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Scottie Hale Buehler

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Baudoin, Marie.

***The Art of Childbirth: A Seventeenth-Century Midwife's Epistolary Treatise to Doctor Vallant: A Bilingual Edition.* Ed. and trans. Cathy McClive.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 98. Toronto: Iter Press, 2022. Pp. 235. ISBN 978-1-64959-078-7 (paperback) US\$54.95.

Thirty years ago, in her edited volume *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), Hilary Marland called for historical scholarship on midwives that saw them “as birth attendants, as women workers, as active members of their communities, as ‘missionary’ and political figures, and as defenders of their status and occupation against the invasions of male practice” (1). Cathy McClive answers this call. *The Art of Childbirth* tracks Marie Gosse Baudoin, a seventeenth-century French midwife, as a robust individual and active community member. Too often historians, when discussing early modern midwives, focus exclusively on their medical practice and conflicts with male practitioners. McClive, however, provides a penetrating glimpse into the world of an average-yet-extraordinary midwife in seventeenth-century Claremont-Ferrand.

The Art of Childbirth centres on an epistolary treatise on childbirth sent by Baudoin in 1671 to Noël Vallant, physician and secretary to the famous *salonnière* Madam de Sable. Baudoin trained in Paris but worked for most of her career as head midwife and, eventually, as governess of the Hôtel-Dieu in Claremont-Ferrand. McClive opens *The Art of Childbirth* with a meticulous introduction that scrutinizes the treatise and Baudoin herself from various perspectives, covering expected topics such as early modern French midwives and their training but also religious communities, credit networks, material culture, translation studies, and critical approaches to the archive. A translation and transcription of Baudoin's letter follow this kaleidoscoping introduction. Both preserve the materiality of the document and marginalia through layers of notations, font changes, and formatting. Extensive footnotes provide further context.

Many aspects of Baudoin's life are congruent with what we know about seventeenth-century elite midwives. She began life in the artisanal class and possessed some education. She trained in midwifery at the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, as many before her had. She was a well-respected member of her community who engaged in conflicts and collaborations with medical men. But Baudoin

was also extraordinary in a few ways. She wrote a medical treatise and, possibly even more astonishing, it survived the vicissitudes of time. In comparison to their Anglo colleagues, French midwives left behind few written sources, a dearth further exasperated for the seventeenth century. Defying traditional roles for lay women, Baudoin took up the administration of the Hôtel-Dieu sometime in the mid-1660s. The achievement of this prestigious position fulfilled her Jansenist obligations to tend to the poor, but it also likely arose due to her connections to Jansenist networks. Baudoin, moreover, lived three decades as a financially independent woman. She separated from her husband and deployed her significant financial acumen to amass wealth through credit networks. Her moneylending further strengthened her position within religious and medical networks.

The meaningful scholarly contributions of this microhistory, however, extend beyond bringing to light a rare instance of writing from a seventeenth-century midwife and unearthing Jansenist social networks. These are both worthy endeavours, but McClive skillfully mobilizes Baudoin's treatise to equally advance scholarship on early modern knowledge-making and archive studies. She presents an account of knowledge-making as fundamentally social, a "shared process and the result of her medical network" (100). While this point is not new for historians of science, rarely is it so thoroughly proven. Convincingly, McClive establishes a corridor of knowledge exchange from Claremont-Ferrand to Paris, counter to dominant narratives that lionize the capitol city.

We owe the endurance of Baudoin's epistolary treatise, in large part, to Vallant's meticulous recordkeeping. Himself a secretary and thus attentive to the complexities of recordkeeping, Vallant had requested the treatise from Baudoin and yet, for reasons unknown, never published it. As her patron and as an eminent male figure in both her religious and professional networks, he was a gatekeeper and represented her writing's best chance of publication. Histories of female writers have illuminated the many mechanisms at their disposal to share their voice with the world, but Baudoin's manuscript reveals the often hidden but frequent occurrence of such efforts failing. McClive retraces the manuscript's afterlife as it was extricated from Vallant's notebooks and integrated into yet another archival order, that of the *portefeuilles* of Vallant at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The triple pagination of the manuscript—by Baudoin, Vallant (or his secretary), and the Bibliothèque

nationale—exemplifies the multiple and layered nature of what McClive calls the “subjectivities of the archive” (110).

The Art of Childbirth adds new facets to our understanding of the lives, work, and community roles of early modern midwives. McClive carefully captures the heterogeneity of midwives despite the universalization of the occupation by too many historians. Her erudite introduction offers much to specialists and scholars of childbirth, religion, and gender in the early modern period, but may be lost on undergraduate audiences. Even so, Baudoin’s treatise makes a fantastic case study and McClive’s detailed context and insightful scholarship opens the world of seventeenth-century childbirth to scholars and students alike.

SCOTTIE HALE BUEHLER

Sam Houston State University

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