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Dorothea Heitsch, *Writing as Medication in Early Modern France: Literary Consciousness and Medical Culture*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg, 2017. vi+261 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. €48.00 (hc). ISBN 9783825367145.

Review by Caroline Petit, University of Warwick.

This book focuses on a group of French Renaissance writers who shared a love for knowledge and drew on the medical to deepen their understanding and sharing of human nature, thought, and passions. The author, in turn, explores the creative force of “medicine” (a term she carefully qualifies on p. 1) as literary inspiration and the potentially therapeutic value of such writing. She explores those texts as “medication,” in the most polysemic way. In other words, this volume falls within the somewhat hackneyed field of “literature and medicine,” but Heitsch offers an entirely new take on it, drawing on a wide range of sources, delving into obscure medical debates, and leaving aside any facile analysis of medical contents in her work. Of course, the theme of writing as therapeutic endeavor will feel familiar to readers of early modern literature (particularly of Burton). Yet, this book feels fresh: it renews our understanding of French sixteenth-century literature through a strong focus on the medical, tempered by acute awareness of the many possible ways to unpack this and related notions, and of the personal strategies used by each writer within specific genre constraints, and with different literary projects in the making. Heitsch’s sources extend to the philosophical roots of contemporary debates, which in turn, as she demonstrates, nourished the writers of her corpus and shaped their authorial consciousness.

Starting with the early sixteenth century, and finishing with Montaigne, the book can be read as a promenade through French Renaissance literature, exploring in turn poetry and prose, satiric and serious texts, female and male writing. Each chapter can also be read as an independent study, focusing on one particular author. The first chapter sets the scene by highlighting the influential vision of cognition as desire, and of love, in Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’Amore*, in contrast to more familiar figures like Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. This chapter provides much of the unity of the book, for Leone’s ideas find their way under various guises in the authors studied in chapters two through six. In chapter two, Heitsch explores the lovesickness that is the subject of Hélienne de Crenne’s “novel” (*Les angoisses douloureuses qui procèdent d’amours*), showing its deep yet untimely rooting in medical discourses on love disease and, ultimately, its profound salutary and exemplary outcome as “medication.” In chapter three, the lighter “cure” of laughter proposed by Rabelais in Pantagruel will revive many school memories in some readers, but parts of the chapter chart new territory in emphasizing contemporary and past medical controversies around pharmacology as consciously anchoring Rabelais’s text in medical debates that are way beyond mere uses of metaphor and parody of medical literature. In chapter four, Heitsch brings together

five poets and connects them with (once again) Ebreo's ideas, emphasizing the erotic aspect of cognition and of the making of knowledge (as per chapter one). This allows her to propose Ebreo as a more interesting source for French sixteenth-century scientific poetry than the "usual suspect," Lucretius. Chapter five offers a study of yet another female writer, Montaigne's protégée Marie de Gournay. Her account of her relationship with the great man—and more importantly, her own authorial self—is tempered and shaped by her strong awareness of existing intellectual debates, where alchemy meets medicine and philosophy. Finally, chapter six revisits Montaigne's *Essais* in the light of medical writing (anatomical, pharmacological, but also the fluid genre of *consilia*) as an attempted cure for loss and melancholy, moving from medical exempla and consilia to himself and his own experience, as the very body of his work.

To sum up, in a work of splendid erudition and complexity, Dorothea Heitsch offers a literary perspective infused with deep awareness of intellectual, and especially "medical," history in the sixteenth century. This book will be welcomed by specialists of the various authors discussed as well as by those interested in the grey area shared by literature, medicine (broadly understood), and rhetoric in the early modern period. It will thus supplement nicely some recent collective volumes on related topics edited by Brian Nance, Florence Glaze, Stephen Pender, and Nancy Struever.^[1] Even though a number of topics will already feel familiar to keen readers of Montaigne or Rabelais, the author's impressive command of the scholarly literature, her attention to the finest details of Renaissance intellectual culture, and the scope of her book will no doubt shed new light on her chosen theme and help many a student of Renaissance literature (even beyond the French scene, for the discussion often oversteps boundaries). Her marked emphasis on Leone Ebreo also provides a change of focus in terms of intellectual filiations in the sixteenth century which should by itself give specialists food for thought.

NOTE

[1] Brian K. Nance and Florence Eliza Glaze, eds., *Between Text and Patient: The Medical Enterprise in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Florence: SISMEL, Ed. Del Galluzzo, 2011); and Stephen Pender and Nancy Struever, eds., *Rhetoric and Medicine in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2012).

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