



Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare's England (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World)

Caroline Bicks

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At the intersections of early modern literature and history, Shakespeare and Women's Studies, Midwiving Subjects explores how Shakespearean drama and contemporary medical, religious and popular texts figured the midwife as a central producer of the body's cultural markers. In addition to attending most Englishwomen's births and testifying to their in extremis confessions about paternity, the midwife allegedly controlled the size of one's tongue and genitals at birth and was obligated to perform virginity exams, impotence tests and emergency baptisms. The signs of purity and masculinity, paternity and salvation were inherently open to interpretation, yet early modern culture authorized midwives to generate and announce them. Midwiving Subjects, then, challenges recent studies that read the midwife as a woman whose power was limited to a marginal and unruly birthroom community and instead uncovers the midwife's foundational role, not only in the rituals of reproduction, but in the process of cultural production itself. As a result of recent changes in managed healthcare and of increased attention to uncovering histories of women's experiences, midwives - past and present - are currently a subject of great interest. This book will appeal to readers interested in Shakespeare as well as the history of women and medicine.



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