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“UNNATURAL CRUEL BEASTS IN WOMEN’S SHAPES”: THE FEMALE BODY IN  
EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

by

HEATHER L. WELCH

Under the Direction of Dr. Jacob Selwood

ABSTRACT

Seventeenth-century England witnessed a surge in the population and the movement of bodies in and out of the city of London, resulting in anxiety and distrust. This masculine social anxiety fixated on the female body as an unknowable space uncontrolled by patriarchal authority, despite efforts through legislation. Violent women in early modern England were used as public spectacle after being subjected to surveillance for their failure to perform to their gendered expectations, both revealing the male anxieties prevalent in society and allowing the maintenance of patriarchy. An examination of violent women through legislation, printed material, and court records reveals the ways in which early modern English society enacted a

society of surveillance and thus difference. This dissertation examines the deeper social and cultural meanings of violence, its portrayals, and the social legitimization of violence.

**INDEX WORDS:** Early modern, England, Gender, Bodies, Legal, Infanticide, Petty treason

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by

HEATHER L. WELCH

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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2020

“UNNATURAL CRUEL BEASTS IN WOMEN’S SHAPES”: THE FEMALE BODY IN  
EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

by

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May 2020

**DEDICATION**

For my family.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Problem with Female Bodies in Early Modern England<sup>1</sup>

The specificities of anxiety in seventeenth century in England were due to an increase in the population of London, the movement of a higher number of people in and out of the country, and larger historical events such as the English Civil War and Restoration. A strong social emphasis on control and order prompted many to see their community role as enforcing and exerting order onto what they perceived as inferior bodies.<sup>2</sup> Women formed part of the social anxieties in seventeenth-century England, especially through their bodies, which society classified as both inferior and unknowable. Women in authoritative roles, like midwives, held power over other women, such as poor and unwed mothers. Husbands or wealthy men possessed authority over their household and the inhabitants, with a masculine responsibility for morality and behavior. By contrast, communities degraded poor men due to their economic status, fearful of having to support the poor.<sup>3</sup> The hierarchal system in early modern England held nuances, often specific to each interpersonal relationship. Patriarchy legitimized men to use violence in order to maintain hierarchy. Society viewed women who committed violent acts, however, as unstable or out of control.<sup>4</sup> The perception of criminality as inherently masculine normalized male criminals while regarding female criminals as social deviants, doubly so first through the

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, spelling and punctuation have been modernized.

<sup>2</sup> See Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). I later define my use of inferior bodies.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 192-195.

<sup>4</sup> Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, editors. *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 16.

female body assuming a masculine role and secondly through the act of the crime itself.<sup>5</sup> Women who committed violent crimes, such as infanticide or murder, therefore negated their femininity by performing masculine acts. Violent women caused unease, as they were appropriating an act authorized only to men and upending the hierarchy.

This dissertation examines the connection between social anxiety, language, and the body in early modern England to form an epistemological view of the female body. Seventeenth century social anxiety was inherently gendered. What specifically about the female body contributed to this anxiety? How do early modern views of the body connect to larger power and social structures, like hierarchy, and what does the existence of violent women mean for those views and structures? Examining cases of violent women suggests that non-conforming women were portrayed and perceived as overturning the hierarchy. More broadly, the unknowability of the female body, particularly regarding reproduction and the attached social rituals, expressed itself in misogynistic rhetoric in print, and this rhetoric is reflected in the language of court records. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, “misogynist thought has commonly found a convenient self-justification for women’s secondary social positions by containing them within bodies that are represented, even constructed, as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable.”<sup>6</sup> The title for this dissertation comes from Henry Goodcole’s *Nature’s Cruel Step-Dames: or, Matchless Monsters of the Female Sex*, where Goodcole describes women committing infanticide as “unnatural cruel beasts in women’s shapes.”<sup>7</sup> This statement indicates that there was a correct way to be a woman and that part of being a woman involved the correct form, or correct bodily expression. Violent

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<sup>5</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Goodcole, *Nature’s Cruel Step-Dames: or, Matchless Monsters of the Female Sex* (London, 1637), 17.

women then were not real women, as their violence negated their femininity. This extends even to sources such as midwife manuals, which discussed the female body at length and often in comparison to the normative male body.<sup>8</sup>

Language then is an integral part of this study, not only in print but in court records as well. Printed material about women accused of committing a crime used narratives of unnaturalness to describe them. Men accused of violent crimes, such as murdering their wives or children, also received the category of unnatural, but it differed significantly from that of women. Violent women upset the natural order and represented a potential problem posed by all women, whereas violent men represented singular and personal masculine failures. In examining language, who can speak becomes important. Both printed pamphlets and court records reveal the importance of words and the legitimization of speaking. Murdered men condemned their wives; murdered women, however, forgave their husbands. Women in infanticide cases needed the testimony of others to legitimize them. While access to voices in sources is limited and constructed, it is still a crucial component of understanding a woman's position in society and before the court.

Theories of the body, particularly the female body, are intrinsic to this work, as I argue that much of the social anxieties in seventeenth-century England focused specifically on the female body as a uniquely cloistered space, an unknowable area, inferior and unpredictable. This raised concerns over the enforcement of order onto an unruly body.<sup>9</sup> The seventeenth century

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<sup>8</sup> Emily Bowles, "Maternal Culpability in Fetal Defects: Aphra Behn's Satiric Interrogations of Medical Models," in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, eds. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013): 50. Bowles argues that Jane Sharp's midwife manual reinforced "falsely naturalized binaries of monstrous and normal, male and female." See also Caroline Bicks, "Stones like Women's Paps: Revising Gender in Jane Sharp's 'Midwives Book,'" in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall-Winter, 2007): 1-27. Bicks argues that Sharp's work is an intervention that normalizes the female body. I would argue that Sharp's work can both disrupt ideas about the female body will reinforcing certain social anxieties, like monstrous births, about it.

<sup>9</sup> Poor men were also at the center of social anxiety.



had very different concepts of public and private to our own, with everything from spaces to physical bodies subjected to public scrutiny and regulation. People in the early modern period used the male body to understand the female body. The one-sex model, for example, envisioned the female body as an inverted male body.<sup>10</sup> Pregnancy, however, represented a moment in which male patriarchal authority ceded to female authority and knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The female body existed as the only private space because it remained unknowable and thus feared. As it disrupted patriarchal authority, it became a primary focus of social scrutiny. While exerting control onto the female body through legislation, executions, and depictions in print, ultimately the female body remained under the control of the individual woman, which prompted more fears about the female body, and questions about female nature, honesty, and its role in the social order.

Gender defined hierarchy in the early modern period and acted as an important structure governing social relationships. Men and women acted according to prescribed societal roles that demanded obedience to the hierarchy and the relationships within it.<sup>12</sup> Men and women both possessed honor, but the concept was gender specific and unequal, as men could protect their honor through physicality while women could lose honor through both physical and immaterial means, such as a mere accusation of immorality.<sup>13</sup> The household existed as a fundamentally public space in early modern England, though male and female honor worked differently. Honor linked the inhabitants of the space, as well as the physical and intangible aspects of the household, with each protecting the other's status. The deeply entrenched societal fears of

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 29.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 212.

<sup>12</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc, 1998), 3. Amussen's work concentrates on the order of society through the structures of class and gender, and state that both have superiors that demand obedience from their inferiors.

<sup>13</sup> Laura Gowing, "Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 225-226.

disorder influenced perceptions of immorality, and legislation stemming from the Elizabethan period concentrated on exerting control onto the poor, targeting them as the most immoral of the population. Laws that focused on the poor and cases of illegitimate births served two purposes: to quell anxieties about disorder as the result of immorality, but also to provide economic benefits to those in power.

## 1.2 Historiography

There is an abundant literature on gender in the early modern period. Most notable in this historiography is the shift from generalized characterizations of women as subservient to governing patriarchal systems to the presentation of women as dynamic historical actors. As individuals, women had unique experiences characterized by the ways in which they shaped, reinforced, or rejected patriarchal and societal norms.<sup>14</sup> A patriarchal hierarchy bound women to their prescribed roles, but not all women possessed the same role. Women often held power within the system, and it is too easy to categorize women as the sole victims of patriarchy. This problematically denies women historical agency, but also ignores the diversity of men and masculinities in the early modern period. Men were not all benefactors of patriarchy, nor were all men content with their roles of power.<sup>15</sup> Elite men held the responsibility for maintaining order

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<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Stone analyzes women only through their domestic role. See also Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, Subordination*, xx. Fletcher argues for the transition of women's history to focus on the individual. See also Kermode and Walker, *Women, Crime, and the Courts*, 21. Kermode and Walker argue for women as a category and denounce the concept of a universalized female experience with the legal system of early modern England. Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Kirilka Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), xvi.

in their household, and their role of protecting those within it extended to preserving social norms of behavior. Those who failed at this faced serious consequences.<sup>16</sup> Communities, however, scrutinized and feared poor men, who were often regarded as masculine failures due to their lack of credit.<sup>17</sup> Though men are not the focus of this dissertation, patriarchy is, and my arguments focus on the ways in which patriarchy structured all aspects of life through a gendered lens, as evidenced by my use of the violent woman as an archetype. Society did not sanction all men to use violence as a means of enforcing order and power, but women in the early modern period were never legitimized to use violence or even to express aggression.<sup>18</sup>

A historical understanding of the body is necessary to examine how and why female bodies became the focus of social anxiety. Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* is a seminal, and controversial, text on the body, sex, and gender. In it, Laqueur examines the division between the biological and the social constructs of the body, arguing that our modern conceptions of the sexed body as historically static is incorrect. For the early modern period, Laqueur looks at the one-sex model which viewed women as imperfect and inverted versions of men. He argued that in the one-sex model, female bodies entered into a hierarchy in which they were imperfect versions of men, and thus only described in those terms.<sup>19</sup> Significant to the early modern period is a discussion of the connection between body and gender and the recognition of the body as a historical actor. The body is an integral part of

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<sup>16</sup> Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the Second Earl of Castlehaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Castlehaven is a well-known and specific case that Herrup is reorienting in the larger narrative regarding the English Civil War. The legitimacy of the charges against Castlehaven are irrelevant. Instead, it is the way society and his peers perceived the charges against him. More specifically, even if the charges themselves were false, the case indicated to other elites that Castlehaven had essentially lost the ability to keep order in his household, making him a failure as a man.

<sup>17</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 195.

<sup>18</sup> Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

gender relations.<sup>20</sup> Gender acts as a “hinge” that connects bodies to politics.<sup>21</sup> From the Reformation to the English Civil War, Mary Fissell argues that transformations regarding understandings about the body are not the result of large events, but a part of them.<sup>22</sup>

How did people understand bodies and concepts of difference? Both Susanne Scholz and Alletta Brenner see bodies as gendered in a new way that highlights difference through social power by the sixteenth century. Brenner argues that this is because, due to the one-sex model, women appear as deformed men, and that by the seventeenth century, female bodies are distinct.<sup>23</sup> Scholz emphasizes that female bodies during this period, while perceived as different and distinct, were described in terms other than just those relating to the “male normative body.”<sup>24</sup> Laqueur based difference on fluids, arguing that blood was the same as semen or milk.<sup>25</sup> Gail Kern Paster disagreed, because medical texts portrayed female blood as somehow less perfect than blood in the male body.<sup>26</sup>

Influenced by Thomas Laqueur and Susan Dwyer Amussen, I use the concept of what I define as inferior and superior bodies.<sup>27</sup> Amussen’s *An Ordered Society* argues that everyone in the early modern society belonged to and participated in the hierarchy, with a case study of a rural town emphasizing how familial relations mirrored those between subject and monarch.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Alletta Brenner, “‘The Good and Bad of that Sexe’: Monstrosity and Womanhood in Early Modern England,” *intersections* 10, no. 2 (2009): 170.

<sup>24</sup> Susanne Scholz, *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Laqueur, 35-37. Additionally, Laqueur argues that early modern belief thought the male body endured a “functional, nonreproductive equivalent” to menstruation, such as bloodletting.

<sup>26</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 79. See also Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 65-66.

<sup>27</sup> See Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc, 1998). See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> See Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc, 1998).

Superior bodies had the power to apply control over inferior bodies. Women were not always the inferior bodies and men not always the superior, though masculinity was associated with “order over disorder.”<sup>29</sup> I agree, however, with Susanne Scholz’s critique of Laqueur. Scholz argues that female bodies in the early modern period, while recognized as different, were not always described only in terms against a normalized male body.<sup>30</sup> While medical texts do promote the Galenic concept of inversion, all the sources I examine in this dissertation describe the female body in distinctly different terms than the male body. The sources define the female body as different, because it is excessive, problematic, undisciplined, and secretive. The idea of inversion does nothing to avert fears or anxieties over the internal workings of the female body. A female body is not only imperfect, but inferior and suspicious. Male and female bodies were distinct. Gender was performative, but sex was real and indicated the amount of surveillance necessary.

While inferior and superior form an oppositional binary, its function in early modern England’s system of hierarchy was fluid rather than fixed, changeable depending upon the situation and the relationship. My use of the concept of inferior and superior bodies includes the experience of both men and women in early modern England. These terms reinforce the idea of masculinity as inherently anxious through both its social power and the ways in which it must exhaust itself reinforcing that power.<sup>31</sup> This extends to how women who were not performing or adhering to acceptable behaviors were construed as not only socially different, but socially inferior due to moral failings.

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<sup>29</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 59. Femininity, by Laqueur’s definition, must be the opposite: chaos.. Gowing also takes issue with Laqueur and his use of elite sources. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Scholz, *Body Narratives*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

In the early modern period, criteria such as status or age determined the extent to which people, particularly women, were able to discuss the body and its functions.<sup>32</sup> Laura Gowing argues that through physicality and touch, women used their authority about the knowledge of female bodies to both resist and maintain the structures of patriarchy, and through these moments of authority, women developed their own power relations between each other.<sup>33</sup> Rituals, including those involving birth, were important to early modern life as they provided structure and meaning but could reveal social tensions.<sup>34</sup> Pregnancy and childbirth exposed hierarchical tensions in society, but were not solely about the power of women. Sara Luttfiring argues that the “inability of male authority to completely control or definitively interpret women’s reproductive bodies” undermined that exclusively male authority.<sup>35</sup> Luttfiring concentrates on the representation of reproductive bodies to argue that both discourse and physical experience created the scripts for performative femininity. Women’s bodies and actions aided in the construction of these narratives; female bodies shaped male power.<sup>36</sup> Luttfiring’s “bodily narratives” are then “stories constructed not only about, but also through, women’s reproductive bodies.”<sup>37</sup>

While Luttfiring emphasizes the reproductive body, I argue that this prevalent social anxiety in the seventeenth-century focuses on the female body itself, and not just its reproductive capabilities. The social anxieties of the early modern period fixated on the female body, fearing

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<sup>32</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 6. See also Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England*, 211-212. Wilson argues that child birth rituals were moments of power for women, beyond the realm of patriarchal power, and that the childbirth ritual is collective resistance

<sup>34</sup> See David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Sara D. Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England* (New York & London: Routledge, 2016), 1-2. Luttfiring is countering both the arguments of Scholz and Gowing by contending that women influenced the interpretations of the female body and shaped male authority

<sup>36</sup> Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 5.

the limitations of societal and scientific understanding and knowledge as it pertained to women. The female body then was the only true private space in the early modern period, one subjected to public scrutiny, but one that, with the exception of physical dissection, remained closed. I use the term private in the sense that the female body was both restricted and concealed, not through an inherently deceptive female nature, but through the concepts of the body prevalent during period. Though I am not using it with its modern definition, I still see this concept of private in regards to the female body as being opposed to early modern definitions of public. Everything, from bodies to the household, was public and subjected to surveillance in an effort to maintain order. Despite efforts to surveille and control it, the female body still contributed to fears about disorder.

Violent women, or even the idea of a violent woman, represented the epitome of this social anxiety. There were “high levels of popular anxiety about female criminality” in printed cases.<sup>38</sup> Cases of infanticide highlight fears about women’s bodies as deceptive, and the print trope of murdering mothers emphasizes the unnaturalness of women who kill. Women accused of murder, particularly of killing men, unsettled society as their actions destroyed the natural order or hierarchy. This study uses violent women as an icon that underscores social fears which center exclusively on gender and on the female body. I additionally examine writings about the bodies of women who experienced violence, or women killed by their husbands. Many of these cases include graphic accounts of abuse and violence with the female body at the center. The point is not to shock, but to examine how that body is discussed. The language ranges from detached descriptions of wounds in trials to sensationalized accounts in crime pamphlets.

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<sup>38</sup> Susan C. Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 7.

While perhaps, as Laura Gowing argues, we may never understand the lived experience of the early modern body, we can “pursue the relationship between the body’s cultural construction and its corporeal experience, and to root the two in the social world of seventeenth-century England.”<sup>39</sup> Criminality was masculinized.<sup>40</sup> There is no disputing that notions of gender shaped the early modern world, including crime and law. This, however, only allows a partial understanding of social anxiety, language, and the body in early modern England. Why did violent women unnerve early modern society? Violent women created unease because women and their bodies in the early modern period were a source of social anxiety. Violent women are then doubly deviant. It is not only their criminality but their abnormality, the assumption and appropriation of masculinity that leads to unease.

Studying women committing violent crimes in seventeenth-century England allows for an examination of female agency that is still relevant to discussions of women and violence today. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry argue that modern international relations narratives still do not fully understand how to explain or incorporate violent women, defaulting to three standard narratives that limit female agency by associating their violence with external factors, such as male control or societal failures relating to gender.<sup>41</sup> Seventeenth-century England presents an opportunity to examine violent females in a different context. The prevalent male anxiety in seventeenth-century England is indicative of larger misogynistic social attitudes towards women, which influenced portrayals of violent women. My study spans from 1550 to 1700, arguing that the negative attitudes towards women and the female body continue throughout the seventeenth

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<sup>39</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Walker, *Crime, Gender, and the Social Order*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> See Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (New York: Zed Books, 2007). For example, in the Whore narrative, women commit violence because they are controlled by sexuality or a man; in the Monster narrative, women commit violence due to unfulfilled gendered expectations, such as childbirth. I think it is arguable that these limiting narratives existed even into the early modern period. Women who committed violence were defined by their femininity, and violence negated it.



century and are arguably a defining characteristic of the period. This study of violent women not only engages in historiography about gender, power, and agency, but also reveals the fractures of the patriarchal system demonstrated by the prevalent masculine anxiety and reexamines the role of the female body in history. The female body is consistently portrayed as problematic throughout the scope of this project, in all of the sources. Even when the intentions are different, like blaming monstrous births on political beliefs rather than the sin, it is still the woman who receives blame. There is no shift in the view of the female body.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

Central to my analytical framework is Judith Butler's definition of gender and her theory of performativity as defined in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. In particular, my work ascribes to her definition of gender as a "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."<sup>42</sup> It is important to keep in mind the difference between modern and early modern understandings of gender, sexuality, sex, and bodies. Butler's work is profoundly influential in modern thinking, and particularly on the development of queer studies. I, however, argue that Butler's theories are useful and applicable to my study of early modern England.

The "highly rigid regulatory frame" in early modern England operated through the systems of hierarchy and patriarchy, which both constructed and enforced concepts about gender

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<sup>42</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 2007), 45.

and the natural order of society. The press during this time period reinforced these ideas about good and bad behavioral and social norms. An increasing number of texts presented women who violated those norms as monstrous, revealing a social anxiety centered on women and especially those who did not adhere to these established norms.<sup>43</sup> The early modern period posited violent women as unnatural because their violence, especially if perpetuated against men, inverted the hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> Butler's views of the body are also relevant because early modern concepts of bodies provide insight into perceptions of homicide and violence.<sup>45</sup> The system of patriarchy legitimized men's use of violence as part of maintaining and enforcing power. Female anger, however, reinforced female inferiority.<sup>46</sup>

I also argue for the female body as the definitive private space. Medical texts on the body function as an explanatory framework and speak specifically about how women should govern themselves, not only externally, through behavior and looks, but internally, or how their bodies should function in order to be legitimized and acceptable women. Kathleen Canning defines four body types, including "*bodies as sites of experience*," which includes pregnancy and childbirth. These experiences "marked them indelibly, shaping subjective and self-representations."<sup>47</sup> The female body in these texts identifies and speaks to specific female experiences, inscribing meaning onto real bodies. The body as a site of experience relates to Gail Kern Paster's concept of external and internal habitus. Social and behavioral norms needed to be upheld externally, through dress and embodiment, but also internally, through the "enshrouded domain of the

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<sup>43</sup> Brenner, "Monstrosity and Womanhood," 160.

<sup>44</sup> Stuart A. Kane, "Wives with Knives: Early Modern Murder Ballads and the Transgressive Commodity," *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (Spring, 1996): 224.

<sup>45</sup> K.J. Kesselring, "Bodies of Evidence: Sex and Murder (Or Gender and Homicide) in Early Modern England, c. 1500-1680," *Gender and History* 27, no. 2 (August 2015): 246.

<sup>46</sup> Kennedy, *Just Anger*, 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 169. "Sites of experience" also include "illness, overwork, and exploitation."

body's internal workings and the locally determined explanatory framework."<sup>48</sup> The female body's internal workings were subject to scrutiny, not only because it was internal, but because it was seen as revealing the fundamental characteristics of women. The public was less concerned with knowing how the female body worked, but rather with the fear of women using those workings in ill ways. Questions of pregnancy and paternity plagued the female body and created a sense that it was potentially untruthful. The female body as deceptive expanded beyond only medical texts. Crime pamphlets centered on the female body, commenting on its legitimacy and truthfulness. All genres of text portrayed the female body as inherently inferior and imperfect.<sup>49</sup>

The female body in early modern England as a site of experience helps us understand concepts of space and gender. Amanda Flather writes that "space was the basis for the formation of gender identities, which were constantly contested and reconstructed" and that space is an "arena of social action."<sup>50</sup> Flather examines how early modern people experienced real physical space through gender; I am arguing that we can view the female body itself as a space, and one that can be analyzed. Laura Gowing described the dichotomies stemming from these texts as male/female, public/private, visible/secret.<sup>51</sup> The female body physically was both private and secret, but these texts shift that definition, as "the social context of sex and reproduction made them necessarily public."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>49</sup> Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. See also Emily Bowles, "Maternal Culpability in Fetal Defects: Aphra Behn's Satiric Interrogations of Medical Models," in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, eds. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013): 43-56. Both authors argue that we can perhaps read the female body as disabled.

<sup>50</sup> Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2011), 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 29.

<sup>52</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 53.

These texts reemphasized the female body as unknowable even as they used words and images to open that body to the mostly male gaze. Space constructs and is constructed.<sup>53</sup> As the female body entered into the public through these texts, it too constructed and was constructed. These constructions portray women “as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control.”<sup>54</sup> The female body as a private and unknowable space created anxiety within early modern patriarchy, even as it was publicly being constructed. That masculine anxiety played itself out on “a body that is the site of socially constructed anxieties about sex and gender but is by no means their origins.”<sup>55</sup> This anxiety was “conveniently located and addressed in the figure of the unruly or disobedient woman.”<sup>56</sup>

The female body was the only private space in early modern England. Even as texts attempted to dissect the body, it remained unknowable, and the appearance of secrecy contributed to the anxiety of the period. By looking at a variety of texts, I am analyzing the ways in which representations of the female body constructed and reinforced its unknowability. By intersecting this concept with crime, I show how the problems of the female body extended beyond reproduction. Portrayals of crime and the development of laws posit the female body as inherently corrupt, increasing the need for surveillance. I argue that it also implied that the female body required harsher levels of discipline, including burning for the crime of petty treason. Order could only be restored through the destruction of the body.

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<sup>53</sup> Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, 14. Breitenberg also points out that male bodies were regulated as well under early modern patriarchy.

<sup>56</sup> Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, 23.

## 1.4 Sources

Print played a significant role in shaping public perception of gender, bodies, and the violence of women. Representation, specifically printed works that included pamphlets, broadside, medical treatises and midwife manuals, shaped understandings of crimes committed by women through the process of public consumption, as certain crimes such as witchcraft or murder were more marketable.<sup>57</sup> Early modern news served an “ideological function.”<sup>58</sup> The representation of female crime acted to enforce the patriarchal system, as it served to promote violent women as doubly deviant and presented their crimes as worse than those of men.<sup>59</sup> Randall Martin defines a pamphlet as a “short piece of printed writing, sold unbound.”<sup>60</sup> This pamphlet literature was “produced quickly and for a general audience.”<sup>61</sup> The representation of women in pamphlets, particularly violent women, is indicative of the general misogynistic rhetoric present in the early modern period.<sup>62</sup>

Print in the early modern period shaped understandings about bodies, difference, women, and crime. Crime writing influenced public perception and allowed for the development of different social and legal reactions to women and crime.<sup>63</sup> The genres of both crime writing and execution literature illuminate attitudes towards women more generally in early modern society. Narratives of infanticide created a trope of the murdering mother. As early as 1610, this genre created a standard narrative of a sensationalized story. These stories ended with either a sermon

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<sup>57</sup> Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), ix.

<sup>58</sup> Clark, *Women and Crime*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Clark, *Women and Crime*, 182-183.

<sup>60</sup> Randall Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 25.

<sup>61</sup> Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England*, 5.

or a “confession” and described the traits of the women involved. These traits, appearing in all the crime writing, included animal or insect references, women as overtly sexual and unable to control themselves, violent women as unnatural, and associations with the Devil or wickedness. Other murders committed by women, particularly women who killed their husbands, inverted the hierarchy and contributed to a wider sense of social anxiety. In one example, a woman accused of infanticide was compared to a tiger or wolf, linking violent women with predators.<sup>64</sup> Another example is a “caterpillar of nature, a creature more savage than a she wolf, more unnatural than either bird or beast.”<sup>65</sup> In *The Bloody Mother*, the author referred to the woman as “bastard-bearer” with a “polluted womb.”<sup>66</sup> She was also called “most unnatural mother.”<sup>67</sup> One woman states that “My soul then blinded by the Devil/Bid me consent unto this evil.”<sup>68</sup> The same woman was described as a “lascivious, lewd, and close strumpet.”<sup>69</sup> One author writes that “women I cannot call them, for a woman esteems the fruit of her own womb.”<sup>70</sup> The violence of the woman negates her identity.

I engage with a variety of sources, ranging from 1550 to 1700, including crime genre pamphlets, monstrous births pamphlets, trial records, laws, midwife manuals and other medical treatises. I analyze these in conjunction with trial records whenever possible. For example, *Murder, Murder* details the case of Anne Hampton, accused of poisoning her husband.<sup>71</sup>

Middlesex court records, however, reveal that Anne was found not guilty, which is a detail not

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<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, *A Pitiless Mother* (London, 1616), sig. A2v.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, *Deeds Against Nature, and Monsters by Kind* (London, 1614), sig. A3v.

<sup>66</sup> T.B. *The Bloody Mother, or The Most Inhumane Murders, Committed by Jane Hattersley* (London, 1610), sig. A4v.

<sup>67</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother*, sig. Br. Women are described as unnatural or cruel even in cases where they were found not guilty.

<sup>68</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. B3r.

<sup>69</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A3v.

<sup>70</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature* sig. A3v.

<sup>71</sup> Anonymous, *Murder Murder* (London, 1641).

included in the pamphlet.<sup>72</sup> Even without corresponding trial records, pamphlets reveal social tensions regarding the female body. In the case of Anne Green no trial records exist, but three pamphlets indicated a widely circulated story that produced questions about the female body. I examine these texts for the language and voices used in them. I use court records to evaluate laws, most notably the 1624 Infanticide Act in chapter three.<sup>73</sup> Court records provide corresponding examples that emphasize the complexity of the laws when enacted. For example, the 1624 Infanticide Act required witnesses. In a 1680 case, Mary Clark claimed to have experienced a still birth, but “having no witness thereof, as the Statute required she was found guilty.”<sup>74</sup> Court records on their own can be illuminating, as they often demonstrate a connection between the rhetoric in print and rhetoric used in trials. I am, however, cautious in my approach with all sources. Relationships are often unclear, and I do not make assumptions. This study does not offer a quantitative approach to crime. I instead engage with these sources to look at language used and how it corresponds between these sources. The trial records used are from the Home Circuit, including Essex, Sussex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Surrey, as well as records from Middlesex. I also look at Old Bailey records from 1674 to 1700.

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<sup>72</sup> “Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1641,” in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 75-79. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp75-79>. See also “Particulars from the Gaol Delivery Register: Temp. Charles I,” in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 106-127. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp106-127>.

<sup>73</sup> “21° James I c. 27, An Act to prevent the Destroying and Murdering of Bastard Children, 1624,” in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1234-1235.

<sup>74</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1680, trial of Mary Clark (t16800707-3).

## 1.5 Chapters

I employ a thematic approach with the chapters, each involving an aspect of the early modern female body. Throughout the dissertation I am careful to distinguish between “detached gazing” and “productive looking.”<sup>75</sup> Alison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood apply these ideas to disability and non-normative bodies in the early modern period, but here I use the idea of productive looking when providing analysis of any body in this dissertation. The goal of looking at bodily experiences, including violence and bodily functions, is to intersect the body and gender with discussions of crime. Chapter two examines textual representations of the female body. This chapter engages with a litany of midwife manuals and medical treatises produced throughout the century, a majority of which were purported to be written by men. Only two claimed female authorship: *The Midwives Book* by Jane Sharp and *The Complete Midwife’s Practice*, translations of writings by French midwife Louise Bourgeois Boursier compiled by four unknown authors. I characterize the male-authored texts as speaking at women, rather than to them. I thoroughly analyze these texts on a variety of topics, including their justifications for writing about anatomy, knowledge, midwives, the female body, the womb, barrenness, and blood. These texts criticize women as ignorant and ashamed of their bodies, while also characterizing the female body in general as deceptive. The female body is described as problematic, prone to female-specific diseases, and often blamed for reproductive problems.

These criticisms extend to midwives as well, with male authors explicitly defining the limits of their knowledge. Hierarchy limited access to knowledge in the early modern period.

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<sup>75</sup> Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, “Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance,” in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, ed. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood (Columbus: The Ohio State Press, 2013), 1.



Status demarcated who could know and speak about the female body. I analyze the female-authored texts in the same manner and argue that, unlike the other sources, they predominately speak to women rather than at them. This is not to suggest that the two female authored texts are devoid of criticism about the female body. Both, however, try to reorient understandings of the body and reproduction by describing the female body as active. All of these works attempted to open the female body, both textually and visually, and yet rather than alleviating anxiety about the female body, these texts reproduced it.

Chapter three, entitled “The Bloody Body,” examines cases of spousal murder. Beginning in 1351, a woman accused of killing her husband received the charge of petty treason.<sup>76</sup> A guilty verdict in a petty treason case resulted in execution by burning. Petty treason was considered a more serious crime than murder, the charge a husband would receive if accused of killing his wife. I first analyze court records and printed works that cover husbands harming their wives, looking at the language describing the actions of the husband as well as the body of the wife. I categorize the violence committed upon the body by type, finishing with a section discussing cases of extreme violence. Both trial records and printed works engender men into narratives of unnaturalness, though these differ from the narratives of unnatural women. Violent men did not negate their masculinity, but rather become examples of masculine failures. They are often depicted as men of excess, who desired more than what they had in life, and as a result, transgressed boundaries for maintaining their households. The failure, however, was not perceived as endemic, but rather as specific, contained examples. Their wives received a clinical approach in the records. Their bodies were reduced to sites of violence, only receiving attention to measure wounds or the depth of brutality. My purpose in examining occasionally graphic

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<sup>76</sup> “25° Edward III c. 2, Declaration what offenses shall be adjudged treason, 1351,” in Statutes of the Realm I, Part I, 319-320.

retellings of violence is rooted in my interest in the body: how these bodies and actions are being described. Women in retellings very rarely spoke and often forgave their husbands.

Voices are crucial to understanding cases of petty treason. I first look at examples of not guilty verdicts. The accused depended on what other people said about the husband-wife relationship. Throughout the rest of the chapter, I discuss men and women's voices in cases of petty treason. Accused women often spoke as a "ventriloquized and confessional feminine subject."<sup>77</sup> Men in portrayals of petty treason cases spoke loudly, accusing their wives of murdering them, a direct contrast to the quiet, forgiving wives in murder cases. Murdering women possessed a body of excess as well, a body that demanded scrutiny and discipline, and did not stay within boundaries. These women were not viewed as specific examples of feminine unnaturalness, but a problem potentially embodied by all women.

Narratives of unnaturalness return in chapter four, "The Unnatural Body." The 1624 Infanticide Act marked a culmination of laws criminalizing the female body.<sup>78</sup> I first discuss poverty laws that precede the 1624 act, to emphasize the codification of the female body into the laws.<sup>79</sup> The 1624 Act included a shift in evidentiary standards, presuming the guilt of a woman while allowing her to present her case to the court. Printed texts established the trope of the murdering murder prior to the 1624 act.<sup>80</sup> Pamphlets likened women to predatory animals or insects, and criticized women as being weak. This reinforced the notion of the female body as inherently inferior. This narrative of unnaturalness featured in pamphlets was repeated

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<sup>77</sup> Kane, "Wives with Knives," 219.

<sup>78</sup> "21° James I c. 27, An Act to prevent the Destroying and Murdering of Bastard Children, 1624," in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1234-1235.

<sup>79</sup> "18° Elizabeth c. 3, An Act for the setting of the Poor on Work, and for avoiding of Idleness, 1576" in *The Statutes of the Realm IV, Part One*, 610-613. "7° James I c.4, An Act for the due Execution of divers Laws and Statutes heretofore made against Rogues, Vagabonds and sturdy Beggars, and other lewd and idle persons, 1610," in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1159-1161.

<sup>80</sup> The earliest pamphlet I discuss is from 1610. See T.B., *The Bloody Mother, or The Most Inhumane Murders, Committed by Jane Hattersley*. London, 1610.

throughout the century, and the language in print and court records mirrored each other. While the 1624 Act focused exclusively on women, men were accused and found guilty of committing infanticide. Male unnaturalness follows the same pattern as presented in chapter two regarding men murdering their wives: these men represented specific masculine failures, not a commentary on men in general.

Within chapter four, I analyze the different components of the 1624 Act. Men were central to infanticide cases, as the presence of a husband or even the promise of marriage functioned as exculpatory evidence in an infanticide trial. A crucial component of the Infanticide Act was its focus on concealment, both of pregnancy and of an infant. The fear over concealment highlighted the anxiety regarding the female body, and reaffirmed the body as unknowable and deceptive. Witnesses could save or condemn a woman. Without witnesses, the law made it possible for a woman who experienced a stillbirth to be found guilty of infanticide. Lastly, I look at the key issues of poverty and maintenance. Women could use maintenance as a defense before the court, arguing that they provided for their unborn child. The long history of laws that focus on the female body concentrate on concerns about poverty. As the female body becomes criminalized, these laws suggest that poor women warranted higher levels of scrutiny.

My final chapter unites the proceeding chapters by arguing that the perception of the female body in the early modern period viewed it as miraculous and monstrous. Eve Keller described the female body as “presented as not a single thing but as the meeting point of opposites, as both agential and passive, as embodied subject and as only body, as self-willing and silent.”<sup>81</sup> These dualities made society uncomfortable and contributed to the concept of the female body as deceptive. Women, or more specifically their bodies, received the blame for

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<sup>81</sup> Eve Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2007), 11.

monstrous births. Midwife manuals, discussed in detail in chapter two, spoke extensively about monstrous births, while printed pamphlets touted monstrous births as feminine failure made manifest. It is important to note that the monstrous births genre shifts throughout the period, responding to religious and political upheaval, but the centrality of the female body remains consistent. Midwife manuals scrutinize the female body's role in reproduction, ultimately placing blame on it. Early examples of monstrous births portray it as a punishment for sexual sins.<sup>82</sup> During the period of the English Civil War, monstrous births shift to be punishment for political or religious beliefs.<sup>83</sup> From the Restoration throughout the rest of the century, stories still blame the mother for any reproductive problems.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, monstrous births represent a variety of abnormalities, ranging from what today we would see as disabled, to bordering on the fantastical. Here I am focused on how these sources are discussing the female body and its influence on an unborn child to argue that the early modern period viewed femininity as inherently monstrous, rather than analyzing these stories for their commentaries on disabilities.

One specific case rendered the female body as especially miraculous. In 1651, Anne Green was convicted of infanticide, executed, and her body given to anatomists. Just before the dissection, people realized she was in fact still alive, and physicians worked to revive her.

Anne's story featured in three pamphlets: *A Wonder of Wonders*, *A Declaration from Oxford*, of

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<sup>82</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse of the Wonderful Judgment of God*, London: 1600. Anonymous, *Strange News Out of Kent*, London, 1609. Anonymous, *Strange News of a Prodigious Monster*, London: 1613. Anonymous, *God's Handy Work in Wonders*, London: 1615. Anonymous, *A Wonder Worth the Reading*, London, 1617.

<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, *Strange News from Scotland*, London: 1647. Anonymous, *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster*, London: 1645. Anonymous, *The Ranter's Monster*, London: 1652. Anonymous, *The Most Strange and Wonderful Apperation [sic] of Blood in a Poole at Garraton*, London, 1645. Anonymous, *Signs and Wonders from Heaven*, London: 1645. Anonymous, *A Monstrous Birth of a True Relation of Three Strange and Prodigious Things*, London: 1657.

<sup>84</sup> Anonymous, *The Two Great Admirable Wonders*, London, 1661. Anonymous, *England's New Wonders*, London, 1697. Anonymous, *The Strange Monster*, London, 1668. Anonymous, *A True Relation of a Monstrous Female-Child*, London, 1680. A. Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster*, London, 1682.

*Anne Green*, and *News from the Dead*. The retelling in each pamphlet is similar but vary in descriptions of Anne's body. She became a commodity, through the pamphlets and later as a spectacle people paid to witness. The pamphlets attempted to reframe Anne as innocent and divine, and I engage in a discussion of the legality of her case. I then look at the forty poems written by Oxford scholars contained in *News from the Dead*. With Anne as a shared subject, these poems offer commentary on the female body, varying between expressing jealousy and confusion at Anne's case, and viewing Anne as a confirmation of the female body as deceptive. Monstrous and miraculous represent dualities of the female body, which society perceived as real and exacerbated social anxiety.

## 2 TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMALE BODY

### 2.1 Introduction

Midwife manuals and other medical treatises produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth century textually dissected the female body for public consumption. Male authored texts claimed authority and knowledge about the female body. This claim disputed notions about the dissemination of knowledge, particularly regarding female communities and shared knowledge. While it is impossible to know the exact audiences of these texts, the male authors spoke at women and not to them. Midwife manuals and other medical treatises printed during the seventeenth century focused on problems related to the female body: sex-specific diseases, troubles with conception and pregnancy, and most of all, feminine ignorance both in midwives and women. These largely male-authored texts attempted to open the female body through words and illustrations but reinforced the idea that it was unknowable, comprehensible only in the context of the male body. Two midwife manuals allegedly produced by women, Jane Sharp's *The Midwives' Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered* and Louise Boursier's *The Complete Midwife's Practice Enlarged*, simultaneously upheld and challenged patriarchal notions of the female body. Sharp and Boursier's reputations as midwives legitimized their writings. Their texts, however, spoke to women as women. Despite this, they still criticized women and their knowledge. Nevertheless, Sharp and Boursier emphasized women as active in reproduction, making their bodies meaningful and important.

These texts also represent a shift in the production of knowledge and its dissemination to the public. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the first time “the body’s workings

were expounded in English and in print” as previously medical texts were written in Latin and only for the well-educated.<sup>85</sup> These cheap texts flooding the market “presented their explanations through argument and dispute” and maintained a “composite nature,” combining ancients ideas with new ones, critiquing the old while being uncertain about the new, and using these texts to reinforce authority.<sup>86</sup> These texts, especially the ones concerning childbirth “plagiarized unmercifully and repeated each other’s venerable observations” and indicated public interest but not necessarily practice.<sup>87</sup> They also contributed to anxiety about the female body rather than alleviating it. Knowledge of the female body and sex, even as it became more accessible through print, still was something to be controlled. As Laura Gowing writes, “the reproductive body was an absorbing mystery: reading and looking offered a means to manage and control it.”<sup>88</sup> Knowledge about reproduction was a form of power, and though these texts were widely produced, they put forth arguments about who should have that power, by critiquing women and midwives as ignorant and ashamed of their own bodies.

## **2.2 Men Speak At Women: Medical Texts and Midwife Manuals Authored by Men**

### ***2.2.1 Anatomy***

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<sup>85</sup> Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>86</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 3.

<sup>87</sup> David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

<sup>88</sup> Laura Gowing, “Knowledge and Experience, c. 1500-1750,” in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present*, eds. Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 242.

Authors offered explanations as to why they chose to write about the female body, though sometimes these explanations were merely thinly veiled commentaries on the intelligence of the general public and in particular of women.<sup>89</sup> In *The Expert Midwife*, Jakob Rüff justified discussing the reproductive parts of women by writing “how necessary a thing it is to insert and annex the anatomy of the matrix.”<sup>90</sup> Nicholas Fontanus argued that diseases specific to women were harder to diagnose and treat, making a work produced about them necessary.<sup>91</sup> Peter Chamberlain addressed his book “to the English ladies and gentlewomen, especially to the more studious in the ensuing subject.”<sup>92</sup> In the translation of his work *The Happy Delivery of Women*, Jacques Guillemeau assured his readers that he wrote for their benefit.<sup>93</sup> Criticisms of midwives and women in general is a prevailing theme in these texts, in which the male authors orient themselves as superiors who are sharing their knowledge for some kind of public good. These criticisms are paired with the appearance of a compliment, as when William Sermon declared,

Worthy Ladies, The serious consideration of the intolerable misery that many women are daily incident to, occasioned chiefly by breeding and bringing forth children; and the want of help in such deplorable conditions, by reason of the unskillfulness of some which pretend to the art of midwifery, etc.<sup>94</sup>

Authors also implied that their works were written for and to be read by women. John Sadler gave women ownership of such medical knowledge by stating that “because I had my being from

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<sup>89</sup> Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4. Mary Fissell states that by the middle of the seventeenth century “men began to write about the insides of women’s bodies without any apology or hesitation” which gave the female body “political significance.”

<sup>90</sup> Jakob Rüff, *The Expert Midwife* (London, 1637), 43.

<sup>91</sup> Nicholas Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor* (London, 1652), sig. A2.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice* (London, 1665), sig. A2.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery of Women* (London: 1612), sig. ¶2v. In this section, Guillemeau emphasizes the connection between mother, midwife, and surgeon, that all three are occasionally necessary for a safe and healthy birth. He does blame both midwives and the birthing chamber audience as sometimes too slow to call a surgeon in dangerous cases, writing that it happens “either through the willfulness of the kinfolks, or obstinacy of the midwives.”

<sup>94</sup> William Sermon, *The Ladies Companion* (London, 1671), sig. A3. His use here of both “unskillfulness” and “pretend” highlights two criticisms of midwives: the first is a deficiency in knowledge and skill, but “pretend” indicates that there could be women who were not legitimized, at least by his account, to practice midwifery.



a woman, I thought none had more right to the grape than she which planted the vine.”<sup>95</sup> James Wolveridge dedicated his work to the “most grave and serious matrons of Ireland and England.”<sup>96</sup> Wolveridge additionally revealed his fear of scrutiny “not only of learned scholars, but of grave matrons, and expert midwives” and that it would take “arrogancy [*sic*] and presumption” to assume he could out do other writers or to be wiser than his readers, instead declaring that he wanted his work to “be candidly received by all.”<sup>97</sup>

Women were not the only readers though. The anonymously produced *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* stated its purpose as “to unravel the mystery of generation, and diverse other mysteries” for “no other end than to what it was designed: for the benefit and advantage of the modesty of either sex.”<sup>98</sup> The content of the work, specifically discussions and visual representations of female anatomy, prompted fears of indecency. Though *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* stated its purpose as to benefit society, the author expressed concern over the work being read by “any obscene person.”<sup>99</sup> In *De morbis foemineis, The Woman’s Counselor*, Alessandro Massaria implicitly stated that he wrote for both sexes.<sup>100</sup>

Other authors, such as Nicholas Culpeper, had different intentions. These texts represent the dissemination of knowledge, but the overwhelmingly male authorship represent what

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<sup>95</sup> John Sadler, *The Sick Woman’s Private Looking-Glass* (London, 1636), sig. A4.

<sup>96</sup> James Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum, or the Irish Midwives Handmaid* (London, 1670), sig. A3r. Wolveridge, despite naming his book *The Irish Midwives Handmaid*, pokes fun at the Irish, writing that his work was never meant for an Irish audience because “there is scarce one barren among them.” Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, sig. A4r.

<sup>97</sup> Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, sig. A3v.

<sup>98</sup> Anonymous, *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* (London, 1584), 4. For the introduction, the author retells the story of Genesis, connecting the Bible, Nature, and reproduction. Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 1-4. By using the term “mystery,” the author is reemphasizing the idea of reproduction and particularly women’s bodies as secret and unknowable.

<sup>99</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 4. The argument being that there is a fine line between the medical and the erotic.

<sup>100</sup> Alessandro Massaria, *De morbis foemineis, The Woman’s Counselor* (London, 1657), sig. A2. Massaria states that “the women do much differ from the men.” Massaria, *The Woman’s Counselor*, 2.

Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth describes as “an authoritative social ‘voice.’”<sup>101</sup> Culpeper used his social voice to continue the thematic criticisms of midwives, writing that “above all things, I hold it most fitting, that women (especially midwives) should be well skilled in the exact knowledge of the anatomy of these parts.”<sup>102</sup> In one statement, Culpeper falsely humbled himself as contributing to a social good, but then accused women of being ignorant of their own bodies. Culpeper assumed this general tone in other parts of his work. He discussed both the male and female body, but started with the male body, writing “for I hope good women will pardon me for serving mine own sex first.”<sup>103</sup> Culpeper’s written dissection of the male body remains half-finished, for as he began to name and diagram parts of the male anatomy on one page, by the next he states he does not want to offend women by speaking on each part of male genitals.<sup>104</sup> Women are, then, both ignorant and easily offended. Culpeper attempted to soften his criticisms with a joking innuendo as he transitioned to writing on the female body: “having served my own sex, I shall see now if I can please the women.”<sup>105</sup>

### 2.2.2 *Knowledge*

Knowledge, particularly about the female body, was subject to a hierarchy of power. A single woman with knowledge about sex and the female body potentially indicated sexual deviancy. In the early modern period “knowledge was always in contest, and contests themselves

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<sup>101</sup> Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, “‘I wyl wright of women prvy sekens’: Imagining Female literacy and Textual Communities in Medieval and Early Modern Midwifery Manuals,” *Critical Survey* 14, no. 1, Literacies in Early Modern England (2002): 46. Hellwarth continues that “sometimes the voice seeks to participate in or enable the community, sometimes it seeks to infiltrate and disrupt it.”

<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (London, 1651), sig. B. Culpeper is an excellent example of these thematic criticisms.

<sup>103</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, sig. B2r.

<sup>104</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, sig. B2v.

<sup>105</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 26.

constituted knowledge.”<sup>106</sup> These texts commodified knowledge, not only through the material cost of their works for the public, but by implying that what they had was something women, midwives or otherwise, could never obtain. In doing so, they ignored the reality of knowledge in the early modern period. Though there was a hierarchy rooted in experience that spoke to who should have knowledge, “women exercised authority over and displayed knowledge of the female body.”<sup>107</sup>

The stated intentions or justifications of the authors did not always coincide with their views about knowledge. In the conclusion to his work, Nicholas Culpeper wrote that “I have for your good, and not for my own, traced the beginnings of myself, and you from the tools, whereby we were made.”<sup>108</sup> Even as authors avowed their work as meaningful for society because it sought to educate women and midwives, it undermined the authority and right to knowledge of women in the same pages. Rüff outlined rules of duty for midwives, comparing ignorance to a blind man, “which...deprived of the benefit of the light, will set forth no excellent and artificial work.”<sup>109</sup> He included midwives in this analogy, for an ignorant midwife, he wrote, “shall not be able in doubtful and dangerous cases to discharge her duty.”<sup>110</sup> Not only is an uneducated midwife dangerous, but she is unable to comfort other women, “which by reason of ignorance, shall be herself more timorous and fearful.”<sup>111</sup> These texts depicted women as lacking knowledge and ashamed of their bodies.<sup>112</sup> If a woman did not know her own body, according to some of these texts, she would be unable to articulate her complaints to a physician, or even to

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<sup>106</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 40.

<sup>107</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 43.

<sup>108</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 216.

<sup>109</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 44.

<sup>110</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 44.

<sup>111</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 44. Rüff also refers to women as “being universally as all men know (for the most part) unlearned.” Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, sig. A2v.

<sup>112</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, sig. A4.

know if she were pregnant. “Ignorance makes women become murderers to the fruit of their own bodies,” accused one text, as a woman unaware of her own pregnancy might assume her menstruation stopped for reasons of ill health and seek a remedy to make it begin.<sup>113</sup>

Even if a woman did have knowledge over her body and its workings, many of these texts still dismissed her as an intellectual inferior. In a section in which he emphasized exercise as key to fertility through heat, Culpeper told women that “you may know what is most fitting for your own bodies, but if you never intended to be wiser, you shall not blame me, when you whine for lack of children, or for the death of those you had.”<sup>114</sup> The problem, as Culpeper later asserts, is not that women might be modest or uncertain about their bodies, but that certain women were simply unable to learn. In a chapter titled “Certain Necessary Questions Answered,” Culpeper defined the chapter’s purpose as “to teach women more wit, if they be but minded to learn; if they be not, I cannot help it.”<sup>115</sup> Alessandro Massaria’s *The Woman’s Counselor* does not speak to women at all. Massaria gives remedies for the so-called “Fits of the Mother,” which include drinking cold water or for another woman to “dip her fingers in some sweet smelling oil” and “gently rub the neck of the womb” to bring it down.<sup>116</sup> He writes a “speedy remedy” only in Latin, stating that “if it be a married woman, her husband may give her a present remedy.”<sup>117</sup> This is a contrast with his other recommendations, which were in English. He also authorized women to create and give these remedies to other women. Massaria denoted the Latin remedy as the most efficient and only authorized men to give it, relegating women back to their perceived space of ignorance. A woman, Massaria assumed, could not read Latin and

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<sup>113</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 142-143.

<sup>114</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 115.

<sup>115</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 185.

<sup>116</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 75.

<sup>117</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 75.

should only concern herself with the remedies in English. The “speedy remedy,” however, is almost identical to the others. In it, a husband is directed to perform with his penis instead of fingers and engage in intercourse.<sup>118</sup> These texts are written about and at women, not for women, despite their titles and intentions. Each text implies that even as it seeks to correct ignorance, women still would not be able to understand.

### 2.2.3 *Midwives*

Midwives and their knowledge remained central topics in the manuals. Male authors of midwife manuals often “complained that female midwives were incapable of explaining their own knowledge.”<sup>119</sup> These texts attempted to claim authority over midwives by informing them, or the reader, how and what a midwife should be, and in some cases, what constituted a bad midwife. Midwifery practice represented its own nuanced hierarchy and a spectrum of power, with religion, social rank, marital status, and reputation all considered.<sup>120</sup> The midwife was a “specialist” with skills and knowledge that qualified her to check for pregnancy, testify in bastardy depositions and to sexual impropriety, and have knowledge of common diseases and their remedies.<sup>121</sup> Midwives came from a variety of social backgrounds, but skill and status were both key factors in the reputation and value of a midwife.<sup>122</sup> Touch comprised one part of a midwife’s power and the texts emphasize and occasionally criticize this point.<sup>123</sup> A midwife’s

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<sup>118</sup> Massaria, *The Woman’s Counselor*, 75.

<sup>119</sup> Gowing, “Knowledge and Experience, c. 1500-1750,” 242.

<sup>120</sup> Samuel S. Thomas, “Early Modern Midwifery: Splitting the Profession, Connecting the History,” in *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 121.

<sup>121</sup> Doreen Everden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 171.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas, “Early Modern Midwifery,” 118.

<sup>123</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 81.

touch was one way to check for pregnancy by her “putting up her finger into the womb to touch the inner orifice thereof.”<sup>124</sup> Their sex allowed midwives to touch a woman’s vagina, cervix, and other parts.<sup>125</sup> Some historians argue that childbirth was a “collective female space,” but there was not always a close relationship between women and midwives.<sup>126</sup> Midwives’ power resulted out of necessity, wrote William Sermon, because women were ashamed to show their parts to anyone else, least of all a man or male physician.<sup>127</sup>

Male authors wrote directly to midwives in their works, referring to them as “grave and modest women.”<sup>128</sup> Midwives had a direct connection to Eve, as God appointed women to “bear children into this world.”<sup>129</sup> According to the Bible, midwives existed since the beginning.<sup>130</sup> Though Guillemeau agreed with the idea of midwives since antiquity, he quickly pointed out that “daily experience doth show us, that many women are delivered without the help of the midwife.”<sup>131</sup> The authors manipulated this biblical connection between women and Eve, using it to promote the idea of midwives, then to condemn women by relating the pain of childbirth to female punishment from God. Birth was a part of the natural order, but women’s role in it was good, if not central to their identity. Others praised midwives as “worthy matrons” and that they were “of the number of those whom my soul loveth, and of whom I make daily mention in my prayers.”<sup>132</sup> Authors instructed midwives in the birthing room to “cheerfully exhort her [the

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<sup>124</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 7.

<sup>125</sup> Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Ashgate: Burlington, 2013), 157. Women sustained their part of the early modern hierarchy without violence, but instead through touch. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 6

<sup>126</sup> Pollock, “Childbearing and Female Bonding,” 295. See also Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 157.

<sup>127</sup> Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 2. This undermines the authority of midwives.

<sup>128</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, sig. A2v.

<sup>129</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, sig. A2v.

<sup>130</sup> Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 1. He titles this chapter “The Antiquity of Midwives, and what manner of Women they ought to be.”

<sup>131</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 79.

<sup>132</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, sig. ¶12r.

mother] to obey her precepts and admonitions” and that a midwife should be encouraging to other women present, pushing them to give prayers.<sup>133</sup> A midwife should be,

neither too young, nor too old, but of an indifferent age between both; well composed, not being subject to disease, nor deformed in any part of their body; comely and neat in their apparel, the hands small, and fingers long, not thick, but clean, their nails pared very close; they ought to be very cheerful, pleasant, and of a good discourse, strong, not idle, but accustomed to exercise...<sup>134</sup>

Mentally they should be “wise, and discreet; able to flatter, and speak many fair words” and “ought to know, that Nature, the hand-maid of the great God, hath given to every thing a beginning, increase, state, perfection, and declination.”<sup>135</sup> Patience, and short nails, were virtues for midwives. Guillemeau wrote that the midwife’s “greatest charge must be, that she do nothing hastily, or rashly, or by force, to enlarge the passage of the child.”<sup>136</sup>

These authors also challenged the authority of midwives through unsolicited advice regarding skill. Chamberlain refers to midwifery as a “mysterious office” and then stated that unskilled midwives cause death.<sup>137</sup> Guillemeau believed difficult births necessitated a surgeon “since there be few midwives found skillful, that can give them much aide or succor in these cases.”<sup>138</sup> By examining and referring to skill and experience, the authors reinforced their own superiority as learned men lecturing women who needed to understand their own anatomy and

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<sup>133</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 78.

<sup>134</sup> Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 6. Sermon also states that midwives should not “report any thing whatsoever they hear or see in secret, in the person or house of whom they deliver.” This can be interpreted a few ways. Sermon is perhaps emphasizing discretion and a medical practioner/patient relationship, but could also specifically be making a comment on women and gossip. It could also potentially be an attempt to undermine midwives’ legal authority.

<sup>136</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 94. He continues on to write that “either through ignorance or impatience” midwives have been known to break the membranes with nails before it was time for birth.

<sup>137</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, sig. A2r. The use of “mysterious” here again reinforces the concept of the female body as an unknowable secret.

<sup>138</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 104. Guillemeau, however, does dedicate an entire chapter to surgeons and what their role is, making the responsibility for knowledge both masculine and feminine. See. Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 123-125.

their reproductive capabilities. In a chapter titled “A Midwife, how she ought to be qualified,” one anonymous author wrote that:

Those that undertake this great task ought by no means to enter upon it rashly or unadvisedly, but with all imaginable caution, well weighing and preconsidering that she is accountable for all the mischief that befalls through her willful ignorance or neglect; therefore let not unskillful women take upon them this office...<sup>139</sup>

Common themes exist in criticisms of women and midwives. They stressed that ignorance in women was a problem and that even those authorized to the secrets and knowledge of the female body, such as midwives, still could be deficient in this knowledge. Authors discouraged midwives from trying new remedies.<sup>140</sup> William Sermon warned midwives to be careful when diagnosing women as pregnant because if wrong “the midwife before well esteemed of, becomes slighted and undervalued.”<sup>141</sup>

An incorrect diagnosis could lead to a bodily purge resulting in an abortion. These texts, however, provide multiple “tests” to check for pregnancy, with none of them definitive. No test for pregnancy meant that “knowledge became a matter of interpretation, and the words women spoke frequently determined how their bodies would be interpreted by others.”<sup>142</sup> Midwives were key interpreters of women’s bodies in legal matters. The anonymous author of *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* narrates a trial of a man accused of “forcing a virgin” in which a surgeon and two midwives examine the woman and say “that her body had not been penetrated.”<sup>143</sup> Guillemeau, however, challenged this authority. He cited the three offices of midwifery, which he claimed were judging if a woman is fertile, being present at the delivery, and divulging if a woman is

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<sup>139</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 99.

<sup>140</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 101.

<sup>141</sup> Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 16.

<sup>142</sup> Sara D. Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England*. Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2016), 78.

<sup>143</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 95.



pregnant or not. On the first office, of judging if a woman is fertile, he writes that “at this day there is no woman so cunning, who is able to tell it.”<sup>144</sup>

#### 2.2.4 *The Female Body*

Understandings about bodies in the seventeenth-century centered on medical texts that promoted the concept of the one-sex model, where women were an inversion of men, establishing gender as polar opposites and allowing for power to be both relational and social. The one-sex model, for example, envisioned the female body as an inverted male body.<sup>145</sup> This created a distinction that allowed for the belief that female bodies were unstable and thus dangerous. In describing the genitals of women, Sadler wrote that “the manhood is outward, and the womanhood within.”<sup>146</sup> Chamberlain dedicated an entire chapter to “the likeness or proportion of the parts of generation in men and women,” putting male and female bodies into a direct comparison.<sup>147</sup> In *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, the author described female genitals only in terms of male anatomy.<sup>148</sup>

Early modern understandings of testicles and ovaries, for example, exemplified the constant comparison between female and male bodies, and specifically the lack of understandings about the female body on its own terms. Culpeper, writing about male anatomy first, stated that “the stones are called in Latin, *Testes*, that is, witnesses, because they witness

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<sup>144</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 82-83.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 29. This has been disputed. I ascribe to the idea that early modern ideas about gender and sex were performative but fluid, and that the one- and two-sex models co-existed.

<sup>146</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman’s Private Looking-Glass*, 5.

<sup>147</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain’s Midwives Practice*, 24.

<sup>148</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 115. The anonymous author writes on male anatomy first.

one to be a man.”<sup>149</sup> A corporeal difference between bodies then encodes their differences in a physical way. He lists nine ways that ovaries, which he also calls stones in women, differ from men. This list is a direct comparison between male and female anatomy and it usually describes the ovaries as less than their male counterparts.<sup>150</sup> Ovaries are softer, colder, internal and secret, and they witness or speak to nothing except to promote anxiety over their invisibility. Culpeper’s definitions speak to concepts of masculinity, but also to the anxiety around the female body. Both male and female bodies act as a text to be read, though the male body and its outward parts represented an easier text. The male body simply was, as it could be witnessed and attested to itself. For Culpeper, the female body was something to be understood in the context of difference, not only inversion, and that difference usually meant less.

The female body itself did not attest to anything, but its function did. Reproductive qualities formed the center of female identity, but those same qualities allowed for the perception of women and their bodies as weak.<sup>151</sup> John Sadler explained the cold nature of women by writing that:

The natural end of man’s and woman’s being is to propagate; and this injunction was imposed upon them by God at their first creation and again after the deluge: now in the act of conception there must be an Agent and a Patient, for if they be both every way of one constitution, they cannot propagate; man therefore is hot and dry, woman cold and moist: he is the Agent, she the Patient, or weaker vessel, that she should be subject unto the office of man.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 11. See also Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain’s Midwives Practice*, 5.

<sup>150</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 35-36. His second difference states that the stones of women differ from men “in quantity; for they are less in women than in men” and his seventh states that “they have but one skin, whereas men have four See also Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 112-114. Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain’s Midwives Practice*, 28-29. Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 52-53. Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 203. Sermon gives eleven ways women’s ovaries differ from men’s testicles.

<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 13-14.

<sup>152</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman’s Private Looking-Glass*, 12.

In this passage, Sadler defines the female body in power opposition to the male body. Though he includes men, he still suggests reproduction as the sole quality of the female body, stemming from the religious authority of the Bible. This supports ideas from the other texts of women as “the frail daughters of Eve.”<sup>153</sup> Pregnancy then was a punishment, or “that all women should bear children with pain and sorrow...for disobedience of the first mother.”<sup>154</sup> Guillemeau referred to pregnancy as “the greatest disease that women can have.”<sup>155</sup> He also instructed women even and especially during pregnancy “to have a care, as much as she can possible, of the preservation of her beauty: since there is nothing that sooner decays and spoileth it, then the often bearing of children.”<sup>156</sup>

All of these texts suggest that understanding of the female body only occurred in relation to the male body. This was not just in its reproductive qualities, but in its very existence. Many of these texts reduce the female body to its organs and their functions, but still cannot seem to grasp, or feel their readers cannot grasp, women without juxtaposing them to men. These comparisons often uphold the idea that the female body is somehow lesser than its perfect male counterpart. The female body, then, is deficient according to these texts, and thus a reason why women needed control and surveillance, because they were incapable of maintaining themselves.

### 2.2.5 *Barrenness*

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<sup>153</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, 102.

<sup>154</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 164.

<sup>155</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 81. See also Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 184. Paster writes that “pregnancy was *inscribed* as disease even as it was required for most women.”

<sup>156</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 32. Guillemeau also wrote on how a woman should emotionally behave during pregnancy, writing that “now concerning the passions of the mind, a woman with child must be pleasant and merry, shunning all melancholic and troublesome things that may vex or molest her mind.” Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 26.

Barrenness or infertility was viewed as a female disease that resulted from problems with the womb.<sup>157</sup> Massaria understood the womb to be the largest obstacle to conception, writing that “amongst all causes of barrenness in a woman, in the instruments of generation, it is certain that the greatest is in the womb, for the womb is the field of generation.”<sup>158</sup> Culpeper offered three causes of barrenness which he defined as natural, accidental, and against nature.<sup>159</sup> Natural barrenness is “that which causeth barrenness in a woman.”<sup>160</sup> Accidental barrenness “comes by reason of some casual infirmity upon the body of the man, or his wife at the time...this is sometimes caused on the man's part, but most commonly on the woman's.”<sup>161</sup> Culpeper defined “barrenness against nature” as women “made barren by diabolical means.”<sup>162</sup> Some authors viewed barrenness as a disability or defect, which connected to larger ideas about the female body as disabled.<sup>163</sup> Chamberlain wrote that “barrenness is a disability in conception,” but then defined falling within two distinct categories. Barrenness was a permanent inability to conceive while weak conception referred to a woman that had trouble conceiving.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> See also Anon., *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, sig. Aar-sig. Bbv [mispaginated as 1-9]. Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 219-223. Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, 256-258. Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 81-124. Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 127-145. Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 99-136. Ruff, *The Expert Midwife*, 11-19. Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking Glass*, 106-122. Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 7-15. Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 99-101 and 163-166.

<sup>158</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 116. He continues to write that “and if this field be corrupt, and not well disposed, it is in vain to expect any fruit.”

<sup>159</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 82.

<sup>160</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 83.

<sup>161</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 89.

<sup>162</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 112. Culpeper furthers his argument by stating that “diabolical means” are not just supernatural, but any abuse of nature. This could mean barrenness after manual abortion or, for Culpeper who defined birth as legitimate and illegitimate, an illegitimate birth, or a birth before due date.

<sup>163</sup> Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. See also Emily Bowles, “Maternal Culpability in Fetal Defects: Aphra Behn’s Satiric Interrogations of Medical Models,” in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, eds. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013): 43-56. Alletta Brenner, “‘The Good and Bad of That Sexe’: Monstrosity and Womanhood in Early Modern England.” *intersections* 10, no. 2 (2009): 161-175.

<sup>164</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, 256.

For Massaria and Sadler, barrenness was unquestionably a problem presented by the female body. Sadler recalled that “in times past before women came to the marriage bed, they were first searched by the midwife; and those only which she allowed of, as fruitful, were admitted.”<sup>165</sup> This line reaffirms the authority of midwives and how they maintained that authority through touch. Midwives handled the female body and through their examination denoted a body as worthy due to its ability to reproduce. Sadler listed causes of barrenness, such as “overmuch heat or cold” which affects the seed, or too many courses or menstrual blood, and swelling or inflammation in various body parts, especially the womb. One theme in his list is apparent, as all of his causes indicate too much of something in the female body, or a body denoted by excess.<sup>166</sup> Massaria also viewed this as a specifically female affliction, writing that “if conception be quite taken away in a woman, so that she can never conceive, this affection is called barrenness; of this may be called a Barren Woman, which you please.”<sup>167</sup> The identity and worthiness of a woman was rooted in her ability to reproduce, to the point that an author issues a new name for that woman.

Authors discussed impotence in men as being distinctly different from barrenness in women. Rüff viewed barrenness in women as “a disability and unaptness of bringing forth children” but in men of “engendering and sending forth fruitful seed.”<sup>168</sup> This again emphasized socially circulated ideas that women and even their bodies were ignorant; the female body was unapt, where the male body was unable. Fontanus explained that causes for women could be natural, such as sickness, but that it was incurable in a man “for no physician can correct” an

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<sup>165</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 106.

<sup>166</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 107-110.

<sup>167</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 101-102.

<sup>168</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, sig. Bb2r-Bb2v [mispaginated 11-12].

error of nature.<sup>169</sup> Barrenness in both sexes could originate from a refusal to ascribe to gender norms, as Rüff argued that masculine women and effeminate men could not reproduce.<sup>170</sup>

Though Massaria emphasized barrenness as a fault of the female body, he made one exception for men. If it were the fault of the man, he argued, it would be due to *penis longue*, but he slyly states that “few women do complain of this fault.”<sup>171</sup>

Though reduced to their reproductive abilities, barren women, these authors contended, experienced some benefits. Sadler explained that “barrenness maketh women look young, because they are free from those pains and sorrows, which other women are accustomed to bring forth withall.”<sup>172</sup> The anonymous author of *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* even offered logic as to why women were usually the ones who were barren. He ascribed the problem to heat and softness in the female body, and “that the woman is not so strong as a man, nor so wise and prudent, nor hath so much reason, nor is so ingenious in contriving her affairs, whereby the faculties are hindered in their operation.”<sup>173</sup>

While there was no consensus on barrenness, most authors contended it was a fault of the female body. Authors who did connect it to problems within the male body did not use the same language to describe that body as problematic. A man unable to reproduce was something incurable, but it did not mean something was inherently wrong with that body. What truly separated the female body was the womb, an organ that baffled early modern writers. They characterized the womb as ever-moving and problematic, a body part that needed heavy scrutiny from physicians and midwives alike, and one that created problems within the female body.

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<sup>169</sup> Fontanus, *The Woman’s Doctor*, 128. See also Fontanus, *The Woman’s Doctor*, 130-132. This section is only on barrenness in men.

<sup>170</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 14.

<sup>171</sup> Massaria, *The Woman’s Counselor*, 104-105. This related to hot and cold in the body: if too long, the seed would ultimately be too cold to function.

<sup>172</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman’s Private Looking-Glass*, 112.

<sup>173</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 9.

### 2.2.6 *The Womb*

Understandings of the female body viewed the womb as central to its working. An “ill affected womb,” wrote Sadler, “through the evil quality thereof” could affect the heart, liver, and brain.<sup>174</sup> Concerns about the womb were extensions of anxieties about the female body and how the womb often overwhelmed the identity of the woman. The authors described the womb in a series of dualities. It gave life, but also produced monsters.<sup>175</sup> It was the center of her body (and arguably of female identity) and yet prone to female-specific diseases that allowed it to roam, to drop, and to move within the body. It is both private and public, subject to intense scrutiny from midwives, doctors, other women, and society. Nicholas Culpeper considered the womb to possess both a private and public function. Its private function was to take “nourishment of blood that comes to it” but publicly “it serves for generation.”<sup>176</sup> It was an indicator of sexual difference, as there was no corresponding organ in men. These contradictions spoke to both ideas about women’s bodies and to women’s nature. A woman’s womb, as characterized by conditions stemming from the humors, could reveal her character.<sup>177</sup> The centrality of the womb “fit neatly with the idea of woman as a passive vessel in generation.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, sig. A4v.

<sup>175</sup> Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 53. Fissell points to a shift in 1603 in which there was an increase in print on crime and women. This negative portrayal of women in print coincided with the negative ideas about the womb. Prior to this, Fissell argues, the womb was seen as something wonderful.

<sup>176</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 57-58.

<sup>177</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives, or A Guide for Women, the Second Part* (London, 1662), 26. A hot womb was good for conception, but only if it did not become too hot. A cold womb made a woman barren. A moist womb was found “commonly in women that are idle.”

<sup>178</sup> Eve Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2007), 73.

The womb gained many names, such as “the Matrix, mother,” and was “a member proper and peculiar to the female sex.”<sup>179</sup> Patriarchal language described the vagina as a mouth.<sup>180</sup> The metaphor of the vagina as a mouth guarding the secret working parts of a woman evoked imageries of gluttony. For Rüff, these “peculiar” parts were “greedy and desirous of receiving.”<sup>181</sup> Fontanus chose a more positive view, saying that it “might with greediness suck in the man’s seed, and dispose and cherish it to generation.”<sup>182</sup> Early modern medical thought viewed the womb as the center of a woman’s body, connected to all her vital organs, but it paid specific attention to the womb because of its reproductive qualities. Culpeper viewed a woman as her womb and that the womb was for reproduction.

In her analysis on midwife manuals, Eve Keller wrote that “books written to fix women’s bodies cannot themselves get a clear fix on the female self . . . unless it is conceived as a womb.”<sup>183</sup> That same assumption is contained in all of these medical texts, that “the patient cannot fully be a person, because a woman is not one *possessed* of a womb, but rather one who *is* a womb, a person coextensive not with the body, but with a body part.”<sup>184</sup> The womb marked the female body as different. Reducing the female body to a womb served to constrain womanhood to reproduction. The womb was internal and elusive. Its propensity to move through the body functioned as a metaphor for the fear of female mobility. A woman’s body, prone to excess and leaking, also held an organ that refused to be restrained. Midwife manuals offered visual

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<sup>179</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 50.

<sup>180</sup> Caroline Bicks, “Stones like Women’s Paps: Revising Gender in Jane Sharp’s “Midwives Book,” in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall-Winter, 2007): 2. See also Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 31. Culpeper defined the womb as two parts, a mouth and a bottom, with the mouth as “a hole at the entrance into it.”

<sup>181</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 50. Rüff states that after the conception the womb is so closed “that a needle cannot enter into it without violence and danger.” Repeatedly Rüff reinforces the idea that the female body, particularly the womb, is something to be feared. Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 51.

<sup>182</sup> Fontanus, *The Woman’s Doctor*, 193-194.

<sup>183</sup> Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves*, 72.

<sup>184</sup> Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves*, 74.



representations of the female reproductive system, always with the womb in its rightful place. The womb epitomized the anxiety about the female body: internal, incomprehensible, and without boundaries. As midwife manuals fixated on the womb as problematic, it follows that a woman's identity would be reduced to her womb.

The so-called "Fits of the Mother" provide an example of just how central the womb was to early modern understandings of the female body and how it overwhelmed the identity of women. Suffocation of the Mother, Fits of the Mother, and other names for this "disease" abound in early modern midwife manuals and medical texts. Edward Jorden's 1603 *A Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* dedicated itself exclusively to this problem.<sup>185</sup> Before actually describing these "fits," Jorden reinforced his authority on the topic by stating "that this disease doth oftentimes give occasion unto simple and unlearned people, to suspect possession, witchcraft, or some such like supernatural cause."<sup>186</sup> He emphasizes the necessity of a book produced by an author like him to correct ignorance.

He continued to justify his work by stating that "the passive condition of womankind is subject unto more diseases" than men are, and these disease stem from the vagina.<sup>187</sup> This reduces a woman to her parts, inscribing that body as diseased. Ancient medical texts considered the womb "to be some straggling creature, wandering to and fro through several parts" though not every medical treatise agreed with this concept.<sup>188</sup> Wolveridge, however, believed that the

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<sup>185</sup> See also Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 108-115. Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 51-60. Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 72-79. Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 61-68. Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 61-78. Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, 155-161.

<sup>186</sup> Edward Jorden, *A Brief Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (London, 1603), sig. Br.

<sup>187</sup> Jorden, *A Brief Discourse*, sig. Br.

<sup>188</sup> Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 52. Fontanus disagreed with the idea of a roaming womb and believed that it instead loosened and stretched due to moisture. See also Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 236. Guillemeau believed the womb could close itself off, which could create problems, but was not convinced it roamed around the body. See also Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 175. Paster says these writers gave agency to the womb, by making it

womb did move, but that its movements were unnatural when it led to suffocation or fits.<sup>189</sup> The reasons for concern were manifold. Jordan's description of the disease explains the name, as he writes that,

because most commonly it takes them with choking in the throat; and it is *an affect of the Mother or womb wherein the principal parts of the body by consent do suffer diversely according to the diversity of the causes and disease wherewith the matrix is offended.*<sup>190</sup>

The concerns then predicated on the unknowability of its origins, though authors pushed their own ideas, focusing on menstrual blood not passed and its effect on the whole body because of the womb's connection to vital organs. Another concern was that fits of the womb could cause sterility and "also to hinder conception and generation."<sup>191</sup> The main apprehension, however, was that "during such a fit the patient is at the mercy of her raging womb."<sup>192</sup> This separated a woman from her womb, but made the womb dominant, uncontrollable.

The etymology of the word 'hysteria' comes from the Latin and Greek words for the womb.<sup>193</sup> Though they did not use the term, 'Fits of the Mother' seem to reflect later definitions of hysteria. Diminishing a female body to this one part conveys the assumption "that the workings of the womb overtake the possibility of a rationality and autonomously volitional female subject."<sup>194</sup> Hysteria represented a broad category of female ailments that doctors incorrectly linked to problems with the womb.<sup>195</sup> Analyzing historical texts and what they write

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a "political entity, a potentially disorderly force needing pacification and colonization but capable of negotiating terms of external control and regulation."

<sup>189</sup> Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, 155-156.

<sup>190</sup> Jordan, *A Brief Discourse*, sig. Cr-sig. Cv.

<sup>191</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, sig. Ee3r [mispaginated 61].

<sup>192</sup> Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves*, 95.

<sup>193</sup> "hysteria, adj. and n." OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press.

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90639> (accessed February 13, 2020).

<sup>194</sup> Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves*, 95.

<sup>195</sup> Ada McVean, "The History of Hysteria," *McGill Office for Science and Society*, July 3 2017, <https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/history-quackery/history-hysteria>.

about this ‘disease’ reveals the ways in which male authors eviscerated the female body textually. They continuously described the female body as uncontrollable, problematic, and prone to curious diseases known only to affect women. The authors praised the womb for its ability to create life but cursed the woman for her inability to control her body and make it as perfect as man’s.

### ***2.2.7 Blood: Menstruation, Menopause, Abortions, and Miscarriages***

People conceived of blood in the womb as central to the workings of the female body, but not always as good or natural.<sup>196</sup> Blood nourished the baby of a pregnant woman and then traveled through her body to become the milk she fed them, creating a link between “milk and the terms.”<sup>197</sup> Blood then was vital, not just to the health of the woman, but in its purpose of creating and then maintaining life. The purposes of blood in the female body could be dangerous as well. In describing what we now refer to as puberty, Culpeper suggests that women begin menstruating around fourteen and that as they go through puberty, this is when “women begin to be lecherous.”<sup>198</sup> Fear of sexuality is a prevalent theme in examining the anxiety around the female body. The types of diseases women faced were categorized by their perceived sexual status, such as diseases all women get, diseases only widows and virgins get, disease of barren women, and disease of women with child.<sup>199</sup> Nicholas Fontanus saw a woman’s marital status as

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<sup>196</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 179. Paster describes these authors as having a “cultural ambivalence” to blood, but I disagree. Blood was important in terms of nourishing an infant, both in the womb and through the idea of it turning into breast milk, but many of these authors associated blood from the female body as equally dangerous and powerful as the womb itself.

<sup>197</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, sig. D4r.

<sup>198</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 66.

<sup>199</sup> Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 3.

part of her health, writing that “wives are more healthful than widows or virgins, because they are refreshed with the man’s seed, and ejaculate their own, which being excluded, the cause of evil is being taken away.”<sup>200</sup> Married women, legitimized to sexual relations, could “loosen the passages of the seed, and so the courses come down more easily through them” by having sex.<sup>201</sup>

The female body became associated with blood and midwife manuals discussed it thoroughly. Vaginal bleeding in particular represented social and cultural shifts in a woman’s life.<sup>202</sup> Sadler defined menstruation as the “accustomary evacuation of the blood, which every month should come from the matrix.”<sup>203</sup> Blood became part of the dialogue that separated male and female bodies. In the female body, it was potentially embarrassing, as people often linked menstrual blood to excrement and because it definitively indicated sexual difference.<sup>204</sup> Historiographical disagreements about this point to blood as being part of the humoral system. Thomas Laqueur argued that blood was the same as semen or milk and that it only mattered in relation to the balance of fluids within the body.<sup>205</sup> Gail Kern Paster disagreed, arguing that characterizations of blood in the female body specifically referred to female blood as somehow less perfect than blood in the male body.<sup>206</sup>

Midwife manuals issued their opinions on menstruation. Massaria viewed menstruation as excrement, writing that “the terms are purged forth by Nature, as superfluous and

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<sup>200</sup> Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 4-5.

<sup>201</sup> Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 4-5.

<sup>202</sup> Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 1. Read argues that different forms of bleeding represented shifts in how a woman was seen. See also Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 181. Read states that though rarely publicly discussed, vaginal bleeding represented life cycles for women.

<sup>203</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 14.

<sup>204</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 65-66.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 35-37. Additionally, Laqueur argues that early modern belief thought the male body endured a “functional, nonreproductive equivalent” to menstruation, such as bloodletting.

<sup>206</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 79. See also Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 65-66.

unprofitable,” but that there was a male equivalent: seed.<sup>207</sup> Massaria linked puberty in male and female bodies as being the same: when women began their courses, he argued, men began to produce seed. Culpepper, however, argued that menstrual blood was not excrement, just another bodily fluid like seed or milk.<sup>208</sup> Sadler viewed only excess bleeding as waste, describing an overflow of blood as “excrement proceeding from the womb.”<sup>209</sup> Sadler’s argument highlights the sexual difference present in debates about menstrual blood. While blood was a part of humoral theory, authors critiqued women for having too much or too little blood. Menstruation itself confirmed ideas about female inferiority, as it was a punishment rooted in biblical history, but a lack of menstruation indicated physical or emotional disease.<sup>210</sup> Bloodletting was not an equivalent to menstruation, as menstruation was involuntary and punitive.<sup>211</sup> The connection between the womb, dangerous and exclusive to the female body, and menstruation indicated that there could no real equivalent in the male body.

Menstruation in the female body instead invited comparisons regarding the quality of blood in male and female bodies. Gail Kern Paster wrote that even “the finest female blood was less pure, less refined, less perfect than the finest male blood and, one infers, the more inclined to corruption.”<sup>212</sup> The involuntary nature of menstruation disproved the connection between it and bloodletting in men. Menstruation was elusive and individual to each woman. Women could produce too much or too little. Bleeding too much would cause an imbalance in the body. Menstruation, like the womb, signified yet another reason the female body needed surveillance, as it was another indication “of women’s inability to control the workings of her own body.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Massaria, *The Woman’s Counselor*, 14-15.

<sup>208</sup> Culpepper, *Culpepper’s Directory for Midwives*, 66.

<sup>209</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman’s Private Looking-Glass*, 30.

<sup>210</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 82-83.

<sup>211</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 83.

<sup>212</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 79. See also Culpepper, *Culpepper’s Directory for Midwives*, 68.

<sup>213</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 83.

Terms left the body in other ways, Nicholas Culpeper argued, writing that menstrual blood could come out of the nose or in vomit, and that the only cure for blood leaking out of other orifices was to start menstruating.<sup>214</sup> Culpeper described the very onset of menstruation as leaking, because “blood can no longer stay in the veins” so it “breaks out at the veins of the womb.”<sup>215</sup> Seed in men, when associated with puberty and thus linked to menstruation in women, is described like men in reproduction: active and thus under the man’s control. Menstruation is passive, out of the woman’s control, another reminder of the insidious female body, one that resists control or boundaries, and one that leaks to excess or bloats as it withholds.

Menopause acted as another reminder of the nature of the female body, though the term “menopause” was not in print until the nineteenth century.<sup>216</sup> Vaginal bleeding, as previously discussed, represented life changes. Menopause, the cessation of vaginal bleeding, did not represent a change in status.<sup>217</sup> It held no official definition in the early modern period, instead viewed as natural part of ageing.<sup>218</sup> This made it different than bareness. Ageing meant a period of “drying out,” or a process by which people began to lose blood.<sup>219</sup> Massaria wrote that women stopped menstruation around fifty.<sup>220</sup> It was yet another bodily function in the female body that a woman herself could not control. While menopause and ageing were natural, it still created anxiety. The unknowing of when precisely a woman had dried out, when the cessation of her menstruation meant she could no longer get pregnant, represented a different type of social fear connected to pregnancy.

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<sup>214</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 90.

<sup>215</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 66.

<sup>216</sup> Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 37. Midwife manuals and medical texts referred to it as “the cessation of terms.”

<sup>217</sup> Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 171.

<sup>218</sup> Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 176.

<sup>219</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 70. See also Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 171.

<sup>220</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 50. See also Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*, 173-174. The ‘socially accepted’ age in which one could be sure a woman could not get pregnant was sixty.

People used abortion and miscarriage interchangeably. ‘Abortion’ could refer simply to the body naturally terminating the pregnancy. Bodily purges were necessary to maintain health. As the center of the female body, the womb was vital to other organs, and people viewed steps to clean or purge the womb as part of maintaining a healthy female body.<sup>221</sup> Delayed menstruation indicated illness, not necessarily pregnancy, and midwife manuals encouraged women to follow their recipes for purges. In the early modern period, “taking a drug for delayed menstruation was just that and nothing more.”<sup>222</sup> Midwife manuals used the terms abortion and miscarriage interchangeably, offering definitions and causes. *The English Midwife* compared false conceptions, also known as molas, to infants. A lost false conception was “an expulsion,” but “when the infant’s form’d and begins to live, if it come before time ordain’d by nature ‘tis an abortion.”<sup>223</sup> Time was central to the various authors’ definitions of what they referred to as an abortion or abortment.<sup>224</sup> Culpeper defined abortion as “the exclusion of a child, not perfect or living, before legitimate time.”<sup>225</sup> Authors like Massaria used fruit metaphors. Massaria used the term “mischances,” and compared a pregnant woman to a tree with the infant as a fruit, describing the perils in nature that could lead to accidents.<sup>226</sup> Rüff wrote that abortment meant to “bring forth an immature feature, or an untimely fruit.”<sup>227</sup> Chamberlain stated that abortion was

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<sup>221</sup> Lianne McTavish, “Reproduction, c. 1500-1750,” in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present*, eds. Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 357.

<sup>222</sup> John M. Riddle, *Eve’s Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>223</sup> Anonymous, *The English Midwife Enlarged*, 29.

<sup>224</sup> Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, 104-109. Wolveridge, like many others, defined it as an untimely birth. See also Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 33. Guillemeau stated that abortment was a woman “not being able to bear their children the full time.” See also Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London, 1671), 221. Sharp uses the terms interchangeably as well, but also uses the term “effluxion.”

<sup>225</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives*, 172. Culpeper also delineates between what he refers to as natural or legitimate births and illegitimate births. A legitimate birth is one that occurs on its due date “according to the Law of Nature” and an illegitimate birth is “when it is before or after the time.” Culpeper, *Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives*, 171.

<sup>226</sup> Massaria, *The Woman’s Counselor*, 155.

<sup>227</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 161.

“when a woman is delivered of an untimely birth, before the time of maturity and ripeness.”<sup>228</sup> Guillemeau used the term “slippery” as part of his definition, defining it as “a shift, or slipping away, or else abortment, or (as our women call it) a mischance.”<sup>229</sup> In a section on the causes of abortions or miscarriages, Culpeper also uses the word slippery, this time to describe the womb. He writes that “fat women are subject to miscarry by reason of the slipperiness of their wombs, and very lean women for want of nourishment for their child in it.”<sup>230</sup> Midwife manuals usually held the female body responsible for abortions or miscarriages. Culpeper stated the causes to be a weakness or problem with the body and womb.<sup>231</sup> Guillemeau viewed the causes as inward, either “from the mother, or things belonging to her, or from the child.”<sup>232</sup> Wolveridge stated that one cause was a weak woman, who took the nourishment (blood) from her child.<sup>233</sup>

Language was key in discussions of abortion and miscarriage, particularly through the lens of everchanging laws. According to Canon law, “ensoulment occurred in forty days for a male and eighty days for a female,” an idea derived from Aristotle.<sup>234</sup> Ecclesiastical courts tried abortion cases until the 1540s.<sup>235</sup> Three cases shaped the understanding and legal language regarding abortion and miscarriage: the Jury of Matrons Case (1349), The Twinslayer Case

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<sup>228</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, 151.

<sup>229</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 69. See also Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 70. He continues on, writing that up to 40 days after conception, it is a shift, 40 days after conception it is an abortment. He defines abortment as abortment “a violent expulsion, or exclusion of the child already formed and endued with life, before the appointed time. But the sliding away, or shift, is a flower or issuing of the seed, out of the womb, which is not yet, either form'd, or endued with life.”

<sup>230</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 146.

<sup>231</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 145-146.

<sup>232</sup> Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 70.

<sup>233</sup> Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, 105.

<sup>234</sup> Wayne C. Barte and Alice Fleetwood Barte, *Litigating Morality: American Legal Thought and Its English Roots* (New York, Westport, London: Praeger, 1992), 12. This was derived from Aristotle. When it came to discussions on crime, debates formed around the terms formed, or an infant possessing physical characteristics of a human, and animated, or whether or not that infant had a soul. See also John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 20-23. See also Anon., *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, 34-47. The anonymous author says males are ensouled “the 45<sup>th</sup> day after conception,” and females at the 50<sup>th</sup> day. See also Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 16. Rüff argued that ensoulment started once the seeds mixed together, with no other timeframe.

<sup>235</sup> Riddle, *Eve's Herbs*, 129.



(1327), and the Abortionist's Case (1348). The Jury of Matrons case introduced the idea of quickening, though the case itself established precedent on the executions of pregnant women, as it decided that if it was after quickening, the execution had to be postponed until after birth.<sup>236</sup> The Twinslayer and The Abortionist's cases attempted to answer the questions of ensoulment.<sup>237</sup> Even with a shift towards a punishable offense after quickening, that punishment remained only a fine.<sup>238</sup>

The intention of purges in midwife manuals was cleansing to restore health, but authors issued warnings.<sup>239</sup> Culpeper issued one of the most direct and explicit, writing to “be sure you use no means to bring it away before you be sure ‘tis dead, lest you be found little better than murderers another day.”<sup>240</sup> Rüff advised against using “sharp and violent medicines” and voiced concerns that virgins and widows “ensnared and entangled with these arts and devilish practices, have committed cruel and more than brutish murders.”<sup>241</sup> Women learned from each other in the early modern period, which Rüff saw as dangerous, arguing that women taught others how to cause abortions.<sup>242</sup> In *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, midwives are cautioned not to give medicine that would cause an abortion to women “that have unlawfully conceived, which to do, is a high

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<sup>236</sup> Bartee and Bartee, *Litigating Morality*, 13.

<sup>237</sup> Bartee and Bartee, *Litigating Morality*, 15. In the Twinslayer Case, a man beat a pregnant woman so severely that she went into labor, delivering one live and stillborn baby. The living infant was baptized as John but died two days later. The man was found not guilty. In the Abortionist's Case, a man was accused of killing a child in the womb but was found not guilty because the child was never baptized and there was no real proof linking him to its death.

<sup>238</sup> Bartee and Bartee, *Litigating Morality*, 20.

<sup>239</sup> Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 159. Massaria gave signs of a dead child in the womb and advice to help a woman expel it but warned to be sure not to expel a live child.

<sup>240</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 163-164.

<sup>241</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 59. Rüff describes an infant in the womb like “a tender flower and blossom of trees” and warns that it can be “easily cast down and dejected with any blast of wind and rain.” He also emphasizes caution and provides a lengthy list of what could cause a woman to lose the baby: “either by sudden fear, affrightments, by fire, lightening, thunder, with monstrous and hideous aspects and fights of men and beast, by immoderate joy, sorrow and lamentation: or by untemperate exercise and motion of running, leaping, riding, or by forfeit or repletion by meat and drink” and finishes this list with his cautionary tale about physicians and sharp objects. Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 58-59.

<sup>242</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 61.

degree of wickedness, and may be ranked with murder.”<sup>243</sup> This passage likens female sexuality to death, emphasizing social anxieties about the female body. Though these texts encourage purgatives to aid a woman in starting her menstrual cycles again, Chamberlain cautions that “it is of evil consequence to give a woman any thing inwardly to force away, or hasten down the birth.”<sup>244</sup> Birth, by most accounts of male authors, should be natural and at its appropriate time. Engaging in a question and answer section of his book, Culpeper responds to “whether is it lawful to cause an abortion to preserve the mother?” by stating that “a Christian may not cause an abortion for any cause, for it is wicked... Nor must the mother be preserved by the loss of the child.”<sup>245</sup>

### 2.3 Women Speak to Women (Sometimes): Female Authored Midwife Manuals

Though male voices dominated these vernacular texts, we have examples of female-authored midwife manuals. Two midwife manuals, Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book* and Louise Bourgeois Boursier’s *The Complete Midwife’s Practice*, touted experienced midwives as their authors.<sup>246</sup> Sharp’s *The Midwives Book* is the only real record of her life and practice.<sup>247</sup> Boursier’s work is a translation from French, compiled by four unknown authors, with the

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<sup>243</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, 101. The author connects this to his advice on midwives not using a new remedy. There is then a new form of ignorance these male authors are presenting: in trying to learn, women might run the risk of doing real harm to the body. The subtext here is that women can perhaps never learn and should stay dependent on the masculine expertise.

<sup>244</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain’s Midwives Practice*, 115. This line is included in a section on how to tell if a woman is in labor. Many of the authors experience this same problem: trying to maintain the idea of ignorance in women while still stating that women are the best judges of if they are in labor or not.

<sup>245</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives*, 161.

<sup>246</sup> Louise Bourgeois Boursier, *The Complete Midwife’s Practice*, London: 1663. Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, London, 1671.

<sup>247</sup> Ornella Moscucci, “Sharp, Jane (fl. 1641–1671), midwife.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 22 Feb. 2020. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001/odnb-9780198614128-e-45823>.

addition of “Sir Theodore Mayern's Rare Secrets in Midwifery.”<sup>248</sup> While the attribution of a female midwife as an author can be viewed as a marketing tactic, the tones of both of these works are dramatically different from their male-authored counterparts.<sup>249</sup> This is not to say that these works do not engage in referring to women as ignorant of their bodies or as having a cruel and deceitful nature, but the supposed feminine voice speaks to women or the reader, rather than at women or the reader.

Both works criticized the existing male midwife manuals. *The Complete Midwife's Practice* opens with “The Preface by Sundry Practitioners in, and about the City of London” and addresses the work to the “Christian Reader.”<sup>250</sup> It argued that the market was oversaturated with medical texts and that many were “strangely deficient, so crowded with unnecessary notions and dangerous mistakes.”<sup>251</sup> By contrast, *The Complete Midwife's Practice* said that it “may prevent the *almost guilt* of the crying sin of murder.”<sup>252</sup> It explicitly named Ruff and Culpeper as two problematic authors.<sup>253</sup> Their critique of Culpeper centered on his use and repetition of other medical treatises, though this was an established practice in medical texts. They accused *The Directory for Midwives* of being “the most desperately deficient of them all.”<sup>254</sup> *The Complete Midwife's Practice* saw itself instead as contributing to the public good.<sup>255</sup> It referred to Louise Bourgeois Boursier as “that most famous woman of the world,” listing her credentials as “late midwife to the Queen of France; the praises that we read of all those that ever heard of her are

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<sup>248</sup> Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 183. Fissell states that she has been unable to identify that four, presumably male authors.

<sup>249</sup> Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 111.

<sup>250</sup> Louise Bourgeois Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice* (London: 1663), sig. A3r.

<sup>251</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, sig. A3r.

<sup>252</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, sig. A3v-A4r.

<sup>253</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, sig. A3v-A4r.

<sup>254</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, sig. A4r.

<sup>255</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, sig. A4r. It also claimed to have consulted works in French, Spanish, Italian, and “other nations.”

not so much a flourish as truth.”<sup>256</sup> They credited her as an expert due to her “solid experiences” and because “her witnesses have been all of the most eminent persons of France.”<sup>257</sup> This text is not solely using a woman as a marketing tactic, but a well-known woman and her reputation.

Like Boursier, Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book* referred to midwifery as an art. In her introduction, Sharp asserted that “the art of midwifery is doubtless one of the most useful and necessary of all arts, for the being and well-being of mankind.”<sup>258</sup> A portion of Boursier’s text is entitled “Instruction of a famous and dying midwife to her daughter, touching the practice of this art,” its purpose and tone reemphasizing that the author is a woman speaking to a woman, not at a woman.<sup>259</sup> This differed from the rhetorical device employed in Wolveridge’s *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum, or the Irish Midwives Handmaid*, in which a Dr. Philadelphos and midwife Eutrapelia engage in conversations regarding pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>260</sup> Dr. Philadelphos interrogated Eutrapelia, testing the extent of her knowledge.<sup>261</sup>

These characters acted out the public argument of physician versus midwife, or male knowledge versus female knowledge. Boursier, however, was a woman sharing knowledge with another woman, accentuating the concept of female communities and shared knowledge. The issue of gendered knowledge is also in Sharp’s work. She stated that “the holy Scriptures hath recorded Midwives to the perpetual honour of the female Sex. There being not so much as one

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<sup>256</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife’s Practice*, sig. A4r-A4v.

<sup>257</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife’s Practice*, A4v.

<sup>258</sup> Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London, 1671), sig. Br.

<sup>259</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife’s Practice*, 23.

<sup>260</sup> See James Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum, or the Irish Midwives Handmaid* (London, 1670). Philadelphos can be translated into sibling-loving or refer to Kings, and Eutrapelia is Greek for witness, or good for conversation. See also Anonymous, *The English Midwife Enlarged* (London, 1682). This anonymous work borrows extensively from Wolveridge and employs the same rhetorical device with the characters with Dr. Good and Mrs. Eurapelia.

<sup>261</sup> Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum*, 36-75. These pages contain a multitude of chapters, each dedicated to the various positions of an infant in the womb. Dr. Philadelphos interrogates the midwife on how she would proceed to deliver the baby, or babies, in these different positions. The result is that Eutrapelia must defend her knowledge, reassuring the reader of midwives’ wisdom, though it is only confirmed through Dr. Philadelphos’ approval, as if male knowledge accepts female knowledge and yet still believes it to be superior.

word concerning *Men-mid-wives* mentioned there that we can find, it being the natural propriety of women to be much feeling into that art.”<sup>262</sup> Sharp placated male feelings by stating that “it is commonly maintained, that the masculine gender is more worthy than the feminine, though perhaps when men have need of us they will yield the priority to us.”<sup>263</sup>

Sharp and Boursier, though women, are equally as critical as their male counterparts of female knowledge. Boursier lamented that “in these days there are many unskillful women that take upon them the knowledge of midwifery, barely upon the privilege of their age.”<sup>264</sup> Boursier criticized women for ignorance of their own bodies, writing “that many women do miss their design, because they know nothing but the outside of things.”<sup>265</sup> Sharp offers a familiar refrain when she described the qualities that a midwife should embody, such as being God-fearing, faithful, and experienced.<sup>266</sup> Boursier followed a similar pattern to her male counterparts, emphasizing that midwives should not try new methods or remedies unless they are certain they will work.<sup>267</sup> Yet Boursier remained sympathetic to the plight of the midwife, recalling “it happens also many times, that a midwife worthy of that name, doth deliver a woman from death, and yet in the place of much praise she incurs many times much blame.”<sup>268</sup>

Boursier, like the male authors, provided a justification for writing about anatomy, stating that bodies “require not only a deep meditation, but the preeminence to take up the first thoughts of those who would arrive to the knowledge of a thing so much needful to all mankind.”<sup>269</sup> Knowledge was the “requisite to the gaining of so great a skill.”<sup>270</sup> Boursier and Sharp both

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<sup>262</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 2-3.

<sup>263</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 4.

<sup>264</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 99.

<sup>265</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 33.

<sup>266</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, sig. Br.

<sup>267</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 24.

<sup>268</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 10.

<sup>269</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 33.

<sup>270</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 33.

discussed the stones or ovaries, and Boursier's descriptions in particular were distinct from Culpeper's nine differences. Boursier specified that ovaries

are seated in the hollowness of the abdomen; neither do they hang out as in men, but they rest upon the muscles of the loins, and this for that cause that they might be more hot and fruitful; being to elaborate that matter, with which the seed of man engenders man.<sup>271</sup>

She viewed female seed as powerful but agreed that it "receives the perfection of that power from the seed of man."<sup>272</sup> Contrastingly, Culpeper's used his listed differences between men and women to demarcate the female body as lesser. Boursier kept her descriptions simple, to the point, and with less focus on superiority or inferiority. Sharp's description is similar to Boursier's in its brevity, but she offered an addition, writing:

There is towards the neck of the womb on both sides a strong ligament near the haunches, binding the womb to the back, they are like a snail's horns, and therefore are called the horns of the womb.<sup>273</sup>

There are no metaphors of flowers or criticisms of form, as Sharp instead rooted difference in women being something unlike men, rather than less than men. She does, however, later write:

for the parts in men and women are different in number, and likeness, substance, and proportion; the cod of a man turned inside outward is like the womb, yet the difference is so great that they can never be the same.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 65.

<sup>272</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 65.

<sup>273</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 36.

<sup>274</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 82.

Here she again emphasized differences, but not the superiority of the male body. In Sharp's vision male and female bodies must work together, their differences uniting for procreation.<sup>275</sup>

Both women wrote about menstruation, menopause, and blood. Boursier referred to menstrual blood as "the matter of the woman's seed" and that after a period or "purgation" each month "the woman is then in perfect health of body."<sup>276</sup> Sharp discussed menstruation but stated that men experienced bodily changes as well.<sup>277</sup> She addressed the many names for menstruation, writing that:

The monthly courses of women are called termes; in Latin *Menstrua: quasi Monstrua*, for it is a monstrous thing, that no creature but a woman hath them; or else menstrua because they should flow every month; and they are named flowers because fruit follows.<sup>278</sup>

She stated that flowers, terms, or menstruation began at age fourteen and stopped around age fifty to sixty.<sup>279</sup> Boursier categorized blood in a pregnant female body, stating that the purest blood went solely to nourish the infant, thinner blood traveled through the body to the breasts to be turned into milk, and that the "most impure part of blood" stayed in the womb as the afterbirth.<sup>280</sup> She viewed a menstrual cycle as a "purgation" and that after "the woman is then in perfect health of body."<sup>281</sup>

The female body is distinct in these works, particularly for Sharp. Even when putting male and female bodies into comparison for understanding, she relinquished the idea of male superiority. "So a woman is not so perfect as a man, because her heat is weaker," Sharp wrote,

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<sup>275</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 83. Here, for example, Sharp emphasizes the importance of both man's seed and woman's blood.

<sup>276</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 87.

<sup>277</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 84-85.

<sup>278</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 288.

<sup>279</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 288.

<sup>280</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 93.

<sup>281</sup> Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 87.

“but the man can do nothing without the woman to beget children.”<sup>282</sup> Women may be imperfect versions of men, but Sharp defended the female form in a variety of ways. Many male-produced works suggested that women were ashamed of their bodies, while reinforcing body shaming ideas. Sharp contended that “we women have no more cause to be angry, or be ashamed of what nature hath given us than men have, we cannot be without ours no more than they can want theirs.”<sup>283</sup> Though imperfect, Sharp reoriented these narratives of body talk to claim the entire female body and its parts as necessary, and that necessity as equal to men’s. Sharp did not reduce a woman to her womb, but instead insisted on the significance of the female body. If a woman is merely her body, as male authors claim, then that body is one of greatness. Sharp explained procreation through floral metaphors: “Man in the act of procreation is the agent and tiller and sower of the ground, woman is the patient or ground to be tilled; who brings seed also as well as the man to sow the ground with.”<sup>284</sup> In her stories of generation, women may be the still earth, but they contributed to reproduction. She reemphasized that “women are not only passive in procreation, but active also as well as the man though not in so high a degree of action.”<sup>285</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusion

Midwife manuals reveal the anxiety that surrounded the female body in early modern England. That anxiety centered not only on the physical body, but about women and knowledge as well. Authors, both male and female, issued justifications for writing about anatomy in the necessary detail. These texts emphasize the female body as a contested site. All present the

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<sup>282</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 41.

<sup>283</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 33.

<sup>284</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 33.

<sup>285</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 62.



female body as complex and problematic. Except for Boursier, the authors also speak in generalizations, rather than referring to individual cases. Most stated that their writings performed a public good, functioning as an educational tool. Knowledge, however, remained a contentious topic. Male-authored texts accused women of being ashamed and ignorant of their bodies, and midwives of being intellectually deficient. Female authors, by contrast, tried to dispel notions of body shame and reorient ideas that posited the existence of inferior and superior bodies. Male authors seemed unable or unwilling to explain the female body in any language other than that of its comparison to male bodies. Jane Sharp shifted that narrative by doing the reverse. While male authors issued unsolicited advice to midwives, Sharp and Boursier reinforced female knowledge communities.

All midwife texts focused on the female body, including its physical parts and its perceived problems. Male authors differentiated female bodies and their health needs based on marital status. They spoke harshly of female-specific issues, such as menstruation or barrenness. The female body as they described it existed as a duality, a body of excess or a body of moderation. Despite speaking to women and reinforcing female knowledge, Boursier and Sharp largely upheld patriarchal notions about the female body. The way Sharp and Boursier wrote, however, made their texts distinct. They did not speak at women, but to them. Their critiques and advice for midwives came from their own experiences, as did their critiques of women in general. Male authors attempted to dispute claims of knowledge about the female body to legitimize their own writings. By doing so, they attempted to infiltrate female dominated spaces: midwifery, the birthing room, and the female body. Sharp and Boursier act as a barrier to that encroachment.

Pregnancy was exclusive to the cisgender female body. Examining and understanding what people wrote about that body reveals more about the anxiety surrounding it. Pregnancy represented viable concerns about the relationship between women and truth. Authors couched their understandings of birth in terms of legitimacy and illegitimacy. These concerns formed the basis of many anxieties about the female body. It was not only the fear of an unknowable body or a body of excess, but the truthfulness of the body. The next chapter examines cases of petty treason, or a wife murdering her husband. This act upset the natural order of society and the household, enough that a guilty verdict resulted in burning, or the destruction of the unruly female body to restore order. Spousal murder, or a husband killing his wife, was a lesser crime. Looking at these cases allows for a discussion of the textual representations of bodies and voices in these cases, both in trials and printed pamphlets. Truth, in many of these cases, was not what a woman said, but whether or not other people could legitimate her claims.

### 3 THE BLOODY BODY

#### 3.1 Introduction

Bodies were central to murder cases in early modern England. The body of the victim revealed the extent of the violence committed upon it, but court cases, pamphlets, and broadsides decried the bodies of perpetrators as weak, corrupted, and monstrous. Cases of spousal murder reveal how patriarchy constructed language, both in court records as well as printed materials.<sup>286</sup>

Examining spousal murder also points to the most obvious gendered difference in crime: punishment. A husband accused of killing his wife received a murder charge and hanged if found guilty. A woman accused of killing her husband was tried for petty treason, a more serious crime akin to committing acts of violence against the king or images of him and was burned to death if found guilty. There are, however, other notable differences. In cases of wife murder, female victims rarely possessed the agency to speak except to predict their own violent ends. Husbands spoke loudly in cases of petty treason, saving or condemning their wives in their last words. Comparing spousal murder cases allows for a discussion of the use of gendered language in

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<sup>286</sup> They also reveal patriarchal anxiety. See Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2. Breitenberg argues that masculinity is inherently anxious, but that anxiety can be viewed as positive because it motivates the patriarchal system even as it reveals problems within that system. These texts, both printed and the court records, are a way to see that anxious masculinity in action. That anxiety focused on the female body and actions a majority of the time, but men who violated accepted norms of masculinity and legitimized violence also made the patriarchal system nervous. See also Martin J. Wiener, "Alice Arden to Bill Sikes: Changing Nightmares of Intimate Violence in England, 1558-1860," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 2 (Apr. 2001): 184-212. Wiener uses the term "intimate murder" as well as marital homicide.

cases of violent crime and how that language, even when it overlaps, differs for men and women.<sup>287</sup>

The monstrosity of men who killed their wives stemmed from their excess, a personal masculine failure. These cases presented women as silent and forgiving, weak and demure. Cases of petty treason portrayed women as unnatural through their rejection of social norms. Instead of being silent and forgiving, they are vicious and evil, weak enough to succumb to notions of violence through the urging of the devil or of other equally evil women. Petty treason cases occurred at a lower rate than murder and yet the women in petty treason cases, or violent women in general, represented a threat to the social order. Society viewed men that transgressed acceptable boundaries of violence as individual failures of masculine responsibilities, but a woman who committed petty treason represented the potential threat that all women were capable of murder.

This chapter uses court records from London and the Home Counties, as well as a variety of pamphlets and broadsides printed throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>288</sup> It first examines murder cases, dividing the violence into distinct categories. There are more cases of spousal murder with a husband killing his wife than cases of petty treason.<sup>289</sup> The violence perpetrated against female bodies, both in court cases and pamphlets, is much higher and often more graphic. Portrayals often denied women a voice or ignored them. Pamphlet literature and the voices contained within were important because of their intent. Pamphlets acted as social warnings,

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<sup>287</sup> Society viewed violent women as “doubly deviant” because they violated both social and gender norms. Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), ix.

<sup>288</sup> Susan C. Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 3. Staub argues that pamphlet literature reflected and shaped popular culture and “because they were produced quickly and for a general audience, they may more clearly reflect the period’s contradictory attitudes.”

<sup>289</sup> K.J. Kesselring, *Making Murder Public: Homicide in Early Modern England, 1480-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 15. Petty treason, Kesselring argues, was the “law protecting hierarchies of power.”

wishing the reader to identify more with the killer than victim and pushing religious ideology as part of state control.<sup>290</sup>

I discuss the law then examine cases that resulted in a not guilty verdict. Voices are important to petty treason cases as well. Men in these cases used their last breaths to condemn their wives, while printed portrayals commodified the female voice to create social and religious warnings. The bodies of alleged murderesses represented unnaturalness, confirming the social unease regarding the female body. As will be discussed in a later chapter, some social anxiety stemmed from its medical and physical unknowability. A criminalized female body, demonstrated both through petty treason and infanticide cases, represented a larger threat, the unpredictability of women.

### **3.2 “Mother, your son has kill'd me!:" The Body and Voices in Cases of Wife Murder**

Descriptive language in court cases, indictments, and printed materials articulated the harm done to women's bodies at the hands of their husbands, accusing men of clutching, throwing, striking, stabbing, and poisoning their wives. Five distinct categories emerged from the sources, including murder by physical blows, by strangulation or broken neck, by poison, by stabbing, and through forms of extreme violence. In cases involving the first four categories, the body of the wife was usually absent from the accounts. Focus instead centered on the violence of the man, what exactly he did *to* her body and the punishment he received for it. Cases that involved extreme violence, however, contained graphic depictions of the female body. Men spoke in their own defense, insinuating that their wives caused their violence. Women were

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<sup>290</sup> Kesselring, *Making Murder Public*, 134. I use the term state here because Kesselring uses the term.

either silent or ignored in these cases. It is important to note that a man's violence as transgressive and unnatural did not feminize him. A failure of a man was still a man, but his failure harmed the structures of patriarchy. Spousal murder cases demonstrated that despite portrayals of men as unnatural through their violence, there was a legitimacy to levels of violence and that cases did not represent generalized social examples but rather episodes of personal masculine failure.

### 3.2.1 *Physical Blows*

Striking, hitting, and beating were common themes in cases of husbands murdering their wives. People debated marital violence in the early modern period.<sup>291</sup> A husband's responsibilities included maintaining their household and that maintenance might require physical discipline, but society frowned on a man who enjoyed violence on the body of his wife, especially if that violence crossed into murder.<sup>292</sup> One man "assaulted his wife with a broom, and kicked her on the right side under the ribs, and by so kicking her gave her a mortal blow of which she languished till the seventh day of the following July, when she died from the said blow."<sup>293</sup> Margaret Bownes visited her husband at work to discuss pawning her petticoat;

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<sup>291</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, "Being Stirred to Much Unquietness": Violence and Domestic Violence" in Early Modern England" in *Journal of Women's History* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 70. Amussen also writes that "domestic violence reveals the nature of male power in a family and how it is used to enforce the subordination of women and children."

<sup>292</sup> Amussen, "Being Stirred to Much Unquietness," 78. Abuse from a husband, however, did not create a strong argument for self-defense in cases of wives killing their husbands, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In terms of masculine violence as part of maintaining household order Amussen writes that "a woman's life should not be endangered, and correction should be appropriate to the offense."

<sup>293</sup> "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1555," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 1, 1550-1603*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1886), 21-26. British History Online, accessed April 2, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol1/pp21-26>.

William Bownes disagreed with her and “struck her on the head with his cudgel.”<sup>294</sup> Thomas Mylles faced accusations that he beat his wife and son before throwing them in a sawpit.<sup>295</sup> He died in jail.<sup>296</sup> John Kytter “attacked his wife with a piece of wood, inflicting injuries from which she died” and was hanged.<sup>297</sup> A court found Edward Haddaway guilty of manslaughter, a lesser crime, after he “beat his wife on the back, sides and buttocks with a faggot bat” and Mary Haddaway died instantly from the beating.<sup>298</sup> Rebecca Davis “died by divine visitation” after her husband “thrust and threw down his wife onto a fire-grate in their house.”<sup>299</sup> Margaret Stephens died the day after her husband “‘clutched’ the back of her head,” though the court ruled there was insufficient evidence to convict.<sup>300</sup> William Smythe “punched his wife violently on the neck” until “she bled profusely from the nose” until she died a few days later.<sup>301</sup> A fight between Andrew and Elizabeth Kennett became physical as he “enraged, attacked his wife, punching and kicking her.”<sup>302</sup> Elizabeth hit her head and died from the injury, though Andrew was found not guilty.<sup>303</sup> John Edwards received the benefit of clergy after pushing his wife so violently to the

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<sup>294</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Hertfordshire Indictments, James I* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1975), 196. William Bownes was found guilty and allowed clergy. See also J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles I* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1995), 136-137. In this case, Thomas Clout “struck Mary on the head with a staff” and she died hours later. Clout was also found guilty and allowed clergy.

<sup>295</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1978), 462.

<sup>296</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 462.

<sup>297</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 481.

<sup>298</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II, 1660-1675* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1995), 827.

<sup>299</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II*, 365.

<sup>300</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II*, 597.

<sup>301</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1979), 45. He was found not guilty.

<sup>302</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 281.

<sup>303</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 281. It was ruled that John Atnock killed her. “John Atnock” is one name for fictional murderers, a device used by the courts in cases where it was obvious a crime had occurred, but guilt was not obvious. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. See Luke Wilson, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 175-177. See also Louis A. Knafila, “‘John at Love Killed Her!’: The Assizes and Criminal Law in Early Modern England,” *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 35, no. 3 (Summer, 1985): 303-320.

floor that she died days later from injuries.<sup>304</sup> Simon Cooke was hanged for assaulting his wife.<sup>305</sup> In each of these cases, regardless of the verdict, the woman's body is absent from the depiction of violence and the focus centers on the violence and actions of men. We read what the men have done to their wives, but not what happens to the woman's body, only that they die from the violence they endure.<sup>306</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Stabbing*

Cases of stabbing differ. In these cases, the violence is more obvious and there is a higher rate of guilty verdicts. These cases, however brief, emphasized how and where the wound fell.<sup>307</sup> Additionally in 1604, James I enacted "An Act to take away the Benefit of Clergy from some kind of Manslaughter," which condemned to death those who stabbed a person with no weapon,

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<sup>304</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Surrey Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1980), 133.

<sup>305</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1975), 77.

<sup>306</sup> See also J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex Indictments, James I* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1975), 95. Alexander Cane was found not guilty after beating Alice Cane with a 'pitchprong' and she died from her injuries. J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, 1649-1659* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989), 61. There was not enough evidence to convict Richard Copland for Bridget Copland's death after he beat her with a staff. See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, 1649-1659*, 69. Richard Silke was found not guilty after Susan Silke died from a bruise he caused on her side.

<sup>307</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Hertfordshire Indictments, James I*, 72. Henry Gates was found guilty of murdering Margaret Gates by stabbing her with a knife. See also RF Hunnisett, ed., *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1558-1603* (Surrey & Kew: PRO Publications, 1996), 118. In 1594, Ralph Mephram "murdered his wife Joan at Mayfield with a knife worth 2d which he held in his right hand, giving her a wound in the throat of which she died at Mayfield within an hour." See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex Indictments, James I*, 5. Thomas Alderton confessed to stabbing Joyce Alderton. See also "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1624," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 2, 1603-25*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1887), 176-186. *British History Online*, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol2/pp176-186>. Nathaniel Tindall or Grindall "killed and murdered his wife Joan Tindall alias Grindall by striking her on the throat and left breast with a knife, and so giving her two mortal wounds of which she then and there died instantly." See also "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1625," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 1-6. *British History Online*, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp1-6>. William Poole stabbed Elizabeth Poole in the stomach, "of which wound she died on the fifth day of the said month."



and if the victim died within a month of the wound.<sup>308</sup> This law is gendered in that it specifically takes away the benefit of clergy, exclusively offered to men, and it also states its cause as stopping those “who heretofore have been thereunto emboldened by presuming on the benefit of clergy.”<sup>309</sup> Convicted women could plead pregnancy to gain leniency. This would result in a physical examination to check for quickening, or movement. If there were no movement, the execution would proceed. These laws codified physical, sexual difference. Even with limitations, men found other ways to argue their innocence.

George Gadesby, accused of stabbing his wife, attempted to circumvent a guilty verdict by blaming her. The 1697 case involved witnesses, his own testimony, and his strategy to avoid execution, which included begging witnesses “to prove that his wife was a grievous scold, and one that would never suffer him to be at quiet, let him do what he could for her.”<sup>310</sup> Gadesby, a butcher by trade, “did stick and stab his said wife” with a knife “on the right thigh near to the groin...of which she instantly died.”<sup>311</sup> Both a child and Gadesby’s own mother witnessed the violence.<sup>312</sup> Gadesby expressed remorse in his confession, but the trial repeatedly emphasized his anger. He was found guilty both of murder and the Statute of Stabbing, and was executed.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> “1° James I c. 8, An Act to take away the Benefit of Clergy from some kind of Manslaughter, 1604,” in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1026. Also known as the Statute of Stabbing.

<sup>309</sup> “1° James I c. 8,” 1026. For a brief introduction to benefit of clergy, see Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, “Crime and Justice - Punishment Sentences at the Old Bailey”, Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0, 11 February 2020 )

<sup>310</sup> Trial of George Gadesby (t16970519-27), [27 February 1697] Old Bailey Proceedings Online. Accessed at <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t16970519-27>.

<sup>311</sup> Trial of George Gadesby (t16970519-27), [27 February 1697] Old Bailey Proceedings Online. Accessed at <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t16970519-27>. The exact measurement of her wound was included in the trial, “of the breadth of an inch, and of the depth of three inches.”

<sup>312</sup> Trial of George Gadesby (t16970519-27), [27 February 1697] Old Bailey Proceedings Online. Accessed at <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t16970519-27>. The boy hears Mary Gadesby cry out and Gadesby mother tries to help Mary by holding her hand to the wound.

<sup>313</sup> Trial of George Gadesby (t16970519-27), [27 February 1697] Old Bailey Proceedings Online. Accessed at <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t16970519-27>.

Little is revealed about his wife, Mary. The only time Mary is given a voice is through the child witness who claims he heard her cry out “Mother, Mother, your son has kill'd me!”<sup>314</sup> Gadesby attempts to construct his wife as a scold as a means to avoid death, by suggesting that Mary’s words forced him into the temper that resulted in her murder. Even though Gadesby’s attempt failed, this emphasizes male legitimization to specific forms of violence in order to control women. Casting his wife as a scold was an effort to make Mary appear as an instigator. In this case specifically, the statute of stabbing established Mary as a victim who wielded no weapon against her husband. Except for her cry at her murder, Mary is voiceless.

As with the case of George Gadesby, George Allen attempted to legitimize his violence through victim-blaming, although to no avail. The crime garnered enough attention to warrant the production of a pamphlet. In *News from the Sessions or, the Whole Trial of George Allen the Butcher*, George Allen received the nickname “the Butcher” after accusations of previously attempting to poison his wife, and when that failed, stabbing her.<sup>315</sup> Allen and his unnamed wife lived apart, but his “fair words prevailed with the woman’s credulity and good nature” as he manipulated her into thinking they might live together again.<sup>316</sup> He was “studying to destroy her” and “near the gravel-pits, a place fit for his hellish purpose, he fell upon her.”<sup>317</sup> When the news of a woman’s body reached her father and uncle they were immediately afraid it could be her, “this person murdered by her unnatural husband.”<sup>318</sup> The pamphlet has Allen appear somewhat remorseful, but even though in print he confesses, he still pled not guilty.<sup>319</sup> The trial transcript,

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<sup>314</sup> Trial of George Gadesby (t16970519-27), [27 February 1697] Old Bailey Proceedings Online. Accessed at <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t16970519-27>.

<sup>315</sup> Anonymous, *News from the Sessions or, the Whole Trial of George Allen the Butcher* (London, 1675), 5.

<sup>316</sup> Anon., *News from the Sessions*, 4.

<sup>317</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1675, trial of Butcher (t16750219-2).

<sup>318</sup> Anon., *News from the Sessions*, 4.

<sup>319</sup> Anon., *News from the Sessions*, 5.

however, shows Allen in a more vicious light. Allen “justified it both by his words and carriage, for when the court asked him if he did not find a remorse and trouble in his spirit for what he had done, he replied that it did not, and that his wife might thank herself for what she suffered for that she urged him to it.”<sup>320</sup>

Very little is revealed about his wife in the pamphlet or in the trial. She is never named, nor does it hint at what Allen might have accused her of doing to instigate him to such brutal violence. The pamphlet uses the violence done to her body to rebuke Allen, calling his crime “sadly remarkable above others” because it was “perpetrated on a poor innocent of the weaker sex, and the nearest relation in the world.”<sup>321</sup> The court record described Allen as “knavish,” and as “that bloody and inhumane Villain, the Butcher.”<sup>322</sup> Pamphlets used descriptors like ‘bloody’, ‘inhumane’, and ‘monsters’ to describe men who killed their wives, giving them space and agency to speak. Their wives, however, often remain nameless and voiceless, defined by their softness and ability to forgive.

### 3.2.3 *Strangulation and Poison*

Guilty verdicts were harder to obtain in cases of strangulation or poison, presumably because the exact cause of death was harder to know. In one case, a man ““did press and wrest’ his wife’s neck, killing her instantly,” but the courts found him not guilty, stating that “she drowned herself in a pond.”<sup>323</sup> Guilty verdicts occurred when the violence was more obvious,

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<sup>320</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1675, trial of Butcher (t16750219-2).

<sup>321</sup> Anon., *News from the Sessions*, A2r.

<sup>322</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1675, trial of Butcher (t16750219-2).

<sup>323</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed. *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles I* (London: HMSO, 1995), 321.

such as a broken neck.<sup>324</sup> Many cases of strangulation occurred in the home. This transgression of masculine authority represented personal masculine failures in which not only did a head of household violate his own authority, but did so within the confines of the space he supposedly kept under control. Court cases often indicated if the crime took place within the household. Robert Hill was found guilty after accusations that “in his own house Hill assaulted his wife and strangled her.”<sup>325</sup> John Porter “strangled his wife as she lay asleep.”<sup>326</sup>

Cases of poisoning could be complex. In a 1583 case, the court jointly convicted Thomas Hayward and a woman simply known as “his wife” for poisoning their spouses to be able to marry.<sup>327</sup> A 1594 coroner's inquest accused Thomas Robinson of poisoning his wife Bridget by inserting “broken glass and poison” into her vagina.<sup>328</sup> He was found guilty and hanged.<sup>329</sup> A pamphlet titled “The Examination, Confession, and Condemnation of Henry Robson” told a similar story.<sup>330</sup> He purchased ratsbane from another man who instructed him to “temper it with

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<sup>324</sup> This was not always true though. Even in cases where violence was obvious, men were still found not guilty. “Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1601,” in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 1, 1550-1603*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1886), 266-276. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol1/pp266-276>. Robert Budden confessed to “with malice aforethought, and murdered her by seizing her neck with his hands and wringing and breaking it.” See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 99. William Hunt was found guilty of assaulting his wife and breaking her neck. See also *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 146. Richard Sharpe “assaulted Elizabeth his wife, broke her neck and threw her in a pond.” He was found not guilty. See also J.S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, James I*, 76, 122. See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles I*, 6. Edward Hayward was found guilty as he “attacked his wife and broke her neck.” See also J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex, James I* (London: HMSO, 1982), 76. John Revell was found guilty of attacking and strangling his wife Alice. See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex, James I*, 112. Her husband broke Jane Abstan's neck and she died from the injury after three days; he was found not guilty.

<sup>325</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 127.

<sup>326</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Surrey Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 109. He was found guilty.

<sup>327</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 202. Both found guilty.

<sup>328</sup> Hunnisett, *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1558-1603*, 116-117.

<sup>329</sup> Hunnisett, *Sussex Coroner's Inquests 1558-1603*, 117. Bridget's death was assumed to be caused by him “putting a mixture of glass and poison into her abdomen by way of her private parts.” Given modern knowledge of female anatomy, I would argue that she probably died from the insertion of the poison no matter where it was, or from an infection or bleeding.

<sup>330</sup> Anonymous, *The Examination, Confession, and Condemnation of Henry Robson, Fisherman of Rye, Who Poisoned His Wife in the Strangest Manner that Ever Hitherto Hath Been Heard Of*, London, 1598.

glass small beaten and wrapped in the skin of a shoulder of mutton...and in the night when his wife should next come to lie with him, he should convey it into her privie parts.”<sup>331</sup> His wife is unnamed in the pamphlet, though her body and suffering receive attention. After falling ill, “her body began to swell more and more.”<sup>332</sup> An autopsy revealed “in every vein both glass and ratsbane” and Henry was hanged for his crime.<sup>333</sup> Mary Brightline’s death was ruled “divine visitation” after her husband faced accusations of poisoning her.<sup>334</sup> In 1610, John Sharpe was accused and found not guilty of a lengthy poisoning of his wife Jane Sharpe, from December 1608 until her death in July 1609.<sup>335</sup> In 1619, Henry Trott was found not guilty of “intending to murder Jane his wife” after he allegedly put “ratsbane in a ‘buttered pumpkin’ and placed it in a cupboard.”<sup>336</sup> In 1620, Thomas Lovedaie was found guilty of poisoning his wife with mercury.<sup>337</sup>

The case of Edmund Allen, who was convicted of poisoning his wife, attracted attention as a pamphlet. *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen*, accused him of “abusing his loving and tender wife by cruelly beating her several times with a bull’s pizzle.”<sup>338</sup> The trial records depicted Allen as having “been a most cruel and barbarous man to his wife in evil treating her.”<sup>339</sup> The Ordinary’s account stated that Allen said “they did not disagree in their conversation, till some persons raised

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<sup>331</sup> Anon., *The Examination, Confession, and Condemnation of Henry Robson*, A4r.

<sup>332</sup> Anon., *The Examination, Confession, and Condemnation of Henry Robson*, A4v.

<sup>333</sup> Anon., *The Examination, Confession, and Condemnation of Henry Robson*, Br-B2v.

<sup>334</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 400.

<sup>335</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, James I* (London: HMSO, 1980), 81.

<sup>336</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, James I*, 219. This case also involved multiple people providing recognizances of evidence against him and yet he was still found not guilty.

<sup>337</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments, James I*, 247.

<sup>338</sup> Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.* (London, 1695), 1. It also states that he caused her to miscarry. See also Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 06 April 2019), July 1695, trial of Edmund Allen (t16950703-19). The trial also says his physical abuse led his wife to miscarry and that he “like a base wretch would suffer none of the women to come near her.”

<sup>339</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 06 April 2019), July 1695, trial of Edmund Allen (t16950703-19).

discord betwixt them.”<sup>340</sup> Printed narratives focused on this “discord,” with the author writing that for Allen “dissembled love turned into hatred” for his wife.<sup>341</sup> Additionally, the courts had previously convicted Allen of bigamy.<sup>342</sup> To poison his wife, Allen manipulated her, as “he seemingly showed more respect to his wife, than he did at other times” and gave her food “in which he had infused the white mercury,” according to the trial transcript.<sup>343</sup> When she languished in pain, he “gave her opium in a drinking potion, and on the day following she died.”<sup>344</sup> Allen denied the crime, that “he could not prove it, but said that he had not done any wrong to his wife.”<sup>345</sup> He “persisted in his resolution, saying, Urge me no more; do not put me into a fret tempt me not to tell a lie, but leave me to myself, I will neither confess it, nor deny it.”<sup>346</sup> The pamphlet showed Allen very differently at the end of his life, functioning as a redemption piece as he went to “a very penitent end.”<sup>347</sup> His wife, Frances Artis or Allen, receives very little attention beyond the pain inflicted on her body, even in the printed pamphlet.

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<sup>340</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, July 1695 (OA16950712).

<sup>341</sup> Anon., *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.*, 1.

<sup>342</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), July 1695, trial of Edmund Allen (t16950703-19). The transcript states “besides, it appeared he had been an ill liver, and kept company with one Dorothy Edwards, and had been convicted at the Assizes in Suffolk for having two wives.” See also Anon., *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.*, 1. The pamphlet describes Allen as having “fell into the court of lewd women.” See also Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, July 1695 (OA16950712). Allen confessed to the Ordinary “that he had married two women formerly at the same time, for which he was burnt in the Hand, about fifteen Years since.”

<sup>343</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), July 1695, trial of Edmund Allen (t16950703-19). See also Anon., *of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.*, 1. The full title includes “and last of all, most barbarously and inhumanely poisoning her, by giving her white mercury, which he unhappily mixed with raspberry jelly”

<sup>344</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), July 1695, trial of Edmund Allen (t16950703-19). See also Anon., *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.*, 2.

<sup>345</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), July 1695, trial of Edmund Allen (t16950703-19).

<sup>346</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 06 April 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, July 1695 (OA16950712).

<sup>347</sup> Anon., *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.*, 2.

This differs greatly from pamphlets of husband murder, as will be discussed, as men often are given the voice to condemn their killers. When we look at cases of wife murder, however, women very rarely are given a voice, and men are not as strongly rebuked.

### 3.2.4 *Cases of Extreme Violence*

Some records of wife murder revealed details of extreme violence and abuse upon the wife's body prior to her death. In 1576, the court convicted Richard Colley of murder after he assaulted his wife with a candlestick, "knocked her down the stairs and then strangled her with a corner-kerchief."<sup>348</sup> These cases are often more detailed, speaking harshly about the husband and with kindness toward the wife. As will be discussed later on, pamphlets of wives killing their husbands were more abundant and arguably more sensationalized. Though lesser in number, pamphlets of husbands killing their wives do exist. In *Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by Kind*, John Arthur is described as a "deformed creature," disabled and impoverished, and now a murderer.<sup>349</sup> John Arthur thus represented several social anxieties in one body, and indeed his body more than the violence enacted on that of his wife's is at the center of this story. In a poem entitled "The Cripples Complaint in the Dungeon at Newgate," the voice of Arthur writes that "I was misshaped by kind/Deformed also was my mind."<sup>350</sup> He became betrothed to a woman, also disabled and a beggar, but refused to marry her.<sup>351</sup> The author chastised John Arthur for not

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<sup>348</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Surrey Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 139.

<sup>349</sup> Anonymous, *Deeds Against Nature and Monsters By Kind* (London, 1614), A2r. This pamphlet also contains a story of a woman committing infanticide, which will be analyzed in a later chapter.

<sup>350</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, Br.

<sup>351</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, A2v. The woman is also described as "knowing herself to be but his strumpet" because he promised marriage, but never wedded her. Both John Arthur and his female companion are representative of social fears about certain bodies- both vagabonds, both deformed, both fallen due to sexual lust.

loving this woman who was so similar to him stating that he “spent the same in the service of the devil, as in blasphemy, swearing, drunkenness, and such” and that he began to “loath her company, though he himself might be thought the more loathsome.”<sup>352</sup> He lured her to a place where “rogue and night walkers” stayed and strangled her with her own girdle in her sleep, the author commenting that “who would have thought such an outcast of the world, such a lame deformed creature, not able of his own strength to help himself, should have power to take away another’s life.”<sup>353</sup> Arthur is described as “a monster by kind and the doer of a deed against nature.”<sup>354</sup>

Adam Sprackling of *The Bloody Husband* was a monster as well. Sprackling went to “taphouses, and there to rant and roar, game and swear exceedingly, upon the least provocation, and used to quarrel and draw his weapon, &c. He regarded not the Sabbath, but profaned it at home,” a man in debts and nearing prison, a man so terrible his wife Katherine occasionally had to “lock up herself from him.”<sup>355</sup> Sprackling was volatile and unpredictable, but what aggravated him to the point of murder is the suspicion that his wife is going to give him to the bailiffs for his debts.<sup>356</sup> The violence of Sprackling was indeed bloody and grotesque, sensationalized and horrific, an absolute violation of the maintenance of a household. Returning home in a rage, “he on a sudden drew his dagger, and struck her with it on the face, which blow hurt her jaw,” then

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<sup>352</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, A2v.

<sup>353</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, A3r. The answer to this is that the devil aids Arthur in his violence.

<sup>354</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, A3v.

<sup>355</sup> Anonymous, *The Bloody Husband* (London, 1653), 2. See also Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195. Shepard argues that early modern patriarchy defined manhood as a man being self-sufficient, economically independent, and responsible for others. In early modern England, not all men benefitted from the patriarchal system, as some men were deemed unfit and unworthy. If we accept Shepard’s concept of masculine worth and economics, then cases of men wanting more money or unable to sustain their own economic worth are not true men under the patriarchal system.

<sup>356</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 7. Sprackling, in this same letter, uses this as a justification for what he has done.



“took a knife and cut her wrist” so that “her hand hung down only by the sinews and skin” and later hit her in the head with a large knife or cleaver.<sup>357</sup>

Katherine behaved patiently, afraid, and quiet, that “her words to him were full of loving and sweet expressions.”<sup>358</sup> His wife possessed a voice, but no words, and offered no reproach of her husband even as he continuously and violently harmed her. In the midst of this violence, she prayed to forgive her husband, and as an interruption to her prayers Sprackling “chopped her head in the midst of the brains, so that she fell down stark dead instantly, lying in her own blood.”<sup>359</sup> The court convicted Sprackling, but the story takes its most painful twist when it is revealed that Sprackling is buried next to the wife he so brutally murdered.<sup>360</sup>

Sprackling killed six dogs and arranged them around Katherine’s body in an attempt to plead insanity.<sup>361</sup> He called two physicians and women to declare him mad, but “none could swear he was distracted, near, at, or after the murder committed; only that he used to be outrageous in passion, etc.”<sup>362</sup> His refusal to repent included his statement that “no man can judge between man and wife, but God alone.”<sup>363</sup> Gory cases like Sprackling were not the norm, but not necessarily outliers either. In 1565, Henry Pellyng murdered his pregnant wife Joan by striking her three times with an axe, “leading to the shedding of her brains of which she immediately died.”<sup>364</sup> The coroner’s inquest referred to Henry as “a frantic man” and he pled

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<sup>357</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 3.

<sup>358</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 3.

<sup>359</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 4. It states that he cuts her legs in two places post-mortem.

<sup>360</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 6, 12.

<sup>361</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 4.

<sup>362</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 10-11.

<sup>363</sup> Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 10-11.

<sup>364</sup> Hunnisett, *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1558-1603*, 5-6. He may also be known as Henry Pellam. See also J.S. Cockburn, editor. *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1975), 35.

not guilty due to insanity.<sup>365</sup> The courts originally convicted him, but reversed the decision after Henry was ruled insane.<sup>366</sup>

Wives were not the only targets of male resentment and transgressive violence. In *Bloody News from Hampshire*, the husband wished to marry another woman, one with more money, “and therefore after a long debate between the devil and his own wicked heart they clap up a bargain to dispatch the poor wretch out of the world.”<sup>367</sup> He tricked his wife with kindness by promising to escort her to a doctor for her hearing and murdered her in a field, “cutting her throat and giving her two or three great wounds besides, and then hid the body a pretty space out of the way amongst the bushes.”<sup>368</sup> Returning to her home, he found his son crying for his mother, and he murdered his son “by knocking his brains out with a club, and then flinging his body into the said pond.”<sup>369</sup> When neighbors noticed the mother and son missing, the husband became a suspect, admitted to his crime and went to jail.<sup>370</sup>

These men are described as having lost control of their domestic lives through their personal excess. This excess differed from the descriptions of the female body as one of excess. Instead of a physical corruption that indicated a potential problem in all women, men of excess wanted too much, resulting in personal masculine failure. Adam Sprackling’s debts indicated his personal failures as a ruler of a household. His sadistic violence confirmed his masculine failure. The disgust at these men for killing their families is real in both pamphlets, evidenced from the titles that include words like inhumane, unnatural, and bloody, but within that is an assumption of the fragility of men and masculinity. The desires of the Inhumane Husband led him to “a bad

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<sup>365</sup> Hunnisett, *Sussex Coroners’ Inquests 1558-1603*, 5-6.

<sup>366</sup> Hunnisett, *Sussex Coroners’ Inquests 1558-1603*, 5-6.

<sup>367</sup> Anon., *Bloody News from Hampshire*, 2. Before resorting to murder, he tries to send them to Virginia. Anon., *Bloody News from Hampshire*, 3.

<sup>368</sup> Anon., *Bloody News from Hampshire*, 4.

<sup>369</sup> Anon., *Bloody News from Hampshire*, 5.

<sup>370</sup> Anon., *Bloody News from Hampshire*, 6.

woman” and the devil.<sup>371</sup> Women accused of petty treason were also accused of being weak, but this was a fault in feminine nature overall. These men crossed the boundaries of legitimized violence in the early modern period due to their lapse in the maintenance and control of their own household and thus of themselves.

### 3.2.5 *Voices*

When women speak in trial transcripts or pamphlets, they warned their neighbors of the ways in which their husbands transgressed and violated their bodies, and often predicted their own ends. Martha Green “complained to her neighbors when she lay languishing upon her death-bed” after her husband had “beat his wife upon the breast, back and belly, by kicking and striking her, insomuch that she was very much bruised in several parts of her body.”<sup>372</sup> A woman referred to only as Elizabeth J “declared to her landlady, Mrs. Godman, and her family after supper, on the overnight, that her husband had sent for her into St. James's Street, about 7 a Clock, where she was going, and that she should not come home that night.”<sup>373</sup> Though not given a voice, Jane Jenkins’ association with her master, “a very worthy gentleman, one Mr. Phipps, a councillor, in Bedford-Row in Holbourn,” arguably helped her by calling greater attention to the crime, even as she was silenced.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Anon., *Bloody News from Hampshire*, title page.

<sup>372</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of Thomas Green (t16910909-16).

<sup>373</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of B - J - (t16910909-51).

<sup>374</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1697, trial of David Jenkins (t16970707-21).

When given voices, men attempted to justify their crimes. Thomas Green was “a person of a very rude behavior” who threatened his neighbors and murdered his wife because of “the Devil that put him on.”<sup>375</sup> Besides confiding in neighbors, Martha Green spoke another time in the trial transcript: on her deathbed, when “the prisoner came to kiss her, but she immediately screekt out and refused to embrace him.”<sup>376</sup> Green defended himself by claiming that his wife “had been sick before” and was acquitted.<sup>377</sup> The case of Elizabeth J follows a pattern similar to others: lured out by her husband and then brutally stabbed. Her husband, referred to as B-J, could not account for his whereabouts and returned home that evening with cuts on his fingers.<sup>378</sup> The court called his defense “frivolous pretenses by way of extenuation, which did not tend at all to his advantage” and he was found guilty and sentenced to death.<sup>379</sup> David Jenkins stabbed wife Jane in a fit of jealous rage after she spoke to “the gentleman that he had forewarned her of keeping company with.”<sup>380</sup> The actual violence occurred when she prevented him from going after the man and so his defense hinged on the idea that he had been enraged or in a fit of passion.<sup>381</sup> Jenkins ruined his own defense, as at the time of the murder he told a witness “you

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<sup>375</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of Thomas Green (t16910909-16). Green had also “tore her with some instrument in her privy parts, in a most horrid manner,” which he again blames the devil for causing him to harm his wife.

<sup>376</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of Thomas Green (t16910909-16).

<sup>377</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of Thomas Green (t16910909-16).

<sup>378</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of B - J - (t16910909-51). The trial transcript also includes graphic descriptions of Elizabeth’s body, which was “exposed in a very undecent manner, her coats turn’d up, her hand all bloody, lying upon her thigh, her throat cut, as also her breast, with a mortal wound under her left ear, her face covered over with blood, and a piece of a case knife, valu’d 1d. lying betwixt her face and her hood, in a most horrible amazing, and most frightful manner, with her body luke-warm.”

<sup>379</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1691, trial of B - J - (t16910909-51).

<sup>380</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1697, trial of David Jenkins (t16970707-21).

<sup>381</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1697, trial of David Jenkins (t16970707-21). He “made it appear, that he was in a great rage at that time, thinking there by to extenuate his crime.”

will see what is the matter, for she has been a whore long enough.”<sup>382</sup> The court found Jenkins guilty.

When we look at crime in early modern pamphlets, the prevalence of those detailing petty treason offers a skewed perspective of domestic violence at that time. This prevalence does not prove that more women committed murder in their household, but that it was considered uncommon and thus received more attention. Society became fixated on petty treason because it represented a transgression of the natural hierarchy, and in return, necessitated the total destruction of the female body to return to order. Men were legitimized to violence in a way that women were not, but murder remained a transgression, both of social and religious norms. Cases and print both portrayed men who killed their wives as out of control. Women had little to no agency or voice in these examples, and attention centered on male action. Many men attempted legal defenses that cast their wives as instigators deserving of the violence perpetrated against them. Male unnaturalness linked to improper masculinity, or abuses of power as head of household.

### **3.3 “To be burned until she be dead:” The Female Body and Petty Treason**

#### ***3.3.1 The Law***

A wife killing her husband was considered a more serious crime than murder, known as petty treason. A 1351 act defined petty treason, which included a variety of offenses, such as to

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<sup>382</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1697, trial of David Jenkins (t16970707-21). His repeated degradation of his wife after he killed her did not stop there. Jenkins also claimed that she had been sick and abusive.

“imagine the death of our Lord the King,” or “if a man bring false money into this realm.”<sup>383</sup>

Petty treason and the burning of women ended in 1790, though it remained on the books until 1828.<sup>384</sup> The transgression of murder, specifically someone in lesser power murdering someone above them, was considered “another manner of treason that is to say, when a servant slayeth his master, or a wife her husband.”<sup>385</sup> The punishment for a woman who murdered her husband was burning, which was intended to make examples of these women and their crimes. A 1677 pamphlet title *Murder and Petty-Treason* stated that,

Tis strange if not the Laws of God or Nature, yet that the severity of the punishment inflicted in such cases by the law should not deter all women from such traitorous attempts; for so it is, for them to rebel against and destroy their husbands, whom the institution of God and Laws of the land have declared to be their head and governors : And if they prove unkind, cruel or unreasonable, they out to mollify and amend such depravity of their husband’s humours by mildness and compliance as far as they can.<sup>386</sup>

To commit petty treason was to “violate the laws of nature and Grace, of earth and heaven, in murdering those whom through duty and affection we are bound to obey, honor, cherish, and preserve.”<sup>387</sup>

Bodies were central to these textual representations of petty treason in a variety of ways. To maintain a balance, the murder of a husband demanded the destruction of the female body in response.<sup>388</sup> Pamphlets detailing cases of petty treason were formulaic and used a disembodied

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<sup>383</sup> “25° Edward III c. 2, Declaration what offenses shall be adjudged treason, 1351,” in *Statutes of the Realm I, Part I*, 319-320.

<sup>384</sup> Wiener, “Alice Arden to Bill Sikes,” 194. This change, Wiener argues, is the result of the shift in social concern, or “crimes against property or authority to crimes against person.” See Wiener, “Alice Arden to Bill Sikes,” 212.

<sup>385</sup> “25° Edward III c. 2,” 319-320.

<sup>386</sup> Anonymous, *Murder and Petty-Treason; Or, Bloody News from Southwark* (London, 1677), 7-8.

<sup>387</sup> Anonymous, *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone at the place of execution* (London, 1678), A2r.

<sup>388</sup> J.A. Sharpe, “Last Dying Speeches”: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England, *Past & Present* no. 107 (May 1985): 156. Sharpe argues that executions were not about brutality, but control.

female voice that issued warnings to society. Texts and court cases highlighted the social anxiety that surrounded the female body, describing women as unhappy, unnatural, and corrupt. The literal violence committed on the body of the husband is crucial, as were the portrayals of women accepting their death and their role as examples to other women. When we search for and examine the body in these texts, how it is being used, and to what purpose, we understand the ways in which anxiety about the female body indicated that women were predisposed to a moral decay through their weakness.

### 3.3.2 *Not Guilty*

Petty treason was a serious crime with deadly consequences, but the courts found women not guilty for a variety of reasons. Jane Growte was “remanded for better evidence” and found not guilty of stabbing her husband.<sup>389</sup> Anne Lambe, accused of striking “her husband on the head with ‘the reins and the snaffle of iron to the same reins fastened,’” was found not guilty because “he died by divine visitation.”<sup>390</sup> Six people, making her not guilty verdict possible through their testimony, endorsed Jane Huekins’ indictment.<sup>391</sup> The case of Elizabeth Symbole, whose husband was killed by a sword, proved lengthy, and her credibility and reputation were significant to her verdict. Elizabeth, her sisters, and Jacob Reginer were accused of the murder, “that they, together with the said Jacob Reginer, not having the fear of God before their eyes, but

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<sup>389</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments, James I*, 165. See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments, James I*, 209. Anne Bates was found not guilty of poisoning her husband.

<sup>390</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles I*, 192-193.

<sup>391</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II, 1660-1675*, 279.

being instigated by the Devil, the 30th of January last past, in and upon the said Isaac Symbole they did make an assault.”<sup>392</sup> Elizabeth

called a whole cloud of witnesses to prove that her husband and she had always lived very lovingly together, and that Mr. Symbole had been often times heard to speak very respectively of his wife, and loved her very well; besides, she had divers very credible persons, who appeared in Court, and gave an excellent testimony of Mrs. Symbole's reputation; and that she had been always bred very religiously, and had a very modest carriage and behaviour...<sup>393</sup>

Elizabeth's reputation and credit was an extension of her husband's social status, but it was significant that she had witnesses to attest not only to the nature of her relationship with her husband, but what her husband had said about the relationship. Her husband's words saved her from death. The court allowed Elizabeth's sisters to offer a defense as well. The first sister, unnamed, stated “that she being so much affrighted when she saw them fight, she ran down stairs and went home crying out and making a noise” and the second sister only added “as to the designing any murder, she knew not.”<sup>394</sup> The reputations of her sisters mattered as much as Elizabeth's in clearing their names.<sup>395</sup> Female accomplices that enticed women to kill appeared in cases of murder and petty treason, emphasizing that all represented potential violent threats.

The Statute of Stabbing was crucial to this case as well. The sisters were found not guilty because there was “no positive proof that they did abet, aid, or assist the said Reginer in the perpetration of so barbarous and bloody a murder” and additionally “he only is guilty of the

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<sup>392</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1695, trial of Elizabeth Symbole (t16950220-18).

<sup>393</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1695, trial of Elizabeth Symbole (t16950220-18).

<sup>394</sup> Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1695, trial of Elizabeth Symbole (t16950220-18).

<sup>395</sup> Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1695, trial of Elizabeth Symbole (t16950220-18). The transcript states “they had both the same Evidence as to their Reputation, as had Mrs. Symbole.”



stabbing and death of the man, because he gave the thrust.”<sup>396</sup> There is no record of a trial for Reginer. The record of Elizabeth’s trial, however, reveals the importance of voices and witnesses to prove a woman’s innocence. Women proved their innocence when witnesses confirmed a loving relationship, allowing the dead to speak. Similarly, the court found Parthenia Owen not guilty because her “husband spoke well of his wife when he languished, and that she had nursed him very kindly during that time.”<sup>397</sup> Elizabeth Flower’s charges were dropped to manslaughter after it was proven that “no premeditated malice appearing, but on the contrary great love betwixt them; and she being greatly provoked.”<sup>398</sup> She was burned in the hand for her crime.<sup>399</sup>

### 3.3.3 *Women’s Voices*

Alice Davies pled pregnancy after being found guilty of killing her husband, but was executed after an examination.<sup>400</sup> Two ballads, *The Unnatural Wife* and *A Warning for All Desperate Women*, told Alice’s story through a “ventriloquized and confessional feminine subject.”<sup>401</sup> This voice of Alice remained after her death with each ballad following virtually the same plot of events, ending with Alice issuing a warning to women. Her public confession

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<sup>396</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1695, trial of Elizabeth Symbole (t16950220-18).

<sup>397</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1695, trial of Parthenia Owen (t16950508-12). Parthenia was accused of “biting, bruising, and dislocating the first joint on the middle finger of his right hand, which swelled afterwards to his shoulder” in December and George Owen died in April. Parthenia admitted to a verbal and physical fight between the two.

<sup>398</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1698, trial of Elizabeth Flower (t16980504-11). Elizabeth’s husband Anthony Flower threw a “fire-shovel” at her, and she left to let him calm down. When she returned, her threw a poker at her, which she threw back, resulting in his injuries.

<sup>399</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1698, trial of Elizabeth Flower (t16980504-11).

<sup>400</sup> “Particulars from the Gaol Delivery Register: Temp. Charles I,” in Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 106-127. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp106-127>.

<sup>401</sup> Stuart A. Kane, “Wives with Knives: Early Modern Murder Ballads and the Transgressive Commodity,” *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (Spring, 1996): 219.

underscored the revelation of private violence, the very tenuous line between public and private spaces in the early modern period, and the importance of neighborly surveillance. The ballad *The Unnatural Wife* both in its title and throughout its text emphasizes the deviance of Alice and her actions. A repeated refrain throughout is “oh murder/most inhumane,/To spill my husband’s blood.”<sup>402</sup> Alice characterized herself as entering into a “wild wrath.”<sup>403</sup> Part of the legitimacy of violence in the early modern period hinged on the idea that men were entitled to anger or to fits of passion, and women were not, making Alice’s anger itself unnatural. Alice termed herself as argumentative and nagging, indicating that their relationship was not loving or gentle.<sup>404</sup> Alice gave two warnings in this ballad. First, she cautioned women to:

Cause not thy husband for to bleed,  
nor lift thy hand to strike;  
Lest like to me, you burn in fire,  
Because of cruel rage and ire.<sup>405</sup>

The ballad ended with Alice reflecting on her last moments, of being “chained to the stake” and praying for forgiveness before her last warning, stating that:

Let me a warning be to wives,  
that are of hasty kind,  
Lord grant that all may mend their lives,  
and bear my death in mind<sup>406</sup>

The last refrain shifts from the previous one, with Alice’s last words of “Oh Father/for thy son’s sake,/Forgive my sins for aye.”<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Anonymous, “The Unnatural Wife” in *A Pepysian Garland: Black-Letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595-1639, Chiefly From the Collection of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Hyder E. Rollings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 283-287.

<sup>403</sup> Anon., “The Unnatural Wife,” 284.

<sup>404</sup> Anon., “The Unnatural Wife,” 285.

<sup>405</sup> Anon., “The Unnatural Wife,” 284-285.

<sup>406</sup> Anon., “The Unnatural Wife,” 287.

<sup>407</sup> Anon., “The Unnatural Wife,” 287.

Though the plot was virtually the same, the emphasis in *A Warning for All Desperate Women* differed. Alice did not characterize herself as a scold but stressed her good reputation and concern that her actions brought shame to people who knew her.<sup>408</sup> In this ballad, Alice viewed herself as deserving of death and an example for women. Where *The Unnatural Wife* cautioned against anger in women and the resulting violence, *A Warning for All Women* advised on proper marriage conduct, with Alice saying that,

And maidens that shall husbands have,  
I warning am to all:  
Your husbands are your lords and heads,  
You ought them to obey,  
Grant love betwixt each man and wife,  
Unto the Lord I pray.<sup>409</sup>

Alice's last lines this time were not of her death or her prayers for forgiveness, a plea that "the Lord preserve our King and Queen."<sup>410</sup> *A Warning for All Desperate Women* focused on the mirroring of monarch and state, husband and wife, highlighting the transgressive nature of a wife harming the body of a husband and how it was akin to a subject harming the monarch.<sup>411</sup>

Alice Clarke also tried to plead pregnancy in 1635, after being found guilty of poisoning her husband.<sup>412</sup> Henry Goodcole's *The Adultresses Funeral Day* details the case and includes

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<sup>408</sup> Anonymous, "A Warning for All Desperate Women by the Example of Alice Davis (1628)" in *A Pepysian Garland: Black-Letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595-1639, Chiefly From the Collection of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Hyder E. Rollings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 291.

<sup>409</sup> Anon., "A Warning for All Desperate Women," 292.

<sup>410</sup> Anon., "A Warning for All Desperate Women," 292.

<sup>411</sup> James I, *the True Law of Free Monarchies: Or the Reciprocal and Mutual Duty Betwixt a Free King and His Natural Subjects*, Edinburgh, 1598. James I publishes this prior to becoming king of England, outlining his understanding of absolute monarchy. In it, he portrays the king as a father and the subjects as children.

<sup>412</sup> "Particulars from the Gaol Delivery Register: Temp. Charles I," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 106-127. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp106-127>. See also Hunnisett, *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1558-1603*, 107. Eleanor Iden murdered her husband with milk and arsenic. She pleaded pregnancy and was "remanded in the goal" until February 26 1593, when "she was said to be not pregnant" and was hanged.

Clarke's two "free and voluntary" confessions.<sup>413</sup> In this work, Clarke was not even allowed to tell her story, as the author tells it for her. This pamphlet does not function as a warning in the same way as the previous ballads. Clarke consorted with a man who she knew before her marriage, a man her husband forbade her from seeing. This was the crux of their discontent. The author does mention that Clarke's husband abused her, that her injuries "almost compelled her to what she did" and that "they were almost beyond the strength of nature for her to suffer."<sup>414</sup> The author put the couple into opposition, referring to her as "young and tender," her husband as "old and peevish," prone to "clownish behaviour, and churlish comportment towards her."<sup>415</sup> Clarke's case could not be understood as self-defense precisely because of this known abuse, as the courts and public opinion through this pamphlet would interpret her action as revenge.<sup>416</sup>

Alice Clarke gave two diverging confessions. In her first confession, she revealed that she intended to poison them both, but changed her mind.<sup>417</sup> She begged her husband to take an antidote, but he replied "nay thou strumpet and murderess, I will receive no help at all, but I am resolved to die and leave the world, be it for no other cause, but to have thee burnt at the stake for my death."<sup>418</sup> In her second confession, she instead declared that her husband grabbed the poison from her pocket and took it himself.<sup>419</sup> There are two warnings contained in this pamphlet, one implicit and one explicit. The most obvious warning is in the religious nature of the work, as it ends not with a graphic account of her death, but the importance of confession and

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<sup>413</sup> Henry Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day* (London, 1635), B2r.

<sup>414</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day*, Br. He writes that her husband "used not only to beat her with the next cudgel that came accidentally unto his hand, but often tying her to his bed-post to strip her and whip her, &c."

<sup>415</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day*, Br.

<sup>416</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141.

<sup>417</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day*, Bv-B2r.

<sup>418</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day*, Bv-B2r.

<sup>419</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day*, B3r.

repentance.<sup>420</sup> The unspoken warning is a reminder to women of their place in such a patriarchal and hierarchal society. Despite the abuse, Clarke's action was viewed as transgressive.

### 3.3.4 *Bodies and Hearts*

Public fascination with the case of Sarah Elestone fixated on her body, specifically what its problems and its destruction. Elestone was “a wretched wife guilty of the death of her own husband” who fell “into acquaintance of some lewd women.”<sup>421</sup> Her husband then “resolved to beat her out of this wicked course.”<sup>422</sup> In another pamphlet, however, her husband did not want to save his wife, but engaged in “ill husbandry, cross carriage, ill company, and other provocations, not here to be mentioned.”<sup>423</sup> In this retelling, her husband attempts to save her soul. Elestone “having been out with her gossips” returned home drunk, demanding money and promising “she would be the death of him.”<sup>424</sup> In a different retelling, Elestone denied the “murderous intention or design to kill him” but wanted “some light mischief in revenge of his cruelty in beating her.”<sup>425</sup>

Each pamphlet focused on Elestone's discovery of religion. “Lewd women” taught Elestone to “profane the Lord's day and hate good men” but after religion she “now loved good men” and was “the willinger to die, finding that it was according both to the law of God and

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<sup>420</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultrresses Funeral Day*, C2r.

<sup>421</sup> Anonymous, *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone at the place of execution* (London, 1678), 2. See also Anon., *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior and Last Dying Words and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.*, 1. This language about lewd women is also used in the Edmund Allen case. In cases of both husband murder and wife murder, then, “bad women” are blamed.

<sup>422</sup> Anon., *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone*, 3. Elestone stabbed her husband with a pair of shears.

<sup>423</sup> Anonymous, *A Warning for Bad Wives: Or The Manner of the Burning of Sarah Elfton* (London, 1678), 2. In this retelling, her husband beats her.

<sup>424</sup> Anon., *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone*, 5.

<sup>425</sup> Anon., *A Warning for Bad Wives*, 3.

Man.”<sup>426</sup> She renounced “her rage, unquietness, and evil communication, whereby she had often provoked her husband to be more violent and cruel towards her, than probably he might otherwise have been.”<sup>427</sup> Again, Elestone preferred death in the end and wanted her death to be a cautionary tale. She desired “all women to take warning by her, and to live in love and peace with their husbands if it be possible.”<sup>428</sup> In *A Warning for Bad Wives*, after giving her speech on obedience through the author or the observer “the fire was kindled, and giving two or three lamentable shrieks, she was deprived both of voice and life, and so burnt to ashes according to the sentence.”<sup>429</sup> In *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone*, her last words were “to exhort all good people to fear god” and then “her body was consumed to ashes in the flames.”<sup>430</sup>

The case of Elizabeth Lillyman provides more examples of authors co-opting a female voice for public consumption. By speaking through a woman like Lillyman, her story becomes a warning for society. The court referred to Elizabeth Lillyman as “that unhappy creature that killed her husband.”<sup>431</sup> Lillyman allegedly stabbed her husband, but the trial records focused on her behavior. Lillyman was “a person of some 50 years of age, old both in years and wickedness” and at the trial “she fell into a kind of passion” asking the court to see her husband’s body.<sup>432</sup> The court suspected this as an attempt “to take off the suspicion of her being instrumental to his death.”<sup>433</sup> Several witnesses testified against Lillyman, including the last

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<sup>426</sup> Anon., *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone*, 2-4.

<sup>427</sup> Anon., *A Warning for Bad Wives*, 5.

<sup>428</sup> Anon., *A Warning for Bad Wives*, 6.

<sup>429</sup> Anon., *A Warning for Bad Wives*, 7.

<sup>430</sup> Anon., *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone*, 4-5.

<sup>431</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1675, trial of Elizabeth Lylliman (t16750707-4). See also Anonymous, *A Narrative of the Proceedings at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey, From Wednesday the 7th of July instant, to Saturday the 10th*, London, 1675. The pamphlet is nearly word for word the trial transcript. The spelling of her name appears as Lylliman and Lillyman.

<sup>432</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1675, trial of Elizabeth Lylliman (t16750707-4). See also Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings*, 4.

<sup>433</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1675, trial of Elizabeth Lylliman (t16750707-4). See also Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings*, 4.

words of her husband which were purported to be “dear countryman, my wife has stabbed me with a knife I borrowed of you.”<sup>434</sup> The court expressed irritation at Lillyman’s denial of the crime and constant requests to see her husband’s body, saying “this bloody woman had the confidence to deny the fact, and to pretend herself to be clearly innocent of it.”<sup>435</sup> After her “judgment to be burned to ashes” Lillyman still did “passionately request to see the body of her husband before she died, saying she could not else die in peace.”<sup>436</sup> The court denied her, writing that they interpreted her asking “as a fit of raving” rather than “the result of a considerate mind” especially “from one who was so apparently proved to be his murderer.”<sup>437</sup>

A second pamphlet titled *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman* claimed to cover both details from the trial as well as Lillyman’s confession, situating itself as the more truthful work in the market.<sup>438</sup> It again used the technique or formula of a feminine confessional, with Lillyman giving her last words, saying:

Good people you are come to see the sad end of a miserable woman. I have been a scandalous liver ever since I was fifteen years old, and now God almighty has taken this time to punish me for all my wickedness; I cannot but acknowledge the murder of my dear husband, though I must needs say I never intended it, but did in my passion, and it is well known among my neighbors how dearly I loved him, I pray God I may be an example to you all, and that though I suffer this cruel death here, I may be delivered from the pains of hell fire for ever.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1675, trial of Elizabeth Lylliman (t16750707-4). See also Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings*, 5.

<sup>435</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1675, trial of Elizabeth Lylliman (t16750707-4). See also Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings*, 5.

<sup>436</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 09 April 2019), July 1675 (s16750707-1). See also Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings*, 7-8.

<sup>437</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 09 April 2019), July 1675 (s16750707-1). See also Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings*, 7-8.

<sup>438</sup> Anonymous, *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman* (London: 1675), A2r. It refers to other “imperfect relations and hearsay reports.”

<sup>439</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, Av.

In this speech, Lillyman referred to herself exactly as the court described her, wicked and miserable, but also freely confessed to the crime and acknowledged her behavior as odd. After giving this speech, Lillyman went “cheerfully to the stake where she suffered.”<sup>440</sup> Execution speeches in pamphlets articulated both state control and religious ideology.<sup>441</sup> The pamphlet added additional details of Lillyman prior to her current, fifth marriage, describing her as a “nurse-keeping” who “lived a life somewhat extravagant and expensive for one of her condition.”<sup>442</sup>

The pamphlet insinuated that Lillyman’s violence stemmed from jealousy. After learning that her husband ate dinner with another woman “the said Elizabeth his wife took up the aforesaid long knife which he had borrowed of the cobbler, and therewith stabbed him under the left pap, so that as the surgeons afterwards testified, it pierced his very heart.”<sup>443</sup> In this retelling, her husband’s last words changed: “Here, here my wife hath killed me.”<sup>444</sup> This pamphlet revealed more details about her behavior at the trial, stating that she behaved strangely during examination “seeming altogether unconcerned at what she had done, and laughing at it” and gave “silly” answers like “*I wish my hands may never see my eyes, if I killed my husband.*”<sup>445</sup> After testimonies against her, she was found guilty “and accordingly she received the usual sentence for persons of her sex, in cases of petty treason, that is to say, *To be burned until she be dead.*”<sup>446</sup> According to this pamphlet, Lillyman never confessed to killing her husband, refusing to plead guilty unless she could see him.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, Av.

<sup>441</sup> Sharpe, ““Last Dying Speeches”: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England,” 163. Sharpe argues that pamphlets widened the audience of executions.

<sup>442</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, 2.

<sup>443</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, 2-4.

<sup>444</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, 5.

<sup>445</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, 5.

<sup>446</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, 6.

<sup>447</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, 6.



Bodies were central in contrasting ways in *The Arraignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seed* and *Murder Murder*. Both demonstrated the horror of murder, through the body of the victim and the body of the murderer. The author described Margaret as “given to all the looseness and lewdness of life,” accusing her of prostitution and the sin of lust.<sup>448</sup> Margaret’s body was significant to the crime itself, referred to as “lascivious” and corrupt.<sup>449</sup> This text promotes her body as unnatural, but also as if this is a fundamental part of her as a person, and perhaps of all women. Anne Hampton’s body is not in question, but her personality, as *Murder Murder* depicts her as the “most unkind woman” and a gossip, that “never was she more joyful then when she was out of her good husband’s company.”<sup>450</sup> The source of discontent for the Hamptons was money, with Anne described as spending too much. Anne’s body was not outright designated in the same terms as Margaret’s, but there was an emphasis placed on her as a woman of extremes, who desired and spent too much and ignored her husband. The excess of her personality faults then functioned as a metaphor for her body. Men of excess, like Adam Sprackling, betrayed their masculine responsibilities. His lack of control was his specific failure. A woman of excess had a body that demanded scrutiny and discipline, one that did not stay within boundaries. Women of excess were not just seen as specific examples of feminine unnaturalness, but of a potential problem of all women.

The victim’s body, the husbands in each respective pamphlet, were described in violent detail. A man found with his throat slashed, a knife in his hand and maggots in his body, was identified as Anthony Ferne-Seed.<sup>451</sup> The body of Anne’s husband, however, performed as a

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<sup>448</sup> Anonymous, *The Arraignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seed* (London: 1608), A3r.

<sup>449</sup> Anon., *The Arraignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seed*, A3v. It also stated that her blood was corrupt.

<sup>450</sup> Anonymous, *Murder Murder*, (London, 1641), 2-3.

<sup>451</sup> Anon., *The Arraignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seed*, A3v-A4r. Margaret is not told how he died and asks about his throat, which the author uses as a giveaway of her guilt.

grotesque display of private violence, in this case poison, becoming a public spectacle. From the poison, The poison caused the body of Anne's husband to "burst," creating "a woeful spectacle."<sup>452</sup> The pamphlet described his hands as being "like two great boils, his belly seemed as if hot irons had been thrust into it, his visage was so much defaced by the quick operation."<sup>453</sup> The surgeon "ripped up his body, and found the poison lying round his heart."<sup>454</sup>

Anne's violence is not only public, but unable to be contained or hidden because it is such a spectacle. Margaret's story is one of repentance, because though "she had lived in all disquietness, rage, and distemperature, often threatening his life and contriving plots for his destruction" she begged for forgiveness before being burned.<sup>455</sup> Anne's story functioned as a warning, with the author cautioning the reader "not to be like a strange woman, which wondereth abroad in the twilight to get a prey, but to be constant and loving to him."<sup>456</sup> Anne's story ended with her and her accomplice in jail. Court records show that Anne was found not guilty.<sup>457</sup>

In the case of Mary Aubry, her own heart became central.<sup>458</sup> Aubry was a French midwife convicted of strangling her husband Dennis then quartering his body and hiding pieces around the city. Sensationalism aside, this case happened in a moment of political upheaval specifically relating to concerns about Catholicism.<sup>459</sup> The Alice Clarke case demonstrated the

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<sup>452</sup> Anon., *Murder Murder*, 5.

<sup>453</sup> Anon., *Murder Murder*, 5.

<sup>454</sup> Anon., *Murder Muder*, 5.

<sup>455</sup> Anon., *The Arraignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seed*, A4v.

<sup>456</sup> Anon., *Murder Murder*, 1.

<sup>457</sup> "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1641," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 75-79. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp75-79>. See also "Particulars from the Gaol Delivery Register: Temp. Charles I," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 3, 1625-67*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1888), 106-127. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol3/pp106-127>.

<sup>458</sup> Other variants of her name include Marie Hobry. Her husband is Dennis Aubry or Denis Hobry.

<sup>459</sup> See Francis E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 213-215. Dolan examines the political aspect of this case, with Aubry as both Catholic and foreign.

social reproach of men who abused their wives and its limits as petty treason could not be understood as a form of self-defense.<sup>460</sup> Court cases and printed retellings described men who killed their wives as anomalies, examples of masculine failure by overstepping the boundaries of legitimized violence in the early modern period. Mary's voice was also notable. Like other crime pamphlets, Mary Aubry retold her story in a disembodied voice. What makes her case different was that Mary's first language was not English, a concern the court addressed by giving her an interpreter.<sup>461</sup>

The Old Bailey records of the Mary Aubry case summarized it as follows:

that after several resolutions to perpetuate the death of her husband, he accordingly on the 27th. of January last, coming home very much in drink, at five a clock in the [Text unreadable in original.] went to bed, and being fast asleep, through excess of drink, she took his garter, and tied a noose, and put it about his neck and strangled him.<sup>462</sup>

The Old Bailey punishment summary from February 22, 1688 stated that "she should be carried from thence to the place from whence she came, and thence be drawn to the place of execution, and there be burnt with fire till she is dead."<sup>463</sup> Five printed works focused on the Mary Aubry case. The anonymously authored *A Cabinet of Grief, or the French Midwife's Miserable Moan* styled itself as Mary recounting her story and detailing her sorrow.<sup>464</sup> A poem titled *A Warning-piece to All Married Men and Women* offered a third person account of the crime that functioned as a social warning, ending with the lines "she is now burned, and begs of all mankind/And

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<sup>460</sup> Goodcole, *The Adultresses Funeral Day*, Br.

<sup>461</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 22 April 2019), February 1688, trial of MARY AUBRY Dennis Fanet John Fanet John Desermo (t16880222-24). Mary confessed to the crime and the court wanted the interpreter to stress to her the severity of her crime. The court offered for Mary to return to France for her trial, but she continued to plead guilty.

<sup>462</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 22 April 2019), February 1688, trial of MARY AUBRY Dennis Fanet John Fanet John Desermo (t16880222-24).

<sup>463</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 22 April 2019), February 1688 (s16880222-1).

<sup>464</sup> Anonymous, *A Cabinet of Grief*. London, 1688.

women too, wisdom by her to find.”<sup>465</sup> *An Account of the Manner, Behavior, and Execution of Mary Aubry* presented a brief but realistic look at Mary’s behavior, noting that she was remorseful and that the court offered her a translator.<sup>466</sup> Roger L’Estrange supposedly wrote *A Hellish Murder Committed by a French Midwife on the Body of Her Husband* which was intended to “publish to the world a plain and a naked narrative of this whole affair,” containing testimony from informants.<sup>467</sup> Elkanah Settle’s *An Epilogue to the French Midwife’s Tragedy* was yet another poem, less about Mary’s crime but her legacy.<sup>468</sup>

Two pamphlets, *A Cabinet of Grief* and *A Hellish Murder*, purported to contain Mary’s confession. *A Cabinet of Grief* was a formulaic crime pamphlet, with ‘Mary’ telling her story as a cautionary tale for married couples. ‘She’ described herself as the “unhappy wife of that miserable man” and Dennis as “my husband, whom I murdered.”<sup>469</sup> In Mary’s testimony, she accused Dennis of denying their marriage and engaging in affairs because she “would not submit to a compliance with him in villainies contrary to nature” and that she was “going every day in danger of her life.”<sup>470</sup> The account in each work was similar: Dennis returned home drunk and violently beat Mary.<sup>471</sup> After he passed out, Mary strangled him before cutting up his body. Mary in *A Cabinet of Grief* stated that the violence of Dennis “did exasperate my spirits to that height of passion, that I resolved in my heart to be revenged of him.”<sup>472</sup> This ‘voice’ of Mary likening

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<sup>465</sup> Anonymous, *A Warning-Piece to All Married Men and Women*, London, 1688.

<sup>466</sup> Anonymous, *An Account of the Manner, Behavior, and Execution of Mary Aubry, who was burnt to ashes, in Leicester Fields, on Friday the 2d Day of March, 1687, for the Barbarous and inhumane murder, committed on the body of Denis Aubry, Her husband, in the Parish of St. Martins in the fields, on the 27th of January Last*. London, 1687.

<sup>467</sup> Roger L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, (London, 1688), A2r.

<sup>468</sup> Elkanah Settle, *An Epilogue to the French Midwife’s Tragedy*, London, 1688.

<sup>469</sup> Anonymous, *A Cabinet of Grief* (London, 1688), 1-2. In this retelling, “Mary” also blames “the bad company he kept, and the abuses he gave me” for a “great confusion between us.”

<sup>470</sup> Roger L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 30.

<sup>471</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 4. See also L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 33-35.

<sup>472</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 4.

her actions to revenge rather than self-defense corresponds with the Alice Clarke case and the overall early modern worldview in which society, especially through the pamphlets, viewed their actions as vengeful.<sup>473</sup> This pamphlet version of Mary expressed aversion to the social views of her actions, for when she confided in those she trusted “they blamed me for my unnatural cruelty.”<sup>474</sup> By the end of this pamphlet, however, Mary vowed to spend rest of time on earth in “holy meditations,” pled guilty to her charges, and seemingly accepted her death.<sup>475</sup>

*A Cabinet of Grief* also referred multiple times to Mary’s heart. Other pamphlets and cases, like Elizabeth Lillyman and Anne Hampton, featured the husband’s heart. In her murderous act, Mary “hardened my heart against him.”<sup>476</sup> The pamphlet ended with a confessional ballad, in which Mary declared “my very heart does bleed” and that due to Dennis’ abuse “my heart was ready then to break.”<sup>477</sup> Yet Mary also referred to herself as “his cruel-hearted wife” who could not have committed such violence “had I not a heart of stone.”<sup>478</sup> In *A Hellish Murder*, Mary resorted to violence because “her frailty was no longer able to resist the temptations of dangerous thoughts.”<sup>479</sup> This duality is indicative of larger patterns within the genre of petty treason pamphlets and their real life cases. Women, especially criminalized women, were presented as fragile, susceptible to immoral acts through their own feminine failings. Yet language in printed works and court records termed these women as cruel, hard, and vicious. This emphasized the generalized anxiety towards women, that every women held the ability to be murderous.

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<sup>473</sup> Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England*, 141.

<sup>474</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 5.

<sup>475</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 7. The voice of Mary stated that “I received the due sentence, To be burnt till I was dead, which was the most terrible and astonishing sound in my ears, that I ever heard in my life.”

<sup>476</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 5.

<sup>477</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 8-9.

<sup>478</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 11-12.

<sup>479</sup> L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 30.

Like other petty treason cases, Mary's voice was crucial as well. Mary gave evidence about her husband's violence and lying. She testified that he promised "he would be a good husband to her" but would only change his behavior "upon the condition you will put me in clothes, and furnish me with what I want."<sup>480</sup> Mary recalled that Dennis told her "if you do not do as I say I will be a worse husband to you than ever I was."<sup>481</sup> He was described as "using her ill," while Mary was easily enticed by the Devil due to her being "under the affliction of bodily distempers, contracted by her said husband's dissolute course of life."<sup>482</sup> His body was unnatural, described with language that made it sound almost diseased, and that body physically violated Mary's body.

In contrast to other stories of petty treason, Dennis never condemned Mary. Instead, an informant stated that Dennis said "he would be the death of" Mary, and that she never spoke "of any purpose she had to kill her husband."<sup>483</sup> At the conclusion of *A Hellish Murder* the author reports he inquired about Dennis and that everyone interviewed saw him as "a libertine and a debauchee to the highest degree, but drunk or sober, without any malice."<sup>484</sup> Mary was frail and monstrous; Dennis was abusive and inept, a masculine failure but not a personal threat to the patriarchal system of early modern England.

Mary never denied her guilt. Print retellings of her story portrayed Mary as almost eager "for my just punishment; which is, to end my days in flames, in view of thousands that will be there to see my end."<sup>485</sup> A discussion of Mary's voice differs from earlier analyses. She never

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<sup>480</sup> L'Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 32.

<sup>481</sup> L'Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 32.

<sup>482</sup> L'Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 31.

<sup>483</sup> L'Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 26.

<sup>484</sup> L'Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 39.

<sup>485</sup> Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 3. See also Anon., *A Cabinet of Grief*, 7. This is a version in which "Mary" is retelling her own story, and she states that after the trial "so I received the due sentence, *To be burnt till I was dead*, which was the most terrible and astonishing sound in my ears, that I ever heard in my life."

denied her crime, nor did she plead pregnancy, and still it is the words from others about what Mary said that incriminated her more. Depositions from those who found the body stated that they often heard Mary threaten her husband.<sup>486</sup> Philip Yard, who knew Dennis in Paris, stated that Mary called him a “dog, drunken villain, and other the foulest words of reproach” and in French would say “I must kill him, and will kill him, though I be hanged for it.”<sup>487</sup> Stylistically, *A Hellish Murder* was the printed work that attempted to claim authenticity and truthfulness.<sup>488</sup> It is also the piece that belittles Mary the most. While Mary gave her version of events and had witnesses who spoke on her behalf about the abuse, it still referred to her “an unhappy wretch,” “miserable creature,” and that it was the “midwife’s lot to suffer alone.”<sup>489</sup> The last lines of *A Warning-Piece* reemphasized Mary’s truthfulness in her guilt, writing that:

She did herself no word of it disown;  
 But did confess that no untruth is here,  
 For God will not let murderers go clear.  
 She is now burned, and begs of all mankind  
 And women too, wisdom by her to find.<sup>490</sup>

At her trial, she “confessed the fact, and that it was the body of her husband, which was known by a mark as was said he had upon his hand which was found in the House-of-Office.”<sup>491</sup> Other

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<sup>486</sup> L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, Br.

<sup>487</sup> L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 2. See also L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 26-28. Mary did have people, related to her, to speak on her behalf. Her daughter in law stated that Dennis told her “he would be the death of this informant’s mother” and Mary’s son affirmed that his mother “hath said several times, that she was afraid her husband would kill her, and that he threatened her several mornings, when had been all night at a debauch.” See also Staub, *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames*, 36. Staub looks at the way pamphlets emphasize Mary’s threats against her husband, rather than accusations that her husband raped her. Speech, Staub argues, is agency.

<sup>488</sup> L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 30-37. This is “The Examination of Mary Hobry, of the Parish of S. Martins in the Fields, taken Feb. 4 1667.”

<sup>489</sup> L’Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 39. Mary’s job as a midwife is mentioned throughout the pamphlets. This is obviously a part of her identity, and while the pamphlets never make the connection, it is arguable that her job as a midwife is additionally a construction of anxiety. Mary as a midwife is privy to the female body and medical knowledge. That knowledge could have been crucial to the case, in terms of how she knew to cut the body.

<sup>490</sup> Anon., *A Warning-Piece to All Married Men and Women*, London, 1688.

<sup>491</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 22 April 2019), February 1688, trial of MARY AUBRY Dennis Fanet John Fanet John Desermo (t16880222-24).

printed works have the husband's last words accuse his wife of murder and often accentuate female violence by stating that it pierced or poisoned his heart. Dennis was silent, except with what Mary claims he said. When Mary cried out for help, no one heard her.<sup>492</sup>

A central feature in the cases of Anne Hampton and Elizabeth Lillyman were their husband's hearts. Lillyman allegedly stabbed her husband directly in her heart, while in Anne's story, poison was found around her husband's heart. Lillyman was executed for her crime and Hampton was found not guilty, but regardless of verdict, the heart of a man served as a crucial metaphor in cases of petty treason. Retellings of Mary Aubry's case focused on her heart. It broke, it bled, and it hardened against her husband. Mary's violence was not glut or excess, but methodical. Mary did not strike at the heart, but at the body. Mary's actions reinforced early modern patriarchal and hierarchal fears about the female body: she was uncontrollable, unaware of the depths of her rage, and violently annihilated her husband, symbolically and literally cutting the head from the head of the household. A woman killing her husband was a crime that upset the natural order of the early modern world.<sup>493</sup> Women committing petty treason struck at the heart, of their husband, of their household, of the realm.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Patriarchy as a system only worked when its participants upheld claims to authority, and for men that meant self-governance and control.<sup>494</sup> Anthony Fletcher referred to what he termed

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<sup>492</sup> L'Estrange, *A Hellish Murder*, 33. Part of Mary's testimony states "this examine crying out to her landlady, who was (as she believes) out of distance of hearing her." See also Anon., *A Warning-Piece to All Married Men and Women*, London, 1688. Two lines in the poem read "Forcing much blood from her, she cried out/To her Land-lady, who did not hear the shout."

<sup>493</sup> Walker, *Crime and Gender*, 138.

<sup>494</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 70.



“men’s dilemma” from 1560 to 1660, or that men saw women as a threat and worked against assertive female behavior.<sup>495</sup> Social fear concerned not only women, but also those failed patriarchs.<sup>496</sup> Failed patriarchs represented personal failure and while that undermined patriarchal structures, a man killing his wife did not destroy the system itself. The crimes of George Gadesby and George Allen, both found guilty of stabbing their wives, indicated they were failed patriarchs. Even the grotesque violence of Adam Sprackling did not diminish the structures of power, but rather emphasized that certain men were inadequate in their positions of power.

A woman killing her husband, on the other hand, did nearly destroy patriarchal structures, albeit metaphorically. To handle that threat, pamphlets coopted the female voice, forcing women to act as warnings to society. In her last words, Alice Davies cautioned women to obey their husbands, their monarch, and their God, an interlinked structure of male authority.<sup>497</sup> Sarah Elestone begged the audience to “fear God” before “her body was consumed to ashes in the flames.”<sup>498</sup> Elestone exemplified the connection between state control and religious ideology in pamphlet literature. Elizabeth Lillyman, who denied killing her husband in other versions of the story, gave an execution speech exalting those who finally punished her for a life of wickedness and went “cheerfully to the stake where she suffered.”<sup>499</sup> In each of these examples, women represented the casual threat of violence from uncontrollable women. Men upheld patriarchal systems through the control of their body, but bodily destruction of the criminalized female was also a part of maintaining power systems. In the next chapter, I examine another process of the

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<sup>495</sup> Anthony Fletcher, “Men’s Dilemma: The Future of Patriarchy in England 1560-1600,” *Transactions of the Royal Society* 4 (1994): 61-81. It is perhaps better to refer to it as a “patriarchal dilemma” and that all benefactors of patriarchy, which could include women, worked against aggressive female behavior.

<sup>496</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England, 1560-1640*, (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 4.

<sup>497</sup> Anon., “A Warning for All Desperate Women,” 292.

<sup>498</sup> Anon., *The Last Speech and Confession of Sarah Elestone*, 4-5.

<sup>499</sup> Anon., *A Complete Narrative of the Trial of Elizabeth Lillyman*, Av.

criminalization of the female body through the progression of poverty laws culminating in the Infanticide Act of 1624.

## 4 THE UNNATURAL BODY

### 4.1 Introduction

In 1680, the Old Bailey found Mary Clark guilty of infanticide. A pamphlet recapping the trial for the public described Mary's story as a "scene of death and ruin."<sup>500</sup> Mary denied that a dead child found in the house where she lived as a lodger belonged to her, "but by view of her breasts, and other symptoms" she eventually confessed to a hidden pregnancy, a secret birth, and "alleged it was still born."<sup>501</sup> The pamphlet stated that "she gave suspicion to some of the neighbors who searched her."<sup>502</sup> Mary's body acted as crucial evidence in her own case, not only through the physical search for signs of pregnancy or recent birth, but the assumptions of others as to her trustworthiness. If the child did belong to her, as she later confessed, then she had not adhered to social norms regarding pregnancy, and the mere thought that a woman would hide her pregnancy, let alone the physical body of an infant, indicated shame and guilt. Mary stated that her child was stillborn, "but having no witness thereof, as the statute required she was found guilty."<sup>503</sup>

Mary's case was not extraordinary. From 1674 to 1700, the Old Bailey tried 65 infanticide cases.<sup>504</sup> Infanticide cases confirmed society's worst fears about the female body,

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<sup>500</sup> Anonymous, *The True Narrative of the Confession and Execution of the Eight Prisoners at Tyburn, on Wednesday the 14th of this instant July, 1680* (London, 1680), 3.

<sup>501</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 29 May 2019), July 1680, trial of Mary Clark (t16800707-3).

<sup>502</sup> Anon., *The True Narrative of the Confession and Execution of the Eight Prisoners at Tyburn, on Wednesday the 14th of this instant July, 1680*, 3.

<sup>503</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 29 May 2019), July 1680, trial of Mary Clark (t16800707-3). See also Anon., *The True Narrative of the Confession and Execution of the Eight Prisoners at Tyburn, on Wednesday the 14th of this instant July, 1680*, 3. In the pamphlet version of events, Mary also stated that she cried for help.

<sup>504</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), Searched for all offences where the offence category is infanticide, between 1674 and 1700.

including female sexuality, questions of paternity, and women as not only capable of violence, but ‘unnatural’ when they engaged in it. The 1624 Act was a legal confirmation of these fears, as it criminalized the female body. Its wording implied that only women committed infanticide, or as though this was an extension of a problematic and unnatural body. The law also presumed the woman (or the accused) of guilt rather than innocence, a radical break from other laws. The importance of witnesses conflicted with historiographical interpretations of the law. While women could now speak before the court in an attempt to prove their innocence, their words were not enough. The accused needed witnesses to testify and confirm what they said about their experience. If necessary, a jury of matrons would physically examine the woman’s body to verify if she had given birth recently. Women who experienced stillbirths alone found themselves in court, accused of infanticide, as did women who concealed their pregnancies. Infanticide cases personify the social fear about female bodies: the fear of female sexuality, untruthfulness, and violence.

Printed pamphlets and court cases demonstrate the diversity of infanticide cases. While the 1624 Act established guidelines, each trial was as individual as the person accused. Courts thus interpreted both the words of the accused and witnesses as well as the female body to pass a verdict. The legitimacy of women and their words, particularly regarding paternity and pregnancy, became a concern, as “men must trust what women say about their bodies to confirm paternity.”<sup>505</sup> The fear of bastardy was pervasive in early modern society and contributed to suspicions about the female body. Luttfiring also states that the female body can be “read” and

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<sup>505</sup> Sara D. Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England* (New York & London: Routledge, 2016), 169. In this section, Luttfiring is examining pamphlets describing monstrous births, but the fear of bastardy was pervasive in early modern society and contributed to suspicions about the female body. See also Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 5. See also Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

develops the concept of “bodily narratives” as “stories constructed not only about, but also through, women’s reproductive bodies.”<sup>506</sup> The courts effectively ‘read’ the female body, in a way that male bodies could not be read in terms of infanticide cases. Still, I argue that social anxiety about the female body, even in examining infanticide cases, is reflective of a fear pertaining to the whole female body and not only its reproductive qualities. The concerns over bastardy and infanticide connected to larger concerns over surveilling and controlling the female body because it was inherently suspicious. The need for witnesses, for example, confirms this.

This chapter will use both legal records, such as court transcriptions, as well as printed ephemera, to examine how this variety of sources reinforce each other.<sup>507</sup> These sources focus on London and the Home Counties. The Old Bailey records only cover a portion of the century, but are far more descriptive, allowing for an analysis of the language used. Legal records emphasize the female body as needing surveillance, as do the printed works. The public desire for scandalous tales of crime maintained the idea of women as inherently suspicious. As evidenced in chapter two, midwife manuals and medical treatises focusing on the female body reinforced social anxiety and the need for surveillance. Women, according to the texts, did not know or understand their bodies. Birth, however, did nothing to lessen either of these worries. Rather than provide a glimpse of the inner workings of the female body, birth could mean shame and secrecy made flesh in the form of an infant, furthering fears of female deception and sexuality. In cases of infanticide, the female body was evidence. Other evidence included testimony of a woman’s credit, with her worth predicated on her sexuality. The only proof that came from a woman was

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<sup>506</sup> Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 5.

<sup>507</sup> Luttfiring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge*, 5. Sara Luttfiring criticizes Laura Gowing’s sole use of legal records, as they only focus on surveillance and control of the female body, arguing that her own use of pamphlets and other literary texts produced in the time period promote the idea that even if the female body is unstable, women have an active role “in stabilizing its meaning.”

her body, as matrons and sometimes neighbors searched her for signs of pregnancy or recent birth.

A series of laws addressing poverty targeted the female body, and an examination of these laws, which culminated in the 1624 Infanticide Act, establishes how the female body became criminalized. Printed works developed the trope of the murdering mother prior to the 1624 law, with emerging language that still existed in infanticide cases later in the century. The gendered language in the Infanticide Act designated women as its focus, but men were accused of committing or being an accessory to infanticide cases in small numbers both before and after the act. Pamphlets portrayed women who killed as unnatural, their violence negating their identity as a woman, while men's unnaturalness was a form of masculine failure.

This chapter engages in a thorough analysis of the Infanticide Act, including the crucial action of concealment, the need for witnesses, the issue of poverty, and the accused's emotional state including melancholy and anger as motives. The laws increasingly criminalized the female body, particularly poor women, and these issues became crucial in infanticide cases, which highlighted the perception of the female body as unreliable. The untrustworthiness of the female body originated in the secret nature of its inner workings, socially reinforced by the female ignorance narratives put forth by midwife manuals. Female bodies remained crucial components of infanticide cases, but the words of others about women remained equally important. The criminalization of the female body acted as an extension of social anxiety about it, legally encoding the need for surveillance. Women themselves could not be trusted to speak the truth about their bodies or experiences. Midwives physically checked their bodies. Witnesses attested to women providing for their unborn children or deliberately hiding their pregnancies. While the 1624 act shifted the evidentiary standards, allowing women to build their cases before the court,

it also presumed their guilt, a major legal aberration. The 1624 Act made infanticide cases more complex and while it perhaps gave women a new voice before the courts, it did not make the courts responsible for listening to them. Instead, witnesses became key to cases, in effect again silencing women legally. What a woman said mattered little. What her body said, or what others said about her body, mattered more.

## 4.2 The Laws

Legislation created, passed, and enforced was another vehicle for society to exert control over women and poor males. Power was fluid and hierarchal in the early modern period, with gender, status, and economic positions all factors. Not all men held power over all women necessarily, but the infanticide act and related cases are examples in which all women potentially were penalized through this anxiety regarding the female body. It is important to note that the poor in general, regardless of gender, suffered under legislation that targeted them for poverty and attempted to restrict their mobility. Poor men, however, were not feminized under these laws, and the shift in language by 1624 indicates a specific attempt to single out women. In the Elizabethan Poor Law, or “An Act for the Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the avoiding of Idleness,” one of the main concerns was bastards in the parishes.<sup>508</sup> The law refers to illegitimate children as “an offence against God’s law and Man’s law.”<sup>509</sup> The public, and the law, perceived illegitimate children to create a “great burden” on the parish, because the responsibility of enforcing maintenance belonged to the parish where the child was born, not where either parent

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<sup>508</sup> “18° Elizabeth c. 3, An Act for the setting of the Poor on Work, and for avoiding of Idleness, 1576” in *The Statutes of the Realm IV, Part One*, 610-613.

<sup>509</sup> “18° Eliz. c. 3,” 610-613.

originated. The law enforced every parish having two justices of the peace with the authority to punish parents who did not obey the law. While the Elizabethan Poor Laws attempted to alleviate poverty, their secondary purpose was social control.<sup>510</sup> These laws focused on the economic concerns associated with illegitimate children, perhaps more than moral concern.<sup>511</sup> Legal historians Peter Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull write that the 1576 poor law:

punished parents of bastard children who ‘defrauded’ the parish of its capacity to relieve the ‘true poor’ by thrusting destitute infants upon local charity. The mother was to name the father, and the father was to give a bond or a weekly payment to the parish. Noncompliance could result in corporal punishment and gaol terms for either parent.<sup>512</sup>

According to language in the law itself, its goal was to counteract the “evil example and encouragement of lewd life.”<sup>513</sup>

The language of the law also refers to the male in each case as the “reputed father.”<sup>514</sup> Pregnancy was a visible condition, to the point that the law itself could never allow women to eschew responsibility, and yet men, who often either contested paternity or fled to avoid charges and payment, had the right to dispute fathering a bastard written into the law. Men were able to deny the child, which allowed them to avoid punishment, but also to save their reputation. Women in this situation faced public shame, which in early modern society meant a loss of status and honor. While the process of the law appeared to treat men and women as equals, the reality of the situation was that the social mobility of men provided them with opportunities to avoid punishment.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803*, Linden Studies in Anglo-American Legal History (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 13.

<sup>511</sup> Mark Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder: Women, Illegitimacy and the Courts in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>512</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 13.

<sup>513</sup> “18° Eliz. c. 3,” 610-613.

<sup>514</sup> “18° Eliz. c. 3,” 610-613.

<sup>515</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 13. In most cases, men with money stayed and challenged the paternity, thus protecting their honor and status, while poor men fled. See also Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 338. Men and women



By 1610, the laws targeting the poor seemed to view women as the bigger social threat.<sup>516</sup> Women convicted of crimes were committed to be “reformed.”<sup>517</sup> These laws reveal a social anxiety regarding morality, but one that seems to allow men to regain their honor while women, again, could not. Female bodies remained more public than their male counterparts, and legislation reflected fears about the immorality of women upsetting societal order. In 1624, Parliament passed “An Act to prevent the murdering of Bastard Children.”<sup>518</sup> The law transformed the evidentiary process, placing the burden of proof onto the accused. The Infanticide Act of 1624 reflected male anxieties in society and criminalized the female body, particularly poor women.<sup>519</sup> The language of the law focused specifically on women, saying that “many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid their shame and to escape punishment, do secretly bury, or conceal the death, of their children.”<sup>520</sup> It also stated that if a child is “murdered by the said women their lewd mothers” that “the preventing therefore of this great mischief the punishment is death.”<sup>521</sup> A major focus of the law was concealment. Concealment under the law included hiding the pregnancy, the birth, or the infant’s body. It also indicated to the court a sound mind, a person who was aware that they had committed a crime, and thus sought to hide it. As a defense, an accused woman needed at least one witness to testify

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received corporal punishments, such as whippings, for bastardy, but Ingram finds that many, both men and women, escape punishment until the 1620s-1630s.

<sup>516</sup> For an example, see “7° James I c.4, An Act for the due Execution of divers Laws and Statutes heretofore made against Rogues, Vagabonds and sturdy Beggars, and other lewd and idle persons, 1610,” in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1159-1161. This law continued those set forth by Elizabeth I and increased the authority of the Justices of the Peace, as well as called for the building of places for people to be reformed.

<sup>517</sup> Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, 30-31. See also 7° Jac. I c.4,” 1159-1161. Any unmarried women that gave birth were to be committed to a house of correction.

<sup>518</sup> “21° James I c. 27, An Act to prevent the Destroying and Murdering of Bastard Children, 1624,” in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1234-1235.

<sup>519</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

<sup>520</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

<sup>521</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

that the baby was “born dead.”<sup>522</sup> The law considered not only concealment, but also marital, social, and economic status, and interpreted the female body by these issues.

Infanticide was a crime prior to 1624, but with different evidentiary standards. The 1580 case of Agnes Death included a footnote which stated that “it was not directly proved that the child was in life.”<sup>523</sup> The 1624 Act marked a shift in the handling of infanticide cases.

Previously, cases were predicated on proof that the woman gave birth to a living infant and then murdered it. The new evidentiary standards set by the act presumed the guilt of a woman while allowing her to present her case to the court. While the historiography regarding the act tends to frame it as cruel towards women, Garthine Walker argued that the law allowed women to be judged by a different set of evidentiary standards than that of men, thus arguably granting them in fact more freedom before the courts than they previously experienced.<sup>524</sup>

The law did allow women to build their own cases to prove their innocence, but still proved damaging to them. Under the 1624 Act, women who suffered a stillbirth or miscarriage with no witnesses received infanticide charges. The law did not attempt to address cases of unequal power in relationships, such as female servants pregnant by men higher on the hierarchy than themselves, or issues of poverty. As previously discussed, laws addressing women and poverty did not help them, but rather stigmatized them, enforced higher levels of surveillance for poor women and punished them. The language of the law itself was contradictory. While it focused on issues such as bastardy, married women still faced accusations of infanticide. Its

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<sup>522</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

<sup>523</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1978), 197.

<sup>524</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158. Previously, women who committed crimes such as theft or homicide were judged by the exact standards as men.

encoded fear of female sexuality did not completely absolve men either. The female body remained at the center of the law.

### 4.3 Narratives of Unnaturalness

Prior to the 1624 Act, printed books sensationalized the trope of the murdering mother. These often retold the story of murders, used specific and typified language to describe the women, and usually ended with a prayer or sermon. The books thus served as both entertainment and education, reinforcing social norms. In 1609, *The Bloody Mother* told the story of maid servant Jane Hattersley, who engaged in a relationship with her master, Adam Adamson. This behavior was not unheard of, but reinforced the notion of hierarchy, as servant girls were vulnerable and unable to say no to the sexual advances of their masters. Jane, according to the text, entered the relationship willingly, and Adamson cared for her so much that he increased her power within the home, upsetting the natural order of the household. Jane's crimes, the focus of the story, were the murders of four infants, each supposedly the result of the relationship. The text also characterized Jane as demanding, that "what she requested must be provided."<sup>525</sup> Adamson promised to elevate her further if and when his wife died.<sup>526</sup>

The author refers to her as a "bastard-bearer" with a "polluted womb."<sup>527</sup> The text also refers to Jane as a "most unnatural mother."<sup>528</sup> The word 'unnatural' became associated with women accused of killing their children, both in published materials as well as in trials. It

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<sup>525</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother, or The Most Inhumane Murders, Committed by Jane Hattersley* (London, 1610), sig. A4r.

<sup>526</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother*, sig. A4r.

<sup>527</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother*, sig. A4v.

<sup>528</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother*, sig. Br. Women are described as unnatural or cruel even in cases where they were found not guilty.

originates with the social horror at a mother killing her children, but it also reinforces the notion that women who commit any act of violence are unnatural, because they are going against prescribed gender norms, and negates them as real women. “Cruel mother” is another consistent description, and this text in particular describes Jane as a “wretch most wicked, unworthy the name of mother.”<sup>529</sup> Jane’s physical appearance is also juxtaposed to that of a real mother, with the author describing her as having a “heart of steel, and eyes of marble” to further the notion of unnaturalness, and to posit her as the complete opposite of a good or worthy mother.<sup>530</sup>

*Deeds Against Nature, and Monsters by Kind*, published in 1614, furthers these tropes associated with murdering mothers. This book highlights four in particular: animal or insect references, women as overtly sexual and unable to control themselves, violent women as unnatural, and associations with the Devil or wickedness. This book featured two criminals: a disabled man named John Arthur who killed his wife, and Martha Scambler, who committed infanticide. The book begins with the sensationalized story of both and ends with a poem for each. In Martha’s case, the poem is titled “Martha Scambler’s Repentance,” and is stylistically written to mimic her confession, making her story a cautionary tale for other women.<sup>531</sup> This is a similar device as used in stories of petty treason, where the author speaks as the woman.

The author presents Martha as possessing animal or insect-like qualities, presumably to continue the notion of her being inhuman, and specifically negated as a real woman. Martha is described as a “caterpillar of nature, a creature more savage than a she wolf, more unnatural than either bird or beast.”<sup>532</sup> The “caterpillar of nature” remark perhaps refers to the transformative

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<sup>529</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother*, sig. Br. Jane’s alleged violence deemed her unworthy, but in all cases of infanticide, worth is exactly what was being decided- the value of the female body and its trustworthiness.

<sup>530</sup> T.B., *The Bloody Mother*, sig. Br.

<sup>531</sup> Anonymous, *Deeds Against Nature, and Monsters by Kind* (London, 1614), sig. B2r.

<sup>532</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A3v.

nature of a caterpillar, with the “of nature” part referring to Martha’s personality, or perceived function in society. Martha’s murder of her own child is, by the author’s account, a grievous deception by her against society, because rather than performing in the accepted manner, as a loving and kind mother, she has betrayed her position as a woman, transforming into something inhuman. Bears and wolves reoccur in the story of Martha. In “Martha Scambler’s Repentance,” the author writes, “But like a Bear or a Wolf in wood,/I wish it smothered up in blood.”<sup>533</sup> These are both reputedly vicious animals, and yet two that are also known for protecting their young. The author is most likely relying heavily on the view of them as predators who kill, and the she wolf is most likely referring, yet again, to Martha as abnormal through her violence. In this same line, however, the author finally remarks that Martha is so unnatural that she cannot be described by any known “bird or beast.” The murdering mother is one who defies definition or description.

The murdering mother is also characterized by her sexuality, as this is what led to her shame. The author refers to Martha as a “murderous-minded strumpet” as well as a “lascivious, lewd, and close strumpet.”<sup>534</sup> Connected to her sexuality is the body as well, for not only is Martha seen as possessing a “lusty body” but one so strong that birth was easy and she did not need a midwife, which “among women seemeth a thing very strange.”<sup>535</sup> In many ways, Martha is portrayed as unable to control her urges, a woman driven purely by sexuality, and yet her body is described as strong enough to endure birth alone, and to deceive those around her into not even suspecting her pregnancy. This is the duality of the murdering mother: filled with urges, both sexual and violent, and yet in control of the physicality of her own body, to the point that she can

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<sup>533</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. B2v.

<sup>534</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A3v.

<sup>535</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A4r. This is an interesting statement, as it is acknowledging the power and knowledge of women.

easily trick people. These ideas centered on anxiety, such as women's overt sexuality and predilection to deception.

The unnaturalness of the murdering mother occurs concurrently in many of the other themes but deserves its own category and analysis as well. The murdering mother, according to the author, is "not like a mother, but a monster."<sup>536</sup> The author also writes that "women I cannot call them, for a woman esteems the fruit of her own womb."<sup>537</sup> The author once again puts Martha in control of her own body by denoting the baby as part of Martha alone, as the male father is never mentioned. Martha is in control of her body and its specifically female function of birth, and yet the author additionally disavows her as a woman. In the poem, which is written from Martha's perspective and voice, the author writes "And die for that accursed crime/That makes me monster of my time."<sup>538</sup> The poem operates to allow "Martha," through the author, to define herself as abnormal, monstrous, and unnatural.

Most murdering mother stories establish the woman as active in her crime. It is the woman who gets pregnant through her own inability to control her urges, the woman who hides her pregnancy thanks to her deceptive nature, the woman who gives birth alone and defies the tradition of midwifery, and finally, it is the woman who decides to kill her baby, the source of shame, and conceal it. This contradicts ideas pushed by midwife manuals that described women as passive in reproduction. In the case of Martha, however, the author mentions the Devil, saying that it was a "devilish practice."<sup>539</sup> The author alleged that the Devil influenced her and her "wickedness."<sup>540</sup> Martha, or the author as Martha, as part of her repentance says that "My soul

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<sup>536</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A4r.

<sup>537</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature* sig. A3v.

<sup>538</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. B3v.

<sup>539</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A3v.

<sup>540</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. A4r.

then blinded by the Devil/Bid me consent unto this evil.”<sup>541</sup> The objective of the author is not to deny Martha’s culpability, but rather to point out the failings of women, as the weaker sex, and who were more susceptible to the control of the Devil. Martha’s violence negates her identity as a woman.

*A Pitiless Mother*, published in 1616, serves as another example of the murdering mother trope. This story contains slight differences, as the mother’s motivation is connected to religious conversion, and the children she murders are aged two and five, instead of infants. Still, *A Pitiless Mother* continues the imagery of animals and unnaturalness connected to the trope of murdering mothers. It cultivates the image of women as the weaker sex, more prone to these acts of violence through their own spiritual failings. The story also differs from other crime retellings with female perpetrators. Margaret confesses, but does not repent. Her story serves as a different example from other infanticide or petty treason cases. In other cases, like *Martha Scrambler*, women repent through a disembodied voice, retelling their stories for a social benefit. Margaret instead represents feminine fragility, and embodies social fears about the female body through her violence and her conversion.

*A Pitiless Mother* engages in both anti-Catholic rhetoric as well as child murder. In its early pages, the author focuses on Margaret Vincent’s upbringing, saying that she is of “good parentage” and “graced with good parts from her youth that promised succeeding virtues in her age, if good luck had served.”<sup>542</sup> Margaret converts to Catholicism, with the author writing that “her opinion of the true faith (by the subtle sophistry of some close Papists) was converted to a blind belief of bewitching heresy.”<sup>543</sup> Despite multiple attempts, Margaret is unable to convert

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<sup>541</sup> Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*, sig. B3r.

<sup>542</sup> Anonymous, *A Pitiless Mother* (London, 1616), sig. A2v.

<sup>543</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A2v.

her husband or children, and feigns illness one day to avoid a neighborhood gathering, leaving her alone with her two children, because:

For having learned this maxim of their religion that it was meritorious, yea, and pardonable, to take away the lives of any opposing Protestants were it of any degree whatsoever, in which resolution or bloody purpose she long stood upon and at last (only by the Devil's temptation) resolved the ruin of her own children, affirming to her conscience these reasons: that they were brought up in blindness and darksome errors, hoodwinked (by her husband's instructions) from the true light, and therefore to save their soul (as she vainly thought) she purposed to become a tigerous mother, and so wolfishly to commit the murder of her own flesh and blood.<sup>544</sup>

Margaret Vincent strangles both of her children with her own garters, and then fails to take her own life. Upon discovery by her husband:

with a ghastly look and fearful eye she replied thus, "Oh Jarvis, this had never been done if thou hadst been ruled and by me converted. But what is done is past, for they are saints in Heaven, and I nothing at all repent it."<sup>545</sup>

Margaret not only confesses to murder, but blames her husband. She condemns Jarvis for not allowing her to both 'rule' and convert him. Anti-Catholic sentiment in this story thus linked the fear of Catholic conversion with the anxiety about the female body. Margaret ordained herself as head of household, converting on her own and resorting to unimaginable violence to 'save' her children's souls. She inverted the hierarchy in every conceivable way. Both her violence, her desire for power, and her religion make her body unnatural. Confession differed from repentance in this case. Unlike in printed retellings of petty treason cases, Margaret's confession did not absolve or redeem her. Margaret received a guilty verdict and execution, with the author writing that "her examination and free confession needed no jury: her own tongue proved a sufficient evidence, and her conscience a witness that condemned her."<sup>546</sup> Margaret served as an example not of piety and potential redemption, but of the weakness of femininity.

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<sup>544</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A3r.

<sup>545</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A4v.

<sup>546</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. B2r.



The purpose of *A Pitiless Mother* is remarkably different from that of *The Bloody Mother* or *Deeds Against Nature, and Monsters by Kind* because of the ages of the children and the religious aspect, but the text still serves as both entertainment and education for the general public. The pamphlet links Margaret's crimes to her religious conversion, and yet the representation of Margaret is similar to that of both Jane and Martha. The tale of Margaret attempts to "serve for a clear looking-glass to see a woman's weakness in, how soon and apt she is won unto wickedness, not only to the body's overthrow but the soul's danger."<sup>547</sup> Referring to those who converted her, the author asserts that "hardly the female kind can escape their enticements, of which weak sex they continually make prize of and by them lay plots to ensnare others."<sup>548</sup> Though anti-Catholic, the pamphlet additionally reinforces negative stereotypes and rhetoric about women and their bodies. Margaret succumbs to religious conversion precisely because she is a woman and susceptible, the text argues. The contradictions of the female body appear again, as Margaret is characterized as weak enough to be persuaded into conversion, but conniving enough to "lay plots to ensnare others."<sup>549</sup> This reemphasizes women as deceptive, making it an inherent quality of all women. Margaret represents a specific danger: conversion and anti-Catholic sentiment. The wider interpretation of her story reinforces the need for surveillance of female bodies.

The author of Margaret's story uses similar characterization to that of other murdering mother tales, such as animal characteristics, wickedness, and unnaturalness. Margaret is referred to as going against nature because she "should have cherished them with her own body, as the pelican that pecks her own breast to feed her young ones with her blood."<sup>550</sup> Instead, she was

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<sup>547</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A2r.

<sup>548</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A2v.

<sup>549</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A2v.

<sup>550</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A3v.

“more cruel than the viper, the envenomed serpent, the snake, or any beast whatsoever, against all kind, [which] takes away those lives to whom she first gave life.”<sup>551</sup> Margaret is also likened to a tiger or wolf, a frenzied and yet methodical predator.<sup>552</sup> The author calls Margaret a “creature not deserving mother’s name” and “without all motherly pity.”<sup>553</sup> On her unnaturalness, the author writes,

The cannibals that eat one another will spare the fruits of their own bodies; the savages will do the like; yea, every beast and fowl hath a feeling of nature, and according to kind will cherish their young ones. And shall woman, nay, a Christian woman, God’s own image, be more unnatural than pagan, cannibal, savage, beast, or fowl?<sup>554</sup>

Margaret, like other murdering mothers, is beyond comprehension, something that defies definition, despite the author’s constant attempt, and her story is meant to reinforce accepted social norms not only regarding religion, but the concept that women were weaker, frailer, and more prone to these failings or episodes of unnaturalness. Margaret is, according to the author, not a reflection of society itself, but rather of the failings of women. This is seen as a specifically female weakness, as is the trope of the murdering mother. It is the mother whose own weakness drives her to commit an unnatural act, and who negates herself through her own violence.

The stories of Jane and Martha reinforce negative ideas about women and violence. Martha’s story includes emphasis on her as active, not only in her crime, but through her sexuality. This directly contradicts the prescribed role of women as passive in reproduction and underlines the fear of the female body. Despite the control Martha exerted over her body, hers is still depicted as a body of excess, or one that does not stay within defined boundaries. Jane’s relationship with her master and subsequent violence against their children is a total inversion of

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<sup>551</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A3v.

<sup>552</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A2v.

<sup>553</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. A4r.

<sup>554</sup> Anon., *A Pitiless Mother*, sig. Bv.

the hierarchy, similar to cases of petty treason. Not only did Jane defy her status, she negated her womanhood through the destruction of her infants. Margaret's tale, though different from true infanticide cases, is relevant because it points to exceptional cases where the negation of her womanhood made her irredeemable. She confesses but does not repent, nor is she allowed to receive absolution. While she does negate her identity as a woman through her violence to become something more monstrous, Margaret is an example of the weakness of women. She succumbs to violence, but also to religious conversion. This perhaps speaks to deeper social fears about women and ideas. All of these women, however, became unnatural through violence and the negation of their identity.

Another narrative of female unnaturalness focused on emotions. The accused's emotional state acted as evidence in infanticide trials and discussions of female temperament furthered ideas about which emotions society allowed women to express. Infanticide, and petty treason, were unnatural acts because they violated a woman's domestic roles and responsibilities, inverting the social hierarchy, but also because these crimes occasionally signified a woman expressing anger. Early modern society and culture upheld honor codes that dictated how people should act, including their emotional expressions.<sup>555</sup> The "honor code dictated behaviors, and silences," and could potentially shape emotions.<sup>556</sup> The code then was part of what William Reddy defines as an "emotional regime," or the societal expectations that dictated emotional responses, which demanded "emotional management."<sup>557</sup> To define the system as rigid ignores the variance of emotional responses, though certain responses were valued more than others. The importance of these cases that focused on emotions is the way they described the women

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<sup>555</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130-134.

<sup>556</sup> Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 132.

<sup>557</sup> Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 132.

themselves. It is not whether or not we understand ‘melancholy’ as different or same, good or bad, in comparison to today’s emotions, but how these different depictions used emotion as evidence and how it shaped the portrayal of the women involved. Violence as an emotional response is characterized differently between men and women. The violence of men, as will be discussed later in the chapter, indicated a desire for self-destruction, inward emotions of loathing turned outward into destruction of the family as an extension of himself. Infanticide cases portray women as predisposed to violence, or to unnatural acts. Female violence is an extension of a corrupted self. Many of the narratives that center on a woman’s emotions follow similar patterns to petty treason narratives. These retellings emphasize women as passionate, heated beings, which again contradicts theories about the female body pushed by midwife manuals. These women and their bodies are thus wrong, their crimes confirming that instead of women they were “unnatural cruel beasts in women’s shapes.”<sup>558</sup>

A 1691 case at the Old Bailey described a woman named only as H-S- as “a very melancholy woman naturally.”<sup>559</sup> In the case of H-S-, her child choked on a cork, but the court could not determine if it was “put there by violence or no.”<sup>560</sup> She was acquitted because witnesses “declared, that she had always been a melancholy woman.”<sup>561</sup> The emotional state of a woman and her overall temperament served as evidence, both in cases and in pamphlets. Murdering mothers often appeared as violent, angry, and selfish women, but a melancholy mother who murdered was described in gentler terms. In a 1675 case from the Old Bailey, a

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<sup>558</sup> Henry Goodcole, *Nature’s Cruel Step-Dames: or, Matchless Monsters of the Female Sex* (London, 1637), 17.

<sup>559</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1691, trial of H - S - (t16910708-15).

<sup>560</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1691, trial of H - S - (t16910708-15).

<sup>561</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1691, trial of H - S - (t16910708-15).

woman faced infanticide charges after throwing her newborn into a fire. The case predicated on not only the esteem of her husband, but her own emotional state. Witnesses described her as “discomposed and distempered in her mind” and a jury “judged her not to be of sound mind.”<sup>562</sup> Her husband was “a person of good repute, and credit.”<sup>563</sup> The court also referred to her as “this unnatural mother” who was spurred into action by the Devil, and a “poor wretch.”<sup>564</sup> This case highlights the complexity of infanticide cases, as the ruling of not guilty was the result of her husband’s social standing, testimony from witnesses, and her own emotional state, despite the woman’s open confession to her act. Additionally, this case demonstrated the importance of witnesses during and after birth. These witnesses spoke at her trial, but were also implicated in the crime itself, as “those that were about her were fearful at any time to leave her alone, and it had been well if they had continued true to their own fears.”<sup>565</sup> This reemphasizes the importance of the communal surveillance of women.

Two pamphlets depicting child murder posit anger at the husband as a motive for murder.<sup>566</sup> Mary Philmore drowned her children after “wrangling words with her husband” though she was described as “being a kind wife.”<sup>567</sup> Her husband speaks when he discovers the

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<sup>562</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1675, trial of Woman (t16750115-1).

<sup>563</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1675, trial of Woman (t16750115-1).

<sup>564</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1675, trial of Woman (t16750115-1).

<sup>565</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1675, trial of Woman (t16750115-1).

<sup>566</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137. Shepard writes that “the only legitimate purchase women had on disciplinary violence was” against servants and children. All of the pamphlets depicting child murder by a mother have nothing to do with discipline, as the women are portrayed as murdering to save their children from poverty, for religious conversion, or out of anger.

<sup>567</sup> Anonymous, *A True and Perfect Relation of a Most Horrid and Bloody Murder Committed by One Philmore’s Wife* (London, 1686), 3-4.

crime, crying out “O cruel and barbarous woman!”<sup>568</sup> Mary’s tale is constructed as a cautionary one for the public, ending by stating that she “remains to receive a reward due for so unnatural and barbarous a crime, and to be an example to all such bloody assassins.”<sup>569</sup> The trial, however, refers to her as Anne Philmore, a woman with an “ill humour” and who attempted to use the defense that she was “distracted.”<sup>570</sup> She was found guilty of the crime.

Jane Lawson’s motive for murder also originated in anger. James Lawson, her husband, returned home drunk, “a thing he was very seldom addicted to by the observations of the neighborhood.”<sup>571</sup> In this retelling, neighbors act as silent witnesses, watching and judging. Jane, his wife, “began to school him at an extraordinary rate, insomuch that the neighbors came in to pacify her” though “her husband neither gave her ill language, or once offered to oppose her unreasonable womanish fury.”<sup>572</sup> This pamphlet portrays Jane as angry, to the point that she abused her neighbors, mother, and husband, calling her an “unnatural daughter.”<sup>573</sup> Her mother characterized her emotional responses as “unworthy actions” towards James.<sup>574</sup> During a private argument, James hit his wife and she grabbed their children, stating “that neither she or them would trouble him longer.”<sup>575</sup> Jane later killed herself as well as their two children.<sup>576</sup> Her unnaturalness, however, was not due only to her murders and suicide. Her public argument with her husband resulted in her lashing out at neighbors, even her mother. Jane received signifiers

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<sup>568</sup> Anonymous, *A True and Perfect Relation of a Most Horrid and Bloody Murder Committed by One Philmore’s Wife*, 5. This is similar to tales of wives murdering their husbands in which the husband’s last words are to condemn his wife, which is discussed in chapter one.

<sup>569</sup> Anonymous, *A True and Perfect Relation of a Most Horrid and Bloody Murder Committed by One Philmore’s Wife*, 7.

<sup>570</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 June 2019), October 1686, trial of Anne Philmore (t16861013-25). This trial mirrors the pamphlet story, except for the name: Anne drowns her child while her husband sleeps and confesses to her child’s godmother.

<sup>571</sup> Anonymous, *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murders* (London, 1680), 2.

<sup>572</sup> Anon., *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murders*, 2.

<sup>573</sup> Anon., *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murders*, 3-4.

<sup>574</sup> Anon., *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murders*, 3-4.

<sup>575</sup> Anon., *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murders*, 5.

<sup>576</sup> Anon., *A True and Sad Relation of Two Wicked and Bloody Murders*, 5.

such as ‘unnatural’ and ‘unworthy’ from the people closest to her. By giving her mother a voice, the pamphlet emphasizes Jane’s inability to fulfill feminine roles. She was not only a bad wife, but a bad daughter as well.

#### 4.4 Men

Though certainly less frequent, men faced accusations of infanticide before and after 1624.<sup>577</sup> Prior to 1624, the charges were more explicit while afterwards men tended to be viewed as accessories to the crime rather than sole perpetrators. Even when not charged, men became a legitimizing force in these cases, in which they could either condemn or save women based on their testimony, credit, and social standing. Men were indicted in infanticide cases after 1624, despite the law’s focus on women and the female body. It is important to note that infanticide cases underscore Alexandra Shepard’s argument that not all men benefitted from the early modern systems of patriarchy.<sup>578</sup> Male involvement in infanticide cases receives little attention in the historiography. The rarity of charges against men occurred for a variety of reasons, most

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<sup>577</sup> The trope of the murdering mother dominated in print and though rarer, murdering fathers or male accessories occurred. A 1693 case, however, saw a midwife or nurse being charged with the murder of four infants in her care, highlighting that it was not always a familial crime. See Anonymous, *A Particular and Exact Account of the Trial of Mary Compton, the Bloody and Most Cruel Midwife of Poplar*, London, 1693. In this account of the trial, Mary Compton is described as “being very lame in her limbs” and that “upon a female infant child, under the age of twelve months, feloniously, willfully, maliciously, and devilishly, you did make an assault.” Compton and her assistant, also charged, both pled not guilty. The key witness, a man named Richard Drake, testifies that he saw her home filled with children of various ages and no food. When the neighborhood intervenes, two dead infants are found in the cellar, one in the home, and one presumed buried elsewhere. See also Anonymous, *The Cruel Midwife*, London, 1693. This pamphlet adds to the tale by alleging that “‘tis generally said that she has followed this barbarous infant murdering trade so long.” See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 29 May 2019), Ordinary of Newgate’s Account, October 1693 (OA16931023). Mary Compton denied the charges even at her execution.

<sup>578</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 1-6. Not all men benefitted from patriarchy, but infanticide cases demonstrate how the female body as a whole was subjected to criminalization under the system of patriarchy. Women exercised different levels of power, such as midwives searching the female body for pregnancy, but midwives were also accused of infanticide.

notably that presumed acts of infanticide usually happened directly after birth, making a female perpetrator more likely. The prevalence of the “murdering mother” trope in print helped to gender the crime of infanticide and child murder, well before the 1624 act. While we cannot assume that all women were victims of patriarchy and all men the benefactors, the topic of infanticide illustrates a definitive legal and cultural inequity between men and women.<sup>579</sup>

It is important to briefly discuss the use of ‘fictional killers’ in court records, particularly because the court used predominately male names. Juries faced a dilemma in cases where a crime obviously occurred, but not at the hands of the accused. They were unable to have a verdict read “murder by persons unknown” and so implemented the use of fictional killers.<sup>580</sup> These names then became part of the court records as assize clerks recorded the fake names.<sup>581</sup> These ‘criminals’ were overwhelmingly male.<sup>582</sup> Names could include John at Death, Thomas Staff, John Anoke, or other variations.<sup>583</sup> The use of these fictional killers represents another instance in which historians must regard early modern court records with a degree of caution. Still, the practice of constructing male fictional killers for use in infanticide cases, in which the accused was overwhelmingly female, is worth noting.

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<sup>579</sup> See Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Shepard argues that men could resist or undermine the system of patriarchy, and that gender history of the early modern period should recognize the individual and varied experiences of men in the time period. Shepard discusses masculinity and violence, but does not examine men and infanticide.

<sup>580</sup> J.S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Home Circuit Indictments, Elizabeth I and James I, Introduction* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1985), 113. See Luke Wilson, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 175-177. See also Louis A. Knafla, “John at Love Killed Her!’: The Assizes and Criminal Law in Early Modern England,” *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 35, no. 3 (Summer, 1985): 303-320.

<sup>581</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Home Circuit Indictments, Elizabeth I and James I, Introduction*, 113.

<sup>582</sup> One exception was in a 1589 case in which Frances Gargrave was found not guilty because “Joan Atstile killed it.” See Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 326. Another example stated that “one at Noke killed it.” See J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1978), 18.

<sup>583</sup> Knafla, “John at Love Killed Her!,” 314.



Men faced infanticide charges prior to 1624. In 1580, Francis Shoosmithe pled guilty to killing the infant of spinster Elizabeth Edlyn.<sup>584</sup> According to a coroner's inquisition, Shoosmithe "seeing the said male infant there, carried it away secretly to a certain place" and buried it.<sup>585</sup> Edlyn is described as both a spinster and working for her master, John Page, and the relationship between Edlyn and Shoosmithe is not explained, as relationships are often unclear in records before 1624. Robert Checkesfeild was "indicted as an accessory" in a 1606 case.<sup>586</sup> The case accused Mary Checkesfeild of throwing "her female child into a well at Goudhurst, where it drowned."<sup>587</sup> Robert received a guilty verdict and was sentenced to hang.<sup>588</sup> The court found William Ellyott and his wife Sibyl not guilty of infanticide in 1565, instead blaming a woman named Christine Grantham.<sup>589</sup> At Grantham's case a year later, the Ellyotts became accessories and all three were found guilty.<sup>590</sup> William, however, took the benefit of clergy in 1567.<sup>591</sup> Robert Willard's guilty verdict in 1567 resulted in execution by hanging.<sup>592</sup> Thomas Dellowe's 1600 indictment accompanied charges against Alice Tederington and Joan Gilford. Dellowe stood accused of helping the two women kill Tederington's infant and he was sentenced to hang.<sup>593</sup> In 1607, Agnes Crowcher was indicted for infanticide alongside Thomas Crowcher, who

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<sup>584</sup> "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1580," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 1, 1550-1603*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1886), 119-121. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol1/pp119-121>.

<sup>585</sup> "Middlesex Sessions Rolls: 1580," in *Middlesex County Records: Volume 1, 1550-1603*, ed. John Cordy Jeaffreson (London: Middlesex County Record Society, 1886), 119-121. British History Online, accessed February 13, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-county-records/vol1/pp119-121>. The case concludes that "on his arraignment for the murder, Francis Shoosmithe put himself 'Guilty,' and was sentenced to be hung."

<sup>586</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, James I* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1980), 30.

<sup>587</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, James I*, 30.

<sup>588</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, James I*, 30. Mary was found not guilty.

<sup>589</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1975), 33.

<sup>590</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 43.

<sup>591</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 43.

<sup>592</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, 46.

<sup>593</sup> J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records, Hertfordshire Indictments, Elizabeth I* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office: 1975), 151.

was accused of throwing her infant “violently on the ground” and killing it.<sup>594</sup> Thomas was found guilty. Both of the Crowchers, however, were “later reprieved for the alleged infanticide.”<sup>595</sup>

The pamphlets *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders* and *The Unnatural Father*, produced in 1605 and 1621, narrate two stories of fathers killing their children prior to the infanticide act. Stories of men that killed their children depicted them as unnatural as well, but male unnaturalness functioned differently. In these two stories, their “riotous living” became “violent and self-consuming.”<sup>596</sup> The protagonist in both situations are men with idyllic lives that included wealth and family. These men, however, resent their lives and engage in improper behavior. In their separate downfalls, care for their children becomes twisted into their destruction. As these men destroy their lives, they convince themselves they must also destroy their children. Frances Dolan describes men like Calverley and Rowse as “married gentlemen whose murder of their heirs is the final act in a prodigal life.”<sup>597</sup> The stories label these men as unnatural and portrays them as men of excess. These men do not lose control of their household, but instead lose control of themselves, failing to uphold the ideal of masculinity. This loss of self-control does not negate their manhood, but in women it represented a negation of feminine identity.

The author of *Two Most Unnatural and Blood Murders* asserts that Master Calverley belonged to good parents and yet perpetrated “unnatural and bloody murder, practiced upon his

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<sup>594</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, James I*, 42.

<sup>595</sup> “Index: C,” in *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House: Volume 21, 1609-1612*, ed. G Dyfnallt Owen (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970), 394-410. British History Online, accessed May 16, 2019, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-cecil-papers/vol21/pp394-410>.

<sup>596</sup> Francis E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994), 153. See also Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 151-159. Dolan discusses the Calverley case in depth, including the pamphlet and two plays.

<sup>597</sup> Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 153.

wife, and committed upon his children.”<sup>598</sup> John Rowse, the central character in *The Unnatural Father*, is a fishmonger in Surrey and is described as “a wretch, not to be matched, a fellow not to be fellowed, and one that scarce hath an equal, for matchless misery, and unnatural murder.”<sup>599</sup> Calverley is a man who desires too much, who becomes less than a man through such large debts that he begs his wife and brother to aid him.<sup>600</sup> Rowse is tempted by his mistress, Jane Blundell, a maidservant in his home with his first wife “who in short time was better acquainted with her master’s bed than honesty required.”<sup>601</sup> Rowse remarries after his wife dies, still keeping Blundell as his mistress, and engages in excessive drinking, friendships with people who encourage his immoral behavior, and eventually becoming poor with his land mortgaged.<sup>602</sup>

Calverley resented his wife, with the author writing that “he could not contain his rage, but would openly proclaim his wife was a strumpet, his children were bastards.”<sup>603</sup> His brother ends up in prison, as a result of the debt he acquired trying to help Calverley.<sup>604</sup> Rowse abandons his second wife and two daughters to travel, supposedly having “a brace of bastards” with his mistress.<sup>605</sup> The imprisonment of his brother is a moment in which Calverley acknowledges his own horribleness, but is not redeemed. Lost in his own thoughts, when his son speaks to him in his study, “all natural love was forgot in his remembrance” and he “caught his child up by the

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<sup>598</sup> Anonymous, *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders* (London, 1605), A2r. His parents died when he was young and Calverley became a ward. His wife actually survives the wounds caused by her husband.

<sup>599</sup> John Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, A3r-A3v.

<sup>600</sup> Anon., *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders*, 5-7. For example, he referred to his wife as “whom though I married I never loved” and yet asks her to help him with money. While she is gone, however, he simply continues to drink rather than maintaining his land.

<sup>601</sup> Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, A3v.

<sup>602</sup> Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, A3v. Taylor also blames Rowse’s unhappiness on Blundell, stating that “he lived much discontented, by reason of his keeping his lewd troll in his house.”

<sup>603</sup> Anon., *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders*, 8.

<sup>604</sup> Anon., *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders*, 11.

<sup>605</sup> Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, A4r.

neck...striking him with his dagger.”<sup>606</sup> Hurting the family within his home, Calverley then rides to kill his infant who is with a nurse, as he “had a desire to root out all his own generation.”<sup>607</sup>

The story of Master Calverley is a man of excess, and that excess drives him to destroy not only himself, but also the extensions of himself.<sup>608</sup>

Rowse’s act is pre-meditated and he casts it as not one of “social suicide” but rather what he perceived as salvation, sparing his daughters from a life of misery. Rowse returns home with no money and no reputation, and yet the author writes of his wife that “the poor woman received him with joy, and his children with all gladness, welcomed home the prodigal father.”<sup>609</sup> Rowse decides to kill his two daughters. He sends his wife to London and drowns them; when she returns home to discover the tragedy, she calls the constable.<sup>610</sup> As to why he committed such a horrible crime on his own children, Rowse stated he did it “because he was not able to keep them, and that he was loath they should go about the town a begging: and moreover, that they were his own, and being so, that he might do what he would with them.”<sup>611</sup> Rowse’s motivations differ significantly from Calverley’s. Calverley kills his first son in a moment of glut and self-loathing, a spontaneous act that then incites a desire within him to destroy his legacy. Rowse perceives his act of violence as one of mercy, though he murders his children due to his own failure as a head of household. Rowse cannot maintain his wife or children so he destroys them; Calverley does not wish to care for his family anymore and turns his self-hatred outward.

Their violence is portrayed as abhorrent and the men are described in terms such as unnatural. There is, however, less of an outcry against their violence in that as men they were

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<sup>606</sup> Anon., *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders*, 13.

<sup>607</sup> Anon., *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murders*, 16.

<sup>608</sup> Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 154. Dolan refers to this as “social suicide.”

<sup>609</sup> Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, Br.

<sup>610</sup> Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, Bv-B2v.

<sup>611</sup> Taylor, *The Unnatural Father*, B3r.

legitimized to violence as a form of control. Their unnaturalness results from their lack of control. The violence they used exceeded the boundaries of acceptable brutality. Rowse and Calverley do not negate their male identity through their violence, but rather become masculine failures. Their inability to maintain control or stay within boundaries of control makes them failures as men, where violent women negated their womanhood completely. Their portrayals indicate that while Rowse and Calverley are viewed as unnatural through their transgressions, their bodies are not described in the same language reserved for women and murder. Their unnaturalness makes them exceptions; the unnaturalness of the female body is a rule to be feared. All women contain the potential to be criminal and violent, and the portrayals of them seem to link this to the female body. The body itself cannot be contained. This contrasts with Calverley's story, in which his self-loathing and hatred turns outwards and yet his body is not described as leaking or excessive. His violence transgresses boundaries, his violence is unnatural, but his body is not.

The 1624 Infanticide Act specifically targeted women in its wording, and while accusations of infanticide increased, the role of men in infanticide cases remained the same. Indictments cast men as accessories and typically found them not guilty, while the women involved often faced execution. Many of the cases follow this pattern. The court charged Elizabeth Inkepen with infanticide, along with Robert, Mary, and Isabel Inkepen. Only Elizabeth was found guilty.<sup>612</sup> John Pelley, indicted as an accessory in the case of Joan Batt, was found not

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<sup>612</sup> J.S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, 1649-1659* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989), 199-200. See also Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, 1649-1659*, 200. Elizabeth pled pregnancy and was found not to be pregnant after an examination.

guilty.<sup>613</sup> Similarly, in 1673, Mary Knowlden was found guilty of infanticide and examined to be not pregnant, while George Pollen, indicted as an accessory to the case, was found not guilty.<sup>614</sup>

There were some variations to this pattern. One exception is the case regarding Alice Prescott and her husband Edward which returned *ignoramus*, or insufficient evidence, despite six witnesses testifying.<sup>615</sup> The court accused Susan King and John Ibbott together for infanticide, but King was found guilty and Ibbott was released.<sup>616</sup> In 1669, John Hunt was indicted for infanticide alone, accused of strangling an infant born to his wife, but was found not guilty.<sup>617</sup> Joan Earle died in jail, while Robert Whibly was found guilty of strangling her infant.<sup>618</sup> Other variations include when the connection between a man and woman became part of the case. In 1683, Margaret Benson and Joseph Axly were tried for “the murder of a bastard-child found in the custody of the former locked up in a box.”<sup>619</sup> Margaret contended that the baby was still born and “alleged that she was married, and that Axly was her husband, which he likewise owned... they were both acquitted.”<sup>620</sup> An unnamed woman was tried for infanticide after “there was found the child lying in the excrement; and she being searched by the midwives, the symptoms of child-bearing was found upon her.”<sup>621</sup> By proving she was married, the court acquitted her,

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<sup>613</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments, 1649-1659*, 250. Joan was found guilty.

<sup>614</sup> J.S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II, 1660-1675* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1995), 336.

<sup>615</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Kent Indictments 1649-1659*, 123.

<sup>616</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II, 1660-1675*, 169.

<sup>617</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II, 1660-1675*, 196. The not guilty verdict did not occur until March 8, 1670.

<sup>618</sup> Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Charles II, 1660-1675*, 319-320. Mary Palmer was indicted with them as well and found not guilty.

<sup>619</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1683, trial of Margaret Benson Joseph Axly (t16830223-9).

<sup>620</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1683, trial of Margaret Benson Joseph Axly (t16830223-9).

<sup>621</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1693, trial of A - M - (t16930426-46).

but added that there was “great suspicion of her being a naughty wicked woman.”<sup>622</sup> Even when not being charged, men were important to infanticide cases, as claims of marriage became a defense for many women before the court.

Despite the gendered language of the laws, men faced accusations of infanticide. Prior to the 1624 act, courts indicted the few men accused as the sole perpetrators of their crime. After 1624, men appeared in infanticide cases as accessories. The stories of Rowse and Calverley allow for a deeper look at men and familial murder prior to the act. These stories frame Rowse and Calverley as unnatural, but does not describe their bodies in the same way as women committing petty treason or infanticide. ‘Unnatural’ for these men referred to their desires and their violence. Their transgressions of acceptable boundaries made them different, but it did not change their bodies. Instead, their depictions cast them as masculine failures, not indicators of a problem within men themselves. Men remained relevant to infanticide cases. The court acquitted Margaret Benson and Joseph Axly after they proved they were married. Husbands and promises of marriage became key pieces of evidence in infanticide cases.

#### **4.5 Husbands and Promises of Marriage**

The 1624 Infanticide law focused on bastardy which meant that relationships served as evidence in infanticide cases. In 1681, for example, the court found Mary Naples not guilty of infanticide after she proved she was married.<sup>623</sup> The law itself was titled “An Act to prevent the murdering of bastard children” and its first line referred to “many lewd women that have been

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<sup>622</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1693, trial of A - M - (t16930426-46).

<sup>623</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1681, trial of Mary Naples (t16810228-5).

delivered of bastard children.”<sup>624</sup> If a woman was married, it followed that her child was not a bastard. The law targeted women, but specifically unmarried women. Therefore the law did not apply to Mary Naples, with the trial even stating that “it was not comprehended in the Statute of King James” because it was “provided for the preventing lewd women from murdering their bastard children.”<sup>625</sup> Legally, Mary Naples was not a threatening, uncontrollable, sexual woman, but one who adhered to social norms and maintained feminine credibility through control of her body and received legitimization of that credibility through her husband.

It was not uncommon for women accused of infanticide to claim that men promised them marriage, or to use marriage as a defense. After all, marriage meant the baby was not a bastard, and the promise of marriage proved intent, in the same manner as financial preparations. A married woman argued, or a woman with the promise of marriage, that she was not lewd or promiscuous, but held the intention of following social norms. It also implies that the man who promised marriage was the one not performing his role. A contract formed the basis for a marriage, or a few simple words in the present tense.<sup>626</sup>

These arguments, however, did not always work. Elizabeth Messenger had “too much familiarity with a fellow that promised her marriage” and hid her resulting pregnancy.<sup>627</sup> A midwife examined her body and testified that Elizabeth had recently given birth, prompting her to confess to her crime and reveal where she buried the infant.<sup>628</sup> Margaret Adams “pleaded that

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<sup>624</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

<sup>625</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1681, trial of Mary Naples (t16810228-5).

<sup>626</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640*, 189-190. Ingram’s work demonstrates that the concept of contracts decreased over time while church sanctification increased. See Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England*, 193.

<sup>627</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1681, trial of Elizabeth Messenger (t16810520-3). Elizabeth Messenger concealed her pregnancy, described as “the which she carried so close that none perceived it, and being delivered alone.”

<sup>628</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1681, trial of Elizabeth Messenger (t16810520-3).



the child was still born, and that one John Ashmore, upon promise of marriage so far prevailed as to deflowered her.”<sup>629</sup> The church frowned on “prenuptial fornication,” though social attitudes were more accepting. Martin Ingram discusses bridal pregnancies and highlights a social fear of pregnancy as a woman’s trick in order to secure marriage.<sup>630</sup> Infanticide cases seem to reveal the opposite. These women testified that men used the promise of marriage to trick them into sexual relations. Elinor Hunt

acknowledged the crime, and said, that she lived with a gentleman, who being overcome with drink, tempted her ...yet she readily consented to his desires, from the evil inclination of her own heart; for she said, that he gave her nothing at the present, nor promised her any thing.<sup>631</sup>

Elinor Hunt asserted that “the child was stillborn, and that she had eight weeks to go of her time, and had no design to murder it” yet was still pronounced guilty.<sup>632</sup> Despite admitting that the man made no offers to her, the account chastised Elinor for being “unwise as not to let him know it” regarding her pregnancy and that she “wandered about till she got into a service.”<sup>633</sup> Elinor’s case highlights many social anxieties regarding female bodies, such as her sexuality and her mobility. The notable use of the term ‘wandering’ indicates that Elinor did not belong, constructing her very existence as suspicious, and warranting the surveillance of her body. All three of these cases highlight the anxiety surrounding the female body and its sexual nature.

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<sup>629</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1680, trial of Margaret Adams (t16801208-2). Margaret Adams became a servant in London, taking care of a younger girl. She left the infant in bed with the girl, who alerted neighbors.

<sup>630</sup> Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England*, 219-225.

<sup>631</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate’s Account, July 1697 (OA16970716).

<sup>632</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1697, trial of Elinor Hunt (t16970707-5). Elinor Hunt’s concealment of her pregnancy, labor, and the child most likely resulted in her guilty verdict.

<sup>633</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate’s Account, July 1697 (OA16970716).

Despite the language of the law and its emphasis on illegitimacy, married women faced accusations of infanticide. The court referred to an unnamed woman's husband as "a person of good repute and credit" while descriptions of the woman included "poor wretch," "cruel," and "unnatural."<sup>634</sup> Her marital status, along with her state of mind as described by witnesses, contributed to the verdict. Elizabeth Stafford "produced one Stafford, who owned her to be his wife, and that he had gotten the child in wedlock" as well as other witnesses stating that she miscarried due to illness.<sup>635</sup> It was in the interest of husbands to speak on behalf of their wives, not only for the woman, but to salvage their own credit and social standing.<sup>636</sup>

A midwife and two additional women faced accusations of infanticide in a detailed 1677 trial. The midwife faked her own pregnancy, leading to speculation about her motivations. The midwife alleged that she did so for her husband because he would "not live with her because she never had a child" while the court added that she might have done it "to preserve her credit in her employ which she thought somewhat prejudiced by the imputation of barrenness."<sup>637</sup> The midwife used a pillow and convinced her neighbors she was pregnant, participating in the social rituals of pregnancy. In an attempt to persuade her husband and her clients that she was not barren, the midwife took a stillborn baby from one of her clients to pretend she experienced a stillbirth. Despite promoting her pregnancy socially, the midwife attempted to give birth alone and when another woman attempted to help her during labor, the stolen baby was discovered and

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<sup>634</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1675, trial of Woman (t16750115-1). This case will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

<sup>635</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1684, trial of Elizabeth Stafford (t16840227-18).

<sup>636</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 84. Shepard writes that "his credit (and therefore his livelihood) hinged upon the reputation of his wife." Marriage made credit reciprocal, though women could lose theirs much easier and often with less recourse to gain it back.

<sup>637</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), June 1677, trial of Midwife aged poor women (t16770601-6). Her husband is described as being "very impatient to have a child."

the midwife's own body was checked for symptoms of pregnancy. The court referred to the event as "a strange extravagant humour" but not murder.<sup>638</sup>

A dead infant found in a public house prompted accusations against an unnamed young woman. Even with her denials, midwives searched her body, determining that she had given birth, but not as recently as the found child indicated.<sup>639</sup> The trial stated nothing about the child she confessed to having previously, but rather focused on her statement that she was married when pregnant before. The woman was acquitted.<sup>640</sup> Elinor Adams attempted marriage as a defense in her own infanticide trial, claiming "that she had a husband, but at sea."<sup>641</sup> Elinor additionally claimed that she experienced a stillbirth because her in-laws "forced her out of doors."<sup>642</sup> The courts believed her father in law to be the father of her baby because of his "extraordinary kindness to his daughter more than to his wife" and there was no proof of her marriage, "more than her saying so."<sup>643</sup> Her words were not enough.

Missing husbands seemed to be a defense tactic for women. Margaret Dean claimed a husband at sea as well, "but nothing materially to her advantage, she was found guilty of murder."<sup>644</sup> She confessed "that he who begot the child promised her marriage, but soon after forsook her, and went to sea; making no provision for her in his absence" and that she committed

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<sup>638</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), June 1677, trial of Midwife aged poor women (t16770601-6).

<sup>639</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1679, trial of woman (t16790430-1).

<sup>640</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1679, trial of woman (t16790430-1). She was acquitted because "there being no proof that it was hers, and for that, being a public house, it was possible it might be laid there by another."

<sup>641</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1683, trial of Elenor Adams (t16831212-2).

<sup>642</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1683, trial of Elenor Adams (t16831212-2).

<sup>643</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1683, trial of Elenor Adams (t16831212-2). It also stated "with other circumstances," but did not elaborate.

<sup>644</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1691, trial of Margaret Deane (t16910527-17).

the act out of fear of shame and poverty.<sup>645</sup> Mary Ingerley “declared that she had a husband, and that the child was no bastard” as well as having a midwife testify to her stillbirth.<sup>646</sup> Jane Langworth “endeavored to prove she was married, but that not appearing” she was found guilty.<sup>647</sup> Bastardy was a crucial component to the law, which is why women attempted to claim marriage in their infanticide trials. Almost equally significant in the law was the issue of concealment.

#### 4.6 Concealment

Concealment encompassed hiding a pregnancy, a birth, or the body of an infant. Any combination of the three could indicate shame and therefore guilt. The Act stated that “to conceal the death thereof, as that it may not come to light, whether it were born alive or not, but be concealed, in every such case the mother so offended shall suffer death as in case of murder.”<sup>648</sup> This concern over concealment, however, connected to anxieties about the female body. Its legal repercussion indicated that “it is concealment, the fear of something unknown and hence

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<sup>645</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, June 1691 (OA16910603). Her mistress became suspicious and Margaret did not deny her crime, only attempted to claim marriage as a defense.

<sup>646</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1696, trial of Mary Ingerley (t16961209-83). It does not state if the midwife was actually present at the birth, but that “she did think that the child was dead born, by reason that the skin was torn.”

<sup>647</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1685, trial of Jane Langworth (t16850116-5). Jane Langworth confessed, stating that she was trying to stop her baby from crying. The court reached the guilty verdict because the law “makes it death to any that shall be delivered of an unlawful issue dead and conceal it.” See also Anonymous, *A true account of the behaviour, confessions, and last dying words, of Abraham Bigs, Richard Cabourn, Jane Langworth, and Elizabeth Stoaks At Tyburn*, London, 1684. This pamphlet describes Jane Langworth as being “well educated by honest parents, and might have continued happy had she not associated herself with lewd persons who had tempted her to commit such wickedness” and that “to cover one shame, she had brought herself into a greater disgrace.”

<sup>648</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

uncontrollable” that brought women before the courts.<sup>649</sup> Concealment could refer to hiding the body of infant, or to keeping a pregnancy secret. The concealment of the infant indicated a sound mind and a guilty conscience, a person aware of their wrongdoings who sought to hide it. Hiding a pregnancy implied the same. The law in both instances ignored the painful reality: a woman hiding a body after a painful stillbirth or concealing a pregnancy from shame and fear of social rejection. The inner workings of the female body were unknowable, and concealment of pregnancy or a birth implied society’s worst fears: shame made manifest and confirming deception as a characteristic of not only women, but their bodies. Guilty or not, these women deliberately defied social conventions. The emphasis on concealment overlooked women who suffered traumatic births or stillbirths. A stillbirth with no witnesses often meant a guilty verdict.

An unnamed woman in 1675 faced infanticide charges after discovery of an infant in a box.<sup>650</sup> She testified to crying for help and called a witness to speak in her defense. The second woman, however, testified that this unnamed woman never tried to wake her for help and that she had not suspected this woman of being pregnant.<sup>651</sup> On the night in question the unnamed woman simply went into another room alone “where it seems she was delivered, and the child afterwards found dead in the aforesaid box.”<sup>652</sup> Though the law defined concealment as hiding the body, this term functioned in a variety of ways to prove guilt in court cases. The court found Mary Corbet guilty of infanticide after she “confessed the putting it in the trunk” despite her

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<sup>649</sup> Susan C. Staub, *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 77.

<sup>650</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1675, trial of woman (t16750414-3).

<sup>651</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1675, trial of woman (t16750414-3).

<sup>652</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1675, trial of woman (t16750414-3).

stating that the child had been “dead-born.”<sup>653</sup> Mary’s case unfolded similarly to the unnamed woman: she testified that another woman was asleep in the bed with her and did not hear her cries for help. Mary, however, received accusations of concealing her pregnancy, that she “all along denying to be with child” and “concealing the time of her delivery.”<sup>654</sup> The case stated that “locking it up in the trunk” was evidence of her intention to murder, but Mary’s body and actions were on trial as well.<sup>655</sup> Hiding the body was enough for a guilty charge, but Mary hiding her pregnancy and labor added to the perception of her guilt.

Women’s bodies were central evidence in infanticide cases, particularly when they concealed and then denied their condition. The mistress of Ann Price suspected her maid and then “got a midwife, who upon inquiry found she had been delivered,” even though Ann denied it.<sup>656</sup> Ann

at last confessed she had, the child being still born, and that she had locked it in her box. where it was accordingly found, this being sworn by the witness; her answer was, that she finding her pains come fast upon her: knocked with her shoe, as loud as possible, but could make none hear her, by reason she lay up three pair of stairs; but the concealing of the child, being a material point of evidence against her; upon the reciting the Statute, she was found guilty of murder.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1684, trial of Mary Corbet (t16840409-20). Mary was “a maid servant to a person of quality.”

<sup>654</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1684, trial of Mary Corbet (t16840409-20).

<sup>655</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1684, trial of Mary Corbet (t16840409-20). See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1684 (s16840409-1). This is a death summary that includes Mary Corbet for infanticide. In this record, there is a second Mary Corbet sentenced for high treason, a coining offense, and to be executed by fire. This second Mary Corbet also pleaded pregnancy but was found not pregnant.

<sup>656</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1681, trial of ANN Price (t16810413-1).

<sup>657</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1681, trial of ANN Price (t16810413-1).

The body of the infant mattered to cases as well. Even in cases of obvious brutality, however, guilty verdicts were still predicated on the act of concealment. A widow with six children “barbarously murdered it by crushing the head, and wounding it both in the scull and eyes (as is supposed) with a pair of scissors.”<sup>658</sup> A woman in the same house examined her “by reason of some symptoms they observed” and the woman stated she miscarried.<sup>659</sup> The court ruled her guilty because “it appearing that she had sense enough to endeavor to conceal it, she was convicted and condemned.”<sup>660</sup> The gruesome physical details of the murder counted enough to be stated in the trial, but her guilt predicated on the fact that she put “it into a platter” and set “it upon a shelf.”<sup>661</sup>

Infanticide cases followed a pattern in which many women explicitly stated that they cried for help, implying that they unsuccessfully attempted to attain aid and a witness to their birth. This repetition is noteworthy when we compare it to cases of husbands killing their wives, in which women voiced presentiments regarding their death, or in cases of petty treason, women defended themselves in court by stating that they cried for help during episodes of abuse. In those cases, printed works acknowledge that women were sadly ignored, but these calls for aid are regarded perhaps differently than a birth. Neighbors surveilled each other and the respectability of a house was a public matter, but witnesses were not as significant in cases of spousal murder. Witnesses in infanticide cases, however, were essential.

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<sup>658</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1677, trial of woman (t16770117-2).

<sup>659</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1677, trial of woman (t16770117-2).

<sup>660</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1677, trial of woman (t16770117-2).

<sup>661</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1677, trial of woman (t16770117-2). See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1677, trial of woman (t16770425-3). This woman was found guilty after “concealing it above a week under her pillow.” This trial is harsher to the woman as well, stating that her “age might have promised more chastity and prudence.”

## 4.7 Witnesses

Witnesses were crucial to infanticide cases, as they upheld the importance of surveillance on the female body. The law contained an exception, that if “such mother can make off by one witness at the least, that the child (whose death as by her so intended to be concealed) was born dead” she could prove her innocence.<sup>662</sup> Pregnancy represented a major life shift for women.<sup>663</sup> Rituals organized pregnancy and child birth as a seemingly private world in which women held knowledge and authority. A pregnant woman participated in highly visible social rituals of preparation, such as making clothes for their baby.<sup>664</sup> This ritual was important, particularly for women later accused of murder, because it indicated that the pregnancy and birth were not meant to be secret, and thus legitimized the woman, protecting her. This knowledge and the rituals it promoted, however, were exclusive. Single women were not allowed to have real knowledge about sex or childbirth, and the ambiguity of early modern medical knowledge and the fear of social shame dictated that they could not ask.<sup>665</sup> The process of childbirth rituals revealed that a “female collectivity” did not always equal women supporting women.<sup>666</sup> Neighbors voiced their suspicions of women, midwives examined female bodies for signs of pregnancy or recent births, and men legitimized women through their higher status.

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<sup>662</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

<sup>663</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 114. Pregnancy signified a single woman becoming a matron.

<sup>664</sup> Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, 34. This was important for women who were later accused of infanticide, because it legitimized the pregnancy and birth, and it demonstrated a certain level of care for the baby. See also David Cressy, “Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England,” *Past and Present* no 141 (Nov. 1993): 104-146. The churching of women marked the end of her recovery post-birth and involved the community as well as the church.

<sup>665</sup> Laura Gowing, “Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past and Present* no. 156 (August 1997): 97.

<sup>666</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 150.



The act, however, had social repercussions. Anyone could accuse a woman of infanticide since the burden of proof fell to the accused.<sup>667</sup> As the population increased, communities saw an “insistence on community morality, which might be read as the desire to stabilize shifting people and values.”<sup>668</sup> The high number of people moving into London coupled with the anxieties regarding the transient nature of those people reflected the fear regarding a disordered society.<sup>669</sup> People found meaning and control through scrutinizing new people in the community. Communities feared women who were new to their area because of their unknown, and perhaps unknowable, sexual history.<sup>670</sup> Neighbors accused women of infanticide for a multitude of reasons.<sup>671</sup> Arguably, one motive was to promote themselves as a subject actively engaged in upholding hierarchies and protecting the morality of society.

Accusers gave oral testimony against the accused, which was problematic, as it reinforced notions of hierarchy that allowed people to attack each other with words. The credit and honor of women based itself on abstract notions, such as obedience or sexual honesty, which words easily called into question. The faults of memory also produced problems, or at least called the accusations themselves into question. It is also important to note that oral testimony accusing women of infanticide followed a specific narrative. The main problem with accusations

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<sup>667</sup> See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1693, trial of Anne Syddings alias Parker alias Abigail, alias Hall (t16930426-57). The Anne Syddings case demonstrates how the social and moral responsibility of surveilling the female body and sexuality could be used for spite. Anne Syddings “was indicted for the murder of her female infant bastard child, on the 30th of October, about six or seven years since; but none could prove it a bastard, only the prosecution arose from malice, by reason of a quarrel that happened between the prisoner and some women that was at the labour; but it appeared to be a malicious prosecution, and the Church-warden of Clerkenwell Parish testified, that she dropped the child in their Parish, which was sent to Nurse and died, and that she had a Husband at that time, but being poor, she was not able to keep the child; so she was acquitted.”

<sup>668</sup> Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996), 22.

<sup>669</sup> See Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime and Control in the Capital City 1550-1660*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>670</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 10. As credit based itself on female sexual honesty, this created a situation in which women new to a community could never realistically develop or maintain her reputation.

<sup>671</sup> Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, 11.

of infanticide is the extent to which they were shaped by “expectations and knowledge of their culture.”<sup>672</sup> This is not to argue that people necessarily accused women of infanticide in high numbers or at random, but to say that a culture predicated on honor, both collective and individual, established an environment in which the household, or which we consider private today, was in fact public. Actions within the household thus became a public matter, and any doubts of the reputation, collective or individual, were cause for concern.<sup>673</sup>

In some cases, witnesses supported the story of an accused woman, swearing to the child being still-born or to the poor state of mind of a woman. In others, witnesses denied the woman’s claims. Many women had no witnesses at all. A midwife’s inspection of Mary Clark’s body disproved her denial of pregnancy, and though Mary stated that her child had been stillborn, “having no witness thereof, as the Statute required she was found guilty.”<sup>674</sup> Witnesses could attest to what they did, or did not, see or hear, but without someone to corroborate the actual birth, a woman was usually found guilty. Two women testified at Mary Bucknal’s trial, one sleeping through the event and the other only stating that she “heard some noise” and Mary told her “that she had bought the day before one penny worth of Damsons, and that by eating them she had surfeited her self, the which had caused her to vomit.”<sup>675</sup> Despite the fact that “two or

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<sup>672</sup> Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 54-55.

<sup>673</sup> Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the Second Earl of Castlehaven*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>674</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1680, trial of Mary Clark (t16800707-3).

<sup>675</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), September 1680, trial of Mary Bucknal (t16800910-5). See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), August 1681, trial of Elizabeth Powel (t16810831-2). Elizabeth Powel wanted “the people to be good to her, for that it was still-born,” but “she not calling any to her labor, to testify the same, according to the Statute of King James, which there was read, she was brought in guilty of murder.” See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1688, trial of Elizabeth Dubass (t16881205-18). A French woman, Elizabeth Dubass was found guilty because she was “without any proof of its so being, or her calling for help.” See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1688, trial of Sinah Jones (t16880113-1). Sinah Jones stated that “she knew nothing of the cloth in the mouth of the child, and that she had not her senses; and was

three made oath, that she said the child was still-born” an unnamed woman was still found guilty.<sup>676</sup> Another unnamed woman “acknowledged she had been delivered of a child, but that some women took the baby from her. According to the trial, “she was not able to produce any of those women, and so was found guilty, and must expect the punishment of death awarded by law to such unnatural offenders.”<sup>677</sup> Katharine Brown testified “that she delivered the child to a neighbour, and what became of it she knew not” but the court described her as “being no ways credited” and she was found guilty.<sup>678</sup>

Witnesses could support a woman’s story or at the very least legitimize her to the court. Mary Stanes was acquitted after witnesses spoke “very favourably” of her.<sup>679</sup> The Mary Stanes example highlights the complexity of infanticide cases. Witnesses worked to her favor despite the fact that she had lied to her mistress, saying instead that she was ill, and that “it was found out she had been delivered, and had put the child in a box.”<sup>680</sup> This is most likely due to the credibility and status of the witnesses in her case. Evidence in the case of Sarah Rhoades included “that the prisoner was afterwards heard to express herself very affectionately towards the child.”<sup>681</sup> Alice Sawbridge “confessed in the hearing of several credible witnesses” that a

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light-headed.” State of mind was an aspect of infanticide cases that connected directly to witnesses. A witness could affirm if a woman seemed unwell after labor and if that contributed to an infant’s death.

<sup>676</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1676, trial of Woman (t16760405-8). The woman “threw it into a pond, in regard the ground was so hard that she could not dig a hole to bury it in” and “did not discover her being with child to any, nor call any in at the birth of the child.”

<sup>677</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), January 1678, trial of woman (t16780116-1).

<sup>678</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1685, trial of Katharine Brown (t16851014-27).

<sup>679</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1684, trial of Mary Stanes (t16840515-10).

<sup>680</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), May 1684, trial of Mary Stanes (t16840515-10).

<sup>681</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), June 1690, trial of Sarah Rhoades (t16900605-7). Sarah Rhoades’ child was found alive, “laid across the chamber-pot” and did not die until the next day. Sarah Rhoades declared herself innocent and the evidence “was somewhat circumstantial.”

child found in a clay pit was hers.<sup>682</sup> Alice, however, was acquitted because “there was no proof against her that she murdered the child” and more importantly, “the child was no bastard,” as Alice was married.<sup>683</sup> Christian Cherrey did not deny that her child was a bastard, but called her own witness, “a woman, who said that she did hire her to be her nurse, and had provided against her lying-in,” and was acquitted.<sup>684</sup> Witnesses testified for Dorothy Kingston that she did scream for help during her labor, “but was delivered before they came.”<sup>685</sup> Dorothy followed all of the social rules regarding pregnancy: she cried out for help and “had provided against her lying-in,” and so she was acquitted.<sup>686</sup> The visible action of providing for the period after giving birth helped women in infanticide cases, as it demonstrated care and forward thinking for their condition. Economic status was another key piece to infanticide cases, both for the people involved and society.

#### 4.8 Poverty and Maintenance

The Infanticide Act of 1624 reflected anxiety in society, particularly regarding poor women.<sup>687</sup> Illegitimate children represented an economic burden for specific locations, and evidence often included an accused’s economic status, as well as any financial steps they took in preparation for a birth. As previously discussed, pamphlets produced in the seventeenth century

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<sup>682</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1693, trial of Alice Sawbridge (t16930713-11).

<sup>683</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), July 1693, trial of Alice Sawbridge (t16930713-11).

<sup>684</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1696, trial of Christian Cherrey (t16961209-27).

<sup>685</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1697, trial of Dorothy Kingston (t16970224-4).

<sup>686</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 27 February 2019), February 1697, trial of Dorothy Kingston (t16970224-4).

<sup>687</sup> “21° Jac. I c. 27,” 1234-1235.

created the trope of the murdering mother. Some of these pamphlets depicted child murder rather than infanticide, but the social issues addressed were similar, specifically concerns about poverty and the maintenance of children. Printed portrayals and trials emphasized that poor women deserved to be scrutinized. Their poverty unsettled society. Poor women who engaged in violence caused further anxiety through their unnatural acts.

As seen in the stories of Calverley and Rowse, poverty could be the result of an irresponsible head of household. The story of Katherine Fox is a subversion of these previous tales of murderous fathers, telling the story from the point of view of the wife. The pamphlet described her husband, named only as Mr. Fox, as once rich “but through riotous living had consumed it all in a few years.”<sup>688</sup> Returning home, he beat his wife so severely he believed her dead, but “this desolate wretch at last returning to herself” awoke to see her children, starved and mistreated.<sup>689</sup> Fox cuts the throat of her children in what she perceived as an act of mercy and then “setting herself down purposely to die and perish in her sorrows” she intended to kill herself as well, but failed.<sup>690</sup> Instead, upon her husband’s return, she killed him, saying “thou shalt die, thou negligent man, since thy ill government has been the ruin of me and my children,” a phrase she repeats at her execution.<sup>691</sup> Fox then functions as a cautionary tale, “that wives should beware of too much fury, and husbands to be more circumspect in their families.”<sup>692</sup> The story of Fox holds similarities to the story of Rowse, as they both murder their children in what they view as an act of mercy. Rowse resorts to this violence after his own failure, his inability as head of

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<sup>688</sup> Anonymous, *The Distressed Mother, or Sorrowful Wife in Tears*, London, 1692. The title of this pamphlet in particular is interesting. Pamphlets retelling infanticide or child murder cases often use words like unnatural, bloody, or cruel in their titles. Katherine is presented somewhat sympathetically in her story. The title also incorporates both of her feminine identities, mother and wife.

<sup>689</sup> Anon., *The Distressed Mother, or Sorrowful Wife in Tears*, London, 1692.

<sup>690</sup> Anon., *The Distressed Mother, or Sorrowful Wife in Tears*, London, 1692.

<sup>691</sup> Anon., *The Distressed Mother, or Sorrowful Wife in Tears*, London, 1692.

<sup>692</sup> Anon., *The Distressed Mother, or Sorrowful Wife in Tears*, London, 1692.

household to maintain his children. He kills them, he says, because he does not want them to go begging, and yet he ignores his own culpability in the situation. Katherine murders her children because of the mistreatment of her husband, who neglects and abuses his family. Katherine and Rowse are both described as miserable, but the cautionary tale in Katherine's pamphlet chastises husbands and wives.

Poverty connected to fear, as pamphlets also depicted women killing their children out of fear of poverty, neglect, and abuse. The first section of Henry Goodcole's *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames* contains "a narration of the diabolical seduction of Elizabeth Barnes," a woman Goodcole describes as "this savage" who "continued with this hellish fire kindled in her breast, violently at the last breaking forth into the unnatural deprivation of the life of the fruit of her own womb."<sup>693</sup> Elizabeth lured her daughter into the woods and when the child fell asleep after a picnic she "barbarously did cut the throat of the child."<sup>694</sup> In her confession, Elizabeth admits that she spent her money on "one that pretended to love unto her," which put her in debt.<sup>695</sup> Mary Goodenough, the woman at the center of *A Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants*, is a widow that committed infanticide due to being "in great poverty and straits, even to the want of bread for her and hers."<sup>696</sup> Mary concealed her pregnancy, the result of being "seduced" by her

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<sup>693</sup> Goodcole, *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames*, A2r. The other sections include infanticide cases as well as an incest/rape case. See also Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames*, 78. Staub points out that many infanticide pamphlets were either heavily sensationalized, like T.B.'s *The Bloody Mother* which alleges multiple infanticide cases over several years by the same women, or has an infanticide case with other horrific crimes. In the example of Goodcole, he has child murder and infanticide cases with a case of a man raping his child, linking all these crimes together. See also Goodcole, *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames*, 18-19.

<sup>694</sup> Goodcole, *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames*, 3. In the same passage, Elizabeth attempts to kill herself with the knife and fails, then attempts to drown herself. Attempted suicide by the mother is a trope itself in these stories of child murder.

<sup>695</sup> Goodcole, *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames*, 5. See also Goodcole, *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames*, 16. In her confession, Elizabeth also admits that in prison "she concealed her adultery, that she was begot with child by him on whom she had wasted her estate" and names this man as Richard Evans.

<sup>696</sup> Anonymous, *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants* (London, 1692), 1. Mary had two other children.

neighbor, a man who promised her money.<sup>697</sup> Mary's body is central in this retelling, as she feigns illness to avoid discovery, but her neighbors still suspect her and as a result, surveil and later inspect her body.<sup>698</sup>

Infanticide cases at the Old Bailey reflect these fears over poverty as well. Sarah Dent became pregnant by a "fellow-servant" and "partly out of distrust of providence, as not knowing how to maintain it, and partly to cover her shame, added murder to uncleanness, and made away with it."<sup>699</sup> A woman referred to as "a poor young wench" was "betrayed as she alleged by a promise of marriage and getting her with child."<sup>700</sup> When she went into labor, the woman she lived with, "cruelly turned her out of doors, and set her in another parish, and there left her in pains, telling her that now the said parish were bound to provide for her."<sup>701</sup> The woman then gave birth in the street and when a midwife was finally called she "found the child dead, but not separated from her body."<sup>702</sup> This woman, however, was still found guilty, due to a small bruise on the infant's throat, its status as a bastard, and "the law making it death in that case for any

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<sup>697</sup> Anon., *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants*, 1. The man is referred to as "Baker (reported infamous for like practices with others)."

<sup>698</sup> Anon., *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants*, 1. Mary confesses to her crime and the infant is found wrapped in a blanket at her feet. Her daughter testifies that she heard her mother cry for help while in labor, but the neighbors say she did not. Witnesses and the issue of crying out or calling for help will be discussed in detail.

<sup>699</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 14 May 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, May 1679 (OA16790509). The Ordinary also states that Sarah was illiterate and "lamentably ignorant of God and her duty" and that she both understood and was remorseful of her "bloody, unnatural crime," praying "very well, and fervently, in expressions suitable to her crime and condition, with much self abhorrency and brokenness of heart." Sarah is also one of the few women named in her trial at the Old Bailey prior to 1680. See also Anonymous, *The Behaviour, Confession, and Execution of the Several Prisoners that Suffered at Tyburn on Friday the Ninth of May, 1679*, London, 1679. This pamphlet is an almost exact match of Sarah Dent's trial record, printed for the public.

<sup>700</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1679, trial of Wench (t16791015-2). See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1679 (s16791015-1). The woman is named as Joan Blackwell.

<sup>701</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1679, trial of Wench (t16791015-2).

<sup>702</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1679, trial of Wench (t16791015-2).

woman to be delivered alone without calling help.”<sup>703</sup> At the center of this case is the fear over her economic status. She is physically removed from her home and placed in another parish so that this new location would be responsible for maintenance of her child.

Mercy Harvey confessed to her crime and unequivocally stated poverty as her motivation. The Ordinary recorded that he asked her “whether she had any promise of marriage with him who begat it” and if “he did promise any maintenance for herself.”<sup>704</sup> Mercy Harvey replied no to both questions.<sup>705</sup> Mercy “despaired how to provide for it” and expressed remorse over her crime, the Ordinary stating that “it grieves her at the heart, that she hath by this notorious sin, given such public scandal and bad example to young people.”<sup>706</sup> Elizabeth Deal lied to a midwife about providing for her child while pregnant.<sup>707</sup> Elizabeth “privately made away the child, throwing it into a puddle of water on the backside of the house, in the Highway.”<sup>708</sup> Elizabeth denied all the charges, pleading that she was “distracted” and “never laid any violent hands upon her child, neither did she put it into the water, nor pinch it, only what she did was to cover her shame.”<sup>709</sup> In her confession, Deal is described as having “worldly covetous

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<sup>703</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1679, trial of Wench (t16791015-2). See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, October 1679 (OA16791024). The Ordinary of Newgate writes that “the poor creature tried for killing of her bastard-child, in consideration of all circumstances, and that she was convicted only upon the severity of the Statute, obtained a reprieve.”

<sup>704</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, October 1690 (OA16901024).

<sup>705</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, October 1690 (OA16901024).

<sup>706</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, October 1690 (OA16901024). At the end, the Ordinary also writes: “As to Marcy Harvey, executed for destroying her bastard child, she confessed the fact now, as she did in effect at her trial: But she being very sick, and unfit for discourse, there can nothing further be said of her, but what she hath before confessed.”

<sup>707</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1691, trial of Elizabeth Deal (t16910422-22). Alternate spellings of her name in the Old Bailey include Elizabeth Dale.

<sup>708</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1691, trial of Elizabeth Deal (t16910422-22). According to other women she confessed to, Elizabeth also “pinched it by the throat and dispatch it out of the world.”

<sup>709</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), April 1691, trial of Elizabeth Deal (t16910422-22).



desires too prevailing on her, how to get fine things about her.”<sup>710</sup> She asserts that consent in her sexual relationship was based on “some promises which he made her, but performed them not.”<sup>711</sup> This follows the pattern in which many women accused and found guilty of infanticide testify that they engaged in sexual relationships under the premise of a man providing economic relief.

Mary Campion’s brief case provides insight into not guilty verdicts. Indicted for smothering her child, Mary admitted that the child “found dead in a box under the prisoner’s bed” was hers, and a midwife testified that “the child was full grown, and no appearance of hurt was seen on the child.”<sup>712</sup> In this case, “no proof was made that the child was born alive.”<sup>713</sup> Mary “was deemed to be out of the statute” because she made “good provision for the child against the birth.”<sup>714</sup> A woman publicly taking steps to provide for her unborn child was not a guarantee of being found not guilty. Mary Baker concealed her pregnancy, telling her mistress that she “had the Dropsy” when she went into labor.”<sup>715</sup> “Mary testified that her child had been born alive and that she had made provisions for it.”<sup>716</sup> Additionally, “there was no sign of any hurt done to the child” but ultimately the court decided that “she could prove nothing.”<sup>717</sup> Mary Baker

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<sup>710</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, May 1691 (OA16910501).

<sup>711</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, May 1691 (OA16910501).

<sup>712</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1689, trial of Mary Campion (t16891211-26).

<sup>713</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1689, trial of Mary Campion (t16891211-26).

<sup>714</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), December 1689, trial of Mary Campion (t16891211-26).

<sup>715</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1693, trial of Mary Baker (t16931012-32).

<sup>716</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1693, trial of Mary Baker (t16931012-32).

<sup>717</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1693, trial of Mary Baker (t16931012-32).

was found guilty under the statute because she had no witnesses.<sup>718</sup> In her confessions, it is stated that Mary admitted to having a “wanton carriage” and that “she was prevailed with to an act of uncleanness.”<sup>719</sup> Though she testified that she had made provisions for the child, her confession asserts that “to cover the shame of her sin, and out of fear that she could not nurse up and maintain her child, she did neglect to feed it, or tenderly use it, so it died.”<sup>720</sup>

The court’s decision involved both Mary Baker’s body and her sexuality. In many ways, Mary Baker followed the prescribed social rituals of pregnancy, even providing for her unborn child. Without witnesses, however, Mary Baker’s words were unsubstantiated. What she confessed about her body and her sexuality stood as evidence enough to convict her. Katherine Fox referred to her husband’s “ill government.”<sup>721</sup> Her story cautioned men and women in their behaviors. While she is the focus of the story, her husband’s failure is like that of Rowse and Calverley discussed earlier. The unnamed woman, referred to as ‘wench’ in the trial records, cast out into the streets of a new parish to give birth alone held many of the qualities that prompted anxieties. By confessing that a man seduced her, she acknowledged her own sexuality and weakness. She was poor and alone, not part of a house or hierarchy, prompting fears of vagrancy and women wandering. She gave birth alone, not following prescribed rituals of pregnancy and childbirth. Society demanded and enacted higher levels of scrutiny on the bodies of poor women, and perceived them as a threat, dangerous to the process of maintaining order.

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<sup>718</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), October 1693, trial of Mary Baker (t16931012-32). The case reads that: “then the Statute of the 21st of King James the First was read to her, viz. Except such mother can prove that the child was born dead by one witness as least, then she shall be accounted guilty, which she could not prove; so she was found guilty of the murder.”

<sup>719</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate’s Account, October 1693 (OA16931023). It also states that Mary is twenty four years old.

<sup>720</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 27 February 2019), Ordinary of Newgate’s Account, October 1693 (OA16931023). Mary is described as expressing “only a general sorrow for her ill life.”

<sup>721</sup> Anon., *The Distressed Mother, or Sorrowful Wife in Tears*, London, 1692.

## 4.9 Conclusion

The Infanticide Act of 1624 included a variety of conditions for guilt, but anxieties about the female body were at the center of the law. The law itself continued societal and legal concerns about poverty, paternity, and women, culminating in the criminalization of the female body. Women claimed marriage as a defense against the act, meaning that their child was not a bastard and therefore could not fit the law, but this defense also indicated that the female body in question belonged in a correct hierarchy. A husband was responsible for controlling his wife, and for the maintenance of her and any children, and a marriage meant that a woman was not a vagrant or a wanderer. The need for witnesses validated the female body, stating that a woman adhered to the social rituals of pregnancy and childbirth, and that her body was reliable. Concealment was yet another perpetuation of fears regarding the female body as deceitful, as it related to both hiding a pregnancy and hiding a body. Pamphlets accused and portrayed women both as having no control over their bodies, subject to weakness when it came to lust, and yet completely in control of their bodies, able to manipulate people around them. This was yet another failure of women: women who were too emotional were prone to anger and selfishness, unable to control themselves or be controlled by their husbands, to disastrous results. The printed retellings and court cases used in this chapter reveal the limits of the law and its inability to help these women. Under the 1624 Act, a stillbirth with no witnesses could result in a guilty verdict. The act created new categories of evidence women could present to the court, including proof of marriage or the act of maintenance, making these cases more complex. While women could now speak before the court, presenting their evidence, their own voices often did not count without someone to validate what they said. Infanticide cases were distinct. Anne Green's infanticide

case is perhaps one of the most famous. Found guilty and executed for her crime, Anne experienced a miraculous recovery when she awoke on the autopsy table. In Anne's case, we see a reversal, in which evidence ignored in her trial because crucial to keeping her from visiting the gallows a second time. Anne's story and subsequent printed retellings of it posit her body as miraculous. By contrast, stories of monstrous births continued social anxieties and surveillance for the female bod. In the next chapter, I examine Anne's story as well as a variety of monstrous births to look at how the duality of monstrous/miraculous contributed to the unease about the female body.

## 5 THE MONSTROUS AND MIRACULOUS BODY

### 5.1 Introduction

A significant part of what incited the anxiety about the female body was not only its unknowability, but the dualities it possessed. Midwife manuals, mostly written by men, challenged and contested female authority and knowledge about women's bodies. They portrayed women as ignorant of and embarrassed about their bodies, and yet fully capable of using that body to deceive. This narrative of ignorance pushed by the manuals did not save women from guilty verdicts in infanticide cases, as the law partially was predicated on the crime of concealment (of the pregnancy, of the infant, or both) even as women claimed they did not know they were pregnant. Monstrous births represented the most base fears about the female body made manifest. In midwife manuals, understandings of male and female bodies and reproduction touted both as responsible for procreation, but monstrous births specifically came from the female body. Men could be partially blamed for their creation, but that a female body carried, nourished, and finally brought monsters into the world meant writers and the public had to grapple with the reasons why these births occurred. These sensational stories wove religious and political ideas into their words, but still portrayed the female body as monstrous and problematic itself.

A 1651 infanticide case, however, offered an example in which the female body was miraculous. Anne Green's botched execution inspired pamphlets, all with overlaps in their retellings, but slightly different intentions. The religious intentions established Anne as saved by God, a true innocent. Anne as a character had to be remade into a purposeful woman, one who

promoted religious ideals such as forgiveness. She served as a caricature of womanly forgiveness, her function of reproduction severed from her body in the religious retellings. Anne's body was a commodity, first as an almost autopsy and second as a resurrected curiosity. A collection of poems with Anne as their topic highlights both the commodification of Anne and her story as well as this tension between the monstrous and the miraculous. They interrogate her body, questioning its sexuality and function as a woman. The poets, however, make claims to Anne's life and even her resurrection. They even puzzle not only over her miraculous body, but what her return to life means for her sexually. With a different ending to her story, Anne's guilty verdict regarding infanticide would have rendered her another female monster, but instead the pamphlets address the power of the family she worked for and how it was perhaps used against her. While Anne's case is specific, it reflects socially upheld ideas of patriarchy and the surveillance of the female body.

This chapter revisits the midwife manuals discussed in chapter two to assess how the authors explained monstrous births. I then analyze pamphlets printed throughout the century that publicize these monstrosities. In cases throughout the century, these births use 'monster' to refer to a range of physical circumstances, from clear disabilities to bordering on the fantastical. At the center of each is the root of the word: *monēre, or to warn*.<sup>722</sup> The female body, however, remains consistently viewed as problematic throughout the century. The warning, whether pointing to sin or war, was ultimately about the female body and what it could potentially produce. 'Monsters' warned and confirmed the problems of the female body. While motivations for the pamphlets change, the perception of the female body as inherently dangerous and a threat to social order does not. The Anne Green case represents an intervention in narratives of infanticide cases as

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<sup>722</sup> "monster, n., adv., and adj.," OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rskey=gtaASu&result=1> (accessed February 23, 2020).

well as perceptions of the female body. I evaluate the three pamphlets on Anne's case, which includes the poems. Anne's case exemplifies the intense scrutiny female bodies experienced, as well as the true harshness of the 1624 Infanticide Act. Her resurrection, whether viewed as a divine or medical intervention, first upholds the notion of male superiority of knowledge. It also highlighted anxieties about the female body, as men viewed female bodily deception in a new way: it avoided death. Little separated the monstrous and the miraculous, particularly with regards to the female body.

## **5.2 A Monstrous Body: "Histories tell us of many monsters brought forth by women."<sup>723</sup>**

### ***5.2.1 Disability and 'Monstrous Births'***

Monsters acted as a rhetorical device, metaphors which people used to make sense of life. The authors' intentions often were social control, forcing people into submission to acceptable behavior. To examine monstrous births in the seventeenth century, I employ what Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood call "productive looking" instead of "detached gazing."<sup>724</sup> Discussing monstrosity, and the underlining implication of disability in some cases, is worthwhile when it produces new discourse, versus ineffective discussions for the sake of shock value. Understanding monstrosity in early modern society involves looking at attitudes within

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<sup>723</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives, Or a Guide for Women the Second Part* (London, 1652), 151.

<sup>724</sup> Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, "Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance," in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, ed. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood (Columbus: The Ohio State Press, 2013), 1

their context.<sup>725</sup> Alletta Brenner wrote that “monsters are objects that cross boundaries of what we perceive to be normal and thus natural.”<sup>726</sup> A ‘monstrous birth’ is thus an extension of a body that is read as unnatural or defective. While modern senses would argue that some of these ‘monstrous births’ read as children born with disabilities, some of them are exaggerated, pushing the boundaries of the fantastical. Examining pamphlets proclaiming strange births through a gendered lens warrants an analysis of how monstrous births reflected attitudes toward femininity and the female body.<sup>727</sup>

I do include descriptions of the infant’s body to analyze how it connects to larger discussions of the female body. People interpreted the female body as monstrous in the early modern period, as the texts discussed reflect. Conjoined twins reflected the reality of disability, but early modern texts used their bodies to point to sexual sin.<sup>728</sup> A 1565 broadside discussed the birth of conjoined twins, referring to them as “two babes in one.”<sup>729</sup> William Elderton named both parents, stressing that the child was born out of wedlock and the father was on the run.<sup>730</sup> This case provides an example of the effect of the Poor Laws: presumably unable to contest the paternity, the father ran from the town, leaving the mother to face the consequences. The child, according to the broadside, is to serve as a reminder; “To witness that this is a truth, and no fable, but a warning of God, to move all people to amendment of life.”<sup>731</sup> In *Strange News of a*

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<sup>725</sup> Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 8.

<sup>726</sup> Alletta Brenner, “‘The Good and Bad of That Sexe’: Monstrosity and Womanhood in Early Modern England,” in *intersections* 10, no. 2 (2009): 163.

<sup>727</sup> Texts throughout the century can be and have been read for their religious importance. See Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). Crawford is reading these texts for their religious meanings, though she does consider gender as well.

<sup>728</sup> Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 94.

<sup>729</sup> William Elderton, *The True Form and Shape of a Monstrous Child, Which Was Born in Stone Stratford, in North Hamptonshire*, London: 1565.

<sup>730</sup> Elderton, *The Form and Shape of a Monstrous Child*.

<sup>731</sup> Elderton, *The Form and Shape of a Monstrous Child*.



*Prodigious Monster* from 1613, the child is described as a “double faced Janus” with the author concluding after this description that adultery and fornication were the worst sins.<sup>732</sup>

These punishments for sin also included intersex births. Two cousins fall in love and reproduce in *A Most Strange and True Discourse of the Wonderful Judgement of God*, and their sin of incest leads to the birth of a child with “no evident sign of the sex, either of man or woman, having the perfect members of neither.”<sup>733</sup> A woman delivered twins, with one being described as perfect, the other “neither a brother nor a sister, but both.”<sup>734</sup> Intersex cases highlight the social discomfort with dualities. In all of these examples, the authors link these births to the sins of the parents. While men are mentioned in some of the cases, more often the disability is connected to the failing of the mother, an extension of her own unnaturalness.

### 5.2.2 *Monstrous Births in Midwife Manuals*

Monstrous births exemplify the social anxiety surrounding the female body. As often as these texts heralded the womb for its power to bring forth perfection, they also criticized the it as “dangerous.”<sup>735</sup> The duality of the womb and its processes added to the discomfort stemming from its unknowability, which can be seen in other examples, such as blood. A woman’s body nourished an infant on blood, in the womb and from her breasts, and yet menstrual blood could be hazardous. The authors of midwife manuals, mostly male, offered opinions on the female body. Nicholas Culpeper stated that if a woman’s body was “vicious” so was her blood.<sup>736</sup> John

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<sup>732</sup> Anonymous, *Strange Newes of a Prodigious Monster* (London: 1613), sig. A4v.

<sup>733</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse of the Wonderful Judgement of God* (London: 1600), 6.

<sup>734</sup> Anonymous, *God’s Handy Work in Wonders*, (London: 1615), sig. A4r.

<sup>735</sup> Laura Gowing, “Knowledge and Experience, c. 1500-1750,” in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present*, eds. Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 243.

<sup>736</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (London, 1651), 77-78.

Sadler offered multiple opinions on the danger of menstrual blood and its connection to monsters or imperfections from the womb. He cautioned that sex with a woman on her period would produce a leper.<sup>737</sup> *Aristotle's Masterpiece* also highlighted the dangers of copulation during a period, writing that “seed mixing with menstrual blood contracts an unnatural mass of corrupt matter, which either turns to miscarriage, abortion, or a monstrous and deformed birth.”<sup>738</sup>

These authors defined monsters likewise, as aberrations. Alessandro Massaria maintained that “it is the certain institution and intent of nature, that women should bring forth perfect man-kind, and nothing else,” and “that whatsoever else is conceived in the woman, besides man-kind, the same is a vicious and depraved conception, against the rules and law of nature.”<sup>739</sup> A monstrous birth was the womb rejecting its intended purpose and nature. Culpeper defined a monster as “that which is either wholly or in part like a beast, or that which is ill shaped extraordinary.”<sup>740</sup> Peter Chamberlain wrote that “monsters must be referred to depraved and illegitimate conceptions.”<sup>741</sup> Sadler outlined four types of monstrous births: “In figure, situation, magnitude, or number.”<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>737</sup> John Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass* (London, 1636), 11. These other imperfections include moles or mola, false conceptions, and are linked to monsters in these texts, usually found in the same sections or in chapters near each other. In all of the texts that mention this, women are blamed, though Sadler does argue that it is caused by both men and women. Sadler argues that it is caused by “corrupt or barren seed in the man, and from the monstrous blood in the woman both mixed together in the cavity of the womb; where nature finding herself weak (yet deferring to maintain the perpetuity of her species) labors to bring forth a fictitious conception rather than none. And so instead of a living creature generates a lump of flesh.” See Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking Glass*, 124-125. Again, here we see blame placed upon the female body and its process of menstruation. By contrast, Jane Sharp states that a widow can produce a mole with her own seed. See Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 106. See also Boursier, *The Complete Midwife's Practice*, 75-80. Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, 79-84. Fontanus, *The Woman's Doctor*, 146-156. Guillemeau, *The Happy Delivery*, 13-18. Massaria, *The Woman's Counselor*, 139-148. Ruff, *The Expert Midwife*, 145-150. Sermon, *The Ladies Companion*, 31-36. Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 106-116.

<sup>738</sup> Anonymous, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* (London, 1584), 49. The author does state that both men and women should know better than to have sex when a woman is menstruating. Anon., *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, 52.

<sup>739</sup> Alessandro Massaria, *De morbis foemineis, The Womans Counsellour* (London, 1657), 137.

<sup>740</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 152.

<sup>741</sup> Peter Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice* (London, 1665), 91.

<sup>742</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 134-135. He describes each as follows: “In figure, when a man bears the character of a beast...In magnitude, when one part doth note equalize with another, as when one part is too big or too little for the other parts of the body; and this is so common amongst us, that I need not produce a

Authors issued several reasons as to why these births happened. For Rüff, a monstrous birth was either a judgment of God or the result of problems in the seed, which he explained as “too much, too little, or corrupted.”<sup>743</sup> Monstrous births were the punishment for sins committed, particularly that of lust.<sup>744</sup> Sadler viewed the causes as either divine or natural, with divine being the will of God, a judgment against the parents “for their filthy and corrupt affections which are let loose unto wickedness, like brute beasts that have no understanding.”<sup>745</sup> He also argued that the “matter” could be at fault, either in defect or excess, or the fault of the womb, as it could be either too strong or too weak, “the instrument or place of conception.”<sup>746</sup> Chamberlain saw multiple causes, such as imagination or a defect in the body, such as an excess of heat.<sup>747</sup> Imagination and the link between the infant in the womb and the mother were important.<sup>748</sup> Culpeper emphasized this connection between mother and child, stating that most monstrous births were the mother’s fault, though the biggest cause in his estimate was sex during menstruation.<sup>749</sup> Sharp put forth two causes, fault in the seed or imagination, and wrote that “sometimes the mother is frightened or conceives wonders, or longs strangely for things not to be had, and the child is marked accordingly by it.”<sup>750</sup> As Culpeper wrote in his second text, “therefore imagination is the cause of monsters.”<sup>751</sup>

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testimony for it. In situation, as if the ears were on the face and the eyes on the breast or legs...In number, when a man hath two heads or four hands...”

<sup>743</sup> Jakob Rüff, *The Expert Midwife* (London, 1637), 151.

<sup>744</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 153.

<sup>745</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 135.

<sup>746</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 137.

<sup>747</sup> Chamberlain, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwives Practice*, 94.

<sup>748</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 173. Paster writes that “in reproduction, the female body was not only different as usual from the male body but different from itself that, at its most dangerous, threatened contamination of self and baby.”

<sup>749</sup> Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 139.

<sup>750</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 116-118.

<sup>751</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 152. See also Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 19.

Crawford argues that the fear of maternal imagination or imprinting worked as an excuse to control female access to ideas and images.

The maternal link or imagination had the power to undo nature, according to this argument, simply from a pregnant woman looking at anything out of the ordinary. For children born with a variety of disfigurements, “most ascribe the reason to the mother, who has busied her eyes and mind upon some ill shaped or distorted creature.”<sup>752</sup> Terror or fright could cause harelips or other spots and birthmarks on a child.<sup>753</sup> Imaginative power was so strong that “it stamps the character of the thing imagined upon the child: so that the children of an adulteress may be like unto her own husband though begotten by another man.”<sup>754</sup> This occurred, one author argued, if a woman engaging in an extramarital affair envisioned her husband while having sex.<sup>755</sup>

Preoccupation with the female body originated in anxiety about its indecipherability, but a portion of that anxiety came from the fear of what the female body meant for male identity, particularly concerning paternity. Not only were there no truly conclusive pregnancy tests, but paternity could be ambiguous in a way that pregnancy, a visible physical condition, could never be. Men were then forced to define a portion of their identity by what they viewed as an unreliable body. The female body was not only uncertain, it was deceptive. Women did hold some power because of their body, but incessant speculation about the female body only furthered ideas that it was disingenuous. This fear arguably should have undermined arguments from these texts that cast women as ignorant and modest, for how could a woman not fully know how her body worked and yet use those same inner workings to deceive?

Maternal imagination retained power even after conception. After blood splashed on the cheek of a pregnant woman walking by her butcher, her child was born with a blemish in the

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<sup>752</sup> Anon., *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, 26.

<sup>753</sup> Rüff, *The Expert Midwife*, 154-155. See also Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives*, 159.

<sup>754</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 138.

<sup>755</sup> Anon., *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, 25.

exact spot.<sup>756</sup> A baby could be born and monsters could spring from the womb later. Sharp wrote that occasionally “worms, toads, mice, serpents” were in the womb with an infant, and retold a story in which Sharp delivered from a woman “two like serpents” three months after that woman gave birth.<sup>757</sup> On these beasts, Sharp reiterated that “again in time of copulation, imagination oftentimes also produceth monstrous births, when women look too much on strange objects.”<sup>758</sup> Women produced monsters by looking at what they should not. No author offered a cure for monsters but emphasized that doctors “are to admonish women with child not to look upon monsters.”<sup>759</sup>

### 5.2.3 *Monstrous Births and Sin*

These texts often centered female sexuality as a cause for monstrosity, the birth a reflection of the mother’s sinful nature. In *A Most Strange and True Discourse of the Wonderful Judgment of God*, the author known as “I.R.” focuses on sexual sins, including “incest, onanisme [*sic*], whoredom, adultery, and fornication, with other sodomitical [*sic*] sins of uncleanness and pollutions.”<sup>760</sup> At the center of this story is “a young maiden, a yeoman’s daughter of Herefordshire (whose names for some causes we conceal) who had convenient offers of marriages.”<sup>761</sup> By withholding her name, this anonymous woman becomes a substitute in which fearful readers can use their own imaginations. An anonymous sinful woman who gives birth to a monster is then potentially every woman, stressing the social anxiety around the female body and

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<sup>756</sup> Sadler, *The Sick Woman's Private Looking-Glass*, 139.

<sup>757</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 111.

<sup>758</sup> Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 111.

<sup>759</sup> Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*, 153.

<sup>760</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse of the Wonderful Judgment of God* (London: 1600), sig. A3r.

<sup>761</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 2.

its need for surveillance. She gets engaged to “a man of competent wealth, and of good name and fame in the place where he dwelt” and they are “contracted together” in church.<sup>762</sup> The author here is emphasizing the comparative goodness of the man this woman later forsakes. He emphasizes the law by demonstrating that this woman was legally and socially bound to this man. He states that she breaks off the match with this good man because of the devil, writing that “she fell to dislike with the man, to shun his honest company, and in the end wholly to break off from this match” and that any woman “with modesty, would have been greatly ashamed, and unwilling.”<sup>763</sup> She goes to live with her maternal uncle, who has three sons, and the woman “fell a lusting; for, good love I cannot well call it” with one of her cousins.<sup>764</sup>

Here we see the emphasis on sexual sins, particularly of incest, and the notion of the Devil’s interference. According to the author “their lust was so hot, that soon after the same began to be kindled, it was so set on fire, and the Devil had so blinded the eyes of these two.”<sup>765</sup> The two, both man and woman, are so overcome by their own desires that they are blind to the sin at the center of it. The woman becomes pregnant and “God in his just judgment (to show his displeasure against mockery with his holy institution of marriage, and his hatred of the sins of whoredom, adultery, fornication, incest, and all other uncleanness) made this proud, this scornful and unconstant [*sic*] wench, the mother of a monster, and not of an orderly birth.”<sup>766</sup>

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<sup>762</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 2.

<sup>763</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 2. The author does state that there was no cause for either to break off the match- the sins of the woman come later, though he is setting this story up as a tragic fall from grace for this woman who appeared to have it all. This could be viewed as a parallel for the story of Eve.

<sup>764</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 3. Again, the author’s use of the word “fell” can perhaps be viewed as reinterpreting the story of Eve and a woman’s fall from grace.

<sup>765</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 3. See also “May 1650: An Act for suppressing the detestable sins of Incest, Adultery and Fornication,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C H Firth and R S Rait (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911), 387-389. British History Online, accessed January 2, 2020, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp387-389>. This law does not make relationships between cousins a punishable offense.

<sup>766</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 3-4.

In this disorderly birth, the problem is the proportion of the body. As noted above, the author describes the infant as having a too long head with unequal eyes that bulged out, a flat nose and a small mouth, “no evident sign of the sex, either of man or woman, having the perfect members of neither,” with knees close to stomach and legs attached to buttocks, and the right foot turned the wrong way.<sup>767</sup> The hands were a central concern. The fingers were webbed together “as with a mitten” and “the finger of the left hand only (which in Latin is called *digitus annularis*, and in English the ring finger) had a nail, and that finger towards the end was separated from the others.”<sup>768</sup> The child was baptized and named “What God Will,” dying on the third day.<sup>769</sup> The author finishes his story by writing “thus you have heard the wonderful deformities of this monster, described unto you in all parts, and according to the very truth, as it was.”<sup>770</sup>

The anonymous author of *Strange News out of Kent* uses women as contrasts to each other. This story begins with “Goodwife Watts, whose husband is a shepherd,” an older, well respected woman in the community who takes in a pregnant traveler, “a certain wandering young woman, as it seemed great with child, handsome, and decently appareled.”<sup>771</sup> The pregnant woman asks for “some Christian-like charity” or else “her self, and the babe within her body were like to perish.”<sup>772</sup> Goodwife Watts possessed “such pity and womanly nature” and takes her in, offering to help with the birth.<sup>773</sup> The author describes the birth as agonizing: the “womb was

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<sup>767</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 5-6.

<sup>768</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 6. See also Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 69. Crawford links the child’s deformity of only one (ring) finger to the legal and religious significance of breaking the marriage contract.

<sup>769</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 7.

<sup>770</sup> I.R., *A Most Strange and True Discourse*, 7.

<sup>771</sup> Anonymous, *Strange News Out of Kent* (London, 1609), sig. A4v. Watts is referred to also as “kind-hearted old woman Mother Watts.” Spelling variations of her name in the text include Wattes and Watts.

<sup>772</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Br.

<sup>773</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Br.

tormented with such grievous pain, that it much affrighted the old woman” and Mother Watts sought other women for help, though “not any of them all knew how to shift in such a dangerous case.”<sup>774</sup> One of the women present is “a midwife of a mild nature, and of good experience, who at her coming thither, so cunningly showed her skill.”<sup>775</sup> No level of skill could aid with what happened as “her womb yielded forth into the world a kind of creature, but no child rightly shaped, for it was most strange and dreadful to behold” and all the women present had “a great fright.”<sup>776</sup> Again, the depiction of the monstrous birth concerns proportion and excess. The author describes that the face and chest were “framed together like a deformed piece of flesh, resembled no proportion of nature, but seemed as it were a chaos of confusion, a mixture of things without any description”<sup>777</sup> No one present could stand the scent in the room, which “smelled so earthly.”<sup>778</sup>

In this story, the pregnant woman is constantly defined as wandering. While perhaps a reference to her vagrancy, it could also be interpreted as a metaphor for the womb, the female body, and the anxiety surrounding them. As discussed in chapter two, people believed that an itinerant womb caused health problems for women. A pregnant, presumably unmarried nomadic woman belonged to no one and no place. This woman represented the fear regarding the unknowability of the female body and the inability of society to restrain that body. She is described as an “unknown woman.”<sup>779</sup> After the birth, she confesses “that this monster, a little

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<sup>774</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Br.

<sup>775</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Bv.

<sup>776</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Bv. See also Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 80. The monster/child terrifies the women present, “reminding them of the power of God, the fallibility of women, and the crucial role they play as the go-betweens between childbirth and the maintenance of social order.”

<sup>777</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B2r. The author also states that the infant had too many fingers and toes. Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B2r.

<sup>778</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B2v. The author says this is because the child is born dead.

<sup>779</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Bv. This functions differently than withholding the name. An unknown woman stresses the need to scrutinize all women. Not only is this woman’s body unknowable, and one that



time before her delivery, moved in her belly, not like unto other natural children, but as she had been possessed with an evil spirit, which put her to extreme torments.”<sup>780</sup> Believing the woman to be ill, Watts proves her usefulness once again by running to town to fetch supplies, but when she returns, the woman has gone, leaving money to bury her child.<sup>781</sup> Watts and the witnessing neighbors go to the magistrate to tell him of what has transpired and the community buries the baby.<sup>782</sup> The ending of the tale again focuses on the unknown, nomadic mother, writing that no one knew “what she was, from whence she came, nor whither she was going, nor as yet it is not known for a truth what place she is traveled, but for a certainty she was proved to be a wanderer.”<sup>783</sup> Wandering then perhaps is part of the female nature: unable to be placed by society, unknowable, and problematic. Medical texts cited the wandering womb as key to female diseases. The metaphor of the wandering woman is then a symptom of social problems. Women needed to be surveilled because they could not control their body, but also because women not in their place created unease.

The most important body in *Strange News of a Prodigious Monster* is that of the monstrous children. The story focuses on a child in the county of Lancaster that was “born of a strange and wonderful shape, with four legs, four arms, two bellies, proportionally joined to one back, one head, two faces, like double faced Janus, the one before, the other behind, four eyes, and two noses.”<sup>784</sup> According to the author, the worst sins committed by man are adultery and fornication.<sup>785</sup> The parents of the child are both physically marked with the brand of bastardy, as

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produced a monster, *she* is unknown, a stranger. This reinforces the connection between unknowability and danger; the female body *is* dangerous because it is unknowable.

<sup>780</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B3r.

<sup>781</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B3r-sig. B3v.

<sup>782</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B3v.

<sup>783</sup> Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. B4r.

<sup>784</sup> Anonymous, *Strange News of a Prodigious Monster* (London: 1613), sig. A4v.

<sup>785</sup> Anon., *Strange News of a Prodigious Monster*, sig. A4v.

the author contends that the child, “from her parents’ crimes in adultery, endured this punishment.”<sup>786</sup> The child, physically deformed, acts as a visible representation of the parents’ sexual crimes. The physical marks of the parents forever changed their bodies, a physical indication of their crimes. As testament to the truth of his account, the author retells how the parents opened the child’s grave for people to see but argues that these monsters should not be “marveled at” because of their cause.<sup>787</sup>

A woman gives birth alone in *God’s Handy Work in Wonders*, transgressing the social norms of childbirth in early modern England. She is described as “a poor wayfaring woman being great with child, but not near her time” that goes into an old barn as night falls.<sup>788</sup> God punishes her physically for the sins of both her and her husband, his intention “to strike her with pain, so that there she fell in labor...she was after many tortures, and torments of soul and body, delivered of two children.”<sup>789</sup> These children, the author writes, are of “shame and sorrow: not of motherly embracements, but of affrights and wonder.”<sup>790</sup> Again, the dead bodies of these infants are displayed, with the authors contending that “the misery of the sad mother” led people to pay to see the children.<sup>791</sup>

By contrast, in *A Wonder Worth the Reading*, the woman delivers with other women present. They were “divers, honest, and religious women” and the baby invoked “their wonderful fear and astonishment.”<sup>792</sup> A midwife present is afraid of the child’s “fiery red” eyes after she

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<sup>786</sup> Anon., *Strange News of a Prodigious Monster*, sig. Br.

<sup>787</sup> Anon., *Strange News of a Prodigious Monster*, sig. B2r.

<sup>788</sup> Anonymous, *God’s Handy Work in Wonders*, (London: 1615), sig. A4r. See also Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 75-76. This monster is a punishment for mother and vagrancy and “such fantasies of public exposure were perhaps a response to the unfixed nature of many wandering pregnant women, a way of pinning them down and making their bodies’ products, if not their own bodies, subject to disciplinary action.”

<sup>789</sup> Anon., *God’s Handy Work in Wonders*, sig. A4r. The author also writes that her pain was “more than women commonly suffer.”

<sup>790</sup> Anon., *God’s Handy Work in Wonders*, sig. B2r.

<sup>791</sup> Anon., *God’s Handy Work in Wonders*, sig. Br-sig. Bv.

<sup>792</sup> Anonymous, *A Wonder Worth the Reading* (London, 1617), sig. A2r.

attempted to close those eyes and could not, and the fear led all the women present “to prayer desiring God to take from them” their fright.<sup>793</sup> In addition to red eyes, the author describes the infant as a deformed female child “with a half forehead, without any skull, having a fair proportioned body from the breast downward” with a piece of flesh on her forehead as “being wonderfully curled like gentlewomen’s attire” and ears “not being like to Christians’ ears.”<sup>794</sup> This story differs from the others as the author concludes by writing that “in this hideous and fearful form was this child brought forth alive, to the great astonishment of the beholders, and grievous lamentation of the parents.”<sup>795</sup> The child then is a physical reminder of the sins of the parents, and their misery is caused by its existence.

#### 5.2.4 *Monstrous Births During the English Civil War*

The portrayal of monstrous births during the English Civil War maintained many of the characteristics from earlier. Pamphlets in this period, however, shifted from a “sin-specific” design to advocating Parliament-approved religious views and the desire for social order.<sup>796</sup> In *Strange News from Scotland*, both the mother and monster speak about their sins. The monster, described as “monstrous and ill-shapen” and inciting fear from witnesses, allegedly proclaimed “I am thus deformed for the sins of my parents.”<sup>797</sup> While this reaffirms monstrous births as punishment for sin, the mother confessed to being a heretic and wanting an end to the church and

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<sup>793</sup> Anon., *A Wonder Worth the Reading*, 6. The midwife thought the baby dead, hence why she wanted to close its eyes.

<sup>794</sup> Anon., *A Wonder Worth the Reading*, 5-6.

<sup>795</sup> Anon., *A Wonder Worth the Reading*, 6.

<sup>796</sup> Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 114.

<sup>797</sup> Anonymous, *Strange News from Scotland* (London: 1647), 2-3.

state-government.<sup>798</sup> The father does not speak in this pamphlet, and while the deformity is blamed on both parents, the later confession of the mother seems to again connect monstrosity with women.

Diane Purkiss argues that although monsters came from women, during the English Civil War monsters signified a “deformation of masculinity.”<sup>799</sup> This is connected to the influx of headless monster stories which later represented the physical beheading of Charles I.<sup>800</sup> If households and their heads mirrored the monarch and his people, a headless monarch understandably created anxiety within men. This anxiety, however, fixated on the female body as before, and pamphlets featured headless monsters prior to the beheading of Charles I. Women created monsters, not only due to their sin or sexuality, but because of political and religious opinions or desires. In the 1645 pamphlet *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster* a child was born headless after the mother prayed to “bring forth a child without a head” instead of having a Roundhead.<sup>801</sup> Mary Adams of *The Ranter’s Monster* said that “rather than she would bring forth the Holy Ghost, to be a Round-head, or Independent, she desired that he might have no head at all.”<sup>802</sup> These pamphlets use women to speak outlandish desires and to bear the monstrous results of praying for such a thing. A mother experienced a “monstrous and prodigious birth” after “infinite pain and danger” in London in 1645.<sup>803</sup> The infant had no head and a “hollow lump of flesh and from thence did proceed another birth in the shape of a man

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<sup>798</sup> Anon., *Strange News from Scotland*, 3-4.

<sup>799</sup> Diane Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 164.

<sup>800</sup> Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 116. Crawford argues that this also refers to ‘headless’ women, or women who refused to be ruled, by husbands or hierarchy.

<sup>801</sup> Anonymous, *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster* (London: 1645), 6.

<sup>802</sup> Anonymous, *The Ranter’s Monster* (London: 1652), 8.

<sup>803</sup> Anonymous, *The Most Strange and Wonderful Apperation [sic] of Blood in a Poole at Garraton* (London, 1645), 7.

child, and perfect in every limb, it was but little but very lovely to behold.”<sup>804</sup> The author directly referred to the Civil War as “sad times” and that the “the spirit of dissention and war is spread over the whole face of the earth.”<sup>805</sup> The mother experienced a still birth, but the author portrayed this monstrous birth in a more positive tone, stating that “from the imperfect ruins of the other” comes new growth.<sup>806</sup> Rather than pushing political ideals, this pamphlet stresses the importance of new beginnings for the country. The woman herself is not portrayed as depraved but her monstrous birth perhaps represents hope. The author alludes to the return of Charles I and that the king could “be reconciled with his Parliament.”<sup>807</sup> Monstrosity in this context is a commentary on the monstrosity of war and bloodshed, not the female body.

Other authors condemn the women, these monsters, and the public. The monstrous birth in *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster* was a “wonderful manifestation of God’s anger, against wicked and prophane people.”<sup>808</sup> The population of Lancashire, the monster’s location, was “a mixed number” and “no parish in England hath had so many witches, none fuller of Papists.”<sup>809</sup> The mother provoked God in a number of ways, including marrying a Catholic and praying to birth a child with no head.<sup>810</sup> Although the story focuses on the woman and her faults, the people of Lancashire are implicated as well. The female body demanded surveillance and many of these stories imply that a woman who birthed a monster somehow eluded this watchfulness. A monstrous birth spoke for itself, as it proved the woman to be deficient and deceitful. This focus on an entire place, however, is specific to the time of the English Civil War. She produced a monster, but her neighbors allowed her monstrous

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<sup>804</sup> Anon., *The Most Strange and Wonderful Apperation [sic] of Blood in a Poole at Garraton*, 8.

<sup>805</sup> Anon., *The Most Strange and Wonderful Apperation [sic] of Blood in a Poole at Garraton*, 2.

<sup>806</sup> Anon., *The Most Strange and Wonderful Apperation [sic] of Blood in a Poole at Garraton*, 8.

<sup>807</sup> Anon., *The Most Strange and Wonderful Apperation [sic] of Blood in a Poole at Garraton*, 7.

<sup>808</sup> Anon., *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster*, A2r.

<sup>809</sup> Anon., *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster*, 4.

<sup>810</sup> Anon., *A Declaration of a Strange and Wonderful Monster*, 5-6.

womanhood to go unchecked. A woman cannot be watched by neighbors that do not first watch themselves. The author of *Signs and Wonders from Heaven* also condemns “all Christian people which are capable of understanding how that the sins of the world have in a high degree offended the world’s maker and provoked the Lord to anger.”<sup>811</sup> Mistress Hart “was religiously given, honest in behavior, courteous in her speech, and well qualified in her actions” and yet “was mightily troubled with what she bore in her womb.”<sup>812</sup> A midwife, Mistress Bullock, and other female neighbors attend Hart during her labor. Hart survives the birth; the infant later dies.<sup>813</sup> Hart is not the focus of blame in this pamphlet, but rather a victim of a wicked world.

Though surveillance remained important throughout the period, it could not prevent monstrous births. The author of *A Monstrous Birth* believes the work itself will later be judged because it talks “of wonders, especially of monstrous things” that represent God’s judgment.<sup>814</sup> In this story, neighbors did watch an unnamed couple, suspecting the wife to be pregnant.<sup>815</sup> The woman “fell distracted” and experienced pain, to the extent that her husband sent word to a man “that had cured other persons so tormented,” seeking to “destroy those things in her which was the cause of her madness.”<sup>816</sup> The pamphlet does not specify what the woman took, but after “there came out of her three monstrous things, all speckled, and like unto young cats” which died.<sup>817</sup> Husband and wife grew distant from each other, as she began to avoid going to bed with him. She later told him that she spent her time playing cards with the Devil, finding him “one of the fairest gamesters that ever she met withal.”<sup>818</sup> The author offers no real analysis to the tale,

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<sup>811</sup> Anonymous, *Signs and Wonders from Heaven* (London: 1645), 1.

<sup>812</sup> Anon., *Signs and Wonders from Heaven*, 4.

<sup>813</sup> Anon., *Signs and Wonders from Heaven*, 4-5.

<sup>814</sup> Anonymous, *A Monstrous Birth of a True Relation of Three Strange and Prodigious Things* (London: 1657), A2r.

<sup>815</sup> Anon., *A Monstrous Birth*, 2.

<sup>816</sup> Anon., *A Monstrous Birth*, 2-3.

<sup>817</sup> Anon., *A Monstrous Birth*, 3.

<sup>818</sup> Anon., *A Monstrous Birth*, 3.

ending the story with the statement that “the Lord’s displeasure hath soon after broken forth very terribly.”<sup>819</sup> In this pamphlet, no one is explicitly blamed. Instead, it seems to speak to the uncertainty in the period. Neighbors surveilled each other as expected, particularly in the case of this couple, who the pamphlet described as poor.<sup>820</sup>

Mary Adams, the woman who prayed for an infant with no head rather than a Roundhead, was jailed for blasphemy and delivered the “ugliest ill-shapen monster that ever eyes beheld” in jail.<sup>821</sup> There’s some debate about whether the Ranters really existed, or whether they were sort of a catch-all term for dangerous sectarians. Adams claimed to be the Virgin Mary pregnant with “the child of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>822</sup> The pamphlet focuses on Mary and her body. It establishes that she came from a good family and her upbringing WAS in a Protestant church.<sup>823</sup> When she went into labor in jail, a midwife and “other good women” came to help her.<sup>824</sup> The author directly juxtaposes Adams to these other women. They are described as ‘good’ and helpful. The author later quotes Adams as stating “that her heart was so hardened in wickedness, that she had no power to repent” even as the other women implore her to pray for forgiveness.<sup>825</sup> These women are then pious as well, compared to Adams who was blasphemous and wicked.

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<sup>819</sup> Anon., *A Monstrous Birth*, 4.

<sup>820</sup> Anon., *A Monstrous Birth*, 2.

<sup>821</sup> Anonymous, *The Ranter’s Monster* (London: 1652), 3-4. See also “August 1650: An Act against several Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions, derogatory to the honor of God, and destructive to humane Society.,” in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C H Firth and R S Rait (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911), 409-412. British History Online, accessed January 3, 2020, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp409-412>. See also Crawford, *Monstrous Protestantism*, 150. While there is debate over the existence of the Ranters, associating Adams with this group further the trope of her as a dangerous outsider.

<sup>822</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 3. See also Crawford, *Monstrous Protestantism*, 155. There was a ‘Free Spirit Movement’ in which people claimed to be Christ or be pregnant with Christ.

<sup>823</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 4.

<sup>824</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 4. All the witness listed, however, are men. See also Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 5. The pamphlet then legitimizes women and their knowledge in the realm of childbirth but delegitimizes their authority to attest to the truthfulness of the story. In this respect, they only act as a contrast to Adams, not to a strong position on the authority of women.

<sup>825</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 4.

Adams labored for eight days, delivering a monster on the ninth day, and the monster was so terrible that the “women’s hearts trembled to look upon it.”<sup>826</sup>

The fact that only women were supposed to be present at the birth reemphasizes birth as a moment of male exclusion. When looking at monstrous births, Diane Purkiss refers to birth as “the opening of the disorderly female body” which “must remain hidden while what is undisclosed is described as horror.”<sup>827</sup> In *The Ranter’s Monster*, there is a narrative shift from the body of the monster to the mother’s body, locating it as “sign of social and political disorder.”<sup>828</sup> Adams becomes monstrous herself, her body “rotted and consumed as she lay” and “full of botches, blains, boils, and stinking scans.”<sup>829</sup> Monstrous births represent physical manifestations of sin or shame. Adams’ body, however, becomes a physical manifestation of her religious corruption. She literally rots from the inside out as a result from her sin. The birth is not sufficient punishment and does not call enough attention to Mary’s sin. Her body is an excess of sin and it seeps beyond its boundaries. Mary does not die from her wounds but kills herself violently with a knife. She “ripped up her bowels with the same knife” that she asked to borrow from the women to use on her nails.<sup>830</sup> Adams tears open the part of her that swelled with pregnancy. There is no celebration to her death or to glimpsing the inner workings of a female body. Adams was heretical and corrupted, her body grotesque. In this story, both mother and infant are monstrous, reminders of sin and the failings of the female body.

Monstrous births during the English Civil War merged old tropes and anxieties with new ones. These births still represented punishment for sins, but 'sin' now could coincide with

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<sup>826</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 4.

<sup>827</sup> Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War*, 182.

<sup>828</sup> Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War*, 179.

<sup>829</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 4.

<sup>830</sup> Anon., *The Ranter’s Monster*, 4.



unorthodox religious or political beliefs. Portrayals of headless births increased after the decapitation of the monarch. Allegorically, headless births followed the same tropes of cases of petty treason: a woman striking at the heart of her household, upsetting the natural order. In monstrous births, a woman upset the natural order by allowing her desires and ideas to be imprinted onto her child. Her body then usurped the father's. The English Civil War might have been a new moment of masculine anxiety due to violence, but that anxiety still fixated on the female body

### 5.2.5 *Monstrous Births Post-English Civil War*

Pamphlets in the latter half of the century still viewed monstrous births as signs from God, the sins of the mother, or in some cases the parents, made physical.<sup>831</sup> Authors also insisted that monsters were a consistent part of history. The author of *The Strange Monster* stated “that monsters and prodigious births have been frequent in each age none that are wise will deny.”<sup>832</sup> Authors dissented on the role of nature in monstrous births. In *A True Relation of a Monstrous Female-Child*, the author referred to these births by writing “wonderful are the productions of nature” and viewed these births as naturally occurring, stating that “several learned historians...make mention of the like.”<sup>833</sup> These occurrences in history “which make men gaze and admire, but for which no certain reason can be given” was “a thing not to be questioned.”<sup>834</sup> Nature being “subject to frequent miscarriages” warranted no deeper examination, these authors

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<sup>831</sup> See Anonymous, *The Two Great Admirable Wonders* (London, 1661), 1-2. See also Anonymous, *England's New Wonders* (London, 1697), 3.

<sup>832</sup> Anonymous, *The Strange Monster* (London, 1668), 1.

<sup>833</sup> Anonymous, *A True Relation of a Monstrous Female-Child* (London, 1680), 2-4.

<sup>834</sup> A. Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster* (London, 1682), 1.

argued.<sup>835</sup> As signs from God or a mistake in nature, these births were scandals that preoccupied whole neighborhoods, as authors purported their stories to be true precisely because they came from neighbors. It is worth noting, however, that these “eyewitnesses” were never midwives or women present at the birth. These stories emphasized the importance of surveillance, particularly regarding women and the female body, as the truly monstrous in these births were not the infants, but the mothers and female nature.

The pamphlet *The Two Great Admirable Wonders* emphasized the connection between the female body and monstrous births, allowing its protagonist to refer to herself as a monster. Anne Wilson gave birth surrounded by a midwife “and other women, who immediately came, all using their art and skill.”<sup>836</sup> After a painful birth, “numerous people flocked together, who went to take a view of this strange and admirable monster” while “the midwife and all the rest of the women kept silence amongst one another all the while the monster was alive, for fear of reducing the child-led-woman into a fear.”<sup>837</sup> Anne called to see her child, but the midwife instead told her to “take something wherewith to comfort her heart, for what the Lord had sent into the world he was again pleased to take away.”<sup>838</sup> Anne is only permitted to see the infant after it dies and she classifies herself as a monster as well, “quivering, shivering, and trembling,” saying “was this same monster formed in my womb, and gave it nutriment nine months from my body?”<sup>839</sup> By specifically mentioning her womb and its reproductive functions, Anne highlights the fears propagated by midwife manuals: monsters may be a part of nature, but they form in the unnatural womb of a woman, and its power includes aiding nature in its “frequent miscarriages.” Anne also

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<sup>835</sup> Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster*, 1.

<sup>836</sup> Anon., *The Two Great Admirable Wonders*, 2. Her story was written in a letter to the printer by her neighbor, John Fuller.

<sup>837</sup> Anon., *The Two Great Admirable Wonders*, 3. Anne is described as a “pained and distressed woman” during her labor.

<sup>838</sup> Anon., *The Two Great Admirable Wonders*, 3.

<sup>839</sup> Anon., *The Two Great Admirable Wonders*, 4.

fears that she is “exempted from the nature of other women.”<sup>840</sup> Though she refers to her infant as a monster, Anne freely discusses her body’s role in its creation and questions what it means for her as a woman.

Anxiety about the female body appears subtly in some of the pamphlets, overshadowed by grotesque description of the infant’s body. In *The Strange Monster*, the unnamed woman is merely described as “a certain woman, an inhabitant of that place.”<sup>841</sup> The pamphlet underscores that the woman, despite the failings and unnaturalness of her body, belonged, rather than being like the wandering woman in *Strange News out of Kent*.<sup>842</sup> This unnamed woman gave birth to “a most strange and uncouth monster” and “endured great torments and excessive pangs not to be uttered, and can only be expressed by imagination.”<sup>843</sup> Imagination in this example is positive, as it allows the reader control over what is happening to the female body. Her pain is only understood through the imagination of the reader, while female imagination within their own bodies is portrayed negatively because it can potentially lead to monstrous births. The author of *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster* reemphasizes that point, writing “the monstrosity it self may have been occasioned by the irregular fancies of conceiving and breeding women.”<sup>844</sup> The author argues that women “are generally the first reporters” and that women reporting, hearing, and reading these stories allow them “to divulge their own misapprehensions and affrightments” or else “to disgrace their neighbors.”<sup>845</sup> Monstrous births are referred to as “accidents of this nature” that “rarely fall out among us.”<sup>846</sup> When they do happen, however, they

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<sup>840</sup> Anon., *The Two Great Admirable Wonders*, 4.

<sup>841</sup> Anon., *The Strange Monster*, 2.

<sup>842</sup> Anon., *The Strange Monster*, 2. See also Anon., *Strange News Out of Kent*, sig. Br.

<sup>843</sup> Anon., *The Strange Monster*, 2.

<sup>844</sup> Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster*, 2.

<sup>845</sup> Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster*, 2.

<sup>846</sup> Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster*, 2.

are “perhaps to punish the pride and vanity incident to the female sex.”<sup>847</sup> No matter the cause of a monstrous birth, it always indicates shame and wrongness within the female body. A monstrous birth in this estimation is the unnaturalness of the female body made manifest.

Like stories of murderous wives and mothers, the pamphlet *England's New Wonders* endeavored to instruct women about selfishness and desire. A married woman named Mary was “passionately desirous to have a child but God withheld from her the fruit of the womb which made her angry.”<sup>848</sup> As Mary gets older and still has no children, her husband remains, according to the author, “an active man, and lively enough for the business of generation.”<sup>849</sup> The beginning of this story positions the female and male bodies as oppositional binaries. The failings of Mary's body, this text implies, comes from her own anger and impatience with God. As her age increases, so does her husband's vitality. Mary's body is doubly unnatural, in that it does not perform its reproductive function, but also because her desire for a child develops into anger.

Mary's story emphasizes the concept of female ignorance. She believes she is pregnant after her stomach begins to swell and then “sink all on a sudden,” though there were “judicious grave matrons who took it for a wind.”<sup>850</sup> For nearly two years “her belly continued to grow big; and she felt strange pains, unusual sweats and faintings” until she physically went into labor.<sup>851</sup> After “extraordinary pains and labour” Mary was “delivered of a monstrous child to the affrightment of all that were present.”<sup>852</sup> People who traveled to see the child asked Mary if she had done anything to offend God, “that might cause him thus for to afflict her with so monstrous

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<sup>847</sup> Brocas, *A True Relation of the Birth of a Monster*, 2.

<sup>848</sup> Anonymous, *England's New Wonders* (London, 1697), 4.

<sup>849</sup> Anon., *England's New Wonders*, 4.

<sup>850</sup> Anon., *England's New Wonders*, 4. The midwives believed it was a mole or false pregnancy.

<sup>851</sup> Anon., *England's New Wonders*, 5.

<sup>852</sup> Anon., *England's New Wonders*, 5. The text also says that “several women” were with her. Mary is adhering to the social norms of women present at birth, even if no one believes she is actually in labor.

an issue.”<sup>853</sup> In reply, Mary “exhorted all that came to visit her, especially women, to be contented with what God was pleased to send, or bestow on them.”<sup>854</sup> Mary functions as a cautionary tale on multiple levels. The infant, described as misshapen with three heads and serpents at its neck, was her unnaturalness made real, another example of the feminine failings of her body. Mary was punished for her anger, but that punishment served to highlight her failings as a woman.

Throughout the century, monstrous births expressed religious and political ideas to the public as a metaphor, but women remained at the center of these stories no matter their intentions. Descriptions of the female body depicted it as monstrous, such as the devouring vagina or its interiority, but its influence on an unborn life heightened the danger. Ignorant women could want for, look upon, or even imagine the wrong thing and inadvertently mar their child. A monstrous birth was shame made manifest, and whether that shame belonged to only the mother or to both parents was wholly irrelevant, as the female body nourished that child to its short existence in the world. Monstrous births encouraged fears of the female body as deceptive. A mid-century infanticide case, however, allowed the female body to be miraculous and create a tension regarding perceptions of the body. The female body brought forth life, but when one appeared to be resurrected by God and fully restored to health by the educated, men began to envy the female body and even attempted to control it through writing.

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<sup>853</sup> Anon., *England's New Wonders*, 6.

<sup>854</sup> Anon., *England's New Wonders*, 7.

### 5.3 A Miraculous Body: The Story of Anne Green

Anne Green, convicted of infanticide, survived her execution in 1650. After being hanged, doctors received her lifeless body for a dissection, but quickly realized she showed signs of life. The men focused on reviving Anne and the public viewed her resurrection as a divine sign of her innocence. Three pamphlets retold the story for public consumption. These pamphlets, however, promoted conflicting world views. *A Wonder of Wonders* and *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green* are nearly identical in their retelling, diverging at the details concerning the violence against her body during her execution, and most notably, what Anne did or did not see when she was ‘dead.’ The third pamphlet, *News from the Dead*, focuses exclusively on how the men revived Anne and is “a rather voyeuristic examination of female bodily functions.”<sup>855</sup> *News from the Dead* also includes a collection of poems written by male Oxford students.<sup>856</sup> These poems reflect on womanhood, death, and Anne’s body and sexuality. Male authors attempt to claim ownership over Anne, and thus her body, through their writings.

Susan C. Staub has written extensively on Anne Green, examining her story from a literary perspective, including an entire chapter in *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames*.<sup>857</sup> Laura Gowing briefly mentions the case to highlight the “difficult points of the infanticide legislation.”<sup>858</sup> It also

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<sup>855</sup> Susan C. Staub, “Surveilling the Secrets of the Female Body: The Contest for Reproductive Authority in the Popular Press of the Seventeenth-Century,” in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, edited by Greta Depledge and Andrew Mangham (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 52.

<sup>856</sup> Susan C. Staub, *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 95.

<sup>857</sup> Susan C. Staub, “Surveilling the Secrets of the Female Body: The Contest for Reproductive Authority in the Popular Press of the Seventeenth-Century,” in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, edited by Greta Depledge and Andrew Mangham, Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011. Susan C. Staub, *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 83-100.

<sup>858</sup> Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 49.

inspired a young adult novel by Mary Hooper.<sup>859</sup> Anne's case predominately is relegated to footnotes or brief retellings in wider discussions of the Infanticide Act. By situating the Anne Green case with monstrous births, I am looking at the ways in which dualities of the female body contributed to social anxiety. Monstrous births revealed shame and indicated punishment for sexual sins. By interpreting 'monstrous' bodies as warnings, we can read Anne's body in the same way. The message this time was not about sin, but rather the lack of it; her resurrection indicated innocence, the sin not hers but society's.

### 5.3.1 *"Thou hast corrupted me; but hast not given me over unto death:" Printed Retellings*<sup>860</sup>

Both *A Wonder of Wonders* and *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green* share the same woodcut for their title pages, as well as a long summary of events. From start to finish, the pamphlets are almost exact copies, but the few differences point to differing world views. *A Wonder of Wonders* states that Anne "got with child by a gentleman," and that the child fell "from her in the house of office, being but a span long, and dead born."<sup>861</sup> It also emphasizes the violence done to her body, highlighting details like how she was "hanged in the castle yard in Oxford, for the space of half an hour, receiving many great and heavy blows on the breasts, by the butt end of the soldiers' muskets, and being pulled down by the legs."<sup>862</sup> *A Declaration from Oxford* says that she was "lately, and unjustly hanged" and focuses on her recovery, "her neck

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<sup>859</sup> Mary Hooper, *News from the Dead*, New York: Square Fish, 2008.

<sup>860</sup> Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 5.

<sup>861</sup> W. Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders* (London, 1651), title page.

<sup>862</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, title page.

set straight, and her eyes fixed orderly and firmly in her head again.”<sup>863</sup> This pamphlet’s brief retelling is more religious in tone, as it focuses on the “four angels that appeared to her when she was dead” and claims that it is “a more full and perfect relation of the great handiwork of God.”<sup>864</sup>

Both retellings refer to Anne as a maid servant who fell ill and miscarried in the house of office, “which much impaired her health and strength” and that out of fear she “covered it [the baby] with dust and rubbish.”<sup>865</sup> Another female servant “found her in a very sad and deplorable condition,” immediately asking if she was pregnant. Anne allegedly replied “*Mary*, that ever I was born, to live and die in shame and scorn; I was, but now I am clear of it.”<sup>866</sup> After a servant alerted Sir Thomas Read and his wife, Anne stated that “a gentleman of good birth, and a kinsman to a Justice of Peace” got her pregnant. The court viewed Anne as “clear and innocent of the crime for murdering of it, for that it was dead born” but she still went to trial for infanticide, with each pamphlet referring to her sin of sex.<sup>867</sup> Anne’s trial, at least according to these retellings, focused on her body and her sexuality. The pamphlets even emphasize that Anne did not kill her infant and that the guilty verdict stemmed from her shame. Not only did Anne conceal her pregnancy and subsequent stillbirth, but her very pregnancy implicated her body as sexually deviant.

According to the 1624 Act, the guilty verdict likely occurred due to concealment, despite testimony and her own claims that she did not know she was pregnant.<sup>868</sup> Anne also had no

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<sup>863</sup> Anonymous, *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green* (London, 1651), title page.

<sup>864</sup> Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, title page.

<sup>865</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 1. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 1.

<sup>866</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 2. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 2.

<sup>867</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 2. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 2.

<sup>868</sup> “7° James I c.4, An Act for the due Execution of divers Laws and Statutes heretofore made against Rogues, Vagabonds and sturdy Beggars, and other lewd and idle persons, 1610,” in *Statutes of the Realm IV, Part Two*, 1159-1161.



witnesses. Testimony spoke only to Anne's condition and wellbeing prior to the stillbirth and to the body of the infant. Midwives' testimony in infanticide cases presented a dilemma regarding contestation of knowledge, specifically gendered knowledge. Only *News from the Dead* explicitly named the father of Anne's child: Jeffrey Read, the grandson of her master. None of the pamphlets discuss the idea that Jeffrey Read raped Anne. The Justice of the Peace that oversaw Anne's case was in fact Sir Thomas Read, her master, which further complicates discussions of Anne's guilty verdict. *A Declaration from Oxford* and *A Wonder of Wonders* frame her guilt as a part of her sexuality, while *News from the Dead* seems to shift blame to the house where she worked.

Anne pled not guilty and at her execution supposedly said "God forgive my false accusers, as I freely forgive thee."<sup>869</sup> In her speech, Anne referred to her execution as a "sad spectacle, an innocent woman to be in a moment cut off, in the prime of her years."<sup>870</sup> Anne begged a man standing near the scaffold to pull on her body to ease her suffering into death and after her hanging soldiers struck "4 or 5 blows on the breast" all with the intention of making her death quick.<sup>871</sup> Her body was taken to a surgeon who "begged her for an anatomy."<sup>872</sup> When "her body was taken out of the coffin, and laid upon a large table... she began to breathe, which was no small terror nor admiration to all that were then present."<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>869</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 2. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 2.

<sup>870</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 3-4. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 3.

<sup>871</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 3-4. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 3.

<sup>872</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 3-4. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 3. See also Staub, "Surveilling the Secrets of the Female Body: The Contest for Reproductive Authority in the Popular Press of the Seventeenth Century," in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, eds. Greta Depledge and Andrew Mangham (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 54. Staub states that the 1624 Infanticide Act provided more bodies for anatomists. See also "32<sup>d</sup> Hen. VIII c. 42, Concerning Barbers and Surgeons, 1540" in *Statutes of the Realm III*, 794-796. This act in part stated that surgeons and physicians could take "four persons, condemned, adjudged and put to death for felony by the due order of the King's laws of this realm, for anatomies" with the goal of "better knowledge, instruction, insight, learning, and experience in the said science or faculty of surgery."

<sup>873</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 3-4. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 3.

For the men present, Anne's body was an extraordinary commodity, both as a female body and one that had recently given birth. The misogynistic rhetoric about the female body in print, as evidenced in chapter two's analysis of multiple midwife manuals, specifically centered on its unknowability. These texts criticized it for being closed. Anatomy represented a moment in which a female body could be open and revealed.<sup>874</sup> None of the pamphlets specify if Anne gave consent to her own dissection, or what would be done to her body afterwards. Despite all this, the pamphlets reimagine Anne after she takes that fateful breath. She is put into a warm bed, oils spread over her body, and she recovers in 14 hours, her first words being "behold God's providence, and his wonder of wonders."<sup>875</sup>

The pamphlets' retellings diverge here. In *A Declaration from Oxford*, Anne says she never felt any pain and reveals that she saw a garden of paradise, where "four little boys with wings" said to her "woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and take away the right from the judges, that the innocent may be their prey."<sup>876</sup> Anne later likens herself to Mary Magdalen and states that "my sins deserved punishment, and thou hast corrupted me; but hast not given me over unto death."<sup>877</sup> At the end of *A Declaration from Oxford* Anne is portrayed as almost joyful as she is given a new purpose, "that the remainder of my life may wholly be spent in setting forth thy praise and glory."<sup>878</sup> The pamphlets depict Anne as spiritually redeemed, her resurgence a sign from God not only of her innocence, but her purpose and duty.

*A Wonder of Wonders*, however, issues a message to the public regarding the law. It states that Anne's case should be viewed as:

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<sup>874</sup> Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 8. Sawday discusses how the human inability to open or gaze into our own body promotes this curiosity about it.

<sup>875</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 5. See also Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 4.

<sup>876</sup> Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 4.

<sup>877</sup> Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 5.

<sup>878</sup> Anon., *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green*, 5.

a precedent to all magistrates, and courts of judicature, to take a special care in denouncing of sentence, without a due and legal process, according to the known laws of the land, by an impartial and uncorrupted jury, either of men and women, etc.<sup>879</sup>

The complexity of Anne's case echoed problems with infanticide cases, as demonstrated in chapter four. The 1624 act set strict guidelines that the court then interpreted. The 1624 fully criminalized the female body for its boundaries. Concealment, not always murder, became the basis for criminality. The courts punished women for concealing their pregnancies and births, even if evidence pointed to a stillbirth or miscarriage. Concealment, the act argued, pointed to a sound mind, an awareness of a woman's own selfish and criminal nature. In cases like Anne's, however, the evidence is truly ambiguous. Anne had no witnesses, a violation of social protocol for the time, but a midwife testified that it was highly unlikely that Anne gave birth to a live infant. Still, the fact that Anne had even been pregnant at all cast her as a sexual deviant, regardless of the circumstances of that pregnancy. Both pamphlets, like many printed works of the time, claim to be truthful accounts, but *A Wonder of Wonders* names Dr. William Petty as its informant, one of the men who cared for Anne.<sup>880</sup> It also claims that "a great man among that rest" called for Anne to be executed a second time, the normal procedure for botched executions.<sup>881</sup> Anne's resurrection, as it was seen, incited a belief among the public that God had saved Anne and that she should not be hanged again.<sup>882</sup>

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<sup>879</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 5.

<sup>880</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 6. See also Barnard, Toby. "Petty, Sir William (1623–1687), natural philosopher and administrator in Ireland." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 30 Dec. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-22069>.

<sup>881</sup> Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames*, 84. Staub argues that it was not only Anne's resurrection that made the case extraordinary, but also this refusal to follow British law. Staub points out that Anne had "greater symbolic (and monetary) value alive."

<sup>882</sup> Burdet, *A Wonder of Wonders*, 6.

A third pamphlet, written by Richard Watkins and titled *News from the Dead, or A True and Exact Narration of the Miraculous Deliverance of Anne Greene*, is longer and provides additional details as well as a collection of poems written by educated men about Anne. The focus of *News from the Dead* is Anne's body, as Watkins details her recovery in excruciating detail. Watkins attempts to distinguish his pamphlet by writing that the event was "a very rare and remarkable accident, which being variously and falsely reported amongst the vulgar (as in such cases it is usual) to the end that none may be deceived...I have faithfully recorded it."<sup>883</sup> Anne is humanized immediately, rather than after her execution as in the other pamphlets, as Watkins reveals that she was twenty-two years old and born at Steeple-Barton.<sup>884</sup> Part of making Anne seem real to the readers includes a focus on her body, as Watkins writes that she was "of a middle stature, strong, fleshy, and of an indifferent good features."<sup>885</sup> Watkins is explicit in naming the father of Anne's child. She was "often solicited by fair promises and other amorous enticements" by the grandson of her master, Jeffrey Read.<sup>886</sup> Though Anne is described as having "at last contented to satisfy his unlawful pleasure" Watkins also refers to "the lewdness of the family wherein she lately lived."<sup>887</sup> The sin of sexuality was a problem of the household, not specifically part of Anne's nature. This is a reversal of other pamphlets involving women. As evidenced in previous chapters, many pamphlets followed a narrative in which women lured men into crimes or emphasized women as duplicitous by nature. To remake Anne, each pamphlet had to cast doubt on the discussions of her sexuality.

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<sup>883</sup> Richard Watkins, *News from the Dead, or A True and Exact Narration of the Miraculous Deliverance of Anne Greene* (London, 1651), 1.

<sup>884</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 1.

<sup>885</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 1.

<sup>886</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 1. Watkins states that Read was approximately 16 or 17.

<sup>887</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 1-2. Watkins is summarizing Anne's execution speech, writing that "after singing of a Psalm and something said in justification of her self, as to the fact for which she was to suffer, and touching the lewdness of the family wherein she lately lived, she was turned off the ladder." The execution speech contained in *A Declaration from Oxford* and *A Wonder of Wonders* make no reference to the Reads.

Watkins reveals more about her resuscitation, giving explicit details about Anne's body in the process. Prior to Dr. William Petty, professor of anatomy, seeing Anne's body, the perception that she was breathing once the coffin was opened prompted "a lusty fellow that stood by...to do an act of charity in ridding her out of the small relics of a painful life" so he "stamped several times on breast and stomach with all the force he could."<sup>888</sup> All of the pamphlets contain details about people attempting to ease Anne's suffering as she 'died.' When Dr. William Petty and Mr. Thomas Willis finally saw Anne in her coffin, they "perceiving some life in her...fell presently to act in order to her recovery."<sup>889</sup> Supporting her body, "they wrenched open her teeth," poured a hot cordial into her mouth, and then "opened her hands."<sup>890</sup> Her mouth and fingers are described as being "fast set" and "stiffly bent."<sup>891</sup> In addition to hot liquids and rubbing her body they tickled her throat with a feather.<sup>892</sup> This is itself a different kind of mercy, presented directly after the account of the man trying to ease Anne's suffering. These men sought to end Anne's suffering by reviving her.

*A Declaration from Oxford* and *A Wonder of Wonders* both endeavored to retell the story of Anne in a way that remade her. These retellings show Anne as young and inexperienced, unsure of her body, and yet at her execution Anne is wise and forgiving. In these pamphlets, Anne's redemption came from God, her surviving an execution proof not only of her innocence, but that she could act as an example and messenger of God and for religion. Men physically remake Anne in *News from the Dead*. The pamphlet focuses on Anne's body and the meticulous way William Petty, Thomas Willis, Ralph Bathurst, and Henry Clerke revive her. That a

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<sup>888</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 2.

<sup>889</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 2. Petty and Willis attempt to save Anne both because they "perceiving some life in her, as well for humanity as their profession sake."

<sup>890</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 2.

<sup>891</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 2.

<sup>892</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 2.

dissection did not occur is almost irrelevant, as instead these men open Anne's body in a different way, unclenching and loosening, pouring hot liquids into her, and working to establish blood flow.

After attempting to bleed her as a remedy, Anne convulsed and began to bleed "so freely that it could not easily be stopped."<sup>893</sup> They continued with oils on her body, plasters on her breasts, and "persuaded a woman to go into bed to her."<sup>894</sup> While the physicians worked to revive Anne, an undersheriff "was soliciting the Governor and the rest of the Justices of Peace for the obtaining her reprieve."<sup>895</sup> Resuscitating Anne was pointless without saving her legally. The men left Anne overnight and the next morning they "found her much amended, being able to answer any question propounded unto her."<sup>896</sup> Anne complained of a sore throat and said that "she remembered nothing at all that had been done unto her."<sup>897</sup> With the restoration of blood flow in her body, bruises developed and the men observed Anne for several days, with her main complaints being soreness and light headedness.<sup>898</sup>

Watkins further pushes the concept that the revival of Anne by the men served a social purpose, writing that "in the same room where her body was to have been dissected for the satisfaction of a few, she became a greater wonder, being revived to the satisfaction of the multitudes that flocked thither daily to see her."<sup>899</sup> The amount of visitors necessitated guards and the physicians asked visitors to "either exercise their charity, or at least to pay for their

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<sup>893</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 3.

<sup>894</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 3.

<sup>895</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 3.

<sup>896</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 4.

<sup>897</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 4.

<sup>898</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 5-6.

<sup>899</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 6.

curiosity.”<sup>900</sup> Anne recovered within a month and went “unto her friends in the country; taking away with her the coffin wherein she lay, as a trophy of this her wonderful preservation.”<sup>901</sup>

Watkins highlights the legal struggles of Anne during her trial more clearly than the other pamphlets. He writes that “there are two things, very considerable, alleged on her behalf” to prove her innocence, that “the child was abortive or stillborn, and consequently not capable of being murdered” and that Anne was unaware of her pregnancy.<sup>902</sup> Watkins also discusses the witnesses present at her trial. A midwife testified that the infant had no hair “and that she did not believe that ever it had life” while other servants testified that she had “certain issues for about a month before she miscarried.”<sup>903</sup> During the trial, this testimony would have been superseded by the fact that Anne had no witnesses. Little is said about the status of the midwife, but the fact that her testimony proved inadequate demonstrates the contestation of female knowledge. Watkins characterizes Anne’s continuous claims of her innocence, before and after her execution as “not spoken with design, or purpose to deceive.”<sup>904</sup> In this pamphlet, Watkins explicitly names Anne’s master, Sir Thomas Read, as “her grand prosecutor” who “died within three days after her execution” though he stresses that “such events are not too rashly to be commented on.”<sup>905</sup> Watkins played to religious sentiment here. If Anne’s resurrection indicated her divine innocence, the death of her master and prosecutor implied God’s wrath at her treatment.

Watkins presents the case of Anne as a two-fold success. First, it brought fame to the men involved, most notably Dr. Petty, despite missing the “opportunity of improving their knowledge

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<sup>900</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 6. Anne received the money, using it to pay the men for her lodging, food, and “towards the suing of her pardon.”

<sup>901</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 6.

<sup>902</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 6. He continues to write that “the child was very unperfect, being not above a span in length, and the sex hardly distinguishable” and “rather seemed a lump of flesh.”

<sup>903</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 7. He states that it was only 17 weeks from the time of her conception.

<sup>904</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 7.

<sup>905</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 7. He connects the death to Read discovering Anne lived.

in the dissection of a dead body.”<sup>906</sup> It also served as “a means to vindicate her from that foul stain of murder, which, in most men’s judgments (and, perhaps, heaven itself also bearing witness) was so harshly charged upon her.”<sup>907</sup> Anne’s case, however is exceptional and rare. The public attention and outcry perhaps spoke to the harshness of the Infanticide Act, but likewise corresponds to religious feelings of the time. She needed to be fully redeemed, physically, spiritually, and legally. While *A Declaration from Oxford* and *A Wonder of Wonders* emphasized the first forms of redemptions in Anne’s journey, only *News from the Dead* focuses on all three. Anne’s case is exceptional precisely because she received such legal deliverance, not only in establishing her innocence, but in additionally ensuring she would not be hanged a second time.

### 5.3.2 “The maid was hang’d for her abortive fruit:” Poems about Anne Green<sup>908</sup>

The second edition of *News from the Dead*, printed in 1651, includes a collection of forty one poems written by Oxford scholars with Anne as their shared topic.<sup>909</sup> While the pamphlets exalt Anne’s resurrection as a sign from God and remake her into a purposeful woman dedicated to either a religious life or to the enhancement of the career of the men who saved her, the poems question her redemption. The male authors interrogate Anne’s feminine nature and body, suggesting that her resurrection is yet another reason for society to be anxious about the female body, which is not to be trusted and is malleable, even at death. The authors focus on the

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<sup>906</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 8.

<sup>907</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 8.

<sup>908</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. Dv [mispaginated 14].

<sup>909</sup> Gowing, Laura. "Greene, Anne (c. 1628–1659), survivor of execution." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 31 Dec. 2019. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-11413>. One of the scholars includes Christopher Wren. See also Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. Dr-Dv [mispaginated 13-14]. A few of them poems are dedicated to the physicians.



relationship between Anne and death and posit her new identity as something indeterminate. Anne is viewed as transformed, and the authors speculate on what this transformation means for her sexuality. Susan Staub argues that negative verses are the exception and that the importance “is the way that Anne’s body provides an occasion for verse.”<sup>910</sup> I disagree. Even verses that are not openly negative still criticize and covet Anne’s body. Many of the verses do not stand out as cruel because they act as further examples of the typical misogynistic rhetoric present in the time. These various authors do portray Anne as exceptional, but this uniqueness remains the crux of male anxiety and resentment.<sup>911</sup> These poems articulate the narrow line between monstrous and miraculous, and their relation to the female body.

In the first poem of the series, titled “On the She that was Hanged but not Executed,” the author writes “Rare innocence! A Wench re-woman’d!”<sup>912</sup> He later cautions against believing women, writing:

Women in this with cats agree, I think,  
Both live and scratch after they have tip’t the wink  
Henceforth take heed of trusting females.<sup>913</sup>

Anne’s case is not a miracle to the writer, but rather a confirmation that the female body is deceitful. It can conceal a pregnancy, or life, but it can also defeat death. Another author reacts to Anne’s case by writing:

Twere wonder if a woman should not change:  
They have mysterious ways, and their designs

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<sup>910</sup> Staub, *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames*, 97.

<sup>911</sup> Staub, *Nature’s Cruel Stepdames*, 96. Staub states that the poems represent the ambivalence towards women. I would suggest that 41 separate poems written about Anne and her body signify the opposite. While we cannot know the full readership of these documents, their survival and prevalence indicate public desire and consumption. Anne’s case is dramatic and unique. These poems, however, remain fixated on negative generalizations of female nature. Anne’s survival, for many of these authors, is both miraculous and monstrous, divine intervention and another moment of female duplicity.

<sup>912</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 14. The author is named as “Hen. Perin. Gen. Com. of Trin. Coll.”

<sup>913</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 14.

Must be read backward still, like Hebrew lines.<sup>914</sup>

Anne's transformation is less about religion then and more about the nature of women. The female body and women in general are malleable and unintelligible. The last line on reading the female body offers another comparison to the male body. The female body is a mirror image of its male counterpart, backwardness as another example of its imperfection. The author finishes his poem with a continuation of Anne's case as solidifying women as deceitful, stating "Well, for this trick I'll never so be led/As to believe a woman, though she's dead."<sup>915</sup> One author fears that "Death it self will be buried there" in Anne's grave.<sup>916</sup> The same author encourages Anne to defy her nature and does not see her restoration as proof of her innocence, but rather a second chance, as he writes:

O! Wench reform in thy new age,  
Write virtue in this second page:  
The first shows characters of vice,  
O! live well once, who livest twice.<sup>917</sup>

Another author likens Anne's resurgence to witchcraft, writing "Hocus pocus, fast and loose, dead and gone,/Here again: Women have more tricks than one."<sup>918</sup>

Many of the male authors wrote meditations about the relationship between Anne and death. This relationship is portrayed as tense, as death itself could not hold Anne. One author writes that "Sure Death abhors the color, all have seen/That Death is black, and therefore loves

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<sup>914</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C2v [mispaginated 8]. The author is named as "Rob. Sharrock, Fellow of New Coll."

<sup>915</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C2v [mispaginated 8].

<sup>916</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. D3v [mispaginated 18]. He also writes that her grave "yet still gapes, alas!" The concept of a gaping hole, particularly in relation to the female body, conjures up the same imagery as the midwife manuals, comparing vaginas to mouths. Anne in her grave femininized it, and Anne's resurrection allows her to consume Death. The author is named as Theodor Wynne.

<sup>917</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. D3v [mispaginated 18].

<sup>918</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. D3v [mispaginated 18]. The author is named as "Hen. Capell Armig. Coll. Winton."

no Green.”<sup>919</sup> Another wrote that fate did “not suffering her to live, nor to depart,” and that “Death wrote her martyr; but from rest to come/Back through such pains, is second martyrdom.”<sup>920</sup> When focus shifts from the religious aspects of the case, Anne becomes a figure that embodies this duality between life and death, and authors that portrayed her in a more positive light describe her in terms such as martyr, or “this unchanged phoenix.”<sup>921</sup> This poem in particular, entitled “Enlightened Thus,” concedes ownership of Anne’s body to herself, writing that she is “offspring herself, and midwife to her throws.”<sup>922</sup> Birth features heavily in a few poems. One author describes the event as “this mysterious birth” and “her resurrection: born again from earth.”<sup>923</sup> He uses his final lines to establish Anne’s innocence, writing

For who can think her guilty, whom the tomb  
Does thus declare unworthy of her doom?  
Whom law, whom physic could not kill, whose date  
Soldiers reprieved, three committees of fate?  
If ye doubt still, her dying words receive:  
How e’re, distrust her risen must believe.<sup>924</sup>

The pamphlets described Anne’s case as one of resurrection, though each offered their own opinions on whether it was due to divine intervention or medicine.

These poets, however, presented Anne as now possessing an in-between identity. One author summed up this indeterminate status by writing “Some Hocus-tricks? the thread of life to be/Asunder cut, and yet entire remain?/A body banished soul recalled again?”<sup>925</sup> This author separates Anne’s body and spirit, accentuating the anxiety around the former, from her alleged

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<sup>919</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. Ev [mispaginated 22.]

<sup>920</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 11. The author is named as “H.B. Coll. Om. Anim.” This poem is also printed in Latin.

<sup>921</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 11.

<sup>922</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 11.

<sup>923</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 12.

<sup>924</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 12.

<sup>925</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C3v [mispaginated 10]. The author is named as “Pet. Killigrew, Eq. Aur.fil.Coll.Reg.”

crime and her resurrection. Another author argued that Justice “judg'd the Wench worthy both of death and life” and that “the crime was heinous, but (if you know all)/T'was not so high as to be capital.”<sup>926</sup> Anne in this iteration is not fully exculpated. The concept of an indeterminate identity extended to gender for one author who wrote “Thou shalt not swing again: come clear thy brow,/Thou hast the benefit o'th' Clergy now” and that “women are sav'd by book, as well as men./Strange wench! What character may fit the, best/That still canst live, though thou art hang'd and prest?”<sup>927</sup>

He remakes Anne into a masculine figure due to the religious connections of her recovery, as only men were allowed the benefit of Clergy. Anne did not plead pregnancy, the option available to women, but maintained her innocence throughout her ordeal. The ‘benefit of clergy’ additionally upholds the notion that Anne’s story is one of divine intervention while pushing the idea that Anne is no longer a woman. These poems do not engage in the rhetoric of unnaturalness as in the other infanticide retellings. Anne is instead presented as ambiguous. This uncertainty is part of the anxiety about the female body. Physically, the one-sex model envisioned women as an imperfect and internal man. The interiority represented one part of that anxiety. Anne’s balance between monstrous (a convicted and executed murderer) and miraculous (an innocent who was not believed and saved by God) is another part. Anne’s revival makes her identity indeterminate and seems to confirm the unknowability of the female body.

Authors express confusion regarding Anne and death. One author penned a poem with the lines “For certain, she was dead! Yet then/The reason how she lives again,/Is that which so

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<sup>926</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. D4v [mispaginated 16]. The author is named as “T. Arthur, Comm. Ch. Ch.”

<sup>927</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C2r [mispaginated 7]. The author is named as “Rob. Matthew, Fellow of New Coll.”

much puzzles men.”<sup>928</sup> The same poem contends that Anne’s resurrection was in fact a humbling process, that “no other way was left to win/Her to confess her shame and sin/But send her back to learn again.”<sup>929</sup> This poem does not absolve Anne from her supposed crimes, but instead argues that part of her redemption should be to confess and change. Death then has not changed her, but instead remade her into a more purposeful woman, as the pamphlets argued. Another author expresses outright male jealousy at Anne with the lines “Death, spare your threats, we scorn now to obey;/If women conquer thee, surely men may.”<sup>930</sup> In the same poem, he refers to women as “the nine-lived sex,” writing that they should “speak high, and say/That here they fought Death, and won the day.”<sup>931</sup> Another author claims ownership over Anne and her story, writing:

The author doth a third life to her give,  
And makes her innocence and fame to live.  
Her life is writ here to the life: she fell  
At a cheap rate, when ‘tis described so well.  
For, th’ author’s pen’s so good, that one would die  
To be revived by such a history.<sup>932</sup>

The author inserts himself into Anne’s story, connecting his renown with hers. He is not remaking Anne, but himself, casting himself as a third part of her resurrection which gives her immortality through the written word. This is an example in which the author erased Anne and her body from the poem. It is not the physicality of Anne and her death, but the idea of her. He is less concerned with her story, but the attention of a resurrection. The pamphlets remade Anne

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<sup>928</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C4r [mispaginated 11]. The author is named as “John Dwight, Ch. Ch.”

<sup>929</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C4v [mispaginated 12].

<sup>930</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C3v [mispaginated 10]. The author is named as “Pet. Killigrew, Eq.Aur.fil.Coll.Reg.”

<sup>931</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C3v [mispaginated 10]. The author is named as “Rich. Glyd, Fell. of New Coll.”

<sup>932</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C4r [mispaginated 11].

into an innocent woman saved by God and exalted the men responsible for her recovery. The author inserts and then reconstructs the narrative to include himself.

Some authors did not see Anne as a woman saved, but as a woman completely changed. This malleability of the female body presented itself as anxiety within these poems. The poem “On She Which was Hang’d and Afterwards Recovered” uses the story of Orpheus. It referred to his wife, writing that “she came back but half the way.”<sup>933</sup> Anne, he writes, was “a stranger sight,” for “(it seems) the Wench was light.”<sup>934</sup> Anne’s experience “sure ‘twill spoil her marriage day,/For who so hard to assay/Such an immortal *Virbia*?”<sup>935</sup> It commodifies her body, making her into a curiosity and denotes the failure of the anatomists’ original intent, to cut into Anne’s body. This body, that of a young, previously pregnant female, was rare for them, but this author makes Anne and her body unknowable and suggests that examination and thus understanding can only occur when her body is trapped and scrutinized. Anne’s body is being characterized as abnormal through her experiences, which includes her alleged crime of infanticide. The accusation of infanticide and the guilty verdict marked Anne’s body as aberrant, but her “resurrection” only served to designate it as strange in a new way. Anne’s case is specific, but these ideas about surveilling the female body were encoded into society. He even remarks upon women, writing that “Wives may deceive, and do their best/To counterfeit in all the rest;/Only let them not die in jest.”<sup>936</sup>

Authors expressed concern over how her experience changed Anne and focused on her sexuality. One author referred to the story of Anne as a “Strange metamorphosis! This dead-live

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<sup>933</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 9. The author is named as “Hen. Perin. Gen. Com. of Trin. Coll.”

<sup>934</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 9.

<sup>935</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 9. *Virbia* is a moth, perhaps connecting to his earlier line about light.

<sup>936</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, 9.

woman/Now differs from her self; and are such common?"<sup>937</sup> The use of 'strange' here specifically denotes Anne's body as different, and emphasizes, as did the press, that Anne went through a transformation. The author traps Anne in a duality by calling her "this dead-live woman." In a poem titled "The Woman's Case Put to the Lawyers," the author wrote:

Mother, or Maid, I pray you whether?  
 One, or both, or am I neither?  
 The mother died: may't not be said  
 That the survivor is a Maid?  
 Here, take your fee, declare your sense;  
 And free me from this new suspense.<sup>938</sup>

As in pamphlets about women accused of killing their husbands, the author adopts Anne's voice and questions exclusively feminine identities. "Anne" as she is written interrogates what resurrection has done to her body in relation to identity predicated on sex and sexual knowledge. Invoking the word 'mother' calls attention to the nature of her previous alleged crime. Infanticide print materials and trials constantly referred to the accused as cruel and unnatural mothers, but this is absent in the available materials on Anne Green. Yet a society that defined women by their reproductive roles struggled to reinterpret the body of a woman who miscarried, 'died,' and was resurrected. Anne became undefinable in terms of her sexuality and this fluidity made society uncomfortable.

Materials connected to the case of Anne Green focused on establishing her as an innocent, bringing attention to the men responsible for reviving her, and yet still hinting at the unknowable nature of the female body. Calling her 'mother' reminds the public of the exact nature of her supposed crimes. Insisting, as Anne, that through her resurrection she must surely

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<sup>937</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. C4r [mispaginated 11]. The author is named as "Geo. Davenant, Comof Qu. Coll."

<sup>938</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. Cv [mispaginated 6]. The author is named as "Joh. Watkins, Eq. Aur. fil. Coll. Reg."

now be a maid reinscribes her body as innocent, of infanticide and of sexual knowledge. Anne's sexuality was key in a poem titled "To the Happy Instrument of the Executed Maid's Recovery," with the author writing:

Yet though your skill and pit could dispense  
More days to her beguiled innocence:  
No art removes a ruin'd virgin's shame,  
Unless revived she, be not the same.  
Thus 'tis more easy to recall the dead  
Then to restore a once-lost maidenhead.<sup>939</sup>

This author explicitly calls attention to Anne's sexual status. While the four men restored her body, this author argues that the guilt or innocence of her supposed crime is irrelevant. What is known about Anne is that she was pregnant, and whether that was rape or consensual, this author argues that Anne's chastity is forever lost. Anne may now be alive, but she is not changed.

Each of these poets illustrate the connection between the monstrous and the miraculous through Anne's story. Her crime made her monstrous while her revival made her miraculous, but the poets explore the boundaries between the two. The female body as monstrous is a comfortable tableau that Anne challenges. Her monstrosity for the poets resided in her body, as she did not negate herself as a woman through her crime but established a new form of monstrosity. Midwife manuals and other crime pamphlets established the female body as deceitful, but Anne's resurrection challenged the perceptions of that deceit. Men coveted the idea of their own resurrections and resented Anne, generating poems that viewed her body as indeterminate and different. They questioned her sexuality, connecting it to the limits of her restoration. Her body and soul could be restored, but they kept shame tied to her body. Anne was

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<sup>939</sup> Watkins, *News from the Dead*, sig. D2r [mispaginated 15]. The author is named as "King Smith (?), Lucy Gent. Com. of Ch. Ch."



both miraculous and monstrous to these men, and they took control of her voice and story to quell their own anxieties.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Throughout the century the feminine was portrayed as monstrous. Monsters were female failure made manifest. The stories of Mary Adams and Anne Green demonstrate the proximity of the monstrous and miraculous with regards to the female body. Mary Adams claimed to be the Virgin Mary while Anne Green rose from the dead and entered print as a Christ-like figure. Both women made the public uncomfortable and both were found guilty of crimes. The duality of monstrosity and miracle contributed to anxiety surrounding the female body and could be portrayed in a negative light. Even when Anne Green's innocence seemed to be a divine sign, male authors still questioned her sexuality and co-opted her voice, attempting to delegitimize her. Anne's indeterminate body, as the authors portrayed it, created a sense of unease: she was a mother who was found guilty of killing her infant, a maid who claimed innocence, and a dead woman who came back to life.

Women were almost exclusively at fault in monstrous births, whether it was their imagination or their desires. Even in cases of incest or bastardy, the female body's role in reproduction came under scrutiny far more than its male counterpart. Monstrous births themselves were miraculous in that they called attention to the faults of the female body. These examples also highlight the commodification of the female body, as consumable print culture or people flocking to see curiosities, like monstrous infants or Anne Green herself. The worthiness of the female body only developed in the connection between its dualities, here presented as the

potential to produce monsters and the potential to miraculously survive. Interest in the female body centered on knowing it fully and being able to define it as an absolute.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Herring received the last guilty verdict in a petty treason trial at the Old Bailey in 1773.<sup>940</sup> The testimony against her was extensive but contradictory. Witness John Boyle stated that he heard no conversation between the husband and wife before Herring stabbed him in the neck, graphically likening the scene to a butcher killing a pig.<sup>941</sup> Hannah Darling testified that an hour before the act, Herring “said she would spill his blood, and be hanged for him.”<sup>942</sup> Thomas Duncan said that Herring cried out “murder, murder, he is killed” before running out the door, and that her husband merely said “you have killed me.”<sup>943</sup> In her defense, Herring described her husband as physically and emotionally abusive, violent against her body and her belongings, and characterized Darling as having a grudge against her.<sup>944</sup> Herring also remembered the scene of her act differently than the witnesses, saying her husband threw a pipe and beer in her face before she ‘threw’ the knife at him.<sup>945</sup> Contradictory witness statements continued as they were asked about the abuse. Three witnesses confirmed Robert Herring as “a very violent bad husband” while one referred to him as “an honest hard working man.”<sup>946</sup> Herring was found

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<sup>940</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6).

<sup>941</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6). Boyle testified that “I thought she was going to give him a lick with her hand; instead of which she struck the knife into his throat; the blood immediately spouted out as if a butcher had killed a pig.”

<sup>942</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6).

<sup>943</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6).

<sup>944</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6).

<sup>945</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6).

<sup>946</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6). Elizabeth Macdonald described Elizabeth Herring as “a sober woman.” Dorothy Hagen, a neighbor, confirmed the abuse and contradicted Hannah Darling’s testimony, stating

guilty and the court declared her “to be burnt with fire until you are dead.”<sup>947</sup> The punishment for women convicted of petty treason changed from burning to hanging in 1790.<sup>948</sup>

Herring’s case, though after the scope of this dissertation, reaffirms key issues highlighted within the chapters. Murder, petty treason, and infanticide cases all predicated on voices and bodies. Petty treason cases fixated on the voice of the dying or dead husband, allowing his last words to condemn his wife, while women killed by their husbands remained silent. Women who testified either to abuse or to a loving relationship, both attempts to save themselves, often needed additional voices to confirm their words. While the Infanticide Act allowed women to state their cases before the court, her words were not enough, as the law required witnesses to support her statement. Midwife manuals emphasized issues with pregnancy and paternity, casting women as not only ignorant, but deceptive. In the case of Elizabeth Herring, what other people said about her mattered more than what Elizabeth Herring herself said.<sup>949</sup> The exception to this was testimony in which Elizabeth Herring stated she intended to kill her husband, which served to condemn her. Women could speak but were not guaranteed that they would be believed. The anxiety about the female body indicated that the body itself was not to be believed either.

Through my thematic approach, I have attempted to underscore the negative perceptions of the female body in the early modern period and how these perceptions were textually and socially reproduced. While “The Bloody Body” examines spousal murder and bodily violence,

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that it was Darling who told her the altercation between husband and wife started with him throwing beer in her face. Elizabeth Rounson described Robert Herring beating his wife with a poker and being terrified of his violence.

<sup>947</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 04 February 2020), September 1773, trial of Elizabeth Herring (t17730908-6).

<sup>948</sup> Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, "Historical Background - Gender in the Proceedings", Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.0, 04 February 2020 )

<sup>949</sup> See Malcolm Gaskill, “Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England,” in *Social History* 23, 1 (January 1998): 1-30.

blood and its association with women invoke Biblical punishment, pain, and the continued narrative of the female body as one of leaking excess. Execution by fire, the most severe punishment for the most severe crime, can be read as both the destruction and cleansing of the female body. The death then is almost sacrificial, destroying one female body to preserve order. The implication, however, was that all women contained this propensity for unruliness. The pejoratives about men who killed their wives were similar to those concerning women: bloody and unnatural. The dialogue surrounding the male bodies in these cases, however, still viewed that body as contained. Male excess was one of intangible desire or lust. ‘Unnatural’ when referring to men evokes the concept of masculine fragility and failure, but when referring to women acts as a commentary on an uncontrollable body. Even as the violence of Adam Sprackling, discussed in chapter three, becomes increasingly grotesque, Sprackling is never portrayed as out of control.<sup>950</sup> By contrast, the body of Anne Hampton’s husband in *Murder Murder*, discussed in the same chapter, leaks and decays in front of a public audience after alleged actions by Anne.<sup>951</sup> Describing the male body in this manner emphasizes female excess made manifest through violence and the public spectacle of the female body and the notions of it leaking. The female body is corrupted and can corrupt; it perpetuates violence and excess onto other bodies.

I have centered much of my discussion throughout this dissertation on voices. In chapter two I argue that male authored texts, such as midwife manuals, speak at women rather than to them. This is part of a process in which these male authors claim and reclaim their authority and access to knowledge. They contribute to public anxiety about the female body while trying to textually and visually open it. These manuals effectively dissect the female body for the public

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<sup>950</sup> See Anonymous, *The Bloody Husband and the Cruel Neighbor*, London, 1653.

<sup>951</sup> Anon., *Murder Murder*, 5.

but cannot understand the embodied experience of it. In court cases and pamphlets, women speaking are often women ignored. As presented in chapter three women were ignored when issuing warnings that their husbands might harm them, and their last words were often silence or forgiveness. Pamphlets, however, allowed writers to speak through women, to use cases of violent crimes as moments to directly address society by having the alleged murderess repent. In court cases of infanticide, discussed in chapter four, women spoke before the courts, but needed to be legitimized through the words of other, thus effectively silenced. Even Anne Green, the subject of chapter five, experienced an author speaking through her. Anne's innocence needed to be legitimized not only with Anne forgiving the audience there to watch the spectacle of her execution, but by male authors penning poems and commodifying her story.

This dissertation studies the female body in early modern England, from 1550 to 1700. In the context of world history, this is a small and specific scope. The issues raised in this dissertation have consequences that extend beyond that scope into our present day. Female rage is still maligned.<sup>952</sup> The early modern texts examined in chapter two seem distant from our modern worldview. In actuality, the male body has acted as the norm in medical practice for centuries, making the female body misunderstood and misdiagnosed.<sup>953</sup> My findings point out

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<sup>952</sup> Soraya Chemaly, *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*, New York: Atria Paperback, 2018. Rebecca Traister, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger*, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2018. Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014. Rebecca Solnit, *The Mother of All Questions*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017. This is only a small sample of more recent literature produced on this topic. In discussing female rage, we must also look at the experiences of women of color and the negative characterizations they face when expressing anger.

<sup>953</sup> Gabrielle Jackson, "The Female Problem: How Male Bias in Medical Trials Ruined Women's Health," *The Guardian*, November 13 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/nov/13/the-female-problem-male-bias-in-medical-trials>. See also Maya Dusenbery, *Doing Harm: The Truth About How Bad Medicine and Lazy Science Leave Women Dismissed, Misdiagnosed, and Sick*, New York: Harper Collins, 2018. Here I emphasizing the medical bias between cisgender male and female bodies in the medial field that persists today. We must also examine the roots of reproductive health and justice. See Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. See also Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, New York: Penguin Random House, 1997.

almost no change over time in the range of my study. Whether commodified for public consumption or used to push religious or political agendas, the female body throughout the early modern period faced scrutiny. What is more interesting is how little has changed between then and today. The female body is still socially feared and unknown, despite advancements in medicine and science. I argue that in the seventeenth century there was a definitive recognized difference in sex, or at least a fluidity between ideas about one-sex and two-sex bodies. By the eighteenth century, there is not only a shift to two-sex bodies, but also a more nuanced understanding of the self. The modern conceptions of the public and private spheres develop, and women are relegated into the private sphere. Modern distrust of the female body is represented through worldwide attempts to legislate and control the female body. This dissertation has focused on cisgender white bodies, but today we confront the challenges of protecting the bodies of those who are marginalized. Our concepts of gender and sex have become more diverse, but there are still those who cling to binaries, refusing to accept the fluidity and performative nature of gender. Patriarchy is still an insidious social force, though it has changed. What remains the same, however, is the concept of hierarchy. As this dissertation has demonstrated, there is a long history of misogynistic rhetoric dictating the means of embodiment. While our conversations about embodiment in the present day have shifted, the arguments are still the same.

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