

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

portions of text which had been excised by 1560 and tables of changes introduced between one edition and another. Hobby has painstakingly collated some fifteen different editions, but leaves it to others, should they wish, to draw their own conclusions as to the significance of the numerous small changes.

Hobby's (and/or Ashgate's) decision to organize the volume primarily so that the general reader can peruse it comfortably and conveniently may occasionally frustrate those of who work closely in this field, but on balance I think it is justified, for this is a work which made a major contribution to the circulation of knowledge about sexuality and reproductive medicine from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, and thus deserves as wide a readership as possible. And it is important to stress that Hobby has certainly not compromised the quality of her scholarly research. This volume has surely set the agenda—and a very high standard—for a pan-European study of the reception of Rösslin's *Rose Garden*.

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G M P Loots, *Epilepsie in de zestiende eeuw. De Observationes van Pieter van Foreest*, Rotterdam, Erasmus Publishing, 2007, pp. 219, €27.50 (paperback 978-90-5235-189-6).

Pieter van Foreest (Petrus Forestus) has been called the “Dutch Hippocrates”. He studied in Bologna, Padua and Paris, and practised in the Netherlands from 1546 until his death in 1597. During these turbulent years, he was consulted for the health of the leader of the Dutch revolt, Prince William of Orange, and performed his autopsy after he was murdered. His *Observationes* contain over 1,350 case studies and were published between 1584 and 1597. In the past fifteen years, some thorough studies have appeared on Foreest, notably those of Henriette Bosman-Jelgersma. The present translation of the *Observationes*

on epilepsy by the classicist and psychologist G M P Loots makes a welcome addition.

The introduction to Foreest's life relies primarily on earlier studies by Bosman-Jelgersma. The *Observationes* themselves are an absolute joy to read. There are patients from all classes of society: a shoemaker, a sailor, a monk, a noble woman, and a relatively large number of young adults and children. A few of the patients are related to Foreest. Some are described as socially isolated, “melancholic”, some do not take his therapy, others respond well, leaving the public amazed at their cure and giving Foreest a sense of satisfaction. Of special interest is ‘Observation 60’ in which Foreest is consulted by his colleague Nanno, to which Nanno's reply is also added.

Each case study is followed by a theoretical “Scholium”. Foreest mentions several “risk factors” for epilepsy such as having had an alcoholic mother, or living in the province “where the wines are damp”. A teacher suffered epilepsy from intense teaching, a student from eating excessive amounts of eel. Symptoms are described as convulsions, frothing at the mouth, etc; but also as pain between the shoulder blades and vomiting, seeing flashes of light, and having bloody urine. In many cases, patients describe a sensation rising up from the extremities towards the brain. This is interpreted as confirming classical pathology, where a bad humour rises up from some place in the body towards the brain. Foreest distinguishes epilepsy from drowsiness, obsession by the devil and stroke.

The *Observationes* show Foreest as having a sympathetic, independent mind. A high point is ‘Observation 62’, where he calls in a second doctor “to be safe against false charges” from the family of the patient. In his language, Foreest is more careful than, for example, Vesalius (whom he met in Padua and later consulted about a patient), but is not afraid to criticize Galen and the Paracelsists among others. He makes some witty allusions to the frustrations of religious clerics.

Cauterization, although proved to be effective