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biological and cultural. She sees clearly how the medieval world has been used by later writers, from the Renaissance onwards, with their own agendas for reform and their own reasons for writing the medieval world in particular ways. Thanks to Green's work, the medieval medical world is a far more clear, but also more varied, landscape than it was before; medical, social, and gender historians will find her a reliable and always stimulating guide.

Helen King,
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Jane Sharp, *The midwives book or the whole art of midwifry discovered*, edited by Elaine Hobby, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. xliii, 323, illus., £30.00 (hardback 0-19-508652-X).

Around the time that the first female-authored midwifery text was published in English in 1671, "the management of childbirth in early-modern Britain was almost entirely in the hands of women: midwifery manuals, by contrast, were almost all written by men", remarks Elaine Hobby. As Hobby demonstrates in her superb introduction to this modern edition, the midwife Jane Sharp was by no means deterred. Leaving aside any discussion of Jane Sharp's identity, Hobby lets the text speak for itself. Concerned to promote the role of the traditional midwife and to reconcile the age-old conflict between experience and expertise, Jane Sharp stressed the need for both "speculative and practical" knowledge in midwifery. She attacked ignorance in general whether in a man or a woman, addressed her colleagues as "sisters" and noted the individuality of her female patients. She steadfastly refused to accept the Aristotelian inferiority of woman, arguing that, "we women have no more cause to be angry or be ashamed of what Nature has given us than men have

... a woman is not so perfect as a man ... , but the man can do nothing without the woman to beget children." The uniqueness of *The midwives book* also lies in its subversion of literary convention, and Hobby's careful annotation and detailed introduction painstakingly reconstruct this process. Whilst following the traditions of inter-textuality in early-modern midwifery manuals and borrowing from ancient Greek medicine, Jane Sharp also greatly re-worked her sources. Her text covers the traditional range of midwifery topics from the generative parts, the process of conception to sterility and delivery, giving them her own individual and often witty treatment.

The midwives book forms part of a series designed to promote forgotten works by "Women Writers in English". The vulgarization of midwifery texts marked a movement to increase the circulation of medical knowledge. In a similar spirit, Hobby's extensive glossary, footnotes and comprehensive explanation of the humoral theory make the seventeenth-century medical terminology more accessible to modern readers, both students of the history of medicine and non-specialists. The "secrets" of early-modern midwifery, for the modern-day historian, are thus shown to extend beyond the woman's private parts and the mysteries of generation to the plasticity and evolution of the terminology used to describe them over the centuries. Two excellent examples of the problems posed by seventeenth-century language are found in the terms "yard" (rendered as penis) and the more familiar "womb", neither of which translate perfectly into modern-day English. Having noted the need to avoid distorting history by projecting modern knowledge onto the past, Hobby cites the remarkably persistent stereotype of the midwife-witch and positivist "scientific" interpretations of the history of childbirth, which concentrate on the rise of the male midwife, as examples of this. Given such attention to seventeenth-century understandings of midwifery and the body,

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it is surprising that Hobby talks in slightly anachronistic terms of the “gender politics of midwifery manuals”. This is however a minor criticism of the erudite and informative introduction to the text.

Hobby’s carefully annotated edition has surely succeeded in making Jane Sharp’s funny, original and intelligent text available to a wider, modern audience.

Cathy McClive,
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Minta Collins, *Medieval herbals: the illustrative traditions*, The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture, London, British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2000, pp. 334, illus., £45.00 (hardback 0-7123-4638-4), £19.95 (paperback 0-7123-4641-4).

This nicely produced volume offers both more and less than its title promises. Begun as a dissertation on a group of late medieval herbals in Latin and French, including Wellcome 626, it studies the iconography of plants in a wide variety of manuscripts, from the Johnson papyrus, Wellcome 5753, written in Greek around AD 400, via Arabic manuscripts to Latin manuscripts of the fifteenth century such as BL Sloane 2020, the Carrara Herbal. This allows the author to trace links across cultures, and to compare plant drawings for the same text produced in northern Iraq, Constantinople, or Burgundy. Her major aim is to track the possible survival of a classical tradition of botanical illustration, insisted upon by Charles Singer, over the centuries from Crateuas, fl. 90 BC, and Dioscorides, fl. AD 60, to medieval France and Italy. This she does extremely well, showing how artists modified earlier drawings or inserted figures, and warns against any easy schematism or romantic idealization of the Greeks. She demonstrates the complexity of the herbal tradition, both

in its text and illustrations, and future editors of Dioscorides or the Apuleius herbal, or indeed classical philologists interested in transmission, will neglect her findings at their peril.

They are backed up by precise personal observation of most of the manuscripts here recorded, often challenging accepted views. Her inspection of Bodley 130 leads her to conclude that many of its most lifelike depictions were made at a date much later than the original illustrations. But she does not commit herself to a date, and the famous blackberry (fig. 51), one of those suspected of being retouched, does not seem to show the same signs of later reworking as does the spurge (pl. xviii). But so well based appear most of Dr Collins’ observations that only further autopsy is going to disprove others that might seem more controversial.

But those who are looking for a history of herbals and herbal texts will be disappointed by the intensity of the focus on plant illustrations. Non-illustrated texts are deliberately excluded unless they show affinities with others that are or were. One might regret, too, a failure to compare the tradition of zoological or of anatomical illustration, e.g. in the Niketas codex and its offspring, which can also contribute to the discussion about the development of realism and drawing from life that underlies much of Dr Collins’ argument. She raises questions about patronage and the individual abilities of artists, but her conclusion is too brief to do them full justice.

The great merit of this book is its willingness to go outside the traditional linguistic categories of editors to look at visual representations of the same plants in culturally linked, and then divided, areas. Dr Collins encourages her readers to think big, even if at times her eye and her notes are fixed firmly on minutiae. I have learned a great deal from her, and I shall constantly return to the beautiful illustrations and to