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### Worth-Stylianou, Valerie, ed. and trans. *Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern France: Treatises by Caring Physicians and Surgeons (1581–1625): François Rousset, Jean Liebault, Jacques Guillemeau, Jacques Duval and Louis De Serres*

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Worth-Stylianou, Valerie, ed. and trans.

*Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern France: Treatises by Caring Physicians and Surgeons (1581–1625): François Rousset, Jean Liebault, Jacques Guillemeau, Jacques Duval and Louis De Serres.*

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 23. Toronto: Iter Inc. / Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2013. Pp. xxix, 412 + 23 ill. ISBN 978-0-7727-2138-9 (paperback) \$37.

This collection of primary sources by Valerie Worth-Stylianou (Senior Tutor, Trinity College Oxford and Professor of French, Oxford University) is a delight. Worth-Stylianou has edited and translated substantial excerpts from the works of five early modern medical men who wrote on the care of women during pregnancy and birth. It may seem surprising to include five male authors in a series on the “other voice,” more usually associated with female authors. However, as Worth-Stylianou reveals, these men’s voices are “other” in three ways: modern historians have tended to draw on midwife Louise Bourgeois’s *Observations* for our understanding of childbirth in this period; childbirth was still controlled by women, as man-midwives would not become popular for another century; and these medical men were (what Worth-Stylianou terms) “caring” (xxi).

In the introduction for each section, Worth-Stylianou carefully situates the books within their wider context. She includes short author biographies, discusses the texts’ circulation, considers textual structure, and analyzes the arguments and style of each text. Her choice of texts highlights the various contexts in which women’s reproductive health were discussed, ranging from a treatise on caesarean operations (Rousset) to one on hermaphrodites (Duval), as well as the more expected works on women’s illnesses (Liebault), childbirth (Guillemeau), and sterility (De Serres). There are a number of thoughtful inclusions throughout the book: a key subject table; maps to chart Rousset’s travels; glossaries for medical authorities, medical terms, and remedies; and indices of names and places.

The selected texts work well together. The authors were not specifically in conversation with each other—though it is clear that they were familiar with each other’s works—but instead address wider concerns, such as the debate over doing caesarean operations on living women and the concern with best birthing positions (xxv–xxvii). For each of the texts, the front matter of the book

is included, which allows for interesting juxtapositions. For example, Rousset includes a sonnet, while Liebault addresses chaste young women. All discuss management during birth, difficult or otherwise. Common topics include how women should conduct themselves during pregnancy (Liebault, Guillemeau, Duval), ensuring conception and reading its signs (Rousset, Duval, De Serres), and caesarean operations (Rousset, Liebault, Guillemeau). More specific topics include choosing a midwife (Guillemeau) and treating infertility (De Serres).

Two of the sections are particularly worth noting. Rousset's support of caesarean operations might appear to contradict Worth-Stylianou's interest in "caring" medical practitioners—certainly Guillemeau would have thought so. However, Rousset was driven by a desire to save women from the horrors of an obstructed labour or carrying around a dead fetus. He also provided methods to preserve women's sexual and reproductive health post-operation. Duval's book on hermaphrodites is most famous for its sympathetic account of hermaphrodite Marie/Marin Le Marcis, but scholars have overlooked a critical one-third of the book, which focuses on conception and childbirth. Worth-Stylianou argues that the first twenty-six chapters of the book provide an important framework for how Duval understood the Le Marcis case (235). Pregnancy and childbirth were "daily dramas" and reproduction was "a source of wonder"; it is within this context that Duval recounted the Le Marcis trial so dramatically and remained open to the possibility of genitals retracting and emerging in unexpected ways (236).

Worth-Stylianou is to be commended for emphasizing that male medical practitioners did in fact care for their female patients, which stands in marked opposition to early feminist arguments about medicalization stripping away women's agency. However, my one criticism of the book is that she over-emphasizes the "caring" nature of these male authors in comparison to later medical practitioners. For example, although she recognizes that there was a "tension between professional male pride and pity for women's physical suffering" in both earlier and later treatises on birthing, the earlier ones "more easily afforded space" to women's voices (xxi). Later *accoucheurs*, such as François Mauriceau (whom she mentions) and Pierre Dionis, not only included lengthy case histories in which the thoughts and actions of women clearly emerge, but they discussed extensively the methods of pain relief for both mother and infant. How is this any less "caring"—even if professional concerns take up more space in their texts?

This will be useful for scholars in the field who do not read French but would like a point of comparison to their own regions; even Francophone scholars, however, will find that the introductions, annotations, glossaries, and indices are helpful for navigating the texts. It can be a challenge to provide non-French reading students with primary sources, but this inexpensive collection would be a great addition to reading lists for undergraduate and graduate courses on gender, health, and the body. Worth-Stylianou's edition and translation open up a wonderful group of texts to new readers.

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