Her “Frigid Herbs”

The “Secrets” of Contraceptives and Reproductive Health Networks in Early Modern England
Content Warning: abortion, miscarriage, menstruation, infant death, female body
“I must fill up this osier cage of ours / With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers. / The earth that’s nature’s mother is her tomb. / What is her burying grave, that is her womb; / And from her womb children of divers kinds / We sucking on her natural bosom find, / Many for virtues excellent, / None but for some, and yet all different. / O, fickle is the powerful grace that lies / In plants, herbs, stones and their true qualities...Within the infant rind of this weak flower / Poison hath residence, and medicine power.”

*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II.3.7-24
Legality and Disorder
An Act to prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children.

1624
Biological Life vs. Personhood

Anne, Lady Pope with her children, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger

Raphael Santi, Madonna of the Pinks, 1506, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London
Medical Theory

Adam and Eve, 1504, engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)
How could you tell a woman was pregnant?

You couldn’t.
Mugwort

Rosemary

Wormwood/Artemisia
Sage

Saffron

Pennyroyal
Privacy and Secrets

Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612-1613

Sofonisba Anguissola, *The Game of Chess*, 1555
Midwives’ Manuals

Nicholas Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, 1651

Jane Sharp, *The Midwives’ Book*, 1671
Receipt Books: More than just a cookbook

Receipt Book of Penelope Jephson [manuscript], 1671, 1674/5. Courtesy of Folger Shakespeare Library, LUNA V.a.396
“The Lady Allins Water”
Cookbook of Susanna Packe, 1674 V.a.215

“Lady Allens Water”
Receipt Book of Jane Staveley, 1693
“In times of Heathenism when men had found out any excellent Herb, &c. they dedicated it to their gods, As the Bay-tree to Apollo, the Oak to Jupiter, the Vine to Bacchus, the Poplar to Hercules: These the Papists following as their Patriarchs, they dedicate them to their Saints, as our Ladies Thistle to the Blessed Virgin, St. Johns Wort to St. John...Alas poor Fools, I am sorry for their folly, and grieved at their Blasphemy; God send them the rest of their Age, for they have their share of Ignorance already; O! Why must ours be Blasphemous because the Heathens and Papists were Idolatrous? certainly they have read so much in old rusty Authors, that they have lost al their Divinity...I never read or heard of such Blasphemy.”

Nicholas Culpeper, *The English physitian enlarged*
With strong Alle
arts of rubrum