

mite-free environments. Later, the mass medical quest began for the psychic and psychosomatic roots of an ever-expanding range of allergies. In time, the media pounced on individuals presented as being bronchially incapacitated by every aspect of advanced capitalist civilization—freezers, detergents, canned food and artificial light.

Any or all of these might bring on welts and rashes, destroy breathing patterns, limit movement and terminate a working-life. African-Americans, and ever larger numbers of Hispanics, continued to live cheek-by-jowl with cockroaches and experienced the kinds of slum-generated breathing disabilities that had nearly killed Flavio da Silva. Mitman speaks of “choking cities” and here his work complements Andrew Hurley’s classic study of Gary, Indiana, and other recent work on environmental injustice. His readings of urban, rural and national asthma and allergy maps and charts bear testimony to innumerable disabled lives.

Mitman reconstructs the little-known “war against rag-weed”. He reproduces a chilling photograph of a vacant slum lot in Chicago’s nineteenth ward in 1908. The image was captured by a periodical that called itself *Charities and Commons*. The subtext is clear. Here, mingled promiscuously together, languished the blighted of the city and their disease-bearing waste and vegetation: each epitomized the other. The war against ragweed culminated in an onslaught in New York City in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1942 *Life* carried an image of mechanized harvesting and destruction by (facially, orally and nasally unprotected) members of the sanitary department. Officially condemned tenements long out-lived the indigenous weed of the back-alley.

In the early chapters of this exemplary monograph, which will become a classic, Mitman describes the era in which the fashionable elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were assumed to be exclusive sufferers from catarrh and asthma. When the pollen season announced itself, they retreated by the score to the White Mountains

of New Hampshire and socialized with their peers in hotels that bore an uncanny resemblance to the hushed retreats of monarchs and aristocrats in Bournemouth and the Riviera during the European late Victorian and Edwardian epoch. Later, what Mitman calls the “last resorts” of Denver and Tucson desperately attempted, long after their famed atmospheric purity had been destroyed, to market themselves as less unreasonably priced sanctuaries for the asthmatically impaired. This is a superb and passionate book. It should be read by all environmental and medical historians.

**Bill Luckin,**  
University of Bolton

**David Gentilcore,** *Medical charlatanism in early modern Italy*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. xv, 426, illus., £65.00 (hardback 978-0-19-924535-2).

Despite its reluctance to draw strong conclusions and highlight the theoretical implications of its important findings, this is a work of fine scholarship that offers a wide-ranging and highly innovative depiction of the medical charlatan from his appearance in the late fifteenth century to his decline in the eighteenth century. It will be essential reading both for medical historians and those working on the social and cultural history of early modern Italy. Gentilcore adopts an analytical perspective which contrasts visual, literary and medical representations of charlatanism with the rich evidence offered by over a thousand licences issued by the medical boards of nearly a dozen Italian cities. This enables him to question a number of assumptions still common in standard accounts of medical history: first of all, the marginal position allegedly occupied by charlatans in the medical marketplace and, more generally, in the professional structure of Italian society. Far from being consistently regarded as swindlers and impostors, charlatans were seen as practising a respectable occupation and one

to be proud of. They were not simply tolerated by the authorities but seen as a particular type of remedy-vendor, selling their wares in public spaces and using stage performance and entertainment to attract buyers. Hence they were licensed as a matter of routine, some held office in the state health boards and two were even raised to the rank of Protophysician. This may appear surprising, but is less so if we consider the specific social function filled by charlatans in the medical marketplace.

Although the evidence is elusive on this point, it is likely that the charlatans' clients were those middling ranks who could neither afford to buy their medicines from apothecaries (whose prices were fixed) nor pay for the preliminary prescription of physicians. With the blessing of the authorities, and within the paternalistic framework of a moral medical economy, charlatans supplied these groups with remedies which were remarkably similar to those on sale in apothecaries' shops while being much cheaper, or else with cheaper imitations of the official remedy. In their petitions, charlatans were in fact careful to emphasize the adherence of their ingredients to the traditional pharmacopoeia (whether these were not subsequently altered remains an open question) and the authorities could not prohibit the sale of officially approved remedies. This, together with the fact that licenses represented a handsome revenue for the Protomedicato, explain the generous licensing policy adopted in Italian states, one that made their system of medical licensing "inclusive rather than exclusive".

Why was the competition of charlatans not resented and opposed more forcefully by the official branches of the medical profession? Gentilcore underlines the ties of interdependence between charlatans and apothecaries, presenting these categories as part of the same world: charlatans bought their ingredients from apothecaries and the latter often became the agents of the most successful charlatans, marketing their remedies in their shops. Only in the late eighteenth century did the medical authorities adopt a more protectionist attitude, restricting charlatans to

selling only what was not already available in apothecary shops; by now, taking advantage of the loosening of corporative restrictions, apothecaries were creating their own "new" remedies. Nor was the charlatan entirely alien to the physician's world: he spoke the same Galenic language, his remedies were said to work according to humoral principles, he saw himself as part of orthodox medicine, kept away from chemical medicines and impressed the audience with his knowledge of anatomy and the causes of disease. Charlatans encroached only marginally on the physician's territory (one is surprised to hear that only a quarter of their licensed remedies were oral) and, in spite of the iconographic evidence, rarely involved themselves in the surgeon's specialities (tooth-drawing and venereal treatment). Gentilcore's depiction of the relationship between charlatans and the official branches of the healing arts thus stresses integration, complementarity and collusion rather than separateness, otherness and open competition.

The book also emphasizes the important cultural and professional links with a range of non-medical occupations: the itinerant world of peddlers, street-sellers and beggars (another licensed activity) and of street performers (jesters, story-tellers, ballad-singers). The boundary between charlatanism and street theatre appears particularly fluid: like actors, charlatans adopt stage names, theatrical garments and the masks of the *commedia dell'arte*; in their performances they use magic tricks, acrobatics, music and songs; they even hire actors or form mixed companies with them. But the study of their communication strategies also highlights the influence of the rhetorical devices common to another form of stage performance: baroque religious preaching.

Despite the strong links with other peripatetic occupations we should not assume that charlatans were constantly on the road. The book emphasizes that many were only itinerant for part of the year or in certain phases of their lives; most had a base, a home town where they ran a shop and were

respected, sometimes prominent, members of the community. Moreover, this was not aimless wandering: Gentilcore reconstructs the routes and seasonality of charlatans' travel and the logic behind them. Whether rare or frequent, real or imagined, travel was, however, a cornerstone of the charlatan's identity: exoticism was a key selling point and his references to past travels supported claims to a knowledge and experience far broader than what could be acquired in just one place. Hence, with the decline of this fascination with distant worlds, the itinerant and open air character of medical charlatanism also ceased to appeal, instead becoming a mark of vulgarity, increasingly associated with a plebeian and rural clientele while those at the high end of the occupation turned into sedentary shopkeepers.

**Sandra Cavallo,**

Royal Holloway, University of London

**Thomas Hofmeier,** *Michael Maiers Chymisches Cabinet. Atalanta fugiens deutsch nach der Ausgabe von 1708*, Berlin and Basel, Thurneysser, 2007, pp. 389, €29.00, SFr 45.00 (paperback 978-3-939176-46-6).

This edition of the 1708 German translation of Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* offers the opportunity to look once more at Maier's most beautiful book on alchemy (first published in Latin in 1617), and to linger over the extraordinary plates by Matthäus Merian the Elder. It also allows us an overview of Maier's career as scholar and erstwhile seeker of princely patronage. In his search for patrons, Maier was both spectacularly good at obtaining honorary titles (some of which he bestowed on himself), such as being named Leibartz and Pfalzgraf to Emperor Rudolf II, but not so good at being paid for his services, despite the fulsome letters of dedication included in his numerous alchemical works. Neither of his positions at the Imperial court involved a salary. Indeed his life seems to have been so occupied with writing and

attempts to get paid that there was not a moment left for the actual practice of alchemy. And this, indeed, is the overweening effect of *Atalanta fugiens*: beautiful images, elegant emblems and explanations, even harmonious fugues (the music was not reprinted in the 1708 edition, and the words but not the notes are provided in this volume), but there is little sign of the laboratory or workshop. The stuff of this book is texts, beautifully combined and synthesized to create emblems bursting with a variety of meanings—moral, spiritual, cosmic, material—the more polysemous, the better.

Michael Maier (1568/9–1622) was born in Kiel, studied in Rostock, Basel, Padua, and Bologna, and began alchemical studies in 1604. He travelled as far south as Rome, east through the Baltic, north to England, and became a Doctor of Medicine in Basel, but most of his life was spent between the Rhine, Oder and Danube in the heartland of alchemical patronage and publishing. He spent time at the courts of Emperor Rudolf II, Landgraf Moritz of Hessen-Kassel, and King James I, attempted to gain positions at several northern German courts, and considered settling in Frankfurt am Main. When he attempted to do so in Strasbourg, the city denied his bid for citizenship, because they believed “he must be a most unusual man”. He began publishing a flood of mostly alchemical works in 1614 and put out more than two a year until his death in 1622.

*Atalanta fugiens* remains a kind of prototypical work of alchemy, no doubt mainly because of its plates. One wants to know more—if such can be known—about the collaboration between Maier and the engraver Matthäus Merian. Was it the printer, Johann Theodor de Bry, who brought the two men together or did they come to him? How much did the book sell for at the Frankfurt fair? In short, how did Maier, Merian, and de Bry conceive of this work—primarily as a work of alchemy, as an emblem-book, or as a picture book? No doubt any of the three would have made it a good investment for de Bry, but the combination of all of them would seem irresistible.