most chapters start with words of wisdom from Mutter himself! A very well-designed book!

This book is phenomenal -- a non-fiction book that reads like a page-turner of a novel. (Think *Devil in a White City* or *Into Thin Air*). Dr. Mutter's *Marvels* traces tells the story of the life of Thomas Dent Mutter, but it is also an incredibly fascinating account of the birth of modern medicine. This is not a subject that is ordinarily at the top of my "to read" list, but Aptowicz has crafted it into a deeply compelling story -- I found myself wanting to get to bed early each night so that I could read more! The book is also extensively researched and sourced. Highly recommended!

This is, hands-down, the best biography I've ever read. It's an intimate glance into history, medicine, change, and compassion. It's the finely crafted life story of a man that we should know, but sadly, many of us don't. But that's about to change, thanks to the hard work of writer, researcher, and poet Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz in her new book, *Dr. Mutter's Marvels*. *Dr. Mutter's Marvels* is the story of Dr. Mutter, of course, but is also the history of a nation, a medical field, of everyday people that lived because of him. No dry tale, never fear - Aptowicz is a storyteller par excellence. She brings readers into history as fully as if we were there alongside Dr. Mutter, treating patients, teaching, full of curiosity, and always, always learning. In the 1800s, Philadelphia was the center of medical learning in the US, but was also rife with competing theories about medicine, germs, treatment protocol, and even rival medical schools. She

makes Philadelphia in the 1800s come alive. The wealth of rich details and characters (and disagreements) populating the story make this book an extraordinary read.

When I was a child, I was always the first to reserve our library's yearly edition of the Guinness Book of World Records to see the range and depth of human extremes. I loved everything Ripley's Believe it or Not, and any book I could find that examined what we now call "medical mysteries." Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz has written a book that the adult me now absolutely savors. As one who appreciates the Mutter Museum, this book gives readers much more than a singular biography of Mutter. It examines the history of modern medicine and surgery from its gruesome beginnings in a pre-germ-theory and pre-anesthesia world. Aptowicz's vibrant, snappy chapters leave readers hanging on the edges of their seats as she moves between episodes in Mutter's life and the growth of Philadelphia's Jefferson Medical College. In doing so, Mutter and the American medical establishment emerge as legitimate and respectable forces of medical innovation and knowledge from the 1840s onward. Some may critique the creative license taken in portraying Mutter, but I would argue that such liberties are necessary in engaging readers with the fully-developed character that emerged after years of extensive research. To see episodes of surgery "through" his eyes, to imagine his thoughts of compassion, and to revisit his reactions at anesthesia's first successes--these are what make this book an historical page-turner. The book is plenty packed with facts, figures, oddities, trivia, and photos to keep the purists happy. I happily keep this book next to other medical history favorites, such as *The Great Influenza* and *The Ghost Map*. Highly recommend to the spirited reader of history.

this book is everything i want out of reading - intelligence, levity, perspective, stakes, and a wall full of eye diseases. it's the best thing i've read in at least a decade.

Focussing on the professional life of Dr. Thomas D. Mutter, a gifted surgeon and professor of surgery, the author discusses the teaching and evolution of medicine with a particular emphasis on surgery, mostly in mid-nineteenth century Philadelphia. Included are reports of rivalry and in-fighting among the physicians vying for higher prestige and more exalted reputations. I thoroughly enjoyed this fascinating book. The author's prose is at once friendly, lively, warm, accessible and quite engaging. The author's accounts of surgery performed on patients without any anesthetic -- "yes, with the patient wide awake" - are particularly gripping. In particular, the description of Dr. Mutter's reconstructive plastic surgery on a burn victim is absolutely spellbinding. As for the

book's title, it refers to a vast collection of medical artifacts, both tools and biological/anatomical samples, amassed by Dr. Mutter during his career. However, this collection and its destiny are only mentioned relatively briefly near the end of the book. Consequently, the choice of the book's title is a bit of a mystery to me; but the sub-title is quite appropriate. Although anyone can enjoy this captivating book, I believe that it would be of particular interest to those with a penchant for medical history.

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