

is a “part” of the body? is the simplest of the questions involved.

The semantic problems generated by the different origins of many terms invited a number of strategies. Medical men involved in the identification of simple medicines invented “synonyms” as a genre of Latin literature within *materia medica* as early as the fourteenth century. Expositors of medical texts, like those of law in Anglo-Norman England, used couplets of explanatory terms, in order that either one of a pair would be intelligible to a major cultural group of the community. The corresponding danger in anatomy was that “involuntary” couplets from two different textual traditions often forced the anatomists to describe two different *structures* in the body when one only was physically there.

The historian of anatomy will also recognize some of the principles that are the concern of this related field. *Names* have a certain durability because they are lexical items of some authority marked on the vellum or paper studied by the anatomist. *Parts of the body* seem also to offer some constancy, because we think that the body has not changed (but we have to remember that important figures like Vesalius’ teacher Sylvius thought otherwise). But these two are not tightly linked in a cultural sense. Parts need names, which are generally supplied from the vernacular. But any specialized knowledge needs a technical language, which is met in a number of ways: appropriation of vernacular terms, or adaptation, translation or transliteration of foreign terms. By the time covered by this book any technical terms could be derived directly or indirectly from the ambient vernacular or the ancient Greek or Latin, French or Arabic. Appendices cover a specimen database entry, foreign terms, terms unique to each group of sources and explicatory devices in the texts.

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Rudolph M Bell, *How to do it: guides to good living for Renaissance Italians*, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. xiii, 375, illus., £19.95, \$25.00 (0-226-04210-3).

Leonardo Fioravanti, the Bolognese physician-charlatan whose peregrinations and publications were so vividly recounted by the late Piero Camporesi, was a great enthusiast for the democratizing possibilities of the print medium. Before print, “the Doctors dazzled the illiterate masses” with their marvels; now, he wrote in 1567, “the majority of people, both men and women, know how to read . . . maybe the day will come when we shall all be Doctors of some sort”. Fioravanti was just one of many of the authors consulted by Rudolph Bell in the preparation of his study of sixteenth-century Italian “popular advice manuals”. Together, these books, published cheaply in the vernacular, offered practical advice on a wide range of topics: lovemaking, pregnancy, child-rearing, infant care, physical health, education, adolescence, choosing a spouse. They were even successful enough to be the butt of satire, such as the tongue-in-cheek advice on the advantages of a plain or barren wife. Treatises by the likes of Michele Savonarola, Laurence Joubert (known to Italian readers as Lorenzo Gioberti), Giovanni Marinello and Scipione Mercurio—physicians all—are well known to cultural historians of early modern Italy, but they have not received systematic study, until now. We are fortunate, then, that the author is someone so well-versed in different aspects of Italian history as is Bell.

Bell does not limit himself to famous works and their authors; indeed, he is only too happy to bring lesser authors into the limelight, writers largely ignored by historians and literary critics because of their obscurity and lack of originality. His notion of the advice manual is likewise all-inclusive: “popular errors” books, pharmacological treatises, exorcists’ manuals, confessors’ guides, *memorie* and

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books of manners. They could all be used in the same way by eager readers, Bell argues—especially if they came equipped with a handy index at the back (ranging from “abortion, what is it and what causes it” to “worms, in children and their cure”). In this way even the classic Renaissance book of courtly manners, Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book of the courtier* (1528), written as a dialogue, could be consulted as a kind of instruction manual on polite behaviour. If the print medium tended to transgress the boundaries of learned and popular culture, this is particularly evident in these “how-to” books. The information included in them was accessible to all who could read, but it also filtered down to the illiterate, through oral summary and reading aloud.

Bell has clearly had a lot of fun preparing this book and his enthusiasm for the material is infectious. His approach is “journalistic” and chatty, which may put off some readers (though it may also gain him many more). He succeeds marvellously in capturing the lively, familiar, confident, sometimes humorous style of the books themselves. There is a comfortably old-fashioned feel to the book. This is evident in its concentration on the weird and the wonderful and in the way the material is organized, first by theme and, within each theme, by author, presenting each writer’s advice and suggestions in turn. For those tired of the approach of literary criticism to some of these texts, this will be refreshing. The material itself is fascinating, but Bell’s presentation of it too often reads like a laundry list, and this can get tedious. He has clearly aimed for a wide readership: tricky methodological discussions are largely kept to the notes and points are made with an enviable assurance and clarity. This is entirely praiseworthy, but there is some loss of historical subtlety as a result.

Although Bell has an eye for the individual characteristics of the manuals, and the way in which the authors’ own outlooks and intentions could shape the material they included, these are not systematically explored. Bell claims the greatest possible diffusion for such works and the information contained in them. But in order to achieve this he overstates literacy rates for the peninsula—not everywhere reached Venetian levels; he makes Joubert out to be a great respecter of popular traditions, when his treatise was in large measure an elite attack against them; and he affirms that people would routinely flip through expensive treatises like Pietro Andrea Mattioli’s edition of Dioscorides in apothecaries’ shops before choosing their own medicines. Throughout, there is the implicit assumption that people followed the advice. When it comes to wet-nursing, Bell very effectively compares the content of advice manuals to social practice in Renaissance Florence. It is a shame there is not more of this, for there is too little discussion of the vexed question of how these manuals might actually have been used by people. Nor is much said about the origins and development of the advice itself, something certainly worthy of historical investigation.

In structuring the material, Bell follows the life cycle, which takes us from conception through to widowhood. He leaves out only death, perhaps because it is not much of a laugh. Yet, given the variety of different literary genres Bell has included under the rubric of the advice manual, he surely could have found room for instructions on the art of the “good death”.

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