unknown at any time or anywhere, but this is a very recent and fragile development. Of special fascination to historians of European imperialism from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century is Cohen's statement on page 141 that "a good case can be made that urban European populations of that period may have been among the nutritionally most impoverished, the most disease-ridden, and the shortest-lived populations in human history". Caucasian chauvinists will find it hard to accept Columbus and Captain John Smith as Typhoid Marys.

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TONY HUNT, *Plant names of medieval England*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1989, 8vo, pp. lvi, 334, £35.00.

The history of English plant-name usage remains to be written. The various stages in the development of English here have been unevenly covered (if covered at all). The obvious starting-point for a delineation of English plant-name history is Peter Bierbaumer's monumental *Der botanische Wortschatz des Altenglischen* (1975–9). Naturally, this work is considered by Tony Hunt in his book on Middle English plant names, as is the relevant information available for the ensuing periods. A welcome recent addition to the comparatively meagre literature on English plant names—which appeared too late to be included in Hunt's book—is Juhani Norri's *Compound plant-names in fifteenth-century English* (Publications of the Department of English, University of Turku, 1988), based on four collections of medicinal receipts.

Ideally, assessments of paradigmatic word history, i.e., of the diachronic development of sets of "synonyms" or equivalents, should be founded on period-specific studies. In other words, the overall chronological perspective cannot be duly evaluated until the synchronic spectra have been clarified. This does not mean, however, that we must start from the beginning in our synchronic analyses, although a reliable diachronic background is of course an asset here.

In spite of the work done and being done (e.g. the publication of the *Middle English Dictionary*), our knowledge of plant names as used in medieval England is deficient. Many relevant texts await scrutiny. Dr Hunt has searched 64 (non-edited) medical texts, dating from *c.*1280 to 1500, which include *synonyma herbarum*. These lists of plant names "were compiled as practical aids to the understanding and making up of medical prescriptions" and they were obviously found useful. The amount of plant-name data unearthed is astounding: over 1,800 "vernacular" names (many of which can be classified as French in form or origin), about 500 of which represent additions to those recorded in the *OED*, covering over 600 plant species. As is well known, the *OED* is particularly weak at citations in the years prior to 1520.

The Introduction, albeit rather short and sketchy, supplies an account of how the material collected has been organized, a discussion of the MSS examined and of the "principal sources of medieval botany" (from Theophrastus onwards), and lists of additions and antedatings for the *OED* and bibliographies. It also touches on problems of plant identification, on synonymy (i.e., plant-name equivalence), the general character of *synonyma* lists, and the motivation of plant nomenclature. As pertinently noted by Hunt (p. xlix), "it is not easy to establish the independent creation of vernacular names".

The main part of the book is a dictionary of the plant names recorded, with the alphabetically arranged Latin terms, as found in the MSS, as headwords. Each item is provided with an identification or identifications (with or without a question mark), in terms of the modern Latin name(s) and the current standard English name(s), and, when applicable, with lists of English synonyms arranged in the sequence of MSS dates (by century).

Two indexes complete the book: one offering English and French names (largely modernized), accompanied by the medieval Latin name(s) as found in the MSS, the other the modern Latin names followed by their medieval counterparts (occasionally, as with *Allium porrum*, an item is misplaced here). Unfortunately, there is no index of the Middle English synonyms as grouped under their modern scientific names. Hence, if you, for instance, want information on Middle English names for orchids, you have to look up *Orchis* (or *Anacamptis*!)

in the "index of botanical names", where the medieval Latin designations take you to the main dictionary, for example to the items *satirion* and *testiculus leporis*, under which the Middle English names are listed, in the case of *satirion* indiscriminately with other possible identifications, such as *Arum* and *Endymion*. Admittedly, the difficulties of identification are considerable—one reason being that the *synonyma* lists, unlike herbals, are most often devoid of descriptive data—but, in my view, Dr Hunt's stance is here too pessimistic and restrictive. The total knowledge available warrants at least some tentative lists of Middle English synonyms (cf. here lists as given by Bierbaumer, sub "Synonymenschlüssel", and in my book, *The English plant names in The Grete Herball,* 1984).

As mentioned above, the plant-name dictionary is filled with additions and antedatings for the *OED;* in some cases however, as with the antedatings of the sixteenth-century *croyt marine* and *remcope*, the sixteenth-century words are not continuations of the medieval forms. There are also notable post-datings, as with *glovewort* (for *Convallaria* and other plants) and *raven's leek* (an orchid name), both attested by Hunt as late as the fifteenth century (previous records only from Old and early Middle English).

Anyone working on the early modern period is fully aware of "the debt of the sixteenth-century English herbalists to their medieval predecessors" and of the fact that many of the plant names with "first" citations in the early printed herbals (or later) will prove to be of Middle English provenance. Dr Hunt's painstaking investigation is a good reminder of that (cf. also Rydén 1984, pp. 34 and 36 f.) and, on the whole, of the rich heritage of English plant names. But it is also obvious that relatively few of the Middle English names are represented in the early modern printed herbals. It is, however, a gross exaggeration to say (p. xlv) that this fact, together with our defective knowledge of Middle English plant names, has "led to a number of misapprehensions concerning the development of English plant nomenclature in more recent times". It has only occasioned "first" datings which later research, for example Dr Hunt's book, has antedated. More antedatings no doubt lie in wait for those with knowledge and time to seek them out.

Tony Hunt's book is chiefly a work of reference, based on a thorough inventory of the highly relevant MSS selected. As such it will prove indispensable for future research on the history of English plant names. It makes us realize the rich variety of Middle English vernacular plant names as well as the bewildering richness of the Latin nomenclature of the time. Dr Hunt has established a firm factual base for the further linguistic evaluation of the vast material collected, in terms of word provenance and word formation, motives of denomination (in intra- and inter-language perspectives), relative frequencies, currency (regional and social), etc.

This nicely produced book extends and solidifies our knowledge of a neglected theme of English-language scholarship. Undoubtedly, many English plant names remain buried in medieval documents, but those brought to light by Dr Hunt significantly add to our knowledge of a fascinating and important section of the word-hoard of the Middle Ages and of an age which "prepared for the work of the great herbalists of the sixteenth century".

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JOHN SYM, *Lifes preservative against self-killing*, with an Introduction by Michael MacDonald, Tavistock Classics in the History of Psychiatry, London and New York, Routledge, 1988, 8vo, pp. liii, 326, £29.95.

Suicides in the early modern period faced a gory, if futile, retribution. A jury verdict of *felo de se* meant that a suicide's land and goods were forfeit to the Crown, his or her body was denied a Christian burial, and instead it was buried in unconsecrated ground, usually at a crossroads, with a stake thrust through it. As was usual in this period, the State and Church combined to enforce a moral position that drew strength from popular abhorrence of suicide. The reprinting, in facsimile, of John Sym's *Lifes preservative against self killing* (1637) allows the Puritan position on suicide to become more widely known. Sym, protected by the Earls of Warwick and installed by them as minister at Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, was a Scottish Calvinist