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Savonarola, Michele.

A Mother's Manual for the Women of Ferrara: A Fifteenth-Century Guide to Pregnancy and Pediatrics. Ed. Gabriella Zuccolin. Trans. Martin Marafioti.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 89. Toronto: Iter Press, 2022. Pp. 254. ISBN 978-1-64959-030-5 (paperback) US\$54.95.

This edition offers the first English translation of Michele Savonarola's fascinating Latin-titled vernacular treatise *De regimine praegnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium* (Regimen for pregnant women and newborns up to the seventh year). Martin Marafioti based his translation on Luigi Belloni's 1952 Italian critical edition, while making careful comparison of Belloni's edition with the text's original printing (after 1460) and the relevant manuscript tradition. Gabriella Zuccolin's extensive and detailed introduction also sets the whole of this material in illuminating conversation with other texts in Savonarola's extensive oeuvre, as well as other contemporary manuals treating gynecology, midwifery, obstetrics, and childcare. Other paratextual assets include a lucid index and footnotes that furnish the original Latin quotes with which Savonarola peppered his otherwise vernacular treatise. In addition, the bibliography helpfully separates out Savonarola's works, arranging them according to relevant categories, from Latin medical writings from his early career days in Padua to vernacular medical texts composed from his years living in Ferrara, literary works written from the perspective of a *cortegiano* at the d'Este court, and his religious works. Both meticulous in its scholarly rigour and lively in its rendering, it is small wonder that this volume won the *Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index's* "Translation of the Month" earlier this year (2023).

As to the text proper, Marafioti's translation deftly captures Savonarola's distinctive and tricky authorial voice. Savonarola toggles between erudite and chatty—and occasionally comical—registers as he courts his explicitly invoked audiences of women readers (including practicing midwives) and married men. At one moment, the physician will be showing his intellectual chops through elaborate citations of Galen or Rhazes (Abū Bakr al-Rāzī), then the next winking at the reader with a jokey aside. For instance, in an elaborate discussion of coital best practices, particularly those that might help avoid having two or more babies at once, nourishing which might overtax a woman's breasts and ruin their beauty, we find this wry remark: "As a friend used to say,

breasts are a stone on which men sharpen their blades; you know what I mean” (80).

Historians of medicine, whatever their geographical foci and even those well advanced in their careers, would do well to add this book to their collections; so, too, graduate students getting their bearings in this field would find it a boon. *A Mother's Manual* would also serve undergraduates taking advanced seminars on early modern medicine, or on women and gender. Undergraduates at large would also find pleasure and profit here, provided that the instructor had the time and space to do a good deal of preparatory framing. This edition's merit of being deeply in the textual weeds comes with the defect that the introduction and notes leave much unsaid about some larger topics and problems. Zuccolin provides readers a detailed explication of how this manual fits with others specifically of its type but engages only in a limited way with the historical setting of Renaissance Ferrara, the problem of women's social roles, or the dynamics of broader gender discourses (including *querelle des femmes*). So, too, the notes engage productively with the most relevant secondary scholarship in the history of medicine, as well as the textual traditions upon which Savonarola draws. Yet non-specialist readers would benefit from greater attention to glossing figures and terms (or at least the more obscure ones, such as “Marsilio da Santa Sofia” and “Magister Pietro da Tossignano”) and seeing more direct connections drawn between this text and scholarship that illuminates its wider contexts—for instance, Rudolph Bell's *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), which is listed in the bibliography but not engaged in a sustained way in the introduction or notes.

It bears emphasis, however, what a profitable addition this translation is to “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe.” The now over 160 volumes (and counting) of this series have tended to favour literary and philosophical works over scientific or medical ones, with some important exceptions being the volume on Justine Siegemund's *The Court Midwife* (2007); *The True Narrative* of 1587, attributed to a woman healer (2010); *Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern France* (2013); and the edition of midwife Louise Bourgeois's (or Boursier's) writings (2017). It is heartening to see more consistent focus in the past handful of years on women in the sciences: Camilla Erculani's *Letters and Orations* appeared in 2021; Marie Baudoin's *Art of Childbirth* in 2022; and now in 2023 we have *A Mother's Manual*. While the series understandably

gives pride of place to women writers, it also has traditionally embraced works by male authors who in their own ways contributed to the “other voice,” that is, Renaissance counter-discourses challenging centuries of misogyny. If Savonarola’s manual seems to present a different form of Renaissance feminism than, say, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa’s 1509 *Declamation on the Preeminence of the Female Sex*, that is not to say that Savonarola’s approach was any less historically significant. In this sense, too, *A Mother’s Manual* gives readers a great deal of salubrious food for thought.

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