

M. A. Katritzky. *Healing, Performance and Ceremony in the Writings of Three Early Modern Physicians: Hippolytus Guarinonius and the Brothers Felix and Thomas Platter.*

The History of Medicine in Context. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xiv + 452 pp. \$134.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6707-0.

Much recent scholarship has explored the way in which early modern dramatists adapted medical discourse into theatrical display. M. A. Katritzky's new study of the writings of three sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physicians takes up the same terms, but reverses them: how did the world of early modern theatrical performance make its way into the writings of medical practitioners?

The first section provides a biographical essay for each of her subjects: Felix Platter, his brother Thomas Platter, and Hippolytus Guarinonius. The middle section of the book discusses various types of performances these men witnessed and recorded. The final section provides translations of selected passages from these men's writings. Also included are various relevant diagrams and illustrations.

The heart of this study consists of the chapters that carefully catalogue a wide range of spectacles, festivals, shows, and other social events through the eyes of the book's subjects. The attention to detail throughout is admirable, and the sensible organization of so much detail is the book's greatest strength. So varied were the interests of the Platters and Guarinonius, that there seems scarcely to be any aspect of early modern life on which they do not shine a light. The various observations highlighted in these chapters do not always point to things of which a scholar of the period would be entirely unaware, but they frequently provide documented exempla that bring into immediate focus matters that might otherwise be conceived of as bloodless social phenomena. The strategy by which the young Guarinonius

contrives to spit upon Jewish boys without being punished by his tutor — to take just one example — better demonstrates the quotidian ugliness of early modern anti-Semitism better than any secondary analysis could (93–94).

The vast range of material treated here does not come without a cost. So capacious is this volume in information that one quickly realizes it would be foolish to expect a wholly unifying thesis. Nevertheless, an opportunity may have been missed here for a more thorough discussion of what precisely should be meant by *theatrical* when it comes to this kind of historical and cultural research. Katritzky notes, for instance, that religious processions had “an obvious theatrical dimension” because of their “costumes, ceremony and spectators” (59), but while such things certainly make those processions spectacular, it’s less obvious that they are theatrical in a meaningful sense. In other words, while various social activities naturally have elements in common with theater, it does not necessarily follow that they share the essence of theater. Put still another way, if anything involving some people seeing others doing things, nearly any social behavior could be called theatrical. In fact, for many of the topics treated here, the “theatricality” is taken for granted — hangings in effigy (76) and occult deceptions (161), for instance, are both described with this term — when the question of what makes such things theatrical, it seems to the present reviewer, is, at the very least, worth discussion.

The analytical promises of the book’s introduction are best met in the later chapters, including, for example, the interesting account of troupes of *commedia dell’arte* performers who used their outdoor shows to sell various medicines (chapters 12 and 13). In the middle chapters, though, Katritzky deals with cases of what the author calls the “intersections” of medicine and theatricality, which is to say that her physicians relate their experiences of a range of observed displays. Such material provides much in the way of scholarly resource, but less in the way of scholarly delight.

In any case, Katritzky’s great care in curating this wealth of material make this book a well-organized trove of useful data for any scholar of early modern history and culture.

TODD H. J. PETTIGREW
Cape Breton University