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contributes to our understanding of the complex interrelation between medical and literary discourses, elucidating why metaphors of the body were so central to early modern political thought. Healy imaginatively maps the moral, religious and political implications of the language of somatic experience in the early modern period.

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Alexandra Barratt (ed.), *The knowing of woman's kind in childing: a Middle English version of material derived from the Trotula and other sources*, Medieval Women: Text and Contexts, vol. 4, Turnhout, Brepols, 2001, pp. xii, 169, €55.00 (hardback 2-503-51073-6).

This book by Alexandra Barratt presents the edition of a Middle English treatise on gynaecology, written for a female audience, one of whose five surviving manuscripts is entitled *The knowing of woman's kind of childing*. It claims to have been translated from French and Latin texts, which derive ultimately from Greek. The editor demonstrates that the source of a large part of the treatise is an Old French translation of the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, one of the three texts which some time in the thirteenth century became part of the compendium of women's medicine known in Europe as *Trotula*, attributed to the female physician and writer, Trota of Salerno. Other sources are a Latin epitome of a text by Muscio known as *Non omnes quidem*, an Old French version of which could have existed, and some recipes taken from the *Genicia Cleopatrae ad Theodatam*, a Latin text attributed to Cleopatra. Barratt explains that there is at least one source that has not been identified, and argues that part of the work may be attributed to the translator's own contribution. The contents of the book fall into two parts. The first section, brief but comprehensive, is dedicated to the general introduction, the description of the manuscripts and the textual introduction. The second is devoted to the

edition, which is followed by a commentary and a useful glossary. In this section, Barratt decides, following an excellent criterion, to present on facing pages the edition of two manuscripts with different versions of the text, both of which, according to her, derive from a first Middle English translation now lost. This impressive editorial work is based not only upon the five surviving copies of the treatise, but also upon Old French and Latin manuscript copies of the known sources.

As a philologist, I have to confess that reading a work with these characteristics is a treat, given the superbly accomplished edition and the consistent textual study. All the same, the role of the linguist does not consist only in making texts available and readable for other scholars. Philological analysis also contributes to the understanding of the texts not as finished products, but as the individual products of historical individuals who write (translate, compile or copy) for a particular audience or attending to different necessities. And this is one of the achievements of Barratt's work. Her concern with the "transmission and reception, rather than the reconstruction of texts" (p. 32) contributes valuable information that facilitates the task of decoding and interpreting their historical meaning.

Nevertheless, although the analysis and description of the sources of the treatise have been done with great scholarship and accuracy, I wish some reference had been made to oral traditions. Experience and actual practice have been overlooked as the plausible origin of some of the recipes and procedures recorded in the treatise, even when it has been impossible to trace all of them. While it is certainly difficult to find evidence of the influence of actual practice in written texts, recent studies have indicated that some medieval texts on women's healthcare (and not only these) were partly influenced by local traditions. Perhaps it might be suggested that what has been called "the translator's own contribution" (p. 8) might be partly indebted to the experience and knowledge of others. And if this were the case, we cannot rule out the weight of women's experience since, as Barratt notes, "[females] are directly and intimately involved

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in the birth process" (p. 3) and, as one of the manuscripts acknowledges explicitly, there are questions that "every whoman knowyth" (p. 36).

There is one final point I should like to raise. Expressions that might imply a value judgement, while projecting modern knowledge onto the past, should be used with care. Medieval texts on healthcare often record practices which may seem absurd to a modern reader. Nevertheless, it is not the role of the historian to question people's beliefs but, on the contrary, to explore their historical meaning, especially when they have been widely recorded in other sources. In my view, qualifying as "good sense" or "good judgement" (p. 32) the scribal decision to omit "superstitious passages" is a historiographical error of perspective that, besides, does not offer a satisfactory answer to the real meaning of the omission. However, apart from these minor differences with Barratt's approach, I believe that the publication of this book is extremely valuable for the history of women's healthcare in the Middle Ages. It provides us with new, painstakingly edited material and the scholarly resources of the general and textual introductions and the glossary.

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Armelle Debru and Nicoletta Palmieri in collaboration with **Bernard Jacquinod** (eds), "*Docente natura*". *Mélanges de médecine ancienne et médiévale offerts à Guy Sabbah*, Université de Saint-Étienne, 2001, pp. 329, €30.00 (paperback 2-86272-230-8).

Thirty years ago, Guy Sabbah was seconded to the fledgling university of St Etienne to be its first professor of Latin. An expert on the late Latin historian Ammianus Marcellinus, he soon turned his attention to Latin medical texts, and established his department as the main clearing house for information on this area of medical history. He has organized conferences, created

bibliographical tools, and published a valuable series of *Mémoires* on ancient medicine. Fifteen friends and pupils have joined together in his honour to offer him a bouquet of studies.

Most are concerned with philological problems in Latin, in Pliny, Scribonius Largus, Fronto, Nemesienus, Caelius Aurelianus, and the Ravenna commentators, but there are also emendations to the Alexandrian commentators and to Aretaeus. Klaus-Dietrich Fischer's discovery of "recycled" fragments of earlier authors in medieval texts is important both for its methodology and for its encouragement to look at later compendia. Alongside wider surveys of Methodism in Cassius Felix, and Hippocratic and Galenic references in St Jerome, three essays discuss the terminology for the voice, respiration, and antidotes. Nicoletta Palmieri offers further thoughts on the sources and development of the late commentaries from Ravenna, while Danielle Jacquart publishes the advice of Jean Le Lièvre, a member of the Paris Faculty from 1392 to 1418, on how to prepare dragées and sweetened waters to soothe the patient. In an essay that ranges widely from Galen's dissection of the elephant to the contagion of leprosy, Danielle Gourevitch raises a series of fascinating questions. I am not entirely convinced by her explanation for Galen's belief that he had found a bone in the heart of the emperor's elderly elephant. Her initial supposition, that he had seen ossified fibres separating ventricles from auricles, seems to me far more likely. This was the explanation given to me years ago by the late Dr Hugh Cott, FRZS, who had seen this phenomenon several times in his years in Africa.

These essays are of a uniformly high quality, and reflect the breadth of studies now being pursued into the medical writings in Latin. What was, thirty years ago, a forgotten area, neglected because it was not Greek, or because its writers did not, on the whole, employ the style and vocabulary of Cicero, has now very much come of age, and no one interested in classical medicine or in the history of Late Antiquity can afford to ignore it. Although he himself has written relatively little on this theme, Guy Sabbah has constantly advised and encouraged others.