In the second part, 'Reverberations', contributors explore the legacy of mediaeval texts and how they shaped post-mediaeval representations of disability. We encounter Chaucer again in a re-working by the Scottish poet Robert Henryson; Shakespeare's Richard III as a construct of early modern narrative; and the afterlife of mediaeval ideas concerning the relationship between the aged female body and disability.

Despite the caveat that the lack of medical topics may disappoint readers of this journal, this volume offers a fresh perspective on the rapidly emerging topic of disability in the Middle Ages. The different approaches employed by literary and historical scholars emerge as one of the stronger points of this collection, in that the tendency of literary criticism to treat disability as a narrative prosthesis is counterbalanced by rigorous historical analysis of sources that uncover the physical bodies of mediaeval persons, making for an interesting, challenging and thought-provoking amalgam of discourse analysis and philological reconstruction. One is, however, left wondering how far the many variant definitions of 'disabled' proposed by the individual contributors reflect more of the specific authors' concepts of disability than attempt an emic understanding of mediaeval notions concerning the consequences of physical or mental difference.

Irina Metzler,
University of Swansea

Thomas F. Baskett (ed. with commentary), *Caesarean Birth: The Work of François Rousset in Renaissance France: A New Treatise on Hysterotomokotie or Caesarian Childbirth*, Ronald M. Cyr (trans.), (London: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 130, £25.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-906985-34-9.

When the French surgeon François Rousset published his treatise on Caesarean birth on living women in 1581, he was not hailed as the great innovator he hoped to be but was criticised by some of his colleagues, such as Ambroise Paré, for, among other things, not taking seriously enough the danger of a fatal haemorrhage. The Parisian master surgeon Jacques Marchant vilified Rousset as the creator of a plague that was sweeping Europe: Caesarean birth that, Marchant claimed, should have been named after Tarquinius, and not one of the Caesars, because Tarquinius delighted in the blood and death of women. What was Rousset's crime? Describing and advocating the performance of the surgical extraction of a living foetus from a living woman. Ronald M. Cyr and Thomas F. Baskett, both of them members of departments of obstetrics and gynaecology, do a real service to medical historians and practitioners by translating, annotating, and contextualising this important and controversial treatise. The illustrations depict title pages of some of the early editions as well as images of surgeons performing the operation. Before Rousset, Caesarean birth had been treated in surgical texts and religious contexts, such as Church Councils, with the assumption that it was strictly a *post-mortem* procedure, to be attempted in order to save the foetus if the mother died during the birth. Rousset wanted to change both the practice and the theoretical thinking about the operation with his treatise. He published it in French (though there was also a German version, published by Bernard Jobin in 1583, and a Latin translation, published in 1586 by Caspar Bauhin) so that practitioners could profit from his advice. Cyr and Baskett offer a very readable translation of the treatise, complemented by a concise introduction and a few historical appendices on Rousset's patrons and the historical situation in sixteenth-century France. There are also ample notes of both an historical and medical nature that allow the reader to juxtapose Rousset's ideas, not only to those of his contemporaries but also to modern medical practice. Of the 228 pages of Rousset's original treatise, only eighteen are devoted to case histories of successful Caesareans, and sixteen to a 'clinical guide'. The bulk of the

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text deals with ideas on expanding the use of the operation, with the optimistic premise that a woman can survive not only one but several Caesareans, and that there is no risk to her fertility from the operation. His tone is passionate and polemical: a rhetorical analysis of this text is not part of Cyr's and Baskett's project but would have yielded some interesting insights into the nature of Renaissance scientific discourse. Rousset's detailed descriptions of numerous surgical interventions related to Caesarean section will be of great interest to anyone wishing to understand the scope of Renaissance medicine. With Caesarean section on living women, an area of obstetrics was inaugurated that moved childbirth away from midwifery and slowly but inexorably into the realm of learned men. Rousset's text was soon eclipsed by Scipione Mercurio's *Commare o raccoglitrice* of 1596. Inspired by Rousset, Mercurio had also travelled widely to interview survivors of Caesarean sections and believed, like Rousset, that the operation was possible with a good outcome for mother and child. But Rousset's treatise, considered a masterpiece by some, a 'plague' by others, was still the first to open up this new surgical field. It is the great merit of Cyr and Baskett to have brought this text to the attention of a modern audience through this very good translation and the study of the operation's feasibility in different time periods contained in the notes.

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski,
University of Pittsburgh

Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *The Marvelous Hairy Girls: The Gonzales Sisters and Their Worlds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. xiii + 248, £18.99/$30.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-300-12733-1.

Maddalena, Francesca and Antonietta were the daughters of Petrus Gonzales (*c*.1537–1618). Along with their father and their brothers, Enrico and Orazio, they exhibited the symptoms of congenital hypertrichosis lanuginosa: much of their bodies, including the face, were covered with hair. Petrus Gonzales was a minor celebrity of his time, and resided at the court of Henri II of France. He was given a superior education, and many a visitor to King Henri's court must have been astonished when the hairy 'wild man' addressed them in Latin. The Gonzales family became popular with painters, scientists, and lovers of curiosities throughout Europe. The family moved to Parma around 1590, under the protection of the dukes and cardinals there. At least one of the children of Petrus Gonzales brought the congenital hypertrichosis into the third generation.

In *The Marvelous Hairy Girls*, her biography of the Gonzales family, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, uses them to explore Renaissance notions of the marvellous and the miraculous. She rightly comments on the family's 'double identity': they were both 'freaks of nature' and regular residents at the courts of various magnates. We learn much of what the Gonzales family might have meant to others, but little of what they made of their own experiences. The scarcity of sources about them means that Professor Wiesner-Hanks needs to bolster this 248-page book with lengthy digressions on Renaissance court life, but this is quite neatly done and the specialist reader is kept interested throughout.

In the book's discussion, Professor Wiesner-Hanks comments that the hairy Gonzales family soon disappeared from history, only to be re-discovered in the late twentieth century. This statement has the disadvantage of being quite untrue. In Victorian times, there was a vigorous discussion of some of the stranger by-products of Darwinism. One of them was the concept of an 'atavism': had a hairy child or a child born with a tail taken one step down the evolutionary ladder? Many ethnologists and medical scientists were busy gathering information about historical cases of congenital hypertrichosis, the Gonzales family

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