

The Natural Mother:
Motherhood, Patriarchy, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relationship between motherhood and power in seventeenth-century England. While historians have traditionally researched the role of mothers within the family unit, this study explores the more public and discursive roles of motherhood. It argues that the various threads of discourse surrounding maternity betray a common desire to circumscribe and condemn maternal authority, as this authority was threatening to masculinity and patriarchal rule. It finds that maternity was frequently cited as harmful and dangerous; household conduct books condemned the passionate and irrational nature of maternal love and its deleterious effects upon both mother and child. Furthermore, various images of ‘unnatural motherhood’ reveal larger concerns over social disorder. Sensationalistic infanticide and monstrous birth stories in cheap print display contemporary fears of lascivious, scolding, and unregulated women who were subversive to patriarchal authority and thus threatened the social status quo. The female reproductive body similarly threatened masculinity; an analysis of midwifery manuals show that contemporary authors had to reconcile women’s reproductive power with what they believed to be an inferior corporeal body. This study ends with a discussion of the representation of mothers in published funeral sermons as these mothers were textually crafted to serve as examples of ‘good mothering,’ offering a striking comparison to the ‘unnatural mothers’ presented in other sources. Motherhood in seventeenth-century England, then, involved a great deal more than the relationship between mother and child. It was a cultural site in which power was contested, and a site in which authors expressed anxiety over the irrational female mind and the unregulated, sexual female body.

DEDICATION

For my children.

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I began this project on early modern motherhood while I was pregnant with my first child, and I completed it with a rambunctious preschooler and toddler in tow. I often found the balance between my personal motherhood and my academic study of it difficult, and I credit the completion of this study to the encouragement of my advisor, Retha Warnicke. Dr. Warnicke not only supported this project in the years it took to come to fruition, but she gently encouraged my progress when I had become overwhelmed in my duties as a mother. For that, and for the many years of patient and kind mentorship, I thank her.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

MOTHERHOOD, GENDER, AND POWER

In 1647 Margaret Moore of Sutton, Cambridgeshire confessed to witchcraft. Her apprehension was part of a relatively large sweep of the area: between 1646 and 1647, twenty individuals- mostly women- were prosecuted for witchcraft.¹ As Malcolm Gaskill has claimed, this particular witch-hunt was likely political. The parish in which Margaret Moore lived was fraught with tension as individuals were in dispute over the drainage and enclosure of the commons. During a time of national political discord and Civil War, drainage was associated with Parliamentary allegiance, and consequently some individuals accused were likely royalist supporters whose arrests prevented them from joining the king's army.²

Margaret, a relatively poor, married woman, was swept up in this political upheaval. She was accused of killing a man, Thomas Nix, to whom she owed money for the purchase of a pig, as well as killing the cattle of two other men. Margaret confessed to committing these crimes through maleficium. As Gaskill explained, she could have very well believed herself to be a witch, although the torture tactic of exhaustion may have led to delusions and fantasies of witchcraft.³ What was also very likely in the case of

¹ The tale of Margaret Moore is recounted here from Malcolm Gaskill's "Witchcraft and Power in Early Modern England: the Case of Margaret Moore" in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. By Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker (London: University College London Press, 1994), 125-145.

² *Ibid.*, 132.

³ *Ibid.*, 133.

Margaret Moore, however, was that she was experiencing severe grief over the loss of her children. Margaret had had four children, three of whom died in infancy. One night she had a dream, or a fantasy, that her deceased children returned to her. As the court records describe:

She herd a voice Calling to hir after this Manner, Mother Mother to which the said Margaret answered sweet Children where are you what would you have with me & thay demanded of hir drinke w[hi]che the said Margaret Answered that she had noe drinke then theire Came a voice which the said Margeret Conveaved to to be hir third Child & demanded of hir hir soule, otherwise she would take a-way the life of hir 4th Child which was the only Child she had left to which voyce the said Margeret made answer that rather then shee would lose hir last Child she would Consent unto the giving a-way of hir soule & then a spirit in the liknes of a naked Child appeared unto hir & suckt upon hir Body.⁴

Margaret Moore sold her soul to the devil to save her last child. As she claimed, she breastfed a spirit, or familiar, which then went on to kill Thomas Nix. Margaret's story, then, is not just one of the horrors of the early modern witch craze: it is one of maternity and power. As Gaskill noted, the case of Margaret Moore was ultimately about a grieving mother who wished to feel a sense of power in the wake of devastating losses. Selling her soul for her child was ultimately "a metaphysical extension of the principle of laying down life for love, and therefore represents an extension of power, whereby the soul is reified in an imaginary sphere as something with which she is able to bargain."⁵

Margaret's case, then, contains several threads: while it foremost concerns maternal love and grief, it also offers an inverted view of the 'good mother' in early modern England. Margaret loved her children, but she also loved them too much, forsaking God for the

⁴ Ibid., 133. Original record, Camb UL, EDR, E12 1647/14.

⁵ Ibid., 138.

devil (as we will see, an action contemporaries often worried about). Margaret also suckled a naked infant, which to her probably represented her deceased child, but which authorities named as a dangerous familiar. This action, the suckling of a spirit, likewise represented the inversion of good motherhood; as this study will discuss, breastfeeding was central to notions of good motherhood, and Margaret Moore's nursing of a spirit thus turned natural motherhood onto its head. The case of Margaret Moore is ultimately emblematic of the tension between motherhood and patriarchal authority, as a tragic personal loss- the loss of children- became associated with 'bad motherhood' and thus the inversion of gender norms, eventually even leading to an association with maleficium and murder. The witchcraft case of Margaret Moore, then, offers an interesting example of the relationship between motherhood, patriarchy, and power in early modern England.

This dissertation will explore the complex connections among motherhood, authority, and patriarchy in seventeenth-century England. Motherhood was a social role that was inherently political: through maternity women possessed a degree of power and autonomy that was in tension with the comprehensive patriarchy of Post-Reformation England. The avenues for autonomy and authority that maternity offered women necessarily destabilized notions of masculinity- and thus gender hierarchies- that were fundamental to English social order. The regulation of maternity thus proved imperative for the proper ordering of the sexes. While 'good mothering' denoted a good woman who fulfilled prescribed gender norms, illicit maternity, from poor mothering to bastardy and infanticide, indicated a subversion of patriarchy. As a consequence the maternal body, both literal and figurative, was deemed a threatening site that contemporaries spent a great amount of time attempting to circumscribe, control, and condemn. Motherhood,

then, did not merely concern the relationship between mother and child; it was emblematic of order or disorder in Post-Reformation English society.

This study explores motherhood as a specific site of power implementation and negotiation. Although the role of mother is most often associated with the family, it also possessed a unique public presence through a variety of discourses that examined the dangerous nature of motherhood, from the dangers of maternal love to the inferiority of women's reproductive bodies. It will begin with a discussion of early modern patriarchy and the relationship between patriarchy, masculinity, wives and mothers, and then turn to analyzing motherhood at home; that is, the norms and expectations of a good mother and the culture of maternity as understood through records of women's experiences. This will shed light not only on the role of motherhood within English patriarchy, but also on the gender politics that existed within the ostensible "little commonwealth" of the private, Protestant home. It will also discuss contemporary views of the body, pregnancy, and childbirth, showing how the corporeal body was culturally constructed to suit patriarchal prescription, ultimately becoming a contested site of power. The study will also analyze the more public usages of motherhood, focusing upon representations of maternity in popular print. By analyzing both "good mothers" in printed funeral sermons and "bad mothers" in sensational stories of infanticide and monstrous births, these sections will seek to understand how maternity was used and manipulated in printed discourse in order to serve larger social purposes. By analyzing these seemingly disparate threads of maternity, from issues of social control to gender politics from the home to the public sphere, this study hopes to offer a snapshot of the very public and political role of motherhood in early modern England.

Maternity is both a biological state and a cultural construct, and consequently the ideas and expectations surrounding it are often naturalized, making the politics involved in this social role obscure. In the past few decades, however, women's and gender historians have begun to unpack the gender prescriptions attached to the role of mother. While these analyses have been important, they have often limited their scope to a mother's role within the family unit. This project seeks to expand the analysis of early modern English motherhood by recognizing its important public presence and its inherently political nature. Because maternity was the most recognizable aspect of a woman's femininity while simultaneously offering women a sense of authority, the role of mother was transformed into a site of tension, negotiation, and anxiety; one that furthermore served as a public forum for issues concerning gender hierarchies, masculinity, and social disorder.

While at the outset this study may appear to concern women, it foremost concerns the social relationship between the sexes, as gender is a mutually dependent category. As Joan Scott has noted, gender is defined as the "social organization of sexual difference," and scholars have used gender analysis to bypass the politics involved in "women's history," a discipline that has been criticized for being limiting.⁶ As an abundance of scholars, foremost Joan Scott, have argued, femininity cannot exist without masculinity; one category is not fully explained until it has been juxtaposed with its opposite. Consequently, an analysis of gender is not simply an analysis of women. It is a discussion of the mutuality and interdependence of the categories of male and female, and of the

⁶ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2

roles, expectations and ideas embedded within the cultural schema that constructs the masculine and the feminine. Because motherhood is the most obvious, perhaps most emblematic, difference between the sexes and of what constituted femininity versus masculinity, it was invested with significant power. Motherhood was a particularly contentious cultural site in which power was contested, in which men and women sought to install order through authority and hierarchy, and in which this authority was constantly ambiguous and fraught with tension.

Although primarily a cultural analysis of motherhood, this study will rely heavily upon theories of gender of power. In her analysis of gender and power, Joan Scott called for a post-structural analysis of gender relying upon Derrida's deconstruction of seemingly dichotomous pairs to reveal their underlying instability, and on Foucault's notion that power is decentralized, unequal and discursively produced.⁷ This project will use Joan Scott's definition of politics as "the process by which plays of power and knowledge constitute identity and experience. Identities and experiences are variable phenomena in this view, discursively organized in particular contexts or configurations."⁸ The issue of power discussed here, then, also relies upon Foucault's notion that discourses produce power, albeit an unstable, decentralized type. On the relationship between power, truth, and the social body, Foucault argued that "there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association."⁹ And, on the analysis of power, he has

⁷Ibid., 42.

⁸Ibid., 5.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Selected Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 93.

argued that “one must rather conduct an *ascending* analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been- and continue to be- invested, colonized, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc....”¹⁰ This study’s exploration of power is influenced by Foucault’s, as this dissertation analyzes the different mechanisms, threads, and discourses of power that ultimately help to construct a truth in early modern England: the truth, of course, being the patriarchal ideology of the early modern social body.

This study often refers to the presence of motherhood within the public sphere, which loosely refers to Jürgen Habermas’ concept of a bourgeois public sphere, “a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed...”¹¹ Habermas’ concept of the bourgeois public sphere was essentially a public forum for the critical exchange of ideas, one that was engaged in and monitored by the people rather than presented by the state before the people. This public sphere emerged alongside the creation of the modernized state and proto-industry, and was carried out by a new class of peoples, the “ ‘capitalists,’ the merchants bankers, entrepreneurs, and manufacturers” whose economic interests were largely at odds with the mercantilist state.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹ Thomas McCarthy, Introduction to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* by Jürgen Habermas, trans. By Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1989), xi.

¹² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 23.

Habermas' bourgeois sphere is specific to a time and place, particularly the rise of industrialization in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of Western Europe, and concerns the Marxist legitimation of a new economic class that was both economically and politically at odds with the royalist states. This definition, of course, may not be readily applied to this study. Rather, this study uses the term 'public sphere' to refer to the nascent press of early seventeenth-century England. Like the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere, this sphere allowed for the exchange and promulgation of ideas. Unlike the bourgeois public sphere, the sources analyzed here were not created for the purpose of legitimizing a new economic class or challenging state authority. Rather, this study will explore the ways in which sources supported the social status quo; printed sources tell us a great deal about prevailing ideas about gender, patriarchy, and motherhood and the tensions within these social structures. And, unlike Habermas' sphere of neo-capitalists, the main priorities of the writers and readers of the sources did not have to do with the economic transformation of the state. While we cannot know the exact readership of the sources discussed below, we do know that some of the information contained probably found its way into oral culture, making some of the ideas presented available to literate and illiterate alike.

Printed materials will thus comprise a large portion of my sources: advice literature on marriage and household management, manuals on midwifery and the human body, funeral sermons, and broadsides, pamphlets and ballads concerning infanticide and monstrous births are all important sources in understanding the place of the domestic, maternal body in English culture. These sources circulated within the public sphere of seventeenth-century England and will be used as an indicator of shared beliefs and

expectations concerning gender and social order. While the above sources are demonstrative of social prescription, available diaries, autobiographies, commonplace and advice books authored by women will demonstrate the lived realities of motherhood. These personal records indicate the extent of acceptance or rejection of gendered expectations, and will further illustrate the different interpretations of motherhood between men and women. By utilizing these seemingly disparate sources, this study pieces together various threads of maternity in early modern English culture to demonstrate its larger political presence.

The politics of motherhood is a topic that has not been fully explored, although a great deal of literature exists on the everyday experience of early modern motherhood, largely as a result of historians' increased interest in the family beginning in the 1970s. The most relevant work is Patricia Fildes' edited volume, *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*. While Adrian Wilson's chapter, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation" is important to Chapter Three of this dissertation, Patricia Crawford's chapter, "The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England" lays the foundation for our basic understanding of the experience of early modern maternity (much of the research on early modern motherhood, in fact, was conducted by Crawford).¹³ The history of motherhood, she pointed out, was not a positive one, with historians like Lawrence Stone and Philippe Aries citing cold, distant, and even abusive relationships between mothers and children.¹⁴

¹³ See Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation," in Valerie Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Preindustrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London: Routledge, 1990), 68-107.

¹⁴ Patricia Crawford, "The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England" in *Women as Mothers in Preindustrial England*, 4.

The rise of women's history, however, brought an increased interest in women's experiences, including motherhood, and consequently helped to rid early modern maternity of such negative views. Maternity in particular, Crawford argued, helped scholars to more fully explore women's lives in isolation from men's, as "the history of maternity, which comprises both childbirth and female-specific child rearing, rightly focuses primarily on women, and secondarily on men's observations and directives."¹⁵ Crawford's chapter, then, explores early modern women's everyday experience in raising children. As she explained, "Women's maternal experiences were varied. Wanted, unwanted, biological and social, their motherhood was mediated by their social level and influenced by their family situation, economic circumstances, and religious beliefs."¹⁶ Women from the higher ranks of society typically married between the ages of 20 and 22 and would commonly hire a wet nurse, and consequently "more emphasis was placed on their reproductive labour."¹⁷ The women from the middling and lower ranks of society typically married later- around age 26- and on average could expect to be pregnant every few years. For the poor members of English society- roughly 1/3 of the population- every child meant more economic struggle.¹⁸ Mothers were typically responsible for their children's education until the age of seven, and after that time families with the means

¹⁵ Ibid., 5. Women's history, like the chapter discussed above, laid the foundations for gender. But in the twenty-five years since Crawford's publication, the historiographical trend- including the focus of this dissertation- is the relationship between genders rather than a sole focus upon one or the other.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

would send their male children to a school or place his education with a tutor. The education of girls would continue to be under the directive of the mother.¹⁹

While motherhood was considered to be ultimately under patriarchal authority, the culture of maternity, Crawford noted, was distinctly female. Childbirth was considered a female rite of passage, and women exchanged information about conception, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.²⁰ Crawford, furthermore, cited the importance of maternity to women and the authority they claimed from it, a point that is further explored in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford's *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* offers a brief survey of maternal roles and responsibilities. They foremost discussed the different experiences of single versus married mothers, as unmarried mothers were socially stigmatized as 'bastard bearers' and often punished in the House of Correction. Some parishes sent illegitimate children out to nurse, although some were kept with the mother.²¹ Most women, however, were married at the time of childbirth, although it was not uncommon for women to be pregnant at the time of marriage. Mendelson and Crawford likewise noted childbirth as a rite of passage, but they also noted the contested role of the midwife, as some wives were at odds with their husbands over the choice of their midwife, a challenge to patriarchal authority that is explored further in this dissertation. The authors also noted the varying experience of maternity based upon

¹⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁰ Ibid., 19-24.

²¹ Sarah Mendelson & Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 148-149. The significance of wet nursing will be discussed further in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

social levels. While the upper echelons of society were less hands-on, largely supervisors, of their children's upbringing, the poorest women could only focus on ensuring their children's survival. In these circumstances, "much of a woman's mothering energy was devoted to ensuring the sheer physical survival of her children in adverse material circumstances. At various stages of her children's lives, she might be endeavouring to provide for them so that they would be not apprenticed out by the parish, or placed in service against her wishes."²² While the experience of motherhood varied, it commonly "played a large role in constructing women's subjectivities."²³

Some scholars have focused more closely on reevaluating the emotional nature of mother/child relationships. Linda Pollock's, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*, rescued views of parent-child relationships from being regarded as emotionally distant, cold, and commonly abusive.²⁴ Pollock used diary and autobiographical accounts to show that parents loved their children throughout the centuries, regardless of social station. While sixteenth and seventeenth-century writings may not have been as verbose in their affections, Pollock argued that writing conventions that limited capabilities for expression should not overshadow actions.²⁵ Parents desired to guide and protect their children, they were anxious and worried over their illnesses, and they grieved when a child died. While some historians have argued that a high child mortality rate led to a personal detachment, Pollock countered that the high mortality rate

²² Ibid., 157.

²³ Ibid., 164.

²⁴ This view was largely a result of Lawrence Stone's grim account of the early modern family in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern England* (1977). See Linda A Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²⁵ See "Issues Concerning Evidence" in Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 68-95.

led parents to worry more over sickness.²⁶ And, as the practice of wet-nursing has been used as evidence for emotional detachment, Pollock offered examples of parents' frequent visits to and concern for their wet-nursed child.²⁷ Finally, Pollock rejected the notion that children were commonly treated brutally. Few of her sources relay instances of abuse or mistreatment, while many illustrate the joy parents took in their children.

Patricia Crawford's *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* offers essays, some previously published, important to the understanding of early modern maternity. Her essay, "'The Sucking Child': Adult Attitudes to Child Care in the First year of Life in Seventeenth-Century England" picks up where Pollock's work left off, exploring some of the more subtle expectations and experiences of childcare.²⁸ Crawford noted the important role of childcare, beginning with identifying conception and pregnancy as sin, including too frequent or zealous copulation that could lead to a deformed child.²⁹

Crawford also discussed infant feeding in depth. Mothers were discouraged from breastfeeding the first day of life, as the colostrum was considered foul for the infant. In general, though, breastfeeding was considered an important part of biological and spiritual maternal care. Contemporaries argued that breastfeeding promoted maternal love and possessed important biblical precedents, making it a topic in which ministers readily

²⁶ Ibid., 124-128

²⁷ Ibid., 215-218.

²⁸ Patricia Crawford, "'The Sucking Child': Adult Attitudes to Child Care in the First Year of Life in Seventeenth-Century England" in *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (London: Pearson Longman, 2004), 140-174.

²⁹ Ibid., 144-145. The importance of a mother's behavior and imagination upon a fetus is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five of this study.

involved themselves.³⁰ At the other end of the discussion about breastfeeding was the use of wet-nurses, a practice typically only used by the elite, but which stirred up a great deal of debate as contemporaries cited the possibility of ill use by wet nurses, or the chance that the use of a wet nurse would lead to a lack of maternal affection for the child.³¹ In sum, Crawford argued that mothers cared deeply for their children and that the reason for “...historians’ judgment of mismanaged child care is their uncritical attitude to the misogynist character of much of the surviving literature.”³² It is this literature that much of this study is concerned with.

Many works concerning motherhood in early modern England have discussed representations of motherhood from a literary perspective, analyzing maternal roles in literature and drama. This is the approach by Kathryn Moncrief and Kathryn M. McPherson’s edited work, *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England* which argued that “maternity-both public and private, physically bodied and enacted- must be performative and that the maternal body, as a result, functions as a potent space for cultural conflict, a site for imagination and contest”³³. Michelle Ephraim’s chapter, “Hermione’s Suspicious Body: Adultery and Superfetation in *The Winter’s Tale*” discussed Shakespeare’s many allusions to Hermoine’s ‘superfetation,’ or the belief that a woman could carry two fetuses by two different men. This was commonly associated

³⁰ Ibid., 147-150.

³¹ Ibid., 147-148. The debate surrounding breastfeeding was an important part of the politics surrounding early modern motherhood, and is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five

³² Ibid., 159.

³³ Kathryn Moncrief & Kathryn M. McPherson, ed., *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1.

with adultery and women's inordinate lust, which necessarily held important consequences for paternity and patriarchy. Furthermore, the author associated superfetation with monstrous births, arguing that "superfetation is yet another tale of the monstrous: a fiction of the pregnant woman's excessive lust as well as the public's ability to police this behavior."³⁴ This challenge of patriarchy by women's corporeal bodies, including monstrous births, is a theme examined in more depth in Chapter Five.

While Chapter Three of this study explores the birthing chamber as a site of female ritual and gathering, Janelle Jenstad's "'Smock Secrets': Birth and Women's Mysteries on the Early Modern Stage" discussed the presence- or lack there of- of childbirth in early modern theater. According to Jenstad, the absence of childbirth and its treatment on-stage lends to its denigration by male playwrights. Because male authors would not have known what typically occurred within this "gynocentric space", childbirth was almost always presented off-stage. The birth was also often parodied, recreating this important female ritual in which "...the male gaze frames, controls, degrades the gathering...the functions of this penetration of the childbed chamber is to dispel the fear of women's power over men by laughing at them."³⁵ The politics of childbirth presented on-stage thus lends to the discussion of women's spaces, sites of authority and patriarchy discussed herein. While the essays in this volume often complement the ideas presented in this study, they largely analyzed representations of

³⁴ See Michelle Ephraim, "Hermione's Suspicious Body: Adultery and Superfetation in *The Winter's Tale*" in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, ed. By Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 58.

³⁵ Janelle Jenstad, "'Smock-secrets': Birth and Women's Mysteries on the Early Modern Stage" in *Performing Maternity*, 92,

maternity in literature. This dissertation will further expand the idea of maternity as “a potent space for cultural conflict,” applying to the family and the public sphere.

Toni Bowers’ *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760*, similarly explored the role of politics, authority, and motherhood in largely eighteenth-century literature. In particular, she discussed ‘monstrous’ and ‘unnatural’ motherhood in the works of Eliza Haywood and Daniel Defoe. She argued that “Augustan discourse was preoccupied with motherhood” and that, during the first half of the eighteenth century, “the increasingly narrow definition of maternal virtue that emerged...was vital to the containment of matriarchal authority at a time when patriarchal authority was undergoing radical reconception and was therefore particularly vulnerable.”³⁶ The ‘narrow definition’ that she referred to was the complete domestication of the mother; the identification of a woman by her maternity, leading ultimately to the ideology of separate spheres and the private woman/public man binary. While Bowers’ work is not always chronologically relevant to this study, her theoretical framework is, and likewise offers an interesting glimpse of what was to come next in the culture of early modern motherhood.

Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh’s edited work, *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period* offers an interdisciplinary examination of early modern maternity. While the work does not address England specifically, a few chapters relate to the content of this study. Susan Frye’s “Maternal Textualities” offers an interesting look at the textual objects that help compose early modern English female

³⁶ Toni Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14.

culture. While, according to Frye, scholars tend to focus on archived journals and prayer books, “fragments of literacy- the initials, the sewn alphabets, the notes left signed and unsigned within worked boxes, many of which were writing boxes- constitute a distinct feminine tradition, however difficult it may be to recover.”³⁷ These items helped to create a “maternal domestic space” which helped constitute maternal identity. The idea of a domestic maternal space is significant to this study, as Chapter Three explores the ways in which women’s experiences and culture challenged, or threatened, patriarchal authority.

Within the same collection Frances Dolan offered an interesting analysis of the threat of maternal power through the image of the Virgin Mary. In Post-Reformation England the Virgin Mary, of course, was representative of Catholicism, and her figure was thus doubly threatening. As Dolan explained, “representations of Mary as a nursing mother, cradling or suckling an infant Jesus, became another focus both for Catholic reverence for and defenses of Mary’s power, and for Protestant attacks on it.”³⁸ Protestants argued that the image of Mary nursing Christ essentially minimized Christ’s power while maximizing the power of Mary; in this image, Christ was essentially “infantilized”, which Protestants viewed as degrading to the power of Christ.³⁹ The threat of ‘Marian devotion,’ then, offers another angle on a theme that runs throughout this present study: the use of the maternal body to express vitriol against Catholicism.

³⁷ Susan Frye, “Maternal Textualities” in *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, ed. By Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 225.

³⁸ Frances E. Dolan, “Marian Devotion and Maternal Authority in Seventeenth-Century England” in *Maternal Measures*, 287.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.

The existing scholarly work on early modern English motherhood may be generally organized into two branches: historical accounts of women's experiences and the cultural expectations surrounding maternity, and literary representations of motherhood. This study aims at using both trends as a foundation and combining these two seemingly disparate threads of research. By looking at written and published sources from both a historical and post-structural perspective, this study will show how motherhood was present in more than the home; it was at once a tool for female agency and a threatening cultural role that needed to be guided and controlled through public discourse and legislation. Motherhood in English culture possessed a multifaceted, political significance that is not easily recognized, and it is the hope of this study to present the different arenas that witnessed the politics of motherhood. This project hopes to reinterpret the role of mother to show that it was not just a social role, but also a cultural site that that was molded, manipulated, and contested in multiple plays for power. Consequently, this project will rely upon the already expansive literature on the early modern family; it will more immediately contribute to the historical interest in issues of gender, power, and agency.⁴⁰

Because of the nature of this study, the following chapters are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. In fact, other than the rapid cultural changes England experienced in the 1640s, this study views little change in the manner in which

⁴⁰ For example, see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) and *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Michael Braddick & John Walter, eds. *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Anthony Fletcher's *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) and Alexandra Shepard's *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

gender and motherhood were culturally understood in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consequently, rather than offering an analysis of ‘change over time’ of early modern motherhood, the following chapters offer a cultural snapshot of the political roles of maternity during this period.

Chapter Two, *Setting the Patriarchal Stage: Husbands, Fathers, Wives, and Mothers* lays the foundation for this study by offering a cultural analysis of the interrelationship between these roles. It begins with a basic outline of the important social and economic role of marriage in early modern England as well as the public, political role of the family as the “little commonwealth.” It then offers a brief description of the most recent scholarly works on early modern patriarchal ideology, whose all-encompassing cultural and legal definition extended the idea of paternal right from the smallest head-of-household to the king. Particularly significant to patriarchal ideology was masculinity, as it depended upon an idea of self-mastery that was unique to the male sex. As the family member who contained this important trait, a male head-of-households thus possessed a unique power and responsibility; he held power over his household, and this power necessarily meant that he was ultimately responsible for his household’s moral failings as well. As we shall see, this concept was particularly significant to the relationship between husband and wife, as it was the most complex and contested relationship in terms of power. The wife was considered a partner, a yoke-fellow, but was ultimately subordinate to her husband. Her lack of self-mastery meant that she must not only be under the guidance and authority of her husband, but that he was also responsible for everything about her, even her actions and emotions; she was ultimately subsumed into his person, stripping her of her basic sense of autonomy and self. And, interestingly,

women's lack of self-mastery was also applied to their roles as mothers, as maternal love was described as displaying feminine irrationality and was thus threatening and needed to be under male guidance.

The Natural Mother: Power, Negotiation, and the Culture of Maternity juxtaposes male-authored prescriptive literature and personal records with female-authored works, including diaries, autobiographies, and advice books, illustrating the patriarchal negotiation and gender politics that existed within the private home. It argues that motherhood was an important facet of female culture. Through nursing and education of children, women understood themselves as offering an important contribution to both the church and commonwealth, and consequently claiming an importance sense of authority. This chapter also looks at the nature of maternal connections within female culture, as relationships between mothers, daughters, and granddaughters were an important part of the life experience of many early modern women. By looking at the male-authored views of motherhood and maternal relationships, which often denigrated this female space and criticized what they cited as mothers' vain or apathetic relationships with their daughters, this chapter will further explore the political nature of female culture and maternity as sites of authority and power negotiation.

The next chapter, *The Unnatural Mother: Infanticide, Gender, and Society* analyzes the ways in which sensational material was used to regulate gendered behavior and promote social order. This chapter begins with a discussion of the connection between infanticide and unwed mothers. Actual acts (not representations) of infanticide were largely committed by poor, unwed mothers who, during a time of economic strife in England, committed murder out of economic desperation. Despite infanticide being a rare

occurrence, contemporaries were quite preoccupied with the act, as it was connected to the sexual sin of bastardy and was emblematic of a fear of lascivious, unregulated women. The chapter will then look at the representations of infanticide in popular print, largely broadsides and ballads, which usually described something quite different from the typical infanticide case. Although infanticide was mostly commonly neonatal and committed by unwed mothers, the act of child murder in popular print often involve older children and married women, midwives and widows. Rather than describe the actual problem of infanticide (single women with few economic and social options), they display contemporary concerns about gender: infanticide was committed by women out of irrational anger, or by scolding women, or women who lacked male heads to guide their behavior. Consequently this genre of literature not only helped to construct early modern images of motherhood- motherhood gone quite wrong- but of the social consequences of unregulated women.

The next chapter, *Reproductive Power: Conception, Parturition, and Patriarchy*, explores the reproductive body as a site of discourse. Because women's important role in reproduction was fundamentally at odds with their inferiority within a patriarchal schema, this chapter explores the ways in which women's reproductive bodies and reproductive culture were used to justify their subordination. It first looks at humoral and one-sex theories of the body, which not only made gender a dangerously fluid realm, but also used the 'objectivity' of sexual difference to explain female inferiority. It also looks at the complex role of the womb and conception as a site of power, as contemporaries grappled with ways in which to explain women's significant role in sustaining life while simultaneously asserting male dominion; the result was an interesting discussion about

the superiority of male seed over female seed combined with the increasing tendency to degrade the womb. This chapter takes a more in-depth look at the political and contested role of midwives, who were stereotyped as ignorant and negligent, eventually leading to the man-midwife's challenge to their claim to authority; feminine, 'subjective' reproductive knowledge was replaced with what was considered the superior masculine, 'objective,' and scientific knowledge. Finally this chapter explores the nature of monstrous births and wet-nursing. While monstrous births displayed a contemporary fear about the power of women's imaginations and bodies, as well as a fear of lascivious, unregulated women, the use of wet nurses was viewed as a sign of a lack of maternal love and was possibly threatening to the genteel class. Ultimately both monstrous births and wet-nursing, alongside the use of 'dangerous' female midwives, were indicators of social disorder.

The Praise of a Godly Woman: Gender, Death, and Motherhood discusses the ways in which women as mothers entered the public sphere posthumously through published funeral sermons. It explores the ways in which women's lives and deaths were textually crafted by male authors, lending to an interesting relationship between male authors, female subjects, and authority and authorship over one's own life. Thus this chapter analyzes the ways in which women's lives and deaths were crafted by the male authors and used to serve various public, didactic purposes, from being molded into exemplars of gendered behavior and serving as bulwarks to the public threat of Popery. It also discusses the importance of maternity within the funeral sermons, as motherhood was not only emphasized as a means to mark a woman's domesticity and thus successful fulfillment of prescribed gender norms, but it also argues that motherhood possessed a

spiritual element that became particularly significant as mothers approached their death. Finally, it looks at the important role of maternity in the gendered deathbed; when mothers died and were 'birthed' into new life, they were simultaneously expected to forsake their greatest earthly treasures, their children, as evidence of their readiness for God.

Early modern maternity, then, was present in much more than the home. Through these various, seemingly disparate threads of motherhood in early modern English culture, we may begin to see not only its significance, but also its role as a powerful, threatening, and contested site of gender politics.

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE PATRIARCHAL STAGE:

HUSBANDS, FATHERS, WIVES, AND MOTHERS

If the husband rule with love, and the wife obey with cheerfulness, and either of them be contented with their lot & portion in each other, then must the yoke needs go easy. But if the wife usurp, and not acknowledge her head & king...Gods wisdom is despised, it cannot be well.⁴¹

...and according to the olde saying, it is an hard matter for a mother to be fond of her children, and wise both together⁴²

The personal is political. This common adage rings particularly true for the family in early modern England, as contemporaries invested the idea of the family with a distinct sense of power. Authors in post-Reformation England spent a great deal of effort discussing social roles, and the roles that appeared the most widely-discussed, and often the most complex, were those of husband and wife, father and mother. These social roles, of course, were not easily divorced. Marriage, after all, served as the founding institution for childbearing and rearing, and both motherhood and fatherhood were roles whose duties and expectations were closely linked to their duties as foremost husbands and wives. This chapter will discuss that interrelation and, more specifically, their interrelation under the umbrella of a patriarchal social system. It will seek to understand the discourse underscoring the conceptualization of men's roles as husbands and fathers, and likewise women's roles as wives and mothers, and furthermore analyze the ways

⁴¹ Richard Boyle, *Counsel to the Husband: To the Wife Instruction* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1608), 92.

⁴² Stefano Guazzo, *The Court of Good Counsel* (London: Raph Blower, 1607), G3.

in which patriarchy, masculinity, and power influenced these gendered social roles. More specifically, it will discuss the power that men imagined women holding as wives and mothers and, as a consequence of this female threat to patriarchy and masculinity, outline the ways in which men attempted to limit and circumscribe women's power.

The roles of both spouse and parent were essential to early modern English society for many reasons. As Keith Wrightson has pointed out, "the family was fundamental."⁴³ Susan Amussen has argued that the family in early modern England "provided the basis for political and social order" and by extension "...we cannot understand politics (as conventionally defined) without understanding the politics of the family."⁴⁴ In its most basic form marriage and childbearing served an economic function; for titled landowners, marriage served as a means to forge important political and social alliances, and the production of heirs allowed families to maintain their coveted estates. Consequently, the upper classes typically married earlier than members of the middling and popular classes; aristocrats were eager to produce children to serve as heirs and possibly pawns in marriage alliances.⁴⁵ For these privileged members of English society, forging important social and political connections and the securing of ancestral estates were key factors in a potential marriage.

⁴³ Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, (1982), 66.

⁴⁴ Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 1-2.

⁴⁵ Historians have acknowledged that affection and compatibility played an important role in choosing marriage partners, effectively dismissing Lawrence Stone's keystone thesis that companionate marriage was a modern convention. Nevertheless, finances played a definitive role in the marital unions of the gentry and aristocracy. See Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern England*.

The family also served as an important economic unit for the middling and popular classes. Until the industrialization of the eighteenth century, most manufacturing occurred inside the home, with husband and wife typically working together in production.⁴⁶ With the exception of the upper classes, husbands and wives often served as an interdependent economic unit, and this economic interdependence necessarily meant that young men and women waited to marry until they were financially capable of establishing their own households. Consequently, most individuals in early modern England typically waited until their mid to late 20s to marry.⁴⁷ Economic independence, however, was a state that many individuals in early modern England would never experience. As Keith Wrightson pointed out, "...marriage and family formation in this society was a privilege rather than a right. It was something to which all might aspire; yet which some would never achieve, while those who succeeded would do so at a relatively high age- indeed a very high age when we consider the comparatively short life expectation of the period."⁴⁸ A significant minority of individuals in early modern England would never marry, and many would remain single for the larger portion of their life. The importance placed upon marriage, and the assumption that marriage and parenthood were the natural state, in an age when many individuals could not financially afford the institution is worth noting.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Although wives tended to contribute through book-keeping and the management of apprentices, they sometimes literally engaged in hands-on production alongside their husbands. For a more in-depth discussion of the role of women and the family in the early modern economy, see "Women's Economic Role" in Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100-140.

⁴⁷ Wrightson, *English Society*, 68. The numbers cited include first marriages only. Wrightson likewise argues that during times of economic prosperity, the middling and popular classes were more likely to marry at an earlier age, particularly during the mid to late sixteenth century.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁹ Amy Froide has discussed the large amount of unmarried women in early modern England (around 20% of adults would never marry), an important subgroup that had hitherto been ignored by historians as they did not fit into the neatly compartmentalized categories of "maid, wife and widow" that contemporaries had

Marriage served an important economic role, but it was its social and cultural significance that made it such a frequently discussed topic. As David Cressy has observed, marriage was quite possibly the most important event in an individual's life. As he explained, "marriage for a man meant autonomy, mastery, responsibility, and the prospect of fathering a lineage. Marriage for a woman was, perhaps, the major defining moment of her life, determining her social, domestic, and reproductive future."⁵⁰ Marriage not only played an important economic role, but it defined individuals socially and served as the bedrock of political organization in early modern England. It is little wonder, then, why contemporary authors produced exhaustive prescriptive literature detailing the ins and outs of marriage and childrearing, offering an outline for their readers of what was acceptable and expected within the family.

To analyze the family in early modern England, and more specifically, the relationship between husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, one is necessarily delving into a patriarchal world. Patriarchy was at the heart of the family equation; it was the functioning of patriarchy that allowed husbands to, in theory, dictate the expectations of a woman's role as both wife and mother. Consequently, patriarchy is a system closely, and naturally, aligned with gender analysis. As Anthony Fletcher has explained, gender is "both relational and organizational."⁵¹ Thus, by studying motherhood, one is not only studying the role of mothers, but also studying

created. See Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 287.

⁵¹ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination* in, XV.

the relationship between the sexes, and, by extension, illuminating the larger cultural and social organization of the period.

The literal meaning of patriarchy is simply, ‘rule by fathers.’ In her most recent analysis of the historical working of this rule by fathers, Judith Bennett offered a more specific definition of the term. She quoted Adrienne Rich in her definition as “a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men-by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.”⁵² Bennett noted that this broad and comprehensive definition was both inherently personal and political, as it was used to “denote the legal powers of a husband/father over his wife, children and other dependents.”⁵³ In early modern England, the theoretical rights of a patriarch in the microcosm of his home likewise applied to the king in his realm. In fact, the monarch’s power over his kingdom was partly justified by the ideology of patriarchal rights; the king held power over his kingdom in the same way a common man held power over his household.⁵⁴ Consequently, we see a comprehensive patriarchal power system throughout early modern England, from the highest political echelons of the monarchy to the lowest male householder.⁵⁵

⁵² Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁴ Robert Filmer most explicitly discussed the king’s paternal power. See Filmer, *Patriarcha: or, the Natural Power of Kings*, (London: Walter Davis, 1680).

⁵⁵ Bennett argues that the power of the male head of household in early modern England is more accurately referred to as paternalism; however, her comprehensive definition of patriarchy outlined above indicates that paternalism and patriarchy were inextricably conflated in early modern England.

Patriarchal power, politics, and the household were issues often conflated in early modern England. As Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have discussed, the issue of a wife's subjection to her husband paralleled the contemporaneous political issues concerning the range of a monarch's authority over his subjects: "what was the true nature of wifely 'subjection', and how far did a husband's powers extend before his wife had the right to resist his authority?"⁵⁶ Thus, the family was a site of power and authority, and contemporaries in post-Reformation England agreed that it served a distinct political purpose: the family produced 'little commonwealths' in which patriotic (and Protestant) Englishmen and women could be born and imbued with the proper qualities. Consequently, that the family was a public and political unit rather than a private one was widely acknowledged by contemporaries.

According to the definition offered above, patriarchy, in theory, appears to be a nicely circumscribed power system; men, and in particular male householders, wielded authority over their dependents, including their wives, children, and both male and female servants. The all-encompassing definition cited by Judith Bennett supposes a relatively simple power dynamic in which men ruled and women obeyed. Other scholars have noted the inherent instability of patriarchy in practice. These revisionist historians have argued that the above type of analysis supposed a combative, dualistic relationship between the sexes that was overly superficial and simplistic. One gender oppresses and is a perpetrator, while the other is oppressed and victimized. These second wave scholars of patriarchy have found that a power system in which men wielded general authority over women was not quite so black and white. While, in theory, men wielded power over women, feminist scholars have found examples of women's agency within a patriarchal world. Just as importantly, scholars have shown that women were not mere

⁵⁶ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 135.

victims of patriarchy. As Judith Bennett has argued, “Women’s history has shown, again and again, that women have not been merely passive victims of sexual inequality; women have also colluded in, undermined, survived, and sometimes even benefited from the presence of patriarchy.”⁵⁷ Thus, as scholars of women’s history have argued, patriarchy might refer to ‘rule by fathers’, but it inherently involved the activity of women as well.

Women’s involvement in a system designed for their own oppression makes the study of patriarchy a challenging venture. Bennett has rightly claimed that “the history of patriarchy is not... a history of men; it is also a history of women as survivors, resisters, and agents of patriarchy.”⁵⁸ The identification of women’s activity within a patriarchal system designed for their own oppression, both colluding in and rejecting, is the subject of this study in general. This chapter, however, seeks to understand men’s roles in the navigation of patriarchy in early modern England; more specifically, it seeks to understand how men imagined themselves as husbands and fathers, and what effect this had upon their construction of ideas about women as wives and mothers. Bennett’s call to discuss women’s involvement within a patriarchal system is important, but, as gender historians will note, the role of men and masculinity cannot be divorced from this equation; gender is, of course, interdependent, and the significance of women’s roles cannot be considered without simultaneously understanding the roles of men.

Feminist historians have focused upon the interactions between men and women as well as women’s responses to their subordination, but more recently scholars like Alexandra Shepard and Elizabeth Foyster have inserted men back into the discussion, arguing that manhood was an integral component of the functioning of early modern English patriarchy. In fact, Shepard called

⁵⁷ Bennett, *History Matters*, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

upon gender historians to correct their unequal focus upon women; she argued that gender historians have continued to work in the vein of women's history, assuming that "only women's lives are gendered on account of being variant."⁵⁹ Consequently, Shepard's and Foyster's studies have focused upon men's navigation of patriarchy within early modern England.

Shepard's central thesis, as she explained, is that "...manhood and patriarchy were not equated in early modern England... while men were often better placed to benefit from them, patriarchal imperatives nonetheless constituted attempts to discipline and order men as well as women."⁶⁰ She argued that scholars have conflated the gendered notion of manhood, or masculinity, with the social organization of patriarchy; not all men were patriarchs, and there were specific roles and behaviors a man must follow in order to fulfill the role of patriarch. Thus Shepard argued that most studies of patriarchy have often assumed a blanket dominant male role without more specific analysis of the men themselves.

Shepard's more specific research, however, is not upon patriarchy as an institution, but the role of masculinity. She argued that there existed a multiplicity of what she called 'manhoods' in early modern England, and these manhoods were socially specific primarily by rank, and to a lesser degree by age or marital status.⁶¹ Where Shepard's research on manhood comes directly into play with patriarchy, and this chapter, is her discussion of men and self-mastery. Shepard argued that the most common theme across social rank was the idea that a man differed from a woman primarily because he was specially equipped to govern himself. A man

⁵⁹ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

possessed a natural reasonability and rationality that women, as popularly believed, did not.⁶² As Shepard argued, “the self-government of manhood was the basis of men’s claims to authority.” Although manhood and patriarchy were two distinct items, manhood specifically allowed men to claim the authority and power invested within a patriarchal social system.

Shepard’s research focused more upon the traits necessary to fulfill the role of the masculine male in early modern England, while Foyster focused upon the role of relationships between men and women in the construction of manhood. Foyster argued that women were integral to the formation of masculinity. More specifically, her central argument relied upon the tenuous nature of man’s control over woman, arguing that “...the pivot on which manhood rested was the control of female sexuality, and this gave male fortunes an unstable foundation...ironically, by resting manhood on women’s sexuality, men had given women the potential for power...”⁶³ Foyster’s research focused primarily upon manhood, but it also contributed to a body of research that seeks alternative forms of power within a patriarchal network, thus proving the inherent instability of this power system.

By its very definition (as provided by Judith Bennett), patriarchy should have functioned seamlessly. Men ultimately possessed comprehensive power over women. Yet, as scholars of both women’s and gender history have argued, patriarchy in early modern England was fraught with instabilities and inconsistencies. It was a system in which women often collaborated in their oppression, while simultaneously finding room for agency and resistance. It was a system in which men necessarily relied upon the cooperation of their oppressed; women gave men power

⁶² Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (New York: Longman, 1999), 29.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 55.

and, by the very necessity of her cooperation, made that same power unstable. It is no wonder that scholars have noted the period as a time filled with ‘anxious patriarchs.’⁶⁴ Anthony Fletcher has described early modern patriarchy as a system “under pressure.”⁶⁵ But how exactly did the role of husband and father figure into the functioning of English patriarchy? How did the expectations of men as husbands and fathers figure into popular ideas about women as wives and mothers? This rest of this chapter will explore the ways in which the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy functioned, and argues that the acts of controlling and exerting authority over one’s family were essential to a man’s role as patriarch, and that, ironically, the individual who most threatened his patriarchal role was his wife. Consequently, men dedicated large amounts of ink attempting to find ways to circumscribe any authority a woman might hold in her roles as both wife and mother.

At its most fundamental level, masculinity and authority were inextricably entwined. Authority, of course, was not a privilege shared equally among patriarchs, and contemporary authors noted a distinct connection between a man’s authority and his socioeconomic level. Authority naturally extended more widely for a gentleman; a titled man was a man who, in part, inherited his masculinity through the privileges of birth and wealth. He wielded power over those who directly relied upon him, including servants and townspeople. The author Richard Allestree described in detail the advantages of being a gentleman, as his authority extended over “servants, tenants, and petitioners”, and was thus commensurate with his wealth and social status.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Alexandra Shepard has concisely characterized the existing historiography on patriarchy as “one abounding with anxious patriarchs: men dogged by fears that they would fail to achieve patriarchal expectations that were, moreover, arguably impossible.” (5).

⁶⁵Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England*, xix.

⁶⁶Richard Allestree, *The Gentlemen’s Calling* (London: T. Garthwait, 1662), 16.

As a social superior, the gentleman wielded authority over his inferiors, but his authority was simultaneously invested with responsibility. As a superior being, the gentleman was to serve as a model of behavior, as the same author asked, “for what can be more perswasive to those of the lower Ranks to embrace Vertue, then to see it made the election of those whom they suppose to have most judgment to discern its value.”⁶⁷ Thus the author discussed the importance of a gentleman’s authority over his inferiors, even his influence over friends and intimates, as a contractual arrangement. The role of the gentleman was not only to claim authority over his inferiors, but to guide and navigate them as an exalted patriarch.

Interestingly, in discussing a gentleman’s authority, the author felt no need to include an analysis of his dominion over his wife and children; his patriarchy over the immediate family was assumed. Instead, Allestree focused his discussion of the family not within the context of the gentleman, but within the context of the common man. While the gentleman received the privilege of this larger network of power, Allestree noted the limited authority of a man with less means, explaining that, “...the poor man’s authority is bounded within the narrow circuit of his little cottage, being in effect no other than the propagation of that Power Nature hath given him over his own body, to those Branches which spring from it, his Children; and to that...which is ingrafted into it, his Wife.”⁶⁸ Consequently, according to this author, the immediate family was of even greater importance to the average man’s masculinity, as he was only able to exert any sort of tangible power upon wives, children, and sometimes a few servants, and these individuals only.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 16.

The family was of grave importance not only to the gentleman, whose offspring were necessary to carry on the family lineage and the wealth and power invested within, but also to the common man, whose family ensured that he was able to wield some sort of authority in a society deeply embedded in social hierarchy. By exerting this albeit limited power, a man was able to claim the masculinity necessary to fulfill the expectations of his gender. It is no surprise, then, that common men claimed their homes as ‘little commonwealths.’ Robert Filmer claimed that the king ruled his kingdom as a father ruled his home, and contemporaries commonly inverted this trope to claim that individual men wielded authority over their own household as a prince over his kingdom, effectively consolidating early modern England as a system under the thumb of a broad patriarchal power.

Filmer offered an exposition of the rule of the king as a patriarch, but some other authors more specifically described the power and duties of the common male head-of-household. According to these authors, the first duty of each household (or ‘little commonwealth’) was to serve God and the church. One commentator, Richard Boyle, explicitly compared the family with the church: “Verily it is a great burthen, which gouernours of families doe beare...their families should be churches, wherein God should be hallowed, serued, and daily honoured...”⁶⁹ If the family was likened to a church, it was the father who would serve the priestly role and oversee the congregation’s worship. John Dodd and Robert Cleaver’s 1614 *Godly Form of Household Government* stated that it was the primary duty of the head of the household to ensure that his family and servants “may liue vnder an ordinarie ministerie of the word...”⁷⁰ The authors

⁶⁹ Boyle, *Counsel to the Husband*, 8.

⁷⁰ John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government* (London: Thomas Man, 1614), 20.

further reiterated that “this duty is laid vpon all householders, diligently to ouerseer the ways of their families, that they serue God, as in all other dueties, so especially in sanctifying the Sabbath...”⁷¹ As post-Reformation England took power away from the priest and placed it within the home, the patriarch found himself with not only social, economic, and political authority over his home, but spiritual authority as well.⁷²

This spiritual authority did not authorize a tyranny; rather, it implied both power and responsibility for the patriarch. The patriarch was invested with the duty of overseeing his family’s spirituality, and in return he was to serve as a righteous example to his servants and kin. One author, Richard Greenham, specifically lamented the shirking of this responsibility, citing its deleterious effects: “The abundance, as the preaching of the Gospell, peace, prosperitie and wealth...causeth me in thankesgiuing to joy. But the contempt and abuse of these blessings, mingleth my joy with greefe and causeth Gods children for sorrow to mourne and lament. And this greeuing of Gods spirite in his children, shall fathers of children, and maisters of householdes...especially answer before GOD.”⁷³ Thus spiritual authority was a double-edged sword: the master of the house was not only privileged with the responsibility of ensuring his household served God and walked in a righteous path, but he also was responsible for answering for his household’s moral failings as well.

⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

⁷² While some early historians praised the Protestant Reformation for its liberation of women from the superstitions of Catholicism, Patricia Crawford argued that the movement towards Protestantism, in fact, merely served to strengthen patriarchy; by claiming that men were the ‘priests of the household’, Protestantism essentially relegated women to the domestic sphere while consolidating man’s rule over the home. See Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁷³ Richard Greenham, *A Godly Exhortation, and Fruitfull Admonition to Virtuous Parents and Modest Matrons* (London: Ihon Windet and Thomas Iudson, 1584), A2.

The patriarch was not only in charge of his household's spiritual health but also in charge of its proper functioning. While spirituality and everyday household management were essential to this healthy functioning, some authors spent a great deal of effort detailing the importance of a household's proper social ordering, from the role of the patriarch downwards to the servant. Not surprisingly, many authors dedicated the most space to the relationship between husband and wife. Contemporaries considered the relationship between husband and wife to be the most important of domestic relationships, as it was paramount to the functioning of the household. Richard Boyle, for example, noted the primacy of the marital unit and described the hierarchy of the family: "A familie may bee compared unto a commonwealth: wherein, there are divers societies and degrees, reciprocally relating, and mutually depending one upon the other. The highest degree of societie is between the husband and the wife; and this is as the first wheele of a clocke, that turneth about all the rest in order."⁷⁴ Thus a healthy, functioning relationship between master and mistress was imperative, as it set the rest of the household in order.

The duties of husband and wife over the household, in theory, sounded quite simple. As David Cressy has explained, "a husband was expected to govern his wife and household, and the wife was supposed to command those beneath her through a mediated extension of patriarchal power."⁷⁵ Contemporaries considered the relationship between husband and wife crucial to the household; however, the marital relationship was anything but simple. By its nature it was the most complex, and was often the most contested, of the relationships within the household, and it was the very use of a woman's 'mediated extension of patriarchal power' that contemporaries often found challenging and at odds with the husband's masculine authority. Contemporary

⁷⁴ Boyle, *Counsel to the Husband*, 40.

⁷⁵ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 287.

authors often struggled to adequately define the true nature of the marital relationship; it was at once a companionate and symbiotic relationship in which two individuals were expected to rely upon each other and work together towards common goals, while also being a relationship submerged in hierarchy and subordination. Consequently, contemporary authors often offered an ambivalent description of the marital relationship; the literature examined often held wives in high esteem and celebrated them for their inherent value as co-governors of households and life companions, while simultaneously maligning them as weak, subordinate, and sometimes harmful creatures.⁷⁶

Commentators often struggled to acknowledge wives' important contributions to the household without diminishing the husbands' role as patriarch. Some contemporaries imbued women as wives with power by noting their important role as governors of the home. The distinction that her authority, however significant, came second to the authority of her husband quickly tempered this power. Dod and Cleaver noted that “..there be more then one [gouernours of families] vpon whome the charge of gouernment lyeth, though vnequally, are first the Cheefe gouernour, which is the Husband, secondly a fellow helper, which is the Wife. These both do owe duties to their familie and dutie one to another.”⁷⁷ The authors assumed a natural subordination of wives to husbands while simultaneously noting the collaborative aspect of the

⁷⁶ Some historians have noted a generalized sense of disorder in early modern England, particularly beginning in the early seventeenth century, which saw inflation, an increase in poverty and an even greater wealth disparity, religious nonconformity and population growth. Susan Amussen has argued that “in the first half of the seventeenth century, rapid social change led to an increased concern for the maintenance of order-not just in villages, but also in families.” See *An Ordered Society*, 33. The discourse analyzed below, which was concerned with establishing the proper roles of husband and wife, father and mother, may be placed within this larger socio-economic context, and may easily be viewed as a response to a growing sense of disorder in a changing world.

⁷⁷ Dod and Cleaver, *Godly Form of Household Government*, 19.

marital relationship. The duty, as they described, was not only from wife to patriarch, but from patriarch to wife as well.

Stefano Guazzo likewise noted this complex dynamic, in which the wife sat by her husband's side as mistress and governor of the home, but was considered inherently lesser than her spouse. Guazzo offered a noteworthy description of this relationship in the 1607 translation of *The Court of Good Counsell*, in which he stated that:

...the husband must not perswade himself that he is aboue his wife as the Prince over his subjects, or the shepheard over his sheepe, but as the mind ouer the body, which are linked together by a certaine natural amitie: But rather wee must consider, that man was not made of the woman, but the woman of the man, and was taken, not out of the head, that she should beare rule ouer man, nor out of the feete, that she should be trodden downe by him, but out of the side , where is the seate of the hart, to the end he should loue her hartely, and as his owne selfe.⁷⁸

Here Guazzo used the natural body to aptly describe a commonly held conception of the marital relationship. By asserting the biblical notion that woman was made from man, the author reinforced the notion that man was naturally superior. However, the author claimed that woman was taken from man's side, simultaneously reinforcing the idea that the wife was a companion and helpmeet to the husband, who sat by his side- although not, necessarily, as an equal.⁷⁹

Guazzo's description also alluded to the contractual element of marriage, including man's responsibility as the patriarch. While the husband enjoyed the privilege of superiority over his wife, he was not to extend this superiority into tyranny (as a prince lorded over his people or a master over his animal). Instead, the husband was charged with the duty of loving his wife. This

⁷⁸ Stefano Guazzo, *The Court of Good Counsel*, C4.

⁷⁹ The trope of a physical body representing the marital unit was a relatively common one; in fact, the body served as a fitting metaphor for power hierarchies, as contemporary political theorists used the image to reinforce patriarchal, royal power.

last responsibility was at the heart of the complex dynamic embedded within the marital relationship; by placing his wife within the “seate of his hart”, a husband offered his wife respect rather than tyranny. However, by loving her “hartely, and as his owne selfe”, the husband claimed his wife not as an individual, but as part of his own person, effectively diminishing any power or authority she may have claimed.

Guazzo offered the image of a woman yielded from her husband’s flank, but Richard Boyle asserted the more explicitly hierarchical nature of the marital relationship. As Boyle described, “the husband is made the head, and the wife resembled to the bodie. May the head of a bodie (natural) be turned downeward? Can the whole person so continue, & liue well in that state?...no more can the bodie politique bee in peacable or blessed condition, if order be inuerted.”⁸⁰ By referring to the marital union as a ‘body politic’, the author assumed the relationship was one invested with power. The power dynamic within the union was clearly a hierarchical one, in which the husband wielded natural, and thus godly, authority over his wife. Boyle further consolidated the inequitable nature of the relationship by aligning the husband with the head, associated with spirit and intellect, and the woman with the body, which was associated with more base functions. Indeed, the author here implied both a physical and spiritual hierarchy between man and wife, consequently allowing the author to vigorously defend wifely subordination. By using the bodily metaphor for the marital union, the author even condemned insubordination as an act against the ‘body’ and thus God: “...should not the wife look unto the hand of God, which made her the wife, and not the husband, the weaker vessel, and not the stronger? the bodie, and not the head? To obey, and not to rule?...To grudge hereat, is not to

⁸⁰ Boyle, *Counsel to the Husband*, 43.

against the husband, but against God...”⁸¹ Boyle was clearly in defense of women’s physical, mental, and spiritual subordination to men, and made clear that by usurping her husband’s role and making herself a head when she should be a torso, a wife would essentially cause the disfigurement of her marriage and ultimately the downfall of her household.

Yet even Boyle struggled with the theoretical nature of the relationship between man and wife, which was clearly a hierarchical one in which the husband exercised power over his wife, and the practical side of marriage, in which a man and a woman joined as partners with shared goals. In fact, when discussing household relationships, Boyle compared the power dynamic between husband and wife with that between father and son. He argued that, “the wiues dutie (or obedience) also differeth from the sonnes, and is by degree more excellent, in yt is graced and seasoned with a kind of equalitie, being fellow heires...the husband...hath not power ouer himself, but the wife: so then the wife hath that interest in, and ouer, the husband.”⁸² Here Boyle admitted a ‘kind of equality’ between husband and wife. However, it was this very equality, or partnership, that reinforced the hierarchical nature of the marital union. Because of her elevated status, the wife had more at stake in her duty to her husband; her obedience to him was of even greater importance than that of even the male heir. Notably, the author’s terminology reinforced the inequitable claims between husband and wife. While the husband had ‘power’ over the wife, the wife had only ‘interest’ in her husband. The latter, in its seventeenth century usage, most

⁸¹ Ibid., 50. The author further explains that women’s subjection to their husbands was a consequence for the Fall, and for being “the principall instrumentall cause of Adam’s miserie, for that she did that, which Satan otherwise could not haue done without her” (57).

⁸² Ibid., 78-79.

likely implied that the wife enjoyed a “spiritual privilege” over her husband, rather than any sort of political or financial stake.⁸³

The power dynamic between husbands and wives was clearly unequal; the authors above acknowledged that spouses shared responsibility as governors of the household, but it was ultimately the husband, being a naturally superior being, who claimed decisive authority. This authority, however, came with responsibility, and contemporary authors described in great detail the importance of a husband in not only the proper functioning of his household, but also in the proper functioning of his wife. Some commentators frequently claimed that it was crucial for a husband to treat his wife well. Guazzo, for example, stated that a husband must, “account of his Wife as his onely treasure on earth: and the most pretious Jewell he hath in the world”, while likewise remembering that, “there is nothing more due to the wife, then the faithfull, honest, and louing company of her husband.”⁸⁴ Although contemporaries considered women the lesser of the two beings, the authors examined agreed that wives were to be treated kindly and lovingly by their husbands.

The husband was charged with treating his wife as a “precious jewel”, but he was likewise charged with the duty of guiding her. According to Rich Barnabe, a husband’s good management of his wife was imperative for her good behavior. Barnabe offered an interesting nautical metaphor to demonstrate this, arguing that the husband was like a merchant and the wife like a ship that brings the goods in; the husband’s words were like the ship’s rudder, “by the which she must be turned, guided and directed, she must be a stirrige ship of quicke of stirrige,

⁸³ See *Oxford English Dictionary*: To invest (a person) with a share in or title to something, esp. a spiritual privilege. 12/3/12 <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/view/Entry/97736?rskey=SVfhzK&result=1#>

⁸⁴ Guazzo, *Court of Good Counsel*, C4.

ready at the word of her husband, she must not be immouable like some womanne that a man were as good to remoue a house, as to remoue them from their willes...”⁸⁵

Women who were not easily guided were “as good to remoue as a house, as to remoue from their willes”, and they reflected poorly not only upon themselves, but upon their husbands as well. Surprisingly, a ‘bad’ wife was often attributed to a ‘bad’ husband. A husband’s kind treatment of his wife, as mentioned above, was not simply for the wife’s sake. According to several of the authors surveyed, contemporaries often assumed a direct corollary between a husband’s love and a wife’s behavior. A husband was required to treat his wife well, and if he did, she would, in effect, be a good wife. Conversely, if a wife behaved poorly, her spouse must have mistreated her; the authors thus placed responsibility for the wife’s behavior upon the husband. Guazzo explicitly argued that, “...let all men be assured, that the greatest part of the faults committed by wiues in this age take the beginning from the faults of their husbands, who for the most part require of their wiues, such an exact obseruing of the Lawes of Mariage, but they themselves make no account of them.”⁸⁶ Here the author held the husband as the prime mover of the marital relationship; it was his example, whether good or bad, that set the stage for a woman’s behavior. Guazzo also instructed husbands to love their wives intensely, for it was this love that would prevent them from becoming wicked. As he argued, if “the beames of her husbands love, faith, and loyalty, shine onely upon her...you shall see her consumed...away in burning flames of loue, and cast all her care in thinking and doing that which she knoweth will please him...”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Rich Barnabe, *The Excellency of Good Women* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1613), 8.

⁸⁶ Guazzo, *Court of Good Counsel*, C2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, C3.

Thus, a husband was not only responsible for his own good behavior, but contemporaries believed that his behavior was in direct relation to his wife's. Consequently, a man had the double duty of controlling both his own and his partner's actions. The belief that a husband could, in fact, control his wife's thoughts, feelings, and actions sheds light on contemporary ideas about both masculinity and femininity. On the one hand, placing blame for a wife's bad behavior upon the husband clearly ameliorated hostility towards women, particularly in an era where misogynist beliefs abounded. On the other hand, by not allowing women to take responsibility for their own behavior, these writers effectively diminished the most basic power a woman possessed: the power over herself.⁸⁸ Consequently, by placing the responsibility, and often blame, for "bad wives" on the husband, writers stripped women of a basic sense of autonomy while increasing the husband's own sense of masculinity. By allowing patriarchs to effectively subsume their wife within their own person, husbands increased their sense of control and power over their wives far past that of the political and economic, but to a very basic sense of self.

Contemporary authors instructed husbands to treat their wives well, if only as a method to deter wives' bad behavior. The same authors instructed husbands not only to love their wives, but to also to lessen their expectations of women by recognizing their inherently weaker nature. Boyle advised his male readers that wives will have 'infirmities' and that the wise man must, "beare with hers...she is said to bee the weaker vessel, and though the stronger, that the bigger

⁸⁸ In a similar vein, Laura Gowing has noted a common imagery of women as 'leaky vessels' in jest books, in which women often prove incontinent. This is perhaps the basest example of women's lack of self-mastery: as Gowing explains, "women's inability to control their own boundaries tested, and marked, the changing contours of shame in early modern culture.." *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century England*, 22-23.

horse might beare the heauier loade.”⁸⁹ According to Boyle, this dynamic was divinely ordained, as God made man the stronger being in order to guide and protect his female companion. Here Boyle explicitly recognized the sense of duty, even divine duty, involved in the role of husband and patriarch. As a man, the husband not only received the privilege of being a more perfect and exalted being, but he also received a great deal of responsibility. A wife was a less capable being, and, although needed to be a husband’s helpmeet, she was considered inherently less capable of dealing with difficulties than her husband. This quotation most obviously slights women and sheds light on early modern beliefs about them, but it also illuminates early modern beliefs about men as husbands. Contemporaries placed a great deal more responsibility and expectation within the person of the husband, and by expecting the husband to bear a wife’s burdens, the above quotation follows a larger trend of a husband guiding, controlling and essentially subsuming his wife under his own person.

The authors above described the nature of the relationship between husband and wife in ambivalent terms, noting the wife’s value while simultaneously reinforcing her weak nature and duty to be commanded by her husband. A wife was an “equal” and a “fellow heir”, but she was simultaneously a subordinate who necessarily needed masculine guidance. Yet this unequal relationship was not explicated for the express purpose of maligning the wife as a lesser being. Rather, commentators discussed the details of a wife’s subordination in order to promote a husband as a patriarch who possessed the most important traits of masculinity: self-mastery and mastery of those beneath him. It is, in fact, unsurprising that contemporaries shed the most amount of ink explicating the dynamics of the relationship between husband and wife, because it was this companionate, collaborative relationship that most directly threatened a husband’s sense

⁸⁹ Boyle, *Counsel to the Husband*, 87.

of mastery. From describing the home as a 'little commonwealth' in which the husband ruled as king, to describing the marital union as a physical body in which the husband ruled the wife as a head to the body, to even taking credit for the most basic of a wife's actions (such as bad behavior) that could point to her autonomy, a husband claimed his role as patriarch and preserved his masculinity.

Contemporaries considered wives subordinate to their husbands in all ways. They believed women lacked the masculine traits of self-mastery and rationality, and consequently considered it imperative for husbands to manage their wives. Interestingly, a similar scenario applied to women's roles as mothers. While one might expect that women would be given a significant amount of autonomy in motherhood (children were, of course, at the very core of the female sphere) contemporary men had a great deal to say about how women nurtured their children. Yet the interest in a mother's work was not born simply out of concern for the child; the authors were more concerned with a mother showing her child too much love rather than too little. Consequently, contemporary authors' preoccupation with a woman's care of and relationship with her children in many ways mimicked the concerns for a husband's control over his wife. These authors' discussions of motherhood reflected a belief that a mother's love was irrational and thus subordinate to the more reasonable nature of a father's love. Consequently, the authors expressed the need to circumscribe and dictate the nature of maternal love and guidance. By claiming women's maternal roles as another example of their lack of self-mastery and inherent need to be guided by men, contemporary authors used motherhood as a site in which men could claim mastery, and thus masculinity, and consolidate patriarchal order.

Contemporary authors considered a mother's work important, because they considered children important. Children fulfilled not only a religious purpose (to people the church), but a

patriotic one as well. As Robert Snawsel stated, "...good parents are special instruments to make godly children...and godly children...will make religious men and women, and religious men and women doth make a flourishing church, and a famous common-weale, set forth Gods glory, and establish the Princes kindome."⁹⁰ Here Snawsel made no distinction between the work of fathers and mothers, but appeared to conflate the contribution of both sexes to the proper rearing of children (this was likely because a father was considered the spiritual head of the household, despite the mother being more directly in charge of childrearing). Nevertheless, parenting was important work, as it produced godly children to people a godly kingdom.

Richard Allestree more specifically mentioned the mother's vital role in raising a child. He noted a mother's presence during a child's most important developmental stage and its impact upon the larger community, noting that both sons and daughters were in the care of the "female institution" until the age of seven, when (in his opinion) the child's mind was most impressionable. Consequently, Allestree argued that "...the Estate of Republics entirely hangs on private families, the little Monarchies both comprising and giving law unto the great..."⁹¹ Here Allestree noted the important civic role of motherhood. While the authors surveyed more frequently detailed the important role of the husband and patriarch in establishing the 'little commonwealth' of the home, Allestree conversely placed the importance within the person of the mother. She raised and nurtured the little minds and souls who would populate the church and kingdom. The little commonwealth informed the greater commonwealth, and consequently her work was directly instrumental to the good of the country. Through the work of motherhood, religious and political power was placed directly in the hands of women.

⁹⁰ Robert Snawsel, *A Looking Glasse for Married Folkes*, (London: N. O[kes] 1610), A5-6.

⁹¹ Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, A3.

It is of little wonder, then, that contemporaries found the role of mother a threatening one, and found reason to dictate and circumscribe its power. Through their work in raising godly sons and daughters, mothers were hugely significant to the welfare of the church and state. According to early modern beliefs, the rearing of children rested primarily, and naturally, in a woman's sphere. Yet some commentators were reluctant to concede this important power to mothers. Women were considered best suited for the important job of raising children; yet contemporary authors often drew upon assumptions of women's irrational nature when discussing the dynamics of motherhood, arguing that mothers' lack of self-mastery could be easily harmful to the family, and by extension, the commonwealth. When discussing motherhood, some authors were most concerned, perhaps surprisingly, with a mother's love, and criticized both its presence and absence. The absence of maternal affection was a transgression distinctly noted by Allestree, who stated, "some women have such a ruggedness of nature that they can love nothing."⁹²

Interestingly, although mothers who mistreated their children formed a topic frequently discussed in sensationalistic print, the authors of the prescriptive literature surveyed more frequently referred to mothers who loved their children *too* much. This "imprudent excess" of love, as Allestree described it, was considered just as deleterious to a child's nature as a lack of attention or affection, and, in certain situations, likely more harmful.⁹³ Allestree dedicated the greatest amount of space to an excess of maternal love, first and foremost for religious purposes. He viewed the passion of maternal love as threatening to the love and devotion a woman should reserve solely for God, stating:

⁹² Ibid., 123.

⁹³ Allestree stated that mothers love their children by natural law, "yet me find this (and other Instincts of Nature) is sometimes violated, and oftner perverted and applies to mistaken purposes; the first is by a defect of Love; the other, by an imprudent excess of it." Ibid., 123.

God is the only unlimited object of our love, towards all others 'tis easy to become inordinate, and in no instance more the in this of children. The love of a parent is descending, and all things move most violently downwards, so that whereas that of children to their parents commonly needs a spur, this of the parent often needs a bridle, especially that of the Mother, which (by the strength of feminine passion) does usually exceed the love of the Father...she is in danger if she suffer that human affection to swell beyond its banks so as to come in any competition with the Divine, this is to make an Idol of her child...Accordingly we oft see the effects of his jealousy (God) in this particular, the dotting affection of the mother is frequently punished with the untimely death of the Children; or if not with that 'tis many times with a seerer scourge: they live...⁹⁴

Allestree made several key points, the most obvious being the near blasphemy of a mother's 'unbridled' love and affection for her child. The result of this intense love, which rivaled and thus angered God, was the sickness and even death of the child; these were dire consequences for love, indeed. The author likewise made two specific points about the nature of maternal love: it was greater than that of the father's, and "feminine passion" created it. It is worth noting that the author conjoined a woman's love with the feminine trait of passion, the antithesis of masculine reason. It was this feminine passion that blasphemed God and created tragedy within the family through death. It is of little wonder then that Allestree called for a husband's rational mind to control his wife and her threatening maternal love.

The irrationality of a mother's love was not limited to a mere excess of it, but also extended to favoritism, often leading to an ungodly upbringing. Interestingly, favoritism was another topic heavily addressed by Allestree, as he viewed it as an error in love that led to the heartbreak and ruin of not only the children (including the favorite) but the mother as well, as "that darling which she makes the only object of her joy usually becomes that of her sorrow."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁹⁵ Allestree, *Ladies Calling*, 125.

Allestree described how beauty easily influenced mothers, and consequently they channeled their love in a manner that was vain and shallow.⁹⁶ According to Allestree, this inequity in maternal love easily meant the ruined character of all her children. Those who did not enjoy their mother's partiality became jealous, "and oftentimes such seeds of rancor have bin by that means sowed in children, as have bin hard to eradicate in their riper years." Whereas the favorites were "usually spoild by it, made insolent and untractable, perhaps their whole lives after."⁹⁷

Favoritism was a dangerous trait for mothers. It not only meant that the other children would have their characters impaired by their jealousy, but also that the favorite would have his or her character ruined as a mother's love was too ardent to allow her to raise the child properly. What, then, if the mother excessively loved all of her children equally? This, according to Allestree, was even worse, as all children rather than one were spoiled. As he argued, "The doting love of a mother blinds her eyes, that she cannot see their faults, manacles her hands that she cannot chastise them, and so their vices are permitted to grow up with themselves..."⁹⁸ If a mother's job was to raise the minds and souls that peopled a kingdom, she did no favor to the commonwealth by loving excessively and choosing favorites.

This excessive love, whether it applied to only one child or to all children, not only ruined the characters of all those involved, but it was also closely aligned with an ungodly upbringing. Guazzo argued that mothers who have "...but one daughter, are so blinded with the extreame loue they beare her...but suffer her to live in all wanton pleasure..."⁹⁹ Some authors

⁹⁶ As Allestree describes, "a little excelling in point of beauty turns the scales." *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁹⁹ Guazzo, *Court of Good Counsell*, B4.

showed concern over a woman's vanity and preoccupation with the materialistic, and thus ungodly, world, and her natural inclination to transfer this unwanted trait to her children: most often, her daughters. Thomas Salter warned mothers that they must keep their daughter's minds in the "Image of God", and warned them of taking too much interest in "suche graments as be gallantly garnish with golde...", accusing these mothers to be "so negligent, and carelesse over their Daughters, and Maidens."¹⁰⁰ According to Stefano Guazzo, the only hope for these daughters, ruined by their mothers' ungodly education, was to be married young, so that her husband "may correct her behavior, "like a tender twigg, make her straight, if she begin to grow crooked."¹⁰¹

Guazzo also offered perhaps the most telling description of contemporary ideas about both a mother's love for her children and her work in rearing them:

...and according to the olde saying, it is an hard matter for a mother to be fond of her children, and wise both together: but yet the right loue, is to beate and correct them when they shall deserue it, for certainly the rod doth not lessen the mothers loue, but rather increase it, for if the increase of loue be blamed in the mother, much more is it to be preoued in the father: whose part it is to examine and correct his childrens faults, assuring himself the onley way to spyle them, is to be too much fond and tender ouer them.¹⁰²

Here Guazzo argued that a mother's love and reason were essentially incompatible, and he named the father as the keeper of the tools necessary to properly raise children; the author viewed a cool detachment, the antithesis of a woman's passionate maternal love, as the trait most crucial in bringing up godly children. A mother's love was many things; it was ardent and

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Salter, *A Mirrhor mete for all Mothers, Matrones, and Maidens* (London: J. Kingston, 1579), 8:A-B.

¹⁰¹ Guazzo, *Court of Good Counsell*, B4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, G3.

irrational; it was harmful to the children, blasphemous to God, and ultimately dangerous to the kingdom. Consequently, while women had responsibility for the children, men claimed ultimate authority over this sphere in order to both “protect” the family and sustain their role as patriarch. Although childrearing fell into the sphere of the woman, it was ultimately only the patriarch, the individual who possessed the masculine traits of reason and self-mastery, who could be fully acknowledged as the architect of the godly family.

As we have seen, patriarchy appears a deceptively simple method of social organization in which men ruled and women obeyed. Patriarchy in practice, however, is much more complex, and in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, contemporary writers and theorists spent a great deal of time outlining expectations of men and women as husband and wives, and fathers and mothers. Their goal in this exercise was not only to offer a lesson in proper behavior and expectations of men and women, but also to ensure proper social ordering and by extension consolidate patriarchal power during a time in which contemporaries felt a growing sense of social disorder. It may not be surprising, then, that their top priority in reinstalling social order would begin in the home and family, the building blocks for political and religious organization in post-Reformation England. It was their express goal in this social ordering to ensure that the husband, as patriarch, assumed comprehensive power over the household.

This desire for comprehensive patriarchal power was not born out of a simple desire to fulfill the patriarchal equation of the superior male ruling over the substandard female. Rather, the intense need to consolidate patriarchal power was the product of a sense of masculine insecurity. Because of the symbiotic and companionate nature of the husband/wife relationship, patriarchs necessarily had both an equal and a subordinate in the person of their wife. Consequently, contemporaries spilt a great deal of ink discussing the ways in which a wife could

be both a help-meet, who, while seated at her husband's side, co-governed the household, while simultaneously an individual who needed to be guided by her husband's more rational nature. In order to explain this contradictory paradigm and reassert power in the person of the patriarch, the authors discussed above reinforced the commonly held assumption that women were lesser beings than men, while asserting that men, as husbands, were ultimately responsible for their wife's thoughts and actions, good or bad. By claiming that a husband essentially subsumed the person of his wife within his own, contemporary theorists stripped women as wives of their most basic sense of autonomy and authority. Indeed, the stripping of a woman's sense of autonomy is a common theme in the consolidation of patriarchal power, and can likewise be found in men's ideas and expectations of motherhood. As we have seen, the authors surveyed found the authority invested within motherhood threatening, and they criticized the most basic and natural aspect of motherhood: maternal love. By claiming that maternal love was threatening to the welfare of children, blasphemous to God, and thus a detriment to the good of the kingdom, contemporaries stripped women of the authority they claimed in the most fundamental aspect of a woman's sphere: child-rearing.

The common link throughout the evidence discussed above is not necessarily a hatred for women (although a case might easily be made for the abundant misogyny found throughout the texts), but rather men's unease with the power that women held in the family in both their roles of wife and mother. While the wife was to be her husband's partner, in a patriarchal world she was ultimately subordinate to him, and her very role of co-governor of the home and overseer of the children proved to be threatening to a man's role as head-of-household and patriarch. But what was really at stake here was not only men's power over their homes, but their sense of masculinity. By claiming any sort of tangible power, women proved to be capable of a rationality

and sense of self-mastery that was considered the bedrock of masculinity, and was what set men, as patriarchs, apart from women as subordinates. Consequently, contemporary theorists' in-depth discussions of the roles and expectations of husbands and wives, fathers and mothers were generated not only for the sake of restoring social order; they were a commentary on masculinity, autonomy and power in early modern England.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURAL MOTHER:

POWER, NEGOTIATION, AND THE CULTURE OF MATERNITY

And from my childhood, by the bringing up of my said dear mother, I did, as it were, even suck the milk of goodness, which made my mind grow strong against the storms of fortune...¹⁰³

For in giving Children He makes us honoured in this world¹⁰⁴

A wise child maketh a glad father: but a foolish and vndiscreete daughter is a heauinesse to hir mother.¹⁰⁵

On an April day in 1619, Lady Anne Clifford spent some time sitting by the corpse of Anne of Denmark, wife of King James I of England. While at Somerset House, where the queen's body lay, she wandered through the private galleries and showed her female cousin "those fine delicate things there."¹⁰⁶ Later she paid visits to the ladies of Bedford and Hume, and finished her day by attending the christening of Lord Hunsdon's godchild. Her account of this Monday in April is representative of the experience of a woman in high social standing; maintaining high social connections was the expected norm, and these connections were commonly homosocial. Yet, underlying the memoir and diary composed by Lady Anne Clifford is something more complex than frequent

¹⁰³ Katherine O. Acheson, ed., *The Memoir of 1603 and The Diary of 1616-1619: Anne Clifford* (Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2007), 220.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Egerton, *Prayers, Meditations, and devotional pieces, by Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater, daughter of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle; collected after her death in 1663, and certified by her husband, John, second Earl of Bridgewater*. Octavo, 1663, Western Manuscripts, Egerton MS 607, British Library, 164.

¹⁰⁵ Proverbs 1:10, quoted from Greenham, *A Godly Exhortation*.

¹⁰⁶ Acheson, *Anne Clifford*, 167.

social callings. Lady Anne's personal and political struggles illustrated a sense of close maternal connections that manifested themselves in opposition to patriarchal control.

As the sole living child and heiress to George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland, Lady Anne was familiar with a life of privilege and connections. Her father, a favorite of Queen Elizabeth, held long-standing rights to baronies in Clifford, Westmorland, and Vescy. Her mother, Margaret Russell, countess of Cumberland, was the daughter of the second Earl of Bedford, and her aunt, whom she frequently mentioned in her memoirs, was the widow of the twenty-first earl of Warwick. Yet, perhaps because of these privileges, Lady Anne experienced familial conflicts over inheritance whereby she found guidance and support from her mother. Upon her father's passing in 1605, a fifteen year-old Lady Anne entered into a legal battle with her paternal uncle, who had inherited her father's titles and various estates in her stead.¹⁰⁷ With the aid of her mother, who competed with and triumphed over the same uncle for Lady Anne's wardship (and consequently control of her property), Lady Anne presented her case as heir to George Clifford to the Court of Common Pleas. While the court saw fit to maintain the will of the deceased and allow her uncle to keep his brother's titles, they judged that she should receive a compensation of £10,000. If she should agree not to further pursue adjudication of the case, she would be awarded £15,000. Lady Anne and her mother rejected the latter offer and continued to pursue Lady Anne's right of inheritance. In 1615, the courts ruled that she should receive the right to the properties over her uncle's female descendants, as well as £17,000 compensation (£20,000 if she agreed to cease all claims).

¹⁰⁷ Lisa A. Klein, "Lady Anne Clifford as mother and matriarch: domestic and dynastic issues in her life and writings," *Journal of Family History* 26:1 (2001), 18-38.

Lady Anne's 1609 marriage to Richard Sackville, third Earl of Dorset, further complicated her legal case. Dorset's extreme gambling habits and general profligacy contributed to marital turbulence, as the couple quarreled not only over money issues but also over custody of their daughter. Lady Anne, as a mother informally separated from her husband, found solace in the company of her mother and daughter. Her mother, Lady Cumberland, educated her and guided her public and political battles with her uncle, challenging the male authority that attempted to seize what she viewed as her daughter's rightful inheritance. Lady Cumberland additionally oversaw her daughter's instruction in the necessary tools of an elite woman's life (including dancing, French, and reading). As an adult, Lady Anne's own daughter was removed from (but later returned to) her household by the authority of her husband, causing a personal anguish reflected in her memoirs. Thus, while Lady Anne Clifford serves as one example of an aristocratic woman's concern with social standing and means, her memoirs also reflect the central place of maternal connections within seventeenth-century England. Lady Anne Clifford's tumultuous life was situated within a culture of patriarchal control; yet maternal connections within her family served as an outlet for both resistance and comfort.

Eventually Lady Anne's paternal uncle died without heirs, leaving Lady Anne her father's inheritance as well as the original compensation of £17,000. She became one of the largest landowners of seventeenth-century England, but the complex road leading to her gain was one of male control and female challenge.¹⁰⁸ Her story reflects the pervasive, yet flexible authority of patriarchy, as well as the importance of the maternal role within seventeenth century England. Lady Anne Clifford's experience, while fairly

¹⁰⁸ For an overview of Lady Anne's legal battles see Introduction; Acheson, *The Memoir of 1603*.

unique due to her exceptional social position, illustrates a sense of female resistance that, when necessary, rejected the cultural passivity so desired in the early modern female.

In seventeenth-century England, maternal bonds were often at the core of familial relationships. This chapter will explore the culture of maternity, maternal bonds, and the power invested and contested within motherhood in early modern England.¹⁰⁹ Women forged a distinct female culture and consciousness through the bonds and experiences of motherhood, and, for some women, this consciousness helped them to negotiate patriarchal control by claiming power and authority within the role of mother. Through an analysis of women's memoirs, diaries, and advice books, this chapter argues that women used maternity to wield authority while under the thumb of patriarchal rule by transforming motherhood from a spiritual punishment to a positive religious and social contribution. Furthermore, a select few women were even able to use the role of mother to enter the public sphere through popular "mother's legacy" publications, exercising a power and speaking with an authority typically reserved for men.¹¹⁰ While male authors of prescriptive texts criticized and regulated motherhood, women simultaneously claimed authority within this role, making early modern motherhood a contested site of power and

¹⁰⁹ This essay argues that maternity was a prevalent feature of female culture; however, maternity should not be viewed as the sole or essential feature of this culture. While Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have devoted a chapter of *Women in Early Modern England* to the linguistic, spatial, and material aspects of female culture, more research needs to be done on the subject.

¹¹⁰ As I have attempted to understand women's experiences as dictated by their own personal thoughts and memories, my sources have been largely limited to the literate and consequently the social elite. However, as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford illustrate, women's economic responsibilities increased greatly within the middling and popular classes, and it is reasonable to believe that these women had more room to further challenge private patriarchal control. While my sources immediately represent a more elite grouping, we may assume that the challenges posed by patriarchy, and the connections afforded by maternity, were likely experienced by middling and popular classes as well. Across social boundaries, then, the experience of motherhood was an important aspect of female collective culture and patriarchal negotiation. See "Female Culture" in *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720*.

negotiation in the gender politics of early modern England.¹¹¹ By better deconstructing the cultural experience of maternity and its relationship to patriarchy, we may gain a more comprehensive understanding of women's experiences as well as the complex gender dynamics within early modern England.

Historians have not always viewed motherhood as a positive component of the female experience in early modern England. Lawrence Stone's foundational study of early modern family life offered a grim view of motherhood. Stone argued that the nuclear family is a relatively modern phenomenon, and he offered a three-part model that traced the development of the family from a cold, kinship-oriented clan into a nuclear, loving unit.¹¹² According to Stone's study, the years between 1550 and 1700 fall within the "Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family" period, in which the power of the male head of household began to be strengthened at the expense of wider kinship connections. Stone ascribed political implications to the development of a strengthening patriarchy in seventeenth-century England; this was the era of a strengthening and centralizing monarchy, and fathers mimicked the rights of the monarch within familial units that were increasingly viewed as microcosms of the state.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Where possible this essay attempts to delineate Tudor maternity; however, sources revealing the more commonplace of female experiences in sixteenth-century England are few. Nevertheless, as past scholars have shown, there are few if any reasons to believe that seventeenth century child-rearing attitudes and practices, including those of the Puritans, were any different than those in the preceding century: see "Attitudes to Children" and "Discipline and Control" in Pollock, *Forgotten Children*. Additionally, the scope of this chapter has been limited to the seventeenth century, as the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of more introspective writing conventions, a phenomenon that has been erroneously attributed to the rise of individualism and more affectionate interpersonal relations.

¹¹² Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, 121-219.

¹¹³ Interestingly, Stone does not reconcile this theory with the regicide of Charles I and the following Interregnum, which may be interesting in application to the theory of strengthening patriarchy.

Stone also cited religion as an important contributor to the strengthening of early modern patriarchy. Stone argued that the Protestant rejection of the spiritual mediation of priests placed religious meditations within the home, and consequently gave the head of the household- the father- a distinctive power over his familial unit. This power was particularly forceful within Puritan households, where religious zeal could be detrimental to the position of the wife. He argued that "...the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers meant in practice that the husband and father became the spiritual as well as the secular head of the household. The aggrieved or oppressed wife could no longer rely on the priest to provide counter-poise to potential domestic tyranny arising from this new authority thrust upon her husband."¹¹⁴ According to Stone, women as wives in later sixteenth and seventeenth-century England were in an increasingly subjugated familial and spiritual position.

If, according to Stone's hypothesis, women as mothers were in an oppressed position under their husbands during this period, they took out their frustrations upon their children. Stone argued that the choice method of molding young minds and characters was physical; parents disciplined their children by "breaking their will", as children were products of original sin and thus required punishments suitable for their sinful nature. Stone cited beatings and whippings as the punishment of choice for English children, and argued that a larger number of children were beaten for longer spans of their childhood in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries than any other period in

¹¹⁴ Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, 155.

history.¹¹⁵ Because of the ostensibly brutal nature of childrearing in early modern England, Stone concluded that parent-child relations must have been cold and indifferent. While children were expected to fear both parents, Stone argued that mothers had the ability to be exceptionally brutal, arguing that, “indeed, it is clear that children often had as much or more to fear from their mothers than from their fathers, presumably because the psychological frustrations and anxieties of the former were vented on their helpless children.”¹¹⁶ In this view, the oppression of patriarchy served as a means to psychologically damage mothers, which in turn damaged their relationships with their children and the children themselves. The constraints of patriarchy, which Stone argued strengthened in the seventeenth century through a mixture of authoritarian political influence and more private religious devotion, trickled down through the wife towards the children to create a cold and distant family that was under the tight rule of their male head of household. Thus, Stone viewed patriarchy as an inflexible cultural marker of seventeenth-century England, which oppressed women even within the feminine, domestic realm and was a factor in the psychological distancing of mothers and children.

Lawrence Stone’s grim view of the early modern family has been refuted by historians who have found ample evidence of more “modern” loving, family relationships. These historians, however, have largely focused on general family relations and have not specifically centered their research on maternal relationships and patriarchy. Linda Pollock responded to Stone’s work with an aggressive defense of the tender nature

¹¹⁵ See “Areas of Repression” in Ch. 5 “The Reinforcement of Patriarchy” in Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

of early modern English and colonial American families. She likewise rejected Phillippe Ariès's thesis that the concept of childhood was a product of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁷ Her interest, however, was not necessarily the complete inter-dynamics of familial relations; she did not address the social relationships between husbands and wives, nor did she address the connections between the public and the private spheres. Rather, using scientific research that demonstrates the socio-biological necessity of childrearing for man and primate, Pollock linked the innate nature of childrearing to firsthand evidence found within diaries and autobiographies. Her findings demonstrated knowledge of the child as a category distinct from the adult, a generally low level of physical abuse, and an overwhelming concern and care that parents offered their children in early modern England. Thus, Pollock rejected Stone's thesis and inserted in its stead a more harmonious familial vision, albeit one in which no differentiation was made between parental roles and the political dynamics of a patriarchal household.¹¹⁸

Anthony Fletcher's *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England, 1500-1800* has offered the most comprehensive study of patriarchy and the early modern family. Fletcher acknowledged the fluid nature of the English patriarchal social system and the wide variety of individual experiences within it, and argued that between 1500 and 1800,

¹¹⁷ In *L'Enfant at la Vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Règime* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1960), Ariès argues that a concept of childhood did not exist until the seventeenth century, when parents slowly began to realize that children were not merely for play and amusement. In this view, children were not fully conceptualized as being different than adults until the eighteenth century, which saw the creation of children's literature and Rousseau's treatises on the importance of children's education and growth. See Linda Pollock's revision of this thesis in "The thesis re-examined: a criticism of the literature" in *Forgotten Children*, 33-67.

¹¹⁸ It is important to note that Pollock did not deny that, at times, children were beaten and abused. Rather, she views loving relationships as the accepted norm and any prolonged physical punishment as a social aberrance.

social, political, and scientific changes further strengthened patriarchy.¹¹⁹ While he offered a few case studies narrating the day-to-day working of patriarchy in early modern England, his focus was largely on a prescribed conduct defined by male ownership and female submission. While Fletcher offered a useful analysis of the ideology of patriarchy in seventeenth-century England, he largely drew his research and conclusions from the viewpoint of the theoretically dominant sex and did not fully explore women's reactions to and experiences within a patriarchal social system.

A few key historians have recognized the power implicit in women's thoughts and actions. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford's path-breaking work on women in early modern England serves as the framework for this study. Mendelson and Crawford offered a synthesis of the experiences of early modern English women, including all stages of women's lives across social boundaries, as well as their public and private responsibilities and roles. In particular, their discussion of female culture is influential to this chapter, as they argue that women shared in a distinct culture that was pervasive across class boundaries, lending to this chapter's argument that women experienced a distinct female consciousness through maternity that afforded them a sense of authority.

Notably, Mendelson and Crawford demonstrated how speech- a cultural female trait that men popularly denigrated and even punished- was a tool of female agency.¹²⁰ As

¹¹⁹ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England*, xv-xxii. For example, Fletcher uses changes in scientific knowledge of the body to bolster his thesis of heightened patriarchy. The female body was viewed as a biological inversion of its male counterpart until a language of otherness blossomed with the "discovery" of the clitoris in 1561, followed by the conjecture in 1682 that women contained an ovum rather than seed. Together, Fletcher argues, these discoveries enabled early modern thinkers to create physical, and consequently gender, differences between the sexes that supported patriarchy's subordination of the female, 30-43.

¹²⁰ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 212-218. For a further discussion of speech, male control and female punishment see "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal

they described, “the proverb ‘words are women, deeds are men’ reminds us that one of women’s greatest strengths resided in discourse, which they were apt to employ as a mode of direct and vigorous action. Women censored speech and men disparaged feminine rhetorical prowess not because it was insignificant, but because it could be powerful and dangerous...scolding was just one end of a wide spectrum of female rhetorical genres that offered modes of female agency in family, neighborhood, and the world at large.”¹²¹ While the social room to maneuver may have been limited, Mendelson and Crawford’s acknowledgement that women did, in fact, create spaces of autonomy while challenging patriarchal control is important to fully appreciate the social and cultural position of women in early modern England. As we will see, women as mothers may have been under patriarchal control, but, through motherhood, created spaces of power and autonomy.

As discussed in Chapter Two, a woman’s position within seventeenth-century English society was governed by a deep-seated tradition of patriarchal rule. Contemporary discourse deemed male control crucial to the governance of the home, as contemporaries viewed the home as a microcosm of the state and training ground for appropriate public behavior. As we have seen, male prescriptive writings from the seventeenth century reflected this belief, as they often attempted to dictate the rules and norms for interpersonal family dynamics, insisting upon the father’s overarching authority. William Gouge’s 1622 work, *Of Domesticall Duties*, is an excellent example of this type of prescriptive genre that attempted to invade the private realm and dictate

Authority in Early Modern England” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹²¹ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 215.

acceptable family practices, and his expectations of women's roles as wives and mothers were typical of patriarchal attitudes. Gouge drew a parallel between the relationship between husbands and wives to that of Christ and his church; a wife (like the Christian church) was invaluable yet naturally lesser to its head. Because of this natural subjection to male authority, Gouge insisted upon dictating to wives the proper methods in governing their children and household. As discussed in Chapter Two, a patriarch's interference within maternal relationships was considered integral to the family's spiritual health, as mothers, with their irrational love and lack of self-command, threatened to love their children more than God. Gouge himself warned that, "the extreme in the excess is too much doting upon children: as they do who so unmeasurably love them, as they make reckoning of nothing in comparison of children. Even God himself is lightly esteemed, his worship neglected, his word transgressed..."¹²² Gouge's work displayed a particular concern with a mother's love; that is, the passionate, and consequently irrational, love that a woman displayed for her child was spiritually threatening to both parties. As a result, a mother's love and care over her child should be under masculine guidance. As we have seen, the guidance of women as wives and mothers was central to a man's sense of masculinity and was thus the cornerstone of manhood and patriarchy. Motherhood, then, was extremely political, as it both threatened, and consolidated, power for early modern patriarchs.

Male-authored prescriptive texts concerning the family and motherhood abound, but through an investigation of female-authored texts, including diaries, autobiographies, and advice books, we may see how women challenged and negotiated patriarchal rule and

¹²² William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 500.

were able to garner a sense of authority from the experience of motherhood.¹²³ In fact, from the earliest stages of maternity women demonstrated a collective female experience that in practice defied the idea of a socially ubiquitous patriarchy. Adrian Wilson's essay, "The Ceremony of Child-Birth and its Interpretations," described the lying-in period as a period in a woman's life that was distinctly female-oriented, arguing that, "the immersion of the mother in a female collectivity elegantly inverted the central feature of patriarchy."¹²⁴ This all-female realm was thus an inversion of the traditional social hierarchy as the father was subject to the mother's needs, and she withheld all gendered domestic obligations, including sex and domestic labor. Fundamentally, the importance of the lying-in chamber was found in its strictly female atmosphere, in which women could exclude males and exhibit their specific expertise and knowledge in childbearing. Wilson further posited that the lying-in chamber held a religious significance, as its darkened atmosphere may have resembled a chapel with women performing the important ceremonial functions.¹²⁵

David Cressy has further cited the lying-in chamber as a site of female authority, and has noted the gender politics involved in men's absence. He cited the "festivities" of

¹²³ While 'personal chronicles' emerged in the later middle ages, diaries first emerged in England in the latter part of the sixteenth century, primarily in the form of spiritual journals. Within a few decades the spiritual journal was accompanied by diaries, whose purpose was to keep an account of temporal affairs in the same manner that the former accounted for the divine. Often diaries kept an account of both. Ralph Houlbrook, ed., *English Family Life, 1576-1716: An Anthology from Diaries* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 3.

¹²⁴ Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretations," in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, 87.

¹²⁵ Indeed, midwives traditionally christened ill newborn babies to ensure their safe passage in the afterlife, a practice that came under intense debate after the doctrinal changes of the Reformation, and after medically trained men began to insert themselves into birthing rooms.

the gossips (the contemporary name given to attendants at childbirth), as, during delivery and immediately post-partum, the lying-in chamber continued to be an all-female realm in which gossips served to keep the new mother in good spirits. As he described, “the marital bedchamber, the heart of patriarchal prerogative, became a gossips parlour, busy with bustling women.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, according to Cressy, the chamber was often criticized for being too boisterous and lacking decorum. As he explained, “...the gathering of women at childbirth was exclusive, mysterious, and potentially unruly. In the interests of health and decorum, and perhaps also to control costs and to reassert masculine authority, some men mocked at the meetings of midwives and gossips...”¹²⁷ In fact, this reputation of an unruly, all-female gathering may explain why some male authors attempted to direct women in their choice of gossips. One author advised his female readers to “send for the Assistance of some sober, wise Women, among her Neighbours, such as have gone through the like hazard before; but above all, take care there be no frightful, whimsical, resolute, headstrong, drunken, whispering talkative, sluttish Woman amongst them...”¹²⁸

Various records support Wilson’s interpretation of the childbed as a counter-offensive to patriarchy (although none of the sources surveyed noted a presence of the drunk, “talkative, sluttish” women that Barret cited). Most fundamentally, seventeenth-century English men and women recognized childbirth as a distinctly feminine realm,

¹²⁶ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²⁸ Robert Barret, *A companion for midwives, child-bearing women, and nurses directing them how to perform their respective offices* (London: Printed for Tho. Ax...,1699), 7.

despite growing professional insistence upon informed men's control. Diaries discussed aristocratic women's common trips to visit friends, relatives and neighbors during their childbirth, illustrating a collective female experience that, at times, may have resembled a female social gathering. Lady Margaret Hoby, for example, recorded her actions during one Wednesday: "in the morning at 6 a clock I prayed privately: that done, I went to a wife in travail of child, about whom I was busy till 1 a clocke..."¹²⁹ Another date Hoby recorded that "I was sent for to Trutsdall to the travail of my cousin Ison's wife, who that morning was brought to bed of a daughter."¹³⁰ While the first birth Hoby attended was probably that of a commoner neighbor, the reference to a cousin does not necessarily reflect close blood ties, as all extended family (through marriage or bloodlines) would have been referred to as cousin. Hoby's attendance at the labors of women of two very different social statures illustrates a collective female experience that defied social boundaries; in fact, it was often customary for local female aristocracy to attend the births of socially inferior neighbors. Regardless of social position, contemporaries saw childbirth as a general platform for female collectivity that surpassed mere social norms through its biblical roots.¹³¹ One male-author, in his treatise on childbirth, described Ruth

¹²⁹ Dorothy M. Meads, ed., *The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1930), 63.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹³¹ It is important to note here that this female collectivity does not necessarily imply a harmonious sisterhood, an idea that Linda Pollock has criticized in connection to the understanding of early modern childbirth. She has argued that "female alliances were more narrow, more transient, more subservient to other bonds, more confrontational than we have envisioned, and never unconditionally supportive." See "Childbearing and Female Bonding in early Modern England," *Social History* 22:3 (Oct., 1997): 289. That women's relationships could be confrontational does not, however, negate the existence of a distinct female experience and culture, or the space and autonomy it could provide.

4:14, where Ruth favored her daughter-in-law over her sons, and the daughter-in-law's child was named by female neighbors.¹³²

While childbirth was a way for distant female kin and more immediate female neighbors to gather, it was also a way in which mothers, daughters, and granddaughters sealed bonds. Lady Barrington spent several months with her daughter during her pregnancy and assisted her during her childbirth. As one friend wrote to Lady Barrington, “Your presence will be a great comfort to your worthy daughter in that condition she is in, your absence would have added much to her affliction and caused many distracted thoughts in your own good heart.”¹³³ While mothers may have been present during pregnancies and childbirths, some stayed with their daughters while the child was young to help look after the baby. Alice Thornton recalled an evening when her own mother saved her child from being smothered by the wet nurse. She recalled that the baby and nurse “laid in my dear mother's chamber a good while. One night she heard my dear child make a groneing troublesomely, and stepped immediately to nurse's bed side she saw the nurse fallen asleep, with her breast in the child's mouth, and lying over the child; at which she, being afrightened, pulled the nurse suddenly from her, and so reserved my dear child's life from being smothered.”¹³⁴

¹³² Christopher Hooke, *The Child-Birth or Women's Lecture* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1590), 2. For a more in-depth discussion of female networks, including friends and neighbors, see Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighborhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹³³ Arthur Seale, ed., *Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1983), 94.

¹³⁴ Charles Jackson, ed., *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton of East Newton, Co. York*, (Durham: Andrews and Co., 1875), 91.

While reflections of lived experiences demonstrate a collective female experience through maternity, prescriptive writings on childbirth illustrate a contested realm. Some male authors wrote prescriptive treatises offering instructions in how to appropriately manage pregnancy and childbirth, and were consequently invading a feminine space and knowledge base. Despite being common practice for a woman to choose her own midwife, one male author devised particular traits of a midwife to look for when hiring. She should be middle-aged (not too young or too old), with small, clean hands and no general deformities. He also decreed that “concerning her behavior, she must be mild, gentle, courteous, patient, sober, chaste, not quarrelsome; nor choleric, neither proud nor covetous, nor a blabber...”¹³⁵ Notably, this author was not necessarily concerned with the midwife’s experience and ability to successfully deliver children. Rather, he attempted to secure the gender norms of a “good woman” unto a female that possessed a distinct type of authority and challenged patriarchal control.

Another male author similarly echoed this concern over an authoritative female presence. William Sermon’s *The Ladies Companion*, likewise attempted to insert masculine control over this female realm. Unsurprisingly, Sermon showed a distinct concern with the woman who carried the power in the lying-in chamber, the midwife, echoing Guillemeau’s concern with her appearance and disposition.¹³⁶ Sermon’s advice on how to choose an appropriate midwife and how to identify “false” ones likewise

¹³⁵ Jacque Guillemeau, *Child-Birth, or the Happie Deliverie of Women Wherein is Set down the Gouernment of Women* (London: A. Hatfield, 1622), 84.

¹³⁶ William Sermon, *The Ladies Companion, or English Midwife wherein is Demonstrated the Manner and Order how Women ought to Govern themselves during the Whole Time of their Breeding Children and of their Difficult Labour, Hard Travail and Lying-In* (London: Printed for Edward Thomas, 1671), 5-7.

denigrated female space, stating that his manual was written because women were in “...want of help in such deplorable Conditions, by reason of the Unskilfulness of some which pretend in the Art of Midwifry...yet not in the least acquainted with the various Diseases which frequently afflict the Female Sex...”¹³⁷

Even more interesting, however, is a female-authored published response to works like those above. Published at a later date, 1671, *The Midwives Book* offered a more scientific explanation and guide to the sexual organs and their functions, which was perhaps a response to the male, scientific intrusion into the female childbed. This author, however, explicitly challenged this intrusion, and castigated men who erroneously believe they may be more qualified to deliver babies:

Yet the holy scriptures have recorded women to the perpetual honour of the female sex. There be not so much as one mention of men-midwives mentioned there that we can find, it be the natural propriety of women to be much seeing into that art...farther knowledge may be gained by a long and diligent practice, and communicated to others of our own sex...the poor country where there are none but women to assist...the women are fruitful, and as safe and well delivered, if not much more fruitful, and better commonly in childbed than the greatest ladies of the land.¹³⁸

This collective female experience, passionately defended by the above female author, did not end with childbearing. Contemporaries considered childrearing a distinctly feminine realm, and, while mothers were to care for children of both sexes before the age of seven, they often expressed a particular concern for their daughters’ education and care. In her mother’s legacy book, Elizabeth Joscelyn wrote to her husband

¹³⁷ Ibid., A3.

¹³⁸ Jane Sharpe, *The Midwives Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered* (London: Printed for Simon Miller, 1671), 2-3.

that, if she died and their unborn child was a daughter, that Joscelin's mother should take the daughter, as she desired that her daughter learn, "...the Bible as my sisters doo. Good huswifery, writing and good work."¹³⁹ Joscelin's desire for her daughter's upbringing by a woman, her grandmother, was motivated by a concern for her proper education, lending to the idea that women's subordination often resulted in the creation of a distinct female culture and a greater sense of female consciousness.

That a young women's education should be carefully managed by women- ideally a mother- was a common sentiment. Hannah Wooley, a governess and a self-described talent at a number of skills, cited the importance of homosocial bonds and female culture, and did so in the context of women's exclusion and perceived inferiority. Interestingly, Wooley argued vehemently that women contained the same wit as men, but were merely excluded from educational opportunities: "hence I am induced to believe, we are debarred from the knowledge of humane learning, lest our pregnant wits should rival the towering conceits of our insulting Lords and Masters."¹⁴⁰ Perhaps because of this distinct feeling of exclusion, the author insisted that women teach each other- and maintain- feminine knowledge. This passing of tradition was especially significant between mothers and daughters, and Wooley insisted that "be ye mothers patterns of virtue to your daughters: let your living actions be lines of their directions."¹⁴¹ While she advised that mothers teach their daughters more secular traits- distilling, preserving, and needlework-

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Joscelin, 107.

¹⁴⁰ Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewoman's Companion, or Guide to the Female Sex Containing Directions of behaviour, in all places, companies, relations, and conditions, from their childhood down to old age* (London: A. Maxwell, 1673), 1-2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

mothers were ultimately an examples of virtue and morality for their daughters.

Consequently, while patriarchal norms dictated a gendered divide between men and women's education, some women used the idea of their inferiority to consolidate female culture and bonds, while asserting that women, be it mothers or grandmothers, played an important and positive role in a female's upbringing.

Death, whether of a mother or a child, likewise demonstrated the importance of maternal bonds and female collectivity to the early modern woman's experience, and some records reveal the distinct significance of maternal connections. In a funeral sermon for Margaret Ducke, William Gouge relayed the story that the woman, on her deathbed, called forth her daughters and gave them each special blessings: "putting her hand on her shoulder, said to her, I give you that blessing which my mother gave to me at her death."¹⁴² Lady Elizabeth Delavel recorded a similar distinct maternal connection, albeit with her grandmother, who, along with Delavel's aunt, took charge of the young girl. In particular, Delavel's memory of her grandmother's death demonstrates the bond between the two women: "I for my part kneeled by her bedside and prayed earnestly for her departing soul with many tears till her last breathe was drawn...Leaving me in this valley of tears to bewaile our loss of life, which I did most heartily and shall do to the end of my life. The loss of such a parent in my great youth is never enough to be lamented by me."¹⁴³ While it is typically held that seventeenth-century writing tropes often lack a

¹⁴² William Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon Preached by Dr Gouge at Black-Friers London, in Cheswicke Church August 24 1646* (London: Printed by A.M. for Joshua Kirton, 1646), 37-38. The importance of the female deathbed and a mother's final blessing will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Six of this study.

¹⁴³ Douglas Greene, ed., *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delavel: Written Between 1662 and 1671* (Gateshead: Northumberland Press Limited, 1978), 67-68.

certain self-reflection and emotional depth, it is clear that Elizabeth Delavel, when writing about her close relationship with her mother-figure, found the words to express her pain.

Delavel was not necessarily an exceptional case. Alice Thornton recorded that “...I took the saddest leave of my dear and honoured mother as ever child did to part with so great and excellent a parent and infinite comfort...certainly the words of a dying friend prevails much; and I do believe the Lord had put words of persuasion into her mouth with prevailed more than all the world to moderate my excessive sorrow, as she said, of our meeting again, never to part.”¹⁴⁴ Lady Anne Clifford expressed a great deal of grief at the death of her mother that would be constantly reflected in her diaries as years passed; for example, she noted briefly but poignantly that during a visit to her mother’s grave “I wept extremely to remember my dear and blessed mother.”¹⁴⁵

A mother’s presence at her child’s deathbed was a traumatic event that likewise demonstrated close maternal bonds and the importance of these bonds to early modern women. In his diary, John Evelyn noted that his wife stayed with his adult daughter for weeks, until her death, when she had fallen ill. His wife’s dedication was all the more notable, as his daughter had recently run away with a young man and married him against her parents’ wishes. Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick showed a similar devotion to her ailing adult child. When her son fell ill with smallpox, she sent his wife away and risked her own health to nurse him: “I shut upp my selfe with him, doeing all I could for both his soule and body and hey he was judged by his doctors to be in a hopefull way of

¹⁴⁴ Thornton, *Autobiography*, 113.

¹⁴⁵ Acheson, *Anne Clifford*, 147.

recovery yet it pleased God to take him away by death the 16 of May, to my unexpressable sorrow.”¹⁴⁶

Elizabeth Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater, whose children and prayers for their safety comprised a great deal of the content of her loose papers, offered an unusually emotive description of her young daughter’s death:

She took delight in nothing but me, if She had seene me; if absent; ever had me in her words, desiring to come to me, never was there so fond a Child of a mother, but She now is not in this world, w(ch) grieves my heart, even my soule...when her eyes were sett, Death having seised upon her the last word she spoke was to me, when in passion I asked her if I should kiss her, she sayd yeas...¹⁴⁷

The tragedy of death, whether of a mother or of a child, afforded women the opportunity to reflect upon and express the significance of these bonds, allowing their readers to better understand the importance of maternal bonds to early modern women.

Maternal bonds were clearly meaningful to the early modern woman, but how did mothers view their social roles, particularly while under a patriarchal rule that dictated, at its most fundamental level, that women and women’s contributions were secondary to men’s? Throughout the various prescriptive writings and memoirs of Englishwomen during this period, one finds that women often conceptualized their space and roles differently than men. In fact, women viewed their maternal roles as invaluable social and personal responsibilities, as rearing a child provided loyal subjects not only to the state, but also to their church. Women, who were viewed as having a spiritual superiority over men, were in charge of the exceptionally important task of instilling piety into their

¹⁴⁶ Diary of Mary, Wife of Charles Rich, 4th Earl of Warwick, Jul 1666-Nov 1677, Western Manuscripts, Add. MS 27351-27355, British Library.

¹⁴⁷ Egerton, *Prayers, Meditations, and devotional pieces*, 232.

children; a task that had both immediate and everlasting consequences.¹⁴⁸ Ralph Houlbrooke has argued that women's spiritual strength enabled them to carve out a distinct cultural space in which they were less harshly subjected to male supervision and control. This independence might then be transferred unto the domestic realm, where they could exercise their spiritual expertise in the instruction of both children and servants. Women's writing supports this argument, and shows that some mothers took their role as spiritual overseer of their children very seriously, considering it a great public service to the realm. Dorothy Leigh discussed the importance of teaching young children to read, because, between the ages of four and ten, "...they are not able to do any good in the Commonwealth, but to learne how to serue God, their King & Country by reading."¹⁴⁹ Leigh was not alone in her belief of women's social significance. Alice Thornton wished to become a wife and mother in order to be "a public instrument of good" and viewed having children as "instruments of building up His [God's] church," reflecting both her social and religious importance as a woman and potential mother.¹⁵⁰

Although Leigh wrote that women are subordinate to men because of their sins, she was quick to claim women's important social role as mothers. After placating male readers by her admission of secondary status, the author reminded her readers that men and women owe their lives to mothers, as "except they feed of the feed of a woman, they

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of women's spiritual superiority see chapter ten of Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

¹⁴⁹ Sylvia Brown, ed., *Women's Writing in Stuart England: The Mother's Legacies of Dorothy Leigh, Elizabeth Joscelin, and Elizabeth Richardson* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 31. Brown's work contains the edited advice books written by Dorothy Leigh, Elizabeth Joscelin, and Elizabeth Richardson, as well as an introduction outlining the lives of these women writers and the context in which they wrote.

¹⁵⁰ Thornton, *Autobiography*, 77-82.

have no life.”¹⁵¹ Additionally, while male-authored texts tended to justify women’s subordination by their common ancestry to Eve, Leigh claimed that women had been redeemed in the world by the Virgin Mary and her birth of Christ, consequently negating any female fault for Original Sin. For this mother, women held no natural subordination to men, as males were dependent upon women for both their lives and their childhood education that molded them and helped teach them “how to serve God, their King, and country...”¹⁵²

Men may have designated domesticity a female task because of its insignificance in comparison to public and civic responsibilities, yet women thought of their duties as anything but insignificant. A common trope of female-authored writings is the idea of mother’s milk instilling quality and values within the child. As Lady Anne recorded, “And from my childhood, by the bringing up of my said dear mother, I did, as it were, even suck the milk of goodness, which made my mind grow strong against the storms of fortune...”¹⁵³ Furthermore Clifford reflected upon the religious values instilled upon her by her mother alone, as she notes that “about this time I began to think much of religion and do persuade myself that this religion in which my mother brought me up in is the true and undoubted religion so as I am steadfastly purposed never to be a papist.”¹⁵⁴ Alice Thornton similarly recorded that “my strict education in the true faith of the Lord Jesus Christ by my dear and pious parents, through whose care and precepts I had the principles

¹⁵¹ Brown, *Women’s Writing in Stuart England*, 36.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵³ Acheson, *Anne Clifford*, 220.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

of grace and religion instilled into me with my milk.”¹⁵⁵ While Thornton cited both parents as playing roles in her education, her reference to milk as the mode of transference reflects a distinct maternal responsibility, and both Thornton and Clifford expressly cited their mothers’ important influence in their spiritual upbringing. That these authors credited their mothers for their spirituality is important, particularly since, during this Post-Reformation era, male heads-of-households claimed spiritual authority over their homes.

Contemporary theorists often viewed men as closer to spirit and intellect while women were inversely closer to nature, and accordingly some female authors frequently referred to the body and physicality when citing the importance of maternity. While it was a common early modern trope for male authors to cite labor pains as women’s punishment for the transgression of their common ancestor, Eve, a few female authors channeled this imagery into something positive and affirming for the early modern mother. These female authors described the importance of a spiritual upbringing through more physical terminology, comparing physical birth and development to spiritual birth and growth. As Dorothy Leigh poignantly described, a mother’s labor did not end at birth, but continued until she succeeded at making her child godly:

Is it possible, that shee, which hath carried her child within her, so neere her hart, and brought it forth into this world with so much bitter paine, so many grones and cries, can forget it? Nay, rather, will shee not labour now till Christ be formed in it? Will shee not blesse it euery time it suckes on her brests... Will shee not be afraid, that the child which shee endured such paine for, should endure endlesse paine in hell?¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Thornton, *Autobiography*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, *Women’s Writing*, 23.

Elizabeth Richardson similarly described the physicality of childbirth, and equated it with spiritual upbringing, writing to her children that, "...you have no true mother but me, who not only with great paine brought you into the world, but do now still travel in care for the new birth of your soules..."¹⁵⁷

Women's roles as mothers-including breastfeeding and childrearing- united a large portion of women across social boundaries within a common experience.¹⁵⁸ The Countess of Lincoln's treatise on child-rearing best reflects this cross-boundary female experience and culture. The authority of her prescriptive text was justified by her nobility (perhaps invocative of noble women's general responsibility to their lesser neighbors, as in childbirth), but she likewise called to all good women to unite in their maternal purpose and experience: "I beseech all godly women to remember, how we elder ones are commanded to instruct the younger, to love their children, now therefore love them so as to do this office for them when they are born..."¹⁵⁹ This office was the duty of childrearing, of which the Countess of Lincoln insisted breastfeeding was of the utmost importance. Its significance rested not only in its religious antecedents- both the Virgin Mary and Sarah suckled their children- but also in the idea that God blessed women with breast milk as a sign of his requirement. However, the Countess took the importance of breastfeeding beyond the religious towards the social. A mother who breastfed

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

¹⁵⁸ Amy Froide posits that around 20% of the population of early modern England would have remained single. Thus, with 80% of the population married, it seems plausible that a large majority of women either had first-hand experience in childrearing, or would at some time participate in child-care for a married relative or neighbor. *Never Married*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Clinton, *The Countess of Lincolnes Nurserie* (Oxford: John Lichfield and James Short, 1622), 16.

transferred goodness to her child and showed her child godly affection, and thus fulfilled her social responsibility as a sincere, virtuous, honest mother. While these norms may have also served as a tool of social control, it is nevertheless notable that women had collective expectations and values embedded within the role of mother, demonstrating a distinct- yet fluid- culture.¹⁶⁰

Women viewed childrearing as an important spiritual task, and if spirituality was the main method in which women as mothers possessed some sort of tangible power, it may be unsurprising that male authors attempted to criticize mothers' religious instruction of their children and dictate a child's proper spiritual upbringing. As Thomas Salter described, "...many Mothers who are nicely curious in other parts of their daughters breeding, are utterly inconsiderate of this; they must have all civil Accomplishments, but no Christian."¹⁶¹ That a mother's vanity would impede her daughter's religious education was a sentiment expressed by several of the male-authored prescriptive writings surveyed. According to these authors, a woman's inclination towards vanity led to the children in their charge possessing "...faire faces and foule minds, proper bodyes, and deformed soules."¹⁶²

If women claimed power and authority through childbearing and rearing, and believed the transmission of female culture and a feminine education between women to be important, it may come as no surprise that prescriptive writings by male authors often

¹⁶⁰ Breastfeeding was a popular topic in post-Reformation England, and the nature of the political debate will be explored in more depth in Chapter Five.

¹⁶¹ Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling* (Amsterdam: S.N., 1682), 133.

¹⁶² John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Government*, (London: Thomas Man, 1614), 18.

described a concern over a mother's lack of interest in her growing daughters, potentially leading to the daughter's moral corruption. One author claimed that a woman's vanity was to blame for infants being given to wet-nurses, as mothers would "...rather to peruert the nature of their children, then to change the forme of their hard and round papps."¹⁶³ The concern with their appearance over their child would result in, "...the children fashioning themselues to the humours of their nurses, swerve from the loue and dutue they owe to their mothers, and haue not in them the bloud which moueth them to obey."¹⁶⁴ According to this author, a mother's resistance to breastfeeding would have disastrous consequences: the child would mimic the nature of her nurse rather than her mother, she would not love her mother, and she would not obey her, effectively ensuring that the mother failed her task of creating a dutiful subject.¹⁶⁵

Male authors frequently displayed a deep concern over a child, particularly a female child, being cared for by a servant rather than a mother. According to one author, a servant would not properly teach the child, but would attempt to ingratiate herself by teaching the children improper things. One author stated that this threat was more concerning for girls, as they might be exposed to men, particularly men of the "meaner sort", who were "apt to entertain, if not to invite amours."¹⁶⁶ According to these authors, the threat of a servant corrupting a young woman stemmed from a mother's lack of

¹⁶³ Guazzo, *The Court of Good Counsel*, F2.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, F2.

¹⁶⁵ Barbara Harris cited more realistic reasons for an aristocratic mother's choice not to breastfeed, including her propensity for travel and long absences from her estate. *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

¹⁶⁶ Allestree, *The Ladies Calling*, 131.

interest in her child's upbringing. One author explicitly instructed mothers to spend more time with their children, particularly daughters, so that the mother could monitor their children's company and conversation, and "...not only Preach but exemplifie in her own practice" proper behavior.¹⁶⁷ Another male author echoed this sentiment: he instructed mothers to be friends with their adolescent and adult daughters, so that the latter, "may have a complacence in her company, and not be tempted to seek it among their inferiors...those meaner sycophants, who by little flatteries endeavor to accru themselves into good opinion, and become their confidents...serving only to render them mutinous against their parents..."¹⁶⁸ Despite personal evidence pointing to commonly harmonious and loving relationships between parents and children (particularly daughters), and mothers great concern over their children's proper rearing and education, these authors assumed that an antagonistic maternal relationship would develop if mothers were left to their own devices in childrearing. Despite women's records showing that maternal bonds were a significant part of many women's lives, and that women often took pride in the authority that the role of mother afforded them, the above male authors argued that a mother's natural inclination was towards vanity and indifference. In the context of the gender politics of early modern patriarchy, these male authors attempted to denigrate and control motherhood and the autonomous space it afforded women, as men's sense of masculinity rested on this very control.

The politics of motherhood were revealed in the public sphere not only by male authors; the mother's advice book also offers a glimpse into the politics of motherhood

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹⁶⁸ Guazzo, *Court of Good Counsell*, 132.

and women's entry into the public sphere. The genre of the advice book, and women's writing in general, were quite scarce. In fact, women's writing accounted for only .5% of published writings from 1610-1620; however, publishers were more likely to publish female works as the century progressed.¹⁶⁹ Yet, despite their relative scarcity, this genre of writing became quite popular, making the mother's advice book somewhat of a cultural paradox: women, who were most appreciated when silent within the private realm of the home, became "bestsellers" in the public sphere.¹⁷⁰ Notably, these female writers wrote not merely as women, but as mothers, and they were only able to achieve their success by reaffirming traditional genders roles. As Brown noted, the authors of the mothers' legacies genres "...are able to step outside the bounds imposed by feminine silence and domesticity because they anchor themselves firmly within the limits of the household and maternal role."¹⁷¹ One tactic the authors used to defend their authority as writers in the public sphere was to simultaneously claim their inferiority as women. For example, Dorothy Leigh explicitly utilized the trope of female inferiority to justify her publication. According to Leigh, a chief cause of her writing was to "encourage women...not to be a-shamed to shew their infirmities, but to giue men the first and chiefe

¹⁶⁹ As Patricia Crawford notes, women's publications did pick up in the latter half of the century, as the English Civil Wars and the Interregnum, and the momentous social and cultural changes that took place therein, prompted more women to publish. Spiritual movements, such as the development of Quakerism, led women to publish prophetic writings. Women also began to engage more in political discourse, particularly as they witnessed populist movements like the Levellers. This cultural watershed prompted publishers to more routinely offer more traditional works from women, including advice books. See Patricia Crawford, "Women's Published Writings, 1600-1700" in *Women in English Society, 1500-1700*. Mary Prior, ed. (London: Methun, 1985), 212-213.

¹⁷⁰ Brown notes that Elizabeth Joscelyn's work went through eight editions between the years of 1624 and 1684: see *Women's Writing*, vi.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, viii.

place: yet let vs labour to come in second...¹⁷² Male writers often claimed that women lacked reason and self-control, and consequently mothers needed to be guided and controlled because their maternal love was too passionate. Leigh craftily used this assumption to her benefit: "...let no man blame a mother [for writing] since euery man knowes, that the loue of a mother to her children, is hardly contained within the bounds of reason."¹⁷³ The very characteristics that men used to claim women's inferiority and subordination were the characteristics these authors used to claim the authority to write.

That these female authors were writing to their children, and not to the general public, was another shrewd tactic in defending a female-authored publication and making them socially acceptable. Elizabeth Joscelyn, for example, explicitly stated that her writings were merely for her child, writing, "...I write not to the worlde but to mine own childe. Who it may bee will profit by a few weak instructions coming from a dead mother..."¹⁷⁴ Like Leigh, Joscelyn further justified her publication through both the trope of inferiority and a mother's zealous love, claiming that, "I thought of writing but then my own weaknes appeared so manifestly that I was ashamed and durst not vnder take it. but when I could finde no other means to express my motherly zeale I encouraged my selfe wth theas reasons first that I wrote to a childe and though I weare but a woman yet to a childes iudgement..."¹⁷⁵ Joscelyn not only justified her authorship through a "motherly zeal", but also defended her writings by claiming that her audience was but a

¹⁷² Ibid., 24.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 106.

mere child. Consequently, Joscelin used the very justification for her subordination-inferiority and irrationality- as reasons to assert her voice in the public sphere.

Elizabeth Richardson also explicitly denied her desire to enter the public sphere through writing, stating that, “I had no purpose at all when I writ these books, for the use of my selfe, and my children, to make them publicke...”¹⁷⁶ Richardson furthermore justified her publication by dismissing its feminine content: “the matter is but devotions and prayers, which surely concernes and belongs to women...”¹⁷⁷ Yet, as Brown noted, Richardson’s publication was likely expressly political: Richardson was a royalist sympathizer, and her “popish” prayer book was published during the Civil War.¹⁷⁸ Richardson’s legacy book, the substance of which was justified by its ‘mere’ feminine nature, was in actuality much more: it was a personal statement of allegiances during a time of great political strife.

Dorothy Leigh furthermore used her legacy book to engage in gender politics through the instruction of her sons. Despite being highly spiritual, her publication, containing “devotions and prayers”, was not merely the stuff of women. Her writings, which she explicitly stated were for all her sons, not just the eldest, also gave advice on how to properly choose a wife.¹⁷⁹ According to Leigh, the choice of a wife was greatly significant, as the choice of an ‘ungodly’ wife could tempt her sons to live ungodly lives. Leigh also used this teaching moment to engage in the discourse of the marital

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 149-150

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

relationship, instructing her sons to, "...not doe as some men, who taketh a woman to make her a companion and a fellow, and after he hath her, he makes her a seruant and drudge. If shee bee thy wife, she is always too good to be thy seruant, and worthy to be thy fellow."¹⁸⁰ Consequently, Leigh used her mother's advice book to engage, even if briefly, in a larger dialogue concerning marital relationships and the nature of gender roles; a dialogue, as we saw in Chapter Two, that was almost always reserved for male authors of prescriptive texts. So, while these authors reaffirmed gender roles by asserting their inferiority and their lack of desire to engage in a public dialogue, they simultaneously used their role of mother to assert their authority and engage in public, and political, discourse. The authors of the mother's legacy books were able to claim power, speak with authority, and engage in a public dialogue through the role of mother, further investing this social role with a distinct power and importance.

The female-authored texts, whether published legacy books or diaries, reflect not only a preoccupation with women's own maternal duties, but also close connections among adult women and their own mothers and children that often surpassed male connections, including husbands. Mothers nursed their adult daughters when ill, help look after grandchildren, and frequently kept their married daughters for extended visits. While marriage was a significant institution for early modern Englishwomen, their relationships to their female kin- particularly mothers and daughters- played a significant role in the everyday life of women. Consequently, the importance of maternal bonds to the early modern woman, as well as the role of maternity in shaping female culture and consciousness, allow us a more comprehensive understanding of female life.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

The relationships between female kin in early modern England played a central role in the everyday experiences of women, and often provided women with emotional connections and comfort. Yet motherhood provided more than just relationships: it also provided a way in which women could claim power and negotiate patriarchal control. Through motherhood women conceptualized themselves as having a greater social purpose and were able to carve out a cultural space that was uniquely their own. Although under theoretical male control, in practice women claimed authority in the governance of the home and the rearing of both male and female children – future subjects to the King and Commonwealth. Perhaps more importantly, women’s exceptional spirituality enabled them to imbibe religious virtues into their children and thus directly serve God and their religion by peopling the church. Some women even used motherhood to enter the public sphere through their published advice books, and consequently seized the opportunity to engage in a public dialogue and speak with an authority not often afforded to women. But, while motherhood enabled women to assert authority, male authors frequently attempted to denigrate and control this site, demonstrating that motherhood was not merely a stage in the early modern life cycle, but a contest for power in the politics of early modern gender. Nevertheless, while men may have attempted to assert patriarchal control over mothers, women did not passively accept their subordination and denigration. For many early modern women, motherhood was not a trivial responsibility to which they were delegated, but rather an extremely significant religious and social duty that only they had the special ability to perform.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNNATURAL MOTHER:

INFANTICIDE, GENDER, AND SOCIETY

...cast your eyes upon this other monster of nature, which was a lascivious, lewd and close strumpet, a harlot lodging priuately...¹⁸¹

... she did it out of revenge to them...¹⁸²

On March 24, 1637, Elizabeth Barnes from Battersea, Surrey slit the throat of her eight year-old daughter. According to the published account, a pamphlet authored by Henry Goodcole, Elizabeth enticed her daughter out of their home early in the morning with herring and apple pies and other fruits. For reasons undisclosed by Goodcole's account, the mother and daughter walked four miles together until they reached some woods and rested. The mother set out the feast of pies and fruits for her daughter, which, as the author describes, parents often used to "quiet and still their children in their unquietness, but this creature otherwise, to destroy her childe by that meanes."¹⁸³ After

¹⁸¹ Anonymous, *Deeds against nature, and monsters by kinde: Tried at the Goale deliuerie forNewgate, at the Sessions in the Old Bayly, the 18. And 19. of July, last, 1614. The one of a London Cripple named Iohm Arthur, that to hide his shame and lust, strangled his betrothed wife, The other a lasciuious young Damsell named Martha Scambler, which made away the fruit of her own womb, that the world might not see her owne shame* (London: Printed for Edward Wright, 1614), A4.

¹⁸² Anonymous. *The cruel mother; being a true relation of the bloody murther committed by M.Cook, upon her dearly beloved child; with the causes wherefore she did it: her occasional speeches to several friends and others that came to visit her in prison, vvith the manner of her execution and demeanour there* (London: W.R., 1670), 8.

¹⁸³ Henry Goodcole. *Natures cruell step-dames: or, Matchlesse monsters of the female sex; Elizabeth Barnes, and Anne Willis Who were executed the 26. day of April, 1637. at Tyburne, for the unnaturall murthering of their owne children.* (London: E. Purlow, 1637), 2.

the girl had feasted, she fell asleep in the coolness of the woods. Her mother, assisted by the devil, then took her daughter's life.

Elizabeth Barnes, according to Goodcole's account, felt immediate guilt for her actions and tried to kill herself by drowning. When she could not, she fled to Kensington where she eventually confessed to a married couple, who brought her to the local justice of the peace. Once imprisoned in Newgate, Goodcole visited Elizabeth, and his description of their conversation abruptly shifted the pamphlet's tone; whereas the depiction of the murder was gory and sensationalistic, he depicted the murderess herself as driven by rational motives. He learned that "she had spent all the estate shee had on one that pretended love unto her, and being by that meanes became poore and indebted, but instantly resolved on this desperate course."¹⁸⁴ So, while Goodcole's description of the murder portrayed Elizabeth Barnes as a cruel and satanic murderess, the latter interview demonstrated her vulnerable and hopeless position as a poor, unwed mother. The author depicted her as evil and menacing while simultaneously expecting readers to be familiar with and even perhaps sensitive to her desperate motives. Goodcole's account thus demonstrates the complicated cultural place of a woman who murdered her child; as the weaker vessel with no male guidance, she fell prey to a man who took her livelihood and left her with no means to support her child.

Henry Goodcole's pamphlet was not unique. Seventeenth-century London witnessed what some scholars refer to as the "infanticide craze": the frequent presence of

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 5.

infanticide cases in cheap print despite its actual infrequent occurrence.¹⁸⁵ These pamphlets were part of a larger discourse concerning murderous women in the seventeenth century. As the work of Joy Wiltenburg and Susan Staub has shown, sensationalistic pamphlets, broadsides and ballads concerning women who murdered their children and husbands frequently circulated London.¹⁸⁶ This chapter will address the creation and social use of these infanticide stories and the important role they held in forming cultural understandings of motherhood.¹⁸⁷ It will argue that the Poor Laws created localized interest in illegitimate births and infanticide and thus an increase in prosecutions, some of which were appropriated by the public sphere to form a larger discourse concerning infanticide, gender norms, and social stability. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to explain individuals' specific reasons for infanticide or concealment of birth, it will consider the social and economic factors that contributed to the act while more directly discussing the appropriation of infanticide cases for the use of bolstering social stability and cultural norms.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ See J.R. Dickinson and J.A. Sharpe's essay "Infanticide in Early Modern England: The Court of Great Sessions at Chester, 1650-1800" in Mark Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁸⁶ Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women And Female Power In The Street Literature Of Early Modern England And Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992) and Susan C. Staub, *Natures Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ The term "infanticide" itself is contested; although Laura Gowing defines the term more traditionally as murder of an infant after its birth, Hull and Hoffer argue that an infant was defined by Tudor homicide trials to be eight years old or younger. This essay will ascribe to the latter definition, although the importance of age in infanticide stories will be discussed in more depth.

¹⁸⁸ A discussion of infanticide stories in seventeenth century English culture requires a brief definition of how this paper will use the very abstract term 'culture'. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz states that "...man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." This essay will also analyze culture as a system of meaning, one which is not wholly transposed by one dominant group unto its subordinate but transferred between and shaped by

By analyzing representations of “murdering mothers” in cheap, widely circulating print, this chapter hopes to understand the ways in which infanticide was sensationalized within a burgeoning public sphere in order to serve a larger didactic purpose. In a culture grounded in rank and hierarchy, it should come as no surprise that these stories often inculcated the importance of the most fundamental hierarchy: gender. Women who murdered their children inverted a natural system of relations, and were thus a threat to the disestablishment of the system as a whole. Consequently, this chapter will explore the relationship between “unnatural mothers” and patriarchy, arguing that the infanticide craze used infanticidal mothers as an example of the consequences of unregulated women and the inversion of gender norms. This chapter is consequently concerned not only with the gender norms for women contained within these stories, but also how the dismissal of women’s gender norms affected masculinity and a more general sense of social stability.¹⁸⁹ Women’s commitment of infanticide, then, was not merely a sad tale with an innocent victim, but a threat to the very foundation of the established patriarchal system.

Infanticide in early modern England is not a new topic. Treatments of infanticide in the early modern period often deal with the subject from a quantitative and legal perspective by tracing the rise of infanticide prosecutions, and a great deal of existing historiography focuses upon the eighteenth century when indictments for infanticide were

various factions of a society. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

¹⁸⁹ For an excellent discussion of the interrelation of seventeenth century English masculinity, femininity and social order, see Cynthia Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

on the decline.¹⁹⁰ Treatments of seventeenth-century infanticide are often addressed within works dealing in larger temporal time frames or thematic issues. Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull's 1981 work is the most comprehensive treatment of early modern English infanticide, mainly discussing its juridical presence between 1558 and 1803. The authors argued that there was a drastic increase in the legal cases of infanticide stemming from the establishment of the Poor Laws of 1576, and they eventually connected the increase of infanticide with mothers' violent aggression as caused by "introjective stress."¹⁹¹ While the authors raised an important point regarding the connection between Poor Laws and infanticide indictments, their assessment of psychological motivations for infanticide is speculative at best, and they do not fully analyze the effect of infanticide upon society at large.

The most recent work, Mark Jackson's *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000*, spanned the early modern to the contemporary period and consisted of essays differing on region and methodology.¹⁹² Although Jackson's work suggested that the demise of prosecutions coincided with the culture of sensibility,¹⁹³ it also argued that the rise of infanticide prosecutions in the

¹⁹⁰For example, see Jennifer Thorn, ed., *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print, 1722-1859* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003) and Jackson, *Infanticide*, chapters 3-6.

¹⁹¹ Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).

¹⁹² Mark Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁹³ That is, the author discusses the place of rationalism, sensitivity and sympathy in the eighteenth-century legal treatment of infanticide, ostensibly linking the cultural treatment of infanticide to the rise of the modern individual. More recent scholarship challenges the connection of individualism with modernity, thus complicating this explanation for decreased indictments for infanticide; for example, see Charles H. Parker and Jerry H. Bentley, eds., *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Inc., 2007).

seventeenth century was caused by the shift to Protestantism and the rationality that ostensibly came with it. Other works have linked this Protestant rationality to the creation of the loving nuclear family; because Protestantism removed the priest as a spiritual mediator, fathers became responsible for the spiritual well-being of their family, ostensibly resulting in a more bonded, nuclear unit.¹⁹⁴ These arguments, of course, raise questions regarding definitions of rationality and likewise impose an antiquated Whig interpretation of English history associating progress and reform with Protestantism. This essay will challenge this explanation, and instead argue that it was the public forum offered by the increased use of print at the turn of the century, rather than a doctrinal shift, which was responsible for the increased concern over infanticide in seventeenth-century England.¹⁹⁵

Malcolm Gaskill's study of crime and mentalities in early modern England likewise offered a compelling perspective from which to analyze infanticide stories. To understand cultural understanding of crime, Gaskill espoused Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which he summarized as "a lived environment which shapes and limits behaviour, but can never wholly determine it."¹⁹⁶ The infanticide stories fit nicely within

¹⁹⁴ See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

¹⁹⁵ Other works look at seventeenth century infanticide as part of a larger discussion of female murderers, such as Joy Wiltenburg's *Disorderly Women And Female Power In The Street Literature Of Early Modern England And Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992) and Susan C. Staub's *Natures Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005). While Wiltenburg's work is geographically comparative, Staub's work is largely a compilation of primary sources, and consequently does not critically address the subject of infanticide within a larger historical and cultural context.

¹⁹⁶ Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

this conceptual framework; while the act of infanticide itself appears as a cultural anomaly, this chapter will demonstrate that certain factors involved in infanticide (such as the mother's marital status and social position) made the act more or less culturally comprehensible to the seventeenth-century audience. Consequently, the transgressive nature of certain actions that appear to be outside of a given cultural framework were used by printed stories to reinforce that very framework those actions defy. Law and definitions of crime are not above a society, but are firmly embedded within it, and according to Gaskill "reveal society's core values."¹⁹⁷ He argued that "for certain situations, it may be more appropriate to think in terms of social signals passing in both directions within shared cultural contexts, the inequalities of power notwithstanding."¹⁹⁸ This chapter will likewise view culture as shared between social groups, and will thus avoid using such terms as 'popular', although the nature of the sources makes such a claim attractive.

The number or frequency of actual acts of infanticide will never be known, but historians do know that it did affect English society. Hull and Hoffer argued that, excluding London, infanticide constituted 30 percent of all early modern English homicide cases, although other historians have challenged that claim, citing unreliable evidence.¹⁹⁹ J.A. Sharpe and J.R. Dickinson's study of the Court of Great Sessions in the county of Chester found 72 women accused of infanticide with 20 executions by hanging

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, xviii. Both J.S. Cockburn and Angus McLaren argue that neonatal infanticide was never common. For a discussion see Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 123.

between 1650 and 1699. They noted a sharp decline in both prosecutions and executions in the eighteenth century, with 33 women accused and four hanged.²⁰⁰ In London itself, Hull and Hoffer stated that 2.7 indictments of infanticide occurred per year for a population of 175,000 to 200,000. Consequently, using available court records one may estimate that infanticide was largely a rural crime, although London did have recorded occurrences.

The Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 dramatically affected the presence of infanticide in English society by making bastardy a local, community issue.²⁰¹ While one cannot estimate the number of children actually killed, historians do know that drastic population increase in the later sixteenth century coupled with inflation and rising food prices until 1630 created dire circumstances for some individuals.²⁰² Consequently, this national law came at a time when more mothers-particularly unmarried ones- might have been struggling. The Poor Laws made requirements for parishes to care for not only for the “impotent poor” (the elderly and disabled), but also young children who were either orphaned or could not be cared for by their parents.²⁰³ Parishes collected local taxes in

²⁰⁰ Jackson, *Infanticide*, 38.

²⁰¹ For a detailed study of the demographics of illegitimacy in early modern England, see Richard Adair’s *Courtship, illegitimacy and marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). Adair argues that there was significant regional variation in bastardy trends, with London surprisingly reflecting a dearth of bastardy cases.

²⁰² Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, 125.

²⁰³ As contemporaries well understood, the majority of children who could not be cared for were illegitimate, and parents of illegitimate children were consequently punished as a way to deter the problem. The punishment, however, was gendered: fathers would be sued for maintenance and sometimes imprisoned if they threatened to flee, but only mothers received punishment, either in the form of whippings, public confessions, or imprisonment in the House of Corrections. In one study from 1600-1699, one-quarter of women of illegitimate children were whipped while one-eighth were imprisoned. G.R.

order to pay women willing to take in these children, who would be sent out for apprenticeships when they reached the appropriate age. By making these children the responsibility of the community, mothers who risked not being able to financially care for their children became a local concern that manifested itself into the legal system.²⁰⁴ The 1624 Act to Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children made explicit the national concern of infanticide, and specifically connected the act with unmarried women. It stated:

Whereas many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid their shame and escape punishment, do secretly bury or conceal the death of their children, and after, if the child be found dead, the said women do alledge that the said child was born dead, whereas it falleth out sometimes (although hardly it is to be proved) that the said child or children were murdered by their lewd mothers, or by their assent or procurement.²⁰⁵

The Act goes on to state that any woman delivered of a bastard child, dead or alive, who concealed or aided the concealment of its birth would be punished by death. If Malcolm Gaskill was correct and the core values of a society are revealed in their conceptions of crime, we can infer that the Act's emphasis on illegitimacy demonstrates its fundamental concern with the social transgression of being an unmarried mother as much as the act of infanticide itself. This is particularly evident in the punishment of death for unwed mothers who did not report the birth of even a stillborn child.

Quaife, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth Century England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 217-218.

²⁰⁴ Despite this great concern with illegitimacy, historians have cited relatively low levels of illegitimate births, usually around two to five percent. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 8.

²⁰⁵ Corporation of London, *An Act to Prevent the Destroying or Murthering of Bastard Children* (London: Printed by Samuel Roycroft..., 1680).

The comparable concern for both illegitimacy and infanticide may be evidenced in the case of Anne Green, a young, single maid who was impregnated by the grandson (aged sixteen or seventeen, according to a contemporary account) of her master. She had been ill and doing physical labor, as she was "...very busie at turning of the Mault, over-reaching her self" when she experienced a great deal of pain.²⁰⁶ About fifteen minutes later she delivered a stillborn child and, being fearful of the consequences of her delivery, hid the child's body in the house. After the child's body was discovered, she was brought before the Justice of the Peace, where she confessed that she was guilty of committing sin (fornication), but not murder; the child was stillborn. Nevertheless, Anne Green was hanged for giving birth alone and not reporting the birth.

Anne's case was particularly exceptional, and thus recorded by contemporaries, because she survived her execution. Despite being hanged, having friends pull her feet while she hanged to ease her suffering, and being beaten on her chest to quicken the process, Anne clung to life and later recovered. The local Justices determined that she should be hanged again and only reconsidered their punishment when local soldiers argued that it was God's Providence that she lived. Nevertheless, even contemporaries determined that Anne was not guilty of killing a child. One argued that "...it is evident that the child was very unperfect, being not above a span in lenth, and the sexe hardly to be distinguished...The Midwife said also, that it had no hair, and that she did not believe that ever it had life...it is not likely that the Child was vital, the mischance happening not

²⁰⁶ W. Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders. Being A Faithful Narrative and True Relation, of one Anne Green...* (London: John Clowes, 1651), A2.

above 17 weeks after the time of her conception.”²⁰⁷ Anne Green’s crime, then, was not the killing of a child, but the concealment of a pregnancy and birth, particularly of an illegitimate child who was likely to require local financial aid. While the Act may have been trying to prevent the claim by some women that their children were born dead, it simultaneously demonstrated a governmental desire for social control over a threatening subgroup of society: unmarried women.

The government was not the only entity that attempted to assert control over pregnant women in seventeenth-century England. As discussed in Chapter Three, childbirth was a distinctly female realm, one that could provide women a sense of power and autonomy. Laura Gowing has noted another side to childbirth, one in which, for unmarried women, “...neighbors, friends, and midwives...were not companions, but threats; one from which male partners were largely absent; and one where pregnancy was an active problem for the household and community, around which were built strategies of secrecy, exposure and confrontation.”²⁰⁸ It was within this context that unmarried mothers experienced pregnancy and childbirth. Because it was easier to hide pregnancies (early modern women gained less weight and wore more forgiving clothing), it was a relatively normal part of female culture to inspect women, particularly young, single women, for signs of pregnancy by touching and inspecting their breasts. Consequently, pregnant, single women who were attempting to hide their state often looked at other

²⁰⁷ Anonymous, *Newes from the Dead. Or A True and Exact Narration of the miraculous deliverance of Anne Greene*, (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield), 7.

²⁰⁸ Laura Gowing, “Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth Century England,” *Past and Present* 156 (1997): 87. Gowing’s excellent article deals with the actual experiences of women during birth and the death of their children, and explains how existing attitudes towards secret births shaped expectant mother’s actions. While her article helps inform this chapter, her focus is on the reality of infanticide rather than its cultural representations.

women-particularly midwives- as potentially threatening to their secret. It is little wonder, then, that many of these women chose, or just hoped for, secret births. Yet it was the secret birth that implicated many women under the Act. As Gowing explained:

Labour, it seems, was so identified with the rituals of legitimate birth that it had to be erased from the story of illegitimate birth. This was obvious in the legal context: a story of a short, painless or unexpected labour was the safest one for a woman accused of killing her child, as it could explain why she had not called for help. It was also established knowledge that poor women, and in particular the mothers of bastards, bore their children quickly and more easily than those fully prepared for a lying-in: stories of illegitimate births and the murder of new-borns created a culture in which such labours were meant to be shamefully easy.²⁰⁹

One infanticide story serves as the archetype of the typical case of child murder.

According to the account, a young, single woman by the name of Martha Scambler found herself pregnant. The author stated that she tried to abort it unsuccessfully (in his words, she “sought to consume it in her body before birth...”).²¹⁰ She later delivered the baby alone, quickly, and without complication, pointing to the “shameful ease” in which mothers of illegitimate children gave birth. In fact, the author specifically described that, “To our purpose, her lusty body, strong nature, and feare of shame brought an easiness to her deliury, and required in her agony no help of a midwife which among women seemeth a strange thing...”²¹¹ According to the account Martha smothered the child and hid it in a privy. After the body was discovered, the local “looselivers” were checked by “Christian women” for signs of being postpartum. Martha was found and hanged at Tyburn.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 99.

²¹⁰ Anonymous, *Deeds Against Natvre*, A4.

²¹¹ Ibid., A4.

If the Poor Laws were central to the increased vigilance paid to infanticide, increased use of print in the early seventeenth century was central to its larger cultural presence. Here it is worth noting the nature of the public sphere in pre-Civil War seventeenth century England. The term “public sphere” as coined by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, refers more directly to the emergence of public opinion during the eighteenth century Enlightenment, which eventually led to greater individual liberties through a republican form of government. This public sphere, furthermore, was largely the creation of a bourgeois class whose underlying intention was to secure and protect their economic interests. Habermas’s theory has been critiqued and revised by a number of scholars, including David Zaret. Zaret’s essay, “Religion, Science and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England” argued that Habermas’s public sphere, with its underlying Marxist thesis, ignores larger cultural contributors to the sphere’s emergence. By looking at the politically tumultuous mid seventeenth-century English civil wars, Zaret argues that one can discern a public sphere emerging from the period’s religious and political conflicts. Thus, Zaret criticizes the Habermasian theory on two distinct points:

First, that development [the emergence of the public sphere] antedates the eighteenth-century period assigned to it...second, the increased importance attached to public opinion as the arbiter of politics had intimate links with initiatives in a more popular social milieu than in the learned culture that is the focus of Habermas’s account. Finally, the connection to religious issues becomes obvious when the events and consequences of the English Revolution are taken into consideration.²¹²

²¹² David Zaret, “Religion, Science and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth Century England” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 212-235.

Zaret was certainly correct in identifying a larger public sphere in civil war seventeenth-century England, but it may be argued that the sphere emerged earlier than even he dated it; the printing and consumerism of early seventeenth-century England must have certainly helped mold opinion, whether that opinion challenged or consolidated the political status quo. Additionally, one might move beyond the printed word to find other modes of communicative reasoning that might have been employed. The parish church had a history, since 1534, serving as both a place of religious resistance or conformity, often depending upon the minister or congregation's predilections. Consequently, one might look upon the seventeenth-century English public sphere as a remarkably fluid realm, marked by both the written and spoken word that could either support or challenge the existing regime and larger English cultural norms, with the former behavior often being the most typical.²¹³ Thus, by broadening the definition of a public sphere, one might find a wealth of sources on the promulgation of social norms and cultural expectations, including infanticide stories.

More specifically, Joy Wiltenburg has discussed the place of cheap printed materials within this early modern English public sphere. She noted "a flourishing market for broadsides and pamphlets containing songs, jokes, news and stories. Sold at markets or fairs, hawked in the streets of towns, or carried to the country by peddlers, these productions reached a far wider audience than more sedate volumes of sedate discourse."²¹⁴ These materials were obviously more affordable; ballads were often a

²¹³ For a discussion of popular participation in the English Reformation, see Christopher Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²¹⁴ Wiltenbury, *Disorderly Women*, 29.

penny each, while short pamphlets were usually around three to four pence. Many London workers could have afforded this; carpenters' wages in 1670 were thirty-six pence a day, while laborers' wages were around twenty-seven pence a day.²¹⁵ As Wiltenburg noted, literacy rates were also higher among men in large trading centers (such as London). Since wages were higher in London, the materials were printed there, and more men were able to read the materials, we can assume that cheap print was more abundant in an urban environment, and consequently a larger part of urban English culture in particular. Unfortunately, however, we cannot know for certain who exactly consumed these materials or how they were received.

Although literate men may have purchased these materials, broadsides and pamphlets may have also found their way into oral culture. Wiltenburg has noted that "authors and publishers catered to buyers rather than to an informal, nonpaying public; but it was an advantage for sellers to draw a crowd, even if only a small minority would buy. Even the poorer and less literate, whether or not they thought these productions expressed their own outlook, would have experienced their performance, in what may have been one of their closest contacts to the world of print."²¹⁶ Consequently, while a Habermasian public sphere may not have existed in the strictest sense in seventeenth-century London, cheap printed materials containing a specific type of social discourse certainly infiltrated English culture through both a literate and illiterate public.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 30.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 29.

Cheap printed materials, including infanticide stories, were thus prevalent in seventeenth-century English culture. While they were most obviously sensationalistic from a consumerist standpoint, they were also didactic and often shared common narratives and themes. Infanticide stories in seventeenth century print literature contained a multitude of didactic threads, but these narratives most fundamentally juxtaposed the naturalness of childrearing with the unnaturalness of child murder. References to animals in nature caring for their young were a common trope. One account decried one murdering mother who “by nature should have cherish them with her owne body, as the Pellican that pecks her owne brest to feed her young ones with her blood...”²¹⁷ This reference not only demonstrates the mother’s natural transgression in not protecting her child, but juxtaposes the spilling of one’s own blood to protect her child with murdering mothers who spilt their children’s blood in an effort to harm them.

Another pamphlet, describing the murder of young children by neglect stated:

Everything is carried on by a natural instinct, to the preservation of itself in its own being: and by the same law of nature even the most brutish amongst the bruite themselves, may be observed to retain a special kind of indulgence and tenderness towards the young. The monsters of the sea draw out their breasts and give suck to their young ones. The barbarous cruelties of some midwives, nurses, and *even* parents to young children, may assure us, that there are greater monsters upon the land than are to be found in the bottom of the deep.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Anonymous, *A pittillesse mother That most vnnaturally at one time, murthered two of her owne children at Acton within sixe miles from London vppon holy thursday last 1616. The ninth of May.* (London: Printed [by G. Eld] for J. Trundle, and sold by J. Wright, 1616), 2.

²¹⁸ Anonymous. *The cruel midwife. Being a true account of a most sad and lamentable discovery that has been lately made in the village of Poplar in the parish of Stepney. At the house of one Madame Compton alias Norman a midwife, wherein has been discovered many children that have been murdered ...* (London: Printed for R. Wier at the White Horse in Fleet-Street, 1693), 2.

This statement demonstrates the most basic and general response to child abuse and murder: it is the most base cruelty and a transgression of nature. It is worth noting that the anonymous author of this pamphlet also categorized midwives and nurses within these expectations. Although they were not the biological mothers, women who held these positions were expected to protect and care for the children under their charge.

Consequently, the expectations of motherhood and childrearing were not limited to biological mothers, but any women involved within the larger culture of maternity. A midwife or nurse might not have given birth to a child, but by being a woman was expected to fulfill a standard of care that was considered natural for her sex.

Child murder, especially by mothers, was culturally transgressive, as it was a crime against a fundamental aspect of nature: reproduction and childrearing. However, while authors of infanticide stories obviously maligned their murdering mothers and midwives, they could also be sensitive to their complicated social positions, motivations, and emotions. The above story of Elizabeth Barnes of Battersea explained how she murdered her daughter because she could not financially support her and felt she had no other option. Other infanticide stories likewise included the mother's concern for their children as part of and motivation for the child's murder. For example, Mary Cook, a thirty-seven year old married mother of three, fell into what we would call a deep depression. The anonymous author of the pamphlet describing the infanticide wrote that "her natural life became a burden to her, and her spiritual life she grew more and more mindless of...so at last she comes into secret council with the Devil and her own wicked heart how to bring her life to an end."²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

Mary was unsuccessful in her attempts to commit suicide by both drowning and hanging before she finally decided to slit her own throat. However, as the anonymous author described, she became concerned for what would become of her favorite child, a two year-old daughter, after she took her own life. With a knife to her own throat, Mary suddenly thought of “what should become of that childe she so much loved above the other two children when she was dead, upon this she conceived better to rid that out of this world first.”²²⁰

Mary Cook, then, took her daughter’s life not because she was inherently evil (although the Devil does make several appearances throughout the narration) but because of maternal love: the child’s murder was a gross inversion of a maternal care and responsibility. Here it is important to note the anonymous nature of the pamphlet’s production; the author claimed to have very specific and personal information on Mary’s thoughts and actions. These thoughts and action, however, fit very nicely into conceptions of *habitus*. Indeed, murdering one’s own child is a cultural anomaly, but the author describes the action in a way that is culturally understandable by the audience; the mother killed her child out of a perverse sense of love and responsibility. Only her actions were perverse, since she fulfilled the natural emotional expectations of motherhood (albeit in an inverted and ultimately destructive manner). So, although the action of infanticide was not considered natural or excusable, the manner in which the actions were described by the author made the case culturally understandable while reinforcing basic maternal expectations in English culture.

²²⁰ Ibid., 5.

Another pamphlet describes a woman who turned herself in for killing her six-month-old baby thirty-three years earlier. The pamphlet explains in detail the circumstances of the murder: the mother had been newly widowed, and “worked her fingers to the bone” trying to maintain herself and her child.²²¹ Eventually, with some goading by the devil, the woman decided she had better chances of remarrying (an obviously much better life for a seventeenth-century woman) if she did not have a young child. She left the child to die by neglect, but, thirty-three years later, was still so tormented by her sin that she turned herself in to be hanged for her penance. The anonymous pamphlet thus contains many different social threads: readers could identify with both the woman’s desire to remarry and the necessity of wedlock for a woman, as well as the moral and spiritual guilt of such an unnatural sin. Although this woman murdered her child, she remained an archetype that was worthier of sympathy than other child-murderers: she was a widow, not an unmarried mother; she had a strong work ethic, and she voluntarily paid recompense for her actions. Consequently, this woman was at once a criminal and a woman who demonstrated some key early modern English values. Although she committed a crime that was ultimately unpardonable, her status as a young widow- rather than an unwed mother- and her desire to pay retribution for her sin made her a more sympathetic character within the pamphlet.

Fulfillment of cultural expectations, however, could be relative. One ballad concerning the murder of a child by a midwife and the child’s grandmother juxtaposes these two villains with the innocent, albeit unwed, young mother. The young girl was a

²²¹ Anonymous. *Murther will out; or A true and faithful relation of a horrible murther committed thirty three years ago , by an unnatural mother, upon the body of her own child about a year old, and was never discovered till this 24th of November 1675* (London: Printed for C. Passinger. 1675), 2.

“maiden young and faire/which many young men loved deare/and him that she esteem’d of best/Did her most wrong of all the rest.”²²² The young girl was “beguild” by this young man, who ostensibly agreed to marry her when it became known she was pregnant. Her mother, however, refused to let her daughter marry, and instead reassured her daughter that she would take care of the situation. The mother then hired a midwife to kill her grandchild after it was born. When the daughter refused payment to the midwife, the midwife framed the young mother by putting the dead baby’s body underneath her bed. Her own mother, described in the ballad as the “old woman,” played along with the midwife’s scheme, resulting in the execution of the young, innocent, trusting maiden.

In other circumstances the young maiden could easily have been maligned by the author; she was an unmarried mother, after all, whose supposed lascivious nature got the best of her. However, compared to the “old woman” and the midwife, the maiden became the heroine of the story. This is because the maiden, in many ways, retained her most fundamental gender norm: passivity. The girl was passively persuaded by both her suitor and her mother; she remained a vessel to be molded and was consequently free of blame. Her mother, however, stood out as the chief villain of the ballad (despite not being the actual murderer). And, as the female head of the family, the mother transgressed gender and social norms. The consequences of this inversion of social order was ultimately demonstrated in the mother’s initially silly and eventually perverse decisions. Barring her

²²² Anonymous. *The wicked midwife, the cruell mother, and the harmelesse daughter. Or, A cruell murther committed upon a new-borne childe by the midwife, whom the grandmother of the childe hyred to kill, but unknowne to the mother of the childe: now the mother of this infant being falsely accused by her owne mother, was executed at Lancaster assize, at midsummer last. To the tune of, The bleeding heart* (London: s.n., 1640).

single, pregnant daughter to marry was an imprudent decision, and one was that eventually resulted in catastrophe for both her own daughter and grandchild.

The story of Mother Dell echoes the above ballad's theme of the threatening matriarch. The crimes of Annis Dell of Hartfordshire were unique in that they did not involve Annis' own child. In fact, Annis Dell was the only person involved who did not physically carry out the crime of murder. As two different pamphlets describe, the parents of two young children—a boy and a girl—were murdered for their money. In one version, two adults and the two children were seen going into the house of Mother Dell. The two adults (who were assumed to be the parents but were actually the parents' murderers) were not seen again, and neither were the children until the young boy's body was found.²²³ The alternate version detailed the murder of the parents by two men and a woman, and described how the “monstrous woman...ript her [the children's mother] up by the belly, making herself a tragicall midwife, or truly a murtheresse, that brought an abortiue babe into the world, and murdered the mother.”²²⁴ The men and the above murderess then took the two orphans to Mother Dell's house, where she resided with her grown son, and paid Mother Dell to advise them of how to dispose of the children. According to the pamphlets, Mother Dell instructed her son to murder the young boy and hide his body, and then cut out the young girl's tongue and leave her for dead (she would later survive the ordeal to identify them).

²²³ Anonymous, *The Horrible Murther of a young Boy, not fully three yeares old, whose Sister likewise had her tongue cut out of her head, hard by the rootes: which murther and massacre done by a woman called Mother Dell...* (London: Printed by E. Alde for VVilliam Firebrand, 1606).

²²⁴ Anonymous, *The Most Crvell and Bloody Myrther committed by and Inkeepers Wife, called Annis Dell, and her Sonne George Dell, Foure yeares since.* (London: Printed for William Firebrand and John Wright, 1606), A3.

While the stories are gruesome and difficult to read, it is remarkable that the chief villain of each story- indeed, the individual upon whom was cast the most blame- was not any of the three to four persons who actually committed murder, but ‘Mother’ Dell, who was charged with masterminding the children’s execution and torture. Of course, Annis deserved blame and her fair punishment for her part, but the pamphlets echo the themes of the clever, manipulative and evil matriarch found in the above ballad, *The wicked midwife, the cruell mother, and the harmelless daughter*. The pamphlets interestingly make very little mention of the woman who allegedly murdered an unborn baby while murdering its mother, and focus little upon maligning Annis Dell’s son, who actually committed the atrocious murder of the boy and torture of his sister. Rather, it focuses upon a woman inverted the natural gendered hierarchy of a household, and failed to uphold the traditional characteristics of a woman, particularly a mother, including passivity and compassion.

While the above two stories display the concern over the power of unregulated matriarchs, other infanticide stories demonstrate the important narrative of murdering midwives in seventeenth century print culture. One pamphlet, *The Murderous Midwife with Her Roasted Punishment*, describes the horrors of a successful Parisian midwife who secretly housed the bodies of sixty-two dead babies. Although she was a midwife of good repute who had gained much wealth and local fame for her obstetric talents, a local male neighbor became disturbed by dreams and his “disturbed spirit would divinely suggest to him, that this woman was otherwise than she seem’d: For he had observed a great resort of young women to house; had been certainly informed a many were made mothers in it; but he could seldom see or hear of any children either about the house, or being put to

nurse.”²²⁵ After searching the woman’s house and finding the babies’ bodies, the midwife was put to a cruel death: as the title of the pamphlet explains, she was put into an iron cage with sixteen wildcats and roasted alive.

The pamphlet demonstrates a concern with power held by midwives.²²⁶ To the male neighbor, this particular midwife’s home became a den of iniquity that was worthy of a trespassing and search. Whether this infanticide story is true or not, it is worth noting that suspicion of a midwife, even a successful midwife, was culturally relatable to readers. Furthermore, the midwife’s success and wealth is of interest as well. While the woman was successful and thus trustworthy within the community, her very different private actions demonstrate the early modern fear of unregulated women. Her home was very obviously missing its male head, and its social and moral transgressions were only put right when a local male neighbor penetrated her private residence. Consequently, the pamphlet warns not only of the necessity of male guidance, but of the capricious nature of women who went unchecked.

The threat of women’s capricious nature was a theme found in other infanticide stories as well. For example, one Mary Philmore of Field Lane, London, a married mother of two, drowned her nine week old son, despite the fact that she “had liv’d in good honest repute for some years...never having been observ’d to be addicted to ill courses, but living in good order, being a kind wife to her husband, and a careful mother

²²⁵ Anonymous. *The murderous midwife, with her roasted punishment being a true and full relation of a midwife that was put into an iron cage with sixteen wild-cats, and so roasted to death, by hanging over a fire, for having found in her house-of-office no less than sixty two children, at Paris in France* (London: s.n., 1673), 4.

²²⁶ Although this pamphlet describes a French midwife, the tale’s translation and dissemination into the English market demonstrates a ubiquitous concern.

of her children.”²²⁷ The anonymous author of the pamphlet stated that her motive was simply anger at her husband: after a heated exchange, Mary took the sleeping baby from its sleeping father’s arms and drowned it to avenge herself against her husband. It is worth noting here that in the Old Bailey report of Mary Philmore’s crime she was named Anne Philmore, and had murdered her child not because of anger towards her husband, but because, as the ordinary’s account states, “her employment was to take home linnen and to wash it, she said that had taken great pains in tending this young forward child, which hindered her washing.”²²⁸ Although the purpose for murder appeared to be financial, the author of the pamphlet instead used anger as the prime motivation. The murdering mother’s marital status is also key; unmarried mothers’ motivations were often financial. However, a married woman who murdered her child for fear of poverty emasculated her husband and his role as patriarch. So, rather than describe her financial worries, the pamphlet’s author used the case of Mary/Anne Philmore to warn his audience of the dangers of women. While this woman was seemingly well-maintained and happy, (after all, he described the family’s state as “neither were they poor so as to want necessaries, but liv’d very well...”²²⁹), the wife committed an act that transgressed nature in two important ways: by murdering one’s own child and by defying the natural rule of the husband. Thus, Mary Philmore’s actions were not only a reprehensible sin that resulted in

²²⁷ Anonymous. *A true and perfect relation of a most horrid and bloody murtehr [sic] committed by one Philmore's wife in Blew-boar-Court in Field-lane, London, upon the body of her own child together with the heads of her confession in prison* (London,: Printed by t.m. for the author, 1686), 3-4.

²²⁸ Samuel Smith, *THE TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE BEHAVIOUR AND CONFESSIONS Of the Criminals Condemned, on Saturday the 16th. of October, 1686. At Justice-Hall in the Old. Bayly. And in the Second Year of his Majesties Reign* (London,: Printed by G. Croom, 1686).

²²⁹ Anonymous. *A true and perfect relation of a most horrid and bloody murtehr*, 4.

the loss of an innocent child, but they were a warning for men for the necessity of keeping a close check on women. While this mother seemed to be happy, and had everything she needed to be content, she was easily tempted into a terrible action because of her irrational nature.

Anger- particularly anger at a husband- appeared as a common explanation for married women's commitment of child murder. Mary Cook, the above woman who murdered her daughter out of concern for the child's well-being, was also described as being motivated to murder because "she did not believe her relations to love her so well as they ought, and she being under some distempers of body a week or a fortnight before, and they would not seek out for help, she did it out of revenge to them which she did intend to have done to herself..."²³⁰ So, although the pamphlet's author cited love in Mary Cook's motivation for murder, he also explained it as being motivated from anger, with both explanations being culturally understandable (but obviously not justifiable) to audiences.

Another married woman, Elizabeth Kennet from London, gave birth to a baby while her husband was out walking and either burnt it in the fire or paid a neighbor woman to drown it in the Thames (the mother and neighbor gave conflicting stories). The day of the birth, however, the author of the broadside depicts the woman as merry and in good spirits: "and on Tuesday in Easter-Week, she was that morning at a neighbor's house merry, and eating some gamon..." Elizabeth returned home and gave birth and murdered their child while "her husband the same day happen'd to take a walk in

²³⁰ Anonymous. *The cruel mother*, 8.

Hampstead...and is now in such a condition, that ev'ry body that knew him does pity him.²³¹

Other stories more specifically address the consequences of the inversion of gender norms within the household. Jane Lawson of north London was angry with her husband for coming home drunk, and unleashed her “unreasonable womanish Fury” upon him.²³² Her violent yelling attracted the neighbors’ attention, and her own mother came over to talk some sense into her, advising her daughter that “...you want nothing neither at home nor abroad, neither for your Belly nor Apparel...therefore such a small fault ought rather to be winckt at, then prosecuted in this violent manner by a Wife to a Husband.”²³³ Nevertheless, Jane attacked her husband with a string of emasculating verbal assaults; as the pamphlet described, “The Woman reviles her Husband with the names of Drunkard, Hell-Hound, Jackanapes, and Idle Rascal...”²³⁴ While her husband left to blow off steam, Jane inexplicably took two of her three children, drowned them, and then killed herself. Interestingly, while the outcome of this story, and the purpose for its publication, was Jane Lawson’s commitment of infanticide, the majority of the pamphlet does not focus upon murder; rather, its focus is upon Jane’s unreasonable

²³¹ Anonymous. *The Unnatural mother being a full and true account of one Elizabeth Kennet, a marry'd woman, living in Robin Hood's Court in Shoe-lane, who, on Tuesday the 6th April, 1697, privately deliver'd her self, and afterwards flung her infant in the fire, and burnt it all to ashes, but a few of the bones : likewise of her being had before a justice, and her confession there* (London: Printed for J. Gladman in Fleet-street, 1697).

²³² *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murthers...The other was done by one Jane Lawson, the Wife of James Lawson, living at East Barnet, upon herself, and Two Small Children, the one a Boy between Two and Three Years old, the other a Girl about one Year and a half old...* (London: J. Clarke, 1680), 2.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 4-5.

outburst and treatment of her husband. As discussed in Chapter Two, a key component of masculinity was the management and guidance of a wife's behavior. Women were considered irrational and motivated passion; conversely, men were equipped with the ability to govern themselves and others. The husband was consequently charged with the duty of maintaining his wife's behavior, and it was a key component of his role as a man and patriarch to do such a thing. Furthermore, as Anthony Fletcher has noted, there was a link between shrewish women, scolding, and infidelity, further complicating this infanticide story as one riddled with gender inversions and a patriarch's loss of masculinity.²³⁵ In the Lawson home, it was clear that the patriarch failed in his duty of controlling his wife, and the ultimate outcome was tragic.

These stories reflect the danger in women's actions when left unmanaged. Left to their own devices, women could not be expected to make reasonable decisions, which reinforced the necessity of female guidance. As discussed in Chapter Two, an important component of early modern patriarchy was the process in which men imagined themselves as forming women's behavior, thereby gaining credit for women's good actions and thus retaining the natural gender hierarchy.²³⁶ This process was central to the establishment of masculinity and patriarchy and, in a society considered to be constructed

²³⁵ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination*, 12.

²³⁶ It is worth noting that this process existed across the social spectrum- even with monarchs. Anne McLaren has discussed the case of Queen Elizabeth I and her male privy councilors. According to contemporary beliefs, God chose Elizabeth despite her gender, and consequently she worked through His divine will. The idea of Elizabeth's providential rule, however, continued to plague men who lived in a culture of gender hierarchy. Elizabeth's councilors "bridled" the queen and ensured that she was not choosing her own will over God's. And, because her male councilors were made in direct image of God, they served as an adequate means to transfer God's will to His main vessel; the queen. As McLaren explains, "if her role was to serve as an instrument for God's grace, theirs was to mould the instrument to be receptive of His will- with the strong implication that this would be an uphill battle", Anne McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 38.

of ‘little commonwealths’ (i.e., families) where fathers ruled as kings, these infanticide stories involving unmanageable women resonate much deeper, and contain a much richer cultural message, than an initial sensationalistic reading would have.

As an extension, some infanticide stories demonstrate the importance of female order for larger social issues. Margaret Vincent, a gentlewoman who lived outside of London, was described by an anonymous author as being brainwashed by Catholics, which eventually resulted in her murdering her two children. The author described Margaret’s pleasant life before she fell under the spell of “Romaine Wolves”: “Twelve or fowreteen yeares had she lived in marriage with her husband well be loved, having for their comforts divers pretty children between them, with all other thinges in plenty, as health, riches and such like...”²³⁷ However, when Elizabeth’s impressionable soul fell to some papists, she came to believe in the supposed Catholic maxim that it is “meritorious yea and pardonable to take away the lives of any opposing Protestants.”²³⁸ According to the pamphlet’s explanation, Margaret chose to murder her children and let them be saints in heaven rather than Protestants. Consequently, this infanticide story possesses a double threat working in tandem: a woman claiming power over her own spirituality, and the socially predatory nature of Catholicism. Being the weaker vessel, Margaret was easy prey to the latter, and the result was a gross misunderstanding of the true religion that resulted in the murder of two children. This scenario served as a resounding warning to society that was only amplified by Margaret’s gentle status.

²³⁷ Anonymous. *A pittillesse mother*, 2.

²³⁸ Ibid, 3.

The above infanticide stories contain seemingly normal women in normal social circumstances who later shocked their husbands and neighbors by their actions. Some infanticide stories, however, contain women who immediately drew suspicion because of their socially transgressive actions. Mary Compton, for example, was an unmarried woman in her fifties and had been a midwife for generations. Before her arrest she had moved to the parish of Stepney outside of London, where she had been taking in children as result of the welfare provided by the Poor Laws. Mary, however, was a socially suspicious character because of her privacy in Stepney. She had moved into a house where “she was observed to have several children of divers ages; but all the time of her living in this place ha[d] been very private, not in the least associating herself with any of the neighborhood, or coming to church, etc...”²³⁹ When a passerby heard a child crying, he entered into the house and found a neglected young child. His concern resulted in a search of the house and the discovery of several bodies of young children.²⁴⁰

As the above story indicates, lack of interaction within the community often led to suspicion, as the community was considered an integral part of early modern English social order. In his analysis of early modern English society, Keith Wrightson has argued that, “For most of the English, more vital social bonds were those which they individually established and maintained not with an extended kinship group but within another social

²³⁹ See Anonymous, *The Cruel Midwife*, 3, and Anonymous. *A particular and exact account of the trial of Mary Compton, the bloody and most cruel midwife of Poplar: as also of her maid, Mary Compton the younger; who were both arraigned in one indictment for felony and murder, in destroying, starving to death, and famishing several poor infant babes: : as also Ann Davis as accessory* (London, 1693). It is important to note that these two versions of the same occurrence contain differing details.

²⁴⁰ It is important to note here that, according to the account of her trial, the children under the care of Mary Compton died of starvation. Mary was paid by the parish church a sum that was far below the requirements to maintain the children they put in her charge. Although the church was condemned, no less blame was put on Mary for her financial inability to care for these children.

grouping: the neighbourhood.”²⁴¹ Authors often emphasized the necessity of positive social interaction and participation for healthy individuals. For example, the author of Elizabeth Barnes’s story, the woman who murdered her daughter after she had squandered her wealth upon a man, stated that “if this womans house had been set on fire, doubtlesse she would have made such an out-crie in the streets, that all her neighbours must of necessity rise, and add unto her all help possible to quench the fire.”²⁴² This author emphasized the important role of the community in supporting and surveying their neighbors and thus checking any social transgressions or sins. Elizabeth Barnes’ story was not only a lesson for women to not fall prey to men, but also a lesson to the larger community. By stressing the community’s potential to prevent Elizabeth’s committing of murder, the author made infanticide a larger issue concerning not only gender norms, but also community harmony and social stability. Infanticide stories, then, were not merely sensationalistic cheap literature, but were used in a variety of ways to uphold and reinforce notions of social order.

The infanticide stories discussed above were the product of a tangible social movement: the rising criminal interest in infanticide. It seems logical to assume that the 1624 Act condemning unmarried women who committed infanticide to death was a consequence, not a cause, of a growing concern with the problem. This concern resulted in the infanticide stories discussed above. To disseminate their didactic, cheap literature, the authors of these infanticide stories made use of both this prevalent social concern and newly available print technology. Consequently, one must not assume that a public

²⁴¹ Wrightson, *English Society*, 51.

²⁴² Goodcole, *Natures Cruell Step-Dames*, 6.

concern for infanticide only developed in the seventeenth-century because of the firm establishment of Protestantism. Rather, because of available print materials, seventeenth-century Englishmen appropriated what had previously been a community, familial, or individual concern and made it the object of scrutiny within a newly established public sphere.

It was this nascent public sphere that afforded the development of a larger discourse concerning gender norms and their effect upon social stability. While the veracity of the documents may never be fully determined, their content nonetheless illustrates societal expectations and values. As Natalie Zemon Davis has suggested, referring to her analysis of sixteenth-century French pardon tales, “I want to let the fictional aspects of these documents be the center of analysis. By ‘fictional’ I do not mean their feigned elements, but rather the...shaping choices of language, detail and order [that] are needed to present an account that seems to both writer and reader true, real, meaningful and/or explanatory.”²⁴³ While the details of these infanticide stories may often seem ‘feigned’, they distinctly reflect the *habitus* of seventeenth-century England, and both demonstrate and reinforce cultural values and social norms.

Of course, the appropriation of infanticide stories for public use was meant to combat the terrible act of child murder. But it was also meant to reinforce gender norms of behavior and thus consolidate early modern England’s social system. Some infanticide stories helped reinforce social stability by displaying gender norms that audiences could understand. The depressed mother who killed her child out of a perverse sense of love, the guilt-ridden widow who turned herself into be hanged thirty-three years later, and the

²⁴³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 3.

young maid whose passivity led to her newborn's downfall are examples of women who could be construed as sympathetic characters by the contemporary public, as they reinforced specific gender norms as mothers. While sensationalistic, these stories entertained readers while simultaneously consolidating ideas about what it meant to be a woman- and a mother- in early modern England.

Although actual infanticide was most commonly neonatal and committed by poor, unmarried mothers, the stories discussed above often involved married women, matriarchs, midwives, older children, and the financially secure. By not highlighting neonatal murder by single mothers, the authors of the infanticide literature often chose instead to use circumstances that were more threatening to social values, including married mothers and older victims. This was meant not only to sensationalize an already sensational topic, but to also heighten anxiety concerning women and their roles in the family and society. The women who committed child murder were often matriarchs- female heads of households- who consequently did not have a male patriarch guiding their decisions. The same concern with women's unbridled power can be seen in the stories involving murderous midwives: midwives possessed a degree of autonomy not often associated with women, and a midwife's act of child murder represented not only the gross inversion of her duty to deliver healthy babies, but of the consequences of women's unregulated power.

The impulsive and destructive nature of women stands out as a main narrative throughout many of the infanticide stories. Women's emotion-particularly anger at a husband- was often cited as the motive for child murder. This should come as little surprise, as contemporaries cited women's irrationality and lack of self-regulation as a

prime reason for their subordination. The cunning matriarch, the dangerous midwife, and the volatile and vengeful wife consequently reinforced the need for male guidance over women, thus helping to consolidate theories supporting patriarchy in early modern England.

As this chapter has shown, infanticide stories in cheap print grew out of a rising social concern with the crime due to a rise in prosecutions. But, while the content contained within these stories may have been fictional, the values and social expectations preached within were very real. Consequently, infanticide stories were used not merely to entertain a broad public, but to reinforce the gender norms that were deemed fundamental to seventeenth-century social harmony. While infanticide stories were part of a larger sensationalistic genre of print, they were simultaneously part of the early modern discourse concerning gender, power and motherhood.

CHAPTER 5

REPRODUCTIVE POWER:

CONCEPTION, PARTURITION, AND PATRIARCHY

We are all the Fruit of the Womb, and the whole World is govern'd by its fertile Product²⁴⁴

So midwifery...conducts Man with safety from the first Principle of his Conception, through all the difficulties and Shocks he encounters both during his Emprisonment in the womb, and in his hazardous Passage from thence into this our World.²⁴⁵

And God in his iudgment...made this proud, this scorenefull & vnconstant wench, the mother of a monster, and not of an orderly birth²⁴⁶

In 1569 Agnes Bowles, a domestic servant in Leicestershire, claimed to have given birth to a cat.²⁴⁷ According to court testimony, Agnes, a longstanding member of her community in Harborough, had sexual relations with another servant, Randal Dowley, several times before becoming pregnant. On the evening of January 16, 1569, surrounded by a trusted midwife and several female neighbors, Agnes gave birth to a monster in the form of a skinned cat. Agnes Bowles' monstrous birth quickly became sensationalistic news. A broadside (now lost) described the tale, and her case quickly underwent investigation in the ecclesiastical court of the Archdeacon of Leicester, even

²⁴⁴ Barret, *A companion for midwives*, 59.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, A3.

²⁴⁶ I.R., *A most straunge, and true discourse, of the wonderfull iudgment of God* (London: [By E. Allde], for Richard Iones, 1600), 3-4.

²⁴⁷ The following tale is recounted from David Cressy's essay, "Agnes Bowker's Cat: Childbirth, Seduction, Bestiality, and Lies" in *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9-28.

making its way onto the desks of William Cecil, the Queen's Principal Secretary, and Edmund Grindal, the Bishop of London.

The details of the investigation betrayed a complicated web of stories and lies involving Agnes' conception and delivery of the feline. Agnes had reported a series of experiences that, according to sixteenth and seventeenth-century beliefs, might indicate a monstrous birth. She had reported seeing a cat six or seven times while pregnant (the repeated sight of an animal was, we will see, a potential indicator of a monstrous birth). According to her midwife, Elizabeth Harrison, Agnes had also reported having sexual relations several times with "...a thing in the likeness of a bear, sometimes like a dog, sometimes like a man", and furthermore, Harrison reported that Agnes claimed that a Dutch woman had predicted that she would give birth to a mooncalf (an unformed mass of tissue) after a fifty-one week gestation.²⁴⁸

The story becomes more complicated still. A gentlewoman knowledgeable in gynecology had examined Agnes before her onset of labor and concluded that she had already given birth, stirring up rumors of infanticide, an action most commonly linked to bastardy cases such as Agnes'. Indeed, Agnes herself at one time claimed that she had already given birth and that the child had died. Yet she had also claimed to have given birth to a child who was alive and residing with a wet-nurse.²⁴⁹ Despite these conflicting testimonies, Agnes' midwife continued to claim that she had delivered a cat. Examination of the gossips attending the birth, however, revealed that no other individual actually saw Agnes deliver; a skinned cat merely appeared from underneath her skirt. The tale of

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 19.

Agnes Bowles' cat becomes even more twisted after her last examination, in which she admitted to being seduced by another man, a schoolmaster by the name of Hugh Brady, who promised Agnes a better life if she would pay him and then let him impregnate her with a male child (witchcraft by Brady also seemed to have been involved, although this appeared to have troubled officials less than the monstrous birth). Hugh Brady later disappeared, leaving behind a pregnant Agnes Bowles, and quite possibly an accomplice in the midwife, Elizabeth Harrison.

After an autopsy of the corpse, it was clear that Agnes had not given birth to a monster, but that the body found laying below Agnes in the birthing room was nothing more than, indeed, a skinned cat (the bacon found in its stomach proved that it could not have gestated within Agnes). Nevertheless, the story of Agnes Bowles' cat was taken seriously by both church and government officials, finding itself on the desks of men in the highest echelons of government. While sensationalistic, the many intriguing threads of the story, including sexual depravity, bastardy, maleficium, and possible infanticide, were not necessarily the central focus of investigators; rather, the main attraction, what was most at stake for early modern authorities, was what was involved in the parturition of Agnes Bowles. Bowles' tale of a monstrous birth was significant to government and church officials as it was an omen of greater social or political strife; it was, in essence, a sign of disorder. Inscribed unto a woman's reproductive body was the power to serve as a gauge of current turmoil or as a predictor of potential unrest. As David Cressy explained, "Monstrous births demonstrated that the nation was in trouble, with deformities in newborn children matching deformities in the body politic."²⁵⁰ Women's reproductive

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 23.

bodies, then, were political: they were visible displays of social disorder or unrest. Agnes Bowles' monstrous birth was not merely a sensationalistic tale: it embodied issues of reproduction and power that reverberated throughout the social and political climate of sixteenth and seventeenth-century England.

The power and significance attached to women's reproduction was not merely limited to the rarity of monstrosities. At their most fundamental level women's bodies—particularly during reproduction—served as a site in which to establish women's "otherness" and inferiority, thus reinforcing patriarchal order. In tension with this denigration of the female body was women's significant ability to carry children and people the church and kingdom. While women's bodies were criticized for their inferiority, they were simultaneously acknowledged, sometimes celebrated, as crucial for the continuance of mankind. The female reproductive body, at a most basic level, constituted an ambivalent site within early modern culture: women at once possessed a corporeal body that was considered physically inferior, while possessing the invaluable power to sustain life.

Female reproduction was a site of female power: women possessed the tools to create new life, making mankind dependent upon the female body.²⁵¹ Yet the details of a woman's body, from her humoral make-up, to her seed and womb, were described as lacking in comparison to a man's biological composition. From a reading of the abundant early modern medical literature, we sense that male and female bodies were in tension, and the source of this tension was ultimately competing claims for authority. Within the

²⁵¹ As we will see, this power was such that, in specific circumstances, women were believed to be able to conceive on their own, although this conception would not result in a healthy fetus.

discourse of early modern medical literature we may see the complicated creation of sexual hierarchies, and, as a result, a gendered contest for power that was enacted through the female reproductive body.

This chapter will explore sixteenth and seventeenth-century beliefs about the female body, sexual difference, and reproduction, arguing that the womb was a particularly powerful site for male early modern medical writers. The power women possessed through reproduction was clearly at odds within a patriarchal culture in which masculinity rested upon male control, eventually necessitating a shift towards male guidance over reproduction and childbirth, a realm which had previously resided firmly within female culture. Implicit in this tension between the female body and male authority was an anxiety over the tacit sexuality involved in reproduction; as we have seen, female sexuality was threatening to male control, and as an extension threatening to masculinity and patriarchy. Medical writers displayed a great concern with lasciviousness in their discussion of the female body, as both were threatening to male control and patriarchy.

The threat of the power of the reproductive body was not limited to conception: contemporary writers also volleyed their opinions over the female culture surrounding reproduction, including midwifery and breastfeeding. As briefly discussed in Chapter Three, midwives were the center of the lying-in room, which was quite possibly the site in which women contained the most collective authority. Consequently, midwives and midwifery in general were topics hotly discussed by male writers, who often denigrated the female profession, citing midwives' lack of humility and knowledge and their dangerous inclination towards greed. Ultimately the female culture of childbirth would

see its end with the development of science and medicine in the eighteenth century, as midwives were cited as amateurs in comparison with increasingly professionalized male physicians.

Tangential to male intrusion into knowledge over the female body and childbirth was a debate over the nature of breastfeeding, which spoke to concerns not only about control over women's bodies, but also the nature of maternal love. Early modern writers symbolically connected the breast and the womb, citing breastfeeding as a natural part of reproduction and, conversely, citing the utilization of a wet-nurse as a sign of disorder. As we will see, the breast entered into the larger discourse of 'motherhood gone wrong.' Similarly, this chapter will explore sixteenth and seventeenth-century discourse surrounding monstrous births, as in the case of Agnes Bowles. Like breastfeeding, contemporaries focused a great deal on reproduction 'gone wrong' through monstrous births, which at once gave women power through God's use of their womb while simultaneously punishing women for their own and/or community sins. This chapter will argue that the mothers of "monsters" were emblematic of the ambivalent attitudes towards motherhood and reproduction in early modern England, as these mothers were at once powerful tools through which God spoke, while also acting as visible signs of disorder and sin. The reproductive body, then, was not only a site in which male medical writers used biology to consolidate their superiority, but through childbirth, monstrous births, and breastfeeding it was also a site of conflict in which gendered struggles for power and authority played out.

Early modern literature on the body and reproduction is abundant and has served as a rich topic for historians. In *Gender, Sex, & Subordination in England, 1500-1800*,

Anthony Fletcher offered an in-depth discussion of early modern views of the body and its relation to patriarchy, arguing that “the subordination of women began with the hierarchical ordering of the bodies and ended firmly with defined gender roles.”²⁵²

According to Fletcher, the body served as the cornerstone on which patriarchal rule was established, and as a consequence the body- including reproduction and sexuality- were threatening to the social order. Although Fletcher offered two chapters exploring the early modern views of the body- particularly humoral theory and its impact upon ideas about gender, which will be discussed in depth below- his focus was more broadly on the workings of gender in early modern England rather than the body and reproduction itself.

Although Fletcher touched upon pregnancy in his discussion of the body and patriarchy, his larger argument involved more general ideas about sexual difference. In *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, David Cressy more specifically linked reproduction to patriarchal rule, arguing that “without childbirth there could be no patriarchy, without human procreation no social reproduction.”²⁵³ His work offered an excellent explanation of the cultural norms involved in reproduction and childbirth, including the common experience in the lying-in room, baptism, and churching, but did not fully explore the power dynamics invested within them.

This chapter will expand upon these earlier works, and is influenced by the works of Laura Gowing and Mary Fissell. Gowing’s book, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*, explored the relationship between the body and power, making an important case that colluded with patriarchal rule by actively

²⁵² Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England*, 61.

²⁵³ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 15.

participating in the policing of pregnancy through physical touch; matrons were commonly called upon to inspect women's bodies for signs of pregnancy. As Gowing explained of married women, "The experience of marital relations and childbirth gave them unique knowledge and authority: wives and widows claimed to be able to tell virgins from whores at signs, to detect the signs of pregnancy, to calculate the maturity and paternity of newborn children, and to differentiate stillborns from infanticides."²⁵⁴ The workings of patriarchy, then, were subtle, and not as simple as male control and female obedience. From women themselves there was collusion, participation and rejection, and the body is a rich site in which we may view the subtle workings of patriarchy and power struggles.

Gowing offered a useful perspective in which to explore the dispersal of power in a patriarchal society, and she offered an equally useful view of the relationship between the body and culture. While Anthony Fletcher argued that sexual difference led to the consolidation of a gender hierarchy in early modern England, Gowing conversely argued that gender shapes the understanding of the body; the corporeal body becomes a cultural construction, and medical literature on the body consequently serves as a rich source for discourse analysis.²⁵⁵ While early modern medical literature attempted to instruct its readers by revealing the mystery of the body, Gowing argued that it inadvertently heightened anxiety about sexual difference, as "the more bodies were explained, the more uncertain their inner truths appeared; and women's bodies were the most secretive of

²⁵⁴ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 41.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

all.”²⁵⁶ This chapter will utilize Gowing’s interpretation of medical literature, and the body itself, as discourse, exploring the ways in which sexual difference and reproduction were influenced by the contemporary views of gender roles.

Mary Fissell has offered the most nuanced discussion of reproduction and power in early modern England. She argued that “the insides of women’s reproductive bodies provided a kind of open interpretive space...they [women’s bodies] afforded many ways to discuss and make sense of social, political, and economic changes.”²⁵⁷ Fissell’s work offers an excellent interpretation of the profoundly political role of reproduction, as she navigated how contemporaries used reproduction to understand vast social and political changes. For example, she contextualized the medical literature of Nicholas Culpepper within the gender upheaval of the 1640s in which he published, arguing that his work promoted a sense of traditional gender hierarchies during a time when more women were claiming power through both religious dissent and speech.²⁵⁸ She also discussed the rampant cultural preoccupation with paternity after the “warming pan baby” rumors regarding the parentage of James Stuart in 1688.²⁵⁹

Fissell traced views of the womb and reproduction through the tumultuous religious and political changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She argued that ideas about the womb changed in the seventeenth century, transforming the womb from a wonderful, revered site to a terrible one. This shift, Fissell argued, was largely a result of

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁵⁷ Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 135.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 231.

the shift towards Protestantism. Where the womb was once celebrated in its connection to the Virgin Mary, it was more increasingly described in terms of suffering and punishment associated with Eve.²⁶⁰ Fissell also argued that post-Reformation medical writers attempted to diminish women's reproductive power, rewarding God, rather than the womb, with the power of creating life.²⁶¹ As she explained, the womb became "merely the space within which a baby matures, a space usually given over to excretion..."²⁶² Where the womb had once been celebrated in its ability to produce, post-Reformation writers not only attempted to strip it of its power, but also maligned it in its ability to harm women and produce monsters.²⁶³

Fissell argued that "Female bodies continued to serve as an interpretive space within which larger social issues might be worked through or reimagined."²⁶⁴ While she explored the connection between reproduction and high political and religious issues, this chapter will further explore the connection between reproduction and the politics of gender roles, masculinity, and patriarchy. It will build upon the analyses of Fletcher and Cressy while utilizing the theoretical framework of both Gowing and Fissell to understand the ways in which the female body and reproduction played into sixteenth and seventeenth-century anxieties concerning the role of motherhood and power.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 53.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 54.

²⁶² Ibid., 60.

²⁶³ Ibid., 3. Interestingly, Fissell relates this change to the culture of cheap print surrounding 'bad mothers', including infanticidal mothers and witches.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 247.

As Laura Gowing has argued, ideas about sexual difference were often shaped by preexisting ideas about gender. As we have seen, gender hierarchy was deeply embedded within early modern English culture. Women's inferiority was fundamentally justified religiously, with women being condemned to bear children in a painful labor because of Eve's primary role in the Fall.²⁶⁵ In his discussion of the relationship between patriarchy and reproduction, David Cressy cited the Old Testament description of childbirth as punishment for women's sins: "'Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband. And he shall rule over thee.' The pain and peril of child-bearing, the exercise of patriarchal authority, and the politics of reproduction all descended from this awful judgment."²⁶⁶ As ideas about gender relations and reproduction were extrapolated from the Bible, it is little wonder that reproduction, patriarchy, and social order were inextricably linked in the minds of contemporary writers.

Issues surrounding the politics of maternity began with ideas about sexual difference, and early modern medical literature contains a wealth of information on views of the body. Until the latter half of the seventeenth century, most educated individuals ascribed to the Aristotelian view that women were imperfect versions of men; that is, the vagina was an internal version of the penis, as the ovaries were to the testes and the uterus to the scrotum. This view not only made women's bodies comprehensible to male physicians, but it also reinforced ideas about women's "otherness" and inferiority.²⁶⁷ The

²⁶⁵ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 18.

²⁶⁶ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 17.

²⁶⁷ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 19.

male body was the perfect model, and any difference was considered a deviance from the norm.

At the root of the early modern interpretation of the body was the humoral theory, dating back to Galen in the second century. According to the humoral model, the fluid within the body was composed of blood, choler, melancholy, and phlegm, with each humor possessing distinct qualities (blood was considered hot and moist, choler was hot and dry, phlegm was cold and moist, and melancholy was cold and dry). As Anthony Fletcher has explained, “Each humor had its physiological functions: blood warms and moistens the body, choler provokes the expulsion of excrements, melancholy provokes appetite in the stomach, phlegm nourishes the cold and moist members such as the brain and kidneys.”²⁶⁸

Contemporaries believed that sexual difference was largely the result of the humors: women were considered colder and wetter than men; men, conversely, hot and dry. This gendered humoral makeup helped to define the physical differences between the sexes. Some contemporaries claimed that hair length was associated with moistness, and since women had more phlegm than men, and were therefore moister, they naturally had longer hair.²⁶⁹ Conversely, the same author argued that women have less body hair than men because of their ‘humidity’, as the body purged the hair-causing moistness each

²⁶⁸ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, & Subordination*, 33.

²⁶⁹ Anonymous, *The Problemes of Aristotle, With Other Philosophers and Physicians* (London: Printed by A.G. by Godfrey Emondson, 1634), A4.

month with its menses. According to the author, this explained why "...we see some old women begin to have beards in their old age...when their flowers have ceased."²⁷⁰

The relationship between humors also helped to define the different body types between the sexes. To the question, "Why have women narrower breasts than men?" the author of *The Problemes of Aristotle* explained:

Answ: Because there is heat in men, which doth naturally move to the uttermost part of them, making those parts great and large. And therefore a great brest is a token of courage...but in women cold doth predominate, which naturally doth tend downward. And therefore Aristotle doth say, that women doe oft fall upon their taile, because those parts behind are grosse and heavie...²⁷¹

According to this author, men's heat led to their courage: indeed, heat and moisture were often attributed to specific gendered behaviors. Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have argued that men were often associated with more positive traits because of their heat: they were considered active, brave, and strong, whereas women were conversely passive, weak, and gentle.²⁷² With humoral theory, then, we see an interesting dynamic between the corporeal body and gender hierarchy, as each helped to define the understanding of the other.

The humors were considered significant to the physical development of the body, and they were key to the functioning of the sexual organs and reproduction as well. At their most basic level, men's humoral heat was believed to 'push' his sexual organs outward to be external, whereas women's natural coldness meant that her sexual organs

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

²⁷¹ Ibid., C7.

²⁷² Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 20.

would remain internal. This ‘one-sex’ theory was popular until the late seventeenth-century.²⁷³ As late as 1684, a publication argued that “A Man...is different from a Woman in nothing else but having his Genital members without his body: and this is certain, that if Nature having formed a Man, would convert him into a Woman; she hath no other task to perform, but to turn his Genital members inward.”²⁷⁴ Heat, or lack of it, also explained menstruation, as contemporaries believed that it occurred because women were not able to burn off excess blood.²⁷⁵ According to physicians, this blood was crucial in reproduction and gestation: the blood that was typically expelled each month served other purposes during pregnancy, as it nourished the womb or ran into the breasts to prepare the expectant mother for her milk.²⁷⁶

The authors surveyed did, however, apply gradations of quality to the blood described while discussing its potential for harm to women. Menstrual blood was considered the most toxic; Mendelson and Crawford have cited contemporaries who believed that menstrual blood could burn the penis, and could even be used in magic—possibly towards sinister ends.²⁷⁷ The anonymous author of *The Problemes of Aristotle* made a clear case about the toxic nature of menstrual blood, saying that “it is of an infection matter: for as Aristotle doth say, if that substance being young and flowing doe touch a tree...the tree doth die and not prosper...if a dogge should taste of it, he would

²⁷³ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, & Subordination*, 36.

²⁷⁴ Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle*, 97.

²⁷⁵ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 26.

²⁷⁶ Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle*, C9.

²⁷⁷ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 26.

run mad three dayes. And therefore nature would expel it every month, as being an enemy unto life.”²⁷⁸ Since this blood was considered ‘unclean’, a child conceived during menstruation would be “evilly disposed of body.”²⁷⁹ This author was quick to note that menstrual blood and the blood that nourished a fetus and created breast milk were different in quality, as the latter was “very pure and cleane, and therefore that blood is fit for generation.”²⁸⁰

Blood and menstruation, or lack thereof, also played into physicians’ ideas about women’s physical and mental health and sexuality. Contemporaries correlated women’s inability to produce enough heat to burn off noxious blood with potential sickness. One physician stated very plainly that “From the stopping, or the immoderate flowing, or the months may proceed all manner of disease which can possibly happen unto mankind...”²⁸¹ Another physician bluntly associated women’s coldness with passivity, stating that “the passiu nature of womankind is subject vnto more diseases...then men are...”²⁸²

The most common disease that afflicted women was called Greensickness, or ‘Mothers-Fits.’ Greensickness was thought to occur when a fertile woman ceased to menstruate. If a woman did not adequately menstruate, she accumulated too much blood

²⁷⁸ Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle*, E4-5.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, E6.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, E6.

²⁸¹ Richard Bunworth, *The Doctresse: a plain and easie method, of curing those diseases which are peculiar to women* (London: Printed by J.F. for Nicolas Bourne, at the South entrance of the Royal Exchange, 1656), 4.

²⁸² Edward Jorden, *A briefe discourse of a disease called the suffocation of the mother* (London: Printed by Iohn Windet, dwelling at the signe of the Crosse Keyes at Powles Wharfe), 1.

that in turn ‘corrupted’ her seed. As Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford explained, contemporary physicians believed that a woman who was filled with too much blood grew melancholic: “Her spirits, suffocated with too much moisture, offended the ‘Chamber of Reason.’ In its most extreme form, this ‘frenzy of the womb’ could lead to melancholy, unsteadiness of the mind, or even madness. Suicidal fancies were also caused by vapors from the womb rising to the brain.”²⁸³ Greensickness could potentially lead not only to irrationality in women, but also lasciviousness, as it was believed that with a corrupt female Seed came a “Swarth and weasel Colour in Maids, when they begin to be win Love, and desirous of Copulation.”²⁸⁴ This author recommended copulation as the best treatment and noted that, as a consequence, virginal maids and widows most often suffered the complications of Greensickness. For virgins, the author advised marriage (and thus sexual relations), and if too young for marriage, he advised light blood-letting.²⁸⁵

That copulation was a treatment for Greensickness, a disease that created young, lascivious women, speaks to the complicated role of sexuality, gender, and medicine in early modern England. Sexual intercourse within marriage was a positive and necessary act. It not only led to the peopling of the church, but was necessary to health and functioning of the body; both men, and women, needed sexual intercourse for the proper balancing of the humors. One author stated that intercourse “doth ease and lighten the body, cheere the minde, comfot the head and sense, take away many griefes of

²⁸³ Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 23-24.

²⁸⁴ Anon., *Aristotle’s Master-piece*, A3.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

melancholy, because it doth expel the fume of the seed from the braine...²⁸⁶ But sexual intercourse was also potentially harmful to humoral balance and overall health. The same author argued that immoderate intercourse could "...destroy the sight, and dry the body."²⁸⁷ And, at a cultural level, the necessity of sex for bodily health was dangerous in a society in which women's sexuality was potentially emasculating. Sexuality was thus inherently complex; within marriage it was believed to be positive and aided physical health but wavered on the edge of dangerous as it could lead to sin and social subversion if enacted immoderately or not within the bounds of marriage.

While sexual intercourse was a necessary treatment for Greensickness, it could also be harmful to mothers in particular. Contemporaries warned against breastfeeding after copulation, as the "subtillest and best part of the milk goeth to the vessels of the seed, to the wombe, and the worst remaineth in the paps, which doe hurt the childe."²⁸⁸ Contemporaries also believed that too much sex could make it difficult for women to conceive; prostitutes were generally regarded as infertile, because of the "divers seed which doth corrupt and spill their instruments of conception, for it maketh them so slippery that nature cannot retain their seed."²⁸⁹ If immoderate sex led to barrenness, then it followed that abstaining from sex could lead to fertility. Nicholas Culpepper noted that a 'slippery womb' was "the reason why Whores so seldom have Children; and also the

²⁸⁶ Anon., *Problemes of Aristotle*, E-E1.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, E1.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, C11.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, E8.

reason why Women after a long absence of their Husbands, when they come again, usually soon conceive.”²⁹⁰

That the humors were ultimately responsible for both sexual difference, and, as a result, gender was complicated by the fluidity of the humors. A person’s humoral composition was individual; a man might possess more phlegm and be colder and moister, whereas woman might possess more choler and be warmer and dryer. If this was the case, a moist man was considered to appear more fragile and feminine, whereas a hot woman would appear larger and more masculine. This, according to Anthony Fletcher, was problematic, as he stated that “with the precise boundary between the heat which made man a man and the cold which predominated to make woman a woman difficult to draw, gender in fact seemed dangerously fluid and indeterminate.”²⁹¹ According to early modern beliefs, the correlation between humors and gender traits began as early as conception. One author argued that a male child whose seed fell upon the moister part of the womb would appear more feminine, and conversely a female created in a warmer part of the womb would be more masculine, “subject to quarrel with her Husband when married, for the superiority...”²⁹² While the humors were used to consolidate the sexual hierarchy, the fluidity of humors, and as a consequence the fluidity of sexual difference, quite possibly contributed to the anxiety surrounding gender relations, masculinity and patriarchy in early modern England.

²⁹⁰ Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives, or a guide for women, in their conception, bearing, and suckling their children* (London: Printed by Peter Cole, at the sign of the Printing-Press in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1651), 121.

²⁹¹ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, & Subordination*, 33.

²⁹² Anonymous, *Aristotle’s Master-piece, or, The secrets of generation displayed in all the parts thereof...* (London: Printed for J. How, 1684), 24-25.

While the humors were responsible for early modern ideas about the body, sexual difference, and gender, the act of conception itself was a site of power and conflict between the sexes. Up until the late seventeenth century, contemporaries believed that both men and women possessed the seed that created life. They differed, however, in their ideas of each seed's role, as some grappled with the potential power given to a woman's role in reproduction. The writers surveyed all agreed upon the woman's key role in the creation of a child, from the woman's seed through its growth in the womb till it was put to breast. Inherent in this was a woman's power over the child, particularly in utero. A fetus after quickening was considered a separate being, but clearly under the full power of the mother. As Jane Sharp described, "The child in the Mothers womb hath a soul of its own, yet it is a part of the mother until she be delivered...but since the child takes part of the mothers life whilst he is in the womb...whatsoever moves the faculties of the mothers soul may do the like in the child."²⁹³

If the growth of a new life was an arena in which the mother possessed full control, it is little wonder that medical writers grappled with ways in which to insert and assert male authority, and some had differing points of view. The author of *Aristotle's Master-piece* readily cited woman's primary role in reproduction, comparing woman's womb to the earth, both of which could be planted in for the creation of life. According to this author, man's seed began the process of generation, but woman's seed and her nourishment of the fetus meant that women effectively contributed more to conception and generation.²⁹⁴ The author of *The Problemes of Aristotle*, on the other hand, attributed

²⁹³ Sharp, *The midwives book*, 119.

²⁹⁴ Anon., *Aristotle's Master-piece*, 33.

the prime importance to the male seed, which “prepared” the female seed to receive the soul of the fetus.²⁹⁵ While he admitted that the mother was the primary contributor to the fetus’s development, he also cited the superiority of male seed, asking, “Why doth the matrix or wombe of a woman draw greedily the seed of a man?...she doth draw it for the perfection of herself.”²⁹⁶ Another author bluntly cited the male seed’s superiority, despite his acknowledgement that women were more responsible for reproduction through nourishment in the womb and by breast. This, according to the author, was because the humoral makeup of the woman’s seed mimicked her inferior humoral balance: “...the quality of them is not alike: for the seed of man doth exceed womans seed, in heate and thicknesse, which in comparison of mans seed is more moist and cold...”²⁹⁷ In addition to having inferior seed, women were also considered to be more lascivious because of their possession of it; not only did they enjoy the emission of seed, but they also enjoyed receiving it.²⁹⁸

Contemporaries grappled with how to accurately ascribe power in reproduction, as the woman contributed more to the process, but they considered men inherently superior in body. It is little wonder, then, that they also discussed how parents could produce the superior child- a boy. If both man and woman contributed seed, how was the

²⁹⁵ Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle*, E3-4.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., E4.

²⁹⁷ Jakob Rueff, *The expert midwife* (London: printed by E. G [riffin] for S. B[urton] and are to be sold by Thomas Alchorn at the signe of the Green Dragon in Saint Pauls church-yard, 1637), 10.

²⁹⁸ Anon., *Aristotle’s Master-piece*, 29. This belief was cited in cases of rape where the woman fell pregnant; a woman’s emission of seed, or orgasm, was believed to be necessary for conception. The author here, however, defended the woman, stating that, “...but my opinion is, that poor silly Girls, struggling to defend themselves in case of such violence...the Seminary Vessels...will open, and the Seed insuch cases, whether they desire it or not, will flow...” (74).

sex of the child then determined? Culpeper made a rational argument for the strength of the individual seed determining the sex: if the mother's seed was stronger, a daughter; if the father's, a son.²⁹⁹ Others argued that the sex was determined by which side the seed fell on: the hotter, more masculine side on the right of the womb, or the colder, more feminine side on the left.³⁰⁰ The humors could also help tell the fetus's sex; a woman who had thick milk could be sure she was carrying a boy because his heat would create thick milk, while a woman's whose right eye sparkled and right cheek glowed was sure to have a boy growing on the right, hotter part of her womb.³⁰¹ She would also, in general, feel "less Sadness than if she conceived a Female."³⁰²

While the power over the seed and generation was attributed uncertainly to both male and female, contemporaries did ascribe a distinct power to women's imagination during pregnancy- and this power was not necessarily a positive one. Contemporaries believed that something that captured the attention of the mother's imagination during pregnancy (i.e., the recurring cat that visited Agnes Bowles) could affect the fetus. Malformations were specifically attributed to the mother's imagination or experiences: Jane Sharp noted a woman who gave birth to a child that was "hairy like a Camel", citing that the mother "usually said prayers kneeling before the image of *St. Johns Baptist* who was clothed with camels hair."³⁰³ The author of *The Problemes of Aristotle* likewise

²⁹⁹ Culpepper, *A Directory for midvvives*, 56.

³⁰⁰ Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle*, E8.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, C10; Anon., *Aristotle's Master-piece*, 121.

³⁰² Anon., *Aristotle's Master-piece*, 122.

³⁰³ Sharp, *The midvvives book*, 118.

attributed malformations to the mother's imagination, as he argued, "the imagination is above the forming power, and therefore the childe borne followeth the imagination, and not the power of forming and shaping; because it is weaker than the other."³⁰⁴ Another author agreed that of the imagination of the mother, "there is nothing more powerful..."³⁰⁵ Some authors consequently warned women to avoid negative emotions or and "all other perturbations of the mind," as this could have a negative influence on their child's development.³⁰⁶

The power of the imagination was at no time more powerful than during copulation. A child who resembled its father was believed to appear so because the mother must have been thinking about her partner during intercourse.³⁰⁷ But more negatively, a mother could scar or misshape her child by thinking about such things during copulation. In fact, one author ascribed scars and lameness to a mother's imagination, and not "from the humors or parts of the body of the father, as sometimes believed."³⁰⁸ Some contemporaries believed that women could produce misshapen children from "too ardent copulation," particularly if the woman was menstrual, and thus unclean.³⁰⁹ The same author even argued that women could produce these 'monsters' on their own if they were too lascivious, "for that by often seeing and touching their

³⁰⁴ Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle*, E3.

³⁰⁵ Anon., *Aristotle's Master-piece*, 25.

³⁰⁶ A.M., *A Rich Closet of Physical Secrets* (London: Gartrude Dawson, 1652), 2.

³⁰⁷ Anon., *Aristotle's Master-piece*, F1.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, E3.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

Husbands, at the same time strongly fancying themselves in the Act, their Seed flows to the Blood, and is by the heat of the Womb...but arrives at no perfection.”³¹⁰ The two aspects of womanhood that were most threatening to male control, and thus masculinity, a woman’s mind and a woman’s sexuality, were condemned as an integral part of the dangerous aspect of reproduction. The area in which a woman possessed the most social power- reproduction- became a threatening site under patriarchal order, and it is little wonder that contemporary writers condemned it as dangerous and cited its potential for disorder through monstrous births.

Indeed, the connection between women, sex, and malformed children was made more explicit in stories of monstrous births. Stories of monstrous births, like the stories of infanticide discussed in Chapter Four, were abundant within the cheap printed literature, including broadsides and pamphlets, of seventeenth-century England. Monstrous birth literature was inherently sensationalistic, but in a climate of gender anxiety, served a greater cultural purpose: it married concerns of both reproductive power and ‘bad’ motherhood. Like stories of infanticide, contemporaries used women’s reproductive bodies within their tales of monstrous births to address concerns about not only women and gender, but greater social and political issues as well. In these broadsides and pamphlets, women’s reproductive bodies did, indeed, become “interpretive spaces” in which greater issues could be explored and made recognizable, although their bodies ultimately took on an ominous role.³¹¹ As Laura Gowing has argued, “...monstrous births played powerfully into the idea of women’s reproductive bodies as a conduit for revenge,

³¹⁰ Ibid., 50.

³¹¹ Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 1.

fear and danger. The cultural effect of this idea was to make the pregnant body into a blank tablet on which anything from economic disaster to ungodliness could be inscribed.”³¹² Other authors have noted the early modern association between the birth of monsters- both human and animal- and natural disasters or periods of social and economic discord. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park have traced the correlation between monstrous birth stories and the tensions of the Reformation, arguing that monstrous births shifted from being a sign of God’s wrath to a part of natural history, eventually being subsumed under the growth of science and the professionalization of medicine.³¹³ Julie Crawford has more specifically explored the connection between monstrous births and reproduction, arguing that within the changes of the Reformation, monstrous birth stories “draw correspondences between monstrosity and specific women’s behaviors, particularly as they pertain to controversial post-Reformation debates over the legitimate forms of marriage and reproduction.”³¹⁴

Like infanticide tales, monstrous birth stories were ultimately stories of motherhood ‘gone wrong.’ Some tales clearly maligned the mother because of her sexual sins or her ‘wandering’ nature, both of which were threatening the male control. In the tale, *Strange nevves out of Kent*, a “wandering yong woman” appeared at the home of “a

³¹² Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 134.

³¹³ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, “Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century France and England,” *Past and Present* 92 (1981): 20-54.

³¹⁴ Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 64.

very honest poore old woman.”³¹⁵ The young woman gave birth to a headless child, among other abnormalities, and abandoned the body with the honest, old woman who buried it.

Another ballad described a single woman’s monstrous birth: her child had a foot where its head should be, stating that, “And as this makes it most monstrous/for foote to clime the head:/So those Subjects be most vicious/That refuse to be lead.”³¹⁶ That the mothers of the monsters were single, one of whom was ‘wandering’, speaks to the preoccupation with a threatening subgroup under patriarchal order: young, single women. As we have seen, young women were considered the most sexual, and this potentially unbridled lascivious could wreak disaster for the institution of marriage. As one monstrous birth story describes, a young woman, who was engaged to a man (banns had even been said, implying just how close the date of marriage was), fell into lust with a relative. As the story describes, “their lust was so hot...that the diyell had so blinded the eies of these two, y[t] they lay together, & shee was gotten with child by him.”³¹⁷ Her lust was so unruly that this young woman not only subverted a contracted match, but she also engaged in incest, and consequently God “...made this proud, this scornfull & vnconstant wench, the mother of a monster, and not of an orderly birth.”³¹⁸ Young, single

³¹⁵ Anonymous, *Strange neeves out of Kent of a monstrous and misshapen child, borne in Olde Sandwich, vpon the 10. Of Iulie, last, the like for strangeness hath neuer beene seen* (London: By T.C[reede] for W. Barley, and are to be sold at his shop in Gracious-street, 1609), 5.

³¹⁶ Anonymous, *The forme and shape of a monstrous child, borne at Maydstone in Kent, the .xxij of October. 1568* (London: By John Awdeley, dwelling in little Britain street withough Aldersgate. The xxij of December, 1568).

³¹⁷ I.R., *A most straunge, and true discourse*, 3.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

women were thus particularly dangerous to social order, as they lacked both a direct male authority to guide their actions and cure them of their inherent lasciviousness. At the very heart of this threat, however, was its challenge to masculinity. God punished these mothers by giving them children without a proper head, just as their mothers lacked a proper male head. Through their own bodies, then, God could punish women who posed a threat to patriarchal order through their own sexuality and autonomy.

Contemporaries also used women's bodies as warnings for the consequences of political and religious subversion. It is worth noting that, like women's sexuality or lack of male authority, the subversion described in the monstrous birth stories similarly transgressed social order. One Scottish mother, for example, was given a monstrous child whose ominous birth was accompanied by thunder and lightning. After the birth she reportedly admitted, "*And I confesse, that I did vehemently desire...to see the utter ruine and subversion of all Church and State-Government...and to be an eye-witnesse of the destruction of the Ministerie, who were not of our faction.*"³¹⁹ This mother's desire to subvert the Church and state necessarily meant that her birth was subverted, as the monstrous child reportedly said himself, "*I am thus deformed for the sinnes of my Parents.*"³²⁰

The theme of a 'disorderly birth' as recompense for social subversion was echoed in another tale concerning a married woman by the name of Mary. Mary came from a good family, was a regular at church and well liked by the community, when she began to

³¹⁹ Anonymous, *Straunge news from Scotland, or, A Strange relation of a terrible and prodigious monster borne to the amazement of all those that were spectators...* (London: By E.P. for W. Lee, 1647), 4.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

associate with Anabaptists, later becoming a Ranter. Her reward for this dissent from religious and social harmony was that she gave birth to a monster, “so loathsome to behold, that the women’s [gossips] hearts trembled to look upon it.”³²¹

But dissent perhaps no more harshly punished than with the case of Mrs. Haughton of Lancashire, who gave birth to a headless child, with its face on its chest, after she reportedly said that, “...*I pray God, that rather than I shall be a Roundhead, or bear a Roundhead, I may bring forth a Childe without a head.*”³²² The author of this pamphlet not only discussed God’s wrath for the mother’s dissent, but also implied that the local community was punished through the body of Mrs. Haughton, as it was full of Papists and “they were the chiefe Instruments in seeking to have the wicked Book of Allowance for Sports on the Lords Day to be published.”³²³

These mothers, and at times their communities, transgressed religious and social order, and were consequently punished by God through the womb. It is worth noting that the women who were punished for larger political dissent were by and large married; theirs were not stories of sexuality and emasculation, but rather stories about politics being played out through the female reproductive body. By engaging in a power struggle in which they had no part, these women were stripped of a female power- reproduction- that they, as women, had uniquely possessed. These mothers, whether they challenged social order through religious and political dissent, or through sexual autonomy, were

³²¹ Anonymous, *The ransters monster: being a true relation of one Mary Adams, living at Tillingham in Essex, who named her self the Virgin Mary...* (London: Printed for George Horton, 1652), 4.

³²² Anonymous, *A declaration of a strange and wonderfull monster: born in Kirkham parish in Lancashire (the childe of Mrs. Haughton, a Popish gentlewoman)...* (London: Prinyted by Jane Coe., 1646), 6.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

believed to be punished by God through their body and reproduction. The area that women should have possessed the most amount of direct control- their corporeal body- was imagined by contemporaries as being ultimately under the possession of God, and liable for destruction for causing disorder.

If a woman's body during reproduction, and the child she produced, was a site of power and gender struggle, delivery was also one, and midwives were at the center of the debate. As discussed in Chapter Three, the lying-in room was a site of female authority and thus threatening to male control. The individual who was ultimately in control of this site of female authority was the midwife, and naturally early modern male writers had a great deal to say about the subject. Midwives played a particularly interesting role; they both resisted and colluded in patriarchy, and men both lauded the role and denigrated it, seeing it as threatening to male authority. As we will see, that midwifery was at the heart of a gendered power struggle led to its eventual demise with the professionalization of science and medicine in the late seventeenth-century.

Although there was no formal institution or structure to the practice of midwifery, the majority of midwives were trained and skilled, many undergoing an informal apprenticeship that usually lasted several years. They were licensed by church authorities, and most were married or widowed, coming from the 'middling sort' of the social strata.³²⁴ The reputation of midwifery as a practice varied, and this may have very well had to do with their contested role within patriarchy. On the one hand, as David Cressy has described, they were celebrated features of an important part of early modern culture and ritual. They had special seats at parish churches, sometimes performed emergency

³²⁴ Mendelson & Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 314.

baptisms, and held the important role of presenting the swaddled infant to its father for the first time.³²⁵ Lisa Forman Cody has further noted midwives' important role within the patriarchal public sphere. By using their knowledge to intercede in cases of paternity, rape, and infanticide, "midwives were granted such a prominent public and political role because they ultimately reinforced the state's need."³²⁶ As Cody argues, despite working within one of the most private rituals, midwives were part of a public sphere, and colluded within the patriarchal prerogative of the state.³²⁷

Yet there also existed a stereotype of the midwife, the "...ignorant, poverty-stricken crone who dabbled in deliveries to eke out a livelihood."³²⁸ Perhaps because of this stereotype, contemporaries were concerned with the power of early modern midwives and the potential problems that could arise because of their authority, as seen through the oaths midwives were required to take. One such issue was the abandonment

³²⁵ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 61-64.

³²⁶ Lisa Forman Cody, "The Politics of Reproduction: From Midwives' Alternative Public Sphere to the Public Spectacle of Man-Midwifery", *Eighteenth Century Studies* 32, Vol. 4 (1999), 482.

³²⁷ This liminal view of midwifery is seconded by Merry E. Wiesner, who argued that midwives in early modern Germany "bridged the gap" between public and private. See "The Midwives of south Germany and the Public/Private Dichtomoy" in *The Art of Midwifery*, 77. But perhaps midwives were no more explicitly part of the public sphere than through the publication, *The Midwives Just Petition: OR, A complaint of divers good Gentlewomen of that faculty* (London: s.n., 1643). This publication called for the end of the Civil War because of the plight of women who, "sensibly suffer since the wars began, living the religious lives of some cloysterd Nuns contrary to their own natural affections..." (A2). According to these midwives, the lack of men was not only the cause of sexual frustration and temptation to many abandoned or widowed women, but also directly affected their midwifery business. Interestingly, the author(s) also used this publication to engage in a dialogue regarding the nature of increasingly 'modern' warfare, citing the more destructive weapons used that took more lives and consequently more husbands away from their wives (A3).

³²⁸ Doreen Evendeen, "Mothers and their Midwives in Seventeenth-Century London," in *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe*, ed. Hilary Marland (London: Routledge, 1993), 9. But, as Evendeen notes, this stereotype was just that; most midwives were financially stable.

of poor women to care for the rich (and higher paying).³²⁹ Other issues included witchcraft, assisting women in secret deliveries, and guiding the mother to falsely name the father.³³⁰ Notably these issues directly pertain to patriarchy, whether through the power of witchcraft, cases of paternity, or through unregulated sexuality in the bastardy in secret births.

Early modern midwives consequently filled a complicated role within English culture. They were celebrated as the knowledge-bearers in reproduction and delivery. But they were also maligned as potentially dangerous to patriarchal order, and some early modern male writers made their disdain quite clear. Robert Barret was a surgeon who initially cited midwifery as an “inestimable art”, but was quick to condemn its practitioners as ignorant and unskilled, whose selfishness and greed were dangerous to the patient.³³¹ Barret claimed that midwives’ greed and false pride made them dangerous, as he claimed that midwives often risked their patients’ health by breaking a woman’s water to hurry along the process and get to another birth, while being generally overhasty during delivery and neglecting the mother and child’s safety.³³²

Barret also cited midwives’ lack of humility and their overabundance of pride, stating that, “They love to engross all the Credit and Honour of an Operation to

³²⁹ Notable, Adrian Wilson has cited the social leveling role of midwives: “And in subordinating the lady to the midwife, it had ceaselessly reminded that lady that she was, for all her pretensions to rank and breeding, a woman like other women; manual labour she might eschew delegating this to servants, but labour in its other sense, that of childbirth, remained her inescapable lot. As long as women’s traditional collective culture remained intact across all social classes, childbirth retained this leveling quality.” See *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England, 1660-1770* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 191.

³³⁰ Anonymous, *The Book of Oaths and the Several Forms thereof...* (London: Printed for H. Twyford, T. Basset, B. Griffin, C. Harper..., 1689), 161-162.

³³¹ Barret, *A companion for midwives*, A3.

³³² *Ibid.*, A6-7; 10.

themselves; rather than any body should share with them in a Creditable Performance, they'll endanger the Life both of Mother and Child.”³³³ The author offered specific examples of deliveries gone wrong due to midwives' negligence: during one delivery, a midwife allegedly tore the arm off the infant.³³⁴ In another, the midwife was too hasty to completely deliver the afterbirth, causing the mother to become extremely ill.³³⁵ In another example, Barret told of a midwife that so was frustratingly unsuccessful in her delivery that she ended up drinking the cinnamon water that was reserved for the laboring woman.³³⁶ In several of these stories, the delivery was only saved from the foolish midwife when a male physician was called for.³³⁷ That the author was engaging in a clear lambasting of the female profession was clear, as he further claimed that the midwives who should be lauded were those that would have the humility to send for a man to deliver during a complicated delivery, and thus “wav'd her imaginary Reputation to save their Lives.”³³⁸ As Barret claimed, where a midwife would let either the baby or the mother die, a man midwife would, “deliver the Woman in a Moment, save her a great deal of Trouble and Pain, and by successful Operations, justifie the Merits of his Profession.”³³⁹

³³³ Ibid., 3.

³³⁴ Ibid., 25-26.

³³⁵ Ibid., 25.

³³⁶ Ibid., 30.

³³⁷ Ibid., 30-31.

³³⁸ Ibid., 4.

³³⁹ Ibid., 5.

Indeed, the late seventeenth century was perhaps the beginning of the end for midwifery as the popularity of the man-midwife grew. Part of this transition was due to the invention of the forceps in the early seventeenth-century, which allowed physicians to more successfully deliver complicated births.³⁴⁰ Yet the forceps were only a minor part of the equation; historians have noted the gendered division between midwife and physician, amateur and professional.³⁴¹ Pregnancy and childbirth, which had once been part of female culture, the knowledge of which was obtained through experience, gradually became subsumed within the male-gendered world of scientific inquiry and the professionalization of medicine. As Lisa Forman Cody has argued, “Before the 1660s, women could be experts, or possess authority, because knowledge was based upon the body, and subjective experience. After the 1660s, reproduction became masculine in that it became associated with scientific knowledge.”³⁴² In a similar vein, Mary Fissell has cited the appropriation of the female body by the authors of seventeenth-century medical texts, particularly Nicholas Culpeper’s 1651 work, *A Directory for midwives*. With the publication of this popular book, Fissell argued that knowledge about the body became something that was created by men and transmitted through the written word, rather than knowledge that was passed from woman to woman through tradition and experience. According to Fissell, male authors like Culpeper thus stripped midwives and traditional female culture of its authority, creating a female body “completely without agency.”³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery*, 3-6.

³⁴¹ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 50.

³⁴² Lisa Forman Cody, “The Politics of Reproduction,” 479.

³⁴³ Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 153. It is important to note that, despite the gendered power struggle between female midwife and male physician, midwives continued to be the norm, unless the delivery was

Like midwifery, breastfeeding was a contested subject that married the reproductive body with gendered power struggles. Nursing sparked a debate in seventeenth-century England about the nature of motherhood and the connection between the body and maternal love. Critics of mothers who practiced the long-established tradition of using a wet-nurse varied from offering advice on how to choose a proper wet-nurse, to lambasting mothers who did not breastfeed. At stake in this conversation was not only the nature of maternity, but of social order and power over one's body.

Contemporaries ascribed a great deal of significance unto breast milk. Marilyn Salmon has examined the medicinal properties of breast milk in early modern England and colonial America, noting its use to feed the weak and treat ailments from ear infections to blindness.³⁴⁴ She cited the comparison of breast milk to semen as a “life-giving force” while arguing that medical literature demonstrated a “strong respect for women’s physical power to sustain life.”³⁴⁵ Of course, breast milk was acknowledged to sustain life, but there was also conflict and power embedded in it. Foremost, breast milk was understood to transfer certain qualities of the mother to the child, which necessarily meant a mixing of qualities of women of lesser means to children of privilege. The scientific explanation for this lay with the humors: a particular woman’s humoral composition was expressed, literally, with her breast milk. Medical writers believed that a wet nurse’s humoral composition must match that of the infant, or else the milk would

complicated and necessitated a physician. Adrian Wilson has made a convincing case that physicians eventually became popular because they were more expensive, and thus differentiated between gentlewomen and poor women who could not afford the fees. See *The Making of Man-Widwifery*, 191.

³⁴⁴ Marilyn Salmon, “The Cultural Significance of Breast-Feeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America,” *Journal of Social History* 28:2 (1994): 247-250.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

not be well-received. One medical writer noted that a child nourished in the womb of a “Body more Fine and Tender” would find it difficult to thrive on the milk of nurses who are “...generally robust and of a courser allay.”³⁴⁶

Nevertheless, writers advised that outward signs of healthiness were a good indicator of her internal “complexion.” Consequently medical writers offered proper guidance in choosing a wet nurse, from choosing a woman not too young or old, with average size breasts and a healthy complexion, to one who slept and exercised a moderate amount.³⁴⁷ Nicholas Culpeper advised mothers to choose a woman “...of a middle stature, fleshy, but not fat; of a merry, pleasant cheerful countenance, a ruddy Colour, very cleer Skin that you may see her Veins through it.”³⁴⁸

Humoral science behind wet-nursing complicated the practice, but was not the main reason for its opponents’ harsh critiques. Robert Barret blamed ill-mannered children on poor care by their nurses, and connected this poor care to larger social and religious failings, arguing that, “If our Nurses were more careful in feeding the Children, then we should have ‘em more obedient, pliable, and sweet temper’d than now they are...more easy and manageable in their Moral and Religious concerns.”³⁴⁹ At the heart of this argument, however, was not the wet-nurse herself; it was the mother. Some contemporaries connected the breast and the womb as signs of a woman’s motherhood, and as part of the corporeal reproductive body; their proper use constituted motherhood

³⁴⁶ Henry Newcome, *The compleat mother, or, An earnest perswasive to all mothers (especially those of rank and quality) to nurse their own children* (London: Printed for J. Wyat, 1695), 70-71.

³⁴⁷ A.M., *A Rich Closet of Physical Secrets*, 18-19.

³⁴⁸ Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 208.

³⁴⁹ Barret, *A companion for midwives*, 111.

properly enacted, because, according to Barret, it was as unnatural for a woman, "...to deny her Milk for nourishment to her own child...as it would be to decline nourishing it in the Womb."³⁵⁰ Because of this connection between breast and womb, many of the writers surveyed here similarly decried mothers who used wet nurses as unnatural or unloving. One author asked, "Doth not...*even nature teach us, that the sea-monsters draw out their breasts and give suck to their young?*...Is this therefore their thankfulness to God for so great a mercy, to refuse to embrace in their arms and nourish at their breasts, the fruit of their womb, when God joined the blessings of the breast and the blessings of the womb together."³⁵¹ The Countess of Lincoln (who, ironically, did not breastfeed herself) made a similar analogy of non-breastfeeding mothers and animals, arguing that women who "deny to giue suck to their own children" were "more sauage than the Dragons, and as cruell to their little ones as the Ostriches."³⁵² While Clinton and Oliver cited using a wet-nurse as unnatural, and worse than the care animals provided their young, another author went as far as to associate the unnaturalness of not breastfeeding with aborting ones' child, citing the scripture Hos 9:14: "*Give them, O Lord, What wilt though give them? Give them a miscarrying Womb and dry Breasts.*"³⁵³

One could very well make a case for contemporaries' anger with the practice of wet-nursing as it allowed some women to claim some power over their body, a body which, as we have seen, was a site of power and part of a gendered struggle for authority.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 90.

³⁵¹ John Oliver, *A present for teeming vvomen, or, Scripture-directions for women with child how to prepare for the houre of travel...* (London: Printed by Sarah Griffin for Mary Rothwell..., 1663), 17.

³⁵² Clinton, *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie*, 8.

³⁵³ Newcome, *The compleat mother*, 34-35.

That a woman might choose not to breastfeed was all the more subversive as contemporaries cited the biblical antecedents to nursing one's own child. But what also heavily weighed upon the minds was wet-nursing's potential for social disorder. As Laura Gowing has noted, the practice of using a wet-nurse meant that poor women could potentially abandon their infants to nurse another's.³⁵⁴ Elizabeth Clinton admonished mothers who used wet-nurses to, "...bee not accessory to that disorder of causing a poore woman to banish her own infant, for the entertaining of a richer womans child, as it were, bidding her vnlove her owne to loue yours."³⁵⁵ While Elizabeth Clinton noted the unfortunate end for the nurse's child, Henry Newcome more specifically cited the deleterious ends for genteel families who used wet-nurses. In an ironic foil, he praised the "Poor Tenants Child" who was "...nursed in its *own Mothers* Bosom, and cherished by her Breasts, whilst the *Landlords Heir* is turn'd out, exil'd from his Mothers embrace as soon as from her Womb..."³⁵⁶ The consequence of this, according to Newcome, was that "...the Infants of the best Families are most hardly used, and vast numbers of them *undoubtedly destroyed*."³⁵⁷ And, not only did wet-nursing ultimately contribute to the downfall of the gentry, it also subverted the most natural of all bonds: that between mother and child. To Newcome, the breast could have an even greater bearing upon the

³⁵⁴ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 201. At the other end of this spectrum, Gowing noted that parishes also needed poor mothers to nurse their own children (some even paid them to nurse their infant) so that the child did not have to be provided for. This, however, caused tensions within social order, as "it meant making a single mother and her illegitimate child a social unit rather than treating them separately, thus undermining both the moral and the economic basis of familial order," (200).

³⁵⁵ Clinton, *The Countess of Lincolnes Nurserie*, 19.

³⁵⁶ Newcome, *The compleat mother*, 7.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

relationship between mother and child than the womb, as he noted that “...*many cruel Tyrants have killed their Mothers, uet none ever offered Violence to his Nurse.* And this shews that bearing in the Womb is not so inviolable Obligation to Love, as Nursing at the Breast.”³⁵⁸

Underlining the above arguments was the issue of maternal love, which was ultimately understood here through the corporeal body. By unifying the breast and womb, and denying it to the child, a woman cast herself as an ‘unnatural mother’, one who did not properly love her child, and who potentially caused social disorder by subverting the social hierarchy through the act of utilizing a wet-nurse. The marriage of the breast and womb in the image of the reproductive body was just one more way in which contemporaries created the image of the unnatural mother, of motherhood gone wrong, much like cases of infanticide or monstrous births, and therefore seized power from a mother through her reproductive body. If her body was powerful, and if it offered her some authority, these writers claimed it from her.

The female reproductive body was an ambivalent site in early modern English culture. Its fundamental importance was obvious: it was what the continuance of mankind rested upon. In that way it was celebrated, as contemporaries acknowledged that, “We are all the Fruit of the Womb, and the whole World is govern’d by its fertile Product.”³⁵⁹ And contemporaries acknowledged the great power that a mother held over her fetus during its development, as she was not only responsible for its gestation, but could directly affect the fetus with the power of her mind. With this authority, however, came tension, and

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 57.

³⁵⁹ Barret, *A companion for midvvives*, 59.

medical writers had to balance women's maternal authority with her subordinate role within a patriarchal culture. These medical writers began with conception; while they acknowledged that women had a greater role in reproduction, they were quick to ascribe superiority to male seed-the underlying justification of this being humoral theory, which likewise granted the male corporeal body superiority over the female.

With this tension over authority between male and female bodies, it is little wonder that male writers attempted to strip the female body of authority, particularly through the area in which the female body possessed the most power: reproduction. This challenge to female control was most obviously present in the case of midwifery, as male physicians lambasted the profession, ultimately ending with its takeover by men who were considered more knowledgeable and professional. The challenge to women's reproduction was also present in early modern discourse: with sensationalistic tales of monstrous births, authors of broadsides and pamphlets claimed the female reproductive body as a site in which God punished. It is unsurprising that this punishment was most often for social subversion, whether sexual or political; a female who transgressed the established patriarchal order was to be punished by God through that which made her most female: childbirth.

This was, perhaps, the ultimate stripping of authority from women, and it was also part of a larger discourse concerning 'bad motherhood' or 'motherhood gone wrong.' Like infanticide, monstrous births displayed the problems of women who, by not being properly guided by a male head, made harmful decisions- like engaging in fornication or religious dissent- that directly challenged masculinity and thus patriarchy. In a similar vein, a woman's choice to utilize a wet-nurse and not breastfeed herself was cited as an

example of ‘unnatural’ motherhood; a sign of a lack of maternal affection. But what was really at stake was also women’s (inadvertent) challenge to social order, as contemporaries worried about not only the displacement of wet-nurses’ infants, but also about the deterioration of a landed class under the care of inferior nurses.

The female reproductive body was invested with a great deal of power, and this power had the potential to challenge patriarchy. What was really at stake with the female body, then, was its authority and its threat to social order. The female reproductive body, discourse concerning monstrous births, and the female culture of maternity, including midwifery and breastfeeding, were consequently contested sites for authority within patriarchal culture.

CHAPTER 6

THE PRAISE OF A GODLY WOMAN:

GENDER, DEATH, AND MOTHERHOOD

We have a winding sheete in our mothers womb, which grows with us from our conception, and wee come into the World, wound up in that winding sheet, for we come to seeke a grave.³⁶⁰

She both lived and dyed like a lamb, lived meekly, and dyed quietly...³⁶¹

And behold, she that is dead, shall yet speake vnto you.³⁶²

In 1622, twenty-seven year old Elizabeth Joscelyn was pregnant with her first child. Elizabeth had married her husband, Taurell Joscelyn, six years earlier and the two resided on his estate near Cambridge. As her pregnancy progressed, Elizabeth was struck with a premonition that death was near, and she began recording motherly instructions and advice for her child.³⁶³ Elizabeth's work, posthumously titled *A Mother's Legacy to her Unborne Childe*, offered advice on both her child's spiritual and temporal educations, and included commentary on topics ranging from scriptural expositions to

³⁶⁰ Johne Donne, *The Sermons*, cited in Lucinda Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003), 16.

³⁶¹ Nathaniel Hardy, *Death's alarum: or, Security's vvarnice-piece. A Sermon rpeached in S. Dionis Back-Church, at the funeral of Mrs. Mary Smith (daughter of Mr. Isaac Colfe, formerly minister of Gods Word at Chadwell in Essex, ald late wife of Mr. Richard Smith of London, draper) who dyed the 9th. Day of Novemb. 1653* (London: Printed by J.G. for Nath: Web, and Will: Grantham at the sign of the Bear in S. Paul's Church-yard neere the little North Doore., 1653), 32

³⁶² Stephen Denison, *The Monument or Tombe-stone, A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of Mrs. Elizabeth Juxon: 1620, A Fascimile Reproduction with an Introduction by Bettie Anne Doeblor and Retha M. Warnicke*, (New York: Scholars' Fasciminiles & Reprints), 43.

³⁶³ Sylvia Brown, 'Jocelyn, Elizabeth (1596–1622)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/view/article/14832>, accessed 15 Jan 2015]

housewifery.³⁶⁴ Although at many times Elizabeth's work appeared personal, recording her desire for children and her hopes for their futures, it eventually became a very public work. *A Mother's Legacy to her Unborne Childe* was published in 1624, two years after Elizabeth's death, and would emerge in a second edition a year later, eventually going through eight editions from 1624 to 1684.³⁶⁵ Elizabeth's writing was, in essence, a 'best-seller' in the early modern public sphere, raising questions about the nature of female authorship and authority. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, Elizabeth Joscelyn's work was permissible within the early modern public sphere because the content was culturally acceptable; her writing took its authority from her own motherhood, and she claimed that her work intended to advise only her own children. The posthumous mother's advice book was, as a consequence, a device for claiming authority in the public sphere without posing a threat to the dynamics of a patriarchal society. What began as a private recording by a mother for her children entered the larger public realm of seventeenth-century death discourse, highlighting the complex relationship between women, authorship, and authority in the early modern public sphere.

While the mother's advice books were written by women, the majority of death discourse concerning women in the public sphere was not in women's own words: rather, it was crafted by male writers through published funeral sermons. Funeral sermons were a key part of the early modern death ritual, and a relatively small percentage were published, thus exposing a select number of deceased women's life to a larger

³⁶⁴ Elizabeth Joscelyn, *A Mother's Legacy to her Unborne Childe*, ed. Jean LeDrew Metcalfe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). For a more in-depth analysis of Joscelyn's work, see Chapter Three.

³⁶⁵ Brown, *Women's Writing in Stuart England*, vi. As discussed in Chapter Three, mother's advice books, a genre in which Joscelyn's work belonged, were fairly popular. Nevertheless mother's advice books, and female-authored texts in general, were relatively scarce.

audience.³⁶⁶ At the very outset the creation and publication of women's funeral sermons, then, pose a different set of complex questions regarding the relationship between authorship and authority. While individual women were commemorated within the sermons, their lives and deaths were, very literally, textually created by male authors and molded to serve a specific purpose. These sermons were used to commemorate and laud their deceased subjects; yet they simultaneously crafted a woman's life and death to serve a didactic function.

This chapter will argue that published funeral sermons were, like many of the other genres of published sources discussed in this dissertation, ultimately political; while they commemorated individuals, they also readily addressed issues of power and gender. These sermons eulogized their subjects by offering prescriptive gender norms for women. The dead female subject was upheld as a "good woman", and her often generic good attributes were listed for the instruction of readers. Because of the interdependence between female behavior and masculinity prescribed within early modern patriarchal culture, this chapter will further argue that funeral sermons were not meant merely for the instruction of women, but served to enforce social harmony and order for the community as a whole. The didactic relationship between women's sermons and social order may be evidenced in the inclusion of larger political issues in some sources, as they obliquely addressed issues of high politics and religious dissent.

³⁶⁶ The sermons discussed below are all published sermons, and ones that contain a eulogy, elegy, or some sort of post-script discussing the deceased subject. While I refer to my sources as 'sermons', I most often refer to this section of the sermon, called the 'praise', rather than the explication of scripture itself.

Women's funeral sermons, then, all commonly utilized what was believed to be the most significant part of early modern life, death, to prescribe gender norms, particularly motherhood, in the consolidation of social stability. Sermons for women with children almost always discussed her maternity in some fashion. Women were best praised by referencing their domesticity, and motherhood was ultimately the pinnacle of a woman's domestic role. The referencing of motherhood, however, signified more than mere praise of a good woman. As this chapter will argue, contemporaries instilled motherhood with spirituality, and it was thus fitting that the authors discussed a woman's maternity as she entered death and everlasting life.

Much like the infanticide stories discussed in Chapter Four, the eulogies of deceased women served to offer instruction in both femininity and motherhood. While infanticide stories presented motherhood gone wrong, the women lauded in the sermons discussed below were presented as examples of womanhood and motherhood enacted perfectly. Women's published funeral sermons, then, serve as a rich source for exploring issues of gender, motherhood, authority and power in early modern English culture.

Death was the purpose of a Christian life and thus central to the early modern experience. As Bettie Anne Doebler and Retha Warnicke have described, "...death often held the place of the most importance in life."³⁶⁷ Historiography on death in early modern England is rich, and has often focused upon the role of death ritual and its relationship to kin and the community. David Cressy's work on life cycles in early modern England has explored the ways in which death ritual fostered notions of community, reflected personal

³⁶⁷ Bettie Anne Doebler & Retha M. Warnicke, introduction to *The Praise of a Godly Woman* by Hannibal Gamon (Anne Arbor: Scholars' Fascimiles & Reprints, 2001), 25.

connections, and upheld social norms. Funerals, for example, were an important part of early modern culture as they reinforced hierarchy. Titled members of the community were expected to distribute doles at their funerals, causing it to become a well-attended public event that demonstrated the reciprocal relationship between commoners and their titled neighbors; while the aristocracy were expected to provide relief for the commoners, the latter showed deference to their social superiors by their acceptance of that relief. Dinners were used to reflect social position as well, and Cressy explained that “though death was the great leveler, survivors ensured that gradations of honour and status were carefully observed...varying degrees of care and ornament attested to a person’s rank or standing.”³⁶⁸

Clare Gitting’s work, one of the pioneering works on death in early modern England, argued that this period produced the rise of the individual, and in particular she viewed death as a specific forum for the individual’s birth.³⁶⁹ She argued that, after the Reformation, funeral ritual was “stripped of any eschatological purpose” and was merely the “disposal of a corpse”.³⁷⁰ The Catholic funeral practice, which included a Vespers of the Office of the Dead, a mass for the dead, and a Requiem Mass, had helped ease the mourner’s anxiety by allowing them participation in the deceased’s salvation. The loss of these practices led to an increased anxiety over death, and Gittings argued that early modern Englishmen and women began to emphasize the differences between life and death rather than the continuum. Funeral sermons, for example, not only offered the

³⁶⁸ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 449.

³⁶⁹ Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

family a way of demonstrating their love for the deceased (which would have previously been filled by prayers and sponsored masses to expedite purgatory), but also showed the family's earthly connection to the person. This more "earthly" and private connection to the deceased is central to Gitting's argument, as her thesis contended that the rise of the individual saw the demise of the community. She argued that the consumerist emergence of the undertaking profession and the use of coffins in the seventeenth century were connected to an increase in individualism, as the deceased's family was more concerned with having the proper items for the procession and demonstrating their love for the individual than partaking in community activities like feasting and the wake, particularly as the larger community activities were slowly replaced by ones for family only. Consequently, through a combination of reformed ritual practices and new consumer trends, Gittings argued that funeral ritual, including the funeral sermon, gradually shifted focus from the community to the individual while severing the spiritual connection between life and death.

While Cressy analyzed death, culture, and community, and Gittings analyzed death and the rise of individuality, Ralph Houlbrooke has focused more closely on the influence of the Reformation upon death ritual. Houlbrooke traced the social and cultural prevalence of death in the early modern period towards its very gradual removal from everyday English life in response to secularization. The rituals of death, including the making of wills and the preaching of funeral sermons, gradually developed to contain more secular material and purpose, while the rejection of purgatory changed psychological conceptions of death and removed the importance of living relations upon

the deceased soul.³⁷¹ Houlbrooke made a particularly important psychological observation regarding the loss of purgatory. From the staunchly Protestant reign of Edward VI (with the exception of the brief Marian interlude), Popish rituals to ensure a soul's salvation were rejected, and consequently the psychological benefits of intercessory actions, including the use of chantries, sponsored masses, and alms-giving, were withdrawn. The psychological reassurance that these actions offered loved ones of the deceased gradually manifested in other ways, particularly sermons, and consequently sermons possessed a distinct significance in the death ritual of post-Reformation England. As Houlbrooke explained, sermons had been preached in England since the thirteenth-century, but after the Reformation they served a greater psychological purpose for family and friends in their description of the deceased's deserved salvation.³⁷²

The Post-Reformation funeral sermon was, in itself, political, as it was embroiled within the vast doctrinal conflicts of Tudor England. As Frederic Tromley has described, "In the second half of the sixteenth century, the English funeral sermon underwent a period of prolonged crisis, becoming the subject of a heated controversy. At stake was a central question: what kind of funeral sermon, if any, could be preached legitimately in a Reformed church?"³⁷³ The answer lay somewhere between the superstitions of the Catholic predecessors and the bare-bones preaching of the Puritan sermon, the latter of which excised the eulogy portion of the sermon in fear that it came too close to the

³⁷¹ See "The Making of Wills", 81-109, and "The Hereafter", 28-56, in Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and Family in England*.

³⁷² See "Funeral Sermons" in Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England*, 295-330.

³⁷³ Frederic Tromley, "'According to sounde religion': The Elizabethan Controversy over the Funeral Sermon," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 13 (1983): 293.

Catholic sermon.³⁷⁴ In fact, some of the more radical reformers argued that there was no biblical evidence for funerals and believed that the funeral should be strictly secular in nature, and consequently “the Christian funeral sermon was therefore a contradiction in terms.”³⁷⁵ Late sixteenth and seventeenth-century Englishmen thus found an alternative use for the funeral sermon: rather than as merely a celebration of the deceased and a method of praying for the dead, they would serve to instruct. According to Tromley, “The attempts of Elizabethan preachers to remove the stigma of Catholicism from their sermons were usually founded on a simple, central argument: that funeral sermons, like the burial service as a whole, were for the benefit of the living, not the dead.”³⁷⁶ Post-Reformation funeral sermons, then, served a specifically didactic function. They instructed listeners of the proper way to respond to the great trial of death, how to ameliorate suffering through piety, while offering lessons in both the finality and impartiality of death.

Funeral sermons were, of course, gendered, and the publication of funeral sermons reflects the disparity between sermons written for male and female subjects. Doebler and Warnicke have noted that, between 1600 and 1630, 66% of published sermons were written to commemorate men, leaving 34% for women.³⁷⁷ Lucinda Becker

³⁷⁴ Bettie Anne Doebler & Retha Warnicke, “Sex Discrimination after Death,” *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 17:4 (1986-7): 311-312.

³⁷⁵ Tromley, “‘According to sounde religion’, 294. Tromley noted that, despite concern for the lack of biblical justification for funeral sermons, they became standard practice amongst seventeenth-century Puritans, a “staple of Puritan piety”, although they typically continued to omit the eulogy section of the sermon as it came too close to Catholic prayers for the dead, 311.

³⁷⁶ Tromley, “‘According to sounde religion’, 299.

³⁷⁷ Doebler & Warnicke, “Sex Discrimination after Death,” 312-313.

has likewise explored the gendered content of funeral sermons. She has argued that multiple agendas exist within sermons; among their many uses they served as a commemoration, a way to uplift both the individual and the family, and demonstrate religious or personal politics. But, fundamentally, Becker argued that “it would be inaccurate to suggest that funeral sermons for women were simply a cynical attempt to ensure gender conformity amongst the female parishioners who read them. The principle reason for their existence was a desire to commemorate a woman in the best way possible”.³⁷⁸ Furthermore Becker argued that women gained a sort of public fame through their published funeral sermons; she contended that not only were they lauded but also that women received fame because of the exotic nature of death itself. A deceased woman was publicly discussed because she was no longer “domestic”, but something unknown by the living and thus worthy of attention. Although sermons kept women confined within the bounds of patriarchy, a woman’s commemoration through sermon was also liberating, as women “could be privileged into print.”³⁷⁹

This chapter will argue that funeral sermons did, of course, praise women, but they were not necessarily liberating. Yes, the deceased were lauded within their eulogies, but as a discussion of the content will show the eulogies praised them by molding them within gendered social norms. Individual women were praised, but only through a specific formula that emphasized their piety, domesticity, and maternity, thereby making them quite the opposite of exotic towards their readers. Furthermore, that the sermons

³⁷⁸ Lucinda M. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003), 123.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

discussed below were published, and thus part of the public sphere, further complicates the role of the funeral sermon, as it created a complex relationship between the author, the subject, and authority over the latter's life and death.

At a most basic level there was a consumerist element to funeral sermons' publications: the published sermon was part consumerist item, part commemoration of a deceased individual. As Doeblner and Warnicke have noted, "publishers wanted to sell the volumes, and ministers, intent upon instructing their readers in how to prepare for death, hoped in addition to obtaining a fee from the publishing houses to win gifts from the patrons of the volumes."³⁸⁰ The published funeral sermon, then, possessed an interesting, multilayered role in the nascent public sphere. It at once acted as a commemoration of its subject- a more private use- and simultaneously fulfilling a more public use as a didactic, consumerist tool for individuals who possibly did not know the deceased subject. One author noted his sermons profitable use, saying that "...since I am affirm'd by some, and those no incompetent Judges, that the Sermon may be tolerable in the Perusal, and possibly, not wholly unprofitable; I chuse...to comply with the Desires of several who would have it Publick..."³⁸¹ In a similar vein, the title of one funeral sermon directly referenced the writing's private and public uses, as it stated "...that sermon, which was at first private...is not become publique in perspect of the readers. Wherein it resembleth the Image, that is taken out of the painters shop, where few behold

³⁸⁰ Doeblner & Warnicke, "Sex Discrimination after Death", 312-313.

³⁸¹ Ralph Lambert, *A Sermon preach'd at the Funeral of Mrs. Anne Margetson, a young lady, under the age of fourteen years In the church of Clerkenwell: on Sunday, November the 12th. 1693* (London: printed for Peter Buck at the sign of the Temple, near the Inner-Temple-Gate in Fleetstreet, 1693), A2.

it, and placed in the open market, where everyone will censure it.”³⁸² The author referred to the public’s use of the funeral sermon in a manner that lacked the intimacy of those who knew the deceased, somewhat stripping the sermon’s power as an intimate, commemorative tool for an individual.

Published sermons were simultaneously used to teach, commemorate, and make profit, but they also reflect the complicated presence of women’s lives, and sometimes words, crafted and submitted to the public sphere by a male author. While mother’s advice books were written by women, the lives and attributes of the deceased women discussed in sermons were textually crafted by a male author, creating a complex negotiation of public power between author and subject. Even sermons that claimed to include the deceased women’s own words were heavily edited by the sermon’s author. One author specifically described his crafting, stating that “I have given thee her sense in a clearer and less ambiguous terme. I will assure thee, I have neither added nor subtracted any thing (which I conceive) material.”³⁸³ The published sermon, then, served not only to praise an individual, but its entry into the public sphere created a complex document that at once celebrated a life while using it as a tool for profit; it at once glorified a female subject while making her life and death at the mercy of a male author’s textual crafting, and made her life legacy ultimately a tool to prescribe appropriate behavior for women.

³⁸² Robert Wolcomb, *The state of the godly both in this life, and in the life to come deliuered In a sermon at Chudleigh in Devon: at the funeralls of the right worshipfull the Lady Elizabeth Courtney the 11. of November 1605* (London: Printed [by R. Bradock] for Roger Jackson, and are to be sold at his shop neere the Conduit in Fleetstreet, 1606), A2.

³⁸³ Nathaniel Cole, *The Christains vvelcome to the court of heauen, or a ioyfull translation A sermon preached before an honourable, and vvorshipfull auditorie at the solemne funeral of that worshipfull, vertious, and truly religious gentlewoman, Mistris Iane Ferrers deceased...* (London: Printed by I[ohn] H[aviland] for H. H[olland] and G. G[ibbs] and are to be sold at the Golden Flower Deluce in Popes-head Alley, 1625), A6-7.

Women's published funeral sermons were part of a power negotiation between author and subject; yet they were political in other ways as well. Accounts of deceased women's lives and deaths, both of which reinforced notions of piety, patience and steadfastness, could also be used to make a larger social or political statement. Part of the purpose of the Anglican funeral sermon, as Frederic Tromley has described, was that it could be used as an "effective vehicle for teaching these differences between corrupt and pure doctrine."³⁸⁴ While women's sermons were used to teach appropriate female behavior, they were simultaneously used to direct its readers in correct doctrine and could be utilized as in invective against Catholicism. This invective, however, often meant that the female subjects were discussed in some sort of political context, often commending the subjects' political opinions. The sermon for Elizabeth Gibson commended her for her support of the true religion during James II's reign, as she prayed to keep away Catholicism: "good God! How she was concerned lest Popish idolatry and Superstition should again take rooting in this land!"³⁸⁵ Lady Sybilla Anderson's sermon praised her ability to decipher true religion, as she could "...spy Rebellion, when it preached in the Cloak of Religion."³⁸⁶ Her royalist sympathies were likewise commended, as "God had given her her hearts desire, to see what she had often begg'd to see...our rejected, almost abjured King, recalled with honour, and without blood, coming home in triumph upon the

³⁸⁴ Tromley, "'According to sounde religion'", 298.

³⁸⁵ Anonymous, *A Sermon preach'd on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs. Elizabeth Gibson Together with a short account of her life* (London: [s.n.], Printed in the year MDCXCII [1692]), 43.

³⁸⁶ Edward Botelar, *No home but heaven A sermon, preached at the funerals of the right worshipful the Lady Sybilla Anderson, in the Church of Broughton, in the county of Lincoln. Octob. 30. 1661* (London: printed for G. Bedel, and T. Collins, at their shop next to the Middle-Temple Gate, M DC LXIV [1664]), 52.

wings of his peoples prayers and votes...³⁸⁷ While high politics were typically the masculine domain, the authors of these sermons used it to praise their subjects by noting their correct loyalties: to both the king and Protestantism. This strategy, of course, not only praised its subject, but was instructive to readers: a godly woman, one who was graced with everlasting life, was loyal to the king and to the Anglican church.

Some sermons more directly addressed local political conflicts with the same intention of deciphering true doctrine. The authors of the sermon for Mistress Katherin Brettergh used the publication as a public forum to denounce the local Catholic community in Lancashire. The ministers described a good death as serving not only the purpose that “the weake by their example might be encouraged to a holy life, when they see it bring with it so happie a death”, but also that “our enemies may see our faith is not in vain.”³⁸⁸ The “enemies” that the ministers referred to were probably the local Catholic community, whom he chastised within the sermon as community nuisances who plagued Mistress Brettergh and her husband with their evil deeds (which apparently included the slaughtering of the couple’s cattle soon after their marriage). Interestingly, the ministers used the death of Mistress Brettergh to admonish the Catholic community and describe their wicked ways by juxtaposing the subject’s good Protestant behavior with the former’s popery. Not only did the ministers describe Mistress Brettergh as reinforcing her husband and home against papists, but they also described her death as a way of deciphering the true religion. In contrast to Catholics’ popish superstitions, the ministers

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 62.

³⁸⁸ William Harrison & William Leigh. *Death’s Advantage Little Regarded and the Soul’s Solace against Sorrow: Two Funeral Sermons Preached at Childwal in Lancashire at the Burial of Mistress Katherine Brettergh the third of June. 1601* (London: Imprinted by Felix Kyngtson, 1602), “A Briefe Discourse of the Christian Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Bettergh,” 3.

wrote that “and if they will judge of my religion by my death, let them acknowledge their religion is the doctrine of desperation, and that the truth & faith which was able to fill the heart and tongue of this blessed Gentlewoman at her death...is the doctrine of Christ, revealed from heaven...”³⁸⁹

While the ministers of Mistress Brettergh’s sermon described her deeds and death in a manner to condemn the local community of Catholics, the authors ended the sermon with an explicit condemnation of Catholicism that far surpasses the use of a sermon and eulogy as a commemoration of the deceased. In “a post script to papists”, the authors of the sermons wrote that “the most of my popish neighbors (what others be I know not) flye by a very low pitch, being people altogether void of learning, wit, and civilitie.”³⁹⁰ And, in response to a rumor that the local Catholics had taken pleasure in what they had considered a bad death for Mistress Brettergh, the authors wrote:

But now touching the death of this Gentlewoman, whereat some of you Romish faction have bragged, as though an oracle had come from heaven to prove you Catholics, and us Hereticks...the Devill and you are all deceived, and God hath you in derision... and shall laugh you to skorn... This Gentlewomans life being more holy, and her death more comfortable, then possible any of yours can be, so long as you continue *papists*.³⁹¹

Consequently, the authors used Katherin Brettergh’s funeral sermon as a public forum to denounce both the actions of their local Catholic community as well as the errors and superstitions of the Catholic faith in general. And, while they used Mistress Brettergh’s

³⁸⁹ Ibid., “The Christian Life and Death of Mistris Katherin Brettergh,” 22.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., post-script, N1.

³⁹¹ Ibid., post-script, N2.

life and death as a foil to illustrate the evils of local Catholics, the sermon nevertheless entered the public sphere as a diatribe against Catholicism, while attempting to reinstall good order and social harmony within the local community.

Women's sermons were political, teaching the nature of correct religious and political allegiances, and they contained other didactic threads as well. The equality of death is perhaps the most common, and fundamental, trope found within funeral sermons. As one sermon stated, "death spareth them no more than others. The wyse dyeth as well as the foole. All was of the dust, and shall return to dust."³⁹² David Cressy's research reveals that death was discussed as 'the great leveller'; the one aspect of life that united all, rich or poor. Doebler and Warnicke have further discussed the doctrinal elements of this equality, noting that

The Book of Common Prayer, the most influential literary edition of which was published in 1609, put its emphasis upon a human image that was neither distinctly male nor female. The generalized service of 'The Burial of the Dead' seemed to assume Christ's assertion in Matthew that there would be no sexual distinctions nor beings 'given in marriage' in the resurrection [Matt. 22:30]. In short, all Christian souls would reside in heaven in a state of love that transcended gender or sexual possessiveness.³⁹³

The concept of spiritual equality, however comforting, did not bode well in the reality of an inherently hierarchical society. The Christian spiritual equality of persons, which was realized in death, had to be reconciled with their very temporal inequality. As the minister Edward Rainbowe described in his sermon for Lady Anne Clifford, "all souls are equal, made so by God, all come out of the Hand of God with equal faculties, and

³⁹² Ibid., 22.

³⁹³ Doebler & Warnicke, "Sex Discrimination after Death," 311.

when they return to God, shall in their degrees, be crowned with equal Glory.”³⁹⁴

However, Rainbow was sure to reconcile this view with women’s inherent inferiority. In the same sermon Rainbow explained that, in Scripture, “so many great sayings and deeds are attributed to, or have their instances in Women... whereas the same might be exemplified or said much more of men... one reason might have been to put an honor on the weaker sex, lest the proud, or more exalted nature of man should undervalue... and despise that sex, as too much inferior to men.”³⁹⁵ Consequently, Rainbowne argued that the recording of women’s piety in Scripture was partly a ruse to ensure their social acceptance in the face of their obvious gendered inferiority. If only the greatest of good deeds were to be recorded, surely only men would be present in Scripture. Although Rainbowne discussed the spiritually equal nature of men and women’s souls, he interpreted Scripture in a manner that supported the very hierarchical gendered system of early modern England.

The weakness of women was a common trope in early modern English sermons, but the authors sometimes manipulated this weakness to become a strength; sermons sometimes used female weakness as a foil to celebrate their piety. Hanibal Gamon, in his sermon at the funeral of Lady Frances Roberts, preached that “she was a woman fearing the Lord. A woman indeed, and so the weaker vessel, yet nevertheless honour [is] to be given her in that respect... because though she this treasure of the feare of the Lord in an earthen and in a weaker vessel, yet Gods strength was made perfect in her

³⁹⁴ Edward Rainbowne, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Right Honorable Anne, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery who died March 22 1675/76, and was interred April the 14th the following at Appleby in Westmoreland* (London: Printed for R. Royston... and H. Broom..., 1677), 7.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

weakness.”³⁹⁶ Gamon’s description of a weak but pious woman is different in form than minister Rainbow’s exposition, albeit similar in content. While Gamon cloaked the inferiority of women in positive terms (that is, showing women’s closeness to God because of it), Rainbow emphasized women’s social inferiority. Nevertheless, both authors reinforced woman’s temporal inequality in order to better emphasize their spiritual equality.

While women’s weakness was simultaneously used to reinforce gender hierarchies and celebrate a woman’s piety, women’s spiritual lives were celebrated and used in order to serve as exemplars for both men and women. As Doebler and Warnicke have noted, “. . .the major moral thrust was always on those characteristics that promised sainthood, regardless of gender.”³⁹⁷ Indeed, many of the sermons surveyed noted daily spiritual routines that often included scriptural reading, praying, and meditation, none of which was specifically gender specific, although contemporaries noted that women may have had more time to devote to prayer because of the greater amount of time they spent at home compared to men. William Gouge’s sermon for a Mrs. Margaret Ducke of London noted her daily routine of private devotions in the morning, followed by lessons for her children, general household affairs, then reading “books of Piety and Devotion. . .a

³⁹⁶Hanibal Gamon, *The Praise of a Godly Woman. A Sermon Preached at the solemne funeral of the Right Honourable Ladie, the ladie Frances Roberts, at Lanbide-rock-church in Cornwall, the tenth of August [1627]: A Fascimile Reproductino With an Introduction by Bettie Anne Doebler and Retha M. Warnicke* (Anne Arbor: Scholars’ Fascimiles & Reprints, 2001), 26.

³⁹⁷ Bettie Anne Doebler & Retha M. Warnicke, Introduction to *The Praise of a Godly Woman* by Hannibal Gamon, 27.

Library of Christ.”³⁹⁸ The author of the sermon for Lady Philippe of Cornwall, wife to the Justice of the Peace, offered a description of a piety that was instructive to both sexes, as his subject “kept her selfe unspotted from the World, and the spots that appeared to God and her Conscience she was carefull to wipe away by daily prayer and repentance.”³⁹⁹ The author of the sermon for Mrs. Mary Boyleston noted that, “though she was of the weaker sort of Sex, yet she was strong in faith and ready in Scriptures, wherein she used to read eight chapters a day at the least...”⁴⁰⁰ Mrs. Elizabeth Gibson’s sermon noted her extreme dedication to a spiritual life, as she spent a minimum of three hours everyday in prayer and meditation, and was a regular attendant at service, traveling a mile to and from.⁴⁰¹ These female subjects’ dedication to a disciplined, pious life were not only topics to be praised in commemoration of their lives, but explicated for an audience to serve as a model for both men and women alike.

Women’s spiritual lives could serve as an exemplar to both men and women; yet their life experiences were gendered, and consequently they were often used more specifically as exemplars for women. As Doebler and Warnicke have argued, “Funeral sermons, then, performed a dual function: to comfort the bereaved and at the same time hold up a model for the inspiration of future saints- and, on a more practical level-

³⁹⁸ William Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon Preached by Dr Gouge at Black-Friers in London, in Cheswicke Church, August 24. 1646. At the funerals of Mrs Margaret Ducke wife of Dr Ducke...* (London: Printed by A.M. for Joshua Kirton, at the signe of the White-Horse in Pauls Church-yard., M.DC.XLVI. [1646]), 29.

³⁹⁹ Charles Fitz-Geffrey, *Deaths Sermon unto the Liuing Delivered at the Funerals of the Religious Lady Philippe, late wife unto the Right Woshipful Sr. Anthonie Rous of Halton in Cornwall Knight* (London: printed by William Stansby for Iohn Mingwell, 1620), 26-27.

⁴⁰⁰ W.B., *Sacred to the precious memory of Mrs Mary Boyleston, daughter of Mr Thomas Boyleston, of Fan-Church-Street, London...* (London: printed by John Macock, 1657), A3.

⁴⁰¹ Anonymous, *A Sermon preach’d on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs Elizabeth Gibson Together with a short account of her life* (London: [s.n], 1692), 34.

wives.”⁴⁰² One author noted explicitly that he hoped the published sermon “may be useful to some of your Excellent Daughters, Young Relations (Your Surviving Daughters particularly) who may be won to a constant Perseverance in the Ways of Religion and Virtue by having so Fresh, and so Extraordinary an Example in their own Family.”⁴⁰³ The dual purpose of funeral sermons, then, was to both instruct readers of both sexes in methods of living a pious life, as well as instructing female readers in how to be a good woman. One author specifically noted his sermon’s dual function, as he described of his female subject: “...whilst shee liued, was a Myrour of womanhood, and now being dead, is a perfect patterne of true Christianitie.”⁴⁰⁴

While Becker has argued that the female subjects of these sermons were lauded because they were dead and thus exotic, sermons tended to emphasize the mundane details of individuals’ life; that is, their domesticity. Women’s funeral sermons, which were written, performed, and published by men, served as forums to explicate appropriate feminine behavior by reinforcing women’s subordinate place in the home. This domesticity was often connected to their spiritual worth, thus directly correlating a women’s temporal inequality with her spiritual strength. In the funeral sermon of Lady Anne Clifford (who happened to be one of the largest landowners in seventeenth-century England) Minister Rainbowe stated that, “the house is a woman’s province, the sphear wherein she is to act, while she is abroad she is out of her territories; she is as a ruler out

⁴⁰² Doeblér & Warnicke, Introduction to *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, 31-32.

⁴⁰³ Lambert, *A Sermon Preach’d at the Funeral of Mrs. Ann Margetson*, A3.

⁴⁰⁴ Philip Stubbes, *[A] christal glasse [for] Christian women Containing a most excellent discourse of the godly life and death of Mrs. Katherine Stubs...* (London: printed for W. Gilbertson at the Bible in [...] street without Newgate, 1664), A2.

of his jurisdiction...the wise womans building her house is, doing all things which belong to good oeconomy; the well ordering of a family...the wise Matron or Mother of a family, is to the House, as the soul is to the body...⁴⁰⁵ Here the author of Lady Anne's sermon commended her foremost by gracing her with the desired attributes of an early modern woman, while mitigating the secular power that Anne Clifford held by reinforcing the traditional limitations of women in secular society.

Other authors were specific in their praise of domesticity, noting their subjects' hermitic nature and industriousness. In a sermon preached for Mrs. Ducke of London, William Gouge praised his subject for never attending London plays, because "...next to Gods house, she could best spend her time in her own."⁴⁰⁶ Unlike the "gadding disposition of other talking, walking women" Mrs. Ducke, was "for the most part as a Snail...within her own shell and family..."⁴⁰⁷ Another author commended his subject's care over her household, particularly during her husband's absences, because "when should a Moon shine bright, but in the absence of the Sun?"⁴⁰⁸

A significant element of the 'good womanhood' described within the sermons was not only women's presence in the home, but her good work. Several of the sermons surveyed praised women for their lack of idleness, a trait that was particularly condemned in the weaker sex as they were naturally more inclined to temptation and sin (or, as one

⁴⁰⁵ Rainbow, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Right Honorable Anne, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery*, 13-14.

⁴⁰⁶ Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon Preached by Dr Gouge at Black-Friers*, 26-27.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas Burroughes, *Christ the Sts advantage both in life and death. A sermon preached at the funeral of Ms Elisabeth Coke, wife to Colonell Tho. Coke of Pebmersh, Esquire...*(London: Printed by T.R. and E.M. for John Bellamy at the 3. golden Lions in Cornhill, 1646), 48.

author put it, “as feminine weakness exposeth sooner to the attempts of seducers”).⁴⁰⁹

One author specifically commended his subject, Sarah Bull’s, work ethic, as she “looked to the Ways of her Household, and did not eat the Bread of Idleness: She willingly work’d with her Hands, rising while yet it was Night. And by Divine Blessing on her singular Industry, great reason had her Children to rise up and call her Blessed, her husband also to praise her.”⁴¹⁰ As the author stated, the praise was not only for Mrs. Bull’s good work, but he noted a connection between her role as mother and wife, her domestic work, and her spirituality, as these were closely connected in the depiction of a good, blessed woman.

Many of the virtues extolled by ministers were ones that prevented women from idle and evil use. The eulogy of the Elizabeth Gouge, wife of the well-known London minister George Gouge, was described as, “a pious, prudent, provident, painfull, careful, faithful, helpful, grave, modest, sober, tender, loving Wife, Mother, Mistress and Neighbor.”⁴¹¹ In a similar vein, the funeral sermon for Lady Frances Roberts of Cornwall also offered a description of what his subject was not: a bad woman. This bad woman, as Gamon described:

fears not the Lord, sets light by Gods anger and her husbands, not caring whether they bee pleased or displeased. She neglects to plant the feare of the Lord in her childrens heart, chusing rather to be an example of wickednesse unto them...She brings want of things necessary to her family by her wastefulnesse, bravery and

⁴⁰⁹Boteler, *No home but heaven*, 54.

⁴¹⁰Daniel Burgess, *A funeral sermon preach’d upon the Death of Mrs. Sarah Bull, who deceased July 29th* (London: printed, and sold by Andr Bell and J. Luntley, at the pestle and mortar in Chancery-Lane, 1694), 78.

⁴¹¹ Nicholas Guy, *Pieties pillar: or, a sermon preached at the funeral of mistresse Elizabeth Gouge, late wife of Mr. William Gouge of Black-friers, London With a true narration of her life and death* (London: Printed by George Miller [sic], dwelling in Black-Friers, 1626), 41.

idleness. She condemnes her natural and legal kindred, lifts up her selfe above her equals...dishonours her place by an over-loftie or an over-base and contemptible behavior in the same.⁴¹²

Praise for the hard-working, domestic woman (or criticism of her antithesis) is a common trope in early modern sermons, and some offered commendations of women who not only excelled in their domestic role, but also fulfilled other attributes of the proper early modern woman. Women who were quiet and amenable to male instruction were particularly celebrated. While the author of Mrs. Anne Baynard's sermon praised her exceptional education and intelligence, he most of all praised her modesty, "For her Words were very few, and her Countenance always compos'd..."⁴¹³ In his explanation for the sermon's publication, one husband wrote that his wife left no instruction for the publication, but she was "...desirous to go as silently out of the World, as she had chosen to live retiredly in it..."⁴¹⁴ Another sermon praised its subject because "she both lived and dyed like a lamb, lived meekly, and dyed quietly..."⁴¹⁵

While discussing the deceased Countess of Manchester's "gracious frame", one sermon described the woman's continued submission to her father: "In her first Marriage (when she was very young) she acted not, without the advice and consent of her Parents: And upon the Death of her Husband, she returned to her Fathers Family, with resolutions

⁴¹² Gamon, *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, 5-6.

⁴¹³ John Prude, *A sermon at the funeral of the learned and ingenious Mrs. Anne Baynard daughter and only child of Dr. Edward Baynard, Fellow of the Colledge of Physicians, London* (London: printed for Daniel Brown at the Black Swan and Bible without Temple-Bar, M DC XCVII [1697]), 3.

⁴¹⁴ Anon, *A Sermon preach'd on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs Elizabeth Gibson*, 21.

⁴¹⁵ Hardy, *Death's Alarum*, 32.

to be guided by Paternal counsel, in her future course.”⁴¹⁶ The minister Stephen Denison similarly praised Mrs. Elizabeth Juxton for paternal obedience, although this obedience was to her husband. Denison wrote that, “I am persuaded, that if her husband had commanded her to do the vilest drudgerie around the house, she durst not have refused, in verie conscience of Gods law.”⁴¹⁷

In a similar vein, some female subjects were also praised for their lack of interest in more ‘worldly’ things, and this, too, directly played into patriarchal prescriptions for women’s behavior. In the sermon of Lady Susan Lewkenor, the author praised her for being “temperat in her diet and apparel, professing that fro her childhood she neuer delighted in those toyes, vanities and superfluties of attire, wherewith many women...are.”⁴¹⁸ Another sermon felt compelled to praise the subject’s “decent” appearance, saying “She was none of those Ladies the father chides...”⁴¹⁹ As discussed in Chapter Two, a good woman was ultimately a reflection upon her husband; he was responsible for her behavior, and a quiet, modest, disciplined, and easily governed woman was a tribute to her husband’s ability to control those under his patriarchal rule. Funeral sermons, then, were not merely a device to commemorate women while prescribing gender norms; they served as a means of cultural production by reinforcing

⁴¹⁶ Simeon Ashe, *The faithfull Christians gain by death: opened, confirmed, and improved, in a sermon at the funeral of the Right Honourable Essex, Countess of Manchester, preached at Kimbolton, Octob. 12. 1658* (London: Printed by A.M. for George Sawbridge at the sign of the Bible on Ludgate-Hill, 1659), 40-41.

⁴¹⁷ Denison, *The Monument or Tomb-Stone*, 112.

⁴¹⁸ Robert Pricke, *A verie godlie and learned sermon treating of mans mortalitie, and of estate both of his bodie and soule after death...* (London: Printed by Thomas Creede, 1608), E3.

⁴¹⁹ Botelar, *No home but heaven*, 46.

existing gender hierarchies. Obeying her husband was not just the trait of a good woman, but also the essence of a deeply rooted natural order. Thus, when Denison further commended Mrs. Juxton for her ability to be good in both the presence of others and alone, and when the husband of Mrs. Elizabeth Gibson praised her silence while asserting that he was the instrument for the sermon's publication, he was also commending the masculinity and good rule of the patriarch.

While the authors of sermons praising women's domesticity often connected it to her spiritual work, the above gendered traits were more temporal in nature; yet were considered important in a posthumous commemoration of a woman's life. In a Calvinist society it is not strange that ministers would have been concerned with a person's virtues, as these were possible clues to his or her predestination, but these concerns were more heavily present with a female subject. This special concern could have been for a variety of reasons, but it seems likely that because women were considered weak and vulnerable, both physically and spiritually, ministers would have paid them extra attention because of their susceptibility to wickedness.

Perhaps the most important aspect, the trait most emblematic of domesticity, was motherhood. Good mothers not only fulfilled the expectations of femininity, but early modern motherhood contained significant spiritual significance as well. The majority of published funeral sermons for women with children contained some sort of discussion of their motherhood, and for some this was one of the most notable aspects of their life. The sermon for Elizabeth Gibson offered an in-depth discussion of her experience with children, as she endured the loss of a toddler and suffered through infertility the rest of her life. She was married to her second husband four fourteen years, but "...it was his

[God's] pleasure to deny her a child. This (she says) was a great exercise to her (having naturally a great love for Children,) but at length she was brought to a willingness to submit to the Will and Wisdom of God."⁴²⁰ Despite not being able to conceive, the author of the sermon noted her care of a local boy. She made him attend Church, taught him in her home, both Catechism and reading, and sent him to school.⁴²¹ So, while the subject of the sermon had no children of her own for the author to praise her maternal capabilities, he instead praised her maternity through her foster-care of another child.

The importance of emphasizing a woman's maternal abilities primarily lay in her role as teacher. As discussed in Chapter Three, mothers were considered the significant spiritual teachers and nurturers of their children, and funeral sermons often praised deceased women in their successful completion of this duty, marrying their abilities to be industrious with their abilities to nurture. One author commended his subject, for "great was her care, and no lesse her industry concerning the education of those sweet children the Lord was pleased to bestow upon you: 'twas her desire to train them up in religion, learning and manners. To this end her daily practice was (upon all occasions) to sharpen instructions to them..."⁴²² There was a specific significance in a mother's spiritual education of her children. While a mother's instruction not only created good, pious members of the Church and kingdom, this education had eternal significance. As Hanibal Gamon described of Lady Frances Roberts, "To her Children, her tenderest Affection and Sollicitousnesse to plant *the feare of the Lord* in their hearts...to adorne her onely Sonne

⁴²⁰ Anon, *A Sermon preach'd on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs Elizabeth Gibson*, 27.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴²² Burroughes, *Christ the sts advantage*, A6.

with the richest endowments of Grace and Learning...to haue the fruit of her body become the fruit of her spirit.”⁴²³ Here the author made a specific connection between maternity and spirituality; earthly motherhood takes on a spiritual significance with the religious education of children, as this education meant the continuance of the Church and the kingdom of heaven, and was a mother’s everlasting legacy. A mother’s children, then, were deeply connected to her spirit.

This significance may figure into why some authors made sure to emphasize a woman’s maternity in their eulogy. Although a dying person was supposed to be ready to leave all earthly relationships and connections behind, many authors noted that a mother’s only second-thought about leaving the temporal world had to do with her children. As Gouge noted in his sermon for Mrs. Ducke, “there was nothing could tempt her to for life, but the breeding of her little ones.” In fact, she was only ready to leave this world when she could “resigne them into the hands of their tender and carefull Father...”⁴²⁴ The Countess of Manchester similarly wished to live so “that she might further take care of the Education of her beloved Children: yet with contentment and comfort, she commended her self by prayer to the good pleasure of the Almighty...”⁴²⁵ According to the authors of their sermons, these women proved themselves doubly worthy of grace: not only did they continue to be concerned about their temporal legacy to the church, their children, they nevertheless placed their trust in God and readied themselves for death.

⁴²³ Doeblner & Warnicke, Introduction to *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, 27.

⁴²⁴ Gouge, *A funeral sermon preach’d at Black-Friers*, 34.

⁴²⁵ Ashe, *The faithfull Christians gain by death*, 42.

While Catechism was an important duty for mothers towards their children, some authors also cited breastfeeding as evidence of women's godly motherhood. The sermon for Elizabeth Juxon noted that "...when the Law of God began to be written in her heart, she durst no longer nurse her children abroad, but tooke paines to nurse them with her own breasts."⁴²⁶ The author of the Countess of Manchester's sermon similarly noted her decision to breastfeed, noting that she had eight children, "to whom she was an affectionate tender Mother, a carefull and diligent Nurse, giving suck to seven of them; which commendable practice is very rare in this Age, amongst women of her Rank and Quality."⁴²⁷ The propensity of authors to cite women's breastfeeding not only had spiritual connotations (a child could literally imbibe good, pious qualities from their nurse) but also proved that the woman was a good mother. As discussed in Chapter Five, contemporaries cited biblical precedents for mothers breastfeeding their own children, and they also made connections between the womb and the breast, making breastfeeding a sign of good, 'natural' motherhood. It was perhaps doubly commendable, then, when mothers nursed the children of the social inferiors. Simeon Ashe was careful to describe how the Countess of Manchester was "...charitable to the poor, friendly in visiting her Neighbours, especially when sick and wea: yea, she would upon necessary occasions, draw forth her own breast, to give suck unto the Children of such, who were of low condition in the world."⁴²⁸ This connection between maternity and charity was evidence of a truly pious woman's good deeds on earth. Not only was she a good mother and

⁴²⁶ Doeblér & Warnicke, Introduction to *The Monument of Tombe-stone*, 57.

⁴²⁷ Ashe, *The faithfull Christians gain by death*, 41.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

dedicated herself to the domesticity required of good, early modern women, but she furthermore carried this work through to poor, linking motherhood and Christian charity. The author of Mrs. Margaret Andrewes sermon offered her great praise when he noted that she was not only a “tender and affectionate Mother, towards the issue of her own bowels” but she was also a “Foster-mother to the poor members of Christ in general.”⁴²⁹

Besides noting a woman’s strength in maternity, ministers used the ideal “good death” to prescribe certain godly behavior, and the significance of the deathbed scene cannot be understated. As Bettie Anne Doebler has described, “in an age that still believed eternity hung upon the tuning of the soul on the deathbed, clear instruction for such a process was in great demand.”⁴³⁰ The *ars moriendi* naturally manifested in funeral sermons, and the description of death scenes, however accurate, informed the public of appropriate responses to one’s own suffering. This response included steadfastness in faith, patience, clarity, and articulation until the very last moment. According to John Donne, as noted by David Cressy, “it was a multiplied misery...to be so tormented by sickness that one could not ‘enjoy death.’”⁴³¹

As historians have noted, the art of dying was gendered, making the woman’s deathbed scene an interesting study in both piety and gender relations. As Lucinda Becker has noted of the process of dying, it was “...necessarily a process predicated upon

⁴²⁹ Isaiah Davis, *A Sermon at the Funeral of the vertuous and truly religious lady, Mrs. Margaret Andrewes only daughter and child of Sir Henry Andrewes, of Lathbery, in the county of Bucks, baronet...* (London: [s.n], printed in the year, 1680),28.

⁴³⁰ Bettie Anne Doebler, *Rooted Sorrow: Dying in Early Modern England* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 79.

⁴³¹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 390.

the masculine virtues of strength, determination and pious public speech.”⁴³²

Consequently, the authors of sermons had to craft a deathbed scene in which the subject was “remaining within the bounds of acceptable femininity whilst exhibiting what are deemed to be essentially masculine strengths in order to achieve a good death.”⁴³³

Furthermore, historians have noted a cultural connection between birth and death itself, making the deathbed a feminine realm.⁴³⁴ As Lucinda Becker has noted, the deathbed was fundamentally a domestic site, as women were particularly involved in visiting and caring for the dying.⁴³⁵ This important site of ritual and life cycle thus shared commonalities with another important ritual site: the birthing chamber. As David Cressy has explained, “like the birthroom where women gathered to witness the entry into life, the sickroom was an arena of action where people watched and waited for a mortal life to expire.”⁴³⁶ Becker has gone even further to offer a more spiritual interpretation of the connection between birth and death, noting that death was, in essence, the birth of new life, and that dying mothers “would recognize and welcome their own dying movement back towards a childlike state in which God took over the role of parent, strengthening

⁴³² Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 1.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴³⁴ Interestingly, Chris Laoutraris has noted the importance of the female deathbed and maternity through the use of tombstones monuments: “That the dying women could gain a voice and even, as the funerary sermons indicate, an audience by playing out the drama and trauma of their own fatal maternity, is reflected in the number of early seventeenth-century monuments which depicted mothers in the very setting in which they had met their untimely ends; the beds upon which they had given birth.” These monuments include those of Elizabeth Coke, Anne Leighton, and Anne Coventry. See “Speaking Stones: Memory and Maternity in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*” in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, 161.

⁴³⁵ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 31-32.

⁴³⁶ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 390.

their own resolve to die well, having disciplined them [their own children] throughout their lives to behave well.”⁴³⁷

The deathbed and the process of dying well was of great cultural and spiritual significance, and Becker has noted the correlation between “good deaths”, in which women silently endured their pain and fear without losing the clarity of the Lord, and their lifelong fulfillment of feminine virtues.⁴³⁸ As women who ‘died well’ necessarily performed masculine traits upon their deathbed, including courage, fortitude, and power, Becker argued that the sermon’s explication of her feminine attributes during her life ameliorated any masculine- and threatening- behavior as she neared death. As Becker explained, “by stressing her feminine qualities in life, those of chastity, compliance, virtue and passivity, it was possible to ensure that any anxiety over the security of gender boundaries was allayed.”⁴³⁹ Many of the deathbed scenes recounted in the sermons surveyed offered a dual image of the subject: a passive and meek woman during life, and a courageous woman approaching death. The funeral sermon of Mrs. Elizabeth Juxton of London described her acute awareness immediately before her passing. The minister, Stephen Denison, described it as “a marvellous change that wrought her mind and understanding. She who before knew not the right hand from the left in religion, she was

⁴³⁷ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 118.

⁴³⁸ At the opposite end of the spectrum, Becker has described a ‘bad death’: “In contrast to the spiritual state achieved by a woman dying well, a wicked woman would be represented as a physical entity in death, unable to escape from her sinful body. The taint of potentially unwholesome physicality was never far from an Early Modern Woman” (76). This physicality in interesting in light of early modern views of the female body, as discussed in Chapter Five, which viewed the female body as the inferior, inverted version of the male form, and threatening in its possession of noxious menstrual blood. The negative understanding of women’s bodies and ideas about their physicality manifested even in death, as some chroniclers recorded the “distortion, or the complete disintegration, of the body of a female sinner.” Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 76.

⁴³⁹ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 58.

growne to a very great understanding, in so much that she was both able to speak divinely, to instruct her servants and children, and to write letters in the very language of Canaan sufficiently.”⁴⁴⁰ This awareness and lucidity not only demonstrated her strength, but more importantly also her ability to maintain her piety in the face of death, thus showing her potential grace. It also emphasized a connection between spirituality and caregiving or maternity, which will be discussed in more depth below.

When Elizabeth Gouge, Reverend Gouge’s wife, fell sick after the birth of her thirteenth child, her maintenance of piety was commended by the author of her funeral sermon. He stated that “her piety left her not till her breath left her”, but goes even further to describe that, “the violence of her disease was such...and the use of her understanding was taken from her. This made her talk much: but in all her talke not an impious word came from her (her tongue was not accustomed thereto). But that it might appear how fast fixed, and deeply rooted piety was in her, in her greatest weaknesse and extremity...”⁴⁴¹ The author of this sermon showed that Elizabeth was doubly pious; she not only kept her faith throughout her travail, but she was so pure that her faith was kept intact in delirium. What could have easily been interpreted as a ‘bad death’, one in which the subject lost sense and strength, was manipulated by the author to be a sign of piety and grace.

A dying person’s lucidity and piety demonstrated his or her increasing proximity to heaven. However, the expectations of a ‘good death’ and the reality of a person’s experience on his or her deathbed were not always conducive, and authors often needed to craft a deathbed scene in a more positive light for their readers. With the Reformation

⁴⁴⁰ Denison, *The Monument or Tomb-Stone*, 119.

⁴⁴¹ Guy, *Pieties Pillar*, 50-51.

individuals lost their ability to usher their relative or friend through purgatory, and would have been comforted by signs of their loved one's salvation. Consequently, when loved ones did not die a "good death", the author of their funeral sermons would look to other aspects that might demonstrate their grace. As described in her funeral sermon, Lady Mary Villiers was "sicke of a long and lingering sickness, but patient and quiet in her sickness, as if she had not beene born to doe, but suffer: and even at her last gasp, she carried such cheerfullnesse in her countenance, as if she had been sensible to the nearnesse of her glory...the fresh vermillion of her cheeks...might had seem'd to witness a joy for leaving the world so soon."⁴⁴² Both of these traits- maintenance of piety and proximity to heaven- were exceptionally important for loved ones. Lady Frances Roberts, for example, evidently died an agonizing death that did not recommend itself to clarity and piety. The author of her sermon, however, states that "yet if God judgeth not according to the strange effects and symptoms of her sicknesse, not according to the short moment and violent passions of her death; but according to the Holy Actions of her Health, the former Affections of her Heart, and the general Course of her Life, then it is our Dutie, not severely to censure her passionatenesse..."⁴⁴³ A death truly well done, however, was performed by Mrs. Elizabeth Gibson, as "the nearer she drew to her end, she felt the less pain, and after the Convulsions...came upon her, she made no complaint at all...She was wholly delivered also from the Fears and Terrours of Death, for she did

⁴⁴² George Jay, *A sermon preacht at the funeral of the Lady Mary Villiers, eldest daughter of the Right Hon[ora]ble Christopher Earle of Anglesey who dyed the xxi. Of Ianuary 1625...* (London: Printed for Thomas Harper, 1626), 41-42.

⁴⁴³Gamon, *The Praise of a Godly Woman*, 31.

not intimate the least apprehension of it.”⁴⁴⁴ Physical pain actually left Elizabeth’s body the closer she came to death, and even convulsions could not tempt her tongue to question God or mention fear of death. For, as the subject was keen to say (according to the sermons author) “...those who lived well, could hardly die ill...”⁴⁴⁵

A key aspect of a woman’s deathbed scene included maternal connections. In fact, contemporaries made distinct connections between motherhood, childbirth, and death. Becker has noted that, “whilst men might encounter death in military service, foreign travel or the epidemics that afflicted centres of population, women...faced death as a routine possibility each time they became pregnant.”⁴⁴⁶ This correlation was even made explicit in instructions for pregnant women; one publication on childbirth dedicated a chapter to the “*Preparation for death, the duty of godly women when with child.*”⁴⁴⁷ This chapter implored women that, in order to prepare for death, they must “alienate your heart and affections from all things below heaven, cast off every weight of worldly desires, and begin to part with that in your affections, which you may shortly part with in person.”⁴⁴⁸ It is interesting that a manual dedicated to helping usher new life into the world should advise its pregnant readers to emotionally distance themselves from that life, but forsaking the earthly life, including all of one’s family and loved ones, was part of the ritual of dying. As one sermon described, “Concerning her death; She did daily

⁴⁴⁴ Anon, *A Sermon preach’d on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs Elizabeth Gibson*, 54.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁴⁶ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 34.

⁴⁴⁷ Oliver, *A Present for Teeming Women*, 85.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

prepare for it...She did willingly forsake Father and Mother, Husband and Childe...to be with Christ.”⁴⁴⁹ Some sermons specifically noted a mother’s forsaking of her child as particular proof of her readiness to enter death and everlasting life. In the sermon preached for Elizabeth Juxon, the minister stated that, “for when I demanded of her, whether the comeliness of the roome where she lay, and furniture of her house did not somewhat tempt her to desire still to liue: she answered me, That noting in the world did moue her to desire life, no not her very children, which were farre more deare vnto her, then any worldly riches whatsoever.”⁴⁵⁰ Juxon’s forsaking of her children was the ultimate declaration of her steadfast entry into heaven: she was not only ready to forsake worldly things, but she was ready to cast off her most valuable treasure, her children.

Perhaps the most poignant declaration of a mother’s readiness to forsake her earthly joys to enter heaven was found in the sermon for Katharine Stubbes, who died a few weeks after childbirth. As the author describes, she became quite ill, and:

...so calling forth for her child, which the nurse brought unto her, she tooke it in her armes, and kissing it, said: God blesse thee my sweete babe, and make thee an heire to the kingdome of heauen: and kissing it again, deliuered it to the nurse, with these words to her husband standing by. Beloued husband, I bequeath this my child unto you, hee is no longer mine, hee is the Lordes and yours, I forsake him, and you, and all the world, yea and mine owne self...that I may win Jesus Christ.⁴⁵¹

Mothers were expected to forsake their children in favor of God, and they also were often expected to carry out a final maternal duty on their deathbed: the mother’s

⁴⁴⁹ Cole, *The christians Vvelcome*, A3-4.

⁴⁵⁰ Doeblér & Warnicke, The Introduction to *The Monument or Tombe-stone*, 41.

⁴⁵¹ Stubbes, *Christal glasse for christian women*, A4.

blessing. This tradition was recounted in the sermon for Mrs. Ducke, who, “called forth both daughters separately and have them the blessing that her mother gave to her.”⁴⁵² As Lucinda Becker argued, this blessing was infused with power. As she described of the tradition of the mother’s final blessing, “lacking the formality of a last legal will and testament, the deathbed scene had to be such as to bring a formality and gravity to the woman’s last actions with regard to her children.”⁴⁵³ The deathbed scene, then, included not only a recounting of a woman’s courage, steadfastness, and piety, but of her maternal connections: she was given a temporal power through her final mother’s blessing, and a spiritual power in her forsaking of her greatest worldly treasures: her children.

Women’s funeral sermons, then, offer a better understanding of the complex relationship between gender, motherhood, and power in early modern England. At their most fundamental level, these sermons served to commemorate and praise their subject, and they did this by casting the individual as a ‘good woman’, and ‘good mother.’ This good woman ultimately possessed the feminine traits conducive to patriarchal rule: she was domestic, quiet, and meek. But a good early modern woman was also particularly pious, as early modern readers would have looked to a description of her disciplined faith and charity for a sign of her grace. This connection of domesticity and charity was where the attributes of a ‘good mother’ intersected. A good mother was not only domestic, caring for her children, household, and family, but also she brought a piety and spirituality to the nurturing of her children that would have an everlasting effect. A good mother imbibed piety to her children through the breast, even children who were not her

⁴⁵² Gouge, *A Funeral Sermon Preached by Dr. Gouge at Black-Friers London*, 39.

⁴⁵³ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, 60.

own. A good mother fostered other children of God, uniting motherhood and Christian charity. But most fundamentally, a good mother brought her children up to be members of the earthly church and the kingdom of heaven; her temporal motherhood was thus ingrained into her eternal spirit. And, ironically, the deathbed was where the gravity of motherhood and piety most intersected, as mothers offered the children their final blessing, while simultaneously forsaking their greatest earthly possessions- their children- for the kingdom of heaven.

Women's published funeral sermons betray this significant connection between women, motherhood, and spirituality, and did so in a commemoration of their subjects. But this commemoration also directly served political purposes. Published funeral sermons were part of the larger public sphere in seventeenth-century England, and were thus part of a public dialogue. As we have seen, some sermons used women's lives to address issues of high politics and religious dissent. But they all commonly addressed issues of gender norms, patriarchy, and social stability. Ministers prescribed gender norms not just to promulgate appropriate feminine behavior, but also to guide men in their council and control of women, a key component of both masculinity and a patriarchal system. So, while a funeral sermon may have technically praised and commemorated an individual, it more directly served the purpose of consolidating social stability by reinforcing hierarchy and order.

The last issue of gender and power present in the sermon was between the author and subject herself. Although it has been argued that funeral sermons liberated and celebrated women, the idea that it gave women posthumous power may apply only loosely. While the female subjects were celebrated and praised, it was their male author

who, essentially, rewrote both their lives and deaths. Indeed, the conclusion of the sermon written by the minister Charles Fitz-Geffrey offers a poetic description between the relationship between the deceased woman and the preacher: “As the apostle sayeth of Abel, *Hee being dead yet speaketh*, so I of this religious Ladie, Shee being dead yet preacheth unto us a sensible sermon...that death is the end of all men.”⁴⁵⁴ There is an irony in this assertion. The minister inverted the social position between himself and the deceased woman, giving a power to a lifeless body that she held neither in life nor after death. Of course, the lessons within the sermon did not really come from the coffin, nor (in the case of a stranger reading a published sermon) from the actions of an unknown woman. The power firmly rested within the hands of the authors of the sermons, who used their subjects’ deaths as a forum to instruct the community and uphold social order. One should thus be weary of claiming that funeral sermons offered its female subjects any sort of privilege of authority, because it was the author of the sermon who rewrote both the woman’s life and death, and he possessed the ultimate authority.

⁴⁵⁴ Fitz-Geffrey, *Deaths Sermon Unto the Living*, 30.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

There is an irony in the title of this study, *The Natural Mother*, because what constituted the majority of discourse surrounding motherhood in seventeenth-century England was not motherhood gone right, but motherhood gone wrong. Contemporaries were much more preoccupied with what constituted an unnatural mother than they were of singing the praises of good mothering. A bad mother, in all of her various forms, caused grave anxiety in Post-Reformation England. This anxiety did not necessarily stem out of a concern over the welfare of children, but from the subversive role a bad mother played within early modern English culture. A bad mother was, above everything else, a bad woman.

As we have seen, motherhood was a topic discussed and debated in a variety of contexts- from infanticidal mothers, to mothers of monsters, to mothers on their deathbed. Although these contexts differed, the themes running throughout the discourse surrounding maternity are recurring. At the heart of the patriarchal criticism of motherhood was an anxiety about the nature of maternal love. By its very definition maternal love was dangerous: contemporary, patriarchal thought considered female nature to be inherently passionate and irrational- the antithesis of the masculine nature of rationality and self-mastery- and was consequently unpredictable and threatening. Maternal love, which was quite possibly the most ardent of the female passions, could easily become sinister if left unchecked. This belief led to a variety of concerns, the most obvious being the religious consequences of maternal love. By loving their children too

much, mothers essentially made idols out of their children. The passionate, irreplaceable love that they should have reserved only for God was channeled instead to their child.

Other concerns about unbridled maternal love had to do with its effects upon children, as contemporary authors expressed worry over children being ruined by a mother's love. A mother's favorite would become too spoiled, her other children would be ruined by not being loved the most, or, if she loved them all equally, they would all be spoiled. The spoiling of a child's character was not to be taken lightly, particularly in an age when personal traits-including piety, charity, and humility- were considered signs of God's grace. Indeed, a mother's most significant task was to educate her young children, particularly in religious affairs, and thus the argument that a mother's love could easily lead to her children's downfall was a serious accusation.

Breastfeeding also entered into the conversation on the nature of maternal love. Seventeenth-century contemporaries- both men and women alike- increasingly criticized the practice of using wet nurses. The practice, according to some authors, was socially subversive. It led to poor women abandoning their own infants in order to gain employment, a topic that held a particular significance during a period preoccupied with what seemed like a swarming influx of single women, bastardy, and infanticide. Furthermore the use of wet nurses led to gentlewomen placing the care of future heirs and heiresses into the arms of a lesser being, one who would, quite literally, imbibe her own personal qualities into the child. This cross-class confusion, or infusion, was a real concern for some; one author cited the possibility that a wet nurse would replace an heir with her own child, thus contaminating the bloodline of a genteel family. But, what was also of great concern to opponents of wet nursing was the nature of the love of mothers

who did not breastfeed their own infants. While some mothers loved too much, which was dangerous and deleterious to their children, these mothers did not love enough. These mothers, according to both male and female authors, were worse than animals (even animals nursed their babies). They were akin to monsters; they were unnatural mothers.

It is the unnatural and monstrous mother that a great deal of the literature surveyed in this study was concerned with. The most emblematic of the unnatural mother was the infanticidal one. Some mothers committed infanticide out of a perversion of maternal love, a gross extension of the irrational love of the mother who made an idol out of her child and ruined his or her nature. Mary Cook, for example, was so depressed she wished to kill herself, but could not bring herself to leave without her favorite child, thus killing her child first. Elizabeth Barnes, who killed her eight year-old, was described as becoming the worst kind of murderess because she had no financial means to take care of her child. She could not take proper care of her child as a mother should, so she killed her. This perversion was, of course, the most tragic result of maternal love. This irrational, passionate, threatening love could not only undermine God and ruin the character of the children of His kingdom, but it could ultimately lead to a mother murdering her own.

At the heart of the danger of a mother's love was women's irrational nature, which leads us into another major theme in the discourse of maternity: the need to control and guide women, and, by corollary, the fear of unregulated women. The concern with infanticide expressed within the pamphlets was emblematic of a very real anxiety about single women and bastardy, as cases of infanticide were largely committed by poor,

unwed mothers who not only suffered the social stigma of having an illegitimate child, but also had no means to support it. This contemporary anxiety over bastardy had several roots. Fundamentally local parishes did not want to be held responsible for economically supporting illegitimate children, particularly as some were the children of ‘wandering’ women, or women who were new to the parish or happened to be there at the time of birth. The ‘wandering’ nature of these mothers heightened this anxiety; a pregnant woman was the physical embodiment of illicit sexuality, and these pregnant, wandering, single women not only represented illicit sex, but also of unregulated women. Thus the 1624 Act to Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children was enacted, conflating infanticide and illicit sexuality into legislation.

The ‘infanticide craze,’ however, was about much more than bastardy; this literary genre utilized the act of infanticide, the most aberrant act that could be committed by a mother, to discuss gender norms through women who subverted patriarchy and challenged men’s masculinity. While actual acts of infanticide were committed by the unwed, the cases of infanticide discussed in sensationalistic print were committed by married women, midwives, and widows- all women that posed a type of threat to patriarchal order. These were midwives and widows whose lack of male heads-of-household made them susceptible to wicked, depraved acts. As female heads-of-households, their irrational, passionate nature gave way to a perversion of power that ultimately led to the murder of innocent children, a gross parody of the domestic sphere. And married women who committed these acts were in similar contests for power with their husbands. These were women who were described as scolds, who emasculated their husbands, and whose irrational anger also led to the murder of their children. Infanticide

stories were the ultimate cautionary tale of the consequences of gender upheaval in the home.

Infanticidal mothers committed horrendous acts that were emblematic of the consequences of unregulated women, and the reproductive bodies of mothers of 'monsters' were utilized in a very similar way. Monstrous births were God's condemnation writ large, and that condemnation came in the form of a woman's pregnancy. As monstrous birth stories-which were often similar to infanticide tales-describe, many a mother was condemned with a malformed child because of her sexuality, as several of the stories surveyed described individual women who had committed sexual sins. This was part of the larger cultural anxiety over the place of single, sexual women with no male heads.

But individual women's reproductive bodies could also be used towards more political ends, as women who were disloyal to a political faction could be described as being punished by God through the misshapen form of their child. Indeed, when Mrs. Haughton of Lancashire, said that, "...*I pray God, that rather than I shall be a Roundhead, or bear a Roundhead, I may bring forth a Childe without a head*" she was rewarded by, of course, a headless infant.⁴⁵⁵ Similarly, a woman who subverted the church could be described as meeting similar reproductive ends, as in the case of a Scottish woman who called for the ruin of the church.⁴⁵⁶ (The political and religious could also be written into the infanticidal mother, as in the case of the Roman Catholic

⁴⁵⁵ Anonymous, *A declaration of a strange and wonderfull monster*, 6.

⁴⁵⁶ Anonymous, *Straunge news from Scotland*, 4.

Margaret Vincent, who killed her children rather than they become Protestant).⁴⁵⁷ So, while mothers could use motherhood to make a political or religious statement, God could use motherhood, more specifically, women's reproductive bodies, to condemn women.

What was also at stake in the case of monstrous births was women's power- that is, the power of women's imaginations. The imaginative power ascribed to women is curious, particularly as contemporaries spent so much time marking women's bodies as inferior. But the female mind- according to early modern scientific beliefs- was dangerous. By thinking of something too often, or at the wrong time, or seeing something, such as an animal, too frequently, women could literally mar their unborn child. This belief was neatly applied to a women's sexuality as well, as a woman who was too lustful could likewise cause a malformed fetus. A woman's mind, her psyche, or her sexuality, then, were literally writ large on the corporeal body of her child. The two aspects of womanhood that early modern patriarchal culture found most threatening- sexuality and the mind- were believed to be punished through the reproductive body; here maternity was inextricably intertwined with aspects of femininity that contemporaries believed needed to be controlled.

With sexuality, the mind, and patriarchy, we come to the central theme of this study: motherhood in relationship to power and authority. The power discussed in this study was at heart a patriarchal power: one that fundamentally relied upon the hierarchical ordering of the sexes for social order. As explained in the introductory chapter, the definition of power that this study has utilized has been one that was, at its

⁴⁵⁷ Anonymous. *A pittillesse mother*.

very core, tenuous. The power discussed here was not the power of the church, or the royal court, or even the courtroom. It was an uneven power; an authority that, by being produced by a variety of discourses, at once saturated early modern English culture while frequently being revised and negotiated.

The female reproductive body was perhaps the most powerful, and the most threatening, aspect of maternity. Because this was the arena in which women clearly possessed the most autonomy, contemporary male writers spent a great deal of time justifying their unique power within conception- ultimately, men possessed better seed or their seed began the process that women's finished. But, despite vying for the ultimate authority over who was more responsible for creating the child, contemporaries nevertheless acknowledged women's important role in carrying it.

Once a woman conceived, she possessed some opportunities- albeit limited- to revise and negotiate patriarchal power through motherhood. This power began with the birthing chamber, which essentially functioned as an inversion of the gender hierarchy; this was a significant cultural site, a rite of passage, attended only by women and where a midwife possessed the skill, education, and power. That the birthing chamber was a threatening site for men is evidenced through the censorious anecdotes on gossips, the attendants of childbirth, where this pejorative is derived.

The midwife was also a threatening figure. Not only did she hold authority over the birth, but her role was also culturally significant: she handed the child to the father; she held a special role in the Churching ceremony, and, perhaps most importantly, she was partly responsible for establishing the paternity of illegitimate children. She was maligned by contemporaries- largely man-midwives- as being ignorant, greedy, and

lacking skill. This contest for power would ultimately end with the male midwife's, and later male obstetrician's, appropriation of childbirth, as midwifery was cast as subjective and unscientific, and thus inferior to masculine, scientific, and 'objective' medical care. And, as we have seen, midwives were even cast as the perpetrators of infanticide, adding another dimension to the anxiety about the authority that the female midwife held.

There was also an authority embedded within female culture itself. Maternal relationships were an important part of the experience of early modern women, and they considered the passing of feminine knowledge between generations to be important. Motherhood, in fact, played an important role in female culture as it offered women a space for authority. Women considered themselves to be offering a vital contribution through reproduction and childrearing: they were, essentially, peopling the church and the kingdom. As we saw in Chapter Six, the spiritual education of children was particularly meaningful. The godly education of children was imbued with not only a temporal significance- it created good, pious members of the community- but it was also imbued with a spiritual importance. Mothers who created pious children created members of the kingdom of heaven. Their contribution was eternal, and consequently a mother's success in child rearing was typically cited as evidence of a 'life well-done' within funeral sermons, likely alluding to her grace. The authority afforded women through child rearing, then, was a key part of female culture, and one that offered women a distinct power.

Female culture, however, was not a rosy sisterhood. A shared culture does not imply harmony or lack of conflict. Some women possessed power within a female culture at the expense of other women, and this often involved maternity and the female

reproductive body. As Laura Gowing has explained, married women (ones who thus possessed sexual knowledge) essentially policed other women's bodies for signs of pregnancy or for being post-partum. Sometimes these matrons were working for local authorities; other times they policed other women as a means of informal social control. While we can call these women collaborators of patriarchy, we must also recognize that they, too, possessed a degree of power within this patriarchal framework.

With this discussion of motherhood and power we are brought back full-circle to gender and the relationship between the sexes; and in particular, the relationship between husband and wife, as the marital union was where the anxiety and tension over power began. Post-Reformation marriage was a complex dynamic in which the husband was to sit simultaneously ahead of his wife and also by her side; he was to be her yolk-mate, partner, and companion, but he was also to rule over her. Her power over the household was an extension of his, but yet this unevenly shared authority was at odds with patriarchal ideology, leading to a patriarchal thought that deemed that a husband was not only in charge of his wife, but that he subsumed her person into his own. He was not only politically, religiously, and litigiously her head, but he was made to be responsible for her actions, her thoughts, and her emotions: essentially, he assumed her autonomy and sense of self.

This complex dynamic was created by an early modern idea of masculinity that defined a man as one who possessed self-mastery. Conversely, a woman was the master of nothing, not even herself. The authority that women as mothers held, from their role in conception, to their various roles in the birthing chamber to their duties as mothers to rear and educate good, pious, children, was by its very definition at odds with a masculinity

that was necessary to construct a patriarchal social order. Women as mothers possessed some authority, and thus by extension we see the anxiety over power writ large upon discourses of the maternal body, from overly-loving mothers to midwifery, to infanticide and monstrous births. What was at stake was not just the nature of motherhood, but issues of power, autonomy, masculinity, and patriarchal order.

The discourse surveyed in this study was largely concerned with unnatural mothers, bad mothers, and motherhood gone wrong. Within this study, however, was one type of mother who was the epitome of good mothering: the mothers described within published funeral sermons. These were the mothers who exhibited the desired gendered traits of modesty, humility, and domesticity. These were the mothers who were praised for being quiet and for staying within the confines of their homes. They were also the ones who were not plagued with irrational, dangerous maternal love, as they forsook their children for God and for the kingdom of heaven. These women were, above all, perfect mothers, and it is not surprising that these were the mothers that male authors, very literally, created.

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