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**Sperling, Jutta Gisela, ed. Medieval and Renaissance Lactations:  
Images, Rhetorics, Practices**

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and the notes are as useful as they are copious. When complete, the series will have done the great service of bringing scholarship on this important transmitter of classical and early Christian literature into the twenty-first century.

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**Sperling, Jutta Gisela, ed.**

*Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices.*

Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. xv, 319 + 30 ill. ISBN 978-1-4094-4860-0 (hardback) \$104.96.

Through a series of thirteen essays, *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices* explores commercial and non-commercial forms of wet-nursing in Western Europe from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. Following the short but helpful introduction, these essays analyze “the allegorical and metaphorical content of breastfeeding imagery, the scientific and political significance of discourses on lactation, and the social and cultural effects of both maternal and non-maternal nursing” (1). Drawing on sources ranging from epistolary exchanges and legal records to paintings and poetry, the collection seeks to establish milk-sharing as essential to understanding the construction of gender in medieval and Renaissance societies.

While the collection lacks an explicit organizational plan, the arrangement of the essays suggests a four-part structure. The first two essays discuss circumstances under which lactation could be gendered male. Mohammed Hocine Benkheira examines a medieval Islamic theory, “the milk of the male,” which was designed to displace the concept of matrilineality via milk-sharing and so affirm male causality in legal kinship. Next, Barbara Orland, framing her article with a critique of Lacqueur’s one-sex model, cogently argues that seventeenth-century humoral and hydro-mechanical medical theories allowed for male lactation without recourse to notions of effeminacy and abjection.

The second grouping of essays surveys the complex relationship between mothers, wet-nurses, and nurslings in early modern Europe. Rebecca Lynn Winer’s investigation of wet-nursing contracts in fourteenth-century Barcelona reveals that Aragonese mothers—unlike the Florentine women studied by

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber—exercised considerable authority in choosing and recompensing their wet-nurses. Using epistolary exchanges of seventeenth-century elite Roman women, Caroline Castiglione persuasively demonstrates that choosing a wet nurse, providing her with instructions on how to care for the infant, and supervising that care constituted important aspects of aristocratic motherhood. Debra Blumenthal's contribution also expands on the work of Klapisch-Zuber by illuminating the long-lasting, kinship-like relationships that could develop between wet-nurses and their nurslings through a compelling analysis of late-medieval Venetian age of majority inquests.

The third—and least cohesive—set of essays is concerned with narrative representations of wet-nursing. Emilie L. Bergmann's chapter explores the anxieties surrounding wet-nursing as expressed in tragic Iberian ballads, wherein negligent nurses cause the death of their nurslings. Diana Bullen Presciutti observes changes in Sieneese frescoes depicting wet-nursing made under Medici rule in order to highlight the fluidity of political understandings of charity. Examining seventeenth-century plague poems, Rebecca Totaro presents a fascinating discussion of the flexibility of lactation metaphors—conveying the breakdown of civilization with a child nursing from its dead mother to the protection that a breastfeeding “Mother London” provided her citizens.

Four of the final five chapters focus on representations of wet-nursing in Renaissance art, the other discussing humanist discourse on breastfeeding. Alexandra Woolley analyzes Nicolas Poussin's use of the breastfeeding woman as an allegory for charity in order to suggest that the artist used lactation imagery to criticize the post-Tridentine Church. The flow of this section is interrupted by Julia L. Hairston's essay, which addresses the contradictions inherent in humanist debates over commercial wet-nursing through a close reading of Leon Batista Alberti's *Libri della famiglia*. Returning to visual sources, Patricia Simons's evaluation of the depiction of breastfeeding in Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Birth of the Baptist* (ca. 1488) leads her to characterize this religiously and civically important fresco as an iconographic oddity. The volume's editor, Jutta Gisela Sperling, examines lactation imagery in Tintoretto's *Birth of Saint John the Baptist* (1603), commissioned by the convent of San Zaccaria in Venice, proposing that it represents an act of resistance by the nuns against the Counter-Reformation Church. Closing the collection is J. Vanessa Lyon's sharp analysis of the naturalistic and eroticized depictions of non-maternal nursing, which emphasize the generative capacity of breast milk, in the early works of Peter Paul Rubens.

The collection would benefit from colour plates to allow the reader to better engage with the images under discussion in many of the essays. The bibliography is comprehensive and will prove especially useful to those new to the subject. Moving the discussion of breastfeeding beyond the history of maternity, this collection makes an important contribution to the study of gendered relations of care.

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### **Speroni, Sperone.**

***Canace (1542)*. Trans. with intro. and notes by Elio Brancaforte.**

Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation 42. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2013. Pp. 151. ISBN 978-0-7727-2140-2 (paperback) \$19.

This first English translation of a Renaissance classic that provoked serious controversy and literary debate is a very welcome addition to the field of early modern studies, and theatre in particular. Brancaforte has edited this volume very thoroughly and thoughtfully. After brief mention of the project's genesis, he presents a comprehensive introduction, divided into seven sections, in order to contextualize *Canace* from literary and historical perspectives.

The first section, "Sperone Speroni (1500–1588)" (13–18), offers a rather systematic overview of an influential if frequently under-appreciated figure of sixteenth-century letters, whose works and life influenced the dominant debates of the era in Italy and throughout Europe. Brancaforte correctly identifies Speroni as a leading figure in the "questione della lingua" debates, and whose *Dialogo delle lingue* emphasized "res" over "verba," or, in other words, philosophically rich content over empty form. Criticism of the slavish cultivation of proper Latin style and grammar that overshadows the actual content of the words comes through in all of Speroni's writings, including *Canace*. Speroni's championing of the vernacular had enormous influence on the work of Joachim du Bellay, for example. In the same manner, the editor makes conscientious mention of the renowned and controversial philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi, who influenced Speroni's works, including his tragedy—such that