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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy: Identities, Families and Masculinities*. (Gender in History.) by Sandra Cavallo

Review by: Rebecca Messbarger

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beautiful *Penitent Magdalene* is undercut by the harsh realities confronting reformed prostitutes (*convertite*) who struggled both with a misogynistic society and, on occasion, against themselves to preserve their secular and religious virtue. Chapter one introduces the perennial threat of sexual yearning that tormented young female novices, which the exemplary chastity of Laureti's *S. Susanna* may have helped Cistercian nuns to overcome (pp. 48–49). When we later encounter recalcitrant *convertite* who simply refused to repent (p. 227), we are reminded, however, of one of the book's central arguments: that none of these images carried a single message or elicited a monolithic response. It is typical that this point about the complexity and the historicity of contemporary imagery and its reception emerges in a chapter which places the social history of a disreputable pocket of the Campo di Marte in the service of visual analysis. Such genuine interdisciplinarity, and the lightness with which Jones wears her learning, make this book important and stimulating reading for specialists, and for any scholar concerned with the relationship of art and society in the early modern period.

NICHOLAS A. ECKSTEIN
University of Sydney

SANDRA CAVALLO. *Artisans of the Body in Early Modern Italy: Identities, Families and Masculinities*. (Gender in History.) New York: Manchester University Press, distributed by Palgrave, New York. 2007. Pp. xii, 281. \$84.95.

Sandra Cavallo's exceptional study of the coincident professional and kinship alliances among surgeons and other "artisans of the body" in early modern Turin posits an original, rhizomic methodology that promises to change how history is done. Cavallo's study is as important therefore for her innovative method of inquiry and analysis as for the wealth of new information she provides about the interconnected working life of barber-surgeons, *peruquiers*, perfumers, *aiutanti di camera*, jewelers, and the like, whose care of the body extended from the Court of Savoy to the local *cantone* or Turinese neighborhood.

Cavallo describes her method as "biographical," by which she means the study of the national and social origins, vocational training, work-life, and overlapping professional and kinship ties of individual surgeons and those in affiliate body crafts. This description is, I would suggest, insufficient in capturing the pathbreaking mode of data collection and interpretation she employs to unearth a complex network of horizontal relationships among the arts and artisans of the body in late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century Turin. Her analysis of this occupational milieu, like the botanical rhizome, has multiple roots and shoots and is formed by conjunctions rather than based on distinctions and oppositions as is commonly the case in a more conventional historiographical approach. Grounded in rigorously local primary source data—censuses, parish registries, municipal, military and hospital records, li-

censing records for medical practitioners and artisans, the writings of ordinary barber-surgeons—Cavallo's reconstruction offers a comprehensive account of the mundane life of individual surgeons and whole family networks attending to the eclectic bodily needs of Turin's populace. By radically reframing the context in which the work and cultural status of the early modern barber-surgeon is viewed, she is thus able to invalidate presumed dichotomies between the learned physician and the practicing barber-surgeon, indeed between surgeon and barber, public and private medical practice, mental and manual labor, the care of the inside and of the outside of the body, the medical arts and other arts for treating and ornamenting the body, men's and women's work within artisanal classes, and finally between the conjugal family headed by the father and families formed without *paterfamilias*, common surnames, and direct blood ties. Not only does the author replace cliché class divisions with a more accurate account of who cared for elite and common bodies, her unconventional method also allows her to make visible the obscure work of women and the young apprentice.

The biographical sketch of barber-surgeon Bernardo Calvo, with which the book opens, immediately and persuasively challenges many of the presumed dichotomies mentioned above. An ordinary neighborhood medical practitioner cupping, leeching, trepanning, and vesicating clients from his *cantone*, Calvo nevertheless published medical tracts based on doctrines, such as humoral theories, that are typically considered the province of the elite university physician. The case of Calvo also serves to launch one of the most important revisions Cavallo makes in her book to early modern notions of masculinity.

Disputing conventional suppositions about the patrilineal transmission of professional knowledge and resources, Cavallo demonstrates instead the pervasive influence of "diagonal male relationships," steered by uncles, fathers-in-law, cousins, etc., and even those with no biological ties, on the burgeoning artisan of the body.

While Cavallo's methodology merits replication in studies of similar occupational milieus in the early modern period, I have some doubts about the transferability of her specific findings to other sites on the Italian peninsula and beyond. Italy did not exist at this time, of course, except as a set of geographical boundaries. Italian city-states had highly distinct cultures, systems of governance, topographies, languages, currencies, and institutional and professional traditions and paradigms. To take Bologna as a point of contrast: rather than a court culture, it was the second city after Rome of the Holy See, co-administered by a secular *gonfalonier* and a cardinal legate sent from Rome. During the years that Cavallo studies, the cultural decline of the university reached its nadir. Private and civic leaders endeavored to restore the city's former standing as the "Mother of Learning" with institutional reforms and the establishment of the Institute of Sciences in 1714. There was a renewed emphasis on the study of medicine and par-

ticular attention to the revival of the annual public anatomy. Andreas Vesalius, it must be remembered, had performed some of his most important dissections here, recorded by his student Baldassar Heseler. This particular history necessarily influenced the professional identity and affiliations of surgeons in ways that diverge from the Turinese model. Cavallo's rhizomic historical method would undoubtedly illumine exactly how the life of the Bolognese barber-surgeon and other artisans of the body differed from that of their Turinese counterparts.

I look with anticipation, therefore, to new studies built upon the critical method of historical investigation and the interpretive model Cavallo has so skillfully defined and put into effect.

REBECCA MESSBARGER
Washington University

FRANCESCA BILLIANI. *Culture nazionali e narrazioni straniere: Italia, 1903–1943*. (Saggi, number 65.) Florence: Le Lettere. 2007. Pp. 374. €32.00.

Writing in his *Notebooks* on Americanism and Fordism, Antonio Gramsci commented on Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922): "It would be interesting to analyze the reasons why *Babbitt* was such a great success in Europe . . . [since] it is of cultural more than artistic importance: the criticism of manners prevails over art. That there exists in America a realistic literary current that starts out as a criticism of manners is a very important cultural fact. It means that there is an increase in self-criticism . . . The intellectuals are breaking loose from the dominant class in order to unite themselves to it more intimately, to be a real superstructure and not only an inorganic and indistinct element of the structure-corporation. European intellectuals have already partially lost this function . . . The European petty bourgeoisie laughs at *Babbitt* and therefore laughs at America which is supposedly populated by 120 million *Babbitts*. The petty bourgeois cannot get outside himself or understand himself, just as the imbecile is incapable of understanding that he is an imbecile (without demonstrating thereby that he is intelligent). The real imbecile is the one who doesn't know he is one."

Gramsci's invitation to analyze *Babbitt's* success in Italy and to do so within the context of nationalism and fascism, of the formation of a modern Italian intelligentsia and the latter's relationship to the creation of a national culture as an act of self-criticism against (petty bourgeois) imbecility—has been accepted by Francesca Billiani in this rich and thoroughly documented monograph. The author engages the editorial politics and practices of importing and translating foreign literatures to Italy in the period between the rise of Italian nationalism (1903) and the collapse of the fascist regime (1943); in other words, she treats the complex interaction between translation of the "foreign," nationalism as an ideology, and the fascist politics of economic and cultural autarchy. Billiani grounds her analysis in a meticulous compilation of contempo-

rary essays and letters written by and between editors, publishers, translators and (largely fascist) government officials. She divides her analysis into three, overall standard periods in Italian historiography: the period spanning the growth of Italian nationalism and the country's entry and experience of World War I; the advent of fascism and its first decade as a "revolutionary movement"; and the 1930s, that is, the years of consent, World War II, and the regime's collapse in 1943.

What Billiani demonstrates is to some extent a curious paradox: it was precisely during the period of right-wing nationalism and fascism that the Italian publishing industry produced, for the first time in the country's national life, an economically consolidated translation policy on a national scale. In the years between 1903 and 1943 the country witnessed a veritable explosion of the Italian market for foreign literary products, indeed one that was destined to last until today. In addition, so Billiani argues, editors and translators (the most active intellectuals in this domain were the "Americanists" Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese, who were both important novelists in their own right) defended an Italian encounter with foreign literature as a vehicle to produce a modern *Italian* culture, one capable thereby to hold its own against America and the rest of Europe.

Because translation in Italy was understood as an act of national (re)construction, Billiani's book is built upon the following theses. First, the fascist regime—and this despite its claims to cultural autarchy—did not repress translations of foreign works, because they were produced in order to be an integral part of Italian literary and cultural activities and a crucial component of national(ist) renewal. Second, she demonstrates that as a consequence the act of translation allowed for the presence of contradictory or "foreign" voices, precisely because they were harnessed to the support of national cultural survival. Implicitly, therefore, Billiani argues that a simple exclusionary logic of heterophobia and heterophilia is inadequate for an understanding of fascist cultural politics, to the extent that fascist consent-building cannot be reduced either to simple repression or imbecility. Third, while she engages the translation on the part of Italian intellectuals of the canon of European literature (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the French naturalists, or the nineteenth-century British novel) and links these editorial decisions to the creation of an Italian canon (via the articulations made, for example, between a new translation of Goethe's *Werther* and a new edition of Ugo Foscolo's *Ortis*), Billiani's real critical edge is provided by the importation of American literature and, by extension, a popular literature for a mass reading public. "American" comes then to connote not just the proper names of Herman Melville, William Faulkner, or John Steinbeck, but more broadly the absorption of genres—whether these be realist fiction, the crime novel, or descriptions of the everyday life of the people. Translation, or so I understand Billiani's central thesis, not only found its first mass diffusion under fascism, but did so in order to create a