



The Midwives Book 1540-1720: The Early-modern British Sex Manual (Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity)

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From the first, the early-modern midwifery manual was a cross-cultural phenomenon. Disseminated in cheap octavo formats and in vernacular translations, they were an accessible source of information and advice on sexual life. In mapping the development of the English-language midwifery manual, Elaine Hobby begins with the first known example, The Byrth of Mankynde (1540); examines developments stimulated by the work of the civil war radical, Nicholas Culpeper; and concludes with a discussion of post-Restoration manuals such as Jane Sharp's The Midwives Book. While tracing their ancient (Greek), medieval (Arabic and European medical models), and contemporary (especially post-Vesalian anatomic) sources, Hobby shows how materials that appeared in early-modern midwifery manuals were borrowed from and by other contemporary works, such as surgeons' manuals, travelogues, and cookery books. Because her analysis of these fascinating texts draws on methods and knowledge drawn from medical history, book history, women's studies, and literary criticism, Hobby's book is an invaluable resource for scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines.



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