independent Iberian translations (together with
the 1988 edition of the Italian original text)
now constitute an important and welcome
cluster of texts for anybody interested in the
vernacularisation of scientific knowledge, the
history of medical books, the emergence of
medical terminology in sixteenth-century
Iberia, and the complex impact of translations
on a core text.

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Teresa Huguet-Termes, Jon Arrizabalaga
and Harold J. Cook (eds), Health and
Medicine in Hapsburg Spain: Agents,
Practices, Representations, Medical History
Supplement No. 29 (London: The Wellcome
Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at
UCL, 2009), pp. vi + 158,
£35.00/€40.00/$60.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-
0-85484-128-8.

Anyone wishing to take the pulse (so to speak)
of the history of early modern Spanish
medicine would do well to start with this slim
but valuable book. Its half-dozen essays
provide a well-rounded sample of recent work
in a field that, as Harold Cook stresses in his
introduction, still remains largely unnoticed in
the English-reading world.

María Luz López Terrada opens the
collection by reviewing the efforts of various
institutions to police the health sector in
sixteenth-century Valencia. She highlights the
lively diversity of this marketplace, and
suggests that competition and confusion
among different authorities – city and
viceregal governments, guilds, and the
Protomedicato, or special royal tribunal –
wound up encouraging medical pluralism.

That one of the physicians whom King Philip
II (1556–98) named Protomedico proved to be
a committed Paracelsian leads appropriately to
the next chapter, Mar Rey Bueno’s overview
of alchemical activities in Philip’s court. She
argues that, while the King showed little
interest in the occult (unlike his relative
Rudolf II), he was certainly willing to employ
such chemists for their skills in distilling
waters and devising other remedies. From this
markedly therapeutic (and Lullian) alchemy
one moves on to witches, or rather, the
saludadores or folk healers, whose many
attributes included the ability to detect
witches, along with other innate skills, such as
the power to cure rabies with their saliva.
María Tausiet has unearthed numerous
intriguing references to these ambiguous
figures, who, not surprisingly, were often
accused of practising the same sort of black
magic they claimed to offer protection against.

Teresa Huguet-Termes then focuses on
efforts to reorganise the medical sector of
Madrid following its designation as capital of
the Hispanic empire in 1561. While the
runaway growth of the city’s population
predictably frustrated these reforms, she joins
a larger historiographic consensus in finding
little to distinguish Counter-Reformation
initiatives in public healthcare from those
which prevailed in the Protestant north.

Mónica Bolufer also keeps the broader
European picture in mind while tracing the
changing representations of women within a
series of texts which ranged from Juan Huarte
de San Juan’s best selling The Examination of
Wits of 1575, to the enlightened cleric Benito
Feijoo’s essay ‘The Defence of Women’,
published in 1726. She discerns a few
important shifts amid underlying continuity in
views of women within learned culture, and
suggests that Iberian discourse on sexual
difference evolved closely in tandem with
medical writing outside the peninsula. Jon
Arrizabalaga closes the volume with a portrait
of Rodrigo de Castro (c.1546–1627), a
Portuguese physician of Jewish background
who re-converted to the faith of his ancestors
after moving to Hamburg. There he achieved
prominence for two publications, a handbook
on female diseases and a weighty guide to
medical ethics. Arrizabalaga places particular
emphasis on the latter, which he sees as
marking an important step forward in the self-
consciousness of the higher ranks of the healing profession, while it defended Jewish (as well as Islamic and Scholastic) contributions to the long-term development of medical knowledge.

The reader of these essays will come away with a strong sense, not only of the dynamism that characterises the small but energetic community of historians of medicine and science in Spain, but also of how, thanks to their efforts, many old clichés are now biting the dust. One certainly bids them well. At the same time, the sympathetic observer may wish that they had taken a few more risks in their analysis, which is heavily outweighed by description. Sacrificing any of the rich empirical detail that is so often found in early modern Spanish documentation would obviously be a mistake. But leavening that detail with a sharper and more sustained analytical effort would help attract greater attention to a sphere of historical research that – as this volume clearly demonstrates – deserves to be much better known.

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Our understanding of the complexities of lay engagement with healthcare and medicine in early modern England has been illuminated in recent years by the investigations of literary scholars in a field formerly the preserve of medical and social historians. The author of the present work brings the techniques of textual analysis and take-no-prisoners style of academic literary studies to bear on her chosen theme with somewhat predictable results. There is a rich seam of fruitful insights buried in this study but readers of weaker constitution may be forgiven for giving up before encountering it.

The central aim of the work is to analyse surviving evidence of female ownership and use of printed vernacular herbals in England in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to shed light on the place of such products in women’s lives and their relationship with established (male) medical authority. The date range in the title is slightly misleading as these are the approximate outer dates of the herbal publications themselves – from William Turner’s A New Herball (1551) to John Parkinson’s Theatrum Botanicum (1640) – rather than the covering dates of the author’s body of evidence: she helpfully lists the twenty-four individual pieces of evidence of female ownership and use dating from c.1597 to 1689 in an appendix. Principal among these are the well-known memorials of Margaret Hoby, Grace Mildmay and Elizabeth Isham. Laroche’s discussion of these three women’s interaction with the printed herbals in their possession, and that of the other less well-documented female inscribers of printed herbals in her survey, is subtle and suggestive, but in the absence of much supporting evidence there is little she can offer by way of general conclusion, apart from the obvious fact that these interactions were varied, depending as they did on a range of differing personal, social and geographic circumstances. One cannot avoid feeling that closer engagement with the much larger body of evidence provided by female-authored and inscribed manuscript recipe books of the period would have served the author well here, whilst admitting that this would necessarily have diluted Laroche’s forensic focus.

The last chapter of the book is a discussion of the textual and other influences in the construction of Isabella Whitney’s A Sweet Nosgay, or Pleasant Posy (1573), a socioeconomic satire on contemporary London using herbal texts as source material. Laroche’s treatment is again sensitive and, in the view of this reviewer, persuasive in locating the seminal influences in