

tuberculosis for the country's military forces during the First World War prompted energetic institution building and the first state-wide legislation regarding the care of tubercular patients. After 1918 this activism continued especially in socialist-run Vienna, which undertook a massive programme of public housing and built up a network of professionally staffed welfare centres that both cared for the tubercular and undertook to educate the public about the disease and its avoidance. After 1945 the story becomes very familiar indeed: mass prophylactic campaigns involving BCG vaccinations, tuberculin testing, and chest x-rays combined with antibiotic chemotherapy practically eliminated tuberculosis in Austria by the mid-1970s.

Between 1874 and 1974 tuberculosis mortality in Austria declined from 35.8 deaths per 10,000 to 0.8 deaths per 10,000; its proportion of total mortality fell from 11.2 per cent in 1874 to 7.8 per cent in 1936, and amounted to less than one per cent in 1974. As elsewhere in Europe the bulk of this epochal transformation occurred in Austria largely without therapeutic intervention. Dietrich-Daum reviews diligently the catalogue of plausible causes of the disease's decline, and concedes that it can not be explained with complete satisfaction. Rather than continuing to search for definitive causes, perhaps the historian of tuberculosis should concentrate on society's experience of and response to the disease. This well-informed and wide-ranging account establishes a solid foundation for such research in Austria, and makes a little-known part of Europe more accessible to the comparative historian of public health.

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Gregg Mitman, *Breathing space: how allergies shape our lives and landscapes*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, pp. xv, 312, £20.00, \$30.00 (hardback 978-0-300-11035-7).

Every good picture tells a story, and there are a plethora of good pictures, maps and cartoons in Gregg Mitman's definitive history of allergy and asthma in the United States between the mid-nineteenth century and the near-present. In the early 1960s, Gordon Parks, the great news photographer and exponent of photo-montage, travelled to Latin America to portray the depths of social and economic injustice which scarred a continent believed by John F Kennedy and his advisors to be ripe for Communist subversion. An enthralled American public devoured Parks's narrative of the young Flavio da Silva in *Life* magazine.

Slum squatter conditions and foul air had reduced the boy from Rio to a state of malnourished bronchial immobility. Physicians and researchers in Denver recognized his condition, treated him for free and restored him to health. Contrasting photographs—Flavio with a grossly distended chest, dilated eyes and matchstick arms, and Flavio in a clean and cosy hospital bed, returning to health—hammered home a powerful political point. The story reinforced a narrative that validated Kennedy's massive aid programme to America's deprived southerly neighbours. "Flavio's Rescue", the *Life* caption read, "Americans bring him home from Rio slum to be cured". Meanwhile, in Harlem cockroaches and allergy thrived as never before. New Orleans was stricken by a horrendous asthma epidemic in 1961. Anti-histamines flooded the market and were dangerously over-prescribed. Drug companies circulated pharmacists with tear-out-and-keep indicators that identified selling seasons for every part of the country and triggered a massive back-lash in terms of near-deadly and counter-productive side-effects.

At the same time, the USA was witnessing the first full flowering of the super-hygienic middle-class suburban home, classically documented by Ruth Schwarz Cowan, and characterized by the designation of middle-class wives and mothers as guardians of sheets and curtains, air-conditioning systems, and dust-, bug- and (so it was vainly hoped)

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.

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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