Healing, performance and ceremony in the writings of three early modern physicians: Hippolytus Guarinonius and the brothers Felix and Thomas Platter

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During his student years and brilliant career as early modern Basel’s most distinguished municipal, court and academic physician, Felix Platter built up a wide network of private, religious and aristocratic patients. His published medical treatises and private journal record his professional encounters with them as a healer. They also offer numerous vivid accounts of theatrical events experienced by Platter as a scholar, student and gifted semi-professional musician, and during his Grand Tour and long medical career. Here Felix Platter’s accounts, many unavailable in translation, are examined together with relevant extracts from the journals of his younger brother Thomas Platter, and Guarinonius’s medical and religious treatises. Thomas Platter is known to Shakespeare scholars as the Swiss Grand Tourist who recorded a 1599 London performance of Julius Caesar, and Guarinonius’s descriptions of quack performances represent the earliest substantial written record of commedia dell’arte lazzi, or comic stage business.

These three physicians’ records of ceremony, festival, theatre and marketplace diversions are examined in detail, with particular emphasis on the reactions of ‘respectable’ medical practitioners to healing performance and the performance of healing. Taken as a whole, their writings contribute to our understanding of many aspects of European theatrical culture and its complex interfaces with early modern healthcare: in carnival and other routine manifestations of the Christian festive year, in the extraordinary performance and ceremony of court festivals, and above all in the rarely welcomed intrusion of quacks and other itinerant performers.


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M.A. Katritzky

T I T L E S I N T H E S E R I E S I N C L U D E


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The History of Medicine in Context

Series Editors: Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell
Department of History and Philosophy of Science
University of Cambridge

Department of History
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