

witches for predicting the hour of death or who participate in the legal procedure leading to the identification and conviction of sorcerers, nocturnal pollution, natural proneness to and medical conditions for possession, impediments to procreation, and purity and purification would be some of the subjects included in the letter P. “Sex” would direct the curious reader to dysfunctional sex, sex with demons, and to sex differences (how is it that women are found to be tainted with this heresy more often than men and why are women sorcerers greater in number than men while men are more often affected by sorcery? was a central theme which intrigued the authors). Sterility, harmful touch (of the witch) and torture would close such an imaginary index.

All this was just a suggestive and partial selection indicating the richness of medical and bodily themes in this book, which should become a standard text for anyone teaching or interested in the history of the human body in pre-modern Europe and in the wild fantasies associated with it.

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Lluís Alcanyís, *Regiment preservatiu e curatiu de la pestilència*, ed. Jon Arrizabalaga, *Els Nostres Clàssics*, Barcelona, Editorial Barcino, 2008, pp. 161, no price given (paperback 978-84-7226-733-6).

From the middle of the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth one of the most popular genres of medical literature was what were known as pestilence treatises. These were a large and heterogeneous group of works in which doctors recorded their perceptions and reactions when faced with the paradigm of infectious and contagious diseases of the late Middle Ages and the early modern era. The majority of these treatises are characterized by a markedly practical approach and their publication often coincided with the onset of plague. They offered prophylactic advice and

medicinal remedies in the face of plague onslaughts that, again and again, devastated villages and towns throughout the length and breadth of Europe. Such is the case of the book being reviewed, the *Regiment preservatiu e curatiu de la pestilència*, an incunabula printed in Valencia in 1490 and written by the Valencian doctor Lluís Alcanyís (c.1440–1506). The *Regiment* is no exception to the rule characterizing medical literature on pestilence that locates the creation of these texts during times of plague. Its publication coincided with the plague outbreak that ravaged Valencia from 1489 to 1490. The book consists of fourteen quarto folios typeset in Gothic and was written by one of the most prominent medical personalities in Valencia in the late Middle Ages. In fact, during the last third of the fifteenth century and the first years of the sixteenth, Alcanyís occupied the highest posts within the education and regulation hierarchy of the Valencian medical and surgical profession. Despite this high social and professional standing, Alcanyís was accused by the Inquisition of being a Judiazzer, banned from his profession, imprisoned, brought to trial, and burned at the stake in 1506. It is precisely the Inquisitorial records of his trial that have been used to document his personal life and family ties.

Jon Arrizabalaga, editor of this critical edition, has dedicated over twenty-five years to the study of Alcanyís and his works. A methodical and thorough researcher, Arrizabalaga complements the edition with an interesting introductory synthesis in two extensive sections: one dedicated to the analysis of pestilence treatises within the literature of the late Middle Ages; and another to the study of the *Regiment* and the biography of its author. Indeed, Alcanyís’s text is simply one of many that appeared after the advent of the printing press. Its re-edition is only relevant if it is framed within the context of Catalan literature, given that the principal merit of the *Regiment preservatiu e curatiu de la pestilència* is that it is the first medical text originally written in Catalan and printed by the crown of Aragon. Only three copies survive of

this rare text (one in the Biblioteca Valenciana, another in the Biblioteca de Catalunya and a third in the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda). It has been transcribed and published on several occasions since the mid-nineteenth century. The present edition has the advantage of having been the object of an in-depth study by one of the most knowledgeable investigators of the plague in the Europe of the late Middle Ages and the early modern era.

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**Elaine Hobby** (ed.), *The birth of mankind: otherwise named, The woman's book*, Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity, Farnham and Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2009, pp. xxxix, 310, £55.00 (hardback 978-0-7546-3818-6).

Elaine Hobby's critical edition of the earliest English translation of *The birth of mankind*, written (at least ostensibly) by Eucharius Rösslin, is a most welcome addition to several other recent volumes on childbirth and gynaecology that have appeared in this series. The phenomenal success of the volume, from the publication of the original German (1513) and its Latin translation, to the versions in many other European vernaculars, including English, alone justifies Hobby's undertaking; in addition, she brings impeccable scholarship and some fresh insights to her task. In a relatively short but incisive introduction, she recognizes that her volume will be used by both specialist and general readers—just as Rösslin's sixteenth-century English translators sought to appeal not only to the midwives for whom Rösslin originally wrote, but also to lay readers (of both sexes) with a broader interest in the subject of reproduction and sexuality. Thus, on the one hand, she engages with detailed critical debates (reassessing debts to Vesalian anatomy in the 1545 edition, and arguing strongly that Richard Jonas, the

original translator, was probably the same Jonas who was Highmaster of St Paul's school), and, on the other, she does not neglect to provide a clear overview of Renaissance understandings of reproductive physiology and humoral medicine.

Since there is already a very good modern English translation of Rösslin's German text (by Wendy Arons), readers may ask why we need Hobby's edition of the early English version. The answer is that from the viewpoint of historians of both medicine and of the book, *The birth of mankind* is particularly rich and complex. The first translation (1540) was undertaken by a layman, who added to Rösslin's text a final section, drawn (without acknowledgement) from the Hippocratic corpus, and treating the conception of mankind. This version was revised in 1545 by a physician, Thomas Raynalde, who also added a new first part, setting out in English the very recent anatomical discoveries of Vesalius, as well as reproducing the latter's anatomical illustrations.

Given that the work remained in print until 1654, going through many editions, Hobby faced a difficult choice as to the base text. She settled on the 1560 version for the reason that it underwent relatively little further change, and thus represents the version which circulated most widely for nearly a century. The decision reflects her wish to make her edition as accessible as possible to less specialist readers. Accordingly, only major differences from one edition to another are signalled in the footnotes, which—apart from useful indications of flagrant mistranslations, unacknowledged borrowings from classical sources or key historical references—are largely given over to translating less familiar sixteenth-century usage into modern English. In addition, the reader is provided with a generous medical glossary at the end of the volume. The illustrations, probably a key to the work's early success, are reproduced satisfactorily, with the exception of the reversed images on p. 88. Specialist readers have to turn to the appendices (of which there are no fewer than fourteen) to track down both