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Gal Ventura, *Hush Little Baby: The Invention of Infant Sleep in Modern France*. Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023. viii + 16 unnumbered pages of plates + 328 pp. Notes, 65 illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$95.00 CAD (hb). ISBN 9780228017295. €82.95 (ebook). ISBN 9780228018384.

Review by Daniela S. Barberis, Shimer Great Books School, North Central College.

Art historian Gal Ventura examines the proliferation and growing popularity of images of sleeping babies during the second half of the nineteenth century in France in this engaging and multi-faceted book. Divided into three parts, the book considers the role of physicians, mothers, and entrepreneurs in the modernization of infant sleep. In her introduction, focusing on Berthe Morisot's painting, *The Cradle*, Ventura argues that it is not the baby who is the protagonist of this kind of work of art, but the activity of sleeping itself and the female agent who enables it. The baby's sleep has become a maternal (or female caregiver's) achievement and responsibility--and continues to be seen as a parental responsibility to this day. "What historical, social, cultural and medical dispositions made this quotidian issue [sleep] a subject of such interest in France during the last decades of the nineteenth century?" (p. 9). The rest of the book addresses this broad question, looking at art, visual culture, medical treatises, and commercial artifacts and their role in promoting a new notion of sleep.

The book analyzes images of infant sleep by considering what Ventura calls the four major components of a visual artifact: the maker, the object, the spectators, and the socio-historical environment. In order to address the last component, the author goes far afield in search of socio-cultural explanations for visual artifacts beyond the image and its immediate context, thus expanding her research to capture additional points of view, "including the medicalization of knowledge, the undermining of maternal expertise, the history of maternal watchfulness, and the capitalist production of clothes and devices that occasionally reinforced the doctors and at other times undermined their advice" (p. 20). She uses a variety of theoretical lenses to interpret her material (theories of design and consumerism, feminist critique, and psychoanalysis, among others) and while this ambitious approach makes the book truly interdisciplinary, the choice of theoretical lenses, which the author claims are chosen "according to the images' own agency" (p. 20), is not always transparent to the reader and can feel forced at times.

The book is divided into the aforementioned introduction, six chapters, and an afterword. Each part--Physicians, Mothers, Entrepreneurs--contains two chapters, the second offering a counterpoint to the first. In the first part, on doctors, chapter one covers the emerging medical and artistic awareness of infants' sleep in the eighteenth century, when a baby's sleep was

perceived as a natural phenomenon that should be spontaneous, while chapter two considers the scientific discourse that sought control over nature, focusing on efforts by pediatricians and hygienists to have mothers control infant sleep. In part two of the book, on mothers, chapter three analyzes visual images by *juste-milieu* and naturalist artists who amalgamated “maternity” and “motherliness” into a new ideal of motherhood, characterized by maternal watchfulness over their children. Chapter four, by contrast, examines the tension between the images of the archetypal happy mother presented in chapter three and the subjective experience of mothering, manifested in the work of avant-garde artists such as Morisot, Degas, and Van Gogh. In the third part, on the world of commerce, chapter five looks at the flourishing of child-oriented industry and the application of the new medical rules to the new products, as well as the introduction of fashion into the nursery. Chapter six, focused on baby beds, argues that objects too have agency and that the cradle and crib designs not only influenced the users’ daily interactions, but also allowed them to express their class mores. Furthermore, despite the medicalization of sleep, artists challenged this trend, producing a counter-discourse on infant sleep. The book closes with a discussion of sleeping trends in the twenty-first century, which boasts of a billion-dollar sleep industry.

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, as the uniqueness of childhood began to be acknowledged, medical writings started to focus on infant sleep. This emerging discourse on babies’ need for care and surveillance at all times, including during their sleep, was connected to France’s national concern with the demographic decline of the French population and its low birth rate. Ventura documents the shift from the indifference of eighteenth-century physicians to infants’ sleep to the increasing medicalization of childcare over the nineteenth century. Doctors started writing *for* mothers, rather than *about* maternity, and sleep gained increasing professional attention. While night nurses and wet nurses had been prevalent among the French middle and upper classes since the seventeenth century, nineteenth-century doctors frowned upon all “mercenary” care and altered their recommendations for newborns, stressing that mothers should nurse, bathe, and watch their children sleep themselves. Traditional practices, such as swaddling, were labelled “unnatural” and roundly condemned as serving the comfort of the caretaker rather than of the child.

Ventura shows how the medicalization of infant sleep happened at different levels: interactional (face-to-face doctor-patient relations), conceptual (medical terminology developed to describe the new “problem”), and institutional (organizations using a medical approach to manage the problem). While pediatricians may seem like the agents of this change, they not only constituted but also responded to public demand as health became a commodity in the last decades of the nineteenth century and young mothers sought out medical advice regarding their babies. Ventura introduces the distinction between being asleep and “doing sleeping.” The first signifies infant self-will and autonomy, the latter is fashioned and controlled by the baby’s caregivers.

In chapter three, focused on images of “maternal vigilance” (p. 86), Ventura argues that such images represent the hallmark of modern maternity. As the size and composition of the bourgeois family changed through the nineteenth century, discourse on the family became increasingly centered on the few children it produced. Small size and increased intimacy, allied with the political emphasis on family values and gender hierarchy after the Commune of 1870, led to the valuing of the figure of the mother who devoted her life to her family. While women lost power by their retreat from the public sphere, the author emphasizes they gained significant power in the household. Academic and naturalistic genre paintings produced an iconography of maternal

happiness and contentment in her medically assigned task of watching over her infant's sleep. Enjoyment of mothering was naturalized, as in this quote from the Third Republic politician Jules Simon, "...there are only good mothers. A bad mother, if present, is against nature...What is a woman? It is a mother" (p. 92). Images of young mother's contentedly watching their infants, reproduced and circulated all over Europe, both epitomized social ideologies and shaped public opinion, preparing new generations for their anticipated role in adulthood.

Ventura introduces a contrast between "maternity" and "motherliness," which she takes from the psychoanalyst Emilia Perroni. Maternity is a condition and a role that results from the act of giving birth to a child; it is connected to reproductive biology and further shaped by the society and culture in which it takes place. Motherliness, on the other hand, is an attribute that expresses an emotional attitude towards others, regardless of biology. These emotions—empathy, acceptance, recognition, attention, nurturing, etc.—are ideally used by a mother in her parental role but can in principle be presented by any human being towards any other. In the last third of the nineteenth century, Ventura shows, French feminism amalgamated maternity and motherliness, presenting selfless motherhood as the fulfilment of an essentially feminine and civic duty towards the state. Influenced by the concerns for French depopulation, French feminists attracted social support for their cause by stressing women's roles as mothers and wives rather than fighting for equal rights for women as individuals. Renouncing their own physical and emotional needs, women became "un-carnated," completely focused on the well-being of others, as represented by their tireless vigil over their sleeping children. Interestingly, as Ventura shows, these representations of women watching over sleeping children crossed class lines, both in the form of "secular Madonnas" and of peasant mothers watching sleeping children.

In chapter four, Ventura turns to modern art, arguing that it offers a more ambivalent depiction of the burdens represented by this new mothering: boredom and depression. While I defer to her expertise as an art historian and can see that her interpretations of modernist paintings are supported by scholarship on the subject, to the non-expert reader, this section of the text can be a bit bewildering in the variety of interpretations placed on the same image or painting, which come to seem random. Is Morisot's painting of her sister in *The Cradle*, truly a portrayal of "personal, reflective, and ambivalent mothering"? (p. 128). It seems to this reader like a lot is being made of the absence of a smile on the mother's lips. The author has recourse to the biography of the sitter (the painter's sister) and to the private correspondence of the painter to support the interpretation that the mother's "gaze conveys tediousness and boredom." A contemporary critic cited by Ventura describes the painting in the following way: "Only a woman could paint this young mother who contemplates, watches and, with all the strength of her ecstatic and fearful love, protects...the sleep of her child" (p. 140). Where he saw a secular Madonna, the author sees a "modern, individual mother, whose gaze reflects her ambivalence about the unrelenting demands of motherhood through the unique combination of mothering, motherliness, and female agency" (p. 141).

Part three, among the most interesting parts of the book, analyzes the commodification of sleep and emerging infant-centered industry through four axes: the objects (bedding, clothing, toys); the manufacturers; the users (primary, the babies and secondary, the parents or caregivers), and the socio-medical environment. The author argues the analysis of the objects reveals there was a shift from the primary users to the secondary users (mainly the mothers), who became critical players in the developing consumer culture of the second part of the nineteenth century. Infant sleep became a consumer product fashioned by doctors, eager to join the market by endorsing

and developing a variety of recommended sleeping aids, and consumed by those mothers who could afford them. From beds to sleeping clothes, Ventura analyzes a rich variety of products, their images, their medical justifications, and, further, the products that catered to consumer tastes rather than medical advice. Department stores became “self-enclosed feminine metropolises” (p. 163) and shopping the main feminine leisure activity. Mass production was largely controlled by women throughout the nineteenth century, as they took part in it as consumers, producers, and sellers. The book’s last chapter offers us a micro-history of a specific object, the infant bed, including discussion of whether cradles or cribs were to be preferred, what materials they should be made of, how class distinctions were expressed in the various objects, as well as medical health injunctions from the expanding pediatric profession. The last section of the last chapter examines an emerging de-medicalization alongside the medicalization described earlier; parents never completely followed medical advice in their interactions with their babies, as shown in a range of images by modern genre artists that represent such practices as co-sleeping, for example, strictly forbidden by doctors.

In her closing epilogue, Ventura turns to contemporary trends, arguing that the incipient de-medicalization has been countered by a new form of medicalization. Despite the current variety of advice available, most of it is backed by contemporary medical experts. I see this fracturing of medical views and proliferation of medically-advised technologies as marking the shift to the “lifestyle” consumerism of the late twentieth century—where we are encouraged to express who we are through the things that we buy. Ventura traces various contemporary advice to the earlier history of babies’ sleep, emphasizing how contemporary child-care advice has become unequivocally a capitalist product, albeit one exhibiting great diversity. Yet, all this advice has one thing in common: the assumption that infant sleep is the parent’s (and especially the mother’s) responsibility. Ventura’s book should appeal to a broad audience, from art historians to parents who wonder when and why infant sleep became such a “problem” and such a capitalist commodity. As Ventura tells us, approximately forty million Americans and nearly 50 percent of children “suffer” from sleep deprivation. Her book may not offer a solution for infant insomnia, as she herself points out in the afterword, but it offers a fascinating origin story.

Daniela S. Barberis
North Central College
dsbarberis@noctrl.edu

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