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Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy, by Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2013; pp. xii + 312. £65).

This book elucidates the ‘culture of prevention’ which characterised attitudes towards health in early modern Italy, and makes a persuasive case for the ‘medicalization’ of daily routines and the home. Cavallo and Storey take printed vernacular regimens, which were very popular between 1560 and 1660, as their starting point. These texts, mostly written by doctors, offered practical advice on healthy living and paid particular attention to the management of the six non-naturals: air, sleep, exercise, the passions, food and drink, and excretion and retention. The authors argue that print fuelled the demand for medical advice, and explain why physicians saw the publication and sale of regimens as an opportunity to cement their authority and to participate in the medical marketplace. The authors explore the extent to which health advice was put into practice by comparing a sample of around fifty regimens with a wide array of other sources, notably letters, inventories and household objects. The opening two chapters of the book focus on these sources. Although the analysis spans the whole Italian peninsula, the correspondence of the Spada and Veralli families offers particularly fascinating insights into the ways in which the behaviour and domestic environments of the Roman elite were shaped by health concerns between the 1570s and the 1670s.

The ‘internal evolution’ of humoral theory is a fundamental argument of this book. Cavallo and Storey challenge the idea that humoral theory was essentially static by drawing attention – with considerable skill, precision and nuance – to changing understandings of the body and its relationship with the environment. Moreover, while both medieval regimens

and modern scholarship concentrate primarily on food and drink, this book mirrors the regimens of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by considering each non-natural in detail. The air was a source of considerable concern in early modern Italy. Cold and damp air and winds began to create far more anxiety than putrid, smelly air, and more attention was paid to the health implications of the local environment. The brain became a new focus in the advice literature: it needed to be protected from cold air, and it benefited from sleep. A new culture of daytime rest emerged, accompanied by daybeds and armchairs, although the comfort of the latter was deliberately limited to ensure that naps were kept short. Moderation was key – excessive night sleep and late awakenings were considered degenerate. Sleeping came to be segregated by gender, and canopy beds became widespread on account of their perceived health benefits, as much as due to a desire for privacy. Moderation also underpinned advice on exercise and walking became fashionable. Interest flourished in *allegrezza* or joyfulness, which could be promoted by the birdsong, gardens and fountains of country villas. Hand-washing and linen underwear grew in popularity in line with new views on hygiene, with a corresponding decline in washing by immersion.

The analysis of food and drink highlights varied levels of compliance with health advice, competing sources of influence (such as the Counter-Reformation Church), and contradictory views. The Spada-Veralli women were eager to keep Lent, but anxious about the health implications of fasting. The sensitivity to the complexity of the relationships between regimens, social practices and the broader context is a core strength of this study. When they write of ‘medicalization’, Cavallo and Storey propose a broad extension of ideas of healthy and unhealthy to everyday life and the home, in which societal changes played just as important a role as medical experts. For the authors, the early demilitarisation of the Italian peninsula, the concept of the noble body, and the emergence of a new culture of gentility all had an effect on ideas of health.

Class is a major theme of this study, even if the focus is mainly on the elite and their lifestyles due to the nature of the sources which have been examined. The most absorbing findings come in the chapter on ‘Gentle exercise and genteel living’, which reveals how conduct books and ecclesiastical educational literature shaped ideas of what exercise was appropriate for gentlemen. Decorum and gravity were the watchwords. Ball games evolved so that the dirty ball did not need to touch the hands of the gentleman, and new sports like billiards and golf were played in socially segregated spaces. Despite the numerous contributions of this study, however, a few questions remain. There is scant explanation of the methodology behind the selection of regimens and the justification for focusing on regimens with ‘health’ or ‘healthy’ in the title. Little is said about the authors of these regimens, and how representative or otherwise they may have been of physicians working at this time. Certainly one or two were colourful characters. Further reference to the extensive scholarship on the senses might have offered insights to cement the arguments on perfuming and music. Finally, although the book aims to redress the historiographical neglect of prevention, it would nonetheless be interesting to glean a sense of contemporary perspectives on the relationship between prevention and cure.

This book deserves a wide readership. Its imaginative research, rigorous arguments and robust engagement with scholarship will provoke the interest of specialists, and the clarity of the exposition will make it essential reading for students. Its discussion of material and visual culture is helpfully supported by numerous plates. The volume’s disciplinary range and conceptual breadth generate broader value. Cavallo and Storey urge their readers to be inspired by their assessment of domestic material culture to add a health perspective to future studies of the domestic interior. Given the scholarly achievement which this study represents, perhaps health should join class, gender and race as a general category of historical analysis.

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