Making Babies in Early Modern England

Early modern English people were obsessed with making babies. In this fascinating new history, Leah Astbury traces this preoccupation through manuscript letters, diaries, recipe books and almanacs, revealing its centrality to family life. Information was plentiful in guides on the burgeoning fields of domestic conduct and midwifery, as well as in the many satirical ballads focused on sex, marriage and family. Astbury utilises this broad source base to explore all aspects of early modern childbearing, from conception to the months after delivery. She demonstrates that, while religious and cultural ideals dictated that women carry out all of this work, men were engaged in its practice through directing medical decisions. With the entire household including servants, wetnurses and other unexpected actors included in the project, childbearing can be situated within the histories of gender, medicine, social status, family and record-keeping. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

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