leur pratique au niveau social des personnes concernées. Le souci d'éviter le scandale est au cœur de cette pastorale et une relation sexuelle cachée de tous recevra une pénitence secrète tandis que des conjoints vivant leur union au grand jour seront renvoyés à l'évêque et dotés de punitions publiques.

Leurs aventures, sujets des échanges épistolaires d'un clergé, qui peut-être éclairait par ces récits la grisaille d'une vie solitaire, se découpent sur une anthropologie de la parenté enracinée dans la géographie des mœurs du second chapitre. Peu de cas explicites de viol, de bestialité, évoqués dans cette source, note Gagnon; il existe surtout des cas d'union libre et d'inceste révélant les obstacles à la légitimation de certaines unions, comme celles entre un oncle et sa nièce, entre un vieux veuf et sa jeune servante ou les situations incroyables auxquelles conduisaient la découverte d'un empêchement occulte annulant un mariage légitime. Aussi habile conteur qu'historien rigoureux, Gagnon passe en revue ces scénarios dramatiques ou loufoques sans jamais oublier de les situer dans le décor d'une société qui endiguait les énergies sexuelles au profit de solidarités familiales qui s'avèrent également les lieux par excellence du péché.

À partir de ces points de vue de confesseurs, on pourrait s'étonner qu'une si forte dose de sublimation imposée n'ait pas produit davantage d'œuvres civilisatrices, à moins que ces incitations au « sacrifice sexuel » n'aient pas été aussi efficaces que le laisse croire le faible nombre de cas réservés à l'évêque. Pour un abbé Painchaud qui ose contester la pensée des théologiens de son temps sur la masturbation et quelques prêtres rigoristes que l'évêque rappelle à la réalité, combien de curés d'expérience géraient la moralité sans faire appel à leur supérieur ? Combien de fidèles rusaient avec les confesseurs ? Peu importe, Serge Gagnon a su exploiter au maximum cette source épistolaire, démontrant la vertu, sinon de nos ancêtres, du moins de l'analyse qualitative de leurs frasques.

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Jacques Gélis — *La sage-femme ou le médecin. Une nouvelle conception de la vie.* Paris: Fayard, 1988. Pp. 560.

Jacques Gélis's *La sage-femme ou le médecin. Une nouvelle conception de la vie* provides a multifaceted history of childbirth, midwives, and the birth of modern obstetrics in Europe between 1400-1800. It complements an earlier and equally comprehensive study entitled, *L'arbre et le fruit. La naissance dans l'Occident moderne, XVI^e^-XIX^e^ siècle* (1984) that focused on the traditional practices and beliefs surrounding pregnancy, birth and infant care in pre-industrial France. This sources for Gélis's *La sage-femme* are extensive and wide-ranging and include printed as well as archival materials.

The first section of *La sage-femme* analyzes the changing features of rural and urban midwifery. Gélis moves from the specific to the general, from the French case to comparisons with other European countries, most notably, Germany, Holland, Italy, and England in his detailed examination of the changing practice, teaching, and

regulation of midwifery. He recounts the gradual demise of the village *matrone* by the trained midwife and *accoucheur*.

The impetus for the replacement of the *matrone* by the trained birth attendant began in the late fifteenth century in urban areas of northern Europe when secular and religious powers became concerned about allegedly high levels of infant and maternal mortality, infanticide, and abortion. The first wave of legislation focused more on the moral and religious behavior of midwives than their technical skills. In France, royal edicts dictated that all officially elected midwives report abortions, infanticides, and illegitimate births, extricating from the parturient the name of the absent father, if possible. Ecclesiastical regulations required that midwives know how to perform emergency baptisms — an attribute that gained importance after the Wars of Religion, the Thirty Years War and the Fronde. As Gélis puts it, midwives were "domesticated" and subordinated to male secular and religious authorities. They gradually became proxies for state and church serving to prevent abortions and infanticides, reporting illegitimate births, and baptizing infants into the Catholic fold.

It was only with the work of the midwife Marguerite Le Boursier Coundray (b. 1712) that midwives improved their technical skills in any palpable way (112). With government support, Coudray instituted midwifery courses thoughout France in order to ameliorate the appalling level of ignorance she found among the vast majority of village midwives. Even illiterate village women could learn about female anatomy and the mechanics of labor vis-à-vis Coudray's "*machine*" — a realistic model of the birth canal and womb (168). In this section of his book, Gélis gives a detailed account of the recruitment, pedagogy, and politics involved in the promotion of Coundray's methods.

One significant aspect to this history, as Gélis portrays it, was the resistance to Coundray's methods and mission (205, 207-213). In some French villages, especially in the south, surgeons, *matrones*, and laypeople were threatened by midwives trained according to Coundray's precepts and actively opposed their presence. Overall, southern Europe also was less receptive to Coudray's methods than northern Europe.

Another significant aspect of Coundry's legacy in France involved the lack of female "demonstrators". M^{me} Coustenceau's perspicacious proposal of 1790 that envisioned an increase in female demonstrators came too late. "(T)he medicine of men was already in the works and the Revolution was about to render the evolution irreversible" (129). In addition to the lack of female demonstrators and therefore female role models, midwives also found themselves at a disavantage because they were prohibited from forming a corporation independent of the surgeons.

The second section of Gélis's detailed narrative focuses on the rival of both the traditional *matrone* and the newer style midwife: the male *accoucheur*. With his science, instruments, self-assurance and ambition, the newly-emerging corps of male-midwives became the pre-eminent childbirth practioners, eventually sought out by rich and poor alike. These new-style male-midwives trained themselves by means of an informal European-wide network of surgeon-*accoucheurs* who attended each others' courses and exchanged students.

Gélis goes on to document the growth of obstetrical science by reviewing the various reproductive theories circulating in Europe during the period between 1500-1789 and the discoveries and observations that contributed to a more empirically correct and technically efficacious understanding of reproduction and childbirth. For

example, Gélis describes the first known case of artificial insemination overseen by the English physician William Hunter in 1776 (264).

Gélis also discusses the significance of the growing number of practitioners who classified types of birth presentation and kept statistical records of infant and maternal mortality, length of delivery, miscarriages, etc. Such impulses created a learned, complex understanding of birth distinct from the simpler understanding of traditional midwives (278). By the end of the eighteenth century, birth was becoming "medicalized".

In his discussion of the rise of modern obstetrics, Gélis reviews some of the "great obstetrical debates" that occurred across Europe. The first controversy to arise was that over the use of instruments during deliveries and among those who did not dispute their necessity, over whether one should use the forceps or the *levier* (a spatula-like instrument) in cases of cephalic delivery. Another debate that was implicit in all the other debates concerned whether to save the mother or child. Indeed, French obstetrics "claimed to respond to that exigency by general recourse to instruments, and the utilization that it made of the forceps after 1760" in order to save both mother and child. However, *in extremis*, due to their Catholic background, most French *accoucheurs* tried to save the baby in order to baptize it, while the English tended to save the mother. Gélis draws upon these national differences to explain the English tendency to be less interventionist than the French in cases of difficult labor.

In all of these discussions, Gélis ignores the thorny issue of whether or not the *accoucheur* and trained midwife were really "safer" than the traditional village matron by claiming that "in former centuries, birthing was not 'better' or 'worse' than today: it was simply different" (12). This statement glosses over the debate about whether or not modern obstetrical practice has contributed in some measure to the lowering of infant and maternal mortality rates. Statistics for the early modern period are not readily available but do exist. (*See*, for example, Edward Shorter's *Women Bodies*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991, 1st pub. 1982), 98-102, or the more recent work of Lauren Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, New York: Vintage, 1990, 173-174.)

In the third section, Gélis argues that a "new conception of life" best explains the rise of the *accoucheur* with the attendant transformation of the experience of childbirth and the techniques surrounding it. This new mentality influenced all of the other developments he traces and helped to transform childbirth from a ritualized event almost entirely in the hands of women into a medical one, overseen largely by male experts. This new conception of life, as Gélis explains it, privileged the uniqueness of each newborn and his/her right to survive. Traditional birthing rituals were sacrificed in exchange for what was believed would result in safer births. Birth was perceived as a (potentially) dangerous medical event that required expert intervention. Thus, Gélis argues that the refusal to see infant deaths as "acceptable" brought with it the loss of individual and family control over birth. Delivery was reduced to the "application of a technique". "In a sense, the inert '*fantome*' [Coudray's *machine*] becomes a symbol of the desired passivity of the woman." But, he adds, that this passivity responded to the "wish of populations" (160-161).

Thus, Gélis believes that women were active participants in the birth process until the rise of modern obstetrics. The late Mireille Laget would not have agreed. She believed that in the past, "women were dominated and passive in childbirth" (*Annales, E.S.C.*, 1977). Each of these interpretations relies upon data derived from the same or

similar sources. Laget emphasized the obstetrical complications that often occurred as a result of poor health and how traditional birthing beliefs and practices restricted the mother. Gélis, on the other hand, argues that the rituals and comradeship surrounding childbirth empowered the mother. While Laget painted an especially bleak picture of women in childbirth, Gélis's portrait may be overly sanguine.

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Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox, eds. — *Her Own Life: Autobiographical writings by seventeenth-century Englishwomen.* London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Pp. v, 250.

How do women describe their own lives? under what circumstances? how can we use such writings to better understand the lives of women in the past? These are the questions repeatedly raised by this collection of women's autobiographical writings from the seventeenth century. In presenting these works in a format accesible to the student, the editors of this collection have performed a great service to all those interested in women's writings and women's lives in the period.

The first difficulty that is met in producing a collection of this sort is selection. There are many texts available from which the editors selected a dozen. They cover a wide social range — from Lady Anne Clifford and Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, to the Quakers Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers and the putative German princess, Mary Carleton. Some of the selections are predictable, but more of them are unfamiliar; few are available in modern editions. Even with Alice Thornton, whose autobiography is familiar from its Surtees Society edition, the editors choose to print an earlier unpublished version: it is less dramatic, but says more about Thornton's early life, and is often more emotionally compelling. Aside from Mary Carleton, whose *Case* offers her defense against charges of bigamy and deception, the non-elite women included write from a religious perspective: Ann Collins's poetic autobiography is part of her *Divine Songs and Meditations*, while other women range from the Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel to the reluctant Presbyterian Susanna Parr.

Even with the common religious themes, this is a very miscellaneous collection. The editors provide great assistance with their introduction, which discusses women's writing in the period, the political and religious context as well as theoretical issues relating to writing an autobiography. They explain the ideas of both Lacan and the Bristish "self" theorists clearly and concisely; while aware of the role of narrative in constructing experience, the editors note the dangers of collapsing the categories of "life", "fiction", and "text". Finally, the introduction identifies common themes that can connect the very different lives and stories presented — the need of authors to share their experience with others, the common female perspective which includes an experience of oppression and a hostile world, consciousness of writing as an important process and, above all, a concern for truth. The introduction is one of the best to such a collection that I have read: it is clear, succinct (25 pages), and theoretically sophisticated without being pretentious. It provides a useful set of ideas for approaching the material which follows. Each individual selection is preceded by a further brief