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reproduced, Columbus's first sighting of America is a billboard boosting Ayar's Sarsaparilla. Certainly, quacks have always proved adroit at exploiting American sensibilities (angelic infants loom large) and pandering to particularly New World fears, not least that of growing old. Early this century, Duffy's Pure Malt Therapeutic Whiskey widely featured the 106-year-old Mrs Nancy Tighe of Lafayette, Indiana, pictured in the bloom of health, declaring, "I really don't feel like I'm a day over 60. Thanks to Duffy's Pure Malt Whiskey". (But if fears remain the same, certain attitudes change: imagine anyone confessing in an ad these days to feeling sixty!)

Much analysis is decanted into Young's delightfully told stories of Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, Dalley's Magical Pain Extractor, Germ-a-way, Grove's Tasteless [sic] Chill Tonic ("Makes Children and Adults as Fat as Pigs"), and many other preposterous products including Dr Porter's Healing Oil. And amusement at their hyperbole sugars a more serious purpose, for Young is no less anxious to expose contemporary frauds (laetrile and so forth), including the opportunists cashing in on today's AIDS crisis.

What remains tantalizing, here as in all of Young's writings, is his historical perspective on the regulars. In his writings they commonly assume a certain sanctified air by virtue of the verbal lashings Young administers to their foes, the mountebanks, food adulterators and ignoramuses. Were he to train his probing mind and ironic disposition onto the deans of the profession, would they escape whipping?

Be that as it may, the bubbling delight of Young's essays derives from the veneer of seriousness with which he treats topics that would be farcical, had they not jeopardized the health and lives of millions and involved some of the longest-running and most money-spinning con-tricks in history. The fact that Young does not even need to explore the grey area where medical folklore overlaps with medical fakery, but is able to target his attention upon such a vast number of fringe and freaky health fads that were arrant and shameless frauds, itself affords a fascinating commentary upon the particularly American circus of the sick trade.

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TERENCE RANGER and PAUL SLACK (eds), *Epidemics and ideas: essays on the historical perception of pestilence*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. ix, 346, £35, \$49.95 (0-521-40276-X).

This volume contains twelve chapters, eleven of which represent revisions of papers presented at the Past and Present Conference on 'Epidemics and Ideas' in September of 1989 at Exeter College, Oxford. Chronologically they span human history from the great plague of Athens of 430 BC (treated by James Longrigg) to Virginia Berridge's essay on the AIDS epidemic in the United Kingdom of the 1980s. Geographically they are centred in Europe, but range from India and the African continent on one side of the world to Hawaii on the other.

All of the chapters focus on epidemic disease and the reactions they elicited—reactions which some may find startlingly similar over the course of the 2,400 or so years, and across the various cultures and societies under scrutiny. Filthy conditions were usually viewed as spawning an epidemic, although (and not necessarily a contradiction) the supernatural was frequently suspected of visiting punishment on erring humankind. It was generally understood that the pestilence spread from person to person, yet notions of contagion continued to be fuzzy in the public mind right up to the present AIDS epidemic. Flight was a widespread response, as was identifying and blaming disease carriers, with foreigners and the poor the usual targets (although, as Lawrence Conrad makes clear, Islamic societies that tended to view epidemics fatalistically constituted a major exception to both flight and scapegoating). Understandably the scapegoats in turn tended to view epidemics as the outcome of plots by the establishment to thin their numbers. In the midst of widespread morbidity and mortality some turned away from their religions; others embraced them more firmly than ever, while still others headed in new directions, as editor Terence Ranger demonstrates in his discussion of prophetic responses to epidemic disease in eastern and southern Africa.

The chapters, then, are intended as "case studies" of the ways in which peoples, during various times and in various cultures, interpreted their plagues, or "constructed" them. In his introductory

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essay, editor Paul Slack masterfully draws parallels between and points out differences in these constructions. Among the variables that determined them are the degree to which the disease was perceived as a new disease or a familiar one; the violence of the disease; the extent to which it confined its ravages to the powerless (Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, for example, points out that the authorities' interest in the plague in India at the beginning of this century waned as it became clear the poor were its chief victims); and the presence of other, intercurrent diseases or social disturbances.

In case of the native Hawaiians—the focus of Alfred Crosby's contribution—new and extraordinary pestilence such as the epidemic waves that rolled over them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seem to have also produced a “cultural shock”. The shock took the form of an anomie that could both produce and combine with alcoholism, infanticide, and venereal disease to prevent populations from rebounding. By contrast, however, Megan Vaughan's chapter on epidemic syphilis in East and Central Africa shows a reaction at the other end of the spectrum. In the face of this, not immediately life-threatening, disease, it became, early in this century, a prestigious ailment to acquire. European physicians provided their “construction” of the epidemic and strove mightily to alter African sexual behaviour with the result that at least one of these doctors expressed relief that “at length an awakening of a sense of shame has begun to appear [with the contraction of the illness]” (p. 276).

Essays by Brian Pullan (on plague in early modern Italy), John Pickstone (on Great Britain from 1780–1850), and Richard Evans (on cholera in nineteenth-century Europe) all focus to some extent on public health and, thus, on the development of the idea (a monumental gift of Europe to the rest of the world) of governmental campaigns to eradicate epidemic disease. Yet, as Evans shows, this idea, although born in the Italian city states of the fourteenth century, wavered under cholera's onslaught during the nineteenth century.

The chapters, then, manage a rather nice “fit”, save perhaps for Peregrine Horden's charming, but a bit esoteric, excursion into the world of ‘Disease, dragons and saints in the Dark Ages’ in search of disease symbolism, with dragons the embodiment of disease (p. 71). The work is well indexed, and represents both a fine introduction to, and documentation of the history of *Epidemics and ideas*.

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EKKEHARD HLAWITSCHKA, *“wazzer der tugent, trank der jugent”*. *Text- und Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Salbeitraktat*, Würzburger medizinhistorische Forschungen, 49, Pattensen, Hanover, Horst Wellm Verlag, 1990, pp. ix, 425, illus., DM 75.00 (3–921456–89–4).

JÜRGEN MARTIN, *Die ‘Ulmer Wundarzney’*. *Einleitung, Text, Glossar zu einem Denkmal deutscher Fachprosa des 15. Jahrhunderts*, Würzburger medizinhistorische Forschungen, 52, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1991, pp. 273, illus., DM 65.00 (3–88479–800–6).

R. VOLLMUTH, *Die sanitätsdienstliche Versorgung in den Landsknechtsheeren des ausgehenden Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit. Probleme und Lösungsansätze*, Würzburger medizinhistorische Forschungen, 51, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1991, pp. 313, illus., DM 65.00 (3–88479–800–6).

These three dissertations show the strengths and weaknesses of the approach of the Würzburg school. Hlawitschka traces a short piece on a distillation of salvia through a variety of manuscripts and printed books. He identifies three main groups, as well as several versions that cannot be easily linked to any of these. There is a lavish appendix of texts, including some related distillation recipes. His introduction discusses the language of these groups, and the potential value of such short texts for the understanding of medieval medicine. Such short tracts, once in a relatively fixed written form, circulated, particularly in south Germany, as part of the standard learning of healers of all types.

By contrast Martin provides simply an edition, with a very full glossary, of a surgery that can on internal evidence be associated with the south German city of Ulm around 1480. There is a brief introduction, relating it to similar practical manuals in the vernacular, notably the ‘Passau surgery’