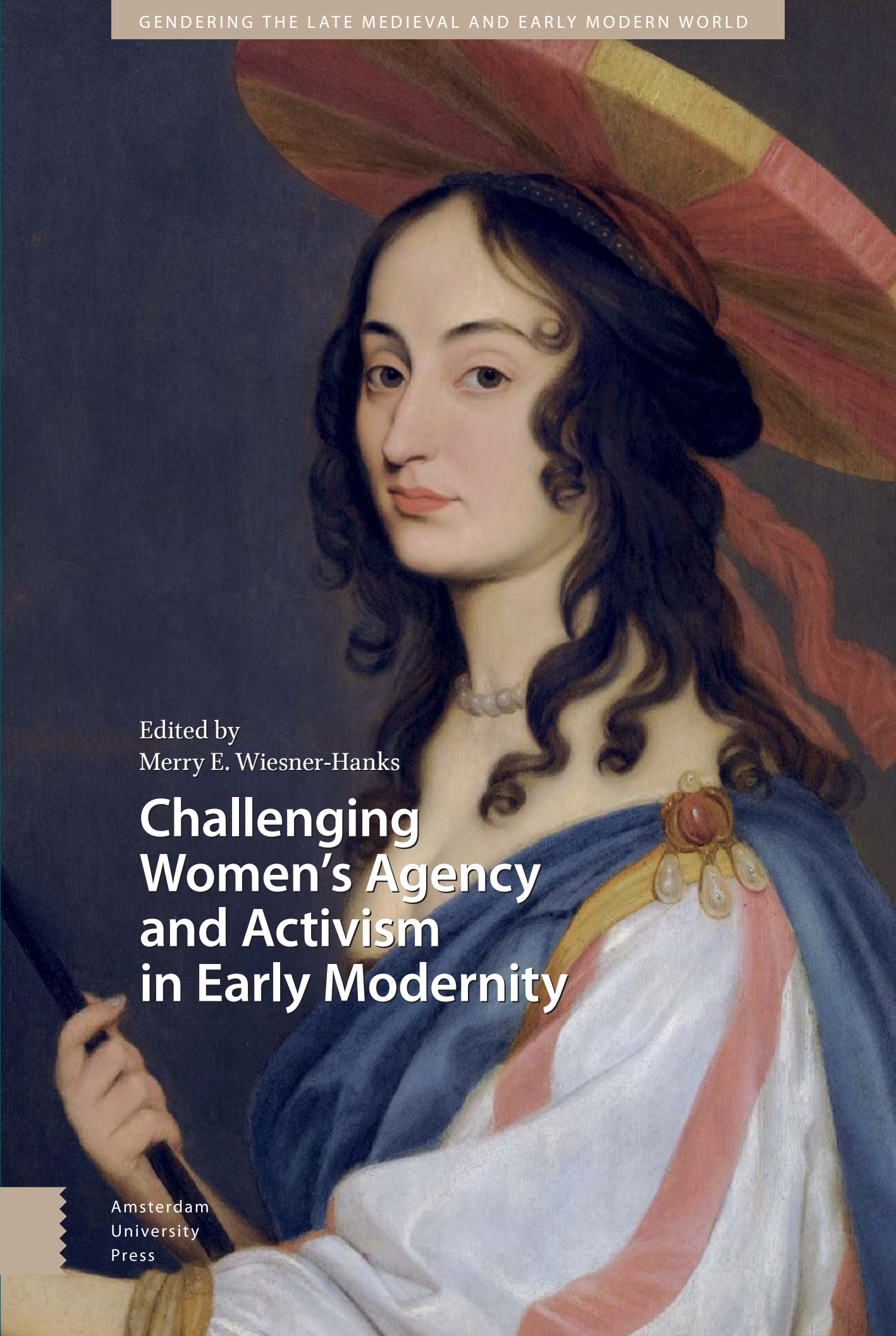


GENDERING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD

Edited by
Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

Challenging Women's Agency and Activism in Early Modernity

Amsterdam
University
Press



Challenging Women's Agency
and Activism in Early Modernity

Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

Series editors: James Daybell (Chair), Victoria E. Burke, Svante Norrhem, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks

This series provides a forum for studies that investigate women, gender, and/or sexuality in the late medieval and early modern world. The editors invite proposals for book-length studies of an interdisciplinary nature, including, but not exclusively, from the fields of history, literature, art and architectural history, and visual and material culture. Consideration will be given to both monographs and collections of essays. Chronologically, we welcome studies that look at the period between 1400 and 1700, with a focus on any part of the world, as well as comparative and global works. We invite proposals including, but not limited to, the following broad themes: methodologies, theories and meanings of gender; gender, power and political culture; monarchs, courts and power; constructions of femininity and masculinity; gift-giving, diplomacy and the politics of exchange; gender and the politics of early modern archives; gender and architectural spaces (courts, salons, household); consumption and material culture; objects and gendered power; women's writing; gendered patronage and power; gendered activities, behaviours, rituals and fashions.

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Introduction

Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

Abstract

This introduction summarizes and notes connections among the essays in this collection, which consider women's agency in the Renaissance and early modern period, an era that saw both increasing patriarchal constraints and new forms of women's actions and activism. The volume includes thirteen essays by scholars from many disciplines, which analyze people, texts, objects, and images from many different parts of Europe, as well as things and people that crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific. The essays address a capacious set of questions about how women, from their teenage years through older adulthood, asserted agency through social practices, speech acts, legal disputes, writing, viewing and exchanging images, travel, and community building.

Keywords: material culture; representations of women; women's agency; women's communities; emotional turn

'Agency' is a venerable concept in the study of women and gender in many disciplines. Examining women's agency in the past has taken on new urgency, however, in the current moment of resurgent patriarchy, Women's Marches, and the global #MeToo movement. The essays in this collection consider women's agency in the Renaissance and early modern period, an era that also saw both increasing patriarchal constraints and new forms of women's actions and activism. They address a capacious set of questions about how women, from their teenage years through older adulthood and across the social scale, asserted agency through social practices, speech acts, legal disputes, writing, viewing and exchanging images, travel, and community building. The book's title is intentionally double-meaning, capturing the fact that women both challenged and were challenged by male-dominated institutions.

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This volume includes thirteen essays by scholars from many disciplines, among them Art Education, Art History, English, History, Italian Studies, Spanish, and Women's and Gender Studies. Each essay reaches across disciplines, and several are written by interdisciplinary groups of authors. The essays examine people, texts, objects, and images from many different parts of Europe, including England, Italy, France, Denmark, Spain, the Low Countries, and Germany, as well as things and people that crossed the Atlantic to British North America and the Pacific to the Spanish Philippines.

The book is divided into four sections, each of them headed by verbs to reflect the book's focus on action: 'Choosing and Creating', with essays that examine how women's choice and creation of material objects shaped their lives and the world around them; 'Confronting Power', with essays that examine sites and modes of gendered confrontations in the early modern period and the ways these resonate in our classrooms; 'Challenging Representations', with essays that examine representations of women and by women that challenged dominant cultural interpretations at the time, and continue to do so today; 'Forming Communities', with essays that examine ways that secular and religious women formed collectivities and networks, and how these created new spaces and routes for writing and action.

Most of the essays began as presentations and conversations at the tenth Attending to Early Modern Women conference, held in 2018 at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Over its three meetings in Milwaukee, Attending to Early Modern Women first asked 'Where?' a question that resulted in the conference 'Remapping Routes and Spaces' (2012) and the conference volume *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World*. Then we asked 'When?' which led to 'It's About Time' (2015) and *Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World*. In 2018 we asked 'How?' For both our subjects and ourselves, the answer was and is the same: action and agency, a conference theme that several members of the organizing committee and I decided on while sitting in the airport of Washington DC, on our way home from the Women's March in January 2017, wearing our pink pussy hats. The conference subthemes— choice, confrontation, and collectivity—also grew out of that conversation, and the experience of collective action that we and millions of others around the world had just shared.

Agency has been a key concept in history since at least the rise of the 'new social history' in the 1970s, with social historians asserting that individuals and groups beyond white male elites had the capacity to act, make choices, and intentionally shape their own lives and the world around them to some

degree.¹ Debates about how much agency various individuals and groups had have recently focused on consumers and children, among others, and especially on enslaved people.² Some historians extend agency beyond the human to animals, arguing that although they do not share human cognitive abilities and self-awareness, animals display some degree of intentionality and self-directed action, and thus are agents.³ As several of the essays in this volume will discuss, agency has also been extended to non-living objects, sometimes dispersed among humans and non-humans as in Bruno Latour's 'actor-network' theory, or simply as a quality that objects or nature possess.⁴

'Agency' has been an enduring notion in women's and gender history as well, one of four key concepts recently highlighted in a forum in *Gender & History*.⁵ Here the historian of modern Africa Lynn Thomas provides a sensitive discussion of why agency has been such a powerful concept, particularly for periods and places in which historians seek to overcome an emphasis on victimization or passivity.⁶ She critiques the limitations of what she terms 'agency as argument', the ways that 'agency often slips from being a conceptual tool or starting point to a concluding argument, with statements like "African women had agency" standing as the impoverished punchlines of empirically rich studies'.⁷ Agency, she asserts, has become a 'safety' argument, that is, an uncontroversial conclusion applicable to nearly every situation. In this she agrees with Joan Scott, who has also commented about ways in which histories 'designed to celebrate women's agency began to seem predictable and repetitious, just more information garnered to prove a point that had already been made'.⁸ Ultimately both Thomas and Scott do not reject the concept of agency in women's and gender history, however, but instead argue that we must be open to its different, historically contingent

1 Johnson, 'On Agency'; Dayton, 'Rethinking Agency, Recovering Voices'.

2 On consumers, see Blanke, 'Consumer Choice, Agency, and New Directions in Rural History'; Reischer and Koo, 'The Body Beautiful'; on children, see Bryant, 'Clothing and Community'; on slaves, see Johnson, 'On Agency'; Millward, 'On Agency, Freedom and the Boundaries of Slavery Studies'.

3 Pearson, 'Dogs, History, and Agency'; Shaw, 'The Torturer's Horse'. My thanks to my colleague Nigel Rothfels for these references to agency in animals.

4 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Martin, 'Agents in Inter-Action'; Jones and Boivin, 'The Malice of Inanimate Objects'; Nash, 'The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?'.

5 'Forum: Rethinking Key Concepts in Gender History'. The forum also discusses intersectionality, gender crisis, and gender binary.

6 For an interesting reflection on this from a medieval historian, see Barbara Newman, 'On the Ethics of Feminist Historiography', in which she points to the temptation to idealize, pity, or blame when looking at the women of the distant past.

7 Thomas, 'Historicizing Agency', p. 324.

8 Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, p. 38.

forms and 'to the multiple motivations that undergird meaningful action, motivations that exceed rational calculation and articulated intentions to include collective fantasies, psychical desires and struggles just to get by'.⁹

The essays in this volume take up Thomas's challenge to historicize agency, to use it as a starting point rather than a conclusion, and to explore how different historical actors have themselves understood agency (though they used different words for this). The three essays in Part I, 'Choosing and Creating', highlight ways in which women's choice and creation of material objects to inhale, carry, wear, read, pray with, work with, work on, and/or display influenced their own lives and the world around them. In 'Bad Habits and Female Agency: Attending to Early Modern Women in the Material History of Intoxication', Angela McShane examines the social practices and material culture surrounding early modern women's tobacco habits. She investigates the modern editorial, historiographical, curatorial, and social practices that have ignored, effaced, and hidden this from view, and then deploys a range of sources to argue that tobacco taking was widespread among all 'sorts' of the female population in Britain and colonial North America, from indentured servants to Quaker matriarchs. Examining the praxis of early modern women's smoking and snuff-taking through judicial documents, periodical and literary publications, newspaper advertisements, personal papers, probate records, court depositions, visual and especially material sources, she reveals how tobacco-taking became a vehicle for social empowerment for white early modern women. Long before the destructive glamour of the cigarette took its hold in modern society, smoking and especially snuff-taking enabled freedom of conversation in a mixed social sphere, and created a canvas on which women could 'proclaim' themselves in society. Though the poor were attacked for the pleasure they took in tobacco, as in so much else, tobacco habits provided white women of all classes with important emotional support, and time for leisure, which they alone had the power to determine.

In 'Setting up House: Artisan Women's Trousseaux in Seventeenth-Century Bologna' Joyce de Vries similarly focuses on material objects as a key to praxis, in this case the linens, clothing, furniture, fabrics, utensils, jewelry and devotional items that artisan brides brought to their marriages, and with which they constructed their outward appearance and social status. The goods listed in trousseaux suggest details of women's activities, interests, and agency, demonstrating their impact in constituting new families, residences, and livelihoods. Brides played a role in selecting,

9 Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 335.

making, and embellishing at least some of the goods that they brought to their marriages, and women oversaw the material assets of the entire household, a domestic duty repeatedly outlined in prescriptive literature. But their domestic work might also be for the market, as some artisan women engaged in the growing and vibrant cottage industry fundamental for textile production, work reflected in the looms, thread, and cloth that formed part of many trousseaux. As de Vries demonstrates, the goods a bride brought with her to her marriage ensured some continuity with the past and provided a material base for the future, anchoring a rich and nuanced realm of female agency in early modern Italy.

In 'Crafting Habits of Resistance', the interdisciplinary author team of Susan Dinan, Karen Nelson, and Michele Osherow examines both actual and metaphorical habits created by women that functioned as texts of resistance within regional systems of power. These include the distinctive garb created by the Daughters of Charity in Paris that communicated their religious stance and allowed them to actively serve the poor; the biblical scenes embroidered by seventeenth-century English women in the era surrounding England's Civil War, through which they interpreted and commented upon the Bible and on contemporary events; and representations of women in war and under siege that provide examples of women's leadership and spying, counterposing the erasure of women from traditional military histories. Taken together, these complicate notions of public and private space, and suggest that the power of stories to animate and inspire took many guises not immediately discernable to those who seek out more standard articulations of women's challenges to misogyny. The authors assert that material traces, ranging from the concrete, to the ephemeral, to the imagined, reflect ways that people take stories already in circulation and use them to create spaces for women's agency.

The four essays in Part II, 'Confronting Power', provide further examples of sites and modes of gendered confrontations—physical, oral, and textual—in the early modern period, and the ways these resonate in the histories that have come down to us, the histories we create, and the histories we convey in our classrooms. Grethe Jacobsen takes us north to Scandinavia in 'Confronting Women's Actions in History: Female Crown Fief Holders in Denmark'. She analyzes the actions of two Danish noblewomen who battled with one another for property while serving as crown fief holders with formal power and authority over crown property, an office that appears unique to Scandinavia among non-royal women. As Jacobsen tells it, the seemingly ordinary dispute over property between two sisters-in-law turns out to contain several layers of confrontations: most obviously that between

the women, but also the confrontation between the ideas and notions of later generations of historians and storytellers as to what women could or couldn't do on the one hand, and the actual lives and experiences of women in the past on the other. Women made up 15 percent of all crown fief holders during the sixteenth century, a fact that was ignored by contemporaries and by later historians unable to imagine non-royal women holding formal power.

Caroline Boswell's 'Divisive Speech in Divided Times? Women and the Politics of Slander, Sedition, and Informing during the English Revolution' delves into a series of court records from mid-seventeenth century England regarding provocative speeches, seditious utterances, and incidents in which women engaged. Civil war and revolution destabilized normative concepts of manhood and womanhood, which empowered those who used disaffected and dangerous speech, but also those who regulated it to prescribe acceptable patterns of behavior within their communities. As utterers and regulators, women consciously and unconsciously engaged shifting notions of patriarchal authority and unease over gender and social inversion. In investigating the politics of everyday life, Boswell looks at the potential potency ascribed to women's disaffected and well-affected speech, and how reported speech was tied to larger political discourses about honesty, order, and affection in a world turned upside down. She finds that the reality of female assertiveness represented in examinations reveals tensions over the power of female speech to provoke quarrels and disrupt social relations within an already divided society.

With Caroline Castiglione's 'Why Political Theory is Women's Work: How Moderata Fonte Reclaimed Liberty for Women inside and outside Marriage', we turn from speech to writing, and move from northern to southern Europe. Castiglione analyzes the Venetian author Moderata Fonte's posthumously published dialogue *The Worth of Women* (1600), in which Fonte critiqued the sexist paradigms that deemed women inferior to men. She located specific dangers to women in the institution of matrimony, and articulated her critique of its risks to women by turning to the realm of political ideas, especially to the concept of women's liberty. Women were, according to Fonte, free before marriage and remained free in the marital state, a liberty similar to that of Venice, which was not subject to the commands of any state. The freedom of a wife was not absolute, but neither was that of the husband, who, in Fonte's thinking, was not free to do anything he liked. As Castiglione demonstrates, Fonte's model of marriage was one in which both parties were supposed to gain the co-stewardship of a flourishing domestic enterprise as well as companionship and love, a model that anticipates later

contract theory and that is still deeply contested today, sometimes to the wife's endangerment or even death.

Connections between past and present emerge at greater length in Jennifer Selwyn's "'Wrestling the World from Fools": Teaching Historical Empathy and Critical Engagement in Traditional and Online Classrooms', an essay that takes its title from Patti Smith's 1988 protest song, 'People Have the Power'. Her essay focuses on the pedagogical implications of examining action and agency, as we seek simultaneously to train students in critical inquiry into the past and the skills that this requires, encourage historical empathy that helps them to understand how contemporaries may have experienced those lived pasts, and draw connections with our students between the past and the worlds that we currently inhabit. Selwyn provides suggestions for specific strategies that can be used to do this, from more traditional ones such as novels or simulations to more innovative experiments with letting students anonymously inhabit fictional personae/avatars and then produce extensive written accounts of their life experiences, a pedagogical method that gives students considerable agency, and allows them the opportunity to develop historical imagination. Assignments or whole courses that explicitly draw comparisons between past and present are another way to engage students and cultivate historical empathy, and Selwyn examines several of these, situating these within current debates about presentism.

The three essays in Part III, 'Challenging Representations', examine written and visual works *by* women and representations *of* women that challenged dominant cultural interpretations at the time and continue to do so today. In 'Thinking Beings and Animate Matter: Margaret Cavendish's Challenge to the Early Modern Order of Things', Mihoko Suzuki argues that the English author and scientist Margaret Cavendish challenged early modern culture's dominant conception of the relationship between humans and non-humans, humans and their environment, as well as the inanimate nature of matter. In her poems that dramatize a dialogue among birds and between a tree and a man, Cavendish disputes the unquestioned assumption among her contemporaries that non-human beings exist for the use of man, anticipating recent findings about the intelligence and emotional capacity of birds and the sentience of trees that communicate with and support one another. In other poems concerning the environment and the earth, Suzuki notes, Cavendish anticipates twenty-first century understandings of humans' destructive effects on the environment. Her series of poems on atoms, in which she assigns not only motion, but also agency, to matter, offers parallels with contemporary concepts of 'vibrant matter' and notions that objects or nature have agency. Cavendish's writings about animals,

plants, the environment, and matter led her to challenge the prevailing assumption of the unquestioned superiority and dominion of man over all creation, and to critique man's use and abuse of all other creatures and the natural environment, thus also anticipating recent ecofeminism.

In 'The Agency of Portrayal: The Active Portrait in the Early Modern Period', Saskia Beranek and Sheila ffolliott argue for the agency of another type of non-living object, the portrait. They suggest that the mobility and display of visual and verbal portraits grant affective agency to the objects themselves, in addition to the conventional artistic agency of the patron long studied by art historians. Portraits negotiate between sitter and viewer, but also between viewers in the absence of the sitter in order to create social bonds and cement dynastic claims. Beranek and ffolliott examine how portraits representing women and owned by women established or challenged identities, activated spaces, circulated in familial and economic networks, and functioned in forging alliances. They consider the ways in which networks of portrait collecting and exchange provide a gendered parallel for a more traditional written archive. Using case studies culled from a range of times and places through the early modern period, they argue for a site-specific, viewer-response based method of examining portraits that foregrounds the cultural work accomplished by the object itself.

In 'Marking Female Ocular Agency in the "Medieval Housebook"', Andrea Pearson analyzes an enigmatic figure who is both viewer and viewed, a female figure drawn later by an unidentified party in the so-called 'Medieval Housebook', a well-known manuscript of late medieval Germany, begun c. 1475. In the drawing, the woman looks down from a framed aperture at a military encampment, which Pearson parallels with actual and pictorial female spectatorship at tournaments, where the female gaze was important in the cultural construction of elite masculinity. Thus, she argues, this figure has agency, and operates in contrast to another, more passive female figure—which may have inspired the later drawing—and also to the largely negative characterization of women throughout the volume. Reading the images as point-counterpoint, Pearson asserts, is not simply a strategy for modern scholars seeking to understand the manuscript, but recommended in the 'Housebook' itself. The manuscript encourages readers to develop memory skills by cross-referencing the content and thus invites its consumers to shape meaning across the illustrated folios that present positive and negative male and female behavior.

The three essays in Part IV, 'Forming Communities', focus more fully on a theme touched on in earlier essays, the ways women formed collectivities and networks that create new spaces and routes for writing and action. In

‘Claude-Catherine de Clermont: A Taste-Maker in the Continuum of Salon Society’, Julie Campbell examines a type of space that has long been recognized as female-dominated: the salon. She analyzes the role of one prominent salonnière, Claude-Catherine de Clermont, *duchesse de Retz* (1543–1603), whose mother-in-law was also known for her literary circle in Lyon during the 1520s and 1530s, and whose young cousin would host the most famous salon of the seventeenth century. As Campbell argues, Retz, too, hosted a group of men and women who engaged in game-playing, conversation, the championing of key vernacular literary styles, and the impulse to escape religiopolitical chaos by taking refuge in regulated conversation spaces. Thus, along with several other sixteenth-century noble and royal women, she cultivated a *société mondaine* that partook of Italian social influence and paved the way for the celebrated salons of the seventeenth century, where the so-called *précieuses* directed polite, cultivated conversation and games, and inspired the invention of the modern novel designed according to women’s tastes.

With Sarah Owens’ ‘Religious Spaces in the Far East: Women’s Travel and Writing in Manila and Macao’, we explore a trans-oceanic community, that of Sor Magdalena de Cristo (1575–1653), one of the co-founders of the first Franciscan convent in the Philippines and later the co-founder of another convent in Macao, China. Owens examines Sor Magdalena’s role as an intrepid traveler and author, but in particular analyzes how she helped form a writing community amongst her peers, assisting her Spanish sisters in cultivating their own religious and literary space in the Far East. Sor Magdalena’s story, and that of the women with whom she formed networks and alliances, comes down to us from the friars who accompanied the nuns or who later interviewed them for biographies, but also from the pens of the original nuns who set out to establish the first female Franciscan convent in the Far East. Many of those pens, Owens argues, were inspired by Sor Magdalena, who served as a scribe and collaborator, helping to make sure the literary and missionary contributions of these Spanish women would be recorded.

The final essay, ‘Accounting for Early Modern Women in the Arts: Reconsidering Women’s Agency, Networks, and Relationships’ comes from the interdisciplinary author team of Theresa Kemp, Catherine Powell, and Beth Link. Like earlier authors in this volume, they connect past and present, looking to contemporary social network theory, feminist calls for intervention into history, and conceptions of feminist collectivity to examine several examples of women’s involvement in professional arts in the early modern period. They draw from two seventeenth-century case studies, one exploring

the female family enterprise of the Dutch naturalist and illustrator Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) and her daughters and patrons, and the other the role played by the English woman Agnes Henslowe and her daughter Joan Alleyn in the family's entertainment establishments, including the wildly successful Rose Theatre. The authors argue that the study of female agency should not be limited to 'great women', but should also incorporate the social and familial networks of patrons, agents, managers, assistants, and others who allowed the great women (and great men) in their lives to succeed.

The themes in the book's title, action and agency, are not the only ones that connect the essays. Many of the essays focus on material objects, along with representations and imaginings of objects, reflecting the 'material turn' in both history and literary studies. This 'turn' has drawn on material culture studies for methodology and theory about the role of objects and the relationships between things and people in the creation and transformation of society and culture.¹⁰ Through taking tobacco, purchasing a snuffbox, designing and sewing a habit, exchanging portraits, embroidering clothing or decorative objects, drawing exotic insects, or writing about atoms and oak trees, the women in the essays reinforce the point made by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Tobin, that: 'Women in the process of making and manipulating things were not only engaged in self-definition and identity performance, but were actively engaged in meaning-making practices that involved the construction, circulation and maintenance of knowledge.'¹¹ As the authors in this volume note, examining or re-examining objects and their representations has highlighted ways in which museum and archival collecting and labeling practices, as well as written texts, have hidden women's agency from view.

The self-portrait that we chose for the cover image, by Louise Hollandine of the Palatinate (1622–1709), provides a further example of women's performance through material objects. Louise Hollandine, the granddaughter of Britain's James I and the daughter of Frederick of the Palatinate and Elizabeth Stuart, was born in The Hague after her parents had fled from Prague at the onset of the Thirty Years' War. She began drawing lessons as a child, showing great talent in portraiture. Among her self-portraits was the one on the cover, painted when she was in her late twenties, holding a paint brush and wearing an elegant brooch and necklace, but also a striped shirt and flat multicolored hat. These latter would have been clearly understood

10 For a general theoretical introduction, see Hodder, *Entangled*. For applications to the early modern period, see Hamling and Richardson, *Everyday Objects*.

11 Tobin and Goggin, 'Materializing Women', p. 4.

as ‘gypsy’ apparel at the time, which Louise Hollandine could have found in the printed costume books that were popular reading material. Why she chose to portray herself this way is not known, though portraits and self-portraits in clothing understood as ‘exotic’ were fairly common in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. Louise Hollandine’s life as well as her art also reflects the book’s action and agency theme: to the horror of her staunchly Protestant family, when she was 35 she fled from home in disguise, became a Catholic nun in France, and was appointed abbess of the Cistercian Maubisson Abbey. Here she spent the rest of her long life, painting to the end.

Along with the material turn, several of the essays also reflect history’s ‘emotional turn’—what in literary studies is generally labeled ‘the turn to affect’—which has led scholars to seek to understand the changing meanings and consequences of emotional concepts, expression, and regulation.¹² Individuals in the essays express anger, sadness, jealousy, desire, affection, and other specific emotions, sometimes in ways that fit with established standards, and sometimes in ways that others sought to control or negate. But women also fashioned new emotional norms, an aspect of agency that is only beginning to be studied. As they created informal and formal groups that gave their lives meaning, women tobacco-takers, the Daughters of Charity, women who exchanged portraits and letters, salon hostesses, Franciscan nuns, and others established what Barbara Rosenwein has termed ‘emotional communities’, which she defines as ‘social groups that adhere to the same valuations of emotions and how they should be expressed.’¹³ Part of the historical empathy—itself an emotion—we seek to encourage in our students is thus to help them better understand the emotional communities and concepts of the past.

Norms regarding emotions are not the only type of norms analyzed in the essays. Several of the authors discuss the patriarchal ideas and structures within which early modern women and men operated, but they also provide examples of what Allyson Poska has recently labeled ‘agentic gender norms’, by which she means a parallel set of expectations, shared by women and men alike, in which women were viewed as capable, economically productive, rational, qualified, skilled, and competent. Poska notes that across Europe queens and noblewomen were expected to engage in political activity on behalf of their families, so were educated to do so. In many places women

12 On early modern emotions, see Lynch and Broomhall, *Routledge History of the Emotions in Europe*; Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*.

13 Quoted in Plamper, ‘History of the Emotions’, p. 253.

were given guardianship over children, with full confidence in their capabilities. Laws gave men power over their households, but also limited this, as did inheritance practices and marriage settlements. Women expected to earn a living, and migrated when they could not. Female writers and artists produced works not *despite* patriarchal disapproval, she argues, but because 'early modern society recognized the talents of female artists' and women writers were 'supported by the literary culture of the period'.¹⁴

Many of the essays in this book provide support for Poska's idea: Danish kings chose noblewomen as crown fief holders because they expected the women would administer royal estates effectively; families included looms in trousseaux because they expected women would support their marital families through textile production; printers published works decrying violence against women because they expected these books would sell; people expected women to engage in conversation or arguments about literary or religious issues in mixed social settings (sometimes while dipping snuff); they expected women to be competent financial managers of family business establishments and knowledgeable patrons of the arts. Women thus defied certain social norms, but fulfilled others, what Poska describes as a process of 'making choices about which set of gender norms they acquiesced to and attempted to enforce'.¹⁵

Finally, many of the essays in this book connect with issues that remain of vital importance today, and will only be more so in the future, as we and our students contemplate and shape a post COVID-19 world. Marriage and other intimate relationships remain dangerous for women, as domestic violence and even femicide make 'safer at home' an unattainable goal, not a reality. The pandemic has created a brief hiccup in fossil fuel use and the resultant pollution and climate change, but the human impact on the environment is now far beyond what even Margaret Cavendish's vivid imagination could have envisioned. Empathy, historical or otherwise, remains a difficult quality to cultivate, particularly when showing empathy or even concern for others is ridiculed or described as dangerous. But, as the essays in this book have shown, women of the early modern period—real and imagined—were active agents in unexpected ways and places, and their legacy can inspire those of us who study them. To return to Patti Smith, who always has words that capture the possibilities of confronting power and forming communities: 'The people have the power / To redeem the work of fools.'¹⁶

14 Poska, 'The Case for Agentic Gender Norms'. This article is part of a broader group of reflections, 'Forum: Early Modern Patriarchy'.

15 Ibid., p. 364.

16 Patti Smith, 'People Have the Power', *Dream of Life* (Arista Records, 1988).

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Part I

Choosing and Creating

1. Bad Habits and Female Agency

Attending to Early Modern Women in the Material History of Intoxication

Angela McShane

Abstract

This essay considers the social practices and material culture surrounding early modern women's tobacco habits, which, in contrast to women's tea taking, have had no part to play in any narratives about social change. Scholars have long been aware that some early modern women did use tobacco, but they have cited a lack of documentary evidence for these practices, and continued to assume that the consumption of tobacco, whether for smoking or snuff-taking, was largely a male affair. Taking a materially enriched approach to the female history of intoxication, this article argues that tobacco taking was widespread among all 'sorts' of the female population in Britain and Colonial North America and offered social empowerment for white early modern women.

Keywords: tobacco; tea; intoxicants; female sociability; material culture; social agency

Lighting Up

[T]he world goes on; we stand still here. Dullness, in the solemn garb of wisdom, wraps us in its gentle wing, and here we dream that others do ill, and happy are we that do nothing. One yawns there is peace in solitude; another stirs the fire, and cries how happy is liberty and independence; another takes a pinch of snuff and praises leisure; another pulls a knotting shuttle out of their pockets, and commends a little innocent amusement; their neighbour more laborious, making a lace with two bobbins, says

business should be preferred to pleasure and diversions. How wise is everybody by their own fireside, and how happy everyone in their own way!

Elizabeth Montagu to Mrs. Donnellan. 1742.¹

I have always hated tobacco. I grew up among heavy smokers and many of my close relatives did not reach the age I am now due to smoking-related cancers and conditions. I campaigned against smoking at school and at work, and I argued with my mother about her smoking almost all my life. If she could have read this chapter, in which I explore how white, early modern women, on both sides of the Atlantic (however unwisely) used tobacco to enhance and empower their social lives, she would laugh—and cough—at me like a particularly smoky drain.² I dedicate this study of women and tobacco to her memory; perhaps I am finally, if belatedly, trying to see things from her point of view.

Insofar as early modern women are ever considered as legitimate consumers of intoxicants (that is, wine, beer, spirits, tea, coffee, and tobacco) scholarly attention has tended to focus on the ritual and material cultures surrounding tea. Indeed, tea forms a central plank in some key gendered historical meta-narratives, especially politeness and the separation between the public and domestic sphere. Polite women are very easy to find around the tea table in the long eighteenth century. As letters, diaries, plays, paintings, poems, pictures, and the huge archive of equipment for drinking it attest, the tea table was a space from which the polite woman could hold court, conspicuously display her taste, serve her household, and assert her domestic virtues.³ As it became ever more affordable from the 1750s on, commentators read tea-taking as symbolic of sober respectability and domestic comfort; some claim it saved British lives by overtaking gin-drinking in popularity.⁴ By the later eighteenth century, tea-taking hardened into a rigid domestic requirement in the Eastern seaboard cities of North America, so much so that eschewing the drink became a means by which North American ‘daughters of liberty’ could demonstrate their republican

1 Montagu, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 318.

2 My mother (1936–2013) became an army wife at seventeen. The phrase ‘to laugh like a drain’ comes from army slang and means ‘to laugh coarsely, or loudly, especially at the discomfort of others’: see Partridge, *Dictionary of Forces Slang*.

3 See, for example, Smith, ‘From Coffeehouse to Parlour’; Goodman et al., *Consuming Habits*; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*; Cusack, ‘This Pernicious Tea Drinking Habit’; Rappaport, *Thirst for Empire*; Norton, *Separated by Their Sex*.

4 Masset, *Tea*, p. 5.

resolve.⁵ In Britain, by the nineteenth century, tea had become a staple that was provided even to the paupers in workhouses.⁶

Yet the picture painted by some contemporaries and almost all historians of tea-taking as ‘refined [...] domestic and private [and] engender[ing of] moderation’, was not uncontested in the period.⁷ The tea craze encouraged crime and corruption, leading to an unhealthy union of ‘respectable’ society with the world of smugglers.⁸ It was feared that the unsupervised female sphere of the tea table encouraged immorality and enabled women to establish a domestic empire, in which men were disadvantaged.⁹ As tea became more widely accessible, new concerns were expressed that tea consumption was as dangerous as gin in raising expectations among the lower sorts of a right to leisure and liberty.¹⁰ Narratives of sobriety were also undermined visually and materially by tea-taking equipment that linked ‘sober’ tea with stronger intoxicants and sexual impropriety, such as teapots depicting seductive wine-drinking women and leering pipe-smoking men, or teacups that exhorted users: ‘Do not put rum in me’.¹¹ Moreover, the ever-increasing adoption of a specified time for tea can be read as a powerful force for the entrapment of polite early modern women. The teatime ritual literally put women ‘in their place’ by rendering all the female roles involved those of domestic service. Even the mistress of the house was expected to be present, dressed, and ready to serve her guests, her family, and especially her husband. Meanwhile, the acquisitive, material world of the tea ritual, which demanded sets of china, silverware, tea tables, boxes, and gowns, served not only to distract women from the wider cares and concerns of the male-dominated outside world, but also to disparage the reputation of the sex as profligate and unthinking.¹²

In contrast, as I hope to show, tobacco-taking was as widespread and as deeply embedded in women’s lives as tea-drinking by the eighteenth century,

5 Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’”; Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*; Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*.

6 Tomkins, *Experience of Urban Poverty*, pp. 7, 54.

7 Goodman, *Tobacco*, p. 82.

8 See, for example, Sweeting, ‘Intoxication and Calculation’; Masset, *Tea*, p. 15.

9 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 14–15, 273–275; eadem, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, p. 208; Kowaleski-Wallace, ‘Tea, Gender, and Domesticity’.

10 See Valenze, ‘Charity, Custom and Humanity’; Rogers, ‘Pleasures of the Poor’.

11 Seductive Teapots: V&A: C.121&A-1930: collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O185188/teapot-and-cover-vezzi-porcelain-factory/ (accessed 25 July 2020); V&A: C.130&A-1940: collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O70825/teapot-and-cover-vezzi-porcelain-factory/ (accessed 25 July 2020); Tea Cups: Harris Museum, ‘True as an Oak’ Staffordshire Tea Wares (no public digital images available); see also ‘Teetotal teapot’ (1834–1840) Object number: PRSMG: ce730.

12 Kowaleski-Wallace, ‘Tea, Gender, and Domesticity’; Rock, ‘A Woman’s Place’, pp. 456–459.

yet it has had little part to play in the neat, well-trodden narrative paths of politeness and domestication. Though scholars have long been aware that some, perhaps many, early modern women did use tobacco, a smokescreen has been drawn across this common element of female social practice.¹³ A paucity of evidence has been highlighted as one reason for this obscurity, but another is a widespread assumption that, where there is no smoke, there is no fire: in other words, that, as with alcohol, the consumption of tobacco was largely a male affair, and only bad or mad girls were likely to indulge in such masculine habits. But this was not true.¹⁴

In what follows, I first investigate the modern editorial, historiographical, curatorial, and social practices that have ignored, effaced, and hidden early modern women's tobacco habits from historical view. Second, by deploying a range of documentary, visual, and material sources, I investigate when, how, and why tobacco-taking became widespread among all 'sorts' of the transatlantic female population. And third, I explore the 'praxis' and social agency of early modern women's tobacco taking. In this, I have followed Andreas Reckwitz's definition of social praxis as 'a routinized type of behavior' consisting of several equally important and interconnected elements:

forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

Reckwitz argues that agency is distributed across the 'social communication network' that these elements create.¹⁵

Adopting this materially and emotionally enriched praxeological approach reveals how tobacco-taking became a vehicle for female empowerment, long before the destructive glamour of the cigarette took its hold in modern society.¹⁶ It also presents a very different view of

13 To take just one example, see Vickery's important works on gender, society and consumption: tobacco is rarely mentioned, and only in relation to men, while tea is gendered as female, and discussed *passim* at length: see *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 52, 67, 128, 274; eadem, *Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 208, 212–213. In *Behind Closed Doors*, snuffboxes are categorized as 'men's ornaments and accoutrements' (128), yet a footnote in *Gentleman's Daughter* (p. 328 n. 24), notes women's purchases from the London jewelers Parker and Wakelin included 'teaware, snuff boxes and paste and silver jewellery'.

14 Goodman, *Tobacco*, pp. 61–63, 66, 106–107; Hughes, *Learning to Smoke*, pp. 79–84, 100.

15 Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices', p. 249. See also McShane, 'Belonging and Belongings'; eadem, 'Thinking inside the Box'.

16 On development of women's cigarette smoking see Greaves, *Smoke Screen*; Hughes, *Learning to Smoke*.

the affordances of power that intoxicants could bring to female lives, which points to the need for a gendered rebalancing in our histories of intoxication.

Dismantling the smokescreen

In 1807, Elizabeth Drinker, matriarch of one of Philadelphia's leading Quaker families, recorded in her remarkable diary a morning visit by her kinswoman, young Nelly Siddon. Throughout much of her adult life, Drinker kept a daily record of the weather, events in her family's life, when and where she had taken tea, and who had come to take tea in her home. But on this day—'a Clear morning, the wind Westerly'—she had a sad task to perform. Nelly's old Aunt Swet had just died and it fell to Drinker to pass on Aunt Swet's most treasured possessions to her nearest female heir: her Bible, her sampler, her thimble and, most importantly (it actually came first in Drinker's list), her silver snuffbox.¹⁷

The intoxicating habits of American Quaker women, combined with their tendency to write diaries, are particularly revealing. Not everyone in the Quaker community approved: in 1762, Ann Cooper Whitall called it an 'abomination of the times' and expressed her outrage at 'So much excess of tobacco; and tea is as bad, so much of it, and they will pretend they can't do without it'.¹⁸ Modern editors and commentators have either ignored or relegated these habits to asides or footnotes.¹⁹ Nevertheless, though they eschewed recreational alcohol (they drank 'table-beer'), and rarely indulged in coffee, leading lights in the Quaker community, such as Elizabeth Drinker, her family, friends, and acquaintances, were as comfortable with their tobacco-taking as they were with their tea-drinking habits. In December 1803 (when she was 73), Drinker tells us:

Yesterday I took the last pinch of Westons snuff, that, perhaps, I shall ever take, unless by Chance, as none is to be had in this city, nor none imported—it is upwards of 50 years that I have taken snuff, more or less, and mostly of the same kind.²⁰

17 Drinker, *Diary*, vol. 3, p. 2043.

18 Whitall, 'Diary', p. 8.

19 See, for example, Crane, *Diary*, 1 n. 894; Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale*, p. 47. Other examples follow below.

20 Crane, *Diary*, pp. 261, 261 n. 11.

Fifty years of snuff taking, probably several times every day—a habit that was completely intrinsic to her everyday life—yet, unlike her constant references to tea (and the weather), Drinker rarely mentions snuff-taking, and refers just once, in all that time, to her own snuffbox.²¹

Drinker's diary exemplifies both the understandable silence of contemporaries about activities that were too mundane to be worthy of record, and the considerable challenge of recovering women's tobacco praxis from sources that they created themselves. Such direct written testimony as there is comes largely from elite, privileged women—like Drinker—whose diaries, correspondence and probate records survive. Nevertheless, by casting our net widely to encompass judicial and personal documents, periodical and literary publications, visual and especially material sources, we can garner numerous insights into the significant relationship between early modern women and tobacco.

A further barrier to overcome has been a tendency among modern commentators to misunderstand the complexities of tobacco consumption, not least by eliding the practices and valences of smoking and snuffing.²² Contemporaries observed that, despite its expense, British women of all sorts smoked tobacco from the early days of its arrival in Europe. In 1615, the London-based chronicler Edmund Howes noted, 'at this day, [tobacco is] commonly vsed by most men and many women'.²³ Women from the West Midlands also took to the habit, as noted by French traveler M. Jorevin de Rochefort, who described his experience while staying at the Stag Inn at Worcester in 1666:

the supper being finished [my hosts] set on the table half a dozen pipes and a paquet of tobacco for smoking, which is a general custom as well among women as men, who think that without tobacco one cannot live in England, because, say they, it dissipates the evil humours of the brain.²⁴

Tobacco-smoking women were also prevalent in English maritime regions, especially the West Country, where it was an almost universally accepted practice.²⁵ For example, while traveling towards London from Torbay

21 Drinker also mentions the snuff bottle from which she filled her snuffbox: Drinker, *Diary*, 1: pp. 212, 262, 711; her sister's snuffbox is mentioned: 2: p. 1190.

22 Goodman, *Tobacco*, Chapter 5, esp. pp. 71–73.

23 Howes, *Annales*, p. 32.

24 Apperson, *Social History*, Chapter 13 (unpaginated).

25 Ibid.

in Devon with William of Orange (later William III) in 1688, Dutchman Constantijn Huygens noted:

we saw country folk everywhere [...] [including] five women, all chewing tobacco [who] greeted [William]. Indeed, we saw many women smoking without shame, even young girls of thirteen or fourteen.²⁶

Similarly, in the 1690s, diarist Celia Fiennes remarked of her visit to Cornwall (one of England's poorest regions):

the Custome of the Country [...] is a universall smoaking, both men women and children have all their pipes of tobacco in their mouths and soe sit round the fire smoaking wch was not delightfull to me.²⁷

These contemporary reactions exemplify abiding features of early modern discourse that have contributed to the relative invisibility of pipe-smoking women in the record. First, Huygens's surprise that women smoked 'without shame' reflects the visual and textual discourse expressing (mainly) male disapproval of (mainly) the lower sort of women's smoking habits.²⁸ This was a particular focus in William Hogarth's *Gin Lane* (1752), in which the central female figure may have been drinking an excess of gin but is actually depicted taking snuff from a large box.²⁹ Apperson similarly points out that

in Fielding's 'Amelia' a woman of the lowest character is spoken of as 'smoking tobacco, drinking punch, talking obscenely and swearing and cursing'—which accomplishments are all carefully noted, because none of them would be applicable to the ordinary respectable female.³⁰

Second, Feinnes's remark that her encounter with Cornish 'smoaking' was 'not delightfull to me', reflects the amplification of women's voices (frequently ventriloquised by male writers) who express disgust of the

26 Huygens, *Diary*, p. 58.

27 Fiennes, *Illustrated Journeys*, p. 117.

28 See, for example, Anon., *The Apish Art of Tasting*, London: John Garrett, 1630–1640: etching depicting elite woman smoking and drinking; see also George Glover, *Gustus* [Taste] London: William Peake, 1625–1635.

29 Wellcome Collection no. 26961i: wellcomecollection.org/works/ckg9bvncx/items?canvas=1&langCode=eng (accessed 25 July 2020).

30 Apperson, *Social History*, Chapter 13 (unpaginated).

visceral consequences of lower-sort or impolite tobacco-taking.³¹ An early literary example of this trope is Samuel Rowlands' *A crew of kind gossips*, in which a wife complains about her husband's filthy smoking habit that 'makes a chimney of his nose'. She describes the troublesome palaver of her husband's habit and the vengeful action she has taken to stop it:

for a Candle and a pipe he'll call; a trencher [...] let there a rush be got, Some paper, make the fire shovel hot, a knife, some match, and reach a little wyre, a tinder box, fetch me a coal of fyre [...] But now and then, I fit him in his kind, When any smoaky stuff of his I finde; For when I meete with his tobacco box, I send it to the priuie with a pox. Then he'll go raging up and downe, and sweare, he misseth such most rare and holsome geare.³²

In much of Colonial America too, pipe-smoking was assumed to be distasteful to polite women, an idea for which there is some support in the sources. In 1704, Sarah Kemble Knight expressed her disgust at men 'fumbling out their black junk' before filling a pipe and 'sucking like a calf', and gave a particularly vivid account of her encounter with a taciturn tobacco chewer:

a tall country fellow, wch his alfogoes [cheeks?] full of Tobacco; for they seldom Loose their Cudd, but keep Chewing and Spitting as long as they'r eyes are open, he advanc't to the midle of the Room, makes an Awkward Nodd, and spitting a Large deal of Aromatick Tincture, he gave a scrape with his shovel like shoo, leaving a small shovel full of dirt on the floor, made a full stop.³³

In accordance with these attitudes, the eighteenth century's developing etiquette of polite gender relations deemed pipe-smoking a male habit that was distasteful to ladies. A gentleman was expected to ask, or wait to be invited, before indulging himself with a pipe at mixed social gatherings. Failure to do so could cause great offence, as when Elizabeth Shackleton complained that she was 'almost suffocated' by her brother and his friend's smoking over breakfast.³⁴ More acceptable behaviour was described by Elizabeth Montagu:

31 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 274; Apperson, *Social History*, Chapters 2, 13 (unpaginated).

32 Rowlands, *Crew*, Sig. D2–D2v.

33 Knight, *Journal*, pp. 25, 42.

34 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 213.

Dr Young [a Tory vicar] came after the meal was over, in hopes of smoking a pipe; [...] I saw a large horn tobacco box, with Queen Ann's head upon it, peeping out of his pocket, but I did not care to take the hint, and desire him to put in use that magnificent piece of furniture.³⁵

This did not mean, however, that ladies desisted from tobacco-taking themselves. Montagu was herself a committed snuff-taker, while many women might have smoked a pipe in private, for reasons of personal health or pleasure. Hannah Allen, who published an account of her recovery from debilitating 'melancholy', was clearly a private pipe-smoker, though this was only revealed when she described a suicide attempt:

I got [poisonous] spiders and took one at a time in a pipe with tobacco, but never scarce took it out, for my heart would fail me. But once I thought I had been poisoned [...] I thought I felt death upon me (for I had taken a spider when I went to bed).³⁶

In some polite communities—not least the Quakers of Philadelphia—smoking was considered a perfectly respectable domestic activity for both sexes.³⁷ Indeed, as Drinker's diary attests, 'smoking a pipe', usually after the afternoon tea meal, presented an ideal opportunity to draw companies of friends together in the home.³⁸ There were limits to Drinker's acceptance of women's smoking, however. She complained about the tobacco habits of her freed servant 'black Jane': 'if she could go every day to meeting, and take her pipe to bed, she would be very happy—the first I don't like to refuse, the second I have affronted her about.'³⁹

We occasionally find non-judgmental accounts of women companionably and respectably smoking together, or in male company. For example, in 1698 Martha Sconce went to 'light a pipe' at Jane Lock's house in Norwich (but found her friend having sex with Thomas Turner), and in 1778 Elizabeth Drinker called upon her friend Hannah Pemberton and 'found her smokeing her pipe with two officers—one of 'em is quarter'd there'.⁴⁰ Women were also encouraged to smoke by male companions, acquaintances, and employers. In

35 Montagu, *Letters*, vol. 3, p. 340.

36 Graham et al., eds., *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 210.

37 Buhler and Hood, *American Silver*, vol. 1, pp. 141–143, no. 169, ill.

38 Drinker, *Diary*, vol. 1, pp. 260, 591, 623, 631.

39 Drinker, *Diary*, vol. 2, p. 1264.

40 *IEM*: Norfolk Records Office: DN/DEP 53/58a, Deposition of Elizabeth Turner in Lock c. Sconce; Drinker, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 274.

1714, it was said that Margaret Buck of Norfolk, a trusted servant, could not be 'a natural or stark fool or idiot' not least because, as a previous employer deposed, 'he has often given her tobacco which (her dame being against it) she would hide up with a great deal of cunning and smoke when her dame was out of the way.'⁴¹

In America, newspaper advertisements that described runaway indentured servants sometimes highlighted women's intoxicating habits as physical and moral identifiers. One striking character who emerges from these announcements is repeat runaway Eleanor Armstrong, who (like my grandfather) was originally from Armagh, in Ireland. She ran away from a position at William Evitt's printing office in October 1771, perhaps because, as the fulsome notice that appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* announced, she 'takes delight in no other work than spinning'. Armstrong was described as 'about 5' 4", pretty lusty, brown complexion, large featured, dark sooty coloured hair, about 26 years of age, large mouth, and an excellent sett of teeth' who 'when in liquor, is apt to laugh greatly' and 'takes snuff immoderately at the right side of her nose'.⁴² Two years later, Eleanor Armstrong ran away again from a new employer, but the *Pennsylvania Packet* advert hints at dark experiences and a shift of habits in the intervening period. No longer 'lusty', the recently widowed Eleanor was now described as: 'short, thick set, brown hair, about thirty years of age, [with] a mark on her right cheek received by a cut', a woman who 'wears a ring on her finger, and smokes tobacco'.⁴³

Pipe-smoking women may be relatively hard to find because it was such an unattractive habit. The damage it could wreak on a woman's physical appearance is underscored by another repeat runaway, Jane Shephard, who, at 23, had 'very black teeth occasioned by smoking'.⁴⁴ As well as its intrusive, pungent aroma, smoking inevitably involved spitting, characteristics that were neither pleasant nor convenient for women engaged in domestic, retail, or textile work. The clumsiness and clutter of smoking apparatus, as noted by the wife in Rowlands's play, may also have been a strong disincentive.⁴⁵ Moreover, pipe-smoking required the smoker's whole attention for a considerable period: an excellent reason for servants, like 'black Jane', wanting

41 *IEM*: Norfolk Records Office: DN/DEP 56/60 (unfold.) Deposition of Augustin Smith in Thorrold c. Neech.

42 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 2 April 1772.

43 *Pennsylvania Packet*, 26 July 1773.

44 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 23 June 1775.

45 See also Goodman, *Tobacco*, p. 84; Hughes, *Learning to Smoke*, pp. 66–68.

to take their pipe to bed. Snuff-taking, on the other hand, was both less troublesome and had several attractive features.

Following the introduction of snuff to British and colonial American society in the late seventeenth century, there was a dramatic shift in the nature, amount, and social acceptability of women's tobacco-taking habits. Snuff-taking was not immediately accepted. From its first appearance in England, writers denigrated and satirized snuff-taking as a fiddly, foreign, and even effeminate fashion. Periodicals, pamphlets and plays accused foppish young men (dubbed 'beaus') who enthusiastically adopted the habit of taking a womanly interest in decorative dress and social gossip. Female users were rebuked for the unfeminine filthiness and unwonted independence that snuff-taking engendered.⁴⁶ For women, however, overcoming the former disadvantage required only an attractive handkerchief and careful personal management, while the latter was regarded by many women as a benefit to be embraced.

Despite its inconveniencies—the risk of sneezing, soiled clothes, and a dirty-looking face—by the 1740s women from across the social scale, on both sides of the Atlantic, had adopted the habit. It became a primary source of feminine cultural capital, as important to elite takers, such as Lady Mary Montagu, who in 1739 was relieved of a pound of snuff 'for her own use' by the port authorities in Calais (but had more hidden in her 'jewel boxes'), as it was for lower-sort workers, such as Pennsylvania runaway Polly Welsh, who in 1777 had 'a very comely carriage when in her airs, takes a great deal of snuff, and will get groggy if she can get liquor'.⁴⁷

Pipe-smoking was introduced to British society via a 'bottom-up' process, with sailors and alehouse keepers key vectors in its social spread and masculine status.⁴⁸ Snuff-taking enjoyed a 'top-down' introduction, giving it a socially aspirational aspect, and putting fewer barriers in the way of female adoption. Snuffing also complemented a number of new consumer fashions, styles and tastes. The small quantities required for leisurely snuffing and for the equally new fashion of gin-taking (just a 'pinch' or a 'dram'), produced a material culture of intoxication in miniature, of particularly compelling appeal for women.⁴⁹ The detachable pocket, a 'must have' accessory for fashion-conscious women, provided an ideal place to keep boxes, while

46 See, for example, *Tatler*, 28–30 June 1709; *Spectator*, 19 April 1711; *New York Gazette*, 24–31 May 1739; *Beaus Catechism* (*passim*); Clodio in Cibber, *Love Makes a Man* (*passim*).

47 Montagu, *Lady Mary*, vol. 2, p. 425; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, 27 February 1777.

48 Lemire, *Global Trade*, Chapter 5, 'Tobacco and the politics of consumption', esp. pp. 198–201; eadem, "Men of the World". See also Norton, *Sacred Gifts*.

49 See Stewart, *On Longing*.

the affordable and attractive pocket handkerchief was an essential tool in the snuffer's personal management. Furthermore, as a mixed substance, combining grated tobacco leaves with a wide array of herbs and other additives, snuff-taking tapped into domestic traditions of recipe-making.⁵⁰ From the late seventeenth century, snuff recipes begin to appear in both manuscript and printed recipe books.⁵¹

Print discourse was almost universally antagonistic towards pipe-smoking women, but as snuff-taking grew more prevalent, the press focused not on its acceptability for women *per se*, but rather critiqued *how* it was taken. Immoderate or careless snuff-taking were criticized as contrary to ideals of feminine delicacy and neatness, but the respectability of women who used, marketed, or exchanged snuff and snuffboxes was largely taken for granted.⁵² The press reported sympathetically on women whose boxes had been stolen, or who had suffered tobacco-related mishaps, as in the notable case of a Dublin woman who suddenly died after taking snuff. Criticism was not directed at the woman, but at the snuff, and the box-makers, who were accused of using poisonous materials.⁵³

A further marked shift took place in the visual culture of female tobacco-taking from the mid-eighteenth century. While images of female smokers were generally satirical and disreputable, women snuff-takers, whether taking a pinch alone or in mixed company, were overwhelmingly represented as attractive and respectable.⁵⁴ American families frequently commissioned portraits of mothers, grandmothers, brides, and even young girls holding their favorite or significant snuffboxes.⁵⁵ For society men and women

50 Goodman, *Tobacco*, pp. 74–75.

51 See, for example, Wellcome Collection MS: 1791/20; MS 8575/113.

52 See, for example, *The Lady's Magazine*, Vol. 1. 1771, 305–306; *The Female Spectator 1744-46*: Vol. 2 45 Book 8, 88–89, Vol. 2 4 Book 6, 6–7; *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, 14 February 1765, 4; *British Magazine and Review*, 1 August 1782, 133.

53 *Parkers Penny Post*, 9 June 1732, 2. On poisons in snuff, see Hughes, *Learning to Smoke*, pp. 50, 70–72.

54 Compare Marcellus Laroon II (1653–1702), print of woman smoking in a tavern: research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=215748001&objectId=1645803&partId=1 (accessed 25 July 2020) with Marcellus Laroon III (1694–1772), painting of elite woman taking snuff in *A Dinner Party*: www.rct.uk/collection/403539/a-dinner-party (accessed 25 July 2020). See also John Russell, Mrs. Robert Shurlock Sr. (Ann Manwaring) (1801), www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437581 (accessed 25 July 2020).

55 See, for example, John Hesselius, *Portrait of Ann Fitzhugh Rose* (Stafford County, Virginia, 1771), Colonial Williamsburg, 1989-338 A&B: emuseum.history.org/objects/31972/portrait-of-ann-fitzhugh-rose-mrs-robert-rose17211789;jsessionid=A614CCEFCB389389CDCEABA2701541F (accessed 25 July 2020); Pieter Vanderlyn attrib. *Wedding portrait of Elizabeth "Betje"*

there was a prominent culture of enameled portrait snuffboxes, but this was soon democratized by the availability of cheaply painted lacquer and papier-mâché boxes.⁵⁶ In the British American colonies, artists regularly advertised their services as portrait painters for middling-sort snuffboxes.⁵⁷ Elegant snuff taking ended at the fingertips, however; once snuff reached the nose, it was very much the stuff of visual satire.⁵⁸

Although, in general, pipe-smoking women were consistently seen as unfeminine, daring or disreputable, acceptable modes of tobacco consumption continually shifted, influenced by a complex mix of high-end fashion, personal taste, and custom. In 1773, the inveterate snuff-taker Dr. Johnson declaimed that smoking had ‘gone out’, but many tobacco-takers (perhaps especially men), continued to indulge in both.⁵⁹ In 1782, Fanny Burney was intrigued to find that Sir Joshua Reynolds carried a ‘vile and shabby tin’ tobacco box along with his gold one for snuff.⁶⁰ Similarly, in 1803, Elizabeth Drinker noted that snuff-taking ‘was more the custom when I was a girl, for young persons to take it than it is at present’.⁶¹ But Drinker’s observation did not necessarily signal a decline in women using tobacco, rather it indicated another shift had occurred in fashionable praxis. By the late eighteenth century, snuff-taking tended to be linked visually with the comforts of older age, while, for the young, the hookah, the cigarillo, and the cigar became exciting new fashions.⁶² Nevertheless, despite some increase in new forms of

Van Dyck Vosburg (New York, c. 1725) www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2585B/lots/216 (accessed 25 July 2020); idem, *Wedding Portrait of Annetje Kool* (Ulster County, NY, c. 1740): www.afanews.com/articles/item/737-inspired-traditions-selections-from-the-jane-katcher-collection-of-america – .XcQ34i2cYWq (accessed 25 July 2020); American School, *Portrait of Abigail Rose at the Age of Fourteen* (North Branford, Connecticut, 1786), www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2567B/lots/293; Christian Gullager, *Martha Saunders Salisbury* (Worcester, Mass., 1789) (Worcester Art Museum) www.worcesterart.org/collection/Early_American/Artists/gullager/martha/painting.html (accessed 25 July 2020).

56 Corbeiller, *European and American*, pp. 78–82.

57 See, for example, *Penna Packet*, 26 April 1793; *Maryland Gazette*, 15 November 1792; *Aurora*, 16 March 1798; 26 November 1799; *Federal Gazette*, 2 July 1794; *Charleston City Gazette and Advertiser*, 25 January 1794.

58 For instance, see the popular caricatures by Louis-Leopold Boilly (1761–1845), which were issued in French and English versions, such as *Snufftakers* c. 1825, Wellcome Collection no. 24985i wellcomecollection.org/works/pjf5ff5h/items?canvas=1&langCode=eng (accessed 25 July 2020) and *The Contrast*, Wellcome Collection no. 24987i wellcomecollection.org/works/q6j67tvc/items?canvas=1&langCode=eng (accessed 25 July 2020).

59 Quoted in Holmes, ‘Some Features of Tobacco History’, p. 391.

60 D’Arblay, *Diary and Letters*, vol. 2., December 1782.

61 Crane, *Diary*, p. 261.

62 Goodman, *Tobacco*, Chapters 4 and 5.

smoking among women, as the extensive material record of the nineteenth century clearly demonstrates, snuff-taking remained a staple feature of many, if not most, ordinary women's everyday experience until the early twentieth century, when the cigarette took over as the most popular vehicle for women's tobacco use.

Thinking outside (and inside) the box

Historians have long considered the Bible, the sampler, and the thimble as iconic objects in early modern women's lives but, as Elizabeth Drinker's appointment with Nellie Siddon helps to show, for many women, the tobacco- or snuffbox was just as significant. We know from the much larger surviving archive of men's boxes that they had a significant role to play in the 'competitive arena of social display' surrounding tobacco praxis.⁶³ Boxes 'spoke' using standardized vocabularies of design, shape and decoration, including popular scenes, mottos, and exhortations, and they 'acted' within a widely understood framework of haptic, gestural, emotional, and material significations. Moreover, customs of personalization and inscription transformed many ordinary boxes into a form of life-writing, as well as helping to locate them precisely in time, place, and social context. Though standard in form, and even factory-made by the late eighteenth century, even the most ordinary box could provide a canvas that 'proclaimed the individual' with statements of identity, allegiance, or emotion.⁶⁴ At the same time, the patina created through everyday practices of use, adoption, and adaptation, gives us a real sense of their past role in lived experience.⁶⁵

By focusing on evidence gleaned from women's surviving or recorded tobacco- or snuffboxes, we should, theoretically, avoid the silences and distortions of textual discourse, and uncover more direct evidence of women's praxis. However, as with the documentary sources discussed above, several factors have conspired to impede the survival and location of more ordinary women's boxes.

Inevitably, we know most about the snuffboxes that operated in elite circles where they proliferated.⁶⁶ Horace Walpole commented that society

63 Sherratt, 'Alcohol and its Alternatives', pp. 12–13.

64 Goodman, *Tobacco*, p. 82; Hughes, *Learning to Smoke*, p. 74; McShane, 'Belonging and Belongings'.

65 McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, Chapter 2.

66 See, for instance, Gage and Marsh, *Tobacco Containers*; Zech, *Gold Boxes*; Corbeiller, *European and American*.

women were ‘wearing a range of snuffboxes—three in a week’.⁶⁷ The design of new boxes and the details of their commission or exchange were often the subject of gossip, as in Lady Mary Montagu’s letter to a friend, explaining references in the ‘Bath Lampoons’ she had enclosed, ‘Corinna is Lady Manchester, and the other lady is Mrs. Cartwright, who, they say, has pawned her diamond necklace, to buy Valentine [a local tradesman and society ‘beau’] a snuffbox.’⁶⁸ The social and emotional significance of portrait snuffboxes was another subject for comment. Lady Mary Coke described one she had seen at court in 1767:

The Duke of York & the Duke of Gloucester were both there. Lord Pembroke and the Duke de Fronsac came up to Us. The latter had a very pretty snuff Box, with the picture of his Duchess, who is lately dead, upon the outside, his two little Sons on the inside, & his Sister, Madam D’Egmond, at the bottom.⁶⁹

The many hundreds of society snuffboxes dispersed in museums across Europe and America were only used for a ‘season’, after which they were subsumed into large personal collections, such as those amassed by Prussia’s Frederick the Great, France’s Madame de Pompadour, and Britain’s Queen Anne.⁷⁰ Though they undoubtedly created models of design, use, and exchange, such elite objects can tell us very little about more ordinary tobacco praxis. But it was not only the rich and powerful in early modern society who valued their tobacco-boxes enough to treasure them for posterity. Alongside the courtly boxes of gold and silver chased, painted, enameled, and bejeweled by highly skilled artisans, public and private collections today also preserve a bewildering array of mundane pop-u-luxe and factory-made creations, made from lowly materials, such as wood, horn, copper, brass, tin, and steel.⁷¹ These more everyday objects are far more valuable for revealing the ‘social communication network’ in which the ‘praxis’ of early modern tobacco-taking was entangled.⁷²

67 Corbeiller, *European and American*, p. 13.

68 Montagu, *Lady Mary*, vol. 3, p. 447.

69 Coke, *Letters and Journals*, vol. 1, p. 247.

70 Goodman, *Tobacco*, p. 74; Corbeiller, *European and American*; Gage and Marsh, *Tobacco Containers*; Zech, *Gold Boxes*.

71 See, for example, Bedford, *All Kinds of Small Boxes*; Kisluk-Grosheide, ‘Dutch Tobacco-Boxes’; Walsh, ‘The Advertising and Marketing of Consumer Goods’.

72 Reckwitz, ‘Toward a Theory of Social Practices’; Hodder, *Entangled*.



Figure 1.1: Two eighteenth-century snuffboxes. Image Courtesy of John H Bryan II.

Personal papers, probate records, court depositions, literary and printed sources demonstrate that by the mid-eighteenth century, snuffboxes had become standard accessories for women of all social sorts on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷³ Children were bought boxes as gifts (a practice advised against by magazine writers), while crime reports reveal that snuffboxes might contain a number of things besides or on addition to snuff, including money and letters.⁷⁴ Box-gifting between and among the sexes was also a widespread and licit custom. Yet despite an abundance of surviving objects suggestively decorated with hearts and flowers, courtship scenes, love-posies, portraits, and pairs of unmatched initials, the material record of female ownership or gifting was far less explicit than that for men.⁷⁵

A comparison of the two boxes pictured in Figure 1.1 serves to highlight the problematic ambiguities that occur. The standard brass box is inscribed ‘A Free Gift of Ralph Meddow to Sam Waterworth: 1717’. It unambiguously documented the identity of both sides of a gift transaction, and, when used in company, made public an obligatory bond between giver and receiver. In contrast, the mahogany box, dated 1777, is inlaid with two sets of unmatched initials, hearts, and trade tools. This box leads only to a number of speculative possibilities. At best, we might tentatively presume it was gifted by a woman to a male weaver of her close acquaintance on a special occasion. In Britain, ambiguous inscription seems to have been the most common practice—just a handful of British boxes have so far come to light that are

73 McShane, ‘Thinking Outside the Box’, Section III.

74 See, for instance, TNA: S.P.36/56 fol. 109; *POBO*: t17130225-23; t17170717-21; t17670715-3.

75 See McShane, ‘Belonging and Belongings’.

explicitly inscribed with the names of female owners or gift-givers.⁷⁶ Perhaps unmarried men and women in Britain preferred to avoid the dangers of making statements that might be regarded as contractual when giving gifts.⁷⁷ Notably, a similarly coy approach to inscription was taken with another popular lover's gift, the stay-busk (a stiff piece of wood or bone that was inserted into the front of a woman's corset to give it shape).⁷⁸

The British context contrasts starkly with the American one, where explicit evidence of female ownership or gifting is much easier to find in both the material and visual archive.⁷⁹ I see three key reasons for this. First, the surviving archive of early modern American women's boxes has benefited, if only inadvertently, from extensive work by curatorial scholars, who have documented the making and ownership of colonial silver.⁸⁰ A particular feature of the well-documented women's boxes that emerges from this work is that the women and boxes concerned were intimately connected to important men, whether revolutionary figures or silversmiths. Indeed, since many silversmiths took up key civic or military roles both before and after the revolution, this accentuated the patriotic significance and importance of any items that they made.

For instance, Figure 1.2 is a cowrie-shell snuffbox made by the Boston silversmith Daniel Parker. The silver lid of this popular snuffbox type is inscribed 'Robert Calef to Mary Calef 1748'. It was probably gifted by Bostonian worthy, Robert Calef, to his daughter Mary, perhaps to commemorate her marriage to Obadiah Hussey in that year. A later inscription on the same box names another (unknown) female owner: 'Lucretia Strasey'.⁸¹

Second, American women's tobacco habits were highlighted by local families of standing who wanted to create a material record through which

76 In addition to five boxes discussed below, two more have been located: Wellcome Collection/Science Museum Loan: A637590, decorated with 'Sarah' (c. 1800) (image not currently available); and Museum of Edinburgh, leather snuffbox inscribed 'Mrs Newton, Castle Hill, 1796' (Accession Number not available). My thanks to my colleague Mr. William Schupbach for sending me images of the latter.

77 O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*; Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, pp. 31–32.

78 See, for example, Butterfield, 'Concerning Decorated Stay-Busks'; see also Town and McShane, *Marking Time*, pp. 151, 169–171.

79 Corbeiller, *European and American*, catalogues several boxes inscribed with the names of their women owners in colonial America, Cat. Nos 363–377; many more are to be found in museum collections in the US.

80 My thanks to Senior Curator Patricia Kane for generously sharing her expertise and allowing me hands-on access to the Yale University Art Gallery collection. See Kane, *Colonial Massachusetts Silversmiths*; Phillips, *Masterpieces*; Buhler and Hood, *American Silver*.

81 See artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/37853 (accessed 25 July 2020).



Figure 1.2: Cowrie-shell snuffbox, dated 1748.
Image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery.

they could trace their dynasty back to their first arrival. Some women's boxes carry postmortem 'provenance' inscriptions, added as they moved down through the family, or into the hands of other owners.⁸² An example is Figure 1.3, a small silver snuffbox, severally inscribed: 'MB Ex Dono to EB', 'Eliza Brame', and, in a different hand, '[General] John Glover'.⁸³ As noted above, material practices of commemoration were augmented by the commissioning of portraits depicting women holding snuffboxes that had been gifted to them at key moments in their own or their family's life cycle.

Third, in what became the United States, tobacco-taking was a matter of nationalistic pride. It has been argued that women's relationship to the great national product was uniquely valued and, after the Revolution, became inextricably linked with the construction of the liberated American family.⁸⁴ American-made snuffboxes offered a further canvas for celebrating national independence and identity. Even Betsy Ross, who sewed the first American flag and took snuff for her health, is commemorated by her silver snuffbox, along with a variety of other domestic objects.⁸⁵

82 Thanks to Pat Kane, YUAG's Senior Curator of silver, for this insight. For an English aristocratic example of postmortem inscription, see below.

83 See artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/6395 (accessed 25 July 2020).

84 See McShane, 'Thinking Inside the Box'; see, for example: Asahel Powers, Portrait of Mrs. Patrick Henry (Dorothea Dandridge) (1826), holding a 'liberty' snuffbox: collections.mfa.org/objects/33096 (accessed 25 July 2020).

85 Miller, *Betsy Ross*, pp. 8, 341, 345.



Figure 1.3: Silver snuffbox. Image Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery.

While contemporary praxis, especially in Britain, undoubtedly contributed to the ambiguity of women's boxes, modern attitudes and practices have done most to reduce the available material archive on both sides of the Atlantic. In first place, the way in which men's and women's boxes were passed down to the family may have impacted the paucity of the female archive. Men's boxes were expressly described as heirlooms in some wills and women received them as trustees who were obliged to pass them on to the next male heir—for example, in 1696, Richard Blackburn left his silver tobacco box to his daughter in law 'to be kept in remembrance of mee and preserved by her for my grandson'.⁸⁶ The silver boxes we find listed in women's probate inventories and wills may also come into this category, as when Susan Cotton left a silver tobacco box to her kinsman in 1677.⁸⁷ Women's own boxes were perhaps passed on more informally, as we saw with Nellie Siddons. This informality made them vulnerable to loss and destruction. It is notable that a box belonging to Sarah Pierpont, wife of Rev Jeremy Edwards, the first President of Princeton, was found buried in their old garden; it was considered of value because its maker was the renowned silversmith, John Dixwell.⁸⁸ Another, belonging to Charles II's mistress Nell Gwynn, was given away to a servant by her son.⁸⁹ In Britain,

86 *IEM*: Cheshire Archives and Local Studies: Archdeaconry of Cheshire Wills: Blackburn, Richard WS 1696. My thanks to Dr. James Brown for drawing this to my attention.

87 Nottinghamshire Records Office DD/T/118/29: Will and probate of Sarah Cotton of St. Clement Danes, widow.

88 See artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/25148 (accessed 25 July 2020). See also collections.mfa.org/objects/42249 (accessed 25 July 2020).

89 See collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O103797/snuff-box-unknown/ (accessed 25 July 2020) a rare [?] case of British 'ex dono' practice.

where explicitly inscribed boxes are now very hard to find, documentary sources indicate that at least some British married women's names appeared in full on their boxes.⁹⁰ This may suggest that British women's boxes were neither treasured nor retained in families as British men's were.

Secondly, though by no means universal, there has long been a tendency for commentators, cataloguers, and dealers to designate any small box known to belong to a woman as 'patch-boxes', that is, receptacles for the small textile patches that fashionable people affixed to their faces, either as a beauty spot, or to cover a blemish.⁹¹ This occurs not just in the description of boxes, but also of American family portraits in which distinctly unpatched women, sometimes with a pinch of snuff in one hand, hold inscribed boxes that are nevertheless said to be patch-boxes.⁹² As already noted, small boxes might be used to contain a wide variety of things: the *Tatler* ran a spoof advertising a robbery from 'Lady Fardingdale', which listed:

a silver tobacco box, with a tulip graven on the top [...] one small amber box with apoplecktic balsam and one silver gilt of a larger size for Cashu and Carraway confits to be taken at long sermon.⁹³

But the 'patch-box' had a very particular purpose, while patches were expensive and fashionable among European society elites from the mid-seventeenth century until the 1790s. Contemporary portraits of elite women at their 'toilette' show that, to be effective, the patch-box needed to be flat and shallow, allowing a fingertip, dipped in fixative, to secure and slide a single patch out of the box and apply it to the face in one easy movement.⁹⁴ Thus, to call any small box of whatever shape known to have been owned

90 See, for instance, *POBO*: t17191204-19.

91 See, for instance, collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O277184/patch-box (accessed 25 July 2020); <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O336615/patch-box/>; collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O76846/patch-box-unknown/ (accessed 25 July 2020); collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O277200/patch-box/ (accessed 25 July 2020).

collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O333376/patch-box-kandler-johann-joachim/ (accessed 25 July 2020).

92 See for example www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2567B/lots/293 (accessed 25 July 2020); www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2585B/lots/216 (accessed 25 July 2020).

93 *Tatler*, 1 November 1711.

94 This can be seen, for example, in paintings: François Boucher, *La Mouche ou Une dame à sa toilette* (1738), private collection: www.freeart.com/gallery/b/boucher/boucher134.html (accessed 25 July 2020); After Hubert Drouais, *Anne de La Grange Trianon* www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=5365468 (accessed 25 July 2020). It can also be seen in objects: collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O91936/patch-box-unknown/ (accessed 25 July 2020).

by a woman or held by one in a portrait a 'patch-box' in this blanket fashion is clearly problematic.⁹⁵

Finally, cataloguers have been far more willing to ascribe female ownership to patch-boxes than snuffboxes. For example, in the case of the two American boxes discussed above, the one shown in Figure 1.2 is made in a popular shape and style that unmistakably proclaims its function as a snuffbox. However, despite the explicit inscription 'Robert Calef to Mary Calef', the public catalogue (which does not show the engraved side) is tentative in regard to its female ownership. By contrast, despite the much less specific engraving of the box in Figure 1.3, its provenance is confidently asserted as being 'from Benjamin and Elizabeth Brame to their daughter, Elizabeth Brame (b. 1694)'. In this case, however, it is described as a patch-box, despite being subsequently owned by General John Glover.

Despite all the obfuscations and material losses, over a hundred surviving or otherwise documented boxes, made of silver, horn, steel, and wood, and dating from between 1623 to 1815, that were definitely owned or gifted by British or American women have been identified for this study. Added to these items are hundreds more which, though ambiguous, are highly likely to have been gifted either to or by women. This archive of objects offers numerous insights into how women employed snuffboxes to express and make known their sense of self in society. For example, boxes could carry statements of political allegiance.⁹⁶ In 1667, Joan Bacon's intricately carved wooden box and, in 1672, Gillian Forahm's gourd snuff-bottle were both decorated with Charles II's coat of arms.⁹⁷ Boxes could also advertise a woman's social status and trade identity, as witnessed by a box in Figure 1.4 depicting a female textile worker.⁹⁸

Some highly skilled women made and retailed boxes, such as Elizabeth Hazelwood, silversmith of Norwich, who affixed her mark to the boxes she made or imported, including one that was later inscribed with a postmortem inscription: 'The Gift of Mrs Elr Hanlen, who died Easter-Sunday, 15th April 1770, To Owen Adams'.⁹⁹

95 See, for example, artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/6395 (accessed 25 July 2020)—described as a patch box, but too deep to be suitable for the application of patches.

96 A practice satirized in *Spectator*, 5 May 1711.

97 Forahm: Town and McShane, *Marking Time*, p. 342; Bacon: collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78640/box-and-lid-unknown/ (accessed 25 July 2020).

98 See also Town and McShane, *Marking Time*, p. 314.

99 Bonham's Auctioneers: www.lotsearch.net/lot/possibly-retailed-by-elizabeth-hazelwood-of-norwich-circa-1710-the-cover-39646170?orderBy=lot-startPrice&order=DESC: (accessed 25 July 2020).



Figure 1.4: Snuffbox with a female textile worker. Image courtesy of John H Bryan II.

A woman could display her taste, interests, and personality through her snuffbox. Book-shaped boxes, which became generally popular from the late seventeenth century, may have been favored by ladies as a way to draw attention to their literary interests. In 1711, *The Spectator* described a learned lady's library in which a 'silver Snuff-box made in the shape of a little book' was laid on a table, while other 'counterfeit books' were being used to fill gaps on the upper shelves.¹⁰⁰ Choosing the right box was a test of taste for both giver and receiver; however humble, it was a matter of reputation to give a thoughtful and appropriate gift. We see this concern in play in Elizabeth Carter's letter to Elizabeth Montagu:

¹⁰⁰ *Spectator*, 12 April 1711.

Harry has been turning you a most creditable looking wooden snuffbox, for the clumsiness of the other has sat very grievously upon his mind, ever since he heard it had the honor of being in your possession.¹⁰¹

Elizabeth Carter clearly regarded her friend's relationship with her snuffboxes as indicative of a carefree and careless personality:

Do not break the head of your fine snuff box before I see it on the cold marble, which has been the fate of every snuff box from gold enamel to plain holly, that you ever were possess of for the last fifteen years.¹⁰²

While boxes were undoubtedly significant as objects of self-representation, the majority of surviving boxes, and the documentation surrounding them, suggests that they operated as receptacles for affection, social obligation, and personal memory, as much as they did for snuff or tobacco.¹⁰³ From the earliest times, the culture of tobacco- and snuffbox gifting offered men and women material and gestural ways to express and experience sensibility. As early as 1623, Endymion Porter told his wife he had 'sent my Ladie Villiers a tobaccco [sic] box, I hope shee will esteeme it as a token of my love'.¹⁰⁴ In 1769, Elizabeth Carter, in 'sentimental mood', wrote to her friend Elizabeth Vesey to tell her,

I am spending this afternoon in great luxury, in spite of a feverish headache: drinking tea out of Mrs. Handcock's white teapot, and taking snuff out of the sweet pretty snuffbox that you gave me, and thinking with tenderness and gratitude on all your kindness for me.¹⁰⁵

By using our understanding of tobacco praxis, we may also read emotional attachment where it is not explicit—for example, in the behavior of Lieutenant Colonel William D. Hoffman Sr. who, throughout the War of 1812, by dipping into his silver, heart-shaped snuffbox, daily engaged with his feelings for his wife and young family.¹⁰⁶

101 Carter, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 132.

102 Carter, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 146. The editor notes: 'this was a gold snuffbox [...] on the lid of which was a miniature painting of Lord Bath, reckoned a very fine likeness; copied [...] from a whole length portrait of him, by Sir Joshua Reynolds'.

103 McShane, 'Belonging and Belongings'.

104 TNA: S.P.14/142, fol. 92.

105 Carter, *Series of Letters*, vol. 3, p. 366.

106 Maryland State Archives, Hoffman Family Material: MSA SC 5767-1-36. Hoffman Snr's son, William Hoffman Jr. (also destined to be a soldier) was born in 1807.

In Britain, the emotional significance of tobacco boxes led to a shift in the content of popular love songs, which, in some cases, were even sold from snuff-shops.¹⁰⁷ In the seventeenth century, a song about a departing soldier or sailor would typically see him give the woman he left behind a ring or a bag of gold as a pledge of faith.¹⁰⁸ By the eighteenth century, however, he was much more likely to bequeath his beloved a tobacco box:

Here Kate, take my 'bacco box—a poor soldier's all,
If by Frenchman's blows your Tom is doomed to fall,
When my life is ended, thou may'st boast and prove,
Thou'st my first, my last, my only pledge of love.¹⁰⁹

The emotionally charged praxis of box-gifting made them seem extraordinarily important in real life too. Mary Price, a hawker and servant, told how,

her Lover [...] must needs go to Sea , yet promis'd her at parting, That he would ever be true and faithful to her; and upon that gave her (as a Token of his Love) a plain Tobacco-box.

In 1718, Price was condemned to die for murdering Ann Bickham, a five-year-old child, who had stolen Mary's precious box to give as a gift to her own father.¹¹⁰

Women's tobacco praxis as social agency

Bringing together a wide range of documentary, printed, visual, and material sources helps to reveal how tobacco-taking brought cultural capital and social power for early modern women. While respectable women were largely excluded from the public sociability surrounding alcohol and coffee drinking, they could participate equally with men in all the rituals surrounding snuff-taking, whether in public or in private. Snuff offered women a legitimate vehicle for participating in and initiating a variety of exchanges with men who were inside and outside the family. For example,

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Anon. (part attrib. A. Cowley), *Love's CHRONICLE: OR, THE Changing HEART* (between 1707–1756), which was 'sold at Mr. Burnham's Snuff-Shop, in Arlesbury': ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/31246/image (accessed 25 July 2020).

¹⁰⁸ McShane, 'Recruiting Soldiers'.

¹⁰⁹ Anon. 'Tobacco Box', p. 2.

¹¹⁰ *POBO* OA17180806.

it enabled women to maintain and develop family and friendship networks, both at home and across the Atlantic.¹¹¹

New Yorker Abigail Franks frequently used snuff in this way. She not only secured supplies 'of the best Scot[c]h Snuff for my Own Use' from her son Naphtali, who lived in Europe, but through proxy shopping, and sending, receiving, and redistributing tobacco-related gifts, she also extended her transatlantic networks.¹¹² On one occasion she tells her son how:

Mr. Pittman [a family connection] Sent me from Lisbon Some Brazill Snuff [...] Your Uncle Aaron Likes it Very Well therefore [I] Shall Send him a little but if he dont Like it Say nothing about it and Give it Whoe you please.¹¹³

In another case, Franks writes:

Send me with Capt[ain] Bryant A genteel Snuff box and the Price to be 40 S. Sterling [.] [D]ont fail its for a Lady I have a great freindship for and I Would not have her Disappointed[.] Lett it be the same fashion Miss Franks sent me.¹¹⁴

This allows her to flatter Miss Frank's good taste at the same time as consolidating a local friendship. Franks' son also sent his mother snuffing-related gifts, though these were not always to her liking: 'I thank you for the pres[en]t of the Handk[erchief]s You take Care to keep me fine [but] you dont Consider I Grow Old.'¹¹⁵ No doubt, these too-youthful objects were also redistributed where they would most be appreciated.

Quaker midwife Martha Ballard mapped out her more local family and friendship networks by recording the many gifts of snuff she received, from friends, neighbors, clients, and family.¹¹⁶ She also notes gifts to her of two snuffboxes, one from her close friend Sally Cocks, and another from her son Cyrus.¹¹⁷

Like men, women were expected to share their snuff in social situations; indeed, some kept 'sharing boxes' at home for just such occasions. This

111 On colonial letter writing, gifting, and transatlantic family networks, see Pearsall, *Atlantic Families*.

112 Hershkowitz and Meyer, *Letters*, p. 60.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

116 Ballard, *Diary*, pp. 132, 137, 622, 747, 800, 861.

117 *Ibid.*, pp. 323, 739.

encouraged a good deal of lively and assertive female mischief-making that undermined the usual power dynamics in gendered encounters. A *Ladies Magazine* story from 1774 told the tale of 'Mr. D' who, having been invited for tea, was persecuted by a family of sisters. First, his handkerchief was surreptitiously removed from his pocket and replaced with a kitten. He was then offered adulterated snuff, which brought on 'freezing' and a desperate need to sneeze. Reaching quickly into his pocket, Mr. D's hand was attacked by the kitten, to the great hilarity of all. Meanwhile, the purloined handkerchief had been rubbed over the fireplace and was replaced in his pocket. Taking it out to blow his nose, Mr. D inadvertently smeared his whole face with soot. He could not understand why this caused further amusement until someone showed him to a mirror. Determined on revenge, Mr. D outrageously tried to 'salute' (kiss) the instigator of his miseries, thereby smearing her guilty face with the soot. As the company settled down, another of the girls, avenging her sister's disgrace, pinned Mr. D's coat to the back of his chair. On getting up to leave, he stumbled, overturning the whole tea table with all its precious china: his dignity gone, and any courtship attempts definitively blighted.¹¹⁸

Such high jinks were not restricted to fiction. In a 1795 description of her travels, Mary Wollstonecraft recounted a visit to a family unknown to her:

The girls were all vivacity, and respect for me could scarcely keep them from romping with my host, who, asking for a pinch of snuff, was presented with a box, out of which an artificial mouse, fastened to the bottom, sprung. Though this trick had doubtless been played time out of mind, yet the laughter it excited was not less genuine.¹¹⁹

Although tobacco-taking could be innocuously and equally companionable, the etiquettes of taking and sharing were fundamentally gendered when performed in company. Polite snuffing rituals involved an elaborate choreography of objects, gestures, and discourse, allowing men to demonstrate masculine sociability, and women to display elegance, control, taste, and the beauty of their arms, hands, and fingers. Snuff-taking interactions offered endless opportunities for flirtation, and for building up more meaningful relationships, but they could also be used as a polite proxy for discouraging unwanted attentions. Fanny Burney entertained her friend with a tale of how she successfully spurned the attentions of Dr. King, a 'prosing, affected,

¹¹⁸ *The Ladies Magazine*, February 1774, Vol. 5: 59–60 (from the series 'A Sentimental Journey').

¹¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, Letter 1.

and very fine' young man. She related how 'a long time since, [he] gave me some snuff in charge for him [...] This snuff I have always unfortunately mislaid, or lost, and been frequently upbraided, I had therefore promised to put it in a box for him but after he went I had thought no more of it.' Deeply disappointed that she had forgotten him, Dr. King declared: 'I picked you out of the herd, as the one whom I expected most from'. King then tried to spark jealousy in Burney by paying attentions to her sister instead, but she

bore this great stroke with all imaginable patience, though I believe he expected I should have wept at least [...] He then renewed his reproaches [saying] if any other person had used him so ill, he should not have minded it but cried he [...] suddenly flinging himself into a theatrical attitude But there where I had treasured up my heart! [...] He did not wait to finish his rhapsody, but left the house, suddenly, on seeing John, the man, coming into the parlour.¹²⁰

Boxes not only communicated identity directly, through inscriptive texts or designs, they also communicated tacitly, through choice of materials, form, and haptic or gestural use. The positioning of inscriptions and decorations, around rims, on the top, bottom, inside, and outside of boxes, could lead to conversation, and also encouraged handling beyond mere use, requiring objects to be turned over, rubbed, and caressed. In mixed company, the haptic aspects of mixed snuff-taking—the dabbling of fingers in another's box, and the exchange of boxes between men and women—could be intensely sexually charged, not least because boxes were typically worn close to the body, by men in their jackets and breeches, and by women in pockets, which were essentially undergarments. The words used when snuff was offered could be full of innuendo; in one play a male character invites a woman to 'Make your fingers familiar with this box'.¹²¹ Lady Mary Coke was shocked when,

Mr Walpole [...] made the Princess Amelia a present of his snuff box with the Picture of Harry the fourth of France, who She was expressing her admiration of. As he had wore it in his pocket for above a year, I don't think it was proper, at least I shou'd have thrown out the snuff; however, it was very politely received & accepted.¹²²

¹²⁰ D'Arblay, *Early Diary*, vol. 2, pp. 45–46.

¹²¹ Bradley, *Ladies Visiting Day*, p. 25.

¹²² Coke, *Letters and Journals*, 2 December 1798.

Elite men and women might also face reputational problems if they were depicted on a snuffbox worn by a someone with whom they were not licitly intimate. When Catherine Talbot reported having seen ‘in Mr. Richardson’s hands an exceeding like picture of you, drawn by Miss Mulso this last summer’, she also reassured Elizabeth Carter that she had not been compromised: ‘Do not be scandalized; he cannot possibly wear it in his snuff box.’¹²³

Polite interactions could be subverted through the use of sexually explicit imagery that was hidden from unsuspecting users, such as an innocent-looking silver, book-shaped box, shown in Figure 1.5. The lid is finely engraved with the initials J.J.R., while on the ‘spine’, ‘Vol. III’ has been more roughly inscribed. Inside on the base, the image of a flying phallus has been scratched.¹²⁴

This image could only be seen when the box was empty, giving the owner a secret pleasure when offering up the box, knowing what people were almost touching as they dipped their fingers into the snuff. Many more sexually explicit boxes survive, and most appear to be designed for male sociability, though they may have been equally desirable as gifts exchanged between licit or illicit lovers. One newspaper report, published in 1738, referred to a woman who had a ‘naked Adonis’ depicted inside the lid of her snuffbox.¹²⁵

While boxes had a key part to play in early modern women’s social interactions, the tobacco and snuff they held was further believed to enhance health and well-being. Early modern medical writers claimed that smoking dried leaves ‘counteract[ed] weariness and induce[d] relaxation’.¹²⁶ The women of Worcestershire claimed that smoking was essential to life for ‘it dissipates the evil humours of the brain’.¹²⁷ Snuff, it was said, could ‘heal colds, eye inflammations, headaches, dropsy, pains of childbirth, hysterical passions, and dizziness’.¹²⁸ Modern science, too, attributes various physiological effects to snuff-taking: including,

an immediate high-powered delivery of nicotine [...] [of which] a small dose produces a stimulant effect, a large dose acts as a depressant [...] changes in blood pressure and pulse rate; increasing and decreasing

123 Carter and Talbot, *A Series of Letters*, vol. 2, p. 238.

124 Wellcome Collection/Science Museum Loan: A637593. No public images currently available.

125 *The Champion, Containing a Series of Papers ... 1739–40*, vol. 2, p. 92.

126 Goodman, *Tobacco*, p. 45.

127 See note 23 above.

128 Goodman, *Tobacco*, pp. 79–80.

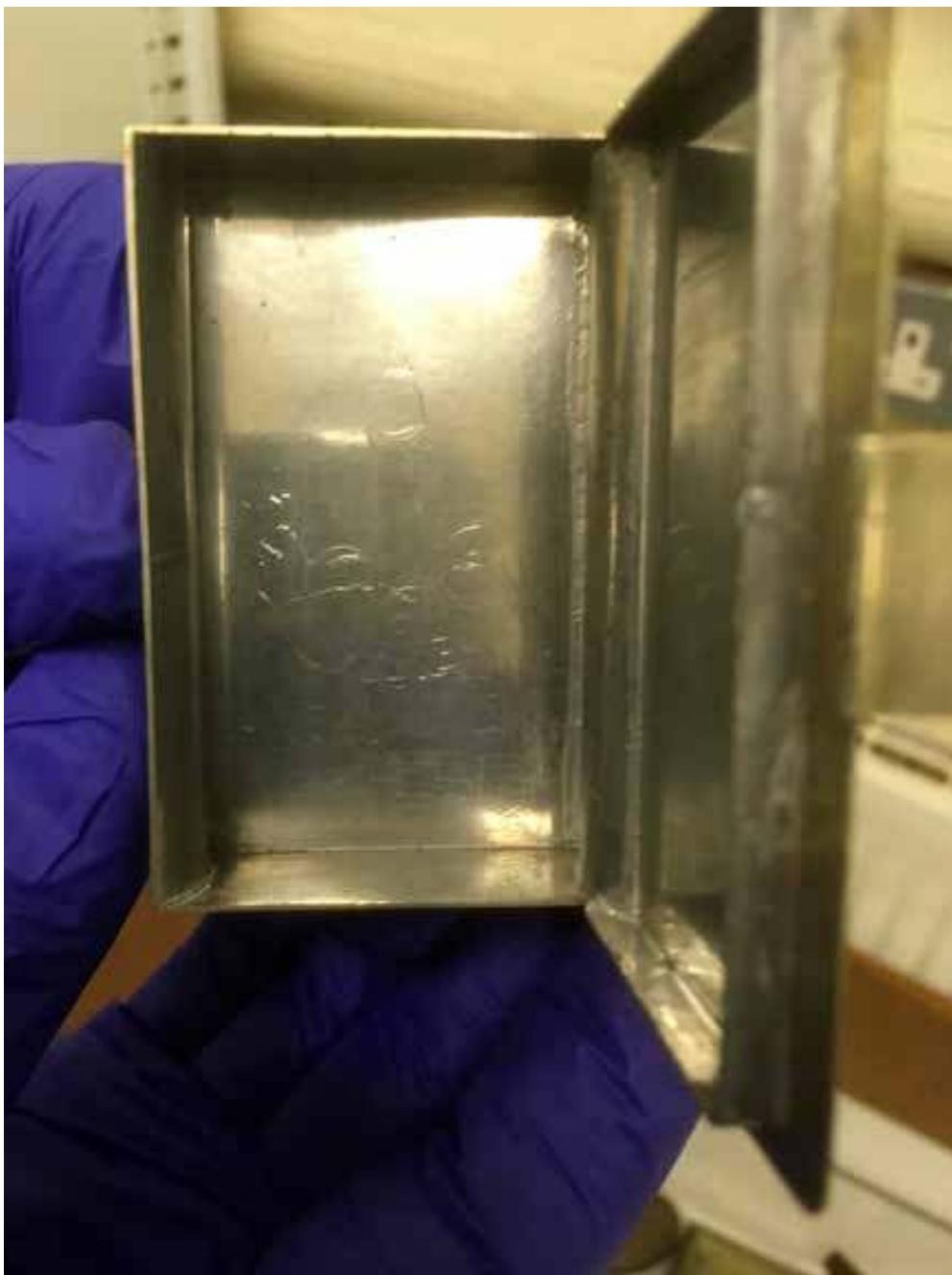


Figure 1.5: Snuffbox with phallic image. Photo: author.

respiration; decreasing skin temperature; producing feelings of well-being, arousal, [and] alertness.¹²⁹

The varying perceptions of snuff's efficacy noted by early modern women indicates that they recognized the importance of dosage and used different

¹²⁹ Goodman, *Tobacco*, p. 6.

recipes to obtain different effects. There were many kinds of snuff, ranging from light and dry to heavy and wet, and incorporating an array of herbs and spices: these were discussed at great length in Charles Lillie's *British Perfumer*, which was first published in 1740 and re-published in 1822. Men often bought 'wet', heavy sorts, like 'Brazil', while women tended to prefer light, dry sorts, of which 'Scotch' (originating in the Glasgow snuff-mills) was very popular. Abigail Franks made clear her preference when she told her son: 'I have A botle of Brazile if you Like it Lett me know and I'll Send it you by the next for its to triffling to Send it for a pre[sen]t and I use nothing but Scot[c]h Snuff of wich I am become a great taker.'¹³⁰ Women regularly exchanged snuff recipes for soothing away various conditions including headaches: for example when Catherine Talbot asked Elizabeth Carter, 'Pray did you ever put lillies of the valley in your snuff? I am told they are a specific for the headache.'¹³¹ Nevertheless, even devotees occasionally questioned the positive effects of snuff taking. In 1803, an increasingly frail Elizabeth Drinker was worried that her snuff habits were making her condition worse: 'I believe I must endeavour to take but very little Snuff, as I think it contributes to hurt my head and, perhaps, stomach. — obstructed bowels is another cause', while in 1806, she declares 'I wish I could easily leave it off'.¹³²

Despite these occasional concerns, tobacco-taking was most commonly seen by women as an emotional support that brought comfort in time of need. For Drinker, snuff was a welcome recourse at times of anxiety, as in 1795, when, at the age of 60, she found herself reaching for her snuffbox in the middle of the night:

rain'd most of the night [...] The heavy rain, and a feverish disposition keep't me wakeing till long after day light setting up in bed, takeing a pinch of snuff I observed the great obscureness of that time thoughts crouded on my mind, for when I lay awake, 'tis not in a stupid or thoughtless state.

Again, on Christmas Day 1806, she wrote:

Christmass [...] last night or rather this morning I heard the kettle-drum for a long time it is a disagreeable noise in my ears, it was after one o'clock,

¹³⁰ Hershkowitz and Meyer, *Letters*, p. 104. Cf. the editor's inexplicable explanatory note, No.12: 'Brazil water, a red-orange dye, extracted from South American trees'.

¹³¹ Carter and Talbot, *Series of Letters*, vol. 2, p. 395.

¹³² Crane, *Diary*, pp. 255, 280.



Figure 1.6: Engraved snuff-gourd. Image courtesy of John H Bryan II.

and at two, I sat up, and took a pinch of snuff, which I do not do, but when I feel unwell and uncomfortable.¹³³

The comforts that tobacco could bring were also materially embedded in the objects that women used. For example, as seen in Figure 1.6, Gillian Forahm's Royalist snuff-gourd had the motto 'A friend at neede doth gold excede' carved around the circular base.

Similarly, a knitting-sheath that was once gifted to a 'Mrs. C.' recalls the opening quotation, in which 'another pulls a knotting shuttle out of their pockets and commends a little innocent amusement' On the most seen face of the object (Figure 1.7), the bonneted Mrs. C. is depicted as the epitome of domestic respectability, with her teapot and cup. But on a less seen face (Figure 1.8), Mrs. C's private comforts are shown—her pipe and tobacco box.¹³⁴

Conclusion

Writing in the 1920s, the Austro-American psychiatrist A.A. Brill remarked:

Some women regard cigarettes as symbols of freedom [...] the first women who smoked probably had an excess of masculine components

¹³³ Drinker, *Diary*, vol. 1, p. 695; Crane, *Diary*, p. 289.

¹³⁴ See also Town and McShane, *Marking Time*, p. 229.



Figure 1.7: Knitting sheath front face. Image courtesy of John H Bryan II.



Figure 1.8: Knitting sheath rear face. Image courtesy of John H Bryan II.

and adopted the habit as a masculine act. But today the emancipation of women has suppressed many of the feminine desires. More women now do the same work as men do [...] Cigarettes, which are equated with men, become *torches of freedom* (*sic*).¹³⁵

While we must always be painfully aware that for many millions of black women, the early modern praxis of tobacco and tea taking underpinned enslavement and injustice, this chapter has argued that white women used their tobacco habits as agents of freedom long before the period on which Brill commented. As James Grehan's work on tobacco-taking in the highly policed Ottoman Middle East proposes:

Although widely reviled in our own time, and scientifically linked to malignant illnesses, tobacco was a key factor in the breakdown of old moral

¹³⁵ Quoted in Greaves, *Smoke Screen*, p. 19.

strictures and helped to frame a distinctively early modern culture in which the pursuit of pleasure was thereafter more public, routine, and unfettered.¹³⁶

As it did for the men in the Ottoman Middle East that Grehan studies, in a similar way, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the praxis of tobacco-taking offered transatlantic women a social currency that enabled freedom of conversation in a mixed social sphere, and a canvas on which to ‘proclaim’ themselves in society. Moreover, tobacco habits provided women with important emotional support, and time for leisure, which they alone had the power to determine.

However, while the wealthy and the polite had leave to participate in all kinds of intoxicating habits, the poor were attacked for the pleasure they took in tobacco as in so much else. But early modern women were not cowed by the better sorts’ attempts to reduce them to sober, silent, domestic, automatons: as we see most clearly from the tobacco-taking evidence of America’s runaway indentured servants. So let us end by saluting this crowd of liberty-loving, early modern women: Mary Gordon (1771) who ‘takes snuff and [is] much addicted to drink’; Elizabeth White (1772), who ‘is very talkative, fond of snuff and spiritous liquors’; Elizabeth Young (1775), ‘a great smoker of tobacco’; Cicily Morgan (1775): ‘much given to smoaking’ and Martha Thomson (1782) who ‘snuffs, drinks and smokes’.¹³⁷ And with them, the women we have already met, ‘black Jane’, Margaret Buck, Polly Welsh, and Jane Shephard. But especially Eleanor Armstrong, who snuffed, smoked, drank, and laughed in the face of her hard life. She reminds me of my Mum.

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¹³⁷ Hagist, *Wives, Slaves and Servant Girls*, pp.16–17, 41, 66–68, 157.

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2. Setting up House

Artisan Women's Trousseaux in Seventeenth-Century Bologna¹

Joyce de Vries

Abstract

From linens and clothing to furniture and utensils to jewelry and devotional items, artisan brides brought a plethora of goods to their marriages. The many items were practical in one sense or another, serving utilitarian and social goals. The goods listed in trousseaux suggest details of women's activities, interests, and agency, demonstrating their impact in constituting new families, residences, and livelihoods. This essay considers both aggregate and specific data from 60 dowries in seventeenth-century Bologna to reveal a rich realm of female agency in everyday life in the early modern era.

Keywords: trousseaux inventories; artisan dress; material culture; gender roles

In 1632, the young Bolognese woman Giacoma Guglielmini married Giulio Rossi, a spinner who may have worked in one of the city's textile mills. Like many of her peers, Guglielmini had a substantial dowry: L. 500 in cash and L. 263.15 in goods, including a bed, some sheets and blankets, two chests, several dresses, *camicie* ('undergowns'), tablecloths, handkerchiefs, veils, and aprons.² Marriage contracts enumerated the dowry, listing the funds

¹ This essay is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Ruth Berg de Vries (1930–2018) and Rimmer de Vries (1929–2020). At the end of their lives, they still used many of the items that they had acquired upon their marriage in 1958.

² ASBo, Notaio Giulio Drusi, dowry dated 2 September 1632. All monetary figures in this essay are in *lire bolognesi*: L., followed by figures for *lire*, *soldi*, and *denari*. Twenty *soldi* was worth a *lira*, and 12 *denari* was worth one *soldo*.

given to the husband for his wife's needs during the marriage, and the *corredo* ('trousseau'), the goods the bride brought to her new household. Guglielmini's trousseau also featured two pairs of shoes, two rings, a fox fur handwarmer, a mirror, lengths of cloth, some spun hemp, a sack with four pounds of raw wool, several pillows, a sewing cushion, and a large barrel half-full of wine, among other things. Would the luxurious fur muff have warmed the same hands that spun wool or wove hemp? Possibly. The textile work would have been completed in the semi-private space of the house, but the fur would have been an item meant for public display, worn outdoors to show the status of family. From linens and clothing to jewelry and devotional items, from beds and chests to bed warmers and chestnut pans, brides like Guglielmini brought numerous goods to their nuptial homes, items tailored to the circumstances of the families involved as well as the brides' needs and skills. All the goods were practical in one sense or another, serving utilitarian and social goals. This essay explores the items in women's dowries in the seventeenth century, drawing upon information in official marriage contracts from the State Archives of Bologna. Specifically, it focuses on data from artisan women, a group still underrepresented in the scholarship on family life and society in the early modern era.³

Because marriage contracts were drawn up for couples from all echelons of society, dowries are a significant archival source for learning about women, and especially non-elites. In general, there are few archival sources that offer access to the lives of ordinary early modern women, typically just baptismal, marriage, and mortuary records; more might be available for women involved in legal disputes or elite women, whose letters and other papers might be integrated into family archives. With such sparse documentation for much of the early modern female population, scholars glean as much information as they can from the limited empirical sources. By considering seventeenth-century Bolognese dowries with classic social history methods along with insights from the recent material turn, we can see what artisan women possessed at a pivotal moment, but can we also get a sense of their lives beyond their nuptials? Can we gain an understanding of their ongoing agency by examining women's dowries? This essay suggests that we can. Artisan women's trousseaux consisted of clothing, linens, and jewels with which they constructed their outward appearance and social

3 The scholarship on early modern non-elite women is expanding. See, for instance, Hamling and Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England*; Hohti, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Popular Consumers'; Hohti, 'Dress, Dissemination and Change'; Niccoli, *Storie di ogni giorno in una città del Seicento*; Sarti, *Europe at Home*.

status. Furniture, kitchen items, household utensils, fabrics, fibers, and foodstuffs reveal the practices that informed their daily lives and tasks, while the occasional painting or book of hours indicates their aesthetic and spiritual interests. An analysis of the goods recorded in dowries thus reveals a rich realm of female agency in everyday life in the early modern era.

Although dowries were inevitably estimated, notarized, witnessed, and controlled by men, women nonetheless had some say when amassing their trousseaux. The husband indeed had legal jurisdiction over both dowry funds and the trousseau; it was his duty to oversee them as investments to provide for his wife over her married life. In practice, however, the trousseau was a wife's domain. Many trousseau items were for the bride's personal use, and brides played a role in selecting, making, and embellishing at least some of the goods that they brought to their marriages. Whether seen as useful items for daily life or commodities, or both, the goods were investments that ensured productivity in one way or another for many years. Indeed, women oversaw the material assets of the entire household, a domestic duty repeatedly outlined in prescriptive literature. Juan Luis Vives (1524), for instance, places many domestic material goods—linens, furniture, tableware, clothing—under women's purview.⁴ Brides would have used their trousseau goods possibly for years, whether clothing, which could be adapted as necessary, or sturdy furniture and kitchen utensils. They also could sell or pawn items. An inventory might have documented what a bride possessed at one point in her early life and her youthful status, but it also provides hints regarding her ongoing life: her skills, duties, and interests.

The foundations of every artisan woman's trousseau were labor and agency. A woman's status upon marriage was inseparable from her productivity, both social and economic, as indicated by her clothing, linen, jewels, and cooking, cleaning, and sewing utensils, and her capacity to reproduce, implied by beds, linens, and perhaps even baby clothes. To understand this process, this essay first outlines the social and economic context of early modern Bologna. It proceeds to analysis of the aggregate data drawn from 60 dowries to establish general trends, and then concludes with a discussion of specific case studies, which demonstrate the wide variation of artisan women's situations. There were certainly consistencies among dowries and trousseaux goods, which underscore how women constructed their public and more private identities and lives via material goods. At the same time, a close look at individual dowries demonstrates wide variations

4 Vives, *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*, p. 79.

from the averages, revealing the nuances of women's lives and the ways their possessions gave them an important realm of influence in the early modern household.

Artisan dowries and social distinctions in seventeenth century Bologna

A study of artisan dowries provides unique insights into the goods and practices that informed social distinctions in early modern Bologna. Social stratifications had been codified since 1453 in the city, with the nobility and scholars in the first and second tiers, followed by three levels of artisans: the highest echelon included the lucrative fields of notaries, bankers, haberdashers, and silk merchants; the next, slightly less prestigious, included spice merchants and goldsmiths; and the lowest rank of artisans were the still quite prosperous skilled laborers such as cobblers, furriers, tailors, dyers, spinners, weavers, and so on. At the bottom of Bologna's social scale were *contadini* ('peasants').⁵ The material used and product made also affected the status of skilled laborers; goldsmiths, for example, ranked over textile workers, who in turn were socially higher than those who worked the land. Devised to avoid unnecessary spending and to maintain the social order, sumptuary laws dictated what people in each tier could wear.⁶ While the laws can tell us what artisan women should not have worn, their dowries tell us what they had, both defining and pushing the limitations of social rank.

The artisan dowries examined here were largely for women from the third tier of artisans, by birth or marriage. Notaries often recorded the profession of the bride's father and the groom, and the occupations in the selected records includes the makers of mattresses, saddles, and weapons, along with bakers, butchers, carpenters, and textile workers. Some of the highest value dowries of the group were for the daughters of booksellers, printers, shoe- and bootmakers, and ironsmiths; the lowest was for a daughter of a carpenter who married a farmworker, a step down the social hierarchy. Finding dowry records for artisan women can be difficult and not every dowry indicated occupations, so the data here includes twelve examples that lack the fathers' or grooms' profession. In these cases, the value of the dowries closely coincided with those that were clearly identified as artisan households already in the pool.

5 Muzzarelli, 'Ricami e pizzi', pp. 10, 148–152.

6 For laws in Bologna, see Muzzarelli, 'Ricami e pizzi', pp. 3–262.

Standards of living in seventeenth-century Bologna were rising largely due to proto-industrial developments in the use of hydraulics in the production of grain, paper, lumber, and most importantly textiles, mainly silk, but also linen, hemp, and wool.⁷ For elites this expansion of production techniques meant ownership and increasing profits; for the lower classes, it manifested in more stable work opportunities and higher incomes via jobs in shops, mills, at home, or in the fields. The dowries underscore the growing number of families who found their main source of employment in the booming textile sector. One third featured either a father or husband involved in the textile industry on some level, whether working with raw materials as spinners or weavers, or making things like stockings or rope. Evidence in the trousseaux suggests that many artisan women were engaged in textile work as well, whether as part of their regular domestic duties or in a more professional capacity. Some Bolognese brides brought lengths of cloth; sewing or lace-making cushions; and baskets of needles, thread, and trims to their new households.⁸ Most women were handy with a needle, as mothers taught their daughters these basic skills. Women might have increased the visual impact and value of their textiles by adding embroidery, and some artisan women had acquired the more highly skilled lace-making techniques that had become popular by the seventeenth century in Bologna.⁹ At minimum, we can imagine the women wearing the garments listed in their trousseaux, updating and adapting them for years of wear, pawning or trading them to obtain other goods, and passing them along to others for further adaptation.

But some artisan women also engaged in the vibrant cottage industry fundamental for textile production. While silk was spun in mills to increase durability and attain a distinctive texture, the steps before and after spinning—pulling the floss from silk cocoons by hand and weaving the thread into fabric—were largely done at home by independent contractors, often women.¹⁰ Nine of the women's dowries included one or two looms. Relatively inexpensive, and thus a great investment, the looms were typically described by the fibers employed or the final product. Most of those listed were for silk, perhaps for the exquisite voile that was the apex of Bolognese textile production, but one was for canvas and two were for rope. If looms only appeared in 15 percent of the dowries, the presence of floss or fibers was

7 Guenzi, 'L'identità industriale', pp. 449–524.

8 For sixteenth-century examples of this, see Robinson, 'The Material Culture of Female Youth', pp. 235–254.

9 Muzzarelli, 'Ricami e pizzi'; Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle Monache madri'.

10 Campigotto, et.al., *Prodotto a Bologna*, pp. 10–45.

more common, in 40 percent. Measured by the pound, floss might have been already spun, sometimes onto spools, ready to be woven into fabric and made into lace, or unspun, awaiting carding or spinning; a few trousseaux listed fiber carding or combing tools. If there was an abundance of floss or fibers in the trousseau, but no loom, perhaps there was already one in the house. But the presence of cloth, fibers, and looms in a dowry did not necessarily mean the bride would be working the materials herself—the loom may have been a contribution to a domestic shop run by her husband. Caterina Castri, for instance, had two silk looms when she married Girolamo Paggi, a spinner, in 1616.¹¹ The plan might have been for him to supply his wife with the spun silk that she and others would weave on the looms. The dowries do not explicitly state if or when women worked in the cottage textile industry; only women employed as servants had their work identified. Even so, a bride's potential for paid labor might have affected her dowry, as Caroline Murphy suggests for the painter Lavinia Fontana.¹² We can assume that wifely duties for most of the artisan brides included cooking, cleaning, and bearing and raising children, as this adhered to centuries of traditional female roles. By extrapolating from the items in the trousseaux, we can see that artisan women also engaged in textile work, some of it for pay.

With this rising standard of living, many citizens from the third tier of the artisan class, just up from the bottom of Bologna's social ladder, were quite prosperous. In Bologna in the seventeenth century, a small, but sufficient dowry was about L. 100.¹³ A very good dowry for an artisan woman, judging from archival records, was about L. 800 or more. The average artisan in Bologna earned about L. 150 a year, with more skilled, successful artisans earning around L. 500. If several family members were working, household income expanded accordingly. Even so, a dowry of several hundred *lire* was a significant amount, and required diligent saving, often through the Monte del Matrimonio, an institution set up for this very task.¹⁴ The clothing and jewels in the trousseaux were outward markers of status when worn, but all such items were also good investments. They were practical, held their value, and were easy to liquidate if cash was needed, whether by the bride's family before her wedding, or later by the couple during their marriage. Socially, a highly valued dowry helped a woman make a more advantageous marriage, and potentially boosted her and, by extension, her family's status.

11 ASBo, Notaio Giulio Drusi, dowry dated 18 August 1616.

12 Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, pp. 43–44.

13 Morselli, 'Bologna', p. 150.

14 Carboni, 'The Economics of Marriage'.

Thus non-elite families often put their savings into their daughters' dowries, and especially into clothing, jewelry, and household goods like furniture and utensils. Indeed, textiles were the most prominent component of the artisan women's possessions and, together with household goods, comprised the vast majority of items within the trousseaux.

General data from artisan women's dowries

Dowries, if they included detailed trousseaux, are excellent sources of information on how women planned their future lifestyles and livelihoods via material culture at the moment of their weddings. On a social level, a woman's goods were a means to construct her new identity as wife, in the home and more publicly. As some of the items, like linens and furniture, were to be shared, her trousseau also shaped the couple's status as a family. Notaries, who wrote up the legal documents, worked with professional appraisers, and the level of detail depended on their working style as well as the couple's situation. There were different ways of recording and valuing a trousseau—it could have been written in a long list with individual items valued, or the items, whether listed in detail or not, could have been valued together in a lump sum. Here, I explore only dowries that featured itemized and individually valued trousseaux, the goods grouped into general categories in my analysis. A bride entered her marriage with at least the basic items she would need as wife: some clothing, personal linens, furniture, utensils, raw materials like floss and cloth, and perhaps some jewelry, artworks, or food.

The aggregate of the data drawn from 60 dowries in Bologna from 1600 to 1700 provides an overview of artisan women's trousseaux. The average total value of the dowries in the pool is L. 633.17, with amounts ranging from a low of L. 110.15 to a high of L. 1957.10, and a majority (69 percent) between L. 250 and L. 749 (see Table 2.1). As a point of comparison, women from merchant families received L. 2000–6000 or more.¹⁵ Noblewomen's dowries were higher still, with Camilla Dolcini's dowry of L. 24,000 an extreme example.¹⁶ Elite dowries often featured real estate that produced

15 See, for instance, ASBo, Notaio Achille Canonici, dowry dated 5 March 1632, for Vittoria Fantetti for L. 5598.5.7; or dowry dated 17 December 1632, for Isabetta Anselmi for L. 2800.

16 ASBo, Notaio Giovanni Lorenzo Muzzi, document dated 5 September 1647 for Dolcini. See also ASBo, Notaio Cornelio Berti, dowry dated 26 August 1653, for Orsola Premarani dall'Oca for L. 7119.10.

rent or other income, and the trousseau, even though it typically featured higher quality items, was a smaller portion of the total dowry than those of women from lower social groups. Only three of the dowries in the 60 artisans' records included the use of living quarters, but none estimated the value of this privilege. In these cases, though, the dowries were relatively modest, a total of L. 400 for two women and L. 769 for the third. On average, just under half the total amount of the artisan dowry, or L. 309.15, was paid in cash. The rest of the dowry, on average L. 324.2, was transmitted in goods, the woman's trousseau.

Table 2.1 Sixty dowries in Bologna from 1600–1700 (All figures in lire bolognesi)

Dowry components, with the number of dowries that feature at least one item in the category	Average values from 60 dowries	Domenica Magnani 1648	Maria Ursina Capelli 1689	Domenica China 1600	Vittoria Cavez-zoni 1650	Angela Alboni 1634
Total dowry, including trousseau	633.17	640.10	654.5	110.15	1957.10	1307.5
Dowry cash or assets, separate from the trousseau inventory (51/60)	309.15	0	600	25	1450	800
Total trousseau	324.2	640.10	54.5	85.15	507.10	507.5
Personal Linens (59/60)	107	183.9	13.5	29.5	38.15	171
Clothing (59/60)	91.4	229	12	11.10	65	175
Furniture (53/60)	49.2	65.10	20	32.10	225.6	99
Jewelry (41/60)	30.18	64	0	0	0	0
Utensils (35/60)	17.15	55.17	0	12.10	58.9	19.5
Cloth and fibers (35/60)	15.14	42.14	9	0	22	43
Cash or investment (8/60)	11.11	0	0	0	41	0
Works of Art (9/60)	4.6	0	0	0	57	0
Foodstuffs (8/60)	1.1	0	0	0	0	0

Adhering to long-standing traditions that associated women with textiles, the two types of trousseaux goods with the highest values were personal linens and clothing, together about one-third of the average dowry or almost two-thirds of the trousseau alone. Worth on average L. 107, personal linens (*biancheria*) included white textiles that came in close contact with the body, related to hygiene: household linens like sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, napkins, and towels; as well as worn linens like aprons, veils, and kerchiefs. While clearly some were for the bride's use, many linens were to be shared by the couple, serving as the foundation of their daily lives and intimacies. Personal linens of some sort appeared in all but one dowry, and while the

individual items might not have been worth much, there were a lot of them. Made from a range of fabric qualities, whether local hemp or linen, or, in more elite dowries, finer linens imported from Holland or France, these items were often trimmed with embroidery or lace. The professional appraisers in Bologna, a textile town, often described these items in detail, indicating the quality, whether they were new or used, and even the placement and style of embellishments. They understood the nuances of fabric and style and their role in constituting value as well as status.

Relatively easy to launder, the many personal linens could be changed frequently to maintain a clean bed, table, and body. The most popular item was the *camicia*, a long white gown worn under a dress. *Camicie* appeared in 59 dowries, with numbers ranging from two to 50 items, or an average of fifteen per dowry. Aprons and kerchiefs were also common, in 55 and 51 of the dowries, respectively. Like the *camicie*, there was a wide range in what women possessed: one to 28, or an average of eight, aprons per dowry, and three to 40, or an average of twelve, kerchiefs. Bedsheets were in 37 of the dowries, with an average of two per dowry. Brides often provided the bed and bedclothes for the marriage, and sheets, made from hemp or linen, were thus traditional components of the trousseau. Veils, usually made of finer fabric, covering the head and sometimes extending down onto the shoulders or torso, were less common. They were found in only 27 of the trousseaux, with numbers ranging from one to 22, an average of five per dowry. Very fine silk organza veils were one of the specialties of Bolognese textile production, but only a few of the artisan women's dowries specified veils made of silk. Caterina Castri, mentioned above, had one used silk veil among her goods. Most often the records described veils as made of linen and cotton. Artisan women could also have used kerchiefs or scarves as head-coverings. The variety of worn personal linens supported and protected the more costly clothing, the *camicie* absorbing bodily fluids and smells, the aprons and kerchiefs shielding the body and dress from the dirt generated by daily chores—cleanliness in itself a marker that set artisans apart from day laborers or peasants.

As the most important sign of a woman's status, clothing unsurprisingly was the second highest group in valuation, worth an average of L. 91 among the dowries. These more costly items, like dresses, overdresses or gowns, mantles, bodices, sleeves, and other components of clothing and accessories such as the infrequent pairs of shoes or gloves, appeared in smaller numbers than linens. Most often noted in the dowries as made of wools and less expensive types of silk like satin or taffeta, these garments were more tailored to the body than the voluminous *camicie* or the easily adjustable

aprons. Many of them were valued under L. 10–15, indicating they were likely basic dresses, made for daily wear; some were used, probably frocks that the women had been wearing for a while. But a bride's clothing could be quite fancy and expensive, with dresses made with multicolored silks worth L. 40 or more peppered throughout the pool. A dress of some sort appeared in 59 of the dowries, with a range of one to fourteen in each of those, or an average of five per woman. Shoes were listed much less frequently, and appeared in only nine of the trousseaux. Ordinary people usually just had the one pair of shoes that they wore, which would not necessarily be valued in a legal inventory.¹⁷ The high level of description often provided by the appraiser is an indication of the economic importance of clothing and its details; it suggests, too, how people 'read' materials and styles not just for economic but also social information. The ribbons trimming a sleeve, for example, added to the value of the garment and augmented the appearance and status of the wearer.

Similarly, the furniture that many women brought to their marriages, on average worth L. 49, had both practical and social meanings. Women stored their clothing and linens in chests, which usually came as a pair, to keep them safe and separate from other goods in the household. If almost all the dowries (52) featured at least one chest, only about half (29) listed a bed of some sort. Some bedsteads were quite elaborate among this group, underscoring the privilege of relative wealth. The dowries show that beds of prosperous artisan couples were stacked with several mattresses made of different qualities of feathers or straw, several pillows, blankets for summer and winter months, and draperies that hung from four corner posters. Some were more basic: a woman's contribution to the marital bed could also have been simply a mattress that would have presumably been placed atop a bedframe already owned by her husband. The bed was loaded with meaning, a site of the couple's ongoing intimacy, births, and eventually deaths. The marriage was legal once consummated; dowry legalese dictated that the dowry and trousseau would only be distributed after that pivotal moment. Thus the bed, and even the tables, chairs, armoires, credenzas, shelves, and chests of drawers, which also appeared in the inventories albeit in lower numbers, were material indicators of the physical and spiritual union of the couple. Some of those objects, which were often described in the inventories as used, might be imbued with memories of a bride's natal family, but they would gain a new patina of associations soon enough.

17 Ago, *Gusto for Things*, pp. 108–109; for more on clothing in Bologna, see Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba Medievale*, esp. pp. 117–145.

The women in the sample less often—in just over half of the 60 records—supplied their new homes with practical utensils. Some brides entered established households and so brought only a few items in this category. The new couple might have occupied a room or two within the husband's family residence, already outfitted with basic implements. Judging from the wide array of utensils in their dowries, other brides seem to have been setting up a new or independent living situation. With an average value of about L. 18, the utensils in the inventories were mostly things necessary for cooking and eating, like fire chains, pots, frying pans, mortars and pestles, graters, cutlery, and plates, their material typically specified—copper, brass, majolica, or terra cotta. Artisan kitchens featured some specialized items indicative of the expanding economy, such as skillets specifically made for roasting chestnuts, an early modern staple protein. There were also candlesticks, bed warmers, laundry basins, storage barrels, and the looms and sewing paraphernalia discussed above. Several trousseaux featured long lists of utensils, each relatively inexpensive, but nevertheless important to everyday life. The most valuable item in this group was quite banal: a wooden cart, with wheels and steps, estimated at L. 55, worth over ten percent of Margherita Brizzi's dowry of L. 469.9 when she married a carpenter in March 1647. She also had some iron tools to cut hemp (L. 2).¹⁸ The various utensils facilitated daily life for the brides, allowing them to cook, clean, make and mend textiles, and complete chores, all the while contributing to the productivity and assets of the family.

Related to the utensils associated with textile work were the lengths of cloth and floss or fibers that appeared in 35 of the dowries, on average worth about L. 15. Cut fabric was slightly more prevalent, appearing in 25 of the trousseaux, compared to 24 that had raw fibers; seventeen of those featured both. The brides with cloth often had only a few pieces, but the servant Sabadina di Bernardo had eleven lengths of different fabrics in her 1619 dowry, along with 23 pounds of hemp and linen.¹⁹ These materials, valued at L. 80.3, comprised about 24 percent of her dowry of L. 333.15. Sabadina's case was the exception, as fabrics and fibers were worth four percent of the average dowry. Valued quite low because of their unfinished nature, these materials, as with the looms and sewing baskets, speak to women's engagement in textile production.

Practical goods dominated the trousseaux, but artisan women also brought jewelry and other items fashioned from precious or semi-precious

18 ASBo, Notaio Giovanni Cesare Manolesi, document dated 12 March 1647.

19 ASBo, Notaio Marco Antonio Fasanini, document dated 1 October 1619.

materials into their marriages. Jewelry could embellish a wife's outfit and reflect the status of the family; these compact and portable investments, equally important, held their value and could be easily sold or pawned in times of financial need. While extensive lists of jewelry and luxury goods dazzled elite trousseaux, artisan women possessed fewer of these types of items, worth an average of L. 31 overall, or about one-twentieth of the total dowry. Two-thirds of the women's dowries here listed something, mostly jewelry, in this category. Associated with marriage, gold rings, sometimes set with gems, appeared in 23 of the dowries, with numbers ranging from one to six, an average of one per woman overall. It was not just the women with the most elegant dowry goods who had jewelry: Margherita Brizzi, whose wheeled cart and hemp knives were noted above, also had two enameled gold rings set with stones of some sort (together worth L. 20). In addition to the rings, and gold or coral necklaces, these artisan brides less often owned crystal mirrors, silver rosaries and crucifixes, and books of hours with silver clasps. Only two books of hours appeared in the pool, for instance; probably few artisan women could read. Perhaps there were other devotional items they could engage with in their new houses.

Art had an important and growing presence in people's lives in the seventeenth-century, and artisan women sometimes turned to religious works of art in their spiritual practices. A center of artistic production, Bologna saw a rise in the domestic display of art, and especially religious images, in the Counter-Reformation. Artistic production expanded to include more easel paintings, prints, and finished drawings that made art accessible to a broader audience. Even so, works of art comprised a small portion of the selected trousseaux, valued at an average of L. 4 per dowry. Only eight dowries included works of visual art; another featured a spinet (worth L. 30), factored into this category as it served the performing arts and was more specialized than other utensils. The visual works were sometimes described by their mediums (works on paper, paintings, reliefs) and subjects (all religious, mostly devotional images of saints, but also biblical narratives). The valuations were as low as L. 2.10 for 'diversi quadri di pittura antichi et moderni' ('various old and new paintings') in Violante Sacchetti's 1646 trousseau and as high as L. 57 for twelve artworks in Vittoria Cavazzoni's, explored further below.²⁰ While only a few women supplied their new homes with art, it is difficult to generalize who they were—it was not just those with high dowries. Some women with modest dowries, of about L. 300–550, had several works of art; only two of the women with artwork

20 ASBo, Notaio Bartolomeo Bocchini, dowry dated 22 February 1646.

had dowries over L. 1000. Angela Caramelli, the owner of the spinet, was among the most elite of this group, a daughter of a bookseller who married another bookseller with a dowry of L. 931.²¹ The religious images and objects certainly aided in spiritual nourishment, and it seems likely that, if women did not bring their own works of art, there were likely others in the home for them to view as part of their devotional practices.

Quite different from the material objects examined above, the two final categories of trousseau goods were cash and food. Cash, or a notice of investment, averaged about L. 11 per dowry, but it was included in the inventories of just eight brides. In six cases, these funds were in addition to the payments made directly to the husband in the dowry and might have been added to top up the worth or replace goods that had once been planned for the trousseau but not realized. For the other two, there was no additional cash in the dowry and it seems like everything was included in the trousseau inventory to simplify the transaction. The husband received both the dowry and trousseau, so either way, the funds were at his disposal. But one wonders if the cash in the trousseaux of the six whose husbands received other funds offered the women any advantage in determining how the money was spent. Food items are perhaps easier to understand. Appearing in only eight of the trousseaux, these were mostly staples like wheat or wine, valued on average L. 1 per dowry. A widow, Margarita Padroni, had 35 pounds of cheese and a barrel of vinegar, together worth L. 10.15, to contribute to her new marriage in 1683.²² These bulk items, which would presumably be shared, remind us of how the dowry goods likely benefitted not just the bride, but the collective household.

The aggregate data suggests a real emphasis on linens, clothing, and practical items, whether furniture, fabric or fibers, utensils, food, and cash. Jewelry, luxury items, and works of art were not as prominent among artisan women. A bride brought to her marriage what she needed to be decently clothed, to keep a tidy house, and to complete daily tasks. In the amassing of her trousseau, one imagines the bride with her natal family making and collecting items over time, anticipating marriage. If the bride's clothing aided her transformation into wife and allowed her to uphold social expectations of hygiene and self-presentation, so too did the other items. The chests protected her goods, and allowed her some autonomy within the house. The bed, sheets, and mattresses facilitated intimacy and reproduction. The cookware yielded nourishment. The looms, sewing baskets, and lengths of

21 ASBo, Notaio Bartolomeo Bocchini, dowry dated 11 September 1652.

22 ASBo, Notaio Giulio Cesare Bignardi, dowry dated 26 January 1683.

cloth and floss were fundamental in clothing members of the household and possibly generating income. All were predicated on women's labor, marking out a space of activity organized and maintained in large part by the women themselves.

Specific women's dowries: the varieties of distinction

While the overview above provides a general picture of the goods included in artisan women's trousseaux, individual examples suggest how dowries were tailored to a woman's needs and skills, her family's ability to provide for her, and the situation she was entering—namely, how well equipped her husband's house was. Beyond the general statistics, examining specific dowries opens a window onto the remarkably complex, individualized lives and possessions of early modern Bolognese women. Furthermore, those goods reveal details of women's daily activities, interests, and agency, demonstrating their impact in constituting new families, residences, and livelihoods.

The dowries of Domenica Magnani and Maria Ursina Capelli demonstrate two extremes in the range of possibilities for a trousseau. (See Table 2.1) While each woman had a dowry that was close to the average of the sample, the details were quite different. Magnani married Silvio Alberti, a weaver, in 1648 with a dowry of L. 640.10, but her husband received no cash. Instead, all of the dowry's value was in the trousseau goods. With a wide range of items that suggest Magnani and her husband were setting up a new household, the trousseau featured a bed with mattresses, covers, and a bed warmer; chests, chairs, a table, a buffet, a chest of drawers, a stool, and an armoire; tools for the fireplace and kitchen, such as fire grates and chains, cooking pots, a frying pan, a chestnut pan, a rolling pin, a grater, a scale, basins for laundry; brass candlesticks, four knives, four forks, and two spoons. Magnani also had an array of personal linens and clothing, including five bedsheets, sixteen *camicie*, aprons, handkerchiefs, tablecloths, napkins, six dresses, stockings, and slippers. She also had linen to make six more *camicie*, over 48 pounds of different grades of linen fibers, two pounds of cotton fiber dyed yellow, and a new silk loom. Her luxuries included five gold rings, a necklace of black gems strung with gold and pearls, a brass crucifix, and a large crystal mirror. Perhaps the families agreed that the dowry would consist entirely of the goods the couple needed for their new life together; if the husband had gotten cash, he might have spent it on the same items. Perhaps the new couple planned that Magnani would join her husband in

weaving or textile work, supplying income to make up for the lack of cash in the dowry. Her husband might have already had a loom for linen, ready to weave the fibers Magnani brought to the marriage; perhaps he wanted to expand his (or her) work into the more lucrative silk industry with the new loom. This speculation aside, it is clear from her trousseau that Magnani had the goods to keep a comfortable, efficient household, and the clothing and jewelry to present herself well.

In contrast, Maria Ursina Capelli's material goods were much sparser. Capelli married the stocking-maker Pietro Trippi in 1689 with a dowry worth L. 654.5; most (L. 600) was paid in cash to her husband. Her goods totaled L. 54.5: one dress, six *camicie*, seven aprons, ten handkerchiefs, six pairs of stockings, two lengths of cloth (one linen and one hemp), sewing items, and a pair of walnut chests. She did not have any other furniture—no bed or mattresses—and no kitchen utensils; perhaps she was entering a well-furnished house. She brought some basics to her marriage, and presumably her husband was going to provide what she needed with the dowry funds he had received. Clothing her was now his responsibility and she represented his family with her appearance. Capelli and her husband probably would have discussed how much to spend, perhaps choosing together the cuts and fabrics, and she could have used her sewing cushion to mend, adapt, and embellish her clothing, new and old.

Magnani brought many goods to her marriage, items that she may have associated with her natal family and that she collected with their help. She might be using them on a daily basis, but they might be sold if she and her husband needed funds for something else. Capelli brought just a few items from her natal home, but more cash for her husband to purchase necessary items. Which situation—Magnani's or Capelli's—was better for a bride? As in cases like Magnani's, did the bride do better by negotiating her trousseau goods with her family, rather than with her new husband? Or, as a wife, did a woman have more leverage to ask for what she wanted? How attached was she to these things in her trousseau, some of which were likely imbued with emotional content, but were all ultimately commodities or investments to be pawned or bartered if the need arose? These questions are difficult to answer, but the possibilities suggest the varied modes of women's agency.

The dowries of Domenica China and Vittoria Cavezzoni provide two other types of extremes—the lowest and the highest valued dowries in the pool. China, the daughter of a carpenter, married Giovanni Francesco Mariani, a farm worker, in 1600.²³ Along with L. 25 in cash, she brought a bed and two

23 ASBo, Notaio Pietro Zanettini, dowry dated 3 March 1600.

sheets, two simple dresses, four *camicie*, some linens, one chest, a tub, and two storage vessels, together worth L. 85.11. With so little allocated for her support during her marriage, China was likely going to work on the farm, although her meager goods covered more bases than Capelli's. She provided the marital bed, some practical items, and modest clothing and linens.

At the top of the economic scale here, Vittoria Cavezzoni had a wider range of items in her 1650 dowry, valued at L. 1957.10, or L. 1450 in cash and L. 507.10 for the trousseau.²⁴ Her inventory included an elaborate bed and lots of furniture, including a credenza, a *prie-dieu*, shelves, chairs, benches, and more, which suggests that she was entering sparsely furnished quarters. But she had relatively few personal linens to put in her four chests (worth L. 70). She had the basics, like two *camicie*, two bedsheets, and several tablecloths and napkins, among other items, and twenty *braccie* ('feet') each of linen and hemp, perhaps destined for more linens to fill out her supply. Cavezzoni's inventory listed only three dresses: one green silk (L. 40), one black brushed wool (L. 20), and one in plain green cloth (L. 5). The handful of kitchen items she brought with her were inexpensive, except for two iron-encircled barrels valued at L. 31.10. She had no jewelry, but her collection of twelve works of art perhaps took its place, worth L. 57. While the inventory did not record the artists of these works, it did list the subjects, which were all religious, including a relief of the Madonna of the Rosary, two paintings of Jesus, and paintings of the Flagellation, the local Madonna della Vita, St. Anthony, St. John, and a six-part life of the prodigal son. The art spoke to her spirituality, but also perhaps to the couple's interest in artistic display. Cavezzoni might have been related to the painter Francesco Cavezzoni, although a connection is difficult to trace. Regardless, she was marrying a printer, Giovanni Battista di Alessandro Zoli, who may have worked with artists to reproduce their works. Akin to jewels, these small, portable works of art attested to the couple's status and were probably stable assets. Perhaps augmenting a collection of art owned by her husband, the works demonstrated the couple's artistic connections and erudition, qualities that could enhance his business. With the array of items in her dowry, Cavezzoni had a significant impact on her new household.

Angela Alboni, a maid for the noble Allamandini family, had a remarkably substantial dowry for her wedding to a shoemaker, Domenico Maria Chechi, in 1634: L. 800 in cash and L. 507.5 in goods.²⁵ How did a servant amass such a large dowry, one well above the average of the pool? The inventory offers

24 ASBo, Notaio Cornelio Berti, dowry dated 9 September 1650.

25 ASBo Notaio Pietro Zanettini, dowry dated 15 May 1634.

some clues. Antoni possessed the highest number of *camicie* in the selected records, a total of 50, worth L. 100, noted as used, some for men, some for women. In addition, along with a length of fine green cloth and spools of thread, she had 52 *braccie* of fabric specifically destined for more *camicie*, worth L. 30. The dowry does not elaborate, but her tasks for the Allamandini might have been to make this type of garment and other linens, clothing her employer's family; she might have had plans to continue to work in this sector after marriage. As a skilled worker, she might have earned enough to save the money in her dowry, but she also might have been paid in goods, which was not uncommon. Beyond all those used *camicie*, Alboni possessed fourteen dresses, described as new, used, or *rotte* ('broken' or 'worn out'); the two finest ones were together worth an impressive L. 110. While used items were common in the selected dowries, *rotte* was a rare qualifier; brides probably did not want to bring worn-out goods to their marriages. But Alboni's three decrepit dresses were still worth L. 4. All goods had value, and perhaps she planned to refashion them into something new. She also had three pairs of sleeves, six chests, a bedstead, mattresses, five blankets, a dozen sheets, some pillowcases and other linens, and several kitchen utensils, including a skillet, a knife, and eight spoons. The dowry was drawn up in the Allamandini household and no one from the bride's family was present, which suggests that she might have been an orphan and that her employer sanctioned her departure. Alboni's dowry reminds us the trousseau was an investment. Those *camicie* made for men could have been a gift to her husband's family, or were meant to be sold or bartered for other goods. Moreover, her dowry shows that someone who worked as a servant was not without the means to marry quite well.

Conclusions

Marriage was a fundamentally transformative event in a young woman's life. We can imagine that emotions were likely mixed when a bride left her natal family and joined her husband: sadness as she left what was familiar, excitement on becoming a wife and potentially a mother, fear of complications from pregnancy, hopes that she would have a happy and prosperous marriage, apprehension about getting along with her husband and his family, and much more. The goods a bride brought with her to her marriage ensured some continuity with the past and provided a material base for the future. Finding further documentation on these women is difficult, so we need to extrapolate whenever possible to understand their lives. As those

who work in archival sources understand, only occasionally can one find the same artisan name in records. An example of this rarity underscores the precarity of women's lives. Ursula Francesca Tiarini married in July 1668 and died in December of the same year, her dowry and her last testament documented in the same notary's records.²⁶ Tiarini's trousseau featured goods to sustain her, whether through sewing, weaving, cooking, cleaning, or simply looking well. Upon her death, those goods, once imbued with hope and now associated with loss, were returned to her natal family.

From this pool of 60 sources, we have seen that there are distinct constants in artisan women's dowries in seventeenth century in Bologna, alongside individual variations and a few surprises. Personal linens and clothing, the basic components of dress, were prioritized, and these items were relatively valuable. Furniture and kitchen utensils facilitated women's activities and filled out the house and offer ample evidence of women's contributions to its management. During this period of increasing industrialization of textile production, only a few women's dowries mention looms and sewing kits, but the greater presence of cloth and fibers suggests some sort of textile work in their futures. The cooking and other utensils speak to their control of everyday resources. From their dowries, we can get a sense of the work these women likely performed in their new situation—cooking, cleaning, weaving, sewing—but it was not all utilitarian drudgery. Even artisans could afford some small luxury, whether it was a rosary, a necklace, a painting, or a fur muff, which could strengthen their spiritual life or display their prosperity and status. Despite the limited documentation on artisan women in seventeenth-century Bologna, a study of their dowries provides unique insights into many aspects of their daily lives, allowing us to understand how the world of goods they brought to their marriages anchored a rich and nuanced realm of female agency in early modern Italy.

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3. Crafting Habits of Resistance

Susan Dinan, Karen Nelson, and Michele Osherow

Abstract

This chapter examines women's material production to explore modes of intervention within regional systems of power. Artifacts such as embroidery, habit, drama, and biblical commentary shaped both their responses and representations of resistance. Local culture formed and informed their choices of media. We draw from three distinct archives to consider methods of resistance available to women during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Taken together, these complicate notions of women's agency, of public and private space, and suggest that the power of stories to animate and inspire took many guises. Material traces, ranging from the concrete, to the ephemeral, to the imagined, allow opportunities to assess women's agency that might otherwise remain absent from other, more conventional, archives.

Keywords: France; England; nuns; embroidery; drama; epic; war; material culture

This essay examines localized women's action and agency within systems of power. How did early modern women appropriate the methods and genres available to them to resist cultural codes that attempted to limit and prohibit them? How did various media shape both their responses and representations of resistance? What impact did local culture and form have upon the choices deployed? In this essay, we suggest that material artifacts reflect ways that people take stories in circulation and use them to create spaces for and of women's agency.

An interdisciplinary approach to considering women's opposition to authority presents both the opportunity and the challenge to recognize resistance when we see it. Attending to early modern women means attending to women's careful negotiation of the many cultural codes designed

to restrict and restrain them. Women played some shows of obedience so skillfully that it took centuries for scholars to concede—let alone to celebrate—a subversive strain in women's texts and histories. Subversiveness of theme bled to form, with the rich acknowledgement that women's texts go beyond the written. The texts considered here demonstrate variously how women constructed resistance and made meaning in pieces crafted through different media for different purposes. They reveal creativity, imagination, autonomy, agency and, most importantly, alternatives to the narrowly defined roles deemed appropriate for early modern European women.

What binds together these disparate archives, for us, is the ways in which material goods or artifacts, ranging from the concrete, to the ephemeral, to the imagined, allow opportunities to assess women's agency that might otherwise remain absent from other, more conventional, archives. Across media, these artifacts allow us to examine the ways in which women's hands and minds crafted materials which function as texts. Those we examine here include how women's hands worked models for behavior, action, and influence, constructed themselves as interpreters of sacred text, and manufactured identities that announced collective agency and service.

We draw in part upon Dinah Eastop's claim that 'material culture encompasses the processes by which things and people interact [...] vital insight into the way identities are created and negotiated'.¹ We are interested in broadening notions of what constitutes material culture, taking up Daniel Miller's charge to include the imaginations that give rise to artifacts.² We consider ways in which material items carry meanings and messages, and here we turn to Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Tobin, who together posit that: 'Women in the process of making and manipulating things were not only engaged in self-definition and identity performance, but were actively engaged in meaning-making practices that involved the construction, circulation and maintenance of knowledge.'³ The performance of identity seems crucial to our considerations of the project that undergird the artifacts we assess.

Central, too, is the project of resistance, and here, we look especially to women's relationships to power, and how the objects they craft reflect their mechanisms for operating within the systems they occupy. In each

1 Eastop, 'The Conservation of Garments Concealed within Buildings as Material Culture in Action', p. 145.

2 Miller, 'Materiality: An Introduction', p. 4.

3 Tobin and Goggin, 'Materializing Women', p. 4.

instance, the materials at the heart of the inquiry allow women to tell stories of varying sorts, about themselves and about their places within their communities. These stories reveal some of the constraints they seek to navigate. Material and visual representations help them define themselves within their communities, and also help us see across the centuries some of the places in which the dominant systems themselves make themselves vulnerable and allow points of access.

We draw from three distinct archives to consider methods of resistance available to women during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. First, the Daughters of Charity, who in the course of their creation in Paris in the 1630s, designed a habit that was not a habit. The Daughters composed all aspects of their distinctive garb to communicate a moderate religious stance and to assist in their explicit goals of actively serving the poor. Second, seventeenth-century English women who embroidered biblical scenes in the era surrounding England's Civil War, and thus created artifacts that commented upon women's relationship to power and their negotiations within those patriarchal structures. In the process, they interpreted and commented upon the Bible and shaped its narratives into stories of their own for display in their domestic spaces. Third, representations of women at war, especially those under siege, which provide instances of women's leadership in battle and recourse to spying, across genre and across geography, in English plays such as William Shakespeare's *Henry VI* and George Gascoigne's *A Larum for London*, which themselves draw upon strategies available from the story of Jael from the book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible and its treatment in commentaries, and which further resound in stories and illustrations available from the *Hamzahahna* (1562–1577).

Habits, service, mobility

When the Daughters of Charity established itself as a confraternity in 1633, it did so to avoid the demands of *clausura*. By not defining themselves as nuns, these women could do the work of Christ and serve the sick and poor. The Daughters defied the rules on enclosure to allow them to embrace the essence of Tridentine reform—education, a clearer articulation of Catholicism, a more orderly church. The Daughters of Charity crafted a collective identity that defined them as neither nuns nor secular women but rather as active women religious. In a letter from 1641, Monsieur Lambert, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission Vincent de Paul's religious order for men, wrote to Barbe Angiboust, a Daughter of Charity serving a parish in Richelieu,

inquiring if the Daughters were still 'passing' for a secular community.⁴ The letter demonstrates that, at least among the ranks of the Congregation of the Mission, it was an open secret that the Daughters of Charity misrepresented themselves as a confraternity and not as a religious order. They constructed this identity with care.

Daughters of Charity worked in public spaces and the houses of the poor, nursed the sick in hospitals, and walked the streets of cities and towns; however, they claimed that they were not public women. Vincent de Paul defined the community's liminal status:

They should consider that although they do not belong to a religious order, that state not being compatible with the duties of their vocation, yet as they are much more exposed to the world than nuns; their monastery being generally no other than the abode of the sick; their cell, a hired room; their chapel, the parish church; their cloister, the streets or wards of hospitals; their enclosure, obedience; their grate, the fear of God; and their veil, holy modesty—they are obliged on this account to lead as virtuous a life as if they were professed in a religious order; to conduct themselves wherever they mingle with the world with as much recollection, purity of heart and body, detachment from creatures; and to give as much edification as nuns in the seclusion of their monasteries.⁵

They were women religious who created a sense of personal cloister through their comportment and by a distinct material marker of identity: a unique uniform. Wearing a consistent uniform, which would become a habit over time, spared them a critical public gaze. The clothing allowed people to recognize them as something other than secular women and girls, but also something other than nuns. It also allowed them to resist the limitations that came from these statuses. For the Daughters of Charity the veil provided holy modesty, but more generally the habit provided space for agency to define suitable work for women as charitable Christian service.

France was in crisis in the seventeenth century due to warfare, famine, and widespread poverty. This atmosphere of crisis gave the Daughters of Charity the ability to create and maintain an active vocation because of France's desperate need for poor relief. They administered and staffed many municipal hospitals as well as Paris's main orphanage, insane asylum, and

4 Archives de Maison Mère des Filles de la Charité (AMMFC), 187. The original letter dated 13 May 1641, reads, 'Je ne sais si vous passez pour seculiere.'

5 Ryan and Rybolt, *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac*, p. 169.

hospice. In Paris, the Daughters' freedom from enclosure did superficially undermine the disciplinary goals of Trent, but also supported the spirit of Trent because the Daughters brought a message of reformed Catholicism to the poor. Moreover, they supplied the government with an administrative apparatus to care for the sick and poor, populations the government had no interest in assisting. The Daughters of Charity was one of a few groups that were not only willing, but also able, to provide poor relief in an organized and professional manner. Nuns were unable, and others were unwilling, to do this critical work.

The Daughters of Charity used a variety of visible markers, especially those that could be categorized as tools, to define themselves as active women religious with a mission to serve the sick and poor. They carried with them the soup pots used for feeding poor families and the infirm as they worked in pairs in parishes. Some worked in hospitals, and they carried such implements as bandages and special mixing bowls for the medicines made by their apothecaries. Daughters who served as teachers to poor girls (never boys) had instructional tools like the letter cards used by Ursuline nuns in their schools. The Daughters served in places of poverty and instability; they brought order along with food and medicines to the communities they served. Their resistance to the letter of Trent demanding that they withdraw from the work allowed them to unleash the spirit of Trent and create a more disciplined church that was more responsive to its members, a population that was better catechized in the tenets of the faith in part because of women committed to the education of girls.

To do their work, the Daughters of Charity needed to distinguish themselves clearly from secular women while also not appearing to be nuns, and they developed a uniform to signal their commitment to their active service to the poor. Louise de Marillac referred to their clothing as a habit, but it was simpler than a nun's habit, and the uniform was to look like the dress of simple peasant women. The Motherhouse generally provided the Daughters with fabric so that their habits would be of uniform color and style, then billed the Daughters' local establishments for the material. The Motherhouse did not have the funds to pay for the Daughters' clothing and expected the local elite of the parish, hospital, or other establishment to pay for the uniform. In 1655 de Marillac wrote to a Daughter who was purchasing cloth for the habits: 'Be particular, I beg you, because variations are very dangerous. Send us her measurements for the chemisettes, and we will make them because ordinarily there are so many different ways of making them from one sister to another that they would seem to come from two

different countries'.⁶ The construction of the habit, the physical artifact, was critical in creating community, and the uniformity of dress reinforced the shared identity of the Daughters of Charity and their assertion of agency when serving the sick and poor while residing in unenclosed communities.

When Daughters went to regions far from Paris and asked permission to vary their dress to conform to local styles, de Marillac denied their requests in the name of uniformity. However, she permitted changes in the headdress to allow for better head and face coverage in more severe climates.⁷ Later in the seventeenth century the Daughters redesigned the cornette to drape onto the Daughters' shoulders, noticeably altering their appearance. According to the Daughters, the original toque did not offer their faces enough protection from the elements.⁸ Leaders of the Company changed the headpiece to improve the Daughters' health, once it was clear that the new design would not hinder the Daughters' indoor work. With this alteration, the Daughters of Charity gained a more distinct appearance; all Daughters looked less like those around them, and more like one another. As the uniform evolved into a more distinct habit, it helped the Daughters of Charity express their collective identity as neither secular women nor nuns and was an important tool in the work of the community. Over time, as the dictates of Trent posed less of a threat to their liminal status, it became a habit.

Across France, Daughters of Charity interacted with a broad range of people in a very concrete manner. Can respectable women be on streets, in the houses of the poor, in hospitals, near the bodies of men, with illegitimate children? The Daughters of Charity used material objects to emblemize their community as one of active service. Their work was hands-on and required tools, clothing, and an attitude of professionalism. They defined themselves as pious, serving God, and therefore able to walk the streets of cities and towns. They nursed the wounded and sick in hospitals, they cared for babies in a foundling hospital and the elderly in hospices. The Daughters framed themselves as respectable women doing holy, necessary work essential to the fabric of the community. The habit, in particular, provided a means to that agency, and provided them the safety and the mechanisms to perform their work in the urban spaces they occupied.

6 De Marillac, *Écrits spirituels*, Lettre 450.

7 De Paul, *Correspondence*, Lettre 534.

8 De Marillac, *Écrits spirituels*, Lettre 148. In this letter, de Marillac wrote to Monsieur Portail at Richelieu in 1646 about a Daughter who had altered her toque. Despite her anger at the Daughter, de Marillac does concede that this portion of the habit might be changed: 'although I suggested to [de Paul] several times not a veil, which would be totally unacceptable, but something which could protect the face a bit from extreme cold and heat.'

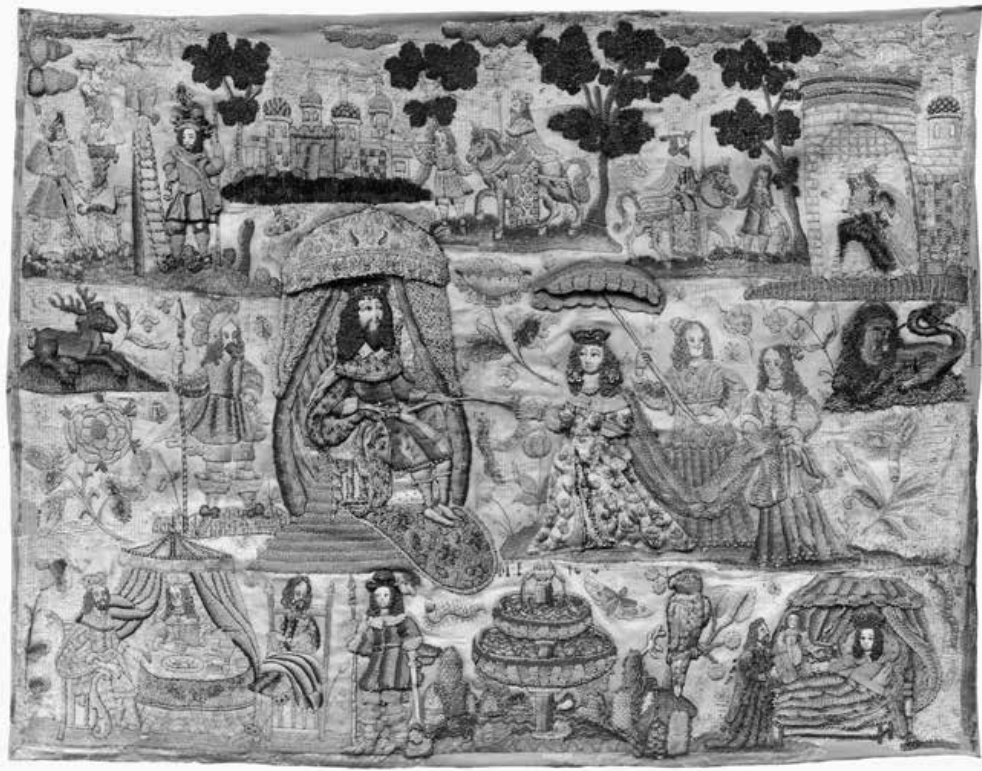


Figure 3.1: Esther and Ahasuerus (1665) © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Embroidering Esther

‘Respectable women doing holy work’ would describe John Taylor’s characterization of the community of women to whom he directs *The Needles Excellency* (1631). In this volume, he locates the virtue of needlework in Scripture and associates sewing with sacred practice.⁹

But despite its association with submissive behavior, needlework is among those crafted habits that offer opportunities for and sites of feminine resistance.¹⁰ In *Women and Things*, Maureen Goggin describes needlework as ‘an act of resistance and purposeful construction and negotiation of [...] identity’.¹¹ Such negotiations show themselves in a 1665 embroidered narrative of the Book of Esther held at the Victoria & Albert Museum (Figure 3.1).

9 Taylor, A2–3.

10 Lena Cowen Orlin identifies needlework as one of the ways women were made invisible in the Renaissance. With its ‘mandate of the submissive pose and the downcast eyes’ it was ‘an occupational topos for women across all class boundaries’. Orlin, ‘Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance’, p. 187.

11 Tobin and Goggin, ‘Materializing Women’, p. 7.

The needleworker, 'MI', presents recognizable scenes from the biblical book, but the lens through which she views the narrative and the heroine's activity within it affirm a feminine agency too often overlooked in commentaries of the period. The stitched piece challenges stifling modes of behavior prescribed to women and indicates the ease with which a woman may substitute for a king.

The stitched Esthers of seventeenth-century domestic embroidery differ from representations on artists' more recognized canvases. The scene most often featured comes from Chapter Five of the biblical text where Esther appears unbidden in Ahasuerus's court; she approaches the king in order to save the Jewish people from Haman's intended annihilation. Paintings by Tintoretto (1546), Rubens, (1620), and Gentileschi (1628–1630) present Esther advancing toward the king and fainting into the arms of the women who accompany her. The Victoria & Albert (V&A) piece similarly features Esther's approach to Ahasuerus and surrounds that scene with several less elaborate renderings of other narrative episodes. But the needlework Esther at center is shown upright, confident, and wearing a crown matching the king's, not fainting. The king extends his scepter toward her, and, as described in the narrative, Esther obediently (and suggestively) 'touch[es] the top'.¹² The raised scepter is a show of masculine authority; Esther's response to this gesture, however, is transformed in the embroidered representation. Rather than present the heroine's swift, obeisant touch, the embroidered picture locks her hand there. The scepter, permanently balanced between the hands of king and queen, suggests a transfer of power and influence. (A caterpillar stitched beneath it indicates transformation.) Instead of displaying a fearful, submissive Esther, the embroidered picture highlights Esther's ambition and agency, and locates the promise of each in the heroine's words.

The Victoria & Albert Esther is extraordinary for the caption stitched inside this scene: a scroll unravels from Esther's hand reading, 'At my petition'. The text is biblical, appearing in Esther 7:3, but its repurposing for this moment expands the potential of Esther's suit. The ribbon of text and the king's scepter collide on the canvas, making it impossible to separate Esther's petition for her people from her hand's proximity to the king's marker of authority. In this way, the narrative event of a woman's bid for approval is transformed in the needlework to a woman's bid for power. And that power is visually shown within the heroine's reach. That it is specifically Esther's petition that earns her a share of sovereignty is borne out by the narrative. In the text, with the king's extended scepter comes his verbal assurance:

12 *King James Bible*, Esther 5:2

‘What wilt thou’, he asks, ‘and what is thy request? It shall bee even given thee to the half of the kingdome’.¹³ The king assigns significant value to Esther’s petition even before she speaks it. What’s more, the success of her petition will be confirmed by Esther’s additional discursive empowerment when Ahasuerus instructs her to ‘Write ye [...] for the Iewes [Jews], as it liketh you, in the Kings name.’¹⁴

Despite Esther’s demonstration of linguistic authority, MI’s characterization of her is uncommon. Esther is consistently celebrated in biblical and other commentaries for the show of duty and obedience she offers her cousin, her husband, and her God. Thomas Heywood claims none is ‘better, more obedient than [Esther].’¹⁵ In his *Monument of Matrons*, Thomas Bentley praises Esther for duty and humility, noting that she ‘[t]hough [...] a royal queene, yet was obedient unto [...] her poore kinsman [...] and did in everything after his counsel and advise’.¹⁶ Though these descriptions circulated some fourscore years before MI raised a needle, Esther remained bound to obedience throughout the seventeenth century. John Trapp, whose commentary appeared within a decade of MI’s completion of her piece, applies the words ‘obey’, ‘obedience’ or ‘obedient’ to Esther’s narrative nearly two dozen times.¹⁷ His reading, moreover, pointedly denies Esther’s linguistic agency: ‘Worthily also did holy *Esther* [...] in ruling her tongue that unruly member [...] she had not let go her integrity’.¹⁸ But MI’s needlework confirms Esther’s integrity through the heroine’s speech and language. The frequency with which Esther is featured in domestic embroidery suggests that other women applauded Esther’s behavior similarly. Ruth Geuter links the popularity of stitched Esthers in Stuart England with the increased frequency of female petitioners during the Civil Wars. Esther serves as a role model ‘to seek redress for personal ills and to make [...] comments directly to Parliament’.¹⁹

A woman’s influence, political and historical, is a clear subject of the Book of Esther and MI drives that point beyond the episode stitched at center.

13 Ibid., 5:3, emphasis ours.

14 Ibid., 8:8.

15 Heywood, *Exemplary Lives*, p. 49

16 Bentley, *Monument of Matrons*, Lampe 7, 149. Bentley refers here to the scene in which Mordecai advises Esther of the danger Haman intends toward the Jews and encourages her to advocate for her people (Esther 4:13–14). Though Mordecai calls Esther to action, the devices by which Haman will be defeated are left entirely to the Queen. The episode closes by punctuating Esther’s authority: ‘So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him’ (v. 17).

17 See Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, pp. 109–190.

18 Ibid., p. 118.

19 Geuter, ‘Embroidered Biblical Narrative and Their Social Context’, p. 65.

In a tiny scene in the lower right corner of the canvas, the needleworker emphasizes Esther's significant engagement with written texts, and suggests the ease with which a queen may displace her king. Key elements of the scene—a royal figure reclining in bed, a very large book—reference Chapter Six, where a sleepless Ahasuerus commands a reading from his 'Book of Records of the Chronicles' (6:1). But in her rendering of the scene, MI swaps Ahasuerus's character for Esther's. The reclining figure wears a crown that matches both queen's and king's, but the figure lacks the facial hair given the king in each of his representations on the needlework. Magnification of the piece reveals no identifiable pin pricks in the satin face; no threads peek out from cheeks, chin, or neck on front or reverse. The lack of facial hair may be the artist's oversight, but the ambiguity of the figure offers several irresistible winks. The ease with which a feminine figure replaces the king's supports the power transfer displayed in the center of the needlework and recalls moments within the narrative when Esther assumes the king's authority by directing his judgement, issuing orders, and writing in his name. In fact, a great irony of the Book of Esther is that the king who announces by formal proclamation that 'every man should bear rule in his own house' never actually does so.²⁰

Most significantly, Esther's presence in the chronicles scene further solidifies the character's engagement with language and heightens her pronounced textual authority. The petition referenced at center emphasizes Esther's spoken words; her presence in this scene underscores her ties to words written. Unlike the king who will have chronicles read to him, Esther herself will document history. In Chapter Eight, another of Esther's petitions will result in more than a dozen references to writing, writers and written commandments. Esther's final description identifies her as one who 'wrote with all authority.'²¹ The narrative establishes her as an essential begetter of texts. The narrator announces that the days in which the Jews overcame Haman are to be 'remembered, and kept throughout every generation' and that it was Esther who 'wrote [...] to confirme the [...] letter of Purim.'²² They are Esther's words to which future generations of readers will be bound; their value is confirmed by the company they keep.

That needlework is the means by which one woman recognizes and celebrates the power of women's words exposes crafted materials as rhetorical spaces, inviting us to recognize the interplay between word and image,

20 *King James Bible*, Esther 1:22.

21 *Ibid.*, 9:29

22 *Ibid.*, 9:29

text and textile.²³ Within her linen borders, MI negotiates the meaning of a woman's story and the representation of her strengths; her work resists the limited way women's histories may be told or feminine virtue understood. In negotiating Esther's agency, MI negotiates her own, not only as another woman who points generations toward things that 'should be remembered'²⁴, but also as one who presses us to question and uncover—down to the stitch or letter—precisely what those things are.

Women and war on stage and in epic

When we turn our attention to the different sorts of archives associated with representations of war, and women's places in (and absences from) them, Daniel Miller's definition of materiality serves as a mechanism to enfold plays, both as texts and as performances, within the parameters of our collective analysis. Miller defines materiality by pointing to the ephemeral and reminds us to consider the large conceptual realm which smaller definitions of 'artifact' occlude.²⁵ Play texts, and the performances for which they operate as markers or monuments, provide one entry into women's associations with war. *Henry 6*, by William Shakespeare (and possibly Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe) dated to the early 1590s and printed in the first folio in 1623, and *A Larum for London*, by George Gascoigne and Thomas Lodge, printed in 1601, provide examples of women's behavior and access to agency across a spectrum. These female characters range from Joan of Arc, who commands armies and strategizes political and military dominance, to the Countess of Auvergne, a French noblewoman, who attempts to capture the valiant English general Talbot, to Lady Champaigne, whom Spanish soldiers almost rape but who persuades the valiant Stump to intervene on her behalf. These staged characters supplied their audiences with examples of women's behavior within the context of war that resonate with the sorts of women who enter literary renderings of war via such epics as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), John Harrington's translation of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591), and versions of the *Hamzamana*

23 Susan Frye outlines the many intersections among women's visual and verbal textualities and suggests that attending to products of both 'presents an alternative way to read canonical literature.' She attributes the popularity of embroidered Esthers to the fact that the narrative offers 'several explicit scenes when a woman's actions and words carried vast political significance.' See Frye, *Pens and Needles*, pp. xvii, 145.

24 *Ibid.*, 9:28

25 Miller, *Materiality: An Introduction*, p. 4.

(1560–1602). These characters in the sixteenth century literary archive help scholars and readers in the twenty-first century recognize the ways in which women's presence is erased and elided from soldiers' sketches of camps from field notes and reports from the field, and also from much military history.²⁶ Andrea Pearson, in her essay for this volume, similarly examines a woman drawn after the fact into a battle scene in a medieval housebook. These women's absences illuminate the constructed nature of the 'historical' archives, which in turn inform this reconsideration of the material realities represented in dramatic stagings, and indeed, across the material artifacts this essay considers.

One category for investigation that results from this juxtaposition of play text, epic, and military field notes, especially in the context of the issues of this chapter of materiality and resistance, emerges from the figure of the spy or the conspirator, which points to the importance of women's perspectives and the spaces to which they have access. The Countess of Auvergne, in *1 Henry VI*, calls attention to this articulation of women's agency. She invites the English super-general Talbot to dine, with the express goal 'that she may boast she hath beheld the man / Whose glory fills the world with loud report'.²⁷ The play quickly alerts the audience that her actual goal is to imprison Talbot and by his destruction bring her own glory.²⁸ Talbot, though, anticipates her plot and brings his army along, which, he notes, is the source of his strength in the first place. With his benevolence and grace, Talbot forgives the Countess on the condition that she feast his army, and ends the conspiracy on a note of reconciliation, as he has planned all along.²⁹ The play here enacts a woman ready to conquer and to weaponize a tool to which she has access—hospitality—to destroy her own, and France's, opponent. Whether Shakespeare revises Jael's story and removes the woman's success in this regard as a way to demonstrate Talbot's superiority as a leader, to undermine the French as a fighting force, or to detract from women's authority is difficult to discern, since the play activates all three trends throughout. Nevertheless, the play stages a woman pragmatically appropriating the means at her disposal to resist an invading enemy; were Talbot not quite so astute, her successful plot would have saved France and ensured her fame.

26 For more on women in warfare in early modern Europe, see Lynn, *Women, Armies, and Warfare*.

27 Shakespeare, *1 Henry VI*, 2.2.41–43.

28 *Ibid.*, 2.3.4–10.

29 *Ibid.*, 2.3.70–80.

This comic turn, with the reconciliation and prospect of a banquet, belies the inherent threats to the countess in this scene and to women associated with war. Nearby armies tend to mean that their property will be destroyed, their stores procured without remission, their bodies violated.³⁰ *Henry VI* continues that theme with its later treatment, in Act 5 Scene 2, of Margaret, daughter of the King of Naples, whom Suffolk would rape and take for his own, until he realizes that he will have more long-term access to her and to her body if he makes a gift of her to King Henry VI. He asks for her agreement and grants the illusion of agency, but as a warrior he notes his 'right' to take her for his own, as the spoils of war.

This dynamic explicitly echoes the less subtle, more provocative message of *A Larum for London*, which opens with Spanish soldiers discussing the beauties of Antwerp and their desire to take it for their own.³¹ The play then emphatically underlines the destruction at work, as Spanish soldiers destroy various citizens and threaten to rape Lady Champaign, wife of the Governor. This play's hero, Stump, pauses before rescuing her from soldiers to comment upon her snobbishness and lavish lifestyle. He encounters two soldiers as they 'begin to strip her', and remarks, 'How now? Two Soldiers ransacking a woman?' He then details her perfidies—she has 'spent as much on Munkeys, Dogs, and Parrets, / As would haue kept ten Soldiers all the yeere' and has 'stop[ped] her nose with her sweete gloues / For feare my smell should have infected her',³² but now she will be 'torne / By lowzie totter'd roagues.' He first advises them merely to rob her, since that should be 'sufficient', but when they persist, he 'drawes his swoord, killes one, and the other flyes'.³³ She offers to reward him with a jewel, but since that will contribute to his own appeal as a target, he refuses. More soldiers enter the scene, including the Spanish leader Alva; they proclaim victory, and her fate, like Antwerp's, is sealed and grim.

The play makes use of Lady Champaigne to underline the vulnerability of those falling under Spanish conquest, argues for England's continuing defense of itself against this sort of 'menace', locates the disruption to property and civility that results from these sorts of invading forces who

30 On billeting and the damages thereof, see Parker, *Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road*, p. 81. On damages by military more generally, especially as represented in art, see Kunzle, *From Criminal to Courtier*. See also Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe*; Sandberg, *War and Conflict*; Edwards et al., *Age of Atrocity*; Lynn, *Women, Armies, and Warfare*; Akkerman, *Invisible Agents*; Ailes, *Courage and Grief*.

31 Gascoigne, *A Larum*, Sig A3–A4.

32 Ibid., sig D1–D1v.

33 Ibid., sig D1–D1v.

will use any excuse to justify their invasions, and generally suggests the need for supporting English efforts to thwart the Spanish and Catholic forces. Set next to *Henry VI*, it reveals the ways in which Talbot and Suffolk as invaders refuse this role, which to some extent elevates the English, albeit more emphatically with Talbot than with Suffolk. This pairing of plays also reveals the ways in which Shakespeare's female characters model women's agency, pragmatism, and refusal to accept English dominance. The Countess's plan to use her castle and her role as hostess to garner his defeat, and the general tendency for men to dismiss women's power, provide her the means to make the attempt to slide under Talbot's defenses.

That the spectacle associated with women's agency is one artifact of these performances emerges in part from the visual materials associated with epic and romance. While such women warriors as Edmund Spenser's Britomart and Ludovico Ariosto's Bradamante, and the figure of the Amazon more generally, enter into critical discussions with relative consistency, these renderings cross cultures and stories and indicate ways in which women's active participation and agency within theaters of war, too, operated across cultures. Connections to the models available from the Hebrew Bible, available within the framework of a culture steeped in Judeo-Christian storytelling practices and authority via Biblical narratives, are perhaps unsurprising.

Links, though, to linguistically disparate and culturally less connected epic traditions such as those in Persia and India suggest that twenty-first century generalizations about women and war need more nuance. A number of these representations appear in a manuscript edition of the *Hamzama*, produced by artists during the reign of Akbar, in the third quarter of the sixteenth century in the Mughal empire. See, for example, 'A Heroine Forcibly Enters a Jail to Liberate a Hero' (Figure 3.2).

John Seyller notes the conventional agency associated with a subset of female characters within the genre of Persian romance: 'Princesses are inevitably beautiful and virtuous, and are the objects of fleeting but honorable romantic attachments (Hamza, for example, marries a Greek princess), but the women who participate in the most dangerous activities are usually their clever handmaidens (see cat. 60, 61, and 66)'.³⁴ This particular image is from a *Hamzanama* manuscript commissioned by Emperor Akbar of the Mughal dynasty in the third quarter of the sixteenth century; as Seyller observes, women's agency emerges on multiple occasions in the narrative and the richly detailed renderings included in this manuscript of fourteen volumes. In this instance, Khurschidchehr wields a sword and assumes

34 Seyller, *Adventures of Hamza*, p. 13.



Figure 3.2: 'A Heroine Forcibly Enters a Jail to Liberate a Hero', Freer Sackler accession S1986.399, Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, www.freersackler.si.edu/object/S1986.399/.

a soldier's dress to rescue Hamza's son Hamid from the jail in which he is being held. Women as agents are not exceptional in this narrative or in that of other epics; they emerge on stage and in the texts and images associated with narratives of war as contributors. Their subsequent erasure and diminishment, especially as part of nineteenth-century historiography complicit with a move to professionalize the military, warrants our continued awareness and skepticism.

Conclusions

Taken together, these material artifacts and these archives complicate notions of women's agency, of public and private space, and suggest that the power of stories to animate and inspire took many guises not immediately discernable to those who seek out more standard articulations of women's resistance to misogynist structures and ideas. Kate Manne defines misogyny 'as serving to uphold patriarchal order, understood as one strand among various similar systems of domination (including racisms, xenophobia, classism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on). Misogyny does this by visiting hostile or adverse social consequences on a certain (more or less) class of girls or women to enforce and police social norms that are gendered either in theory (i.e., content) or in practice (i.e., norm enforcement mechanisms).'³⁵ It is clear, however, from examination of women's goods, how possible it is to maintain an illusion of compliance while practicing subversion. In writing on material culture, anthropologist Daniel Miller refers to 'the humility' of objects, suggesting that much of the power of material cultures lies in its ability to go unnoticed, and yet to profoundly affect our impressions. The artifact's 'affinity to the unconscious' enables 'perspectives arising from different social positions to exist concurrently without coming into overt conflict'.³⁶ The different instances and artifacts we point to in this chapter, of habits, of craft, of story, do just that; they demonstrate some of the ways that women—and men—maneuver to make the systems themselves more capacious. They also demonstrate the value of looking to these expanded archives and to material artifacts to illuminate aspects of women's lives and works beyond the narratives available from more traditional archival records and texts.

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35 Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, p. 13.

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Part II

Confronting Power

4. Confronting Women's Actions in History

Female Crown Fief Holders in Denmark

Grethe Jacobsen

Abstract

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, noble women in Denmark (and Norway and Sweden) could be found holding the office of crown fief holder, that is, an individual who administered part of the royal estate, ranging from a few manors and villages to an entire county. They thus held the power and authority that came with that office, something that appears unique to Scandinavia among non-royal women, but which was ignored by later historians. This chapter tells the story of two noblewomen in sixteenth-century Denmark, sisters-in-law who confronted each other in a dispute over a crown fief they had inherited jointly—a dispute that was also affected by several more hidden agendas, including that of a king in love.

Keywords: women and power; women and authority; women office-holders; Danish women—early modern period; Denmark—sixteenth century

This chapter deals with confrontation on several levels. It opens with a story of two Danish noblewomen confronting each other over a property dispute, with the result that one woman was removed from her office as a (female) crown fief holder, only to be succeeded by the other woman. There is, however, more to the story than simply a disagreement between two women. It is also a story of love confronting political norms. Ultimately, on a more theoretical plane, it is a story that is familiar to all of us studying women's history—the confrontation between the perceived role of women and the actual role of women during the early modern period.

The story begins in December 1560, when the king ordered six noblemen to intervene in and settle a controversy over property involving two noblewomen, Lady Eline Gøye and Lady Anne Rosenkrantz. Half a year later, on 12 July 1561, Lady Eline Gøye received a letter from the king, ordering her to hand over the crown fief that she had administered for eleven years after her husband's death in 1550. He had held the crown fief for the previous ten years, so the manor that came with it had been Eline's home for 21 years. Eline had to hand over the account books, cadasters, and other documents concerning the crown fief to the royal chancellery, and in return she would receive whatever money the crown owed her. She was thereby removed from office and, one month later, Anne Rosenkrantz—her sister-in-law and opponent in the dispute—was installed as holder of the same crown fief. This did nothing to improve the already severely strained relationship between the two sisters-in-law.

Eline was the daughter of one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Denmark during the 1520s and 1530s, Mogens Gøye (d. 1544). He had seventeen children from two marriages and left enough property for each of his adult heirs (or their heirs) to receive one or two manors, as well as land. However, in accordance with Danish inheritance law, the entire estate was divided into shares according to the number of heirs, with sons receiving two shares and daughters one share, a division of inheritance that was unique to the Nordic countries.¹ Primogeniture did not exist in medieval and sixteenth-century Danish law. (This was introduced in the late seventeenth century after the advent of absolutism.) In the earlier Danish inheritance system, all heirs would receive one or two shares according to gender and, more importantly, each share had to be of absolutely equal value, even if that meant that a manor with adjoining lands had to be split between two or more heirs. This is what happened in the case of the manor of Clausholm, which Eline and her brother, Albrecht, jointly inherited. They both resided there with their spouses, when they were not administering their crown fiefs. As long as Albrecht lived, Eline, Albrecht, and his wife, Anne Rosenkrantz, managed to get along, but when Albrecht died, in 1558, Eline and Anne each began a remodeling and rebuilding program in their respective portions of the manor. Since the purpose of these programs appeared, at least in part, to be a campaign of mutual harassment, this was the reason the king called upon the six noblemen to intervene in December 1560. The dispute involved 'the buildings, the courtyard, walls and moats on Clausholm, lands in forests and fields and other things belonging to

1 Jónsson, 'Døtres arvelod i perioden 1160–1860'.

the property'.² The six noblemen did negotiate a settlement, and although Eline was very dissatisfied with it, she could do nothing about it. She complained to her friend and patron, the dowager queen Dorothea, but the latter could do nothing but offer her sympathy.³

A king in love

On the surface, this is a story of two women from the upper ranks of society confronting each other over property—hardly an unusual story in early modern Denmark, or elsewhere—but there is more to the story than two women fighting. It is also the story of a king in love and the political demands concerning his marriage, demands that did not include permission to marry his beloved. King Frederik II had ascended to the throne in 1559 and shortly before had fallen in love with one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting, a young noblewoman named Anne Hardenberg. She was engaged to be married—to a young nobleman, Oluf Mouridsen Krognos, who was none other than Eline's son. The king's plans for marriage met strong opposition from his mother, the dowager queen Dorothea, as well as from his sister, the Electress Anna of Saxony, who both wanted him to marry a princess. The Danish nobility was also against the marriage because it would give one noble family, the Hardenbergs, an advantage over all the others, which might upset the cohesion of the noble elite and thereby shift the balance of power between the high nobility and the king, who shared political power during this period.⁴

It should be noted that Anne Hardenberg herself was not the problem. Judging from the letters of the nobility, she was generally well-liked and she remained a lady-in-waiting to the dowager queen, who was genuinely fond of her, as was the Electress Anna. It was instead her status as a non-royal person that caused the confrontation between the king's desire to marry her and the views of his mother, sister, and the nobility concerning what constituted a proper royal marriage. This situation aggravated the already tense relationship between the king and his mother (who, as mentioned above, was also a good friend of Eline Gøye). Frederik refused to marry as long as his mother was alive and kept courting Anne for more than thirteen years. When the dowager

2 *Kancelliets Brevbøger*, 13 December 1560.

3 *Breve ... Herluf Trolle og Birgitte Gjøe*, II, pp. 26–27.

4 Grinder-Hansen, *Frederik 2.*, pp. 146–158; Anemette S. Christensen, 'Anne Hardenberg (–1589)', *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon*. Online edition: <http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/174/origin/170/query/hardenberg/> (accessed 25 July 2020).

queen died in October 1571, the Electress Anna succeeded where her mother had failed, namely in talking her brother into meeting with some suitable princesses, and in 1572, King Frederik married his young cousin Sofie.

We know much less about Anne Hardenberg's own feelings towards the king. She apparently broke the engagement with Eline's son but she never became the mistress of the king; moreover, she also tried to talk the king into marrying a princess. In 1572, shortly before King Frederik married, Anne wrote his secretary to ask whether she should return the jewelry that the king had given her during their long courtship. She was allowed to keep it at the king's order. After the royal wedding, Anne expressed deep relief in a letter to Eline's sister,⁵ and half a year later, she married her former fiancé, Eline's son Oluf. Eline, however, had died in 1563 and so never experienced her son's happiness, which, alas, lasted barely six months. In June 1573, Oluf died aged 38, while Anne lived as a widow for another sixteen years, administering her late husband's property. They had no children, so she could not inherit his lands, but in his will he had stipulated that she should enjoy the property for as long as she lived.

The impact of the king's love for Anne on his decision about the crown fief is impossible to verify, of course, as nothing is left in the sources about this. However, it is not difficult to assume that this was one possible reason why, in the early years of his courtship of Anne Hardenberg, he would want to remove the mother of his rival from her office, particularly because that woman was also a good friend of the king's own mother who was so much against his plans to marry Anne.

Danish crown fief administration

Eline Gøye was, as mentioned, a crown fief holder and as such wielded public power and authority, something that was normally reserved for royal women as queens regnant or regents. Other than crown fief holders in Denmark and Norway, and Sweden until Gustav Vasa became king in 1524, I have not come across non-royal women holding public office anywhere else in Europe.⁶

The crown fief administration of sixteenth-century Denmark was an instrument for administering crown lands.⁷ Crown property was divided

5 *Breve ... Herluf Trolle og Birgitte Gjøe*, II, pp. 187–191.

6 The following is based on my forthcoming book, *Magtens kvinder*.

7 The essential work on sixteenth-century crown fief administration is Erslev, *Konge og lensmand*. Unless otherwise noted, the following discussion is based on Erslev.

into a varying number of crown fiefs of different sizes: some, which later historians termed 'major crown fiefs', included a county as well as a royal castle or fortress, while smaller crown fiefs, later defined as 'minor crown fiefs', could be anything from a small number of farms and a manor to several villages and manors. The holder of a crown fief administered the property and collected ordinary and extraordinary taxes, fees, and services imposed on the subjects of the Crown. In addition, the holder maintained law and order by keeping an eye on how the local courts functioned. Holders of major crown fiefs were also obliged to provide soldiers and equipment in the event of war or attack on the kingdom.

Becoming the holder of a crown fief happened in several ways: as surety for loans to the crown, as reward for services to the crown, and as a regular office. The remark in the letter dismissing Eline Gøye indicates that Eline and her late husband, who was also very wealthy, had received the crown fief at least partly in return for lending money to the king. Conditions for holding a crown fief took three major forms: by account, by fees, and by service. A holder of a crown fief by account received a fixed wage for administering the crown fief and in return surrendered all income received to the royal treasury, subtracting all documented expenses. A holder of the crown fief by fees paid an annual fixed sum to the crown and could keep all income from the crown fief, but in return had to pay all expenses incurred in administering the fief. Eline held her crown fief by fees, as had her husband. A holder of the crown fief by service was obliged to muster armed soldiers in times of war as well as entertain the king and his officials whenever they resided in the area, but could otherwise manage the crown fief as if it were his or her private property. Anne Rosenkrantz held the crown fief under this condition, as she was obliged to provide four fully equipped soldiers and horses but did not have to pay any fees. Right before she received the crown fief, she had also lent a sum of money to the king.⁸

The administrative system of crown fiefs also became a central institution in the secular exercise of power in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Denmark. Controlling who received positions as holders of crown fiefs and which form these would take (account, fees, or service) was a decisive factor in the exercise of power during the late medieval and early modern era. Thus each of the two secular powers of the period, king and aristocracy, strove to control who became crown fief holders. In 1449, the aristocracy, through the Council of the Realm, was strong enough to dictate the rules for the distribution of crown fiefs in the coronation

8 *Kancelliets Brevbøger*, 5 August 1561.

charter of King Christian I, namely that no crown fief should be occupied without the consent of the Council of the Realm.⁹ This became the rule for succeeding kings, including Frederik II. As with all power relations, the balance of power was never stable for an extended period, yet overall the aristocracy generally enjoyed greater power than the king until the early seventeenth century.

Not all members of the nobility enjoyed the benefits of the crown fief system, however. A small group of noble families, the magnates, exercised control over the distribution of crown fiefs through their male representatives in the Council of the Realm. This group of magnate families was composed of women as well as men, which meant that noble women could also share in the benefits of the group by receiving crown fiefs. Both men and women appear as holders of crown fiefs, including those created after the Protestant Reformation reached Denmark in 1536, whereupon the lands, buildings, and services formerly owned and claimed by bishops, monasteries, and convents passed into royal control.¹⁰ However, as in all patriarchal societies, there was a 'glass ceiling': although they could acquire crown fiefs, women could not become members of the Council of the Realm.

Female crown fief holders in sixteenth century Denmark

The number of female crown fief holders was not insignificant. One hundred and eight-nine noblewomen, primarily from the magnate group, held crown fiefs during the sixteenth century. As some of the women held more than one fief during their lifetime, the total number of fiefs held by women is 293. Overall, this corresponds to 14.7 percent of all crown fief holdings, with women holding 10.8 percent of major crown fiefs, 17.8 percent of minor crown fiefs, and 16.1 percent of former monastic fiefs (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Danish crown fief holdings by gender

	Men	Women	Total	Women as % of total
<i>Major crown fiefs</i>	745	90	835	10.8%
<i>Minor crown fiefs</i>	775	168	943	17.8%
<i>Monastic institutions</i>	182	35	217	16.1%
TOTAL	1702	293	1995	14.7%

9 *Den danske rigslovgivning, 1397–1513*, p. 102 (§ 4, 8)

10 Jacobsen, 'Monasteries'.

The longest a woman held a major crown fief was 37 years; another woman held a minor crown fief for 39 years and a third woman had a monastic crown fief for 26 years. The average length for women holding a crown fief was 4 years for major crown fiefs, 9.8 years for minor fiefs, and 7.7 years for monastic fiefs. We are not, then, talking about a widow closing her deceased husband's account books and handing over his crown fief within a year—there are many examples of that, too, of course—but about women making up a small but significant part of royal administration, representing the king in their crown fief.

In addition, while 69 percent of the crown fiefs were held by widows who had succeeded their husbands, as was the case of Eline Gøye, 31 percent were held by women who were given crown fiefs personally, either as widows, as was the case of Anne Rosenkrantz, or in a few cases (I count eight) even as unmarried women. Some of these unmarried crown fief holders did later marry, but they kept the crown fief in their own name. Among all the women who held crown fiefs, 40 percent had been married to members of the Council of the Realm, 46 percent had fathers who had been members of the Council of the Realm, and 32 percent had mothers who had been crown fief holders. In other words, a female crown fief holder would often have close family ties to other female crown fief holders as well as to the Council of the Realm, and she would in all events have role models when she became a crown fief holder.

My explanation for this somewhat unusual role of women holding formal power and authority, despite not being queens or dowager queens, is that in order to keep control of the crown fief administration, and thereby control the resources of the realm, the magnate group preferred to fill a vacant position as crown fief holder by choosing a woman from among their own families whenever there were no suitable male candidate. We can see this phenomenon clearly during the Nordic Seven Years' War (1563–1570), when the number of women who received crown fiefs rose quite visibly. The war took a heavy toll among the nobles, including magnates, and women were appointed to vacant positions.

This would also explain why the deposition of Eline Gøye and the conferral of the crown fief upon her sister-in-law were accepted by the Council of the Realm without problems. Each woman could equally be counted as 'one of our own', as both the Gøye and Rosenkrantz families were part of the magnate group, so the group's combined power was not threatened by the change.

This public role of noble women in sixteenth-century Denmark was largely ignored by contemporaries and by later historians, or mentioned only in

passing. The contemporary image of a noblewoman's proper role emerges largely from printed Danish funeral sermons, which were widely read.¹¹ The emphasis in funeral sermons was not on providing a true biography of the deceased, but presenting him or her as a true Christian (Protestant, of course) in life and death, as a model for others. Of the fourteen extant funeral sermons for women from 1565 to 1600, five were for women who had served as holders of royal crown fiefs, and all five had held their crown fief for longer than a year. For four of them, however, their career as crown fief holder is completely ignored. In only one case does the preacher refer to the woman as a public authority, namely in the funeral sermon of one of our protagonists, Anne Rosenkrantz, who died in 1589.

The preacher mentions that, in addition to other virtues, Anne possessed the virtue of wisdom, through which she could 'rule in this secular world. Because God had assigned her to be a public authority, then he had also endowed her with the virtues that a good official ought to have'. But—the preacher continues—her duties were often 'man-like and not the business of women [...] And one could not find many who possessed what God had bestowed on her'.¹² In other words, according to the funeral sermon, the case of Anne Rosenkrantz was exceptional and she succeeded primarily due to her masculine virtues. But as we have seen, Anne was far from an exception.

This brief comment is the only mention in a funeral sermon of a noblewoman holding office, and it does not give details about what Anne's public duties were. In contrast, all the funeral sermons for men describe their public careers. Some are outlined in a cursory manner, while others are described in more detail but—and this is the point here—all noblemen are depicted as public officials if they were crown fief holders or held other offices. This habit of overlooking female crown fief holders and their actions has continued in historical writings and research, making it an example of another type of confrontation, namely that between the actual historical experience of women and the perceived historical experience, handed down by male historians.

Another twist in the confrontation between the perceived role and actual roles of women comes when we examine the role of Eline's second husband, Vincents Juel, whom she married in 1559. He was a nobleman, younger than her and from a good (but not magnate-level) family. After he married Eline, his name appears in letters sent to crown fief holders, as if he has taken over her crown fief, but he never received a formal letter of crown fief holding,

11 The following is based on Jacobsen, 'Danske ligprædikener', unless otherwise noted.

12 Scavenius, *En Lijgpredicken*, E ii v–E iii r.

and the royal letter ordering Eline to surrender her office does not mention him at all. He is mentioned in the letter to the six noblemen concerning the property fight between Eline and her sister-in-law, and later in some documents in which he deeds some of his wife's property to the king in return for some other property. Here he is acting on behalf of his wife, which is the traditional role of a husband in accordance with Danish contemporary law.

In 1560, Eline's brother-in-law made a list of his in-laws and on this list, Eline's husband's name is written instead of hers, but in another note by the same brother-in-law to the king, he writes that 'these good [i.e. noble] men have property in Holbo and Try counties' and among the 'good men' listed is 'Lady Eline Gøye'.¹³ So Eline's contemporaries saw her as the wife of Vincent Juel but also as a crown fief holder and property owner in her own name. (Danish law, incidentally, was rooted in continental Roman and Germanic law and while circumscribing the independent agency of a married woman, never erased her legal personality as did common law in England.) Vincent Juel did eventually receive a crown fief, but not until after Eline's death and after holding military office and acquitting himself well during the Nordic Seven Years' War.

This dual identification—as a wife, but also as an individual—raises another question, which we cannot answer but should at least consider: did these women see themselves as belonging primarily to a gender or to a class? Judging from the funeral sermons (which all concern persons from the high nobility), women as daughters and wives were expected to be submissive to fathers and husbands because of their gender, but they should definitely not behave submissively towards their children, their servants, and their peasants. In these relationships, the women are praised for being firm and protective, and even for being good 'lords' to their servants and peasants. I will venture to say that this particular group of women from the highest levels of society was most likely more conscious of class than of gender. The experience of some magnate women serving as crown fief holders, and thus exercising power and authority over both men and women, would have strengthened this rank-based sense of identity.

Conclusion

This seemingly ordinary dispute over property between two sisters-in-law in sixteenth-century Denmark turns out to contain several layers

¹³ *Breve ... Herluf Trolle og Birgitte Gjøe*, I, p. 60.

of confrontations: most obviously that between the women, but also the confrontation between the ideas and notions of later generations of historians and storytellers as to what women could or couldn't do, on the one hand, and on the other, the actual lives and experiences of women in the past. Women made up 15 percent of all crown fief holders during the sixteenth century, though contemporaries largely ignored this, and later historians forgot or were unable to imagine that non-royal women held formal power.

With the introduction of Absolutism in Denmark in 1660, the female crown fief holders disappeared. The absolute monarch now appointed administrators of crown property without the Council of the Realm, and monarchs preferred men from the bourgeoisie. Within a few decades, the administration of the country was overhauled and women with authority disappeared from Danish society. A few women, notably dowager queens and ladies at court, could still hold (limited) political power, but women exercising formal power was a thing of the past—and a quickly forgotten past.

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5. Divisive Speech in Divided Times?

Women and the Politics of Slander, Seditious Utterances, and Informing during the English Revolution

Caroline Boswell

Abstract

This essay delves into a series of court records and examinations against provocative speeches, seditious utterances, and incidents in which women engaged in the politics of civil war and revolution in mid-seventeenth century England. It looks at the potential potency ascribed to women's disaffected and well-affected speech, and how reported speech was tied to larger political discourses about honesty, order, and affection in a world turned upside down. While early modern women often deployed tested 'weapons of the weak' to navigate power within interpersonal relations, civil war and revolution produced new discourses and conceptions of loyalty, order, and honesty that informed women's engagement with the politics of slander, sedition, and informing within urban communities.

Keywords: slander; sedition; informing; English revolution; female speech

Following a series of disconcerting skirmishes amongst elites, Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell's Council of State released a new ordinance against challenges, duels, and 'all provocations thereunto' in June 1654. The Council expressed concerns about those who continued to pursue 'private Quarrels' that threatened 'all good order and government' after the civil wars. In addition to its ban on challenges and duels, the ordinance criminalized the 'disgraceful, provoking words or gestures' responsible for most clashes.¹ With this move, the Council articulated the power that quarrelling had to solidify and foment divisions within a nation recovering from civil war. Though it crafted the

¹ *Acts and Ordinances (A & O)*, vol. II, pp. 937–939.

legislation to quell conflicts within the upper echelons of English society, the ordinance was taken up by some everyday litigants concerned about the consequences of provoking behavior. Did pervasive anxieties over the threat revolution posed to the social order alter perceptions of worrisome speech? While scores of studies of slander and defamation tell us how early modern men and women navigated social relations through gendered insults and gestures, we still know relatively little about the relationship between divisive speech and female agency within the context of the civil wars and revolution.

In its investigation of the politics of everyday life, this essay explores the relationship between women's speech and the perceptions and practice of slandering, speaking sedition, and informing within English urban communities during the 1640s and 1650s. By delving into a series of depositions from Colchester and Exeter session courts, it considers how anxieties over civil war and revolution influenced how women and the courts deployed female speech to investigate what made men and women honest, well-affected, and orderly. While examinations from the 1640s and 1650s reveal significant continuity in their descriptions of troublesome speech, at times they also detail how civil war and revolution further destabilized normative concepts of manhood and womanhood and fueled contested visions of what it meant to be a loyal subject. These fissures empowered those who used disaffected and dangerous speech, but also those who regulated it to prescribe acceptable patterns of behavior within their communities. As utterers and regulators, women consciously and unconsciously engaged shifting notions of patriarchal authority and unease over gender and social inversion.² Speech that threatened to upend hierarchies or questioned loyalty, allegiance, and affection relied on the identities and emotions of those involved—including the officials charged with extracting and recording these narratives. These cases, situated within their own contexts, suggest that increased anxieties over political authority, reinforced by the rhetoric of a world turned upside down, emerged in female speech that engaged these changing dynamics to promote or deny women's agency.

Slander, sedition, and the politics of informing

Early modern English women found speech to be a powerful tool to navigate social relations and everyday power structures.³ Normative conceptions of

2 Walker, *Crime, Gender and the Social Order*, p. 212.

3 See, for example, Amussen, *An Ordered Society*; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*; Freist, *Governed by Opinion*; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*; Ingram, 'Law, Litigants, and the Construction of "Honour"';

womanhood articulated in prescriptive literature required women to remain docile and quiet, limit their speech, and refrain from gossiping and rumor-mongering. Subordinates who violated these prescribed norms were thought to undermine hierarchical and patriarchal values. Yet subordinate women and men exercised speech to navigate interpersonal relations and power dynamics within and between households, among neighbors, and within their communities.⁴ The uneasy relationship between normative ideals and linguistic practice enabled women to engage prescriptive discourses in speech acts that promoted their agency.

We know less about whether women's use of speech acts in interpersonal or communal relations altered within the larger context of civil war divisions and revolution. In 2005, Alex Shepard noted that there was a general trend amongst social historians of early modern England to study the period from 1560 to 1640—a time of economic and social dislocation—and to end their research right before the outbreak of war. Social historians had paid little attention to the civil wars and revolution, despite it being an area 'ripe for research'.⁵ By peering into communities within civil war and interregnum England, we may locate instances where women continued to use speech to position themselves by contesting the honesty of others. Turning to London and its environs in particular, we know that, prior to the revolution, women with adequate resources frequently looked to London's consistory court to prosecute slander cases.⁶ This court provided merely one of several avenues to pursue and resolve interpersonal tensions in the metropolis, but its loss undoubtedly left some women scrambling for new mechanisms to navigate conflicts.

When Lord Protector Cromwell and his councilors released the ordinance against challenges, duels, and all provocations in June 1654, little did they know that it would be taken up by a diverse range of men and women across Middlesex county.⁷ Given the popularity of London's consistory court and the evidence of increased concerns over women's 'unruliness',

Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England*; Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England*.

4 Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, pp. 10–20; Amussen and Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England*, p. 16; Freist, *Governed by Opinion*, pp. 6, 282–284; Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions*, p. 119; Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, pp. 9–11; Walker, *Crime, Gender and the Social Order*, pp. 9–12.

5 Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen', p. 286.

6 Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*; Gowing, 'Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London'.

7 *A & O*, vol. II, pp. 937–939. For a detailed examination of this ordinance and its prosecution in the Middlesex sessions, see Boswell, 'Provoking Disorder'.

it is unsurprising to find that litigants and officials around the London metropolis exploited this new legislation.⁸ The ordinance's targeting of conflict and provocations—verbal and gestural—heavily influenced its implementation within the Middlesex court. Many of the cases prosecuted centered on 'provoking' behavior that questioned normative social and gender relations. The Protectorate's anti-dueling legislation provided a new tool that transformed how some litigants and the court reported and defined interpersonal conflicts.

Given the origins of the ordinance—and the image of manly swashbuckling it conjures to mind—it is intriguing that women made up a significant proportion of the accused. During the first year of its implementation, women accounted for roughly half of those accused of provoking language or gestures in the Middlesex sessions, and slightly *over* half of those bound by recognizance. While petty criminals were regularly bound by recognizance to appear before the court, justices often bound suspects by recognizance to avoid filing an indictment. Binding by recognizance could resolve disputes without recourse to costly, time-consuming legal action.⁹ The number of women bound by recognizance for provoking words aligns with other studies that indicate women were more frequently prosecuted by recognizance.¹⁰ Unlike breach of the peace cases, several recognizances taken against women who provoked their neighbors included the alleged incriminating language or gestures articulated, along with the usual formulaic legalese. Records detail a series of examples of women using the language of sexual insult to attack another woman's common fame or a husband's manhood. William Riley prosecuted Anne Soames for jeering that he was a rogue who brought his wife to the tavern simply to pimp her out. Marie Peacock was similarly accused of uttering 'provoking words and gestures' at Marie Harrison and her husband. Peacock allegedly labeled Harrison a 'Baud', and told her husband that Harrison was 'a Bitch'.¹¹ The steady run of cases against women who provoked their neighbors using insults that undermined gender relations gives further credence to historians' claims that civil war heightened anxiety over the potency of female speech acts.¹²

8 Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*.

9 Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, p. 95.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 207–216; King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England*, p. 200; Walker, *Crimes, Gender and the Social Order*, pp. 4–5.

11 London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), MJ/SR/1132 R. 149 (23 October 1654); MJ/SR/1129 R. 275 (20 September 1654).

12 Walker, *Crime, Gender, and the Social Order*, p. 99; Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, pp. 139–140.

The quick and broad adoption of the ordinance against provocations in the Middlesex courts appears to have been rather unusual. There is scant evidence from the Exeter and Colchester courts that litigants and authorities manipulated this ordinance to arbitrate everyday tussles between poorer and middling neighbors, and this pattern holds in other county quarter sessions courts. Further research into interpersonal squabbles pursued via civil suits in courts such as the Common Pleas or the King's Bench may help historians better understand how prospective litigants navigated the closure of ecclesiastical courts during the 1640 and 1650s.¹³

The politics of slander and its regulation that infused interpersonal conflicts also permeated women's engagement with seditious and scandalous speech. Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that women uttered seditious words, even if they were prosecuted for it less frequently than men.¹⁴ In spite of the exhortations against loud and impertinent women in conduct literature, women engaged in gossip, rumor-mongering, and seditious conversations. Ballads, plays, and legal records are merely a few of the genres that capture elements of oral culture where women expressed views about politics within their households and communities.¹⁵ The weight of a woman's speech was dependent on the motivations, dispositions, and identities of the speaker and those of her audience. When they spoke or reported sedition, women balanced the multiple identities that intersected in definitions of loyal and well-affected subjects and neighbors during the 1640s and 1650s. The gravity of their speech was deeply situated not only within the immediate contexts and local customs where it was uttered, heard, and re-told, but also within the larger social, cultural, and economic force fields that informed the potency of the act.¹⁶

As reporters of seditious and scandalous behavior, women's voices could also gain authority despite their subordinate status. While informing might limit the subversive potential of radical speech, it was also one of the few 'forms of agency' that women could use to influence the politics of civil war and revolution in their communities.¹⁷ Occupation, allegiance, and

13 See, for example, Brooks, *Pettifoggers and Vipers*; Brooks, 'Interpersonal Conflicts and Social Tension', pp. 357–364.

14 See, for example, Sharp, 'Popular Political Opinion in England', p. 14; Harris, 'Introduction', pp. 18–20.

15 See, for example, Capp, *When Gossips Meet*; Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*; Freist, *Governed by Opinion*; Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior*; Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*; Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule'; McShane, 'Political Street Songs and Singers'.

16 Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity, and the Limits of Popular Agency', pp. 43–44.

17 Ibid; Weil, *A Plague of Informers*, pp. 23–24.

interpersonal histories infused women's examinations and their plausibility before urban magistrates.¹⁸ The existence of these contingencies, not to mention the problematic nature of the records themselves, questions whether we can make any claims about the agency of women's speech in mid-seventeenth century England.¹⁹ The remainder of this essay will consider how concerns over social and gender relations, patriarchal authority, and disaffection that emerge in examination narratives could promote and denigrate women's ability to engage in the politics of civil war and revolution within their communities.

Bad patriarchs and unruly women: The politics of women's reported speech

Most studies of sexual slander during the civil war examine how parliamentarians and royalists employed gender inversion to malign their enemies in printed rhetoric.²⁰ The representations of unruly women and cuckolded husbands that filled pages of civil war pamphlets drew on popular insult language and shaming rituals men and women exercised to uphold normative social and gender relations. Because authority was gendered and hierarchical, these labels threatened to undermine the authority of those men who violated concepts of manhood and the patriarchal household.

Yet we also know that historians have uncovered how unsteady gender relations truly were. Though England was clearly a patriarchal society, with authority resting with male heads of household, familial relations were 'reciprocal' as well as 'hierarchical'.²¹ Male authority was bound by expectations that men run their households with affection and care, provide economic support, and ensure order among its inhabitants. In practice, husbands shared significant responsibilities with their wives, who helped manage households and supplemented their income. Laboring men also had alternate conceptions of manhood untethered from the patriarchal household. These ambiguities informed tensions in gender relations, which, historians argue, were 'acute' during the early modern period.²² As Ann Hughes has claimed, the upheaval of the mid-seventeenth century was

18 Weil, 'Matthew Smith versus the "Great Men"', p. 233.

19 Dolan, *True Relations*, pp. 123–127.

20 See, for example, Underdown, 'The Man in the Moon'; McElligott, 'The Politics of Sexual Libel'; McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*, pp. 45–62; Peacey, "'Hot and Eager in Courtship'".

21 Wrightson, 'Politics of the Parish', p. 15; Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit, and Patriarchy', pp. 97–104.

22 Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen', pp. 283–284.

'bound to raise questions about family structures and proper relationships between men and women'.²³ Civil war further destabilized normative conceptions of male patriarchal authority, which led to heightened concerns over male and female behaviors that rejected legitimizing codes of conduct.

The following section will delve into narratives contained within examinations from Colchester and Exeter session courts that describe women who engaged with these tropes to consider whether such words may have been spoken—or recorded—to provide the utterances with heightened authority or agency. Women's speech within these examinations not only explored unsteady conceptions of the 'bad patriarch' and the 'woman on top', but also fluid concepts of affection, loyalty, and order during moments of political crisis. At first glance, urban sessions courts may seem an odd place to investigate female speech and divisive politics. Similar to county quarter sessions, many urban courts prosecuted a variety of felonies and misdemeanors, including theft, breaking and entering, regulatory infractions, offenses against the peace, and, at times, rape and murder cases.²⁴ Mayors and aldermen administered the courts, which meant that magistrates could significantly influence the implementation of justice within their town.²⁵ Some borough and city courts had relatively extensive powers. These courts shared criminal jurisdiction with the quarter sessions and assize courts, and, when they had an official recorder, they had the authority to prosecute felonies and even some capital cases.²⁶ Both the Colchester and Exeter sessions had considerable authority to prosecute cases in the seventeenth century, and evidence indicates that women were involved in litigation at higher rates in urban sessions courts.²⁷ Peter King has suggested that accessibility and leniency enhanced the likelihood that women would be prosecuted in borough courts, and, when possible, greater numbers of women featured as both complainants and offenders when prosecuting by recognizance.²⁸

Partisan divides that permeated corporate and community politics in battleground cities emerge in pre-trial examinations, which survive in the records of the Exeter and Colchester sessions. Several historians of women and gender have argued that court records, particularly depositions, offer

23 Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, p. 1.

24 Sharpe, *Crime in England*, p. 35; Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, pp. 6–8.

25 Brooks, *Pettifoggers and Vipers of the Commonwealth*, p. 99.

26 Baker, 'Criminal Courts and Procedure at Common Law', p. 30.

27 See Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp. 13–14.

28 King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England*, pp. 197–200; Sharpe, *Crime in England*, p. 35; Shoemaker, *Prosecution and Punishment*, pp. 214–215.

exceptional insight into early modern women's experiences.²⁹ However, these and other scholars have problematized their use as both evidence of historical events and as texts that illuminate early modern mentalities. No one has done so as thoroughly as Frances Dolan, in her searing critique of historians' half-hearted recognition of the problem in *True Relations*.³⁰ Her work has rightly influenced how historians engage with depositions as 'fictive' mediated narratives, but several historians argue that the collaborative and relative nature of depositions does not necessarily bar their use in studies of popular mentalities.³¹ Examinations, constructed to support legal processes, contextualize the expression of language and narratives that deponents, clerks, and magistrates believed might promote or prevent certain outcomes. Popular knowledge of the law suggests that those who gave testimony were well able to understand and navigate legal frameworks and officials' expectations.³² Women who gave examinations in response to male authorities could engage a variety of competing popular discourses and legal formulae in their statements. Speech that comes to us refracted through legal examinations tells us something of the concepts early modern people used to fashion authoritative accounts and to denigrate those whose views or agency clashed with their own.³³ Examining the very complexity of examination narratives can shed light on how women, through the courts, engaged with popular concerns over gender and social inversion, disorder, and disloyalty within their communities and the nation.

The bad patriarch

In June 1645, just weeks after the bloody battle of Naseby, a young female servant gave a gut-wrenching testimony before five male authorities in Colchester. In the examination of Frances Evans, we find a carefully recorded narrative that details, in the third person, how Evans' master, John Andrew, repeatedly forced her to have sex with him when she would have been around twelve or thirteen years old. It began in January 1644 on a day when her

29 See, for example, Walker, *Crime and the Social Order*, pp. 3–4; Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, p. 19; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp. 8–9; Gaskill, 'Reporting Murder', p. 2.

30 Dolan, *True Relations*, esp. Chapter 4; Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*.

31 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*, pp. 8–9, 26; Harvey, 'What Mary Toft Felt', pp. 37–38; Amussen and Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England*, pp. 30–31.

32 Herrup, *The Common Peace*, p. 68; Walter, 'The English People and the English Revolution', p. 174.

33 Herrup, *The Common Peace*, p. 67; Stretton, *Women Waging Law*, pp. 18–19; Walker, *Crime, Gender and the Social Order*, pp. 7–8.

mistress was away at church. Andrew allegedly called Evans to his bedside, where he ‘told her that’ if she did not go to bed with him, ‘he would pull her lymbe from lymbe’.³⁴ The text further claims that two months later, when Andrew’s wife went to ‘watch’ with Goodwife Austen, he forced Evans to lie with him again. After this episode, Andrew regularly had ‘carnal knowledge’ of Evans on Wednesdays when his wife was at church, and, on Saturdays, when she went to the market.³⁵

Evans’ examination offers a narrative of a household undermined by an unrestrained and tyrannical patriarch. Though it recounts how Evans engaged in illicit sex with her master, the constructed narrative portrays her and her mistress in a sympathetic light. Andrew, on the other hand, is represented as violent, uncontrolled, and profane. Andrew’s wife is described as a model of womanhood—a mistress who attends church, engages in household duties, and provides support and fellowship to women in her neighborhood. Evans, meanwhile, is presented as a victim who attempted to deflect her master’s assaults by reasoning with him. In the examination, Evans reported that she expressed fears about getting pregnant. The text states that Andrew retorted that she was too young and it would only be in two or three years hence that he might ‘enter her body’.³⁶ Elements of the narrative also suggest that the young Evans and her audience constructed her story with great care. The text provides a particularly vivid and explicit discussion of the sexual assault, which was unusual in most rape cases, though it happened more often in cases involving children.³⁷ In the sentence describing Evans’ first accusation of Andrew forcibly having sex with her, the clerk revised the text. These revisions may have been made after the statement was read back to Evans, or in response to questions posed by the authorities present.³⁸ The multivocal narrative depicts an innocent, terrorized female servant who suffered under the rule of her immoral master—a bad patriarch, a violent man who exploited the ritual life cycle of a dutiful wife to assault his servant, whom he was expected to protect.

In many ways Evans’ examination depicts a crime that appears to be wholly removed from the context of England’s bloody civil war. But read closely, we can see how the political conflict emerges within the narrative. Parts of the examination suggest that the violent realities of war intersected

34 Essex Record Office (ERO) Chelmsford, D/B 5 Sb2/7 (22 June 1645).

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Walker, ‘Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England’, pp. 6–7.

38 For information on pre-trial processes, see Herrup, *The Common Peace*, p. 88; Cusack, *Everyday English*, p. 92.

with the violence of the master against his servant. When describing the assault, it states that Andrew consistently laid siege to Evans until she felt 'something prick her' and 'blood came from her'.³⁹ Much of the narrative details how Evans' expressed fears of what should happen to her should her master continue to violate her as she approached her childbearing years. Andrew supposedly shrugged off any immediate danger due to her being so young, but he did note what might happen should Evans actually prove with child—she could simply blame it on a 'soldier in the army'. Should she dare blame it to him, he would 'kill' her.⁴⁰ Given the pervasiveness of cases against women who had sexual relations with soldiers, such a scenario could be convincing.

Often when historians discuss women's experience of the violence of the civil war, we look to soldiers as the actors in atrocities. However, anxieties over manhood spilled into the partisan divides, as royalist and parliamentarians both made claims to male authority. Andrew's alleged assaults on Evans not only violated dominant notions of patriarchal authority tied to the household, but also parliamentary concepts of manhood that emphasized self-restraint and reason.⁴¹ Andrew is presented as consistently violating his obligations as a patriarch while shielding his crimes under the violence of war. Delivered before five Colchester authorities, concerns over Evans and Andrew's relationship were inevitably tied to larger concerns over manhood and male authority. Even the oblique reference to the unnamed trooper Andrew would allegedly blame for any unwanted pregnancy tapped into pervasive anxieties about the proper comportment of parliamentary and royalist armies in the 1640s, which were tied to larger discourses over manhood.⁴²

In this testimony—whether she offered it through compulsion or voluntarily—Francis Evans held her master to account for both of these violations. Servants who deposed against masters often did so to avoid any association with their master's criminal behavior, but Evans' report of rape required courage and bravery. She likely feared retaliation, damage to her reputation, and how authorities would perceive her admission of the rape.⁴³ While the deposition of Francis Evans details her extremely vulnerable, subordinate status, it also presents her as a disempowered woman who

39 ERO Chelmsford, D/B 5 Sb2/7 (22 June 1645).

40 Ibid.

41 Worley, 'Reason Sways Them', pp. 19–22.

42 Ibid., pp. 68–109; Donagan, 'The Web of Honour'.

43 Herrup, *The Common Peace*, p. 84; Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence', pp. 4–6.

was able to articulate how her master violated the ideals of the patriarchal household in an attempt to hold men to account.

The woman on top

Tensions over the origins and exercise of patriarchal authority within royalist and parliamentarian rhetoric also emerge in anxieties over the ‘woman on top’. Royalist discourse derided effeminate and inadequate parliamentarians who were ruled by their domineering wives. Within royalist print, the republic was run by Amazonian women, hypocritical fornicators, tinkers, traders, and effeminate cuckolds. It was truly a world turned upside down. As a contested category, gender informed social and political crises as well as people’s experience of them. Fears of gender inversion expressed in representations of the woman on top were not merely figurative, but also based on the literal threat that assertive women posed to normative gender relations.⁴⁴

The marital misfortunes of the parliamentarian commander Robert Devereux, the third Earl of Essex, provided easy fodder for royalist authors who depicted parliamentarians as unmanly or impotent rulers incapable of controlling their households. Essex had been cuckolded twice before civil war broke out. His first wife, Frances Howard, sought an annulment from Essex so that she could marry Robert Carr, James I’s favorite. Howard claimed her marriage to Essex had never been consummated due to his impotence—assertions that were publicly confirmed. Essex’s humiliation, followed by the fall of Howard and Carr after their conviction for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, filled the pages of underground verse and libels.⁴⁵ In the 1630s, Essex faced another scandal when he separated from his second wife, Elizabeth Paulet, following the death of their infant son. The child was reasonably rumored to be the offspring of Paulet’s affair with the royalist Sir William Uvedale. Royalist newsbooks, ballads, and pamphlets depicted ‘impotent’ Essex as a failed patriarch emasculated by his unruly wives.⁴⁶ Royalist armies proudly displayed banners depicting Essex as a cuckold as they marched into battle. His story was so well known that one royalist newsbook claimed that he was even ridiculed in the ‘table

44 Davis, ‘Women on Top’; Achinstein, ‘Women on Top’, p. 143; Amussen and Underdown, *Gender, Culture and Politics in England*, pp. 27–28; Underdown, ‘The Man in the Moon’.

45 Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, pp. 103–104; Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal*.

46 See, for example, Cleveland, *The character of a London-diurnall with severall select poems*, p. 46.

talk' of commoners.⁴⁷ It is hardly surprising that the symbolism of Essex as cuckold seeped into the politics of slander within England's communities.

While we know men expressed their disaffection through jeers at Essex's cuckoldry, women could also explore the ambiguous potency of female agency in the representation of Essex as a failed patriarch emasculated by his wives. When the Exeter widow Dorothy Graye allegedly drew on the same rhetoric in her conflict with John Bremlecombe, her recorded words engaged the 'inverted' power Lady Essex exerted over her weak, unmanly husband. According to the examination of Elizabeth Gosse, Graye and Bremlecombe got into a verbal spat while they drank together at Bedford house in 1647. Gosse alleged that the drunk Graye told Bremlecombe that if she was his wife, she would 'make him weare more horns than Essex'.⁴⁸ In Gosse's examination, Graye did not accuse Bremlecombe of being a cuckold, but rather she laid claim to the agency of the 'woman on top', who had the power to make him one through her behavior.

While Graye's alleged gibe seems commonplace enough, the meaning of the slight against Bremlecombe was intertwined with the history of the place in which it was uttered: Bedford house, the town residence of the Earl of Bedford. Evidence suggests that Gosse, Graye, and Bremlecombe all lived within Bedford house, so they likely knew of the house's history within the earlier stages of the civil war. Not long after the outbreak of the war, Exeter fell into parliament's hands, but a royalist assault placed it in their control in 1643. Exeter's secure royalist defenses brought the pregnant Queen Henrietta Maria from Oxford to Bedford house in 1644. She gave birth to the princess Henrietta Anne there on 16 June 1644, which was celebrated with the ringing of bells.⁴⁹ As the Earl of Essex's forces made their way toward Exeter, the Queen was obliged to flee, and she left the Princess at Bedford house under the care of the royalist governor. In late July, Charles I traveled to Exeter to encounter Essex's forces, where he met his daughter at the house. When the Earl skirted the city, Charles pursued his troops into Cornwall, forcing Essex to flee. The Princess remained at Bedford house until the royalists surrendered the stronghold in April 1646, when she was ceremoniously sent out of the city with the governor's wife and other high-ranking royalist women.⁵⁰ Given its rich history, those who

47 Quoted in Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, p. 103; Donagan, 'The Web of Honor', p. 384.

48 Devon Heritage Center (DHC), ECA Book 64, fol. 111r.

49 Stoye, *From Deliverance to Destruction*, p. 97; Miller, 'Henriette Anne'.

50 Stoye, *From Deliverance to Destruction*, pp. 98–99.

inhabited Bedford house likely had exposure not only to the royalist rhetoric slandering Essex's manhood, but also the competing discourse fashioning Charles I as effeminate, and Queen Henrietta Maria as a licentious papist whose immoderate power informed Charles' unmanliness.⁵¹

Gosse's account of Graye's drunken jibe against Bremlecombe mocked his inadequacy in its use of the imagery of Essex as cuckold, but it also laid claim to the agency that the image of women on top afforded. For her unruly and unsettling words, Graye would be sentenced to a turn in the house of correction as a 'lewd and disorderly person'.⁵² The exploitation of the trope of the cuckold, while conventional, was not necessarily conservative—the immediate cultural and social environments of the alleged utterance arguably influenced both the use and the effect of this politically charged slur. Whether Gosse fabricated the offense with the magistrates or Graye truly uttered the jeer, the circulation of a claim that Bremlecombe was as weak as Essex amongst the inhabitants of Bedford house likely made the smear more potent, but also more dangerous.

Unruly women and the politics of disaffection

Women who railed against civil war enemies during the civil wars represented the larger social and ideological threat of the revolution, but these divisions could also empower subordinate members of a community to police disaffection vocally. We see these realities in a case against a woman who was accused of taking extreme exception to the royalist army's defeat in Exeter in 1646. A series of examinations against Mary Cholwill, the wife of William Cholwill, describe an unruly woman whose behavior aligned with parliamentary discourses of royalist excess and crudeness. The first examination comes from Thomas Skinner, a pewterer charged with collecting Cholwill's rate. Skinner claims that Cholwill 'reviled' him with 'opprobrious and scandalous terms' and said that 'every Rogue was putt in Office nowe'. When Elizabeth Beare came before Exeter authorities, she also related the highly incendiary speech that Cholwill allegedly gave, likely while they drank together. According to Beare's examination, Cholwill's frustration at the royalists' surrender of the city led her to state that she would 'rather the Turks should come in the Cittie', and that 'the Castle and

51 Worley, 'Reason sways them', pp. 187–196; Achinstein, 'Women on Top', p. 132; Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, pp. 61–63.

52 DHC, ECA Book 64, fol. 111r.

the Cittie should be sett on fyre, or words to that effecte'. Beare also reported that Chowill called her a 'Roundhead', attempted to force her 'to drink to the confusion of Parliament', and continued to 'abuse' her with verbal jibes, such as 'whore' and 'vagabond'. A third deposition from the wife of Leonard Collins also claimed that Cholwill called her a whore, a bitch, and a witch.⁵³

The excessiveness of Cholwill's alleged behavior was not simply about her being an unruly and disorderly woman, but also a disaffected one. Her uncontrolled speech and loss of control aligned with parliamentary conceptions of royalists. Beare's examination suggests that Cholwill's drinking—which included drinking healths—mirrored the excessive imbibing associated with royalists.⁵⁴ In Skinner's examination, Cholwill's disaffection justified her rejection of his authority to collect rates. Her disaffection was also linked to her slanderous jibes. Each deponent depicted her as attacking their reputation, while they are represented as well-affected members of the city. Beare's examination draws on women's social authority to police the uncontrolled speech of their female neighbors, but the potency of her words reporting Cholwill's alleged personal assaults on Beare's honesty is tied to Beare's alleged affection for parliament.

Similar tensions emerge within a 1651 examination of the recently widowed Mary Campin, who reported the disaffected talk and rumor-mongering of Fayth Barrell to Colchester authorities. A series of overlapping concerns about the instability of political, social, and gender relations intersect within this deposition. Not long before Campin shared her statement in May, the Council of State had gained information of a potential royalist rising that would advance near Colchester.⁵⁵ Campin's examination before Mayor Furley suggests that city authorities were investigating the origins and spreading of a prophecy predicting Charles II's successful invasion. While Campin's examination accuses Barrell of claiming that 'the prince would be heere before Michaelmas next', it also shares troublesome speeches from Barrell that were likely to provoke Colchester officials living in fear of a royalist invasion.⁵⁶ Indeed, Campin's deposition *first* relates Barrell's abusive language against Colchester magistrates. Campin's information starts off by noting some scandalous talk that she had overheard three months prior. Barrell allegedly declared 'that none but peddlers tinkers and coopers sate

53 DHC, ECA Book 64, fol. 102b v; Stoye, *From Deliverance to Destruction*, p. 132.

54 McShane, 'The Extraordinary Case of the Blood-Drinking and Flesh-Eating Cavaliers'; Worley, 'Reason Sways Them', pp. 71; 103–109; Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, pp. 34–35.

55 Underdown, *Royalist Conspiracy*, 47; Davis, 'Colchester, 1600–1662', pp. 413–414; *CSPD* 1651, pp. 90.

56 ERO Chelmsford, D/B 5 Sb2/9 (22 May 1651).

upon the bench and ruled in this towne'.⁵⁷ Next, the examination claims that Barrell declared that a 'Company of Roundedly things ruled this land, but she hoped to see them dare long all upon a stringe'.⁵⁸ Barrell's reported dangerous talk engaged both the ubiquitous jeers against roundheads and the classist trope depicting 'mechanical' men overtaking the state. By labeling Colchester officials as peddlers, tinkers and coopers, Barrell's reported taunt drew upon a rich rhetorical discourse of social inversion that represented Cromwell and his fanatic crew as lowly artisans. This language mirrors royalist rhetoric of the world turned upside down to undercut the legitimacy of the local bench, and ties those who sat on it to a 'Company of Roundedly things'.⁵⁹ The narrative depicts Barrell as a woman who believes her professed adherence to the traditional social and political orders justifies her abuse and rejection of those in authority. While the examination tells us little of Barrell's exact words or actions, their representation within this mediated text may well meld Campin's agenda with that of the Colchester bench.

Anxiety over rumors and prophecies also permeate Campin's examination against Barrell. The agency of female prophets such as Elizabeth Poole and Anna Trapnel similarly provoked those whose power they threatened. Campin's information claims that Barrell predicted that Charles II would return, but it suggests Barrell was recounting the prophecy of a traveling musician named Hills. As Hills came from Magdalen Green, he supposedly saw 'a bright starre, in which there was a greate man in a golden chair with a crown on his head and Cromwell's head in his hand'.⁶⁰ Barrell's alleged acceptance of this prediction, coupled with her repetition of it, provoked concern that empowered Campin to speak of it. Campin's examination suggests that Mayor Furley already knew of Hills' prophecy, directly from Hills. According to Campin's statement, Barrell claimed 'that the said Hills had said he had told Mr. Mayor of it'. Given the Mayor was present for Campin's examination, it is possible that this part of her examination was informed by questions the magistrate posed to her. However, it is also conceivable that Campin shared this part of Barrell's conversation to enhance the legitimacy of her information. Competing concerns over Barrell's language may also have been fueled by the power invested in the speech of female prophets.⁶¹ Though Campin's examination does not accuse Barrell of having seditious

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Knoppers, "Sing Old Noll the Brewer".

60 ERO Chelmsford, D/B 5 Sb2/9 (22 May 1651).

61 Mack, 'Women as Prophets during the English Civil War'.

visions, it does suggest that Barrell was eager to share Hills' predictions to those who would listen.

The series of forces intersecting in Campin's examination underscore how gender informed the politics of disaffection within communities and between individuals. In the examination we see both women drawing on the power that professed loyalty or disloyalty to a regime may bring. Barrell, on the one hand, is presented as one who adopted popular royalist discourse against social inversion in attempts to undermine local authorities and justify her affection for Charles II—albeit without much success. Campin, on the other, is presented as the 'honest' woman reporting subversive speech to exact justice on a disaffected person who violated normative codes of conduct. Such representations of female agency underscore the tensions and contradictions in how transformations wrought by civil war and revolution could inform the agency and perceived veracity of women's speech within interpersonal and communal conflicts. The city's investigation of Barrell's seditious desire for Charles' return may well have offered Campin an ideal opportunity to explore grievances she had with Barrell or royalists more generally.

Campin's history with the Colchester sessions court suggests she may have viewed herself as an informant against those whose behavior threatened the ideals or legitimacy of the Commonwealth. A year before she gave witness against Barrell to Mayor Furley, Campin recounted to him a scene she had witnessed two years previously, not long after the siege of Colchester in 1648.⁶² Campin alleged that, while she was working as 'a helpe' within the house of John Maidstone, one Turner visited Maidstone's house. She allegedly overheard Turner 'whisper' to Maidstone's wife, after which the wife asked Campin to make a fire in the chamber. Campin reported that Turner and Maidstone went up into the chamber, where he immediately began to kiss Maidstone. Campin's statement further claims that Maidstone bid her to fetch some beer for the couple, and that, as Campin brought it to them, 'she did see the said Turner stand against the said Maidstones wife, shee being at the bed sit leaning backward and her coates up above her w[ai]st'. When the two heard Campin approach, Turner reportedly moved to the window 'with his breeches in his hands', and Maidstone put on her clothes.⁶³

Mary Campin's information raises a series of questions about the significance of her reported accusation against Turner and Maidstone. First, it is worth noting that Campin's information, given two years following

62 ERO Chelmsford, D/B 5 Sb2/9 (7 November 1650).

63 Ibid.

the alleged incident, came a few months after parliament's new legislation against adultery in May 1650.⁶⁴ The infamous act made adultery a felony that was punishable by death. While Turner and Maidstone could not be prosecuted *ex post facto*, the timing of the information suggests Campin may have been aware (or made aware) of the act when she provided her testimony. Campin, the wife of a husbandman, may have been socially inferior to her mistress, but the new legislation may have empowered her to communicate her narrative of the incident to the local Colchester authorities. Who, precisely, mistress Maidstone was raises another set of questions. It would be interesting to know what was the relationship, if any, between the accused Maidstone and the godly, prominent Maidstones of nearby Boxted, Essex, or to John Maidstone, the future MP for Colchester who served as a member of Essex's sequestrations committee starting in 1650.⁶⁵ Should there have been a relation between the families, such a striking example of household disorder would have delighted the disaffected, who could draw on the trope of the hypocritical puritan.⁶⁶ Regardless of the identity of the accused, Campin's information against Turner and Maidstone in 1650, and her examination against Fayth Barrell a year later, indicates that Campin engaged within the politics of the civil war as they played out in the Colchester community.

Conclusions

Given that modern political conceptions of radicalism and conservatism do not align with early modern views of female agency, it is hardly surprising women's speech during the civil war and revolution cannot easily be described as repressive or liberating. Depositions, produced within the context of the legal system, do not provide us straightforward evidence of the degree to which divisions forged during the 1640s afforded an *enhanced* voice for women within the communities of civil war and revolutionary England. Yet they do allow us to consider how civil war and revolution, and the unsettling of gender and social relations that provoked fears of inverted authority, created new mechanisms and paths to political agency through

64 *A & O*, vol. II, pp. 327–298.

65 *Calendar, Committee For Compounding*, pp. 565–574; John Walter, 'Confessional Politics in Pre-Civil War Essex', p. 693; Round, 'Colchester during the Commonwealth', pp. 658, 663.

66 Knoppers, 'Sing Old Noll the Brewer'; De Groot, *Royalist Identities*, p. 123; Worley, 'Reason sways them', pp. 175–177.

which women and their communities could pursue conflicts and rivalries with neighbors. As the tensions within Mary Campin's examination against Faith Barrell suggest, the politics of disaffection charged social relations in which women strove to negotiate power in their everyday lives. Yet Campin's deposition also uncovers strains within gender and social relations that provoked genuine concern over a world turned upside down. The reality of female assertiveness represented in examinations reveals tensions over the power of female speech to provoke quarrels and disrupt social relations within an already divided society. Examples of women engaging in speech acts to enhance their authority are often matched by ones where we find others desirous to right the social order. Experiences such as these further chipped away at normative concepts that required silence, passivity, and obedience from subordinate members of households and communities. They reveal women's ability to provoke and agitate their social superiors, and show us that women's speech could be empowered when it manipulated clashing concepts of affection, honesty, and order in an unsettled, divided society.

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6. Why Political Theory is Women's Work

How Moderata Fonte Reclaimed Liberty for Women inside and outside Marriage

Caroline Castiglione

Abstract

Why is the status of being female frequently dangerous and all too often fatal? This old problem is a concern today as it was during the early modern period. The Venetian author Moderata Fonte (1555–1592) located specific dangers to women in the institution of matrimony. In her posthumously published dialogue, *The Worth of Women* (1600), she articulated her critique of its risks to women by turning to the realm of political ideas, especially to the concept of women's liberty. Women were, according to Fonte, free before marriage and women remained free in the marital state. Their neglect, abuse, or murder were illegitimate, as were husbands' claim to superiority and usurpation of women's freedom to protest or to exit marriage as they might deem necessary.

Keywords: women; liberty; historical feminism; Renaissance Venice; marriage; misogyny

Why is the status of being female frequently dangerous and all too often fatal? This old problem is still very much with us today, as determined activists have recently made clear. From the Ni Una Menos protests in Argentina to the outpouring of international support for the #MeToo movement, the risks of being female are now recognized to transcend national boundaries and undermine celebratory narratives of progress for women.¹ Even in

¹ See Uki Goñi, 'Argentina's Women Joined Across South America'. 'MeToo', was a phrase coined originally by Tarana Burke in her work with women and girls of color.

societies where women have earned considerable success, misogyny and femicide move in lockstep with their advance.²

Attention to these issues emerged long ago in the early modern debates on women and society, the *querelle des femmes*, whose prescient authors analyzed the twin problems of sexism and misogyny.³ Both prejudices vexed the Venetian writer Moderata Fonte (1555–1592), author of the dialogue *The Worth of Women*, published posthumously in 1600. She critiqued the sexist paradigms that deemed women inferior to men. Women who broke with expected norms endured even worse criticism and ran greater risk. The noose of social expectations was especially tight for married women, even well behaved ones, according to Fonte. For these reasons she dedicated a considerable portion of the dialogue to the particular and sometimes deadly bargain that was matrimony.

Fonte was scarcely alone in her interest in husband–wife relations, a favorite topic in the proliferating advice literature on domestic life. Spousal dynamics also came increasingly under the scrutiny of marital courts in both Catholic and Protestant Europe, where tribunals adjudicated marital disputes, more often than not, at the request of the wife.⁴ *The Worth of Women's* attention to matrimony demonstrates that Fonte was well aware of such developments and their influence on marriage in the sixteenth century. Yet she remained skeptical of their perspectives. She took issue with many of the notions about women and marriage in contemporary conduct literature for women and advice manuals on the family. She briefly but firmly rejected the Church's assertion that matrimony was an indissoluble state.

To articulate new possibilities, Fonte shifted her revision of marriage to the realm of political ideas, especially to the concept of women's liberty, a political turn that merits closer scrutiny than it has hitherto received.⁵

2 Manne, *Down Girl*, pp. 279–307.

3 I follow the distinction between misogyny and sexism gaining ground in contemporary scholarship. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–80.

4 Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, pp. 8, 169 n.; Hacke, *Women, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 41.

5 The treatment of her political views is briefly addressed in the growing scholarship on Fonte. Cox analyzes Fonte's originality in the women's positive discussion of the single life in the dialogue, and situates this outcome in the context of the dowry inflation of the sixteenth century. Cox has briefly recognized the 'textured treatment' of marriage in Fonte in *Prodigious Muse*, pp. 248–249. Malprezzi Price points out some connections between Venice and its politics in Fonte's work (*Moderata Fonte*, pp. 85–98); Ross suggests that Fonte posited 'a discourse of "rights"' though this is not examined in any detail (*Birth*, pp. 279–285); Martelli situates Fonte in the larger social history of Venice, including women's *donnesca libertà*, with a focus on its sociability (*Polifonie*, pp. 397–406); McKenna examines the garden as a space to combat patriarchy ('Women', pp. 74–77).

Fonte's recourse to liberty is critical to her thought. If women possessed equal liberty to men, then men's claims to superiority were an illusion and the restrictions imposed upon women's liberty a usurpation of their rights. Women were, according to Fonte, free before marriage and remained free to exit the marital state. Their neglect, abuse, or murder was therefore illegitimate, and their exit from matrimony where they were at risk entirely justified. To assess the significance of Fonte's emphasis on liberty, we must briefly survey her critique of femicide and the shortcomings of sixteenth-century interventions to improve domestic life for women. Fonte's insights on such failures led her along the path to political thought—a maneuver that allowed her to reclaim women's liberty both outside and inside the marital state, a powerful if unfinished project in the work of Fonte and in the world today.

Women's death in Venice

Shortly before going into labor in the first days of November 1592, the Venetian woman who had been born Modesta Pozzo completed her dialogue, *The Worth of Women*. As her belly expanded before her and the pages of her dialogue grew in number on her writing table, she summoned seven fictional women to accompany her on what would be her last intellectual journey. In a voice trained by beloved texts, Fonte wrote women back into the stories that Venetians told about themselves. We know relatively little of Modesta Pozzo, who published under the name Moderata Fonte. We have her published writings, a short but suggestive biographical recollection by a contemporary, and a handful of legal and ecclesiastical records. And we know that she died in childbirth a few days after completing her manuscript.

That she left this testament to the worth of women in dialogue form has contributed to our difficulties in interpreting it, since its seven distinctive female interlocutors often express contradictory positions. Consistent from beginning to end was her praise of Venice,⁶ including the achievements of Venice's famous sons, immortalized, as she noted approvingly, in sculptures and memorials.⁷ Fonte did not evade death's role in the republic, nor could she avoid it in the domestic sphere, dying, as she did, in the line of maternal duty.

6 Fonte, *The Worth of Women*, p. 201 [hereafter Fonte (1997)]; Fonte, *Il merito delle donne*, p. 142 [hereafter Fonte (1988)]. All English translations of Fonte are from the edition by Virginia Cox, unless otherwise noted below.

7 Fonte (1997), p. 227; Fonte (1988), p. 161.

Yet the dialogue took issue with the deaths of women, including those nameless dead, like the two unidentified women whose bodies washed up on the Lido the same year Fonte prepared to enter married life.⁸ Fonte protested the losses of such women 'buried in the oblivion of time', as she put it: the nameless, monument-less, unavenged women that sixteenth-century historians did not bother to write about, but Fonte did.⁹ Why was being female and Venetian so lethal? Why did men kill women and was there anything that could be done about it?

The problem emerges early in *The Worth of Women*. In search of an organizing purpose for their days together, the women of the dialogue elect Adriana their queen, charging her to give them a unifying purpose for their talk. Adriana proposes, to unanimous acclaim, a *lite* or debate on the subject of men, with three women taking up the defense of men, and three women arguing against them.¹⁰ The predilections of the anti-men side pushes the dialogue toward an examination of the origins of cruelty, violence, and murder in the family. Such problems are treated on two levels: within the historical and literary context that justified the killing of women, and within the particular locale of sixteenth-century Venetian society. Fonte's analysis of contemporary Venice will receive more scrutiny here, since it relates most closely to the specific dangers of her contemporaries.

The dialogue ranges freely over the problems that sixteenth-century women might face from birth, due to the lesser value placed upon daughters. In marriage, women did not necessarily face a better future. Some husbands ignored their wives' sage advice on the management of the household. Other women were more prisoners than wives, locked 'like animals within four walls' as a method to guarantee their honor.¹¹ Spendthrift husbands squandered the family's fortune on cards, prostitutes, or extravagances that could leave a once well-off family in poverty. Some husbands simply vanished along with the family money for long periods of time. Wives left behind spent their time, 'counting the hours passing, like the watchman on guard at the Arsenal, and waiting until dawn for their reprobate husbands finally to come home'.¹² The losing gambler was not always a welcome

8 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Provveditori e Sopraprovveditori alla Sanità, Atti, 814 [28 May 1582].

9 Fonte (1997), p. 107; Fonte (1988), p. 65.

10 Fonte (1997), p. 57; Fonte (1988), p. 24. The Queen describes their discussion assignment as an argument (*ragionamento*). It is compared with lawsuits (*liti*) by the speaker Helena.

11 Fonte (1997), p. 68; Fonte (1988), p. 33.

12 Fonte (1997), p. 70; Fonte (1988), p. 35.

sight, for 'if by some unlucky chance the [husbands] have lost, it's the wives who have to suffer for it, because the scoundrels take out all their anger on them, poor wretches', as Cornelia observes.¹³ The men whom fortune failed posed a special risk: having suffered 'some kind of humiliation outside the home [...] [such men] come home and try to give vent to their frustration by taking it out on their wives'.¹⁴ Men who shouted were often also wife-beaters.¹⁵

The acknowledgment of such cruelties elicits varied responses on the part of the women—from shared dismay, to skepticism, to outright denial. Some speakers highlight examples of good men to challenge the negative critique of men in general. Even the righteously angry Leonora acknowledges that she condemns bad men, not good ones. These qualifications might easily be lost on some readers, due to the sheer quantity of the women's negative assessments and the paucity of good men amidst the seemingly endless supply of scoundrels.¹⁶

Fonte's sketches of good-for-nothing men have living counterparts in the records of the Patriarchal court, a Venetian tribunal that expanded its activity in the sixteenth century. The court sorted out legitimate from illegitimate marriages and intervened in abusive marriages, mostly at the behest of women suffering the consequences of marriages gone bad.¹⁷ The records of the tribunal contain first-person testimony on domestic abuse and cases of women forced to marry against their will. Witnessing in the dialogue and witnessing in the tribunal produced similar and mutually illuminating texts. Like two halves of a fractured image, reassembled, they provide for a richer view of the problem. One woman, for instance, testified about her father to the Patriarchal Court that, 'He was a man who lived badly, keeping prostitutes, with little fear of God. He beat my mother and us without any compassion. He came home full of anger and dirty words that cannot be said here.'¹⁸ In the dialogue, the indiscretions of husbands are similarly linked to men's easy access to prostitution. The origin of the trade itself is the behavior of men who 'trapped, tempted, solicited, and lured on these women while they still had their honor, leading the most naïve

13 Ibid.

14 Fonte (1997), p. 71; Fonte (1988), p. 36.

15 Fonte (1997), p. 70; Fonte (1988), p. 35. Fonte also recognizes other intergenerational forms of abuse in the home: Fonte (1997), p. 64; Fonte (1988), p. 30.

16 Fonte (1997), p. 258; Fonte (1988), p. 182.

17 Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, pp. 8, 169 n.; Hacke, *Women, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 41.

18 Testimony of Marietta, sister of Camilla Bellotto, offered to the Patriarchal Court, cited in Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, p. 36.

and easygoing of them to fall head-over-heels to their ruin'.¹⁹ Wives are also powerless to stop their husband's illicit relationships, which sometimes crossed the threshold of the family home:

Such men inflict endless sufferings on their wives, even stripping them of their most treasured things to give them to prostitutes [...] [the husbands] very often make mistresses of their servants and fill the house with bastards and expect their wives to keep quiet and bring them up for them [...] [turning their wives] from mistresses of a household into the prioresses of an orphanage.²⁰

Assuming that such marriages had been legitimately contracted in the first place—that each person had been eligible to marry and had consented of her or his own free will—the Patriarchal court could not grant an annulment. It could only decree the necessity of a separation of bed and board, a separation that did not allow either party to remarry. The notion of Catholic marriage, reinforced by the Council of Trent in its 1563 decree, was that a legitimate marriage was indissoluble. This meant the choice to enter marriage could pose a lifetime of consequences, including the impossibility of exit, unless it were granted by a tribunal like the Patriarchal court.

Fonte's dialogue, on the other hand, disputes the premise that a woman's flight from an abusive husband needed approval by men:

If she is unable to live with him because of the extent of his wickedness, after suffering long and hard, she can at least finally leave him, if circumstances permit. It's something one sees every day, in fact: many sensible women, unable to put up with them anymore, leave their wicked husbands to avoid a living hell.²¹

Fonte insists that 'many sensible women' reasonably walked away, without recourse to religious precepts on the indissolubility of legitimate marriage. This feature of the dialogue links Fonte to the 'coolly secular' proclivities of her ruling male peers in the late sixteenth century.²² Such observations mark the distance between the conclusions of the dialogue, the decrees of

19 Fonte (1997), p. 88; Fonte (1988), p. 52. Cox observes that Fonte's sympathy for prostitutes was unusual for her class. See Fonte (1997), p. 89 n.

20 Fonte (1997), p. 69; Fonte (1988), p. 34.

21 Fonte (1997), p. 65; Fonte (1988), p. 31.

22 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, p. 184. Fonte's religious beliefs found expression in two intriguing religious poems analyzed by Cox, *Prodigious Muse*, pp. 129–137.

the Council of the Trent, and the judgments of the Patriarchal court. What other concepts of marriage does Fonte dismiss along the way to advancing her ideas on women's liberty?

Bodies that are (and are not) one

Fonte's interlocutors are intrigued and repulsed by sixteenth-century marriage. They are not alone in their morbid fascination, since contemporary domestic advice literature also frequently addressed what the interlocutor Leonora refers to as the 'yoke' of matrimony.²³ The battle-weary widow Leonora and the learned and determinedly single Corinna provide the most memorable lines on the glories of life outside of servitude, another term used to describe the experience of marriage for women. The explosion of treatises on domestic life and women's conduct literature attempted to normalize the dilemmas in the marriage enterprise, popularizing the indissolubility of marriage in the New Testament or the notion that the institution rendered two individuals 'one flesh'. This vivid and problematic concept did little to sort out the daily details of married life, matters of intense concern for Fonte's interlocutors.

One creative attempt to sustain and elaborate the marriage metaphor was offered by the prolific Venetian author Lodovico Dolce, who enthusiastically embraced the 'one flesh' argument in his short dialogue, *Della institutione delle donne*. The successful work was published in Venice in 1545 and reprinted four times.²⁴ Key passages in *The Worth of Women* suggest that Fonte was not only familiar with Dolce's dialogue but that she was writing against his one flesh analogy for the matrimonial state. Such concepts were obstacles to her thinking on women's equal liberty to men. Thus early in her dialogue these ideas by Dolce had to be defeated so that Fonte could advance an alternate view of the marital state that allowed for women's liberty.

Dolce's vernacular dialogue promoted views offered earlier in the sixteenth century by the humanist and educator Juan Luis Vives, whose Latin text *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* had begun as a treatise for the English royal family. Translations into European vernaculars expanded its

23 Fonte (1997), 34; Fonte (1988), p. 68.

24 Sanson, 'Introduction', in Dolce, *Dialogo* (2015), p. 11. Although I will focus here on the differences between Dolce and Fonte, both authors concurred that women's learning was remedy rather than cause of female deviance, another parallel that suggests Fonte's acquaintance with Dolce's text. Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*, p. 196.

influence throughout Catholic and Protestant Europe. Dolce's translation of Vives' ideas from Latin to Italian were part plagiarism, part appropriation, and part re-interpretation.²⁵ He transformed the humanist treatise into a dialogue between the pedantic Flaminio and the laconic widow Dorothea, who occasionally interrupted Flaminio's self-assured declarations to assent or, more rarely, to query him with a bit of understated irony.

Dolce's treatise elaborated the 'one flesh' image of marriage, echoing the claims in Christian gospels that after the exchange of marriage vows 'one single being is formed'.²⁶ Dolce embellished the concept further—marriage renders two separate individuals—'that amazing Hermaphrodite that cannot be divided in two'.²⁷ That a marriage created a hermaphrodite had not occurred to Vives, but it seemed in Dolce's mind to capture the implications of the one body metaphor.²⁸ Ostensibly quoting an admirable youth of his acquaintance, Dolce bubbled with enthusiasm for the merits of this twin-sexed creature: 'one and the same desire and disinclination, one body, one heart, and the same soul'.²⁹ Such a paradigm obliterated the difference between the wills and wishes of one person or the other, an erasure of the woman as a separate person that Fonte likely found troubling.

For Dolce's marital hermaphrodite did not imply the equality of the two genders, far from it. The physiology of this hybrid creature reinforced men's so-called superiority, since 'the husband is the head' of this 'single body'.³⁰ The hermaphrodite produced a sexual binary that retained the conventional gender hierarchy. Elsewhere Dolce described the physiology of the hermaphrodite somewhat differently but with the same sexist outcomes, noting that the wife was 'the body and the husband, the soul' and since the body is governed by the soul, 'it is therefore reasonable that [...] the wife would be governed by the husband'.³¹ Their corporal union confirmed the husband as the one who commanded, leaving the wife with the necessity of obeying, but did she really obey anyone other than herself? Not according to Dolce, who asserted that, 'This obedience should not be called servitude since [a woman's] service to her husband is the same as serving herself. And if such obedience merited the name of servitude, it is filled with such tenderness

25 Ibid., pp. 11–23.

26 In the New Testament, Mark 10:9; Matthew 19:6; Dolce, *Dialogo* (1547), fol. 43r.

27 Dolce, *Dialogo* (1547), fol. 38r.

28 Ibid.; Vives merely referenced the 'mystery' of two becoming one. See his *Instruction*, p. 88.

29 Dolce, *Dialogo* (1547), fol. 52v.

30 Ibid., fol. 40v.

31 Ibid., fol. 47r.

and sweetness that render it greater than every liberty.³² The typically bitter metaphor of servitude became instead pleasant and sweet—greater than any liberty the wife might have otherwise enjoyed. In serving the husband, the wife served only herself.

Fonte re-scripted Dolce for her own purposes and reversed his arguments. She reclaimed the one flesh analogy for understanding family relations, but rejected the husband–wife hybrid as its most significant form. Fonte's explicit attention to Dolce's metaphor suggests that she likely worked on her dialogue with Dolce's text near to hand.

Fonte recasts Dolce's familial hermaphrodite as maternal rather than marital. She elevates in significance the intertwining of mothers' and children's bodies, for according to Fonte, children received, 'their blood, their early nourishment, their upbringing, entirely to [in?] their mothers' care'.³³ Appropriately, it is the interlocutor Cornelia who advances this argument in the dialogue. Like her classical predecessor, Cornelia Africana (c. 195–c. 115 BCE), the mother of the political reformers the Gracchi brothers, Fonte's Cornelia attests to the preeminence of maternal love. Such an attachment was deeper than the bond between a woman and her husband, which means that a child could hurt a woman more than her husband could, according to the sixteenth-century Cornelia of *The Worth of Women*.³⁴ A mother's love remained, regardless of her offspring's treatment of her, for '[a mother] cannot abandon or disown her own flesh [*le proprie viscere*]'.³⁵ Similarly, the children's loyalty to their mother should be as great as what she has sacrificed for them: '[Children] in return are much indebted to their mothers and should by rights treat them as well as they would their own selves [*le persone istesse*]'.³⁶

The sixteenth-century Cornelia's insight is much more than a ventriloquizing of her ancient venerated predecessor. It is one of the very few moments in the dialogue that produces unanimity among the women, suggesting its significance for Fonte. In the dialogue, the comments of an individual interlocutor typically inspire discussion but rarely agreement. Even in this case, the *immediate* response of the women of the dialogue to Cornelia's views varies—they continue to debate the relative loyalties of women vis-à-vis men in their lives. However, a riddle and its solution, recited in

32 Ibid., fol. 39r.

33 Fonte (1997), p. 64; Fonte (1988), p. 30.

34 Fonte (1997), p. 65; Fonte (1988), p. 31.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

poetry by the learned Corinna, delight her listeners and eventually inspire enthusiastic acceptance.

Corinna's poem narrates the dilemma of a woman terrorized by enemies with only bitter choices before her:

Oh no, not this.
 In the midst of a mob of enemies
 I see my spouse, my parent, and my son
 And I can drag from danger only one
 Shall I be a better wife, daughter, or mother?
 Do I save the one I love most?
 Or the one I should hold most dear?
 Who can put an end to my uncertain deliberations?
 Between choosing a father over a husband
 Or a son over them both?³⁷

The women debate the poet's choices: some think the woman should save her husband, 'since he was one flesh with her [*una carne istessa con lei*]', as the gospel metaphor elaborated by Dolce had underscored. Others think the woman is compelled to save her father's life, 'since she had herself received life from him'.³⁸ Corinna proposes a resolution in poetic form, drawing upon Cornelia's previous claims surrounding the maternal bond:

If you are a compassionate mother
 Save your dear son from pitiless enemies
 For to spare the life of your husband or old father
 Would put your own life at risk
 What a mother feels is natural love
 Sympathy is for your father
 Good advice for your husband
 But that love born with your child
 Surpasses the obligations of matrimony
 And the debt owed to your parent.³⁹

37 The translation of Fonte's poem is my own. See Fonte (1997), 66 for Cox's translation; Fonte (1988), pp. 31–32.

38 Fonte (1997), p. 66; Fonte (1988), p. 32.

39 The translation of the poem is my own. See Cox's translation in Fonte (1997), pp. 66–67; Fonte (1988), p. 32.

The women are delighted not merely by the elegance of Corinna's stanzas, but by the persuasiveness of their poetic solution. It inspires unanimous agreement that the mother's life and the child's life were the two lives most intimately intertwined, just as Cornelia argued earlier. Since saving the child's life is the equivalent of saving the mother's own life, mother and child, rather than husband and wife, are one. The poetic rejoinder references and reverses the claims made by Dolce. The rightfulness of this view is reinforced by the eldest among the women, Adriana, whom they elected their Queen at the beginning of the dialogue. Credit is likewise given by the Queen to Cornelia, who 'has argued so convincingly that our love for our children is greater than any other love'.⁴⁰

This intimate and enduring conjoining of mother and child would become its own conflation of the woman with the familial against which modern feminism would have to struggle.⁴¹ But Fonte used the then new claims of maternal love to undermine the assumption that the tie with her husband was the most significant relationship for a woman. This meant that in contrast to what Dolce believed, husband and wife were not one body and one soul. Even in matrimony the woman remained free to choose the attachment of greatest significance to her. That included prioritizing someone other than the husband, a possibility not encompassed in Dolce's worldview.

Women's liberty inside and outside marriage

Having undermined the hypothetical 'one flesh' argument that fused a woman with her husband into one body, Fonte then celebrates the liberty that rightfully belonged to a woman, the liberty that helped to distinguish her person from that of her husband. Fonte is particularly attentive to what we would call negative liberty,⁴² the liberty she most associates with women before they marry, the liberty of not serving anyone else.⁴³ Two characters, the learned and single Corinna and the articulate widow Leonora, provide

40 Fonte (1997), p. 67; Fonte (1988), p. 33. Intriguingly, Leonora later returns to the 'one body' metaphor for marriage. See Fonte (1997), p. 191; Fonte (1988), p. 133.

41 Castiglione, 'Mothers and Children'.

42 The terms *negative* and *positive liberty* first gained widespread attention in Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*. Although Quentin Skinner dismisses their difference and their explanatory power, they do help clarify Fonte's argument, which prefigures social contract theory. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, esp. pp. 113–116.

43 Fonte (1997), p. 49; Fonte (1988), p. 18.

the most striking passages on the glories of life without men. Leonora describes how this 'beautiful liberty' allows her to enjoy the happiness of her life outside matrimony.⁴⁴ In imagining an alternative identity for herself as an 'Amazon of old', Leonora notes that the emblem on her shield would be 'the golden yoke broken through the middle', a symbol that signifies liberty.⁴⁵ For marriage was said to be the burden that prohibited women's ability to do as they wished. Corinna, who refuses to marry, captured her liberty in poetic verse: 'The heart that dwells in my breast is free: I serve no one, and belong to no one but myself.'⁴⁶ Corinna further argues that matrimony leads to a loss of liberty, describing such a union as reducing a woman to the status of 'slave' or to a person who 'loses her liberty along with her control over her possessions to the man whom she bought [with her dowry], allowing him to plunder and to use her property at his whim'.⁴⁷ By contrast, if the dowry were left to the woman for her own purposes, it would allow her to live as a 'queen' outside the marital state.⁴⁸ The reference to a queen has double significance here—it suggests wealth but also the autonomy of the woman who can command herself as well as others.

A statue of a woman who symbolizes liberty itself is present in the fictive garden where the dialogue unfolds. The statue holds the sun as emblem of liberty, underscoring that it is liberty that lights the world and is essential to everything else around it. Liberty illuminates the 'fine and respected qualities', that were characteristic of the owner of the garden, Leonora's aunt, who refused to marry and remained independent. 'Under the lordship and dominance of a husband perhaps [her aunt] would not have been able to develop [such qualities]', Leonora observes.⁴⁹ These qualifying phrases—the 'perhaps' and the conditional verb—do leave open the possibility that even as a wife Leonora's aunt *might* have been able to thrive. Such qualifications are easy to miss, however, in the dialogue's bolder and more frequent exposition of liberty's gifts as located *outside* the matrimonial state. Most often

44 Fonte (1997), p. 47; Fonte (1988), p. 17.

45 Fonte (1997), p. 231; Fonte (1988), p. 164.

46 Fonte (1997), p. 49; Fonte (1988), p. 18.

47 This translation is my own. The original Italian: 'salvo che di compratrice e patrona diventi schiava e perdendo la sua libertà, perda insieme il dominio della sua roba e ponga tutto in preda ed in arbitrio di colui che ella ha comprato', Fonte (1988), p. 69. Cox's translation reverses who is the buyer and who is the seller: 'instead of being her own mistress and the mistress of her own money, she becomes a slave, and loses her liberty and along with her liberty, her control over her own property, surrendering all she has to the man who has bought her, and putting everything in his hands'. See Fonte (1997), p. 113.

48 Fonte (1997), p. 113; Fonte (1988), p. 69.

49 Fonte (1997), pp. 54–55; Fonte (1988), p. 22.

in the dialogue, marriage is critiqued as undermining women's ability to do freely what they want with themselves and with their possessions, and to enjoy the freedom from restraint on their action typically associated with negative liberty, the best known and more obvious liberty in Fonte's dialogue. It is as brilliant as the sun, as fundamental to human beings as the beating of their hearts.

Fonte's discussion of liberty links the dialogue to the most significant word in Renaissance Venetian republican politics. Her liberty has connections to classical republicanism as well as to its specific iteration in sixteenth-century Venice, where 'liberty meant the rejection of subordination'.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the myth of Venice rested upon the city's liberty, the notion (if not the reality) that Venice had never been subjected to any foreign nation. Corinna's enthusiastic determination to remain single is cast in terms of this Renaissance notion of liberty: Venice as Virgin was free, not subject to the commands of any state. The opposite of such liberty is marriage, itself popularly referred to as servitude, a state of subjugation from which it takes God to 'liberate' a woman, as the acerbic Leonora observes.⁵¹

The contrast between the bondage of marriage and the liberty of single life has a persuasive clarity, especially when articulated by the happily widowed Leonora. It ignores, however, other contexts also mentioned by Fonte's speakers that describe limitations on women's options *before* the marital state, specifically that fathers sometimes ignore or deprecate daughters; that a fatherless daughter may find that her brothers deny her rights to a dowry; that even an open-minded mother, such as the interlocutor Adriana, might insist that her daughter Virginia must marry, even if the women's conversation has changed the younger woman's mind—as she puts it, 'I'd prefer not to submit myself to any man, when I could be living in peace and liberty alone.'⁵² For some interlocutors, the liberty of a woman's life before matrimony is clearly contingent upon the woman's family context—she (like Venice) may not be as free as the allegory suggests.

Fonte brings further nuance to the discussion of liberty *after* marriage. Marriage could offer a women *donnesca libertà*—a liberty that describes what women are able to do inside marriage that they could not easily do

50 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, p. 11.

51 Fonte (1997), p. 56; Fonte (1988), p. 23. The Queen Adriana uses a similar expression for her second husband, 'fin que piacque al Signor di liberarmene un giorno'. See Fonte (1997), p. 70; Fonte (1988), p. 35.

52 On Virginia's wish for the single life, see Fonte (1997), p. 238; Fonte (1988), p. 170; on fathers who ignored daughters and brothers who denied sisters their dowries, see Fonte (1997), p. 112; p. 63; Fonte (1988), p. 68; p. 29.

outside of it. *Donnesca libertà* can be framed as a form of positive liberty, an opening to action not available otherwise. As is typical in the dialogue, individual speakers voice their skepticism about *donnesca libertà*. The unhappily married Cornelia refers to it as an illusion, embedding it in a discussion of the connections between marriage and martyrdom, making a word play on the closeness of the expressions *marito* and *martirio* in Italian.⁵³ According to Cornelia, women only think that by taking a husband they have acquired for themselves a certain *donnesca libertà*, to pursue ‘some pleasurable activities’, but they can find themselves deluded and ‘held instead like animals confined in four walls’.⁵⁴

In defense of this purported illusion, the older widow Adriana points out that without entering the marital state, women will never be allowed the same sociability that the conversationalists enjoy—an unmarried woman would lack such possibilities.⁵⁵ So the liberty of single life may not be greater than the liberty of married life, if the woman can manage to find the right kind of man, a daunting task, described by Cornelia as having about the same possibility of success as buying the winning lottery ticket.⁵⁶ To put it another way, as Queen Adriana explains, finding such a man can be a considerable research project.⁵⁷

Should she succeed in that undertaking, a married woman gained positive liberty, liberty that allowed her a sphere of action and autonomy she would not have had if she remained with her parents. Marriage ushered her in to the governing of the affairs of the Venetian household—to tending, guiding, managing, and directing people in that domain. Such individuals might include servants, children, and sometimes her wayward husband, even when, as Cornelia points out, he is throwing away his money and not inclined to accept his wife’s guidance.⁵⁸ She was also charged with preserving the goods of the household. The word for this role in the dialogue is *governare*, and its overlap with the term for Venetian men’s role in governing the city is worth examining in more detail. Good governing in the household and good governing in the city have many similarities in Fonte’s dialogue.

With this analogy Fonte adds an additional facet to women’s liberty. In Venice, as in the dialogue, liberty embodied what would later be distinguished

53 Fonte (1997), p. 68; Fonte (1988), p. 33.

54 Ibid.

55 Fonte (1997), p. 239; Fonte (1988), p. 171.

56 Fonte (1997), p. 30; Fonte (1988), p. 44.

57 See Fonte (1997), p. 258; Fonte (1988), p. 181.

58 On the wife’s multiple roles, see Fonte (1997), p. 99; Fonte (1988), p. 61; on the activities of husbands, see Fonte (1997), p. 72; Fonte (1988), p. 37.

as rights of political participation. In the late sixteenth century, liberty implied a capacity for rule or for participation in governing associated with the ruling aristocracy and the citizen class who staffed the offices of the republic.⁵⁹ Fonte affirms the equal ability of both women and men to govern themselves, or as the interlocutor Leonora summarizes it: 'all the other creatures recognize us as the rulers of the world, just as much as men, if not more.'⁶⁰ Fonte's lengthy excursus into the discussion of the natural world signaled the original equality between the sexes, as the literary scholar Virginia Cox has astutely observed.⁶¹ Such equality was founded in their equal ability to govern, recognized in nature, if not always in the realities of Venice where '[men] claim (and even actually believe) that the status they have gained through their bullying is theirs by right'.⁶²

Fonte draws attention to the resemblance of the wife's activities in the home to those of men in the governing and administration of the Venetian state. Her convergence of these concepts is not accidental. The ideal of good governing is summarized by Adriana in her willingness to be the Queen of the group: '[I] accept the governance and command [*reggimento*] you have assigned to me, and I promise to maintain justice and to govern you in the manner that faithful subjects deserve.'⁶³ Fonte's use of the word *reggimento* ('direction and command') repeats elsewhere in the dialogue when Leonora describes the women's tasks in the household, as 'amministrando il regimento (*sic*) della famiglia'.⁶⁴

The language echoes Venetian treatises on household management, especially the analogies between women's attention to the household and a military general's oversight of his soldiers. Such texts linked the household and the state—with the former as a microcosm of the latter.⁶⁵ Fonte's dialogue echoes the most egalitarian gender attitudes of those earlier works, since she places at parity the activities of women and men in the production

59 Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, p. 11.

60 Fonte (1997), p. 169; Fonte (1988), p. 114.

61 Cox, 'Moderata Fonte and the Worth of Women', pp. 11–12.

62 Fonte (1997), p. 61; Fonte (1988), p. 27.

63 Fonte (1997), p. 57; Fonte (1988), p. 24: 'accetto graziosamente il governo e reggimento impostomi e vi prometto mantenervi giustizia e così governarvi come a fedeli suddite si conviene'.

64 Fonte (1997), p. 100; Fonte (1988), p. 61: 'amministrando il regimento (*sic*) della famiglia'.

65 Earlier treatises such as that of Paolino the Minorite describe the necessity of men's rule over wives, children, and servants but also posit an equality between spouses. His fifteenth-century successor, Francesco Barbaro, allowed a greater role for women and noted that 'women are obliged to maintain that which men have accumulated', and that the domestic role of women was similar to that of generals over soldiers, an image that Fonte may have absorbed from Barbaro. Romano, *Housecraft*, pp. 5–6, 11.

of family life. Cornelia's description of women's activity in the *reggimento* of the family alerts us to the potential interpretive difficulties for English readers if we translate *governare*, when practiced by women, as merely 'to look after' or 'to tend to'. It certainly has those meanings, but it also contains an element of 'guiding' or 'directing' of inferiors, including children, servants, and husbands. The woman's good governing of the household mirrors the good governing of Venice, also 'governed most wisely', as Fonte put it. Venice 'has always found men of good sense and great integrity to regulate and guide its affairs'.⁶⁶ Women were similarly skilled at these same types of activities, according to Cornelia, because they are 'guided by their reason and not by their impulsive desires'.⁶⁷ Her friend Corinna echoes her sentiment, adding that a man who married gained reason due to his exposure to the 'decent and sensible behavior [*buona practica*] his wife will place before his eyes'.⁶⁸ Such insights underscore that good governing was not gender specific, but in general was likely to be more characteristic of women than men in *The Worth of Women*, since women 'acted according to reason rather than appetite', an attribute that led to better individual behavior and better governing practices.⁶⁹ Success in homes and in the halls of power required mastery—of things, of people, and of desires.

Cornelia identifies the wife's activity in the household as 'the office of the wife, just as it is the husband's task to bring in the money and deal with the world outside'.⁷⁰ She notes with pride that in that sphere only women can govern, since men are 'incapable of getting anything right'.⁷¹ Leonora acknowledges that her contemporaries critique women's actions in the household by asserting that such women wish to 'dominate [men]';⁷² men who are ostensibly the masters of their houses. She counters such criticism by pointing out that a woman's goal is to secure the peace of the household.⁷³ A 'woman, whether she be a wife or a mother or a sister' was essential to the successful Venetian household.⁷⁴

66 Fonte (1997), p. 203; Fonte (1988), p. 143.

67 Fonte (1997), p. 84; Fonte (1988), p. 47. In her translation Cox attributes this intervention to Corinna. Chemello's edition follows the original edition of 1600, which identifies this speaker instead as Cornelia. See the Venetian edition of Fonte from 1600, p. 40.

68 Fonte (1997), p. 115; Fonte (1988), p. 70.

69 Fonte (1997), p. 84; Fonte (1988), p. 47.

70 Fonte (1997), p. 71; Fonte (1988), p. 36.

71 Fonte (1997), p. 99; Fonte (1988), p. 61.

72 Fonte (1997), p. 100; Fonte (1988), p. 61.

73 Fonte (1997), p. 100; Fonte (1988), pp. 61–62.

74 Ibid.

The dialogue also recognizes the differences between the hypothetical positive liberty (*donnesca libertà*) and its realities. Women found their possibility for domestic agency limited by the misbehavior of their husbands, whose negligence, gambling, or whoring undermined the survival of the family itself. This left the wife in precarious and sometimes violent circumstances. It overturned her station. Instead of a wife, she became a guard at the Arsenale, the Venetian industrial shipyard, waiting in vain for the return of her woebegone spouse. Rather than a mother, she became the mistress of an orphanage, tending to the numerous illegitimate children her husband had brought to their domicile. Rather than wives with a minimal subsistence for their needs, they were confined entirely to the home, stripped of finery and of the possibility of socializing—'nuns in all but habit' who had believed that on their wedding day to have taken a vow of matrimony, 'not a vow of poverty'.⁷⁵

Husbands could thus pose multiple obstacles to wives' rightful *donnesca libertà* in the household, including undermining their wives' opportunity for governing in the domestic sphere. The husband who treated his spouse below her rank as his equal exercised a form of tyranny against which she had the right to complain or to flee. Fonte critiques men's actions as the abuse (*abuso*) of women, leading men to excessive control of their wives' behavior and to verbal abuse.⁷⁶ She defines abuse as any exercise of authority improper to the status of the governed by those who do the governing. In the case of men, they have achieved their superior status in society 'through their bullying' and thus have unfairly usurped the rights of women.⁷⁷ They are certainly not superiors in the homes where they wrongly tyrannize women, treating them below their station, that is, as less than the equals to men that they are.⁷⁸

Such men miss the essential component of marriage because they fail to recognize women's state of liberty prior to marriage as well as their *donnesca libertà* within it. By contrast, if a woman marries a man who respects her, who trusts her, and who 'is not going to interfere with her freedom [*lascia la sua libertà*] then she takes the yoke on her shoulders of her own free will'.⁷⁹ This original assent has to be enacted on a daily basis. Men who rule their wives without the recognition of this fact tend to become offensive—they are nagging schoolmasters instead of loving spouses, and in the worst-case

75 Fonte (1997), p. 71; Fonte (1988), p. 36.

76 Fonte (1997), p. 61; Fonte (1988), p. 27.

77 Ibid.

78 Fonte (1997), p. 59; Fonte (1988), p. 26.

79 Fonte (1997), p. 68; Fonte (1988), p. 34.

scenarios, verbal and physical abusers. In such cases, women who leave their husbands are considered 'wise' (*savie*) in the dialogue, for they flee a domestic 'hell' (*inferno*) that was not part their original marriage agreement.⁸⁰

Fonte's turn to politics might at first glance seem to be undermined at the end of the dialogue by the concession of the happy widow Leonora that she might consider the possibility of marrying for a second time.⁸¹ Leonora hardly seems like remarriage material. Her unrelenting but likely accurate critique of sixteenth-century men at times unnerves the other women. The young Helena warns that Leonora's life might be in danger if men 'knew what you were thinking when they saw you walking past in the street'.⁸² Leonora openly relates to her friends the dream of killing the 'bad men' of the dialogue. She speaks effusively about the beauty of liberty outside of marriage, suggesting that she would rather drown than remarry.⁸³ One of the most articulate critics of men then seems to relent in her views, a reversal that could lead some twenty-first century readers to despair. Her concession might be seen as one of several maneuvers that help render the dialogue's more radical statements merely hypothetical or establish the dialogue itself as a form of 'serious play'.⁸⁴

Yet Leonora's concession to *possibly* remarry is hypothetical ('forse che mi disporrò ad accettare il vostro consiglio').⁸⁵ It is one of a several conciliatory gestures on the part of Leonora late in the dialogue. When Virginia expresses concern for Leonora's safety because of her negative comments about men, Leonora counters that her critique was directed specifically at 'bad men' who are under the mistaken notion that 'they are created to be women's superiors'.⁸⁶ This mistaken belief results in their 'treating women as tyrannically and brutally as they like'.⁸⁷ Earlier in the dialogue, Leonora spoke directly to men as though she were making closing arguments in a legal case.⁸⁸ Her reasoning ranges across male–female relationships, noting

80 Fonte (1997), p. 65; Fonte (1988), p. 31.

81 Fonte (1997), p. 259; Fonte (1988), p. 259.

82 Fonte (1997), p. 258; Fonte (1988), p. 181.

83 Fonte (1997), p. 53; Fonte (1988), p. 21.

84 On the interpretation of the *querelle des femmes* as *serio ludere*—serious play, but play nonetheless—see Chemello, 'Gioco e dissimulazione in Moderata Fonte'; Martelli, *Polifonie*, pp. 42–43.

85 Fonte (1997), p. 259; Fonte (1988), p. 182.

86 Fonte (1997), pp. 258–259; Fonte (1988), p. 182.

87 Fonte (1997), p. 259; Fonte (1988), p. 182.

88 Fonte (1997), pp. 189–192; Fonte (1988), pp. 132–135. Leonora refers to her intervention as 'la più giusta causa e le più sante ragioni', and urged the men to listen as 'giustissimi giudici'. Fonte (1997), p. 190; Fonte (1988), p. 132.

the necessity of improvement in men's roles as father, brother, husband, or lover. Her intervention recognizes the equality between women and men: 'we were born with the same substance and qualities as you, and that we were given to you as companions in this life, not as slaves'.⁸⁹ A better future for women and men necessitates that men also recognize the faults of their behavior and 'pass sentence against themselves' since the women themselves have been proven innocent.⁹⁰ Men should give up their bad behaviors and in return women will '[be] submissive that is, as a free choice, out of love for you, not under compulsion'.⁹¹ Matrimony rests on mutual engagement by both parties: 'for if you [men] love us, then we will love you; if you pay us the regard due to a wife, we will pay you that due to a husband—we will even regard you as our masters, not through obligation, but through love'.⁹²

Leonora's pledge of submission is certainly uncomfortable to our ears. But it is a pledge predicated upon a conditional promise—if you love us, then we love you. All social contracts also entail a submission and a loss of some liberties in order to gain others, as Fonte's prescient thinking anticipated. In Renaissance marriage, each party sacrificed some of her or his negative liberty. The dialogue clearly demands that men give up some of their freedom to do anything they like, including their illicit, expensive, and immoral activities. They could no longer be completely free in marriage if marriage were to be acceptable to women. As in (later) social contract theory, people surrendered some personal liberty of doing anything they wanted in order to secure civic freedoms unobtainable otherwise. If a marriage were to be a successful one, it had to offer positive liberty to both parties—not just the sacrifice of negative liberties. In Fonte's model of marriage, both parties were supposed to gain the co-stewardship of a flourishing domestic enterprise as well as companionship and love. On the part of women, it was an arrangement not without its perils, either due to the misbehavior of men, as repeatedly emphasized in the dialogue, or because of the risks of childbearing, as the last days of Modesta Pozzo remind us.

Much in Fonte's dialogue is purposefully left open to debate: one might disagree about the boundaries between human will and the natural disposition of one's humors or about the correct treatment of various diseases. Her insistence upon women's liberty as existing both before and after marriage, and her willingness to confront the rage women felt at its violation, were

89 Fonte (1997), p. 190; Fonte (1988), p. 132.

90 Fonte (1997), p. 192; Fonte (1988), pp. 134–135.

91 Fonte (1997), p. 192; Fonte (1988), p. 134.

92 Fonte (1997), p. 191; Fonte (1988), p. 134.

more demanding insights for her readers. Leonora's recognition of her wish to kill in retribution for the harm men have done is a desire her later arguments reject. For while Fonte condemned femicide, she also refused to use murder to address it.⁹³ While our own sense of women's possibilities has thankfully moved far beyond the categories of married or single life that shaped Fonte's approach, her insistence on women's equal liberty is still very much at issue. More rigorously analyzed than she could have ever imagined, it remains in danger, and with it, women and girls across the globe.

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7. ‘Wrestling the World from Fools’

Teaching Historical Empathy and Critical Engagement in Traditional and Online Classrooms

Jennifer Selwyn

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the pedagogical implications of examining action and agency. It poses some vital questions for those engaged at any level with the work of the humanities, but particularly for educators who face the daunting but urgent task of connecting our students to a meaningful past, even as we recognize the need to help that past speak to their contemporary realities. Building on my own experiences as an educator, as well as the scholarship and pedagogical strategies of others, I ask how we can engage our students in meaningful critical inquiry, encourage their cultivation of historical empathy, and draw vivid connections between the past and the worlds that we currently inhabit, particularly in addressing such themes as identity and lived experience.

Keywords: historical empathy; presentism; student engagement; pedagogical strategies

The current climate of pandemic, economic crisis, and political incompetence at the highest levels provides daily opportunities to look closely at our presuppositions about teaching history, and other humanities fields, as well as offering many challenges in a period in which historical memory is intensively contested: it inspired the title of this paper, based on a song lyric by the inimitable punk rock legend and poet, Patti Smith. Every day, it seems, we see assaults on the historical narratives that we have taken for granted, and attacks on the very notion of evidence-based reality. We historians might say that empiricism itself is under assault, even though we may have some doubts about empiricism ourselves. This moment, I would

argue, provides a greater sense of urgency than many of us can remember for engaging our students in meaningful, critical inquiry, encouraging historical empathy, and drawing vivid connections between the past and the worlds that we currently inhabit. In this context, the call for ‘wrestling the world from fools’ from Smith’s anthemic ‘People Have the Power’ (1988) resonates ever more powerfully.

In this essay, I would like to pose some questions for those engaged at any level with the work of history and the humanities, but particularly to educators, who face the task of connecting our students to a meaningful past even as we recognize more than ever the need to help that past speak to their contemporary realities. In the process, I will also offer a few reflections from my own teaching experiences and suggest some innovative teaching strategies from other scholars and educators that offer to deepen student engagement.

I teach a range of upper division European and world history courses—including several courses that focus on women/gender/sexuality—at two good-sized state universities that attract primarily commuter students, many of them working class, first generation, and often from immigrant families, in Sacramento, California, and Portland, Oregon. At the latter, I teach exclusively online courses. While some of my students are demonstrably aware of contemporary politics and global affairs, and engaged with student activism, most are not. I find that they are sometimes reticent to express opinions about which they worry that classmates may take offense, or that might breed controversy. Students who are not history majors tend to come to my courses with the usual misconceptions about history as a discipline, based upon what are often negative or uninspired experiences in secondary school. While the history majors are obviously better disposed toward the discipline, they do not necessarily come with a very deep understanding of historical method or refined skills of interpretation. Interestingly, students in the online environment often seem much more willing to connect the historical material that we are studying with our contemporary situation, but whether that speaks more to the older demographic of many online students in general, or to the format of those courses which provides greater sense of privacy, I cannot say with any confidence.

Recent teaching experiences had inspired a series of questions that have been vexing me, as I reflect on what has worked well in my teaching over the years and how I would like to stretch myself to be more effective in this current climate, whose contours I sought to sketch above: First, how do we as humanities educators fight against the attacks on evidence-based scholarship that our students are imbibing in the wider culture, while also

helping them to cultivate an empathetic disposition in their study of the past (toward those relatively few individuals to whose words and thoughts we have at least some access, but even more so toward the majority of individuals in the past, to whom we do not)? In other words, how do we *both* advocate for the value of the historical method,¹ something about whose specific features reasonable historians can disagree, *and* attend to what one historian has referred to as familiarizing our students with lower case 'h' history—reminding students that their forebears were living, breathing individuals, reminding them that, as one educator eloquently put it, 'when you pricked these people of the past, they bled; their lives were not textual even though we receive them in that fashion'.² Historical individuals, we want to impress upon them, are not just characters in some 'novel'—our students' all-purpose term for any single monograph, fictional or not—or actors in a Hollywood movie.³ We understandably ask ourselves how we might accomplish these ambitious pedagogical goals, given the limited time that we have with our students. We are also mindful of meeting other objectives that we must fulfill, like the demands of comprehensive coverage of course material, and/or meeting learning goals that may be set by departments and colleges.

Second, within this larger challenge of defending the virtues of inquiry and justifying the marshaling of evidence comes yet another challenging question: how might we negotiate the delicate balancing act of, on the one hand, explaining to students how evidence in primary and secondary sources is contested, partial, and biased, and, on the other hand, still defending the idea of a certain kind of empiricism? The irony of this moment is that while we have spent years trying to problematize a simplistic notion that we can use source evidence unproblematically and whole cloth to arrive at truth about the past—an idea about which many of our students come to us convinced—we are now faced with a new cohort of students for whom the 'fake news' mantra may lead them to be highly skeptical of any and all truth claims.

In what follows, and with a renewed awareness of the balancing act in which we are engaged in asserting the value of empiricism without fetishizing it, I first want to return to the theme of historical empathy and ask what exactly we mean by this contested term. How best can we teach our

1 I would define historical method simply as building our analyses of the past out of available evidence, while remaining careful to pay attention to context in the fullest sense of the term and remaining self-reflective about what informs the perspectives that we bring to our study of the past.

2 Volk, 'How the Air Felt on my Cheeks', p. 194.

3 Volk, 'Empathy and Engagement', p. 6.

students to engage with the past and its inhabitants in the most engaging and fruitful ways? How expansively should we define historical empathy? Should educators teach student to engage with the past on its own terms, according to a conventional definition of historical empathy that stresses its critical and analytical virtues, while cautioning us about the dangers of abandoning the supposedly objective ground on which historians should ideally stand? Or should we also seek to give students a more intimate connection to the past by finding opportunities for them to inhabit that space and understand it at a deeper, perhaps more personal level?

Then I would like to explore briefly some of the teaching strategies that I have found helpful in engaging students actively and cultivating historical empathy as I understand it: as some combination of the capital 'H' history that trains students in critical inquiry into the past, and the skills that this requires, and the more flesh and blood empathy that helps students to understand how contemporaries may have experienced those lived pasts. I will examine teaching strategies such as creating non-traditional writing assignments that build in historical empathy as a tool for understanding the past, using historical simulations, and analyzing the use of historical avatars/fictional *personae*, and assess whether these might be helpful in engendering empathy in our students.

Historical empathy

Before we can cultivate historical empathy, we need to decide what this concept means. There appears to be no singular definition, though I have sketched out one of my own. In all of my course syllabi and many class assignments, I integrate the worthy learning goal of cultivating historical empathy and I do so for very deeply held reasons, but I also realize that even the idea of encouraging students to respond empathetically to history has been controversial in the secondary and college classrooms, whether in the United States or abroad. This has particularly been the case since the 1960s and 1970s, when such approaches gained greater visibility. Since that time of experimentation in education and the rise of a variety of new, critical approaches to studying and teaching history, critics of the empathetic approach to teaching history opposed what they saw as its purely 'affective' quality; that is, they cautioned against its apparent tendency to elicit emotional responses in students.⁴ We are all too familiar with the pejorative (and,

4 Lee and Shemilt, 'The Concept That Dare Not Speak Its Name', pp. 39–40.

I would argue, all too frequently misused) term *politically correct*, which seems to be the proverbial elephant in the room when such critics consider an empathetic approach to studying history. Critics contend that cultivating historical empathy is antithetical to encouraging rigorous inquiry into the past, although that false dichotomy seems artificial in practice.

According to this skeptical approach, teaching students historical empathy has been viewed as an academically 'soft' approach that has led more to the cultivation of 'historical imagination', which could slip too easily into—god forbid—'literary invention'.⁵ While critics have acknowledged the necessity of engaging students in active learning, they have worried that 'enthusiasm for a "process"—and sometimes for a certain sort of "product"' of learning has tainted the idea of historical empathy.⁶ According to this view, historical empathy should not constitute anything as warm and fuzzy as 'affective engagement with predecessors', if it sacrifices teaching the nuts and bolts of historical method.⁷ The crux of the matter is the fear that history educators might actually choose to encourage students to empathize with certain historical actors over others, a familiar argument that we hear today—invoking yet again the grossly overused and nebulous charge of 'political correctness'. Certainly, we can see the risks of engaging students intimately with historical actors, given the tendency of some students to 'slide into "us and them" conceptions of the past'.⁸ But I would argue that there is not any inherent contradiction between learning to empathize with figures in the past, including those from whom we have little direct testimony of their lived experiences, and teaching rigorous skills of critical inquiry. In this I agree with Lee and Shemilt, who provide a way out of the conundrum between fostering empathy and critical thinking skills by defining *historical empathy* as incorporating an understanding of what motivates historical actors (whether as individuals or collectivities), as well as reconstructing historical mentalities, including appreciating, if not agreeing with, the reasons why people did what they did, or felt as they did.⁹

As we have seen, some critics have cautioned against crude approaches to cultivating historical empathy in the classroom, but I believe that we can do this effectively without sacrificing the critical tools of analysis that students so desperately need in order to navigate a particularly fraught historical

5 Ibid., p. 39.

6 Ibid., p. 40.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

moment. One of the most fascinating scholarly exchanges that gets at the heart of the controversy surrounding the project of cultivating historical empathy can be found in the 1988 debate between Natalie Zemon Davis and Robert Finlay over Davis's retelling of the story of Martin Guerre, Bertrande de Rols, and Arnauld du Tilh in *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983).¹⁰ This debate, brought forth in an *American Historical Review* Forum, but also referenced in an excellent chapter on teaching historical empathy by Merry Wiesner-Hanks and Urmi Engineer Willoughby in their volume *A Primer for Teaching Women, Gender, and Sexuality in World History. Ten Design Principles* (2018),¹¹ posed a number of questions about Davis's methodologies in reconstructing this famous story of mistaken identity in sixteenth-century rural France. At its heart, however, the exchange between Finlay and Davis became an argument over the ideal nature of the historian's craft and the place of historical empathy within it. So where did each scholar come down on these pertinent questions?

Finlay critiques many aspects of Davis's historical reconstruction, though he credits her creative reconstruction of the context of sixteenth-century French peasant life in its complexities and her efforts to bring to a wider audience the fascinating story of the impostor, Arnaud du Tilh, Bertrande de Rols, the woman to whom he posed as husband, the real Martin Guerre, and the trial that exposed Arnaud du Tilh's imposture. In particular, he challenges Davis's claim for Bertrande de Rols' apparent complicity in the crime and the author's efforts to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of Bertrande's possible motivations and mindset. Finlay takes issue with Davis's interpretations that presumably contradict the primary account of the trial of Arnaud du Tilh by the jurist, Jean do Coras, as well as critiquing what he characterizes as Davis' illegitimate, twentieth-century perspective on the key characters in the saga, especially Bertrande. Toward the end of his essay, Finlay argues against Davis's apparent focus on 'self-fashioning rustics', again suggesting that her historical 'invention' directly contradicts the evidence in the primary source upon which she bases her book: 'What Davis terms "invention", the employment of "perhapses" and "may have beens," is of course, the stock-in-trade of historians, who are often driven to speculation by inadequate and perplexing evidence'.¹² What troubles Finlay is not so much the idea of speculation where no clear evidence exists in the record, but what he perceives to be Davis's knowing refusal of the

10 Davis, 'On the Lame'; Finlay, 'Refashioning of Martin Guerre'.

11 Wiesner-Hanks and Willoughby, 'Fostering Historical Empathy', pp. 94–95.

12 Finlay, 'Refashioning of Martin Guerre', p. 571.

conclusions drawn by Jean de Coras, the key contemporary chronicler. He laments that Davis has gone too far in her empathetic treatment of the key characters in the saga (or is it, perhaps, empathizing in a manner not true to the integrity of the historical record, as he sees it?), adding:

Regrettably, in *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Davis has permitted an excess of invention to obscure the lives of the people who engaged her sympathy and imagination. If readers feel a kinship with Bertrande and lament the return of the man with the wooden leg, if they feel that they truly understand the lives of those long-dead peasants, it is all, unbeknownst, at the expense of respecting their historical integrity, their very different motivations and values.¹³

Responding to Finlay's critiques in her essay, 'On the Lame', Natalie Zemon Davis asserts that she intentionally played with questions of how we ascertain historical truth and foregrounded the uncertainties raised within the story of the *Return of Martin Guerre*, asserting that her book 'is an exploration of the truth and doubt: of the difficulty in determining true identity in the sixteenth century and of the difficulty in the historian's quest'.¹⁴ Invoking Finlay's own question to highlight her methodology, Davis remarks: "In reconstructing historical writing where does reconstruction stop and invention begin?" is precisely the question I hoped readers would ask and reflect on, the analogy with the uncertain boundary between self-fashioning and lying built into my narrative'.¹⁵

Meticulously taking on each of Finlay's critiques with a reasoned defense of her methodological choices, Davis provides a particularly robust defense of deploying historical empathy rooted in careful reading of relevant primary sources, as well as displaying an in-depth command of the deeper and broader context of sixteenth-century French peasant life and structures when she considers what drove Bertrande de Rols' actions and decisions.¹⁶ Highlighting how Bertrande displayed a pragmatic view of matters that was consistent with her gender and social status within the confines of a patriarchal, pre-modern society, Davis notes that Bertrande's actions are clearly motivated to a large degree by the imperative of maintaining and defending her honor at all costs. In this case, then, readers are led

¹³ Ibid., p. 571.

¹⁴ Davis, 'On the Lame', p. 572.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 576–587.

into a thoughtful illustration of the historian's craft in all of its complexities, including the challenges and virtues of striving to really understand contemporaries on their own terms (as much as possible for a modern scholar, that is). Sometimes, cultivating historical empathy may mean taking methodological risks, as Davis has so famously done throughout her career as one of the greatest historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but if it is done transparently and skillfully, it bears tremendous fruit.

Engaging students and cultivating empathy

At this point, and drawing upon the lessons that I have highlighted from the Finlay–Davis exchange of 30 years ago, I want to propose a few strategies to engage students and cultivate historical empathy that we can do with just a bit of tweaking of our course designs and syllabi, as well as consider some more radical restructuring ideas from other history educators. By describing some of the values and also potential drawbacks of these approaches, I am hoping to motivate myself to take the plunge and integrate these innovations into my course design. Perhaps you, the reader, will be inspired to do so as well, or see your own experiences reflected here.

For the short term, I have found that adapting course materials, activities, and formal assignments can provide a useful method for engaging historical empathy and asking students profound questions about how historians know what we know, how much speculation is legitimate, and to what degree our own contemporary worldviews can and should intrude upon our investigation of the past. Teaching *The Return of Martin Guerre* in both early modern European history courses as well as courses on gender in pre-modern Europe, in conjunction with the Finlay–Davis exchange, offers an excellent opportunity to consider just these kinds of questions. I had long asked students to think about what Davis's monograph can teach us about changing constructions of identity over time (and with the arrival of modern forms of technology that make authentication of the individual seemingly much more certain), but including the detailed and lively debate about methodology and historical empathy, and asking students to consider who makes the most compelling case and why, offers students a more in-depth opportunity to practice historical thinking and practice. One of the virtues of Davis's essay is that she lays bare the motivations and strategies of one very prominent, highly talented (but also self-aware) scholar's approach to sticky historical material, providing a rich vein for students to draw from in considering the historian's craft at an intimate level.

One very simple and perhaps obvious strategy, but which can still be surprisingly controversial among some history colleagues, is using novels as windows into the time periods under study. While using fictional works in history courses without providing sufficient context risks students' generalizing from one seemingly unreliable source or viewing the novel as a direct representation of the reality of the age, if we are honest with ourselves, we find that this is true with any kind of historical source. But fiction can also inspire a deep and meaningful engagement with the past for many students, leading them to develop some excellent written work.

In a recent semester, I had great success in teaching and assigning written work related to Sibilla Aleramo's pathbreaking early twentieth-century autobiographical novel, *Una Donna/A Woman* (1906), in my upper-division 'Women in Western Civilization—Renaissance to the Present' course at CSU–Sacramento. This assignment allowed for valuable exercises in comparative analysis, which could be adapted when teaching about early modern women. For one of their essays, students were invited to write either a conventional essay on the book or an alternate writing assignment on how Aleramo's novel reflected the complexities and challenges in the life of an educated, middle-class woman in Italy at the turn of the twentieth century. I invited them to discuss the novel in light of some of the key themes that we had discussed in class, including the political and cultural climate in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italy, the rise of the New Woman, and the legacy of earlier generations of Italian feminists, beginning with fifteenth-century humanists like Laura Cereta and moving all the way to the nineteenth-century feminist Anna Maria Mozzoni. Students were also encouraged to incorporate other common course materials, such as the main text and/or optional journal articles.

Students could write an analytical essay, a newspaper article from the time period, or a letter from a contemporary to the author, in response to the prompt question on how Aleramo's novel reflected the complexities and challenges of the era. Almost without exception, those who chose the alternate writing formats wrote their best papers of the term in terms of the quality of the writing itself, but more so in terms of their level of engagement with the material and effort to dig deeper into the time period and the ideas with which at least some contemporaries would have been concerned.

For the last few years, I have been broadening the range of formats for written work in my courses in order to promote deeper historical engagement and empathy. As we know from research on learning and our own experience, many students work best when provided with a variety of formats in which to work, and the point is to help them produce their best, most meaningful

work. I have had mixed success with journal writing, based largely upon how much time I have carved out for it during class sessions, as students are loath to do much spontaneous writing outside of class, unless I clearly create those expectations. Many students enjoy the option of producing PowerPoint lectures as an alternative to writing longer essays, whether because their formal writing skills are somewhat iffy, or because they tend to prefer working with visual images. I have not found a good formula to convince them that a strong presentation, like an excellent paper, needs to have a clear analytical focus, however, so I tend to get information overload and very little historical analysis; perhaps you can relate.

Finally, historical simulations have offered an excellent, though all too rare opportunity to bring students closer to the possible, lived reality of their forebears. In my online upper-division class at Portland State University, 'Witches and Witch-hunting in Early Modern Europe', I have students complete a witch hunt simulation designed by Brian Pavlac at the beginning of each term.¹⁷ I teach this popular upper-division class each spring, and students almost universally find it a very useful exercise, often returning to reflect upon its impact throughout the remainder of the term. Many students enter the class with, at best, a distorted sense of the historical realities of the early modern European witch hunts gleaned from popular culture, and from some familiarity with the rather unusual example of the Salem witch trials.

The simulation serves as an excellent corrective at the outset of the class, providing students with a clearer sense of contemporary, inquisitorial legal procedures from seventeenth-century Germany, the widespread use of torture to extract confessions from the accused, and the variability of outcomes that suspects faced. This last feature creates a visceral sense of the randomness and contingency of witch trials in students who play the simulation (and some do so repeatedly), and builds in a depth of empathy for many students that written texts rarely achieve with the same degree of immediacy. Although different outcomes are baked into the simulation through algorithms, and students know this, they still compare notes and wonder how they could have done everything 'right' and still find themselves on the losing end as accused witches. I am particularly gratified when students make connections with more recent historical examples of the use of torture (such as in the case of Abu Ghraib, or in the so-called War on Terror) and their equally dubious efficacy in protecting contemporaries from 'evil'.

17 Pavlac, 'Witch Hunt'.

One of the most exciting approaches to cultivating an empathetic response in students that I have learned about in recent years involves integrating the use of historical avatars centrally into course design. These 'avatars', or fictional individuals, serve as witnesses and participants in a given history. History educators have radically re-envisioned their courses in order to let students anonymously inhabit these fictional personae/avatars and produce extensive written accounts of their life experiences that respond to instructor-driven questions and interventions tied to key moments in the course curriculum. This allows the instructor to move past the seeming contradiction between teaching the skills of historical inquiry and bringing forth an empathetic response to the 'hidden histories' of those who may not have left extensive, or any, records of their lived experiences. It also gives students considerable agency, and allows them the opportunity to develop historical imagination. A restricted course website, or publicly accessible WordPress site, allow class participants and sometimes others to review these personal accounts, while maintaining students' confidentiality in the interest of producing the most honest and unconstrained reflections.

In her 2009 article 'Creating Lives in the Classroom', Stanford historian Edith Sheffer first publicized this approach to building historical empathy.¹⁸ Sheffer discusses using avatars in a course on modern Germany history, in which students were provided with just the barest of information about their avatar's gender, place of birth, religious affiliation, and parents' occupation. All assigned avatars were born in 1900 and lived through to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. They were not allowed to take actions that would change the course of the known history of twentieth-century Germany, and had to live in the country, or at least not permanently relocate. They were asked to respond to key events in the history of Germany in the twentieth century, and also to prompt questions that offered some minimal guidance and structure to their personal accounts.

Among Sheffer's main takeaways from teaching the class and having students post their avatars' journal entries on a class website were the following: students demonstrated a high level of ownership in the course and their contributions to the website; they chose to engage in a variety of ways with 'real' history through the eyes of their avatars—some actively, and some in a more passive manner; students cultivated highly detailed personae over the course of the term, moving well beyond the minimum expectations for their 'characters'. As Sheffer reflects upon the virtues of the use of historical avatars in her course: 'The project inspired an unusual

18 Sheffer, 'Creating Lives in the Classroom'.

level of commitment. Students often went well beyond the required material in developing their avatars. Their research included Internet searches for images, period-appropriate children's names, and food specialties, as well as reading scholarly works on particular topics of interest.¹⁹

In sum, Sheffer felt that the shift of the course focus to students' development of their avatars led them to a much richer, more nuanced engagement with German history than they would have had with a more straightforward course design, and complemented the 'traditional' work of the class, including lectures and exams.²⁰ Sheffer further reflected upon the strengths and challenges of this kind of assignment in a subsequent piece, based upon the adaptation of the avatar-focused course design for a modern European history class at Stanford. She and her co-author Kathryn Cianca observed that some students seemed to have a much harder time transcending their decidedly US-centric, twenty-first-century worldviews in their avatar entries, but judged the educational experience a worthy one.²¹

Having read about Sheffer's experiment, Stephen Volk adapted this method for an upper-division course at Oberlin College on four Latin American countries from the 1960s to the present, entitled 'Dirty Wars and Democracy'. For this course, he posed several provocative questions at the outset about the nature of political regimes and how they change, mass violence, concepts of justice, and the dynamic ways in which family life is affected by social unrest and trauma.²² I could easily imagine adapting these questions to any number of pre-modern historical courses focused on Europe, or elsewhere, although there are discrete challenges to utilizing the avatar project in classes without a relatively condensed periodization. Volk insists that though his use of avatars, students in his course more strongly appreciated the importance of history, not only as a methodology through which they could approach an understanding of the past, but as a way of seeing themselves within history, as the product of multiple (often conflicted and conflicting) pasts.²³ Given the depth and quality of the work that students produced and their own reflections on the significance of the experience, he felt that it was one of most gratifying teaching experiences in his long professional life.

While I am very drawn to experimenting with the use of avatars in both online and face-to-face classes, I am challenged by the fact that, in contrast to

19 Sheffer, 'Creating Lives in the Classroom'.

20 Ibid.

21 Cianca and Sheffer, 'Creating Lives'.

22 Volk, 'Empathy and Engagement', p. 6.

23 Volk, 'How the Air Felt on My Cheeks', p. 207.

Sheffer and Volk, my classes almost universally range over several centuries, much longer than the lifespan of any individual, historical avatar. One idea for courses with longer chronological spans would be to scale down the avatar project assignment to that of the natural lifetime of an individual (which in the pre-modern period might be only 40 or 50 years), but still give it a place of prominence in a section of the course. For example, in a Renaissance and Reformation class, or a course on women in Medieval/Renaissance Europe, I could imagine using the avatar assignment in a staggered fashion, so that all students would have an opportunity to follow their historical avatar's progress through key historical moments and trace their engagement with the wider history of their age, but perhaps not all do so at the same time in the course. Using the online Learning Management System to this purpose would also offer students more innovative ways to interact than the standard discussion boards on which I have tended to rely for student discussions. At this stage, there are logistical challenges that are part and parcel of course design and organization to overcome, but these are not impossible. I am currently in the process of launching a new class on the history of sexuality in comparative perspective that is both global and spans the pre-modern to contemporary period, and I look forward to seeing how well I can integrate this kind of activity in the classroom setting. I am planning to include a modest version of the avatar assignment in the students' class journal requirement.

Presentism

Alongside asking students to embody and reflect upon historical avatars, another valuable approach to cultivating historical empathy involves designing classes that *explicitly* draw comparisons between past and present societies by highlighting key themes that animated both. Carla Cevasco, an early Americanist, recently adopted this approach when she was tasked with creating a new class that would draw healthy student enrollments. This conventional enrollment imperative was made all the more pressing by the challenge of engaging students in the immediate aftermath of the violent, white supremacist activity in Charlottesville, Virginia during the summer of 2017, just before her class was to debut. In a blog post that describes the course she created and why it took the shape that it did, Carla Cevasco includes a provocative title, 'How I learned to stop worrying and embraced presentism'.²⁴

24 Cevasco, 'How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Embrace Presentism'.

As her title suggests, presentism has been a concept and approach with which historians have been rightly concerned, but it is also a term that may too often be used imprecisely, leaving us overly fearful of acknowledging that history is always taught (and written) from the perspective of the present moment and fueled by the questions and concerns that we bring to it. Several years ago, Lynn Hunt expressed her concern over the rise of presentism in history, particularly in teaching. She argued that presentism tended to distort the past in the light of present concerns, and she bemoaned the continual focus on recent history instead of a longer historical perspective. She saw this approach as giving in to the wider culture's interests in the present day, tendency toward historical myopia, and sense of self-satisfied moral superiority toward our historical forebears. Hunt urged historians to fight against the presentist tide.²⁵

Yet not all historians have been as critical as Hunt about the notion of presentism, and some have problematized it in nuanced ways. The historian of science Naomi Oreskes, for example, argues that we can and should embrace what she calls *motivational presentism*, 'simply because we live in the present and are motivated by the conditions of our own lives'. Such an approach is positive 'because hiding our motivations hamstring us intellectually and stylistically, isolates us from potential audiences, and undermines our ability to speak persuasively about the value of our work'.²⁶ I would add that masking the imperatives that frame our pedagogy distorts our teaching and leaves us feeling vulnerable that in any case students will suss out our intentions in the end.

So, to get back to that curious title of Carla Cevasco's blog, which alludes playfully, if not overtly, to the film *Dr. Strangelove*, as the editor of this volume reminded me, speaking even more directly to how present-day debates and political crises can inspire a decided turn toward what some might call 'motivational presentism', Cevasco poses an important argument about the value of connecting thematic debates in colonial North American history with the thorny issues with which we are wrestling today, such as environmental degradation, exploitation of labor (whether enslaved or wage-based), the rights of sexual and gender minorities and marginalized groups, and income inequality.²⁷ She did in the Fall 2017 course that she taught at Rutgers. Cevasco explains that despite what she had been taught about the risks of presentism, some of which I have just highlighted, she felt

25 Hunt, 'Against Presentism'.

26 Oreskes, 'Why I Am a Presentist', p. 596.

27 Cevasco, 'How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Embrace Presentism'.

compelled by pressing current events during the summer of 2017 to take a different approach to course design: 'But our own political moment—I started teaching two weeks after far-right protests converged around Confederate monuments in Charlottesville—felt too urgent not to let our own moment into our discussions of the past. Instead of keeping the present in the subtext of my class, I brought it into the text.'²⁸

It is worth asking whether the current moment might lead us to cast aside cautionary notes about presentism that held more sway at other times, and in the case of Cevalasco's course, there does not seem to be any of the presentist arrogance about the past against which Lynn Hunt rightly cautioned us. Instead her course self-consciously stresses the common issues that concerned early colonial North Americans of varying states of mind and that also concern contemporary Americans, while also noting key differences across the centuries. This approach draws on research that notes the pedagogical value of comparing past and present contexts by consciously highlighting both similarities and differences.²⁹ Perhaps some of you have already seen the value of this approach, or have designed courses that explicitly move the present 'into the text', alongside, but also in tension with, the past.

I decided to put some of Cevalasco's suggestions about how to engage directly with cultivating historical empathy in new ways to the test in constructing a new course on the comparative history of sexuality, which spans the ancient to contemporary periods. One of the most relevant questions in this course concerns how different societies across time and culture have understood sexuality and the categories through which individuals and groups have identified and expressed their desires. As luck would have it, two scholars of the pre-modern period have offered quite distinct, but complementary, studies of the construction of 'lesbian' or 'lesbian-like' identities in Europe and the Arab Middle East. These allow students to investigate the seemingly contingent nature of sexual identity, past and present, as well as providing an opportunity to consider the specific challenges that scholars of the more distant past face in interpreting the intimate lives of historical actors.

In her essay, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms", Judith Bennett argues that direct references to same-sex desire and acts among women are quite rare in available documents from pre-modern Europe. This is true, she argues, because contemporary observers focused more narrowly

28 Ibid.

29 Craig, Mahoney, and Danish, 'Correcting for Presentism'.

on sexual acts considered sinful and deviant; that is, those acts primarily associated with illicit sex between men and women, or among men, thus making it difficult to provide clear evidence for lesbianism as we would recognize it in the contemporary world. If, instead, we focus on what Bennett calls 'lesbian-like' relationships, she maintains that we will find historical antecedents across a wider range of social status groups and broaden our understanding of the focus of women's erotic and affective interests.³⁰

In her article, 'Medieval Arab Lesbians and "Lesbian-like" Women', Sahar Amer contrasts the medieval Christian tradition that viewed sexuality generally as sinful and spoke little of same sex acts, or identities, among women, with the medieval 'Islamicate' tradition. Amer focuses in her piece on medical/sexological tracts, as well as literary imagery.³¹ Building upon Bennett's earlier analysis, Amer asks us to consider the distinctiveness of medieval Arab-Muslim understandings of same-sex desire and sexual acts, the places where one might expect to find mention of same-sex erotic practices in primary sources of the period, and the various ways in which such practices (or identities) were viewed by contemporary commentators.

The scholarly questions about identities and behaviors from the distant past posed by Bennett and Amer are, of course, not academic at all for our students, or ourselves, as they speak to the very challenges that marginalized groups face today, whether they are sexual/gender minorities, people of color, and/or students from working class/poor families. Again, I return to the larger theme of the uses of history with which I began this essay. As Judith Bennett argued in 2000, this work of reclaiming a usable past is valuable not just from a scholarly perspective, but because it 'speaks to the emancipatory possibilities of history'.³²

History is not mere antiquarianism, fascinated with the past for its sake alone and assuming, naively, that there is a unitary past reality that can be approached, albeit not fully uncovered. In its best forms, history

30 Bennett, "Lesbian-Like" and the Social History of Lesbianisms', pp. 1-4.

31 Amer, 'Medieval Arab Lesbians and "Lesbian-like" Women'. Amer specifically invokes Bennett's category of 'lesbian-like' in her title, using it as a conceptual tool and basis for comparing the European and Arab traditions during the medieval period. On her use of the term 'Islamicate' to emphasize the cultural and social implications of Muslim thought, as compared to strictly theological interpretations, see p. 215.

32 Bennett, "Lesbian-Like" and the Social History of Lesbianisms', p. 4. While Amer does not explicitly cite the goal of seeing her work of historical inquiry serve the interests of contemporary Arab-Muslim, queer communities, I would suggest that her work implicitly shares Bennett's larger vision.

transcends the antiquarian impulse, seeking, of course, to understand the past in its proper contexts but seeking also to play with the ways in which the past illumines the present and the present illumines the past. As V.A. Kolve recently noted, 'we have little choice but to acknowledge our modernity, admit that our interest in the past is always (and by no means illegitimately) born of present concerns'.³³

Our students desperately need the tools that we historians (and other humanities educators and scholars) can offer them in navigating the treacherous terrain of a twenty-first-century world in crisis. The questions that we can pose about the past often speak to their contemporary concerns, whether engaging with questions of identity, considering the often fraught choices that individuals and communities make in challenging times, examining how people negotiate the ethical norms of their respective societies, or assessing the treatment of strangers and those viewed as different. Perhaps the time has come to stop worrying so much about sliding into mindless presentism and instead acknowledge, per Cevalco and Bennett, that our own times, and the urgent questions that they pose for us, always inform our work of examining the past. Surely, the answers that historical actors offer may not always resonate with our own worldviews, may strike us as harsh, dissonant, or even disturbing, but how much less alone we feel when we make the effort to listen.

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Part III

Challenging Representations

8. Thinking Beings and Animate Matter

Margaret Cavendish's Challenge to the Early Modern Order of Things¹

Mihoko Suzuki

Abstract

This essay argues that Margaret Cavendish challenged early modern culture's dominant conception of the relationship between humans and non-humans, humans and their environment, and the inanimate nature of matter. In her poems that dramatize a dialogue among birds and between a tree and a man, Cavendish argues against the unquestioned assumption among her contemporaries that non-human beings exist for the use of man, anticipating recent findings about the intelligence and emotional capacity of birds and the sentience of trees. In other poems, Cavendish anticipates twenty-first-century understandings of humans' destructive effect on the environment. In addition, her representation of the animation and activity of atoms shows congruence with Jane Bennett's concept of 'vibrant matter'.

Keywords: Cavendish, Margaret; animals; plants; environment; materialism

In *Poems and Fancies* (1653), Margaret Cavendish challenged early modern epistemological frameworks, in particular, contemporary understandings of animals, plants, and matter, and the ascription of uncontested human superiority over all other living beings and the environment (Figure 8.1). In taking these extraordinary positions for a thinker of

¹ This essay benefited from discussion with the Animal Studies and Environmental Humanities Interdisciplinary Research Group, sponsored by the Center for the Humanities, University of Miami. I also thank Liza Blake, Margaret Ferguson, Frank Palmeri, and Jessica Rosenberg for helpful comments and suggestions, both substantive and bibliographic.



Figure 8.1: Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, or several Fancies in Verse. With the Animal Parliament, in Prose* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668), frontispiece. Engraving by Abraham von Diepenbeeck. 720.h.28. ©British Library Board.⁴

her time, Cavendish anticipates many of the writings of twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers on these subjects.² In comparing Cavendish and Lucy Hutchinson's representation of animals, I have previously discussed Cavendish's two poems on hunting—one involving a hare and the other a stag—that call attention to the animals' capacity for emotion, especially fear. I concluded that Cavendish considers the relationship between humans and animals as a political one, which she explicitly characterizes as 'tyranny'.³

In this essay I extend my earlier analysis to Cavendish's innovative challenge to the existing and accepted relationship between humans and birds and between humans and plants. Moreover, I will demonstrate the hitherto unnoticed close connection between Cavendish's calling for an ethical treatment of non-human beings on the one hand, and her atomism and vitalist materialism, on the other, which leads to an understanding of the animate nature of the material environment. Finally, I will suggest that the relationship between Cavendish's challenge to the accepted chain of being—or the order of things—and her challenge to patriarchy and the subordination of women derives from her understanding of intersectionality between the two systems of hierarchy, rather than an essentialist identification of women with nature. In this, Cavendish anticipates recent ecofeminist scholars who go beyond an earlier generation of ecofeminists who tended to equate women and nature. While Cavendish was ridiculed not only by her contemporaries but even by Virginia Woolf, a relatively modern feminist, recent scholarly developments in animal studies, materialist theory, and environmental humanities provide us with the necessary perspective to recognize the importance of her thinking; such recognition three and half centuries later confirms her conviction of the afterlife of her writings: 'But say the Book should not in this Age take, / Another Age of great esteem may make; / [...] / For who can tell but my poor Book may have / Honour'd renown, when I am in the Grave.'⁵

2 Wilson also states that 'probably uniquely amongst seventeenth-century philosophers' in protesting 'against not only an authoritarian God, but the supposition of human superiority over the rest of creation', Cavendish's positions 'were anything but conducive to fame and fortune' ('Two Opponents', p. 48).

3 Suzuki, 'Animals and the Political'.

4 One of three frontispieces that Cavendish used for different copies of her various volumes, this one is particularly appropriate for my argument in its inscription's emphasis on her originality: 'Scorning dead Ashes without fire / For her owne Flames do her Inspire'.

5 Cavendish, *Natures Pictures*, p. 390 (mispaginated).

The genius of birds

While Cavendish's poems on the hunting of the hare and stag were focalized through the victims of the hunt, her 'Dialogue betwixt Birds', a poem that appears among others concerned with animals, goes even further to present a non-human perspective through birds who discuss their species-specific mistreatment *qua* birds by humans.⁶ In this, Cavendish's poem diverges from other poetic representations of speaking birds, who function as stand-ins for humans, such as the most well-known predecessor in the genre, *The Parlement of Fowles*; in Chaucer's poem, the interlocutors discuss love in ways that do not center on the speakers' status as birds.

Two contemporary texts, one in French (Cavendish wrote *Poems and Fancies* in France) and the other in English, are more comparable to her version. In the 'Histoire des oiseaux' Cyrano de Bergerac refuted Descartes's contention that birds' imitation of human speech was mechanical and did not bespeak their possession of reason, a refutation also evident in Cavendish's 'Dialogue'.⁷ However, representing the birds as inverting the existing social hierarchy among humans—so that the king of birds is not the eagle, the strongest, but the dove, the weakest—Cyrano thereby produces a satiric allegory of human society, by contrast with Cavendish, who represents the birds as themselves. At the same time, Cyrano shares Cavendish's challenge to the accepted human mistreatment of birds in having the lawyer for the birds plead for equality with humans, while voicing a bitter critique of human arrogance. While Cyrano's 'Histoire' was not published until 1662, though it circulated in manuscript, John Ogilby's *Fables*, published in England two years before *Poems and Fancies*, includes 'A Parliament of Birds' in which different species of birds represent humans of different rank, such as '*Kitish* Peers and *Bussard* Lords'.⁸ Unlike both her contemporaries Cyrano and Ogilby, Cavendish represents birds in their own right, not as satiric versions of humans; she is closer to Cyrano, however, in calling attention to the plight of the birds at human hands.

6 Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, pp. 160–163. Further citations (by page and line number) will be provided in the text. Siegfried bases her text on the third, 1668 edition. See also Liza Blake's digital critical edition that collates all three editions of *Poems and Fancies*.

7 Harth, *Cyrano*, p. 173. 'Histoire des oiseaux' was embedded in the *Estats et empires du soleil*. In 'Political Writing across Borders', I argue that Cavendish was steeped in the political and literary culture of mid-seventeenth-century France, noting the connection between Cyrano's utopia, *L'autre monde*, and Cavendish's *Blazing World*. In an epistolary exchange with Descartes, Cavendish's husband William registered his disagreement with Descartes' notion of animals as machines. See Suzuki, 'Animals and the Political', p. 231.

8 Ogilby, *Fables*, p. 45.

In mounting her challenge to the assumption of human dominion over other beings, Cavendish draws on the poetic tradition of complaint—as associated with abandoned women ever since Ovid’s *Heroides*, and deployed more recently by George Gascoigne to voice the perspective of hunted animals. Perhaps avoiding what Gascoigne had already done, in her poems about hunting a hare and a stag Cavendish vocalizes the emotions of the animals rather than having them speak for themselves. But here, she deploys the genre of complaint to give voice to birds and an oak (in ‘A Dialogue between an Oak, and a Man Cutting it down’), as well as to Earth (in ‘Earth’s Complaint’), advancing an understanding of their plight not available to her contemporaries.⁹

The extensive account of the specific examples of human abuse by different bird species in the ‘Dialogue’ indicates Cavendish’s wide-ranging knowledge of the multitude of ways in which birds were made to suffer at the hands of the humans. Many of these examples concern tortures the birds undergo to satisfy man’s gratuitous desire to have them approximate human speech. The Magpie states, ‘they our tongues do slit, their words, to learn; / And with this pain, our food we dearly earn’ (ll. 51–52). The Parrot explains that she, the Jay, the Daw, and the Pie are captured ‘[o]nly to talk and prate, the best we can, / To imitate, to th’ life, the speech of man’ (ll. 123–24). She concludes by defending their right to use their own ‘[t]ongues giv’n us, like to Men, our Lives to save’ (l. 130).

Some birds, who are consumed as food, are not so fortunate. While the ‘smaller Lark, they eat all at one bite’, some species are prized only for certain parts of their body: ‘[men] of our Flesh do make such cruel waste, / That but some of our limbs will please their taste. / In Woodcocks’ thighs, they only take delight, / And partridge wings, which swift were in their flight’

9 Gascoigne’s *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting* (1575), a translation of Jacques du Vouilloux’s *La Vénerie* (1561), includes complaints by hunted animals, including a hare and a fox. See Suzuki, ‘Animals and the Political’. Smith, O’Callaghan, and Ross, ‘Complaint’, identify three kinds of complaint: erotic, religious, and political. While the authors do not discuss Cavendish, her use of the genre most closely approximates the political: ‘complaint offered a widely used, emotionally charged, nuanced vehicle for expressing powerlessness and protest in response to loss and grievance’ and therefore constituted a ‘crucial mode for the formation of the early modern political subject’ in early modern England (p. 339). They remark that ‘tension between resignation to loss and the possibility of redress [...] continues to underwrite the mode throughout the early modern period’ (p. 340). As the authors point out, during the Civil War period, complaint became a vehicle for royalists to express their loss and dispossession; for example, Hester Pulter expressed her distress over the imprisonment of Charles I in ‘The Complaint of Thames, 1647’ (p. 349). By contrast to Pulter, Cavendish uses the genre to imagine birds, an Oak, and the Earth voicing their own suffering rather than as a vehicle to express her own.

(ll. 73–76). The rapacious appetite of humans who ‘eat until their bellies burst’ sharply contrasts with that of the birds whom they kill with ‘guns and bows [...] / And by small-shot [...] / Because we pick a cherry here and there’ (ll. 39, 35–37).

In an example puzzling to modern readers, Cavendish’s Swallow complains that ‘[men] will take us, when alive we be, / (I shake to tell, O horrid cruelty!) / Beat us alive, till we an oil become’ (ll. 95–97). Through their research on seventeenth-century recipe books, Michelle DiMeo and Rebecca Laroche have shown that the concoction of a topical ointment, ‘Oil of Swallows’, called for a large number (as many as 40) live swallows to be beaten or ‘cut [...] to pieces feathers and guts’. As ecofeminist critics, DiMeo and Laroche find disturbing that women were often the purveyors of such recipes.¹⁰ While men were presumably the perpetrators of violence in the hunting poems, here Cavendish implicitly acknowledges those perpetrators, in this case towards birds, were not limited to men, though she clearly diverges from her female contemporaries’ apparently routine acceptance of such use of swallows for medicinal purposes. Laroche and DiMeo importantly note that in the recipes, the treatment of the swallows is verbally assimilated to the processing of plants in herbal medicine, with the implication that while such violence may give twenty-first-century readers pause, it was not considered extraordinary to seventeenth-century women.¹¹ By calling attention to the perspective of the Swallow, who irrefutably claims, ‘O man! O man! if we should serve you so, / You would, against us, your great curses throw’ (ll. 99–100), Cavendish turns the tables and challenges the routine and normalized nature of such violence that would presumably not elicit a second thought from those who followed the recipe to create the ointment.

These numerous examples of the human abuse of birds are explained as the result of ‘[c]orrupted manners’: ‘No creature doth usurp so much as man, / Who thinks himself like God, because he can / Rule other creatures, and make them obey. / Our souls did never Nature make, say they, / Whatever comes from Nature’s stock and treasure, / Created is, only to serve their pleasure’ (ll. 109–114). Cavendish thereby indicts man’s arrogation of superiority over the rest of creation as usurpation, and the wrongheaded assumption that other creatures exist for human use. The language of usurpation, like the language of tyranny in ‘The Hunting of the Hare’, indicates that Cavendish understands the relationship between humans, and, in this instance, birds

10 DiMeo and Laroche, ‘On Elizabeth Isham’s “Oil of Swallows”’, p. 88.

11 Ibid., pp. 96–98.

to be a political one. In a striking passage, Cavendish ascribes this human ability to dominate birds not to the humans' superior intelligence. The birds assert:

Alas! Alas! We want their shape; for they
 By it have power to make us all obey.
 They can lift, bear, strike, pull, thrust, turn, and wind,
 What ways they will; which makes new arts they find.
 'Tis not their wit that doth inventions make;
 But 'tis their Shape, which height, breadth, can take.
 [...]
 What Creature else has arms, or goes upright,
 Or has all sorts of motion, so unite,
 Man, by his shape, can Nature imitate;
 Can govern, rule, and can new arts create. (ll. 145–50, 153–55)

Cavendish reiterates this acknowledgment that man's dominion over other beings is accidental in the chapter 'Of Man's Shape and Speech' in *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*:

The Shape of Man's Sensitive Body, is [...] singular in this, That he is of an upright and straight Shape; of which, no other Animal but Man is: which Shape makes him not only fit proper, easie and free, for all exterior actions; but also for Speech: [...] Whereas other Animal Creatures, by reason of their bending Shapes, and crooked organs, are not apt for Speech; [...] Man's shape is so ingeniously contrived, that he is fit and proper for more several sorts of exterior actions, than any other Animal Creature; which is the cause he seems as Lord and Sovereign of other Animal Creatures. (ll. 49–50)

This passage confirms in Cavendish's own voice her birds' emphasis on man's 'shape', rather than any other quality, as enabling his dominion over them.

Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* also distinguished man's upright shape from that of animals, who 'are prone, and fix their gaze upon the earth'. Yet in celebrating man's 'uplifted face', his ability to 'stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven', Ovid's view that god created man 'of his own divine substance' (which of course parallels the Judeo-Christian creation story in Genesis) contrasts with Cavendish's. Ovid also states that man's kinship with the gods in his capacity for intelligence gives him dominion over the rest of creation (Book 1, ll. 76–88)—although his later stories of the transformation

of humans into animals while retaining their understanding and emotions certainly complicates this view.

Cavendish pointedly declines to endow such significance to man's shape, or to affirm man's ability to reason as exceptional or superior to that of non-human creatures. When the birds complain that it is man's 'shape' rather than his 'wit' that gives him dominion, Cavendish boldly implies that birds do not in fact lack 'wit'. In 'Of Birds', also in *Poems and Fancies*, she makes a similar claim: 'Who knows but birds, which under th'azure skies / Do fly, know whence the blustering winds do rise; / May know what thunder is, which no man knows.' The list of what birds may know continues, until she concludes the lengthy question: 'The birds perhaps might tell, could we inquire' (p. 207). Cavendish thereby suggests that birds have access to multitudes of knowledge not available to humans, and that we are simply ignorant of their abilities because we have been incurious, assuming that humans are the only ones with access to knowledge. These assertions, which must have seemed outlandish to Cavendish's contemporaries, have now been confirmed by recent findings on avian intelligence by Jennifer Ackermann and Nathan Emery. Moreover, Cavendish's representation of birds as experiencing pain and emotion throughout the 'Dialogue' has been supported by Irene Pepperberg's chronicling of her close emotional bond with Alex, a grey parrot.

Finally, in the dedicatory letter to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), 'To the Two Universities', Cavendish strikingly compares women to birds:

for we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad to see the several changes of fortune, and the various humours, ordained and created by nature; thus wanting the experiences of nature, we must want the understanding and knowledge and so consequently prudence, and invention of men.¹²

This passage articulates Cavendish's understanding of the equivalence between birds and women vis-à-vis their relation to men: just as humans confine birds in cages, 'to hop up and down' instead of freely taking flight, so men confine women to their homes, constraining their natural desire to experience, understand, and know. Here, as in her hunting poems, we see evidence of Cavendish's 'understanding' of the intersectionality of the political subjection of animals and women, as victims of the 'tyranny' of

12 Cavendish, *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, n.p.

men. Anticipating arguments made by scholars of the recently ascendant plant studies, Cavendish would extend such intersectionality not only to animals, but also to plants.

The hidden life of trees

While Cavendish may agree with her contemporaries who assimilate birds to plants, she would reach the opposite conclusion from those who would subject both birds and plants to human use: she believes that they both equally deserve not to be sacrificed to such instrumental use. In 'A Dialogue between an Oak, and a Man Cutting it down', one of the poems she groups among her dialogues, Cavendish stages an exchange between tree and man, in which the tree appears more reasonable than the man at every turn (pp. 155–160). In addition to the complaint, which I have already mentioned, Cavendish makes reference to pastoral by casting her poem in the form of dialogue taking place away from the city. It is far from a conventionally bucolic one between shepherds (as in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*), however, but one in which an oak pleads for his life to a man about to cut him down. Pastoral was a genre that claimed to challenge the ideology of epic, whose goal was the founding of cities, entailing violence; Cavendish repurposes and demystifies the pastoral in this poem by calling attention to human violence against other beings in service of mercantilism and colonialism.

In identifying the tree as an oak, Cavendish may have been thinking of the groves sacred to Zeus in Dodona, where the oaks, as Herodotus relates, rustled their leaves to communicate prophecies to the priests who interpreted them. The prophetic ability of the oaks endows them with a numinous status, and Cavendish's oak may derive his impressive dignity from this classical antecedent. The most famous post-classical example of a talking plant is, of course, Dante's Pier delle Vigne, whose descendants include Spenser's Fradubio; both exclaim and bleed sap when their boughs are broken and his leaves are plucked. Less well known but closer to Cavendish's time is James Howell's *Dendrologia: Dodona's Grove, or The Vocall Forrest* (1640), a historical allegory of Stuart England and contemporary Europe that makes extensive use of tree lore.¹³ And in 'Of the Husband-man, and the Wood', in

13 See Marder, 'To Hear Plants Speak'. As examples of 'Talking Trees', Marder discusses Herodotus, Dante, and Howell, but not Cavendish. The example he gives that most resembles Cavendish is from the Warring States period in China (third century BCE.). In Master Zhangzi's

Ogilby's *Fables*, the 'Royall Cedar' meets his demise at the hands of a 'Swain' who becomes the instrument of the Cedar's rebellious subjects, such as the 'rotten-hearted *Elms*', who accuse him of tyranny.¹⁴ Cavendish's striking innovation lies in her interest in the oak *qua* oak, rather than as a vehicle of prophecy, a suicide punished by being turned into a plant, or a vehicle for an allegorical political narrative.¹⁵

Finally, two important historical and political referents for Cavendish's tree are the 'Parliament Oak' under which Edward I met Parliament in 1290 and the Oak of Reformation—in both senses of 'Reformation', the religious and the political—under which Robert Kett and his followers, who rose against aristocratic enclosures, dispensed justice during Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk of 1549. More generally, Sylvia Bowerbank has argued for the deforestation of Sherwood Forest as a context for Cavendish's lament in *The Blazing World* for the 'diminishing population of English trees as trade increases', blaming 'the civil war for destroying the ancient forests and castles of the kingdom'.¹⁶ In her *Life* of her husband William, Cavendish recounts his reaction to the destruction of trees on his property as a result of the civil war:

And although his patience and wisdom is such, that I never perceived him sad or discontented for his own Losses and Misfortunes, yet when he beheld the ruines of that Park, I observed him troubled, though he did little express it, onely saying, he had been in hopes it would not have been so much defaced as he found it, there being not one Timber-tree in it left for shelter [for the wildlife]. (Cavendish, *Life*, 92)

Although Bowerbank considers Cavendish's critique of deforestation to be nostalgic and conservative in seeking to shore up feudal and aristocratic

tale, an oak appears to a carpenter in his dream, and challenges him concerning the utility of trees: 'The lesson of the tree is that all existence is worthless from the standpoint of instrumental rationality [...] human beings cannot presume to know that their scales of value extend to all creatures, including plants'.

¹⁴ Ogilby, *Fables*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁵ 'The Hunting of a Stag' includes a twenty-line catalogue of trees, which grow in the 'shady wood' where the stag dwells (p. 217). Unlike the trees in Ogilby's *Fable*, these trees—'straightest pines', 'tallest cedars', 'Olives upright'—are not placed in hierarchical relation to one another, nor do they together represent an allegorically ominous 'shadie grove' where the trees 'heavens light did hide' as they do in Spenser's catalogue of the trees in Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene* (cantos 7–9).

¹⁶ Bowerbank, *Natural Philosophy*, p. 53. Bowerbank points out that 'Parliament Oak' was located five miles from Welbeck Park, the private park of the dukes of Newcastle, known for its oaks (pp. 56–57). See also Nardizzi, *Wooden Os*, on the way the representations of trees and wood in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries address the ecological crisis of deforestation.

privilege, this passage indicates that even her husband was not simply concerned with the war's effect on his feudal privilege, but on the ecological relationship between forests and wildlife. Even so, the contradictory political valences of the two references, one that commemorates a popular uprising, and the other that laments the passing of feudal privilege, is characteristic of Cavendish's use of equivocation in other respects, as we shall see.

Indeed, in Cavendish's 'Dialogue', the Oak pleads with Man to refrain from cutting him down, describing that action as a taking of his 'life', and killing of his 'body' (l. 18). Cavendish calls attention to the embodiment of the Oak, emphasizing the equivalence between the body parts of human and tree: 'you do peel my bark, and flay my skin, / Chop off my limbs, and leave me naked, thin: / With wedges you do pierce, my sides to wound; [...] / I minced shall be in chips and pieces small' (ll. 23–25). Thus Cavendish presents as utterly reasonable the Oak's plea to 'let me live the Life that Nature gave' (l. 65).

By contrast, Cavendish presents as specious and self-serving the reasons Man gives to justify his intent to cut down the Oak. To his exhortation that as a ship, the Oak will gain 'knowledge'—'Thus shall you round the world, new land to find' (l. 79)—the Oak drily responds that he will no longer be alive: 'I am contented well, / Without that knowledge, in my wood to dwell; / For I had rather live, and simple be / [...] / I am contented with what Nature gave' (ll. 81–83, 101). Moreover, the Oak demystifies Man's attempt to entice him by describing how he will majestically 'cut the seas in two, / And trample down each wave as you do go' (ll. 71–72), by characterizing his transformation into a ship as subjection: 'With sails and ropes, men will my body tie; / And I, a prisoner have no liberty' (ll. 93–94).¹⁷ Similarly, to Man's celebration of the 'stately house / [...] Wherein shall princes live of great renown', that will be built after the Oak is 'cut [...] down', the Oak responds with bitter irony: 'Both brick and tiles upon my head are laid; / Of this preferment, I am sore afraid. / With nails and hammers, they will often wound, / And pierce my sides, to hang their pictures round' (ll. 104–105, 116–118). Rather, he avers, 'More honor 'tis, my own green Leaves to bear. / More honor 'tis to be in Nature's dress, / Than any shape that men, by art, express' (ll. 126–127). By claiming that courtly 'preferment' would entail

17 In 'A Moral Discourse of Man, and Beast' (*Poems and Fancies*, pp. 197–203) Cavendish again couples the human ingenuity that surpasses that of beasts to build and navigate ships and the human capacity for violence that exceeds that of animals: 'And with his ships, the world he'll circle round; / What beast or bird, that doth so, is yet found? / He'll fell down woods, with axes sharp he'll strike; / Whole herds of beasts can never do the like' (ll. 185–88).

subjection and asserting the superiority of 'Nature' to man's 'art', the Oak overturns conventionally accepted values.

Finally, the Oak refutes man's assertion of his own superiority, 'I am happier far (said th' Oak) than you, Mankind; / For I content, in my condition find. / Man nothing loves, but what he cannot get; / [...] / And, as his mind is restless, never pleased, / So is his body sick, and oft diseased' (ll. 136–38, 142–43). Here the Oak challenges the early modern 'order of things' by demystifying the striving and mobility that was the hallmark of the humanist celebration of man—and of colonialism and mercantilism, which Cavendish not so subtly criticizes in the poem—and by flatly proclaiming it to be pathological in its insecurity and arrogance. Cavendish suggests that this pathology, not man's superior uniqueness, leads him to assert dominion over and seek to subjugate the rest of creation. Its contrast, the contentment and self-sufficiency of the Oak, without pride clouding his vision, overturns the conventional hierarchy that subordinates tree to man.

By having the man respond that '[y]ou do not know, nor can / Imagine half the misery of man' (ll. 146–47), Cavendish ironically calls attention to man's inability to 'imagine' the 'misery' of other creatures. Moreover, his assertion that 'man has something more, which is divine, / He hath a mind, and doth to heav'n aspire' (ll. 149–50) indicates his failure to comprehend the 'mind' that has been evident in the Oak's eloquent self-defense. The concluding couplet—'If you, as man, desire like Gods to be, / I'll spare your life, and not cut down your tree' (ll. 162–63)—demonstrates that while Man seeks to present himself as magnanimous, he in fact has completely missed the point of his 'Dialogue' with the Oak. His self-satisfaction coupled with his failure to understand any of the Oak's arguments enables him to maintain the illusion of his own superiority and to insist on subjecting to his power the rest of creation. While maintaining that trees still speak to man (unlike Howell who states that the oaks spoke once, but do so no longer), Cavendish concludes her 'Dialogue' by indicting the inability of man to understand the language of the Oak, and the perspective from which he speaks.

Cavendish's extraordinary representation of the Oak, who eloquently expresses his completely reasonable desire for self-preservation, proves to be prescient, in light of recent findings concerning 'the hidden life of trees'—the title of the book by Peter Wohlleben, with the subtitle, *What They Feel, How They Communicate*. According to Wohlleben, trees experience pain and have memories; communicate with each other in forests, warning one another of impending danger; and sustain the wounded or diseased among their number by sharing nutriment. Strikingly recalling Cavendish's 'Dialogue', Wohlleben emphasizes the status of trees as living beings and their embodied

nature: ‘When logs in the fireplace crackle merrily, the corpse of a beech or oak is going up in flames.’ He concludes, ‘I for one, welcome breaking down the moral barriers between animals and plants. When the capabilities of vegetative beings become known, and their emotional lives and needs are recognized, then the way we treat plants will gradually change, as well. Forests are not first and foremost lumber factories and warehouses for raw material, and only secondarily complex habitats for species [...] Completely the opposite, in fact.’¹⁸

Noting that oaks can live for over five hundred years, Wohlleben argues that at least some trees ‘should be allowed to grow old with dignity and finally die a natural death.’¹⁹ Wohlleben’s statement resonates with that of Cavendish’s Nature (in ‘A Dialogue betwixt Man, and Nature’, pp. 146–48), who claims her ‘Tree’ as her own and who indicts Man’s arrogant presumption in destroying it:

May not I work my will with what’s my own?
 But men among themselves contract and make
 A bargain for my tree; that tree they take:
 Which cruelly they chop in pieces small,
 And form it as they please, then build withal.
 Although that tree by me, to stand, was graced.
 Just as it grows, by none to be defaced. (ll. 20–27)

When the English translation of Wohlleben’s book was published, it attracted a great deal of media attention because it overturned the prevailing understanding concerning the nature of trees, just as Cavendish’s poem did in her own time.

Another recent example of the reassessment of humans’ relationship to trees is the bestselling winner of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize, Richard Powers’s novel *The Overstory*, which takes as its subject the heroic but failed effort of environmental activists to prevent the logging of California redwoods. As Cavendish does in her dialogue, Powers’s novel endows trees with speech, though not understood by most humans: ‘Trees used to talk to people all the time. Sane people used to hear them.’²⁰ Echoing the concerns of Cavendish’s poem, one of Powers’s characters asks, ‘What’s crazier? Believing there might be nearby presences we don’t know about? Or cutting down the last

18 Wohlleben, *Hidden Life of Trees*, p. 244.

19 Ibid., p. 245.

20 Powers, *Overstory*, p. 432.

few ancient redwoods on Earth for decking and shingles?'.²¹ And another: 'the world is not made for our utility. What use are we, to trees?'.²² Finally, 'Should trees have standing? [...] What can be owned and who can do the owning? What conveys a right, and why should humans, alone on all of the planet, have them?'.²³

In challenging her contemporaries' unquestioning assumption of man's entitlement to make use of trees as commodities, Cavendish anticipates not only Powers's question concerning whether trees have standing, but also Michael Marder's question, 'Should plants have rights?', which he answers in the affirmative: 'they possess intrinsic worth, pursue a good of their own, and thus merit respect. Plants do not exist exclusively for animal and human consumption'. Marder asserts that plants have 'the right to flourish' and 'the right to be free of arbitrary violence and total instrumentalisation'²⁴—a position that is clearly articulated in Cavendish's poem.²⁵

Cavendish stages a dialogue and a confrontation between man and oak, but not between man and any of the non-human animals of which she writes—birds, hare, and stag. Jeffrey Nealon has recently argued that plants, rather than animals, represent the 'forgotten other' for humans, and the dialogical form of Cavendish's poem calls attention to the nature of this relationship.²⁶ Understanding plants as the 'other' for humans clarifies the intersectionality between plants and women as objects of domination by male humans, and Cavendish's clear-eyed ability to analyze the exploitative dominion that man assumes is his right in relation to the oak. Indeed, Cavendish's extension of empathy to the oak as well as to the hare, stag, and birds, finds its modern equivalent in critical ecofeminism, as articulated by Greta Gaard, which acknowledges the embodiment and agency that humans share with non-human animals and the intersectionality among animals, plants, and human women, as objects of dominion by human men.²⁷ Thus

21 Ibid., p. 178.

22 Ibid., p. 222.

23 Ibid., p. 249. See also Christopher Stone, 'Should Trees Have Standing?' Extending his discussion to the legal standing of bodies of water, Stone proposes that the legal interests of such entities could be represented by guardians.

24 Marder, 'Should Plants Have Rights?', p. 50.

25 By contrast, the Enlightenment materialist La Mettrie's *Man a Plant* begins by comparing 'the parts of plants with those of man' (e.g., the lungs to the leaves), but concludes by affirming man's superiority, for plants are immobile and therefore 'lack intelligence and even feeling' (pp. 78, 85).

26 Nealon, *Plant Theory*, p. 11

27 See Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, especially Chapter 2, 'Plants and Animals'. See also Donovan, 'Animal Rights', for discussion of the feminist understanding of the permeability between the

these poems by Cavendish anticipate the tenet of posthumanism, which challenges the humanist celebration, since the Renaissance, of man as the measure of all things.

Environmental ruin

The political implications of Cavendish's atomism and materialism have already been discussed in previous scholarship, for example by John Rogers and Lisa Walters, but her understanding of earth and the environment as a vibrant actant, to combine the terminology of Jane Bennett and Bruno Latour, has, to my knowledge, yet to be examined.²⁸ In 'Earth's Complaint' (pp. 207–208), Cavendish has Earth describe the ravages wrought by man's actions, such as agriculture, characterizing his treatment of her as filial ingratitude: 'My children, which I from my womb did bear, / Do dig my sides, and all my bowels tear. / They plow deep furrows in my face' (ll. 3–5). While again deploying the genre of complaint, she diverges from her poems on the birds and the oak by representing Earth as the mother of the human race in a manner veering toward the allegorical; at the same time, in her indictment of the destructive consequences of human action, her Earth speaks *qua* Earth.²⁹ Here, Cavendish recalls Christine de Pizan's *Christine's Vision* (1405), which features prominently the maternal lament of Libera (France) whose body has been torn apart by her children in civil war; the destruction of Earth in Cavendish also derives, at least in part, from civil war—in the felling of trees, as we have seen. In gendering this destruction of the environment, Cavendish anticipates Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*, which indicts the mechanistic cosmology that considered nature to be passive and inert, available for human exploitation.

But perhaps more significantly, in the two poems 'A Description of an Island' and 'The Ruine of this Island', which follow the two hunting poems in the same section, Cavendish describes a flourishing 'Island'—in reality a

worlds of humans, animals, and plants, so that 'we exist in the same unified field continuum' (p. 183). Donovan briefly discusses Cavendish along with Anne Finch as critics of Cartesianism (p. 178).

28 Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, pp. 197–198; Walters, *Margaret Cavendish*, p. 94. See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

29 See Hanlon, 'Margaret Cavendish's Anthropocene Worlds', on Cavendish's anthropomorphism in *The Blazing World* and in *Observations of Natural Philosophy* 'as a distinct method for acknowledging and describing the ways in which nature is already animated'; Hanlon sees this method as 'highly relevant to our contemporary studies of [...] the Anthropocene' (p. 63).

planet—without humans, and the ‘Ruin’ it experiences as a result of human arrogance (pp. 221–25). As in ‘Earth’s Complaint’, Cavendish personifies the ‘Island’ as a woman and includes a mythological framework with Apollo (the sun) and Cynthia (the moon). Yet, as in ‘Earth’s Complaint’, the environmental destruction does not remain in the allegorical register. In the shift from the first poem to the second, Bruno Latour’s recent call for recognizing Earth ‘as active without endowing it with a soul’ and for understanding how Earth responds to the collective actions of humans is strikingly relevant.³⁰ In the ‘Description’, the ‘Island’ is an harmonious and stable network:

All this Place was fertile, rich, and fair;
 Both woods, and hills, and dales, in prospects were.
 Birds pleasure took, and with delight did sing;
 In praises of this isle, the woods did ring.
 Trees thrived with joy, for she the roots well fed;
 And tall with pride, their tops did overspread.
 Danced with the winds, when they did sing and blow. (ll. 21–27)

However, in the second poem, Cavendish explains the Island’s ‘Ruin’ as the result of her prideful self-adoration, which angers the ‘gods’, another personification that represents the disruption of the harmonious network described in the first poem. Although the nature of this pride is not specified in this poem itself, the hunting poems that precede it, as well as the two poems I have previously discussed, suggest that the pride is coterminous with human arrogance that transgresses and disrupts the harmonious network of the Earth. The gods accordingly take revenge on the Island by wreaking havoc:

the Planets drew, like with a Screw,
 Bad vapors from the Earth; and then did view,
 What place to squeeze that poison on, which all
 The venom had got from the world’s great ball.
 Then through men’s veins, like molten lead it came,
 And did, like oil, their spirits all inflame.
 Where malice boiled with rancor, spleen, and spite;
 In war and fraud, injustice took delight. (ll. 39–45)

Cavendish innovates on Ovid’s account of the devolution of human society from the age of gold to the age of iron as a result of human lapses by

30 Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p. 86.

emphasizing the systemic link between the physical and moral/ethical; human arrogance gives rise to the poisonous vapors rising from the Earth that in turn lead humans to commit ‘thefts, rapes, murders, at their will’ (l. 48). Responding to these outrages in their turn, the gods ‘unbound the winds’ (l. 55) and unleash weather deadly to humans. Here again, as in the ‘Description’ that portrayed the Island’s flourishing, Cavendish represents the Island as a system—but this time emphasizing its disorder.

‘Earth’s Complaint’ and the two ‘Island’ poems are examples of what Timothy Morton calls ‘thinking big’, which he recommends in contradistinction to ‘[t]erms such as the local, the organic, and the particular’. Although Morton celebrates Milton’s description of earth from space as ‘the beginning of ecological thinking’, unlike Cavendish, Milton only provides a view of earth as pristine, not having been ravaged by human habitation.³¹ In this, Cavendish’s poems constitute examples of Morton’s ‘dark ecology’—in contradistinction to overly affirmative ‘utopian eco-language’—which he promotes as ‘a new ecological aesthetics’ that foregrounds ‘negativity and irony, ugliness and horror [...] [which] compel our compassionate coexistence to go beyond condescending pity’.³² While Morton claims that ‘the ecological thought is modern’—and he dates ‘modern’ to the late eighteenth century—these poems by Cavendish indicate that she was thinking ecology in the mid seventeenth century.

In *Facing Gaia*, Latour argues that the distinctions between Nature and Culture, as well as human and nonhuman, are oversimplifications in which ‘we [...] designate some as animate and others as inanimate’, so that we deanimate ‘material’ protagonists and overanimate humans ‘by crediting them with admirable capacities for action—freedom, consciousness, reflexivity, a moral sense, and so on.’³³ As we have seen, Cavendish was already seeking to demystify this distinction, in her poems on birds, the tree, and the catastrophic response of earth and the material environment to human arrogance and transgression.

Vibrant matter

Cavendish’s levelling of the hierarchy between humans and other beings as well as ‘Nature’ and the environment, I suggest, derives from her vitalist

31 Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, pp. 20–23.

32 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

33 Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p. 68. Morton similarly maintains that ‘the ghost of “Nature” [...] inhibited the growth of the ecological thought’; see *The Ecological Thought*, p. 5.

materialism. She, like Hobbes, and unlike Descartes, maintained that everything was material and that incorporeal substances did not exist. Her poems on atoms that comprise Part I of *Poems and Fancies*, preceding those on plants, animals, and the environment, represent atoms as the foundational material of all creation.³⁴ In 'A World Made of Atoms' (pp. 81–82), she states:

Small atoms of themselves a world may make,
For being subtle, every shape they take.
As they dance about, they places find;
Of forms that best agree, make every kind. (ll. 1–4)

Cavendish assigns not only motion, but also agency, to matter, characterizing the atoms' movement as dancing and purposeful. In this respect, she diverges from Hobbes, whose mechanist materialism understood the motion of matter to be passive.³⁵ In the dedicatory letter of *Philosophical Letters* (1664) to her husband William, Cavendish states that 'there is not onely a Sensitive, but also a Rational Life and Knowledge, and so a double Perception in all Creatures', characterizing this 'Opinion in Philosophy' as 'new, and never thought of, at least not divulged by any, but my self, [...] [and] quite different from others'.³⁶ In his entry on Cavendish in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, David Cunniff confirms her assertion: 'Cavendish is working within a philosophical tradition in which the doctrine that matter is self-moving and intelligent is almost completely unintelligible'.³⁷ Cavendish's likening of atoms to 'workmen' who consult and collaborate with one another—'Thus, by their forms and motions they will be / Like workmen which amongst themselves agree' (ll. 15–16)—indicates that she considers atoms to possess communal agency and identity.³⁸ Indeed, this

34 In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), published the same year as *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish repudiates atomism to argue for continuous matter. This shift, which may have been motivated by the strong association in the Renaissance of Epicurean atomism with atheism (see Palmer, *Reading Lucretius*, Chapter 1), does not impact her vitalist materialism. Moreover, Cavendish does not repudiate other aspects of her metaphysics that challenged creationism, such as the infinity and eternity of matter. Sarasohn argues that Cavendish's repudiation of atomism was directed against 'the general opinion of atoms', not her own 'particular opinions' expressed in *Poems and Fancies*. (*Natural Philosophy*, pp. 64–65). She also points out that Cavendish's defensive response to charges of atheism immediately precedes her condemnation of Epicurean atomism (p. 67).

35 See Hutton, 'In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes'.

36 Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters*, sig. a.

37 For further discussion on 'Thinking Matter', see Cunniff, *Cavendish*, Chapter 2.

38 In 'What Atoms Make Change', Cavendish further develops this notion of the communal or group identity of atoms, by positing them as either 'sympathiz[ing]' and 'agree[ing]' with one

creative agency of atoms is in keeping with her comparison of herself to an atom in one of her prefaces to *Poems and Fancies*, ‘To Natural Philosophers’: ‘and so shall I remain an unsettled atom, or a confused heap, ‘til I hear my censure’ (p. 67).³⁹

In the final couplet of the poem, Cavendish equivocates on whether the resulting creation occurs by chance or follows a design: ‘And so, by chance, may a new world create, / Or else, predestinate, may work by fate’ (ll. 17–18). The former possibility, ‘by chance’, is the more radical one, but even the latter, which may appear to be acknowledging divine creation, in fact assigns the source of the ‘predestination’ to ‘fate’—associated with Jupiter’s speech (*fatum*), rather than with that of the Christian divinity. In this, Cavendish decidedly departs from Descartes’ acknowledgment of divine design at the conclusion of the *Discourse of Method*.⁴⁰

Cavendish elaborates on her notion that all creatures as well as matter share atoms as their basic material foundation in ‘What Atoms Make Vegetables, Animals, and Minerals’ (p. 96). The differences among the three derive from the different shapes of the atoms. The ‘branched atoms’ make up plants; ‘square and flat’ atoms make stones and minerals; in both, ‘sharp points’ cause vegetables and minerals to ‘grow’ (ll. 1, 5, 8, 9).⁴¹ Cavendish’s concept of the common material foundation of plants and minerals enables her to consider minerals in their crystallization to be just as vibrant as plants

another to ‘join together’ or to ‘meet [...] / Without all order, running in and out’ in a ‘rabble route’ (p. 119, ll. 3–6).

39 In the introduction to her edition, Siegfried suggests that *Poems and Fancies* is best understood as a conversation with Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (p. 18), and that the structure of the volume closely follows that of Lucretius’s work. While a published translation of Lucretius in English was not available to Cavendish, Siegfried points out that Cavendish nevertheless ‘directly alludes to and often paraphrases material from all six books of Lucretius’ (p. 20). Siegfried states that Cavendish revises Lucretius’ theory of atoms, ‘threading a connective, sympathetic vitalism through Lucretius’s otherwise dead atoms’ (p. 14). But see Shearin, *Language of Atoms*, on ‘the atomization of humans’ and ‘the humanization of atoms’ in Lucretius (p. 79). On Cavendish and Lucretius, see also Rees, “Sweet Honey of the Muses”.

40 Cavendish explicitly registered her disagreement with Descartes in *Philosophical Letters* (1664). On Cavendish and Descartes, see Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy*, pp. 129–35; and Semler, ‘Margaret Cavendish’s Early Engagement’.

41 The different shapes and sizes of Epicurean atoms correspond to different qualities, such as ‘roughness to bitterness, roundness to sweetness [...] bulky atoms form heavy materials like earth or flesh, whereas tiny atoms [...] produce rarified, invisible, interpenetrating substances like breath, sound, sense data, and the soul’. Palmer, *Reading Lucretius*, pp. 11–12. Sarasohn points out that Cavendish’s vitalist theory of matter—even in her early atomism—diverges from Epicurus’s notion that ‘atoms possess motion and figure but not life’. Moreover, Cavendish ‘credits matter not only with life and self-movement but also with self-consciousness and thought’. *Natural Philosophy*, p. 35.

whose growth is more visible. This observation leads to the larger, bold conclusion that ‘for ought we know, the world’s whole frame / May last unto eternity the same’ (ll. 12–13), a conclusion that overturns the accepted notion of the impermanence of matter and the material world. As in the previous poem in which she appeared to equivocate between creation by chance or by design, she prefaces this conclusion with an apparent concession that mankind is made up of ‘the best of atoms’ (l. 11). Yet given her persistent questioning elsewhere of the assumed distinction between humans and other animals, the assertion of the superiority of man contradicts and is undercut by the statement that precedes it—that all animals consist of the same atoms: ‘According to the several atoms go, / In animals all figures do agree’ (ll. 9–10). Cavendish further subverts the assumption of man’s supremacy in her musings on the hidden understanding of vegetables and minerals:

who knowes, but *Vegetables* and *Mineralls* may have some of those *rational spirits*, which is a *minde* or *soule* in them, as well as *Man*? Onely they want that *Figure* [...] to express *Knowledge* that way. For had *Vegetables* and *Mineralls* the same shape, made by such *motions*, as the *sensitive spirits* create; then there might be *Wooden men*, and *Iron beasts* [...] And if their *Knowledge* be not the same knowledge, but different from the *Knowledge* of *Animalls*, by reason of their different *Figures*, [...] yet it is *Knowledge*.⁴²

Not only does this passage recall her similar musings concerning the epistemological parity between birds and humans, but it also echoes her assertion that it is only his accidental shape that gives man advantage over the rest of creation.

I have already mentioned that John Rogers, and more recently, Lisa Walters have argued for the republican implications of Cavendish’s materialism; and Catriona Sandilands has called, in the twentieth-century context, for the alignment between ecofeminism and democracy, based on a questioning of the essentializing association between women and nature.⁴³ Considering together Cavendish’s writings about animals, plants, the environment, and matter provides a fuller picture of her ecofeminism and materialism that led her to challenge the prevailing assumption of the unquestioned superiority and dominion of man over all creation, and to critique man’s use and abuse of all other creatures and the natural environment as a

42 Cavendish, *Philosophical Fancies*, pp. 54–55.

43 Sandilands, *Good-Natured Feminist*, pp. xvii–xix.

consequence of that assumption. While the conclusions she reached posed radical questions to the status quo, her methodology of basing her ethical and political principles on her investigation of natural philosophy tracks Lucretius, Ovid, and Seneca, who derived lessons for living in their ontology and cosmology.⁴⁴

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44 Ovid concludes the *Metamorphoses*, in which he describes the multifarious transformations of humans to non-human beings or stones, with the teachings of Pythagorus, who enjoins against eating meat (Book 25, ll. 75–142). On the relationship between physics and ethics in Seneca's *Natural Questions*, see Asmis, Bartsch, and Nussbaum, 'Seneca and his World', p. xvii. Noting his similarity to Lucretius in 'interspersing ethical messages throughout his physical inquiries', they state that Seneca 'differs from previous Stoics by welcoming other aspects of Epicurean philosophy' (p. xv).

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9. The Agency of Portrayal

The Active Portrait in the Early Modern Period¹

Saskia Beranek and Sheila ffolliott

Abstract

Portraits of women represent a fruitful avenue from which to approach the study of women's lives and agencies in the early modern period. When taken seriously as objects which function independently of their sitters or makers, portraits reveal themselves as active, affective components of women's lives. Portraits negotiate between sitter and viewer but also between viewers in the absence of the sitter in order to create social bonds and cement dynastic claims. Using case studies culled from a range of times and places through the early modern period, we argue for a site-specific, viewer-response based method of examining portraits that foregrounds the cultural work accomplished by the object itself.

Keywords: patronage; identity; viewer; Amalia van Solms; Catherine de' Medici; Lady Cobham

Early modern portraiture is simultaneously appealing and alienating. On the one hand, a portrait allows a viewer access to the face and identity of a person distant in time and space. For those interested in early modern women, portraits are thus doubly appealing, as they make visible those who have often become invisible in written records. Though women may leave fewer traces in payment books, archives, and treaties, their presence permeates both portraits themselves and the history of their collection and display. On the other hand, every art collection holds countless iterations of

¹ This essay derives from a workshop held at Attending to Early Modern Women 2018; additional contributors to that event included Sandra Friesen, English Instructor, Langara College, Vancouver and Kyungran Park, PhD Candidate, Department of English, University at Buffalo.

'portrait of a woman, sixteenth century, artist unknown'. Lacking the names of artist or sitter, the portrait loses its agency and languishes in the darkened corners of collections and scholarship. And yet it remains an artifact that someone once took great care to commission, to craft, and to view. That portraits of early modern sitters exist in such numbers and yet often remain so silent is itself a compelling paradox. For all that the faces of the past feel immediately present and profoundly human, they remain distant.

Discussions of painted portraits have frequently centered on issues of iconography and likeness, exploring how symbolic and mimetic conventions have been used in the representation of women.² Broader studies of patronage have stretched the study of women's portraits to include hypotheses about the agendas of the female sitter-patron.³ How did a sitter-patron wish to be perceived? Which aspects of wealth, erudition, or status did the patron wish to foreground? Lacking documentation of artistic commissions in payment books, scholars (including the current authors) have looked to portraits to try to reclaim and reconstitute the artistic activities and agencies of early modern women.

This essay examines how portraits both representing women and owned by women established or challenged identities, activated spaces, circulated in familial and economic networks, and functioned in forging alliances. Networks of portrait collecting and exchange provide a gendered parallel for a more traditional written archive. Our concern is not what a portrait says about the sitter-patron, nor is it about the agency of the sitter, but rather, situated somewhere between the object and the viewer. We suggest that the mobility and display of visual and verbal portraits grant affective agency to the objects themselves in addition to the conventional artistic agency of the patron. We ask a series of questions: In what ways can representations themselves be said to have agency? Since this is dependent on demonstrable viewer response, how can scholars accurately gauge this type of agency, since response is likely to be highly variable and subjective? Even if an early modern viewer commented on their impressions upon seeing a portrait, would they do so in terms that are compatible with our understanding of agency? Do cases where the representations may directly result from the agency of the sitter function differently from those where no such influence can be registered? How do we effectively and responsibly triangulate among patron, producer, and consumer of representations of women? These broad, far-reaching questions are

2 Cropper, 'The Beauty of Women'; Simons, 'Women in Frames'; Brown, *Virtue and Beauty*.

3 Woodall, 'An Exemplary Consort'; Jordan, 'Los retratos de Juana de Austria'; Griffey, 'Devotional Jewelry', *On Display*; Perry, *Women and Portraits*.

impossible to fully address in a short essay, but it is our hope that our reflections on them will suggest new attitudes and methodologies for approaching the studies of women, images, spaces, and the acts of viewing and portraying.

Artists and agency

A common branch of portraiture studies has tended to focus on the role of the portrait in the career or stylistic development of the painter. How did a portrait commission from a specific sitter-patron change the painter's fortunes by connecting her/him to a social network of potential patrons? How does a portrait demonstrate a painter's particular technical accomplishments or develop the genre of portraiture more broadly?⁴ Portrait painting was an accepted commercial outlet for the small number of women artists active in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If something innate to the woman artist could deliver an image more in line with their female subjects' desires than their male counterparts is difficult to ascertain.⁵

Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1532–1625), from a North Italian noble family, made portraits in her early career and painted several while serving as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Isabel de Valois in Spain. She also made the largest number of self-portraits in the time span between Dürer and Rembrandt, both of whom have been extensively studied for the significance of their contributions in this genre.⁶ Hers remain less well examined. Women artists needed to be extremely careful to protect their virtue and reputations while working as professionals. Many of Sofonisba's self-portraits emphasize her virginal status: that in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna is inscribed *Sophonisba Anguissola Virgo seipsam fecit 1554*. Sofonisba's self-portrait *tour de force*, now in the Siena Pinacoteca, expresses a unique conceit: she depicts her master Bernardino Campi in the act of completing a portrait of her, in which she appears not as a painter, but dressed as a properly modest lady without the accoutrements of the artist. Although some scholars question her authorship, most agree that Sofonisba thus simultaneously displays her virtuosity as a painter while paying homage to her master who represents her as befits her status.⁷

4 Woodall, *Anthonis Mor*.

5 Berdini, 'Women under the Gaze'.

6 Woods-Marsden *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*; Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves*; Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*; Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*.

7 Garrard, 'Here's Looking at Me'; Gómez, *Tale of Two Women Painters*, p. 103.

Her contemporary, Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614), supported herself painting portraits of noblewomen in Bologna and also painted two self-portraits that similarly dealt with the plight of the professional woman artist and the problem of representing those conflicting terms.⁸ In what may be her presentation piece to be accepted into the Haarlem Guild of St. Luke for painters and gold and silversmiths, Dutch painter Judith Leyster (1609–1660) depicts herself in the act of painting, but in more formal attire than she probably wore in the studio.⁹ In a *Self-Portrait* (London: The Royal Collection Trust), Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656) adopts the iconographic elements attributed to painting personified, inserting an actual artist, herself, into the typical allegorizing of abstract qualities as female.¹⁰

The agency of patrons

Patronage studies has been one of the most fruitful avenues for pursuing the topic of early modern elite women and agency.¹¹ One thread in such studies has been the study of elite portraits and their capacity to assert dynastic power through displays of continuity and kinship.¹² Gender aside, to be in the presence of a state portrait was not that different from being in the presence of the royal body itself. Portraits of monarchs quite literally stood in for the body of the monarch while also generating the aura of authority that monarchy needed to function. This could be stretched back to antiquity, where, famously, the colossal statue of Emperor Constantine oversaw all cases being adjudicated in the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine. Like an icon, the image of Constantine emphasized the legitimacy of his rule.

So too in the early modern period: in the case of Philip IV, the artist Juan Bautista Maino represents figures kneeling before an image of the King (*Recapture of Bahia del Brazil*, 1634–1635, Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado). The portrait itself—likely a tapestry—is displayed under the sort of baldachin that we might expect to shelter a throne or the physical body of a monarch.¹³ A group of figures kneel before it, some reaching up with

8 Murphy, 'Lavinia Fontana and *Le Dame della Città*'.

9 Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster*.

10 Garrard, 'Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait*'.

11 For further reference, see Dunn, 'Convent Creativity'; Reiss, 'Beyond Isabella and Beyond'; and McIver, 'Material Culture'.

12 Campbell *Renaissance Portraits*; Mann and Syson, *The Image of the Individual*; Hearn, *Dynasties*.

13 Woodall, *Anthonis Mor*, pp. 350–351.

clasped hands, some gesturing to the image of the monarch, but all seemingly acknowledging the extent to which the image made present the absent body of the monarch. The body made present is a powerful type of agency.

With specific regard to women, how did portraits establish or challenge identities, activate spaces, circulate in familial and economic networks, and function in forging alliances?¹⁴ As Joanna Woodall noted: ‘the circulation of portraits could mirror and expand the system of personal patronage whereby power, privilege, and wealth were distributed.’¹⁵ For a specific example, we have only to look at a portrait of Amalia van Solms, Princess of Orange, in her small palace Huis ten Bosch. In the central Oranjezaal, a cruciform room covered with a complex cycle celebrating the legacy of her husband, the Prince of Orange and head of the Dutch armies through the Eighty Years’ War, a large portrait of Amalia accompanied by her daughters by Gerrit van Honthorst (still in situ) hung just to the left of the monumental main canvas of the cycle, a painting which celebrated her deceased husband as a godlike hero.¹⁶ In the portrait, an idealized Amalia is dressed in ermine and pearls, and seated within a triumphal arch. What makes the agency of the portrait even more apparent is that the portrait concealed a door that connected the central hall to Amalia’s apartment.¹⁷ The painted body could quite literally be replaced by the living body of the Princess at any moment.

Portraits then serve not just to stand in for, but actively *construct* the sitter: the portraits of Elizabeth I, for example, were created and circulated explicitly to negotiate the space between her (feminine) body natural and her (masculine) body politic. The proliferation of portraits under Elizabeth is important, but so too is the agency she exerted over them: images of Elizabeth not made from approved models or departing from approved mandates were collected, burned and outlawed.¹⁸ Similarly, Anne Marie Jordan Gschwend has suggested that Antonis Mor’s portrait of Catherine of Austria was the only portrait Catherine allowed to be copied.¹⁹

Anecdotes inform us about what women have to say about portraits of themselves and others. Although not as straightforward a concept as the word suggests, texts indicate that likeness was a major concern. A letter

14 Pearson, *Women and Portraits*; ffolliott, ‘The Italian “Training” of Catherine de’ Medici’.

15 Woodall, *Portraiture*, p. 3.

16 Judson and Ekkart, *Gerrit van Honthorst*, p. 149.

17 De Jonge and Ottenheim, *Unity and Discontinuity*, p. 202. See also architect Pieter Post’s plans, where the door is clearly indicated. Rijksmuseum inv. RP-P-AO-12-96-4.

18 ffolliott, ‘Portraying Queens’.

19 Haag, Eichberger, and Gschwend, *Women and the Art of Power*, p. 136.

of Isabella d'Este's laments the scarcity of painters able to 'counterfeit the natural face.'²⁰ Catherine de' Medici, similarly concerned for quality, wrote her cousin in Rome with a logical proposition: find a painter, have him portray someone I know, and send me the result so I can judge his ability.²¹ Simple resemblance was not the only objective: likeness for Isabella also meant linking an individual to a position or status. She requested Titian to paint her. The result, in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, he made by copying a copy of a much earlier portrait.²² More than an exercise in vanity, control over the image was an essential component of power structures and social status. Elizabeth's state-sponsored clamping down on unlicensed imagery demonstrates that the existence of the wrong *kind* of portrait would do the wrong work. Elizabeth's political position was precarious enough that it was essential to carefully control what portraits were allowed to do. Her legitimacy was, in some ways, created by the portraits, in perhaps the same way that Louis Marin has argued that portraits of Louis XIV created the absolute monarch of the Sun King.²³

Portraiture exists within a triangular matrix where at least three different parties can and should be considered. In addition to painter and sitter-patron, the audience receiving the portrait is an essential component. As Ann Jensen Adams has argued,

Portraits are created as cultural objects to have an impact on their viewers [...] in the space between the patron and the artist, the portrait's human subject, and its assumed viewer, a portrait functions as an interpretive medium, visually organizing the experience and understanding of all parties involved in its production and reception. For each of these individuals, the portrait is a site or transfer point that relates and structures ideas. [...] the portrait participates in setting the terms through which perceptions about the individuals it portrays are produced, the cultural discourses through which they are understood, and the devices and associations of the visual tradition.²⁴

20 Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, p. 149.

21 *Lettres de Catherine de' Medicis*, I, p. 109. 'A monsieur le cardinal strossy, 1557 13 october [...] Aussi regardez d'en trouver ung autre [homme] qui saiche bien paindre au vif et luy ferez faire vostre pourtraict, ou de quelque autre que je cognoisse et le m'envoyez à ce que, si je le trouve bon et bien fait, vous m'envoyez le dict personnaige pour qu'il serve par deça, et surtout qu'il soyent des meilleurs et plus excellentz en leur art et métier que l'on pourra recontrer'.

22 Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, p. 190.

23 Woodall, *Anthonis Mor*, p. 343; see also Marin, *Le Portrait du Roi*.

24 Adams, *Public Faces and Private Identities*, p. 25.

Further, the viewer most often encounters a portrait in the absence of the sitter. Though the approaches discussed above are essential components in the study of early modern representations of women, these models do not consider that the agendas of the patron may differ radically from the messages received by viewers and how the object itself is an active agent in furthering an agenda. The act of viewing, of constructing images of an individual based in an internal assemblage of art, architecture, correspondence, sculpture, rumor, and gossip, complicates how early modern viewers perceived images of women.²⁵ Rather than passive reflections of faces, values, and social status, representations of women are images, spaces, and texts which themselves possess cultural agency.²⁶ Representations of women are engaged not in the reflection of what and who women are but in the active creation of what they might become. Therefore, it is to the portrayals themselves to which we now turn.

The agency of objects

To suggest that images have agency, or at least some sort of active affect, is nothing new. Although portraiture was not his principal focus, David Freedberg has explored the range of different ways that images exuded power. In certain circumstances, as one example below will demonstrate, portraits can assume an almost talismanic significance. As Freedberg noted, 'the time has come to acknowledge the possibility that our responses to images may be of the same order as our responses to reality'.²⁷ On the one hand, critics maintain that objects do not and cannot possess agency because they cannot act with an internal, conscious intent. And yet, supporters reply, images exist in the world and work upon it, often separated from the makers and the patrons whose intent is more immediate. Images have always possessed a sort of agency if considered from the perspective of the icon. Icons were appealing because they functioned as direct conduits between the here and now and the divine presence. Icons were bathed, kissed, and swaddled as if they were living presences. Icons and images were also destroyed specifically because they could be viewed as living, active, and in idolatrous competition with the divine. There is no tidy resolution. Art history may have something

25 Feigenbaum, 'Art and Display in Principle', pp 1–6 and p. 24; ffollott, 'Learning to Be Looked at'.

26 Broude and Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency*, pp. 1–26.

27 Freedberg, *Power of Images*, p. 438.

to learn from anthropologist Alfred Gell, who notes: ‘I describe artefacts as “social agents” not because I wish to promulgate a form of material-culture mysticism, but only in view of the fact that objectification in artifact form is how social agency manifests and realizes itself, via the proliferation of fragments of “primary” intentional agents in their “secondary” artefactual forms.’²⁸ Gell goes on to frame ‘relational agency’, situating artifacts—and agencies—within a network of relationships and transactions. They are sometimes active and sometimes passive within these transactions, but transactional they remain.

That portraits take on such transactional properties in the early modern period, and that they might enact a sort of agency is not merely a twenty-first-century projection. Leon Battista Alberti noted in Book 2 of *On Painting and Sculpture* that ‘Painting contains a divine force which not only makes the absent present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive’.²⁹ It is worth noting that Alberti links the ‘divine force’ to *painting*, and not to *the painter*. In Joanna Woodall’s analysis of this text, she comments:

In identifying the power of friendship with the divine power of naturalistic portraiture to make present someone who is absent in space or time, Alberti acknowledged the desire to overcome difference, separation, and ultimately death that lies at the heart of such work. And the friendship-like force that makes the absent present binds together not only the painting with the absent sitter, but also the beholder who takes pleasure in the perception of ‘life’ in a portrait and the painter who manages to create it.³⁰

The portrait makes the sitter present, toying with the beholder just as paintings of fluttering curtains tempt the viewer to reach out and touch the image, to pull the curtain back, in the long tradition of the battle of Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Images provoke the viewer to action.

What Gell and many of the respondents to and critics of his work have been less attentive to are the women-specific implications for the agency of objects. Elsje van Kessel has recently used Gell’s concept of the ‘art nexus’—the ambiguous and complex relationship between the thing

28 Gell, ‘Things as Social Agents’, p. 339; see also Gell, *Art and Agency*. Critics and proponents of Gell have been prolific, and I would here point to volumes such as Van Eck, Van Gasteel, and van Kessel, *Secret Lives of Art Works*.

29 Leon Battista Alberti, in Book Two of *On Painting and Sculpture*, quoted in Woodall, *Anthonis Mor*, pp. 16–17.

30 Woodall, *Anthonis Mor*, p. 16.

represented (prototype), the art object (index), the artist, and the recipient (whether patron or audience)—to good effect in an early modern context, and one that has significant implications for the study of the relationship between women, representation, and agency specifically.³¹ She recounts the experience of a painted portrait of Bianca Capello arriving in Venice:

In the twenty-first century, we think of paintings as objects quietly hanging on the walls of our homes and offices, waiting patiently for someone to throw a glance at them [...] we hardly consider paintings as active participants in social events; as persons we can talk to when they come to visit. In sixteenth-century Venice, however, the situation was altogether different. In June 1586, a painted portrait of Bianca Capello, daughter of Venetian patricians and grand duchess of Tuscany, visited the doge. On a Monday afternoon, the owner of the portrait, a certain Francesco Bembo, took it to the Doge's Palace to show it to his head of state. All the way through the palace it went, until it reached the doge's apartments. Once the portrait of Bianca had arrived, it received lavish praise from all people present [...]. When Venice's head of state and his guests went to table, the portrait joined them [...] after the meal the old doge went to rest and took the portrait with him [...] Later that day, the portrait moved to another room in the palace, where it received visits by several dignitaries.³²

This anecdote, recounted in the letters of Francesco Bembo, demonstrates an attitude towards the portrait that grants the object itself an agency that borders on personhood, and in doing so, creates a precedent for other scholars of early modern portraits to take seriously the affective agency of portrayals.

To step out even further from the object, in an early modern sense, we might frame Gell's transactional agency as a relationship between parts of a room, or the context in which an art object is viewed and thereby does its work. There has been an increased interest in recent scholarship in sites of display and the ways in which objects work together to create an impression or message that is more than the sum of its parts. Gail Feigenbaum, for example, has written about how it was up to an attentive viewer to weave together components of an ensemble within a domestic space into a coherent (but ultimately independently created) image of the resident. She notes that Roman palaces were 'activated by the moving bodies and the attention of residents and visitors.' Further, the palace 'operated in concert

31 Van Kessel, *Lives of Paintings*, p. 21.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

to convey multiple artistic, social and political messages that were in no sense random or casual, so that a beholder, while on the move [...] and with his own agenda to pursue, was also required to figure out what was intended by the display [...] the viewer is a collaborator without whom the display is incomplete [...]. Display unfolds in space in such a purposeful narrative of rank, honour, privilege, intimacy.³³ The significance attached to the display of portraits—and the essential component display holds in constructing meaning—can even be found in early modern sources. Spanish writer and humanist Felipe de Guevara, speaking to Philip II of Spain, argued that ‘thus, the covered and hidden paintings are deprived of their value that consists of people’s eyes and judgements that men of good understanding and imagination make, which cannot be done if they are not in places where sometimes they can be seen by many’.³⁴

One reason that this strikes us as so important is because it relocates the source of meaning from fundamentally contained within the painting to the liminal space between object, space, and viewer. The impact of the artwork is not dictatorial, but transactional. Therefore, the spaces in which objects are viewed—and the audiences by whom they were viewed—are essential components for understanding what it is that portraits were able to do, and for whom. In the same way that a colossal image of Constantine may take on specific functions by being viewed in the context of a court of law, so too would portraits in the early modern period take on specific agencies as they were viewed alongside other objects in specific spaces or contexts. That images in general and portraits specifically had the agency to alter the spaces that contained them was indeed clearly understood by the early modern viewer: in a letter to Elizabeth of Bohemia dated 30 March, 1623, Sir Thomas Roe, speaking of portraits of Elizabeth, wrote that ‘your picture here doth conquer hearts; [...] Euery day wee honour them, they make my house a Court and my Chamber a presence’.³⁵ The power of portraits to transform the spaces they contain gave particular potency to the creation and maintenance of portrait galleries by elite early modern women.³⁶ Mencía de Mendoza, Marchioness of Zenete and widow of Hendrik III of Nassau, placed such value on her portrait collection that she took 75 paintings,

33 Feigenbaum, ‘Art and Display in Principle’, p. 2.

34 Quoted and translated in García Perez, ‘Gender, Representation and Power’, p. 181.

35 Letter 295 in Akkerman, *Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart*, p. 419. The implications for the power of portraits in the context of the patronage of Elizabeth of Bohemia were explored by Michele Frederik in her talk, “You will think I haue too warring a minde for my sexe”: Elizabeth Stuart and the Necessity of Patronage in Exile’, College Art Association, New York, 2019.

36 Beranek, ‘Strategies of Display’.

many portraits, with her on a trip on the occasion of her sister's wedding in 1533.³⁷ Following her permanent relocation to Spain, she would also commission a library where she displayed no fewer than 22 portraits. As Noelia García Perez has argued, the selection of the portraits was deliberate, as was their display in a space intended specifically for diplomacy.³⁸ The portraits emphasize her family line and her legitimacy as sole heir to her second husband. Moreover, displaying the portraits alongside her extensive library further framed particular aspects of the Marchioness's public image. García Perez further notes that the portrait gallery tradition is one that Mencía adopted from Mary of Hungary, whom she both corresponded with and visited, as well as Mary's predecessor, Margaret of Austria.³⁹

Van Kessel's anecdote about the portrait of Bianca Capello certainly grants a living presence to the object, and it exerts a pull on those around it. That said, it remains an object at the whims of its (male) owners and viewers. How do such images fare when considered within an explicitly gendered paradigm? As van Kessel argues elsewhere, the portrait continued to act on behalf of the sitter in the sitter's absence and aided in the construction of 'Bianca Capello' as a cultural construct within the collective consciousness of Venice—whether or not that was the intent of the sitter.⁴⁰

Between women: the agency of a miniature

Accounts of a soirée that took place in the Parisian dower house of Catherine de' Medici in February 1580 provide a detailed glimpse into the significance of a small portrait in diplomatic discourse. Hosted by the Queen Mother, the soirée was specifically, while disingenuously, advertised as being offered simply for her 'son and his wife', not for the King (Henri III) and Queen (Louise of Lorraine) of France. Nevertheless, it had an agenda: one item was the ongoing negotiations for the marriage of Elizabeth I with a French prince. Among the guests, therefore, were the English ambassador to France, Sir Henry (Brooke) Cobham (previously posted to Madrid, Vienna, and elsewhere) and his wife, Anne (née Sutton). Anne was the widow of Walter

37 García Perez, 'Gender, Representation and Power', p. 185.

38 For the complete inventory of Mencía de Mendoza's portrait collection in her library, see García Perez, 'Gender, Representation and Power', pp. 196–200.

39 Ibid., p. 186; The significance of Mary and Margaret's portrait galleries has been more extensively explored by Eichberger and Beaven; See also the recent exhibition catalog: Haag, Eichberger, and Jordan-Gschwend, *Women and the Art of Power*, 2018.

40 Kessel, 'Staging Bianca Capello', pp. 278–291.

Haddon, who had been attached to the courts of Edward VI and Mary I and was master of requests for Elizabeth I, and was therefore wise to courtly ways.

Remarkably, both Cobhams wrote descriptions of the event that were sent back to London.⁴¹ The evening involved welcomes, ascending a staircase, presentation to members of the royal family, dining, visiting diverse rooms, dancing, and watching a masque. Sir Henry's account prioritized his concern over precedence, while Lady Cobham's, significantly, focused on the role played by a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, which presumably she carried on her person. As Lady Cobham's itinerary differed, in part, from that of her husband, having two reports was essential and indicates, moreover, that what she experienced mattered.⁴²

Several layers of female agency operate here. A woman wrote a letter relating her experience of a house built and decorated according to the wishes of another woman. Lady Cobham focuses in particular on her experience with a portrait of her queen, which she was under orders to present to Queen Mother Catherine de' Medici. She, not her husband, is the agent who bears the portrait, which has its own power, as it represents her sovereign. Nevertheless, men intervened in the plan. Although Catherine de' Medici had issued the invitation, she did not in the end attend the party, owing to illness. Lady Cobham eventually found herself talking to Henri III. The king asked her if he could see 'the Queen's picture', about which his chamberlain has informed him. She replied, however, that she 'had made a vow that the first that should see it should be his mother'. He pressed her, but, holding her ground, she offered that the 'picture was excellent' and demurred.

Many scholars have demonstrated how portraits circulated among early modern courts, often in conjunction with marriages. Peter Paul Rubens's *The Presentation of the Portrait* (Paris: Louvre), from his cycle of images made for a gallery in Marie de Médicis' Palais du Luxembourg, magnificently allegorized the effect that the exhibition of portraits of the betrothed was ideally to achieve, although in this case the agents are Hymen and Cupid, not mortal ambassadors. Ambassadorial reports and other texts make clear how portraits serve as catalysts for dialogue or action. Their initial presentation creates an event. Diplomats recorded monarchs and courtiers

41 Lady Cobham at the French Court, Feb ? [sic.] 1580 'The French courtesy to the Lady Ambassador', *Calendar of State Papers Foreign: Elizabeth, Volume 14, 1579–1580*.

42 Whitely, 'Royal and Ducal Palaces', p. 52. Christine de Pizan indicated in her life of Charles V of France that in the fifteenth century gatherings in mixed company were not the norm. By the late sixteenth century, the sexes mingled for part of the day.



Figure 9.1: Nicholas Hilliard (1547–1619), *Elizabeth I* (1533–1603) c.1580–1585. Watercolor on vellum laid on paper | 3.8 x 3.3 cm (support, canvas/panel/str external) | RCIN 422026.

giving, receiving, examining, and discussing them. These texts inform us that in their absence, portraits are objects of speculation, desire, and negotiation; in their presence, they evoke comment on their quality of execution or on the sitters themselves, often triggered by one viewer's calling attention to a particular image or detail. Lady Cobham probably carried it on her person. Using the evidence of a number of portraits from this period, a miniature worn or carried could demonstrate paternity, as in the case of *Bia de' Medici*, depicting the daughter of Cosimo I (Bronzino, Florence: Uffizi) or loyalty to a male relative, for example *Juana de Austria*, showing her allegiance to her brother Philip II (Alonso Sánchez Coello, Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes). While her letter provides no information about the artist and format, it might have been similar to a miniature by Nicholas Hilliard (Figure 9.1), who had spent time in France.



Figure 9.2: Sofonisba Anguissola, *Isabel de Valois holding a Portrait of Philip II*. Copyright ©Museo Nacional del Prado.

If worn as a locket, the cover must have been closed or the chain sufficiently long so that it could only be seen if the wearer permitted it. If Lady Cobham sported such a locket, it would have been quite deliberately provocative and also indicative of her, and by extension her monarch's, power, being both evident and hidden. Miniatures were also carried—perhaps Lady Cobham had a pocket? In a portrait by Sofonisba Anguissola, Queen Isabel de Valois holds her husband's image rather than wears it (Figure 9.2).

After dinner, Lady Cobham continued, 'the queen called me to her in the presence of the king and desired to see the picture saying that I should not break my vow in showing it to her, because she was queen'. The king, having failed in his quest to obtain the portrait directly, enlists his wife's cooperation: thus, the transaction remains one amongst women. What does this exchange tell us? In these marriage negotiations, Elizabeth I saw herself dealing with Catherine and not with the prospective bridegroom's brother. Renata Ago has suggested, with regard to Italian noble families seeking to rise, that actions instigated by women put matters on a less official plane.⁴³ Because Lady Cobham is the agent, is that what is happening here? A trial balloon? As such, it provides Elizabeth more wiggle room, a strategy she employed constantly at home when dealing with the marriage question.

Determining her best option, Lady Cobham capitulates, saying, 'There-upon I showed it to her [Queen Louise], and [as] she was looking at it, the king suddenly took it from her, so that it was well viewed by both'. So, Henri got his way and took over the dialogue. Their next exchange typifies the way in which portraits were discussed in this period. 'The King said it was an excellent picture; the queen asked me if she were like it. I answered that she was'. As stated earlier, questions of likeness dominate discourse, but portraiture required something more: melding an individual to a position, representing a queen, not just an Elizabeth, and there lies the ever present paradox.

Lady Cobham's next remark demonstrates how material portraits, moreover, stood in for their subjects: 'I told them her Majesty had commanded that whenever I came in the presence of them both, I should wish her there'. The portrait itself was talismanic—it was presumed to represent her own agency. After further exchanges about the excellence of both queens, Lady Cobham continued: 'If the queen, my mistress and your Majesty might meet, it then be truly said that two of the goodliest creatures and greatest queens in the world were together'. Queen Louise protested, saying that 'as

43 Ago, *Carriere e clientele nella Roma barocca*, pp. 60–64.

appeared by the picture, it might be true of my mistress [i.e. Elizabeth], but not in respect of herself'. This solidifies that the portrait must successfully represent a queen, and echoes an earlier exchange between the recently widowed French Queen Mary Stuart and Elizabeth's ambassador Nicholas Throckmorton in 1560. In discussing a potential exchange of portraits between the two cousin queens, Mary employed similarly deprecating language, declaring her portrait 'not worth the looking on'.⁴⁴

Both approaches cue the diplomat to make a reassuring complimentary remark. Lady Cobham parried, of course, declaring that Queen Louise 'much resembled my mistress [...] so the Queen thanked me for the good opinion I had of her'. Here she channels the era's ideology that women's appearance, whether in person or as portrayed, projects their inner virtue. Queen Louise then raised the stakes, asking if Lady Cobham could 'find it in her heart to part with the picture'. Lady Cobham managed to retain it by answering that 'the greatest comfort which I have, being absent from my mistress, is to behold it', which resulted in the queen's giving way, acknowledging the quasi talismanic power of the portrait. What did this verbal, but not material, exchange accomplish? If the portrait had actually been given, or if the exchange had occurred between men, not women, would it have meant a more serious acknowledgment of betrothal on the part of the bride? Did Lady Cobham's coyness, aided by her possession of the portrait, reproduce Elizabeth's way of deferring from a distance? Did Elizabeth plan this negotiation between women to permit a different degree of commitment than if Lady Cobham had presented the portrait directly to the King? Surely the significance would have changed if Sir Henry, the ambassador, had held it.

To return to the fête, Lady Cobham relates that a bit later King Henri III led some ladies to the hôtel's gallery, where they looked at pictures. This episode does not figure in her husband's account, so he probably did not accompany them. The gallery she described ran the length of the palace on the entry side. The postmortem inventory listed 39 portraits here—some individual, others double, depicting a total of 51 persons—of the French royal family, its connections by marriage, or would-be alliances.

44 Sir Nicholas Throckmorton had an audience with the recently widowed Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Upon hearing comments about Elizabeth from the French Ambassadors just returned from England, Mary said: 'They all do greatly praise her, and say that she is both a wise and very fair lady; and because the one of us cannot see the other, I will send her my picture, though it be not worth the looking on, because you shall promise me that she shall send me hers'. Throckmorton replied, 'You may be assured if you send her your picture she will send you hers'. *Calendar of State Papers Foreign: Elizabeth, Volume 3, 1560–1561*.

Then, as Lady Cobham related, 'showing the pictures to the ladies, he [the King] called me to him and brought me to those of the King and Queen of Scots, asking if I had seen them. I said I had seen the King but the queen [Mary Stuart] never'. By king, she means Darnley, a regular at Elizabeth's court before marrying the Scottish queen, after which he bore the kingly courtesy title. But as Mary Stuart was Henri's former sister-in-law, he knew her likeness well. So why ask the question? Is it simply to make conversation, because Henri presumes that Lady Cobham, as representative of England, may have seen the subjects and could, following convention, comment on the likenesses? Probably he made this choice because, among all the portraits on display, this one provided an indirect means to continue discussion of the betrothal of his younger brother to Elizabeth. James VI and I had been born by this point, and Henri's directing Lady Cobham's attention to these portraits highlighted the fact that it as long as Elizabeth bore no children, it was Mary's lineage that would sit on the throne of England and Scotland. Lady Cobham displayed her diplomatic skills by anticipating where the king was headed and not questioning his calling attention to these two portraits.

Henri next escorts Lady Cobham into an adjoining 'very gallant chamber, richly hung round, where there stood a sumptuous bed. The King showed me there the picture of his father, which he said was very like him when he lived. I said it seemed by his picture he was a wise and valiant gentleman, which the king said was true'(Figure 9.3).

This exchange further illustrates the dual nature of portrait discourse in the Renaissance: the image is at once likeness to someone familiar with the person and representative of virtue to someone who was not. This interchange also made indirect reference to the betrothal issue implying that Henri's brother will resemble their father in wisdom and valor: like father, like son. The king kept moving, forestalling any continuing conversation on these topics.

These examples demonstrate the power of portraits, whether large or small, installed in a carefully orchestrated setting or portable, and therefore functioning as a prop to be manipulated, to inspire action. In addition, however, these cases also demonstrate the ability of the portrait to exert an almost independent agency of their own. In the cases of Bianca Capello, Amalia van Solms, Mencía de Mendoza and Lady Cobham discussed above, the portrait not only represents but also makes present its subject, sometimes in a very real and affective way. Approaching the study of early modern portraits of women with an attention to object agency, site specificity, and audience response expands our understanding of the portrait beyond traditional avenues of portrait analysis through artists' style and iconography.



Figure 9.3: Circle of François Clouet, *Henri II* (Paris: Louvre).

Such a method thereby increases the proper context for understanding how portraits of women functioned within the arenas of power in early modern court culture.

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10. Marking Female Ocular Agency in the ‘Medieval Housebook’

Andrea Pearson

Abstract

In the sixteenth century an unidentified party intervened in the so-called ‘Medieval Housebook’ (begun c. 1475) by portraying a female figure observing a military encampment illustrated in the volume. This figure is one of agency in the cultural construction of elite masculinity, and operates in contrast to another figure that inspired it, in which female agency is elided. The point-counterpoint strategy of these two figures corresponds with ways in which the Housebook invites its consumers to shape meaning across the illustrated folios through its representation of positive behavior to emulate and negative behavior to avoid for both men and women. For some viewers, the drawing of the female observer could have resisted the largely negative characterization of women throughout the volume.

Keywords: gaze; tournament; castle; masculinity; sexuality

Among the scores of drawings in the so-called ‘Medieval Housebook’ is a bifolio rendering of a military encampment (Figure 10.1). In it, men confident in their readiness for war—their tents are firmly pitched and their carts brim with supplies—cluster under a Habsburg imperial banner sited at the epicenter of the composition. There is, however, an interloper in this otherwise masculinist central scene, for a woman is shown glancing down from a framed aperture drawn into the sky on the left (Figure 10.2). She is apparent only with sustained observation, as the eye moves from the heart to the periphery of the drawing. Close scrutiny reveals her novelty. Framed as she is, she looks out as one might from a window, yet no structure supports her. The ink of her figure is lighter and browner in tone than the darker, nearly black ink used for other passages of the drawing, and

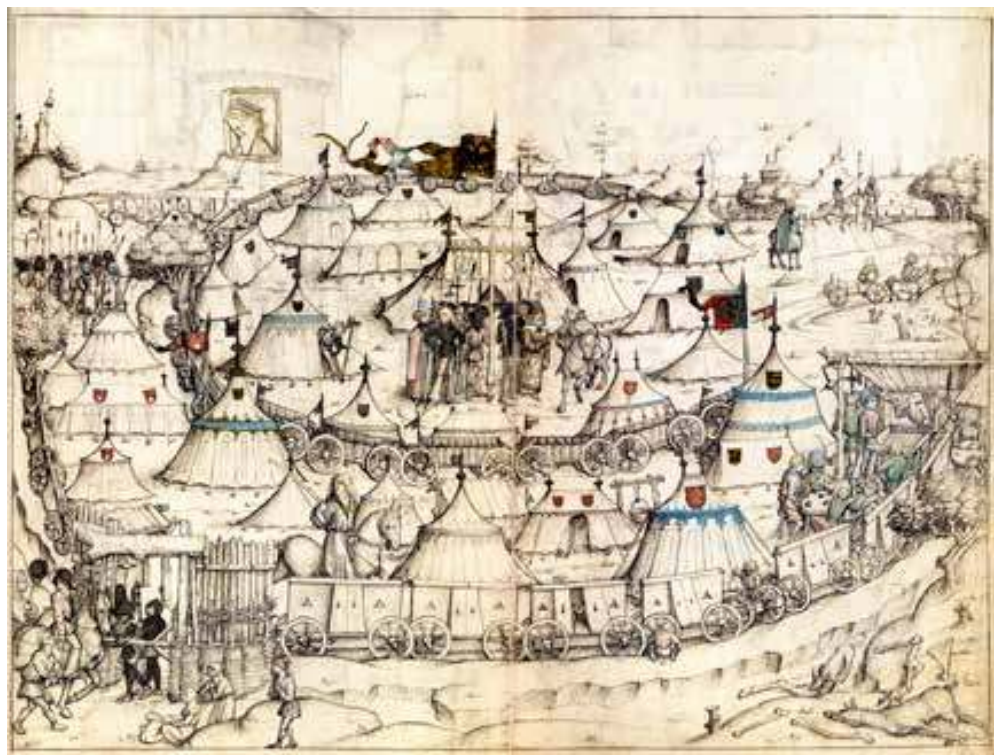


Figure 10.1: Housebook Master, *Military Encampment*, drawing from the *Medieval Housebook*, begun c. 1475, fols. 53r–53r1. Private collection, public domain.

it is comparatively coarser in application, with broader contours and less precision than elsewhere in the folio. The figure is also much larger in scale than those rendered below it. These distinctive features compel our attention, as they must also have done for viewers of the moment. Yet this woman declines to reciprocate our interest. Rather, she tilts her head down and to the right, such that the men gathered at the banner are the subjects of her gaze.

The figure of the apertured woman, previously unanalyzed, offers new ways of understanding gendered experiences and responses through the enduringly enigmatic ‘Medieval Housebook’. Arguably the best-known manuscript of late medieval Germany, the *Housebook*, begun probably around 1475, includes an array of drawings by several German and possibly Netherlandish artists who were associated at least temporarily with the same workshop.¹ These individuals were most likely male, in accordance with gendered protocols of the period: not only did male artists dominate in

¹ The literature on the date of the manuscript is surveyed by Hutchison, ‘The “Medieval Housebook”’, pp. 218–219. The *Housebook*’s production by several artists associated with a single workshop was proposed by Hess, *Meister um das ‘mittelalterliche Hausbuch’*, pp. 15–24.



Figure 10.2: Detail of Fig. 10.1.

northern Europe in this era, but the sexual themes present in the manuscript, discussed below, breach gendered boundaries of decorum for portrayal by female artists. The name 'Master of the Housebook' (German; active *c.* 1470–1500) was assigned to the volume's major draughtsman; it is the singular manuscript within the larger body of drawings, prints, and paintings he produced.² The content of the volume hardly aligns with that of a traditional household almanac or housebook of the period, however, for among its themes are medicine; metallurgy and mining; jousting and hunting; tools, instruments, and practices of warfare; and scenes of flirtation, seduction, and fondling. These varied themes render the manuscript overarchingly complex, a situation that has led to various and sometimes competing interpretations of its illustrations.

Such interpretive tensions are not only products of the present, however, but also of the past, as the apertured woman exemplifies: the motif, added by an unidentified party, probably in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, altered the meaning of the original drawing by fundamentally challenging its male centrism. It does so in part by tapping into cultural practices that assigned agency to elite female beholders in military and

2 Earlier he was called the 'Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet' because nearly all of his known prints are represented in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

tournament contexts. This perspective counters a prevailing conclusion of the scholarship on late medieval chivalry: that the female gaze was merely symbolic, since women's assessments of men's performances functioned to help men evaluate each other.³ At the same time, the figure resists intertwined tropes of forced passivity and female licentiousness that are suggested by its prototype in the Housebook: a woman in a tower scaled by three marauders. This point-counterpoint strategy corresponds with ways in which images operate elsewhere in the manuscript, where moral and behavioral boundaries are defined by alternatively endorsing and vilifying the behavior of men and vilifying to a greater degree the behavior of women, especially in the area of sex. Thus, the figure carried significant interpretive weight within the manuscript as a whole by undermining the largely unfavorable characterization of women expressed throughout.

Spectatorial agency

In continental Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, female ocular acumen was considered essential for defining both the ideal competitor in tournaments and the ideal warrior on the battlefield. These two activities, playing at war and going to war, were contingent upon one another. On the one hand, knights with experience on the battlefield made stronger tournament competitors. On the other, participation in tournaments, most notably jousts, provided essential preparation for the rigors of military engagement: from the early fifteenth century, writings by authors such as Christine de Pizan (1364–c. 1430) argued that knights were obligated to participate in 'the art of chivalry' to build the physical stamina required for battle.⁴ Certainly an implication of the Housebook's encampment drawing is that the knights who are gathered to fight had prepared in ways expected of them. The drawing may even represent a historical camp, not a fictional one: that of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III (1415–1493) at the Siege of Neuss in 1474–1475. In this event, widely discussed at the time, the Burgundian duke Charles the Bold (1433–1477) held but eventually lost the imperial city of Neuss, a challenge he assumed in defense of Frederick's adversary, Ruprecht of the Palatinate (1427–1480), archbishop of Cologne. Two pieces of evidence suggest that the Housebook Master intended to

3 Karras, *From Boys to Men*, pp. 20–66.

4 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, p. 32, with additional evidence in Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 37. A counterargument appears in Fallows, *Jousting*, pp. 240–266.

represent this imperial camp in the drawing.⁵ First, a deep trench like that described by chroniclers of the siege is portrayed along the foreground of the composition. Second, Adolf II of Nassau, archbishop of Mainz and counselor to Frederick, was present in the camp, a situation represented in the drawing by a heraldic banner near a tent to the right of center, second in prominence only to the imperial banner.⁶

The Siege of Neuss motivated contemporaneous commentary that bears upon the representation of female ocular agency in the Housebook's encampment drawing. In particular, the Burgundian chronicler Georges Chastellain (c. 1405–1475) asserted that observant women would have been helpful for motivating ideal manhood during the siege, but none were present: 'Alas, where are the ladies [...] to inspire us to noble deeds'?⁷ One might question the leap from women's surveillance of men's acts in tournaments to the participation of women in shaping masculinity in warfare, since women had little opportunity to observe men in battle. However, Gerry Milligan found that tales of courageous female warriors and wartime orators from antiquity that were included in chivalric literature 'recall and even honour the potential of feminine power.'⁸ Of Baldassare Castiglione's (1478–1529) *Cortegiano* ('Book of the Courter') published in 1528, Mulligan concluded that, 'for while it is unlikely that Castiglione expected [elite women] to imitate the women of Chios or Persia, he might have hoped that the narration of such stories would have mobilized men into action by erecting a narrative reminder of the potential of women in war.' Chastellain's plaint about the absence of women at Neuss suggests that he likewise entwined tournaments and warfare: the two cultures pivoted around shared investments in male valor and the power of the female gaze to shape masculinity.

Tournament culture flourished not only as a set of practices but also as a literary and pictorial topos: chivalric biographies aggrandized their subjects, and festival books and manuals described and illustrated the practices and rituals meant to help men succeed in competition. These sources reveal complexities around the means by which female spectatorship was considered to define masculinity, and in what aspects of tournament culture men perceived women's gazes to matter most. For example, although Ruth

5 Hutchison, "The "Medieval Housebook", pp. 218–219.

6 Hutchison, "The "Medieval Housebook", p. 218.

7 'Hélas! où sont dames pour nous entretenir, pour nous amonester de bien faire', in Chastellain, *Oeuvres*, p. 266.

8 This and the following quotation appear in Milligan, *Moral Combat*, p. 158.

Mazo Karras found that in tournaments discussed in chivalric texts, men often negotiated masculinity in relation to each other and as an outcome of male anxiety over shame, she also demonstrated that men aspired to win the approval of women through noble performances. Men considered women's positive evaluations of their acts crucial for success in love: 'the man's success in deeds of arms obligated the woman to love him, and her love spurred him to further deeds'.⁹ Indeed, chivalric biographies describe men coming under the judicious eyes of women in various micro-rituals of the tournament, and some of these writings present the leading characters as desirable love objects. A biography written around 1470 of Jacques de Lalaing (1420/21–1453), a courtier of Charles the Bold's father, the Burgundian duke Philip the Good (1396–1467), described how, as Jacques traveled to a joust as a competitor, he was observed by a group of 'ladies, damsels, bourgeois dames, and maidens' who assessed what they saw from doors and windows along the route.¹⁰ These onlookers expected that Jacques would perform with the valor of a knight, even if his laudatory feats were made possible only by divine intervention: they had 'prayed to God that Jacques might accomplish the joust most honorably.' Jacques's biographer endowed him with the ideal physicality of a successful knightly competitor, qualities that he envisioned would effectively arouse desire in the onlookers (who in this passage are not described as expressly female):¹¹ 'you should believe and know that many desired him, for it was certain that it would be impossible to find or look for a more handsome esquire, better built and shaped in all his body parts'.

Other writings attributed specific, evaluative public roles for women in tournament competitions. The *Le Livre de Tournois* ('The Book of Tournaments', c. 1460) of Duke René of Anjou (1409–1480), a kind of how-to manual on the subject, describes how women inspected and rendered judgements about the crests and armor of knights at the start of the competition, how they observed competitive jousting and its outcomes from elevated scaffolds reserved for them, and how they bestowed prizes upon the winners at the conclusion of the games. Illuminations in the manuscript helped to sustain

9 Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 54.

10 Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 114. For this and the following quotations, see the translations in Zrinka Stahuljak, 'Plates', p. 22.

11 See Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, for an analysis of homoerotic desire in chivalric literature. Similarly, for an argument that in tournament contexts, 'descriptions of the chivalric body offered a way, through the reading-imagining process, for both women and men to circumvent proscriptions on the expression of love and desire', see L'Estrange, 'Gazing at Gawain', quotation on p. 79.

such practices by showing women watching the competitions from viewing boxes and distributing largesse to the victors.¹²

Although certain tournament practices were revised between the production of the Housebook and the subsequent addition of the woman above the encampment, the discerning female gaze continued to be advanced as consequential to elite masculinity in northern European tournament rituals.¹³ Miniatures in a manuscript version (c. 1530) of the Jacques de Lalaing biography, probably commissioned by one of Jacques's sons or grandsons, focus largely on Jacques's heroic deeds in the jousts in which he participated, with women shown as attentive spectators of these events (Figure 10.3).¹⁴ Images of the kind were not restricted to manuscripts with limited audiences, however, for they circulated relatively widely in the form of prints and printed books that helped to sustain the expectations and practices of tournaments. Several prints by the German artist Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) included female spectators watching competitors from boxes, windows, and doorways.¹⁵ Other examples appear in the projects of Frederick III's son and heir, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519).¹⁶ Maximilian commissioned the *Weisskunig* ('The White King'), woodcuts for which were printed in Augsburg between 1514 and 1516, to idealize his formative development as a knight. His poetic allegory called *Theuerdank* ('The Knight of Adventurous Thoughts') of 1517 describes various fictional trials that Maximilian, in the role of the character Theuerdank, overcame on his 1477 journey to the Netherlands to wed Mary, Duchess of Burgundy (1457–1482). Woodcuts from both the *Weisskunig* and *Theuerdank*—the latter was published in nine editions between 1517 and 1693—show women observing armored knights who skirmish. Furthermore, announcements in French and Spanish of a joust in celebration of the arrival of the Spanish king and governor of the Netherlands, Philip II (1527–1598), which took place in Brussels in 1549, stated that, 'Four gentlemen of rank and arms will hold a joust [...] for the service of the ladies [...] He who runs the best lance for the ladies wins a ruby worth at least five hundred escudos. [...] The prizes will

12 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Français 2695, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522067.image>, fols. 97v–98r, 100v–101r, and 103v (accessed 25 July, 2020).

13 Revisions to tournament practices in this period are summarized by Frieder, *Chivalry and the Perfect Prince*, pp. 3–31.

14 The probable patrons of the volume are discussed by Legaré, 'A Family Text', pp. 157–159. She has identified thirteen manuscript versions of the biography, inventoried on pp. 151–152.

15 See, for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (www.metmuseum.org), accession numbers 18.65.4, 27.54.26, 27.55, and 47.100.194.

16 Surveyed by Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, especially pp. 147–168.

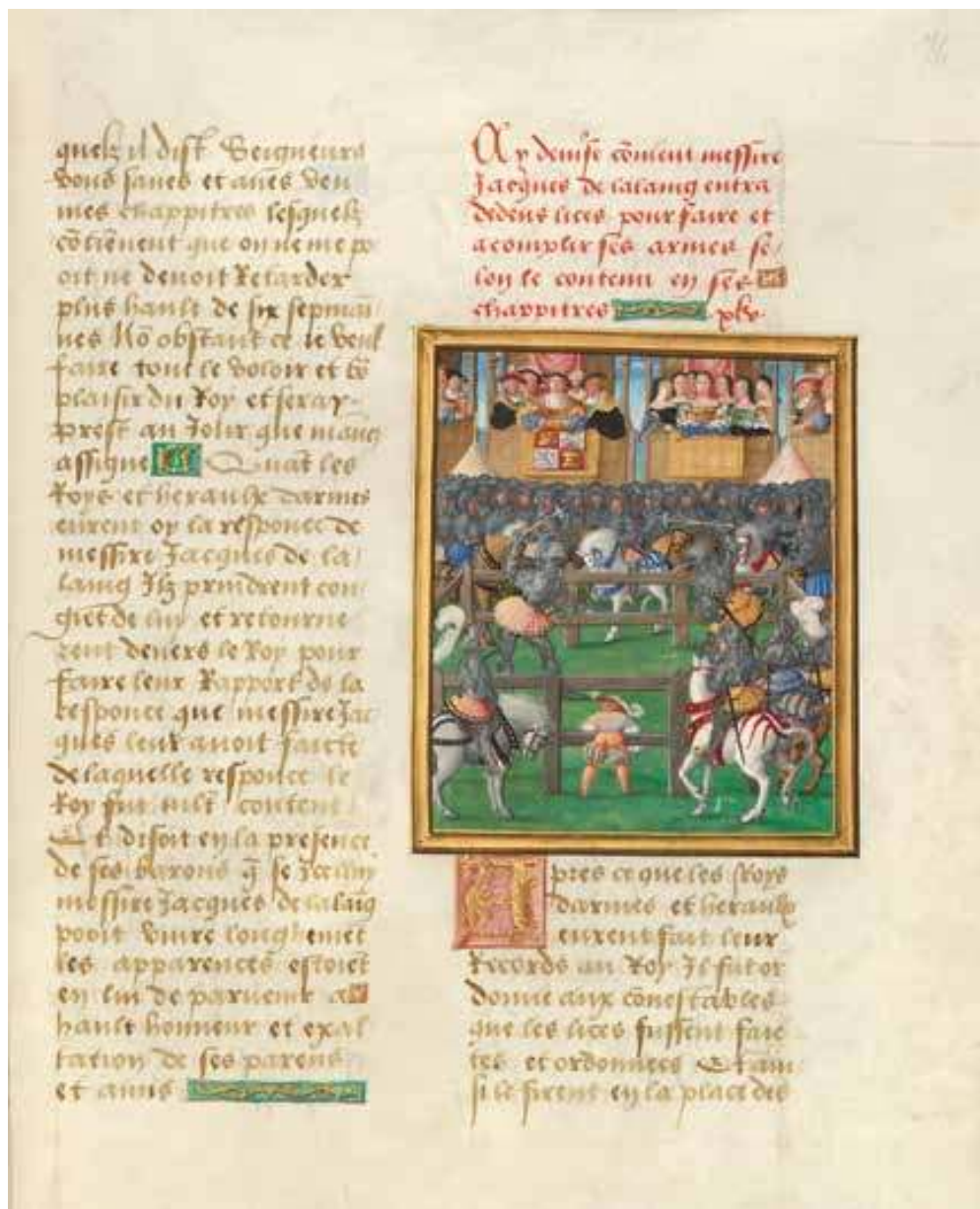


Figure 10.3: Master of the Getty Lalaing, 'Jacques de Lalaing and Diego de Guzman Jousting before the King of Castile', illumination from the *Book of Deeds of Jacques de Lalaing*, c. 1530. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Acquired in honor of Thomas Kren, Ms. 114, fol. 76r. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program, public domain.

be given by the ladies, and the jousting who gives a poor account of himself will win no prize.¹⁷ This tournament, like René of Anjou's in the previous century, placed women's discernment of male performance at the forefront of the competition and its outcomes.

17 Cited by Frieder, *Chivalry and the Perfect Prince*, p. 128.

Compromised agency

For audiences of the Housebook, the most immediate example of a discerning female gaze at a tournament appears within the manuscript itself. This example undermines the authority of female visual acumen, however, with compositional choices that convey gendered, male-centric hierarchies in defining masculinity and by sexualizing the female body. The image in question is one of seven bifolio compositions in a section of the manuscript described as the 'Chivalric Life'. It presents courtly onlookers gathered around two knights who convene in a colonel joust (*Krönleinstechen*) (Figure 10.4). In these competitions, victory was achieved not by inflicting serious injury on one's opponent but rather by knocking him off a horse using a lance outfitted with a blunted tip called the *colonel*.¹⁸ The armored knight at the left of the illustration, having assumed full control of his mount, lance, and shield, is ready to skirmish. His steed rears up in a prelude to a charge. This act is suspended, however, by a tournament steward (*Griesswärtel*), who understands that the knight's competitor, to the right in the facing folio, is not yet prepared. His untoward behavior is patent. Rather than assuming the erect posture of his competitor, he slumps languidly on his mount. He has failed to take control of his steed despite its inert status, for a steward firmly holds the reins at the bit; neither has he grasped the hilt of his weapon nor raised his shield in his defense. The knight's sluggish pace and clumsy actions inspire unfavorable verdicts on the part of his entourage. A steward who hands him his lance casts a disapproving glance, while a nobleman on horseback to the left urgently conveys that the competition is poised to act. A mounted observer at the right frowns and clenches his fist, as if in resigned disappointment over the ill-prepared knight and his likely defeat.

If this drawing offers an example of men defining ideal manhood among themselves, it also includes women as observers and, in the tradition of female spectatorship, implies their consequence in shaping masculinity. Yet it also undermines women's visual acumen. The female beholders in question appear along the upper margins of the sheet, some riding behind male companions with two others standing arm in arm nearby. The latter figures glance toward the central scene, their facial expressions suggesting that they possess the same agility in discerning male readiness as the men who surround the fumbling knight. At the same time, however, certain aspects of the iconography challenge female agency. The women are depicted not at the center but rather at the periphery of the main action (much like the women

¹⁸ Waldburg Wolfegg, 'The Medieval Housebook', pp. 80–81.



Figure 10.4: Housebook Master, *Colonel Joust*, drawing from the *Medieval Housebook* (see caption for Fig. 10.1), fols. 20v–21r.

portrayed in the viewing boxes in tournament imagery, distant from the male participants and other noblemen). In addition, the two figures standing side by side are defined in hierarchical gendered terms by the act of an adjacent man on horseback. He reaches down to shield the bumbling knight from them and, in the process, protects him from diminished manhood in the women's eyes. Their otherwise discerning gazes are thereby rendered inert. Not only this, but in the process of shielding the women, the nobleman's right palm covers the left breast of the maiden closest to him, as if he salaciously touches her even as he shares a mount with a paramour who conveniently remains oblivious. This act by a compatriot of the failing knight underscores the scandalous nature of the latter's humiliating situation. Indeed, the colonel of the lance for which the rider bears responsibility pushes one apparently amorous horse toward another, as if his compromised valor put into motion both the lust of these creatures and the illicit human activity adjacent to it.¹⁹ Horses were in fact a long-serving emblem of physical desire, as described the theologian Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141): 'we sit upon our beast of burden just as we press down the wantonness of our flesh'. Bodies required strict surveillance to keep such desire in check.

19 Cited by Smith, *The Power of Women*, pp. 118–119.

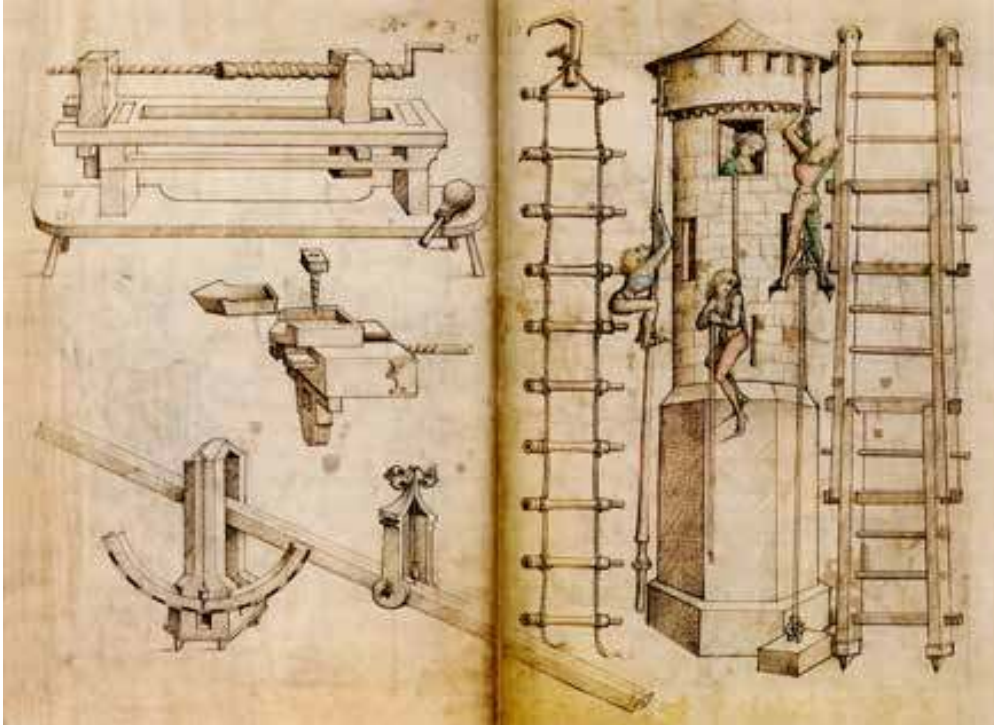


Figure 10.5: Housebook Master, *A Woman in a Tower Scaled by Three Men*, drawing from the Medieval Housebook (see caption for Fig. 10.1), fol. 53v1.

Interventionist agency

Female spectatorial agency is constructed in yet another way through the addended figure in the encampment scene: relationally to a second figure representing a woman in a tower. The apertured woman was in fact immediately inspired by this other figure, which was original to the Housebook and appears on the opposite side of the folio (Figure 10.5): its contours were visible through the thin parchment, such that the party who intervened in the encampment drawing simply traced over it to create the motif of the female observer. This verso-tracing is a relational approach to marking the folio, one that places the two figures in direct conversation with one another, both conceptually and visually—the women are at once mirrored counterparts and characters in substantially different iconographical contexts—while also substantiating comparative analysis as an effective means for furthering an understanding of both.

Unlike the encampment addendum, the prototype figure is vulnerable to, or licentiously accepting of, sexualized male attention and action. This woman observes from a tower a man immediately below, who descends from her window along the stone wall with the help of a thick cable. Two other men climb up on either side, one with a wall claw and the other with



Figure 10.6: Paris, *Casket Lid with Scenes of Courtly Love and Jousting*, 1310–30, elephant ivory, 5 7/8 x 9 7/8 x 5/16 in. (15 x 25.1 x 0.8 cm). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190.173a, b; The Cloisters Collection, 1988.16. www.metmuseum.org, public domain.

climbing irons and a weighted rope. Ladders to either side of the turret illustrate other means of scaling walls. Although the ostensible aim of the drawing is to demonstrate several ways by which soldiers might breach enemy fortifications, the presence of the female figure aligns the iconography with late medieval depictions of courtly love. Among these, as a subtheme of this trope, is the Attack on the Castle of Love, where knights in chainmail scale turreted castles to conquer their aspirational paramours. Many images of this type portray women welcoming knights as their suitors. For example, the left hand carving of a lid of a fourteenth-century Parisian ivory casket, which may have safeguarded love tokens or letters, presents women variously welcoming invading knights (Figure 10.6). They throw flowers as signs of interest, pull suitors toward them, and ride off with their chosen beloveds by aid of steed and dinghy. In the central image, some men but primarily women watch men joust: this is a competition for the favor of ladies. At the left, a castle is taken down by catapulted bouquets, such that a knight on the right will soon access the willing paramours above by ladder.

While this and other images of the Castle of Love may have been interpretive playfully, in ways that shaped positive notions of love between willing partners, others operated as a means of sexual critique. Most works falling into this category defined women as sexually willing and therefore morally corrupt. An example is found in the *Ars amatoria* ('Art of Love') of the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE), in verses that read, 'Little can one value

the small castle / That is taken at the first assault.²⁰ Implied in these lines is the idea that women did not hesitate or were easily persuaded to surrender to desire without the resistance expected of them. Ovid, and the many medieval authors his writings influenced, deemed such women immoral and unworthy of respect.²¹ Some visual variants on the Castle of Love from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries suggest that women were not only available but had lost all discretion about whom they accepted as lovers: a painted glass roundel made in Cologne around 1530 portrays not knights but Wild Men storming the castle, invited by enthusiastic maidens with wreaths in hand.²² Yet the castle was also deployed as a metaphor for the unwelcome conquest of female bodies. *Le Commens d'amours* ('Commentary on Love') a thirteenth-century *vade mecum* on love and sex attributed to Richard de Fournival (1201–1260) for a male readership, describes how a desirous lover used magic to induce the slumber of an unsuspecting maiden, then 'took carnal pleasure in her until he had accomplished his will. And then he made a little text and in his writing were written the words, "This castle that was so long under siege by great force of cunning was finally broken."²³ A similar, potentially menacing approach to the conquering of female bodies appears in medieval German writings, where in one case a castle is burned by an upright lance, a euphemism for an erect penis.²⁴ In these examples, courtly love has a dark underside, where a female body is attained by deceit, and where a woman is subjugated to a morally impoverished character that the author wished to heroicize. Such discourses problematized tropes of love by creating a space in which the love-game ended in bodily violation.

Against this backdrop, it seems that aspects of the visual Castle of Love could have inspired readings that resisted the violence of the depicted assaults. In the casket discussed above (Figure 10.6), for example, a woman at the upper left grasps the hilt of a sword that she points toward a knight to hasten his ascendance: it seems that he has handed the hilt to her, to protect her hands while she pulls him up. Yet the blade would slash his hands as he grasped it, a situation that doubles down on the physical harm suggested by the proximity of the tip to his chest. Furthermore, the crown worn by the woman who wields the sword may signal her secular authority within the castle, but crowns were also emblematic of salvation achieved

20 Smith, 'The Gothic Mirror', p. 79.

21 For the influence of Ovidian love poetry, see Desmond, 'Venus's Clerk'.

22 Husband, *The Wild Man*, pp. 74–75, Fig. 40.

23 Smith, 'The Gothic Mirror', p. 79.

24 Dinzelbacher, 'Die Burg', p. 97.

through ideal purity.²⁵ The figure might therefore be understood as one who has chosen to preserve her virtue and ultimately her soul by fighting off an unwelcome suitor.

The dark side of courtly love perhaps bears even more deeply upon the Housebook's image of the tower, which is complicated by its assertion of social distinction. Here, the figures who climb the turret are not elite knights, for they are absent the chainmail and other attributes that would convey their noble status, such that their acts were more likely to carry the full interpretive weight of unwanted conquest for the privileged audiences of the Housebook. Marks below the buttocks of the climbing figure on the left, which suggests that his body is releasing perspiration or more likely urine, visually define the figure's act of scaling as uncivilized or even morally contemptible. Such a strategy is used in the encampment composition (Figure 10.1), in a figure in the lower foreground who exposes his rump to defecate. This act defines the area outside the camp as a lesser place, distinguished by behaviors deemed appropriate for those in the lower social margins. Absent too are the telltale signs of requited love on the part of the turreted woman, since flowers and wreaths, the traditional means of conveying that women welcomed male suitors, are not present. However, neither does the figure protest the advances of the men who ascend and descend. Her passivity is therefore ambiguous: she may be interpreted as resigned to her fate at the hands of marauders or, like the maidens in the Wild Men image, as having licentiously surrendered her virtue.

With these points in mind, the origin of the encampment figure in the woman in the tower invites an interventionist reading of the former motif, one in which female agency is asserted to correct its absence in the prototype. The added figure's disembodied status and restrictive framing disengages her from the sexual ambiguities of courtly love: from the castle context, from men's advances, from female promiscuity implied in references to it, and from menace against women's bodies intimated in literary sources. In comparison, female ocular and interpretive agency is compromised in the prototype by the sexualized context of the iconography: by the scrambling men in the woman's vicinity, by the implications of the soldiers' actions both in the depiction and in the imagined future, and by the resigned acquiescence or willing forfeiture of virtue as options for understanding the woman's response. If Georges Chastellain decried the absence of women at the Siege of Neuss, where their observations would have encouraged ideal chivalric masculinity in proximity to combat, the interloper in the drawing offered

25 Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, p. 296.

this very advantage, if to the Habsburg militia it portrays. Her presence in the folio, in temporal and physical contiguity to battle, may not have reflected the reality of women's access to men's performative warfare. Yet her image offers a counter-perspective to the denial of female agency in the Housebook's tower scene.

Comparative agency and the Housebook's audiences

The comparative analysis invited by the remaking of the woman in the tower as the woman of the encampment is encouraged from the very start of the Housebook, in ways that implicate the content on the whole within a point-counterpoint analytical strategy. This approach is framed by the text of the *Ars Memorandi* ('Art of Memory') that is included at the start of the volume, which encourages readers to develop memory skills by cross-referencing the content.²⁶ Thus, viewers might activate the observer of the encampment to counter other, passive or negative conceptions of womanhood across the full spectrum of the volume, where female figures could be easily interpreted as inept or corrupt. The imagery invites viewers of the 'Chivalric Life' to consider their choices regarding bodily comportment and the potential outcomes of such acts.

The first image in this section depicts a Garden of Love, with two pairs of lovers and a grouping of three additional figures, in which a man directs the attention of his female companions to a fountain.²⁷ The space in which this activity takes place is sequestered from the landscape behind by a high wall that frames it as a *hortus conclusus* of the *Canticum canticorum* ('Song of Songs'), the enclosed garden that was emblematic of the Virgin Mary's purity and that moralists used to advocate virginity for men and especially for women.²⁸ A figure that stands on the basin emphasizes through its position atop the cover that the fountain is covered. This is the 'fountain sealed', of the *Canticum*, likewise symbolic of purity. Here and in other images in this part of the manuscript, a male figure takes on a pedagogical role by directing the women in his company, who passively receive his guidance, toward the types of licit actions represented by the emblematic garden. By

26 My reading contrasts with Leng's, 'The Prelude to the Housebook', p. 114, who argues that the text 'remains independent'.

27 [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hausbuch_\(Schloss_Wolfegg\)#/media/Datei:Hausbuch_Wolfegg_18v_19r_Badehaus.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hausbuch_(Schloss_Wolfegg)#/media/Datei:Hausbuch_Wolfegg_18v_19r_Badehaus.jpg) (accessed 25 July 2020).

28 Pearson, *Gardens of Love*, pp. 28–80.



Figure 10.7: Housebook Master, *Seductions and Entrapments*, from the Medieval Housebook (see caption for Figure 10.1), fols. 23v–24r.

contrast, on the right side of the folio nude men and women gather together in a bath house. Above, a woman throws open a sash to a second-story window to invite a youth inside and presumably into the bath. This kind of open, gender-mixed bathing breached decorum and draws even deeper attention by contrast to the licit acts and motives of the figures in the garden.

Women are the aggressors in another bifolio image in the section, where they are shown with objects emblematic of seduction that entrap men (Figure 10.7). A woman hikes up a hillside to the left toward a man caught in her snare. To his right, a woman approaches a male fowler in a hut as he waits to catch birds, but it is he that will be snared. In the middle ground, a woman carrying a birdcage, emblematic of entrapment and of prostitution, is cautioned by another woman but to no avail. On the right, rather than defending the castle form which she peers out, a woman at a well beckons a stable boy feeding grain to a duck. Seduction is also central to the final image in this sequence (Figure 10.8). On the left, four couples appear in an enclosed garden with a door open to untamed nature and an unsealed fountain opposite. These motifs play into the main subject, amorous couples that engage in acts of drinking, fondling, and bodily exposure. For example, a musician's penis is exposed by his female companion while a woman to the right draws a jester's attention to this act, perhaps as an invitation of



Figure 10.8: Housebook Master, *Garden of Lust*, from the *Medieval Housebook* (see caption for Fig. 1), fols. 24v–25r.

sorts. Perched on the back wall of the garden, a peacock, emblematic of both immortality and Paradise, turns away, implying that these activities will not win favor on judgment day. By contrast, a courtly couple in the right-hand folio makes a decorous choice. In a departure from other images in this section that identify the main courtier in the scenes as the primary exemplar of morality, here he strides toward the licentious group, towing a female figure who raises her left hand to her breast, perhaps in surprise at what she sees before her. With her right hand she points toward the group, drawing attention to the illicit nature of the figures' behavior and implying that neither she nor her companion will cross a nearby bridge that leads to the garden. She, in other words, provides the moral compass. Similarly, the active looking of the apertured woman in the encampment scene offers a corrective to other means of shaping female action in the volume, where it is rare or corrupt.

But to what readers and viewers were these lessons directed? Two drawings in the volume that illustrate a heraldic device and tournament helmets (fols. 2r and 34v) have inspired several proposals. The most convincing, offered by Annett Klingner, is that the manuscript was commissioned by a member of an upwardly mobile entrepreneurial family by the name of Guldinast, members of which resided in urban Constance: they adopted the

motif of a bare, knotted branch, which is illustrated on shields portrayed in the two folios.²⁹ The emblem appears twice within the encampment scene, on a tent at the right, ostensibly to aggrandize the family through proximity to the imperial banner.³⁰ Some Guldinasts may have seen themselves (and each other) as the primary male character who appears in every scene in the 'Chivalric Life': for example, in the colonel joust (Figure 10.4) he is the nobleman who clenches his fist in frustration over the bumbling knight's ill-preparedness. He is distinguished there and elsewhere by a white sash adorned with a two-handled vase filled with flowers. This is the insignia of the Order of the Jar (or Pitcher), a chivalric order founded by Ferdinand I of Aragon (1380–1416) and popularized in Austria and Germany through its promotion by Frederick III starting around 1473.³¹ The flowers in the vase are lilies, symbolic of the Virgin Mary's purity at the Annunciation and a sign of the Order's devotion to restraint, including bodily restraint as exemplified by Mary's virginity (the motto 'Halt Mass'—'observe moderation'—that Maximilian I later assigned to the Order suggests this association). The knight of the Housebook exemplifies the positive values and acts of elite masculinity: he chose the enclosed garden over the illicit bath at the start of the sequence; he observed with disappointment the knight who is unprepared to joust; and he rejected the corrupt group in the garden under the guidance of his female companion.³²

To close, we would do well to consider the gendered aspects of the manuscript in light of the party who intervened in it with the verso-tracing approach described above. Unfortunately, available evidence reveals more about who was *not* responsible than who was. It could not have been the original owner of the manuscript who acted upon it. The ink type and tone, and the breadth of line of the portrayed figure, align not with the drawing but rather with a foliation in the manuscript dated by historians to the second quarter of the sixteenth century, such that it is reasonable to conclude that the marks were made coevally.³³ This is the same era in which an *ex libris* (fol. 65v) was added to the manuscript by one Joachim Hofen. Efforts by several scholars to track this person in the archives have been unsuccessful, and we can only speculate whether he, a member of his family, or someone else with access to the manuscript intervened in it; unknown

29 Klingner, *Die Macht der Sterne*, pp. 120–124.

30 Klingner, *Die Macht der Sterne*, p. 137.

31 Clark, *Collecting Art*, pp. 163–165, 170, 173.

32 Noted by Waldburg Wolfegg, 'The Medieval Housebook', pp. 73–74.

33 Waldburg Wolfegg, 'The Medieval Housebook', p. 68.

as well are the gender and age of this person, or if this act was inspired through an individual or group effort. Certainly the content would have been compelling to many beholders, if for a variety of reasons. Some viewers may have found transgressive the active gaze of the apertured woman in an era in which modest, chaste looking was the dominant ideal.³⁴ Yet certainly attempts to define strict identity boundaries in terms of audiences and reception would be misguided: the imagery makes a number of claims to class distinction, in addition to those cited here, in order to elevate the elite, even as it shapes womanhood and manhood comparatively differently in important ways. Such evidence suggests that a fuller, intersectional approach to the manuscript will yield important discoveries. We may never know, though, if the Housebook's pedagogical messaging was persuasive or not: whether viewers responded with compliance or resistance, in another way altogether, or not at all. Perhaps the encampment figure was even rendered without much forethought, by someone whose eye was simply intrigued by the marks that were visible through the parchment. It is clear, nonetheless, that the figure held potential as a consequential, gendered force within the manuscript, one that invited its audiences to consider the volume anew.

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34 Smith, 'The Gothic Mirror', pp. 83–84.

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Part IV

Forming Communities

11. Claude-Catherine de Clermont

A Taste-Maker in the Continuum of Salon Society

Julie D. Campbell

Abstract

Claude-Catherine de Clermont, *duchesse de Retz* (1543–1603), stands at an important juncture in the continuum of salon history. Her mother-in-law, Marie Catherine de Pierrevive (c. 1500–1570), was known for her salon in Lyon during the 1520s and 1530s. Her young cousin, Catherine de Vivonne, *marquise de Rambouillet* (1588–1665), would host the most famous salon of the seventeenth-century. Retz, too, was lauded for entertaining her circle in ways that both reflect the earlier Franco-Italian traditions of Lyonnaise *société mondaine* and anticipate those of the *précieuses*. Consideration of texts that allude to Retz's status as a *proto-salonnière* illustrate ways that game-playing, conversation, and the championing of key vernacular literary styles cross boundaries of periodization to serve as foundational elements of salon history.

Keywords: salons; Claude-Catherine de Clermont, *duchesse de Retz*; games; letters; Marie de Romieu; Estienne Pasquier

French salons of the seventeenth century are typically characterized as something new in women's history:¹ a clean break with the harsh manners of the French court made by such women as Catherine de Vivonne, the *marquise de Rambouillet* (1588–1665) and Louise Marguerite de Lorraine, the *princesse de Conti* (1588–1631). They are considered the birthplace of the modern novel designed according to women's tastes,² and the bastions

1 Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture sous l'Ancien Régime*, p. 64; Cholakian, *Women and the Politics of Self-representation*, pp. 31–32; Randall, *The Concept of Conversation*, pp. 11, 123, 142–156.

2 DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, pp. 5–6, 11–12, 43–93.

of the so-called *précieuses* who directed polite, cultivated conversation and games.³ While scholars of seventeenth-century salon culture and sixteenth-century women's history have long gestured to similarities in sixteenth-century social practices, few, if any, have detailed those similarities.⁴ The majority of scholars of seventeenth-century salon society generally assert that, as L. Clark Keating put it in 1941, 'the *salon* of Mme de Rambouillet was not an outgrowth of, but a protest against, the sixteenth-century society which she saw round about her'.⁵ While that may be the case if we look only at the immediate political context of this group and others like it, the historical record suggests something quite different—that while such seventeenth-century groups may have broken with the Bourbon court, there was no perfectly clean break with social practices of the sixteenth century.⁶

In reality, sixteenth-century noble and royal women cultivated a *société mondaine* that partook of Italian social influence and paved the way for the celebrated salons of the seventeenth century. Specific transnational elements included game-playing, group authorship, debates, the championing of particular vernacular literary styles and authors, and the impulse to escape religiopolitical chaos by taking refuge in regulated conversation spaces. Here I will focus on Claude Catherine de Clermont, *maréchale* then *duchesse de Retz* (1543–1603). My goals are to position her in the

3 'Précieuse' is a loaded term that spread following Molière's usage in *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659). I use it sparingly, in context with characteristics attributed to it—cultivated manners, genteel conversation, use of pseudonyms, etc.—without engaging in the debate over the validity of the term. Regarding interrogation of the term, see Dufour-Maître 'La critique des femmes', pp. 157–168 and 'Les précieuses', pp. 251–263, as well as the entire *Les Précieuses*. See also Stanton *The Dynamics of Gender*, pp. 96–97.

4 Cholakian, *Women and the Politics of Self-Representation*, pp. 31–32; DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, pp. 20–21, 72; Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of 17th-Century France*, p. 22; Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, vol. 3, p. 943; Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture sous l'Ancien Régime*, p. 64; Berriot-Salvadore, 'Les femmes dans les cercles intellectuels de la Renaissance', pp. 210–237; Evain, 'Les reines et princesses de France', p. 92; Viennot, 'Introduction', (1993), p. 12.

5 Keating, *Studies on the Literary Salon in France*, p. 144.

6 I use 'salon', 'proto-salon', and similar terms to refer to the *sociabilité mondaine* which was already in practice in the sixteenth century before the Franco-Italian architectural term *salon*, derived from *salone* and *sala*, appeared c. 1664. See Bray, 'Les Salons', pp. 925–928. Harth, *Cartesian Women*, p. 15, explains that the term 'salon' was not 'applied to social gatherings until the nineteenth century.' See also Menestrier, *Bibliothèque curieuse*, vol. 2, pp. 115–128, who calls the gatherings of the *société mondaine* of sixteenth-century Lyon *académies*, *assemblées*, and *conferences*. In Italy, such gatherings are *ridotti*, *veglie*, or *cenacoli* (French version, *cénacles*), and all essentially mean gatherings for sociability of various kinds: formal debates and discourses, informal conversation and debate, sometimes prescribed by games. Such gatherings might include music or dramatic performance.

continuum of salon history and examine texts that allude to her status as a *proto-salonnaière*. Since much scholarly attention has been focused on the manuscript poetry miscellany associated with her circle,⁷ I will focus instead on the genres of games and letters, as well as poetry by Marie de Romieu (c. 1569–c. 1585).

Madame de Retz,⁸ also known by the pseudonym Dyctinne, participated in academic debate before Henri III in the Académie du Palais⁹—in other words, she was a *femme savante* long before Molière made that a negative label for women with humanist educations¹⁰—and she hosted dinners and what sound like rather diverting, conversation-game-driven evenings at her home, long before Molière made *précieuse*¹¹ a negative label for *salonnières*.¹² Moreover, Retz stands in a fascinating place in salon history regarding family connections because she is the daughter-in-law of Marie-Catherine de

7 Rouget and Winn, *Catherine de Clermont Retz (Maréchale de)*, *Album de poésies*.

8 Clermont was married to Albert de Gondi (1522–1602) in 1565. In 1561, at around age eighteen, Clermont was married to Jean d'Annebaut, baron of Retz (1527–1562), who was killed in the battle of Dreux. See the *Nouvelle biographie générale*, vol. 10, p. 842 (the source for this citation is Prudhomme's *Biographie des femmes célèbres*), and Keating, *Studies on the Literary Salon*, p. 104. Marguerite de Valois, *Mémoires*, p. 51, stated that 'Fortune' in the form of the battle of Dreux delivered Clermont from a great bother, her first husband, who was unworthy of her: 'Madame qui sut en ce lieu la grâce que la Fortune lui avait faite de la délivrer à la bataille de Dreux d'un facheux, son premier mari, Monsieur d'Annebaut, qui était indigne de posséder un sujet si divin et parfait.' Translations are mine unless otherwise attributed.

9 Her academic devices were the rose, lily, amaranth, shrubs, and brambles. See L'Anglois, *Discours des Hieroglyphes Aegyptiens*, pp. 106v–107v.

10 Molière, *Les Femmes savants* (Paris, 1672).

11 Molière, *Les précieuses ridicules* (Paris, 1659).

12 Key Sources: 1) Dale (1576), accessed 2 November 2013: 'For all these troubles the King has used of late to call certain poets and philosophers into his chamber to hear them dispute three or four hours together *de primis causis de sensu et sensibili* and such like questions. The auditors are none but the King, the Queen of Navarre, the Duke of Nevers, the Countess of Retz, and another lady or two.'

2) D'Aubigné, 'À mes filles touchant les femmes doctes de nostre siècle' (1669), pp. 852–853: 'Je choisis aussy dans la Cour pour mettre en ce rang [des femmes de mérite] la Mareschale de Rez et Mme de Lignerols. [...] Ces deux on fait prevue de ce qu'elles savoyent plus aux choses qu'aux aproles, dans l'Academie qu'avoit dresse le Roy Henry troisieme, et me souvient qu'un jour entre autres, le problem estoit sur l'excellence des vertus morales et intellectuelles: elles furent antagonists, et se firent admirer.' ('I also choose among the Court to put in this rank the Mareschale de Rez and Mme de Lignerols. [...] These two have shown that they know more things than words, in the Academy which addressed King Henri III, and myself one day among others; the debate was on the excellence of the moral and intellectual virtues: they were antagonists, and were admired.')

3) Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Airault', p. 221: see note 39 below.

Pierrevive (c. 1500–1570), *dame* du Perron and wife of Antonio Gondi,¹³ who hosted one of the early sixteenth-century *cercles mondains* or salons in Lyon (from the 1520s to the 1530s). As the daughter of Claude de Clermont-Tonnerre and Jeanne de Vivonne, Retz was through her mother's side of the family related to Catherine de Vivonne, *marquise* de Rambouillet.¹⁴ Retz was a cousin and contemporary of Jean de Vivonne (1530–1599), Rambouillet's father, a key ambassador for Catherine de Medici. Retz was one of her *dames d'honneur* during the same period. Her life overlapped with Rambouillet's from 1588 to 1603. Rambouillet was fifteen and had been married since age twelve when Retz died. Rambouillet, who had an Italian mother, Giulia Savelli, a member of the illustrious Strozzi family,¹⁵ would go on to host the famous *chambre bleu* and would be known by her pseudonym, Arthénice.¹⁶

Salonnière family history aside, consideration of textual artifacts from the historical trajectory of the *société mondaine* of this period illustrate that sixteenth-century Italian social practices became recurring elements of salon society. These findings problematize the notion that the sixteenth-century salons were purely academic or humanist in nature, as some scholars of seventeenth-century salon society have asserted.¹⁷

The twentieth-century scholar Verdun-Louis Saulnier (1917–1980) identifies the Lyonnais salon of Pierrevive, Retz's mother-in-law, as one

13 Marie Catherine de Pierrevive (c. 1500–1570), wife of Antonio Gondi (1486–1560), was born in Lyon, the daughter of Nicolas de Pierrevive and Jeanne de Turin. The Pierrevives came from Chieri in Piedmont to Lyon around 1470 and established themselves as grocers and apothecaries. Gondi came from Florence to Lyon in 1506. In 1521, the couple acquired the Seigniorship of Le Perron, which provided their entrée into French nobility, and in the 1520s to 1530s, they held their salon. *Vincentian Encyclopedia* (accessed 12 October 2017); Milstein, *The Gondi*, pp. 178–179. For more on the Pierrevive and Gondi families, see Picot, *Les Italiens en France au XVIe Siècle*, pp. 37–43.

14 Regarding powerful family connections, Viennot, 'Douze lettres inédites de Marguerite de Valois' (1996), p. 262 n. 6, points out, 'La mère de Claude-Catherine, Jeanne de Vivonne (Mme de Dampierre), était la soeur d'Anne de Vivonne, mère de Brantôme; elle avait épousé Claude de Clermont.' ('The mother of Claude-Catherine de Clermont, Jeanne de Vivonne (Mme de Dampierre), was the sister of Anne de Vivonne, mother of Brantôme; she married Claude de Clermont.') Lavaud, *Un poète de cour au temps des derniers Valois*, pp. 106–107, paints a vivid picture of his view of the family relationships. He asserts that Jean, the issue of a cadette branch of the Vivonnes, that of the 'seigneurs de Fors et de Saint-Gouard', would be included among Claude-Catherine's guests when he was home between diplomatic missions.

15 She was the widow of Luigi Orsini, and the daughter of Cristoforo Savelli and Clarice Strozzi (daughter of Roberto Strozzi and Maddalena di Pierfrancesco de' Medici). See Del Balzo, *L'Italia nella letteratura Francese*, p. 14, and Tallemant des Réaux, 'Le Marquis de Pisani', pp. 37–38.

16 Tallemant des Réaux, 'Malherbe', p. 235.

17 Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of 17th-Century France*, p. 22; Keating, *Studies on the Literary Salon in France*, p. 19; Craveri, *The Age of Conversation*, p. 10.

for high-ranking nobles and royals. He argues, rather chauvinistically, that their interests were more aligned with ‘la sève italienne’, or Italian sappiness, than humanist study. He clearly prefers the humanist circles made up of what he calls the authentic Lyonnais families and a few foreigners who had lived there a very long time—and who had the good taste to prefer Greek and Latin literature. He identifies the sappy material as French and Italian vernacular literature and ‘fêtes et jeux (ou les lettres au service de jeux)’, (‘feasts and games (or literature [used] in service to games’).¹⁸ This sounds, on one hand, rather like the entertainments in Sieneese salon society that George McClure has addressed in *Parlour Games and the Public Life of Women in Renaissance Italy*¹⁹ and on the other, like the literary taste and the conversation games of the seventeenth-century *salonnières* who enjoyed, for example, creating Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Carte de Tendre* (Clélie, 1654–1661) or the *Guirlande* (1641) for Rambouillet’s daughter Julie.²⁰

For textual examples popular in the sixteenth-century, we may look to Innocenzio Ringhieri’s *Cento giuochi liberali, et d’ingegno—Hundred Games of Learning and Wit* (1551)—translated in part by Hubert-Philippe de Villiers in his *Cinquante jeux divers d’honnête entretien—Fifty Diverse Games of Honest Conversation* (Lyon, 1555).²¹ Both would target Franco-Italian female audiences, with the first dedicated to Catherine de Médicis (who befriended Pierrevive and brought her to court) and the second to Marguerite de Bourbon, *duchesse de Nevers* (1516–1559),²² the mother of Retz’s close friend Henriette de Clèves (1542–1601). The work did indeed feature literature in the service of games. In *Cinquante jeux*, we find, for example, ‘Le jeu de beauté’, (‘The Game of Beauty’), in which players describe elements of a woman’s beauty with lines ‘drawn from the Sonnets of Petrarch’.²³ Moreover, in his dedicatory letter to the ladies (*Aus dames*), De Villiers hints at the

18 Saulnier, *Maurice Scève*, vol. 1, p. 113.

19 McClure, *Parlour Games and the Public Life of Women*, pp. 55–80.

20 Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of 17th-Century France*, pp. 8–9.

21 De Villiers, *Cinquante jeux divers d’honnête entretien, industrieusement inventés par messer Innocent Rhinghier, gentilhomme Boloignoys*.

22 Marguerite de Bourbon was married to François I de Clèves, *duc de Nevers*. Their children included François II, *duc de Nevers*; Henriette, *duchesse de Nevers*; Catherine, *comtesse d’Eu*; Jacques, *duc de Nevers*, and Marie, *princesse de Condé*.

23 De Villiers, *Cinquante jeux divers*, p. 132: ‘le Seigneur, qui dispensera toutes ces parties d’une belle Dame entre tous les Ioüeurs, avec ces vers a icelle convenables, tirés des Sonnets Petrarque’ (‘the elected Lord of the game will pass out these descriptions of parts of a beautiful woman among all the players as is suitable, with these verses drawn from the Sonnets of Petrarch’). A list of lines from Petrarch’s poems to use in the game is provided.

civilizing or ameliorating influence such games and women should have on men. He writes that ‘men should count themselves most fortunate’ (regarding the playing of these games) because ‘the conversation of your divine and modest troupe ought to make them clearly understand that it is the greatest happiness that their most favorable destiny will present them’.²⁴ That Italian conversation games made their way from Italy to Lyon and into the society of high-ranking noble and royal women by the mid-sixteenth century is certain, and De Villiers’ assertion that women’s edifying conversation with men during the course of play would be a highlight of the men’s lives seems to foreshadow the perceived *précieuse* quality of such sport.

Sixteenth-century Italian salon culture is featured alongside that occurring in France in Marie de Romieu’s *Briefdiscours*, a defense of women, which appears in her *Premières œuvres poétiques* (1581). In November of 1581, ‘the baronie of Retz was elevated to a *duché-pairie*’,²⁵ elevating at the same time Retz’s position as an important *mécène*, or patron, a circumstance surely not lost on Romieu. In the section on French women, Romieu awards the most lines to the ‘comtesse de Retz’, whom she makes ‘[l]a première en mes vers’ (‘the first in her verses’), noting that Retz is familiar with Greek, that she is so eloquent that she delights kings and their court, and that she knows Latin and Italian.²⁶ She includes Retz among a catalogue of learned female *exempla* that includes the Italians, the ‘docte Degambara’, and ‘Pesquiere’, as well as the poet Armill’ Angosciola (Emilia Angosciola).²⁷ The first two, Veronica Gambara, Countess of Corregio (1485–1550) and Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara (1492–1547), were especially known for their erudition, their poetry, and the salons

24 De Villiers, 1: ‘Mes Dames, s’il se trouve ça bas chose par la-quelle les hommes se doivent tenir pour bien-fortunés, la seule conversation de votre divine & pudique troupe leur doit clairement donner a entendre, qu’elle est le comble de tout l’heur que leur plus favorable destin leur savroyt presenter’.

25 St-John, ‘The *Salon Vert* of the Maréchale de Retz’, p. 89; Keating, *Studies on the Literary Salon in France*, p. 105.

26 Romieu, *Briefdiscours*, p. 20, ll. 296–300.

27 Romieu, *Briefdiscours*, pp. 19–20. See also p. 24, notes for ll. 263, 267, and 271. Winandy says Angosciola is a painter and the eldest of a noble family in Cremona, but he seems to confuse her with Sofonisba Anguissola, the famous Cremonan painter, who was the eldest of her family and did not have a sister named Emilia or Armilla. Most sources that mention Emilia Angosciola identify her as a poet or *erudita*. Bronzini includes Angosciola in his *Della Dignità, & nobiltà delle donne*, p. 53 and p. 143, where he mentions her poetry. Lando mentions her in *Lettere di molte valorose donne* (1548), p. 31v. In *Della Letteratura Italiana*, Tiraboschi includes her in a list of ‘donne erudite’ next to Gambara, p. 1184.

of poets and scholars that they cultivated.²⁸ Intriguingly, Colonna and Gambera are also highlighted in De Villier's *Cinquante Jeux*, in his 'Jeu des arts', game of arts.²⁹

Romieu's French *exempla* include, along with Retz, Marguerite de Valois (1553–1615), a regular in Retz's circle, as well as leader of her own court circle filled with poets and scholars; Antoinette de Loynes (1505–1567), co-host with her husband Jean of the Morel salon; and Madeleine and Catherine Des Roches (c. 1520–1587 and 1542–1587, respectively), the mother and daughter famous for their salon in Poitiers; along with several other famous erudite women such as Madeleine Chemeraut (dates unknown), Hélienne de Crenne (aka Marguerite or Madeleine de Briet, c. 1510–after 1552), Madame de Chastellier (Ippolita Scaravelli, dates unknown), Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), and Catherine de Médicis (1519–1559).³⁰ The passage on French women comprises what Claude La Charité calls 'a veritable reading program' to introduce scholars to women writers of the period.³¹ Such catalogues of celebrated female *erudite* were common during the era,³² but the inclusion in this case of Retz, Loynes, and the Des Roches together especially gestures to an awareness of early salon society in sixteenth-century France and pairs these women with Italian counterparts also known for their cultivation of such circles.

Regarding elements of 'la sève italienne' in the milieu of Madame de Retz, Jacqueline Boucher points out that at the court of Henri III there developed 'a penchant for modes of expression so affected that one may see in them the beginnings of the *préciosité* that would expand into the following century', and regarding the sources of this trend, she notes

28 Poss, 'A Renaissance Gentildonna', p. 47, notes that Gambera presided over a court-salon 'whose luminaries included the leading political and literary figures of the day' and that '[p]oets, princes, and prelates gathered for discussions of literary and philosophical topics as well as for good food, singing, dancing, storytelling, and dalliance'. McIver, in 'The "Ladies of Correggio"', p. 28, writes, 'As Gambaro's reputation as a poet and *letterata* grew, her court attracted learned visitors; her *studiolo*, called the "Camerino Daurato", in the Palazzo in the city, and her Casino di Delizie in the country became fashionable settings for cultured nobility; poets, princes, and prelates gathered to discuss literary and philosophical issues and to dance, dine, sing, and tell stories.' Robin, in *Publishing Women*, pp. 3–40 (and *passim*), writes of Colonna's salon on Ischia, as well as her salons in the subsequent places that she lived.

29 De Villiers, *Cinquante Jeux*, p. 19.

30 Romieu, *Brief discours*, pp. 19–21. See Winandy, *Brief discours*, pp. 24–25, notes for ll. 296, 307, 308, 309, 310, and 319, as well as 44, unnumbered note on Madame de Chastellier. See also La Charité, 'La Décade féminine de Marie de Romieu', pp. 318–319.

31 La Charité, 'How Should Sixteenth-Century Feminine Poetry Be Taught?', p. 223.

32 Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 1–2.

that 'Italian influence was certain'.³³ In particular, she points to books of letters, and we find familiar dedicatees and a familiar translator. Hubert-Philippe de Villiers translated Girolamo Parabosco's *Lettere Amoroze* of 1545 (Venice, Giolito) in his *Lettres amoureuses* (Antwerp, 1556), and dedicated the volume to Martin de la Herbaudière, the secretary of the *duchesse* de Nevers, Marguerite de Bourbon, mother of Henriette de Clèves.³⁴ Etienne du Tronchet, secretary to Catherine de Médicis, dedicated his later work, *Lettres amoureuses* (Paris, 1575), to Madame de Retz. Both volumes of letters contain sentimental language that probably would qualify as *la sève* for Saulnier, but it is imperative to note that it is Petrarchan and Neoplatonic in nature: these trends in literary and cultural diction elide during this slippery cross-century literary era. In De Villier's translation of Parabosco, we find the lady praised and appealed to for her 'humaine douceur' ('humaine gentleness') and her 'sur-humaines' ('super human') graces, virtues, and beauties.³⁵ In Tronchet's dedicatory letter to Retz, he asserts that he writes of love that is 'bonne & tressaincte' ('good and very holy'), of the 'plaisir du sincere Amour' ('pleasure of sincere Love'), and not that which is the product of 'la brutalité d'une bestialle imagination' ('the brutality of a bestial imagination'), but that is about 'la divinité de l'Amour' ('the divinity of love').³⁶ Boucher argues that such women as Retz and her close friend Henriette de Clèves made this style of sensibility and language popular in their gatherings.³⁷

Estienne Pasquier (1529–1615), the attorney, scholar, historian, and poet, was a member of the circles of the Morels, the Dames des Roches, the *duchesse* de Retz, and Marguerite de Valois. He, too, participated in the literary and conversational entertainments popular in their company. He wrote his own collection of *Lettres amoureuses* (1610). The genre of *lettres amoureuses* would retain its popularity with *salonnières* well through the seventeenth century.³⁸ Regarding his participation in games, during an evening *chez* the *duchesse* de Retz described by Pasquier in 1591, we find playful, if not terribly *précieuse*, language and literature used in the service of games, as well as

33 Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, vol. 3, p. 943: there developed a 'penchant pour des modes d'expression si affectés qu'on peut voir en eux des prémices de la préciosité qui devait s'épanouir au siècle suivant' and 'L'influence italien fut certaine dans ce domaine.'

34 Henriette de Cleves becomes *duchesse* de Nevers in 1564.

35 De Villiers, trans. *Lettres amoureuses de G. Parabosque...*, first letter, n.p.

36 Du Tronchet, dedicatory letter, *Lettres Amoureuses*, pp. 4–5, p. 9.

37 Boucher, *Société et mentalités*, vol. 3, p. 943.

38 There is a helpful chronological bibliography of this genre in Bray and Landy-Houillon, eds., *Lettres Portugaises*, pp. 7–12.

vice versa—and it all follows a *fête* or feast—much as Saulnier described in the earlier circles of Lyon. Pasquier records his memories of this evening in a well-known letter to his friend Pierre Airault.

In this letter, Pasquier specifies that Madame de Retz invited him to supper, and he describes an evening in which there is a mixture of the serious and 'la sève'. During the first part of the evening, the group addresses 'an infinity of good and beautiful topics concerning the calamity of our times'—these are references to the wars of religion raging around them and the ensuing political machinations.³⁹ He then writes, 'And as it is the privilege of banquets to leap from [one] topic to others that have no connection', the group also spoke of 'our private households', then 'the convenience of plowing', and he asserts that the eloquence of such discourses was highly impressive. He suggests that they could have been included in a book such as that of Athenaeus or Macrobius.⁴⁰ He then writes, 'Finally, as the discourse of love is the seasoning of beautiful minds, we could not forget it.'⁴¹ To lighten up the serious tone of the evening, the interlocutors turn their attention to the *questione d'amore*, who makes a better lover, a young man or an old one? Pasquier says he wanted to participate in the discourse on love because he wanted a share of the 'cake' or the dessert of the evening's entertainment, and he notes that 'this honest woman', Retz, cleverly chose to create an entertaining transition from the former heavy topics, by beginning to 'wage war' on him, stating that an old man (*bonhomme*) such as himself was badly positioned to take part in this new discourse.⁴² Pasquier, the author of *Le Monophile* (1554), a Neoplatonic

39 Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Airault', p. 221: 'Madame de Rets me convia à soupper, où se trouverent plusieurs seigneurs de marque. Toute la serree se passa sur une infinie de bons et beaux propos concernans la calamite de ce temps'.

40 Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Airault', p. 221: 'Et comme c'est le privilege des banquets de sauter de propos à autres qui n'ont aucune liaison, sans sçavoir pourquoy ny comment, aussi fismes-nous le semblable sans y penser, et discourusmes tantost de nos menages particuliers, tantost du fait de la justice, puis de la commodité du labour. Jamais je ne vy pieces plus descousues que celles-là, ny de meilleure estoffe. Un habile homme en eust fait un livre tel qu'Athenee ou Macrobe dans ses Saturnales.' Thickett, in *Lettres familières*, p. 223, identifies these works as the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus (Venice: Aldine Press, 1541) and *Saturnaliorum Libri VII* by Macrobius (Venice: Aldine Press, 1528).

41 Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Airault', p. 221: 'Enfin comme le discours de l'amour est l'assaisonnement des beaux esprits, aussi ne le peusmes-nous oublier.'

42 Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Airault', pp. 221–222: 'Et moy qui en mes jeunes ans en avois composé deux livres sous le nom du *Monophile*, voulus avoir bonne part au gasteau. Qui fut cause d'une nouvelle recharge entre nous. Car comme ceste honneste dame est pleine d'entendement, aussi par un doux contraste commença-t-elle de me guerroyer, disant qu'il estoit mal seant à un *bonhomme* comme moy d'en discourir.'

discourse on love, among other topics, was, of course, the perfect guest with whom to start this 'war'.⁴³ Congratulating himself on his own quick wit, he states that he seized upon the word *bonhomme*, acting as if he had sustained a great insult, as if it were 'an eighth mortal sin', and, because 'à beau jeu, beau retour'— one must to 'a beautiful game' or 'play' give 'a beautiful come-back', they swiftly decided that their new subject for the discourse of love would be 'who could better speak of love, a young man or an old one'.⁴⁴

Inspired by his evening at the Retz salon, Pasquier wrote his *Pastorale du vieillard amoureux* and presented it to Madame de Retz with a cover letter in which he again takes up the game of 'bon-homme'.⁴⁵ However, in choosing her topic, Retz may have already been familiar with Pasquier's dialogue, 'Vieillesse Amoureuse', or 'Love in Old Age', collected in his *Jeux Poétiques* (1610), in which 'Damoiselles' call their interlocutor 'bon homme' and comment on his 'years, beard, and hair'.⁴⁶ Jean-Pierre Dupouy notes that most of the works in *Les Jeux Poétiques* were published earlier in other works. In any case, the game that Pasquier reports playing at the home of the duchess seems to be related to that of the 'Jeu de l'épous et l'épouse' ('the game of the husband and wife') from *Cinquante jeux*, in which one of the questions is, 'Who can sooner win a wife? The old man or the young one?'⁴⁷

The pattern of entertainment Pasquier describes here with its trajectory from serious to light topics is not that of a random dinner with friends. Emmanuel Buron has suggested that there is little evidence that a group ever met regularly in Retz's homes, and that, therefore, the word 'salon' should not be used for her gatherings.⁴⁸ That is a conversation for those concerned with anachronistic use of the term, but for our purposes, it is important to note that the pattern that Pasquier describes would be familiar to anyone who

43 Leushuis, in *Speaking of Love*, pp. 239–247, situates *Le Monophile* in context with the Italian Neoplatonic love dialogues of Castiglione and Bembo, and analyzes its Ciceronian elements. Warner, in *The Ideas of Men and Women*, pp. 135–139, comments on the elements of the *querelle des femmes* Pasquier incorporates in *Le Monophile*.

44 Pasquier, 'A Monsieur Airault', p. 222: 'Je m'attache à ce mot de *bonhomme*, que je prenois à grande injure, comme un huitiesme peché mortel. Et croyez que ce fut à beau jeu, beau retour; voir cela nous apporta un nouveau sujet de discours; savoir qui pouvoit mieux parler de l'amour, ou le jeune homme ou le vieillard; en quoy il y a assez pour exercer les beaux esprits qui sont de loisir.

45 Pasquier, *Pastorale du vieillard amoureux*, vol. 2, pp. 903–908.

46 Pasquier, 'Response des Damoiselles au vieillard', p. 453. Dupouy, *Edition critique des Jeux poétiques d'Etienne Pasquier*, abstract, n.p..

47 De Villiers, *Cinquante jeux*, p. 60: 'Qui doyt plus tôt prendre femme? Le viellard, ou le jeune?'

48 Buron, 'Le mythe du salon', p. 310. Milstein, *The Gondi*, p. 206.

knew the *serées* ('soirées') or *banquets* of Poitiers as described by Guillaume Bouchet in his *Serées* of 1585.⁴⁹ In the *serées*, he identifies the same pattern of the evening's conversation, and he calls the 'sappy stuff' at the end, the piquant sauce instead of the dessert. Similarly, the activities of a Lyonnais humanist circle in 1506 are described by Humbert Fournier in a letter of 1506 to Symphorien Champier (physician & historian), and they range from singing Petrarchan sonnets, to theatrical presentations, to game-playing.⁵⁰ There are two points to glean here: even the so-called humanistic academic gatherings of the sixteenth century could include vernacular ludic elements purely for entertainment—*la sève*, according to Saulnier—and there was an accepted pattern to this sort of regulated society, from serious to playful discourses, one that Madame de Retz clearly understood and engaged in when entertaining members of her circle in her home.

Retz's participation in the continuum of salon practices may have been influenced by knowledge of the Lyonnais salon of her mother-in-law, or by those of other groups in Paris such as those of the Morels or Villeroy, or by the general trend in Franco-Italian *sociabilité* developing in court circles. But in any case, it is clear that by the mid-sixteenth century, groups of men and women who met to discuss literature, politics, religion, and play games were fixtures in both Italy and France, and that they were not always debating in Neo-Latin or reading Greek texts together.⁵¹ Ian Maclean, in his study of seventeenth-century salon culture, reminds us that the 'practice of assemblies of men and women interested in literature and polite conversation has always been assumed to begin in earnest at the Hôtel de Rambouillet at about the same time as the publication of the first part of *L'Astrée*' but that '[s]uch assemblies must, however, have been common in Italy in the early sixteenth century, and probably also in Lyons in the 1550s'.⁵² He is, of course, correct.

The *duchesse* de Retz's engagement in proto-salon society is but one example of such women's agency during this period. Others include the

49 *Les Serées* were 36 dialogues purporting to depict discourses in which Bouchet participated at regularly held 'banquets' in Poitiers. They were published in three installments in 1584, 1597, and 1598, and went into several editions, continuing to circulate in the seventeenth century. For a recent study, see Janier, ed., *Les Serées*.

50 Boucher, *Présence Italienne*, pp. 137–138: 'En 1506, existait un tel cercle qui se réunissait dans une maison située sur la colline de Fourvière, surplombant la ville.' See also p. 138 n. 1.

51 See Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, p. 27, on Veronica Franco and Gaspara Stampa in the Venetian circle of Domenico Venier (1517–1582), whose salon existed from around 1546 until his death. See also Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, p. 177, and Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity*, p. 7, pp. 136–137, as well as Robin, *Publishing Women*, pp. 3–40, (and *passim*).

52 Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, p. 141.

Mesdames de Roches (Madeleine, c. 1520–1587, and Catherine, 1542–1587), Antoinette de Loynes, Madame de Morel (1505–1567), and Madeleine de L'Aubespine, Madame de Villeroy (1546–1596). These women were known for the groups of poets and intellectuals that they entertained in their homes and with whom they participated in writing poetry and playing literary and conversation games, even as the wars of religion took place around them. Much like the salon society of sixteenth-century Italy that Diana Robin describes in *Publishing Women*, in which the women of the Colonna and Gonzaga families hosted coteries focused on the literary, political, and religious concerns of the times, we find that noblewomen in France similarly hosted such groups. These gatherings hosted by noblewomen were part of the continuum of *société mondaine* that would eventually blossom into the well-known salon society of seventeenth-century France.

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12. Religious Spaces in the Far East

Women's Travel and Writing in Manila and Macao

Sarah E. Owens

Abstract

This essay examines the travel and writings of Sor Magdalena de Cristo (1575–1653), one of the co-founders of the first Franciscan convent in the Philippines and another convent in Macao, China. Her harrowing journey emerges in a letter written by her confessor, who was also her advocate. While in Manila, Sor Magdalena wrote her *magnum opus*, *Floresta Franciscana*, a three-volume mystical treatise glorifying the Franciscan order. Based on unpublished letters and manuscripts gathered from archives in Spain and Italy, this essay explores Sor Magdalena's role as an intrepid traveler and author, and also analyzes how she collaborated and formed a writing community with her peers, helping her Spanish sisters cultivate their own religious and literary space in the Far East.

Keywords: Franciscans; Saint Clare; Macao; Manila galleon; nuns

Women's agency in the early modern period could take on many different forms. In this volume of essays, we encounter the nuances of women's action and agency through an examination of their unique garb, the items found in their dowries, and their representation in portraits, among other examples. This essay delves into the networks formed by Spanish religious women who traveled from Spain to the Philippines and then to China in the first half of the seventeenth century, another way in which women shaped the world around them. Even by modern-day standards, the verve required to take on such a journey is astounding. Much of what we know about this story comes from the pens of the original nuns who set out to establish the first female Franciscan convent in the Far East. Other firsthand accounts come from the friars who accompanied the nuns or who later interviewed them for biographies.

The main journey began in Toledo, Spain in May of 1620 and took ten nuns on two transoceanic voyages, the first across the Atlantic to Mexico and the second across the Pacific on a Manila galleon, finally arriving in Manila in August of 1621. During their fifteen-month odyssey, the founding nuns had to endure bouts of high fever and diarrhea, fight off swarms of mosquitos, mount mules, cross rivers, sleep cheek by jowl in the cramped quarters of musty galleons, and bury one of their own sisters at sea. The founder of the convent in Manila, Sor Jerónima de la Asunción, was immortalized in a portrait by Diego Velázquez when the nuns stopped in Seville on their way to the port of Cádiz, Spain. At the time, Sor Jerónima was 64 years old; she would go on to live another ten years in Manila. During her lifetime and even until the present day, Sor Jerónima was revered not only as a holy woman, but as the founder of the first convent in the Philippines. Much of what we know about Sor Jerónima comes from her first biographer, Sor Ana de Cristo, one of her travel companions and close confidant. Both nuns hailed from the same convent in Toledo, Spain, and Ana had known Jerónima for more than 35 years. My recent book, *Nuns Navigating the Spanish Empire*, is based largely on Sor Ana's 450-folio biography, which also includes a detailed account of their difficult journey to the Philippines.¹ There is, however, another fascinating story that has to do with a branch of the same group of nuns that went on to found a Franciscan convent in Macao, China. One nun in particular, Sor Magdalena de la Cristo (1575–1653), stands out for her prolific writing and for her role in the foundation of Macao.

In many ways, Sor Magdalena shines at the center of the group, not only for her own works but also as the promoter of others. Although Sor Magdalena faced many challenges during her lifetime, this essay will show how she also became the center of nuns' intellectual and religious space in the Far East. She collaborated and formed alliances with several nuns and friars, but she also undoubtedly faced disappointment, especially when she and several other nuns were expelled from the island of Macao in 1644.

Mariana González de Avila, as she was known before she took the veil, was born on 14 August 1575 in Pinto, Spain, a small village near Madrid. According to her anonymous biographer, she was born three or four months premature, so tiny that her ears stuck to her head and her mouth barely opened. For weeks Mariana was fed with a straw and wrapped in uncured lambskin to keep her warm.² Evidently her premature birth did not harm

1 For a translated excerpt of the journey, the portion from Mexico to Manila, see my translation, 'Sor Ana's Travel'.

2 'Resumen de la vida', fol. 338r, 338v. All translations from archival documents are mine.

Mariana physically or intellectually. She learned to read at the age of three and entered the convent of Santa María de la Cruz in Cubas, Spain as a teenager. Later in life, at age 45, she traveled halfway around the world with Sor Jerónima to Manila to help found the Convent of Saint Clare (1621). At age 58 she crossed the South China Sea from Manila to Macao to establish another Franciscan convent, but returned to Manila ten years later after being expelled from Macao. She passed away in 1653 at age 78 from old age and complications due to *hidropesía* (edema).

We do not have a portrait of Sor Magdalena, but it is easy to imagine her with the same intractable determination as Sor Jerónima. In fact, Sor Magdalena had been selected as vicaress on the journey to Manila, and by all accounts, if Jerónima had died en route, Magdalena would have become the next abbess. It is unclear exactly why Sor Magdalena never held that position in Manila. Perhaps she was waiting for her chance to become abbess in Macao, a post she would later hold, or perhaps convent politics held her back. Regardless, she did form deep alliances with her Franciscan sisters from Spain, Mexico, and Manila.

As vicaress of the initial foundation in Manila and second only to Sor Jerónima, Sor Magdalena held sway over the other nuns. Years earlier, she had become inspired to travel to Asia after she met Friar Luis Sotelo when he stopped at her convent in Cubas on his way to Rome as interpreter of a Japanese Embassy. Fray Sotelo, who later would be martyred in Japan, had spent much time in Manila and Japan and longed to see convents of nuns spread throughout Asia, especially China.³ Fray Sotelo had a similar conversation with Sor Jerónima in Toledo. These women yearned to participate in the missionary endeavors of their male counterparts and Fray Sotelo's visit helped them realize their dream. Indeed, they could not officially act as missionaries in the traditional sense, but on their journey they did interact with numerous local peoples and could influence them through conversations and their presence alone. Magnus Lundberg's excellent study *Mission and Ecstasy* speaks to the need to expand our traditional view of men as the only missionaries. He writes, 'I understand mission much more inclusively as acts made by a person perceived to be in favour of the salvation of others. Using such a definition, religious women could and did, have a missionary role: they were contemplative missionaries or active in a contemplative apostolate.'⁴ Such a perspective helps us understand why Sor Jerónima, Sor Magdalena, and the other nuns would want to embark on such a long and dangerous journey.

3 'Resumen de la vida', fol. 347v, 348v.

4 Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*, p. 16.

Although nowadays very few people have heard of Cubas, Spain, it is not surprising that Sotelo stopped there to speak with the nuns at the convent of Santa María de la Cruz. That convent was renowned for its connection to the community's founder, Madre Juana de la Cruz, who lived from 1481 to 1534. Many Spaniards believed Madre Juana to be a *beata*, a holy woman, and although she was never canonized, she was referred to as *santa* or saint Juana. Employing another nun as scribe, Madre Juana dictated her lengthy *Libro del conorte*, a series of 72 sermons that she preached in a state of rapture every Sunday over the course of thirteen years.⁵ She also dictated her life story to the same scribe who we are told learned how to write through miraculous literacy (an inspiration, mentioned directly by Sor Ana who only learned to write during the long voyage to the Philippines). Furthermore, Juana de la Cruz supposedly had received miraculous rosary beads blessed by the Virgin Mary and Christ himself. When chosen for the Manila foundation, Sor Magdalena brought some of those very beads on their long journey to the Philippines. According to several accounts the nuns used the rosary beads to ward off fierce storms at sea, cure their sisters from diarrhea, and expel the devil from an enslaved African woman on the Manila Galleon.

Far from their home convents in Toledo and Cubas, the nuns in Manila and Macao inspired each other to document their experiences, write about each other, and craft their own mystical treatises. They also felt inspired by their famous predecessor Madre Juana and her literary works. Oftentimes, the nuns literally took writing into their own hands, telling each other to pick up the pen. Notably, it was Sor Magdalena de la Cruz who first approached Sor Ana de la Cruz, saying, 'Write the *vida* of our Mother [Sor Jerónima de la Asunción], because that is why you were taught.'⁶ It appears that Sor Ana knew how to read before the nuns left Toledo, but still did not know how to write when she left Spain—a scenario that was not so uncommon in the early modern period, since reading and writing were taught as two separate skills. It was the nuns' confessor and travel companion, Fray José de Santa María, who served as Sor Ana's instructor, teaching her to put words on paper.

Indeed, confessors and ecclesiastical authorities played a substantial role in the writing process, especially because they often sanctioned the works or authorized them once they were finished. The words crafted by the nuns could also be used to further their missionary campaigns in the

5 For more on Madre Juana de la Cruz, see Boon 'Mother Juana de la Cruz: Marian Visions' and Boon and Surtz, *Mother Juana*.

6 Sor Ana, AMSIRT, fol. 68v.

Philippines, Japan, and China, and often became the rough drafts that they would use for their own works. For example, two Franciscan friars, Ginés de Quesada and Bartolomé de Letona, used Sor Ana's manuscript as the basis of their own published biographies of Sor Jerónima de la Asunción.⁷

Another friar played a crucial role in encouraging the nuns to write about their experiences. Fray Montemayor, commissary general of the Franciscan order, wrote to the nuns from Mexico in 1626 ordering them to write about the foundation in Manila, including biographies of the founding nuns.⁸ Officially sanctioned by their superior, the nuns took this mandate seriously. In addition to her own autobiography (which unfortunately has been lost), Sor Magdalena served as scribe for another nun, Sor Juana de San Antonio. During the early hours of the morning while she plucked chickens, Sor Juana de San Antonio dictated her lengthy *Noticias de la Verdad* (or News of the Truth) to Sor Magdalena, a series of spiritual revelations, which she claimed came directly from the Lord and the Virgin Mary.

In addition to her role as amanuenses, Sor Magdalena also wrote a short prologue to the three volumes of *Noticias de la Verdad*. In the prologue she alludes to the precarious state of female authorship by stating that she had no time to edit the work and that she wanted Franciscan friars to correct any errors, suggesting that she recognized writing could lead to censorship or even persecution by the Holy Office. She even adds another layer of protection for herself, stating that Sor Jerónima had read the work 'and authorized it with incredible joy in her soul.'⁹ (Her worries were not unfounded: years later the Inquisition did accuse Sor Juana de San Antonio of spreading heretical doctrine through her works and put her under house arrest outside the convent, where she died in 1661.)¹⁰ Another one of the co-founders, Sor Leonor de San Buenaventura (one of the two nuns who joined the expedition in Mexico) wrote her own endorsement of *Noticias* by adding a two-page document at the end of volume, attesting to its legitimacy and urgency: 'and it has been written with such haste that you can hardly see the hand of the secretary [Sor Magdalena] since the author speaks so quickly.'¹¹ It is not surprising that she would comment on Sor Magdalena's dexterity with the pen, since Magdalena wrote 770 folios over a period of fourteen months. On an interesting side note, Sor Leonor de San Buenaventura mentions

7 Quesada, *Exemplo de todas*; and Letona, *Perfecta religiosa*.

8 Montemayor's letters to the nuns in the Philippines can be found in Sor Ana, AMSIRT, fols. 152r–56v.

9 Sor Magdalena de la Cruz, prologue to Juana de San Antonio, *Noticias de la verdad*, vol. 1, n.p.

10 'Proceso y causa criminal', fols. 122r–42r; and Owens, *Nuns Navigating*, pp. 103–105.

11 Sor María Magdalena, prologue to Juana de San Antonio, *Noticias de la verdad*, vol. 1, n.p.

in this same document that she was writing her own autobiography, but unfortunately, that manuscript appears to have been lost.

For the most part these women banded together in collaboration and alliances, but some of these alliances disintegrated when they crossed into areas of power struggles. Some of these struggles stemmed from a backlash toward Sor Jerónima's push to follow the strict First Rule of Saint Clare, while others were due to global tensions such as the final split of Spain and Portugal's joint monarchy in 1640. Convent and political politics were already brewing when, in 1633, Sor Magdalena and Sor Leonor de San Francisco, both originally from Spain, and six other women from Manila set sail for Macao to establish the first Franciscan convent in China. Sor Magdalena and her sisters built up the new community in Macao until she and several others were expelled from the island in 1644.

In the initial foundation to Macao, Sor Magdalena once again took the role of vicaress and her co-founder Sor Leonor took the helm as abbess. Sor Magdalena's biographer alludes to the incongruity of her not being chosen as abbess when he writes, 'One could point out that if this servant of God was what we have described, why hadn't the prelates chosen her as abbess and principal founder of this new foundation?' He goes on to explain, however, that this was part of God's divine plan to hide her leadership virtues (even from herself), until the proper time. Sor Magdalena did eventually become abbess after Sor Leonor, and when her three-year term was finished, she became novice mistress.¹²

Again, it appears that convent politics, along with the tense political situation between Spain and Portugal, played a big role in who stayed and who left Macao. By 1644 the Portuguese crown had split away from Spain and Spanish residents were forced to leave Macao.¹³ It is unclear to me, however, why several of the original founders remained in the convent, including Sor Leonor (originally from Spain), who once again had taken the helm as abbess, and Sor Melchora de la Trinidad (a nun from Manila who would later die of breast cancer).¹⁴ Sor Magdalena de la Cruz, along with a small group of at least three nuns, family members, and two friars, left Macao in October of 1644 accompanied by Spanish soldiers and other military personnel.

12 'Resumen de la vida', fol. 348v.

13 Boxer, 'Portuguese and Spanish Rivalry', pp. 163–164.

14 For more on this time period in Macao (1633–1644), see Penalva, pp. 71–113. See also Martínez, *Compendio histórico*, pp. 298–299.

We know much about the details of the harrowing journey back from Macao to Manila because the chaplain of the Macao convent, Fray Antonio de Santa María Caballero (1602–1669), who accompanied Sor Magdalena and the other nuns, wrote a letter back to the nuns in Macao as a type of account of their journey.¹⁵ The French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes, who met Fray Antonio and another friar in Cochinchina (present-day Vietnam), also wrote an account.¹⁶ Like many of the other friars discussed in this study, Fray Antonio de Santa María apparently had developed a deep friendship with Sor Magdalena, also becoming her close advocate and promoter of her life and works. He had met her in Macao while preaching at the Convent of Saint Clara, and volunteered to become her confessor when she told him about her plan to write *Floresta Franciscana*, or ‘Franciscan Grove’. Sor Magdalena’s anonymous confessor tells us that she first received inspiration to write this work while listening to Fray Antonio’s sermon. Apparently, his words transformed into a net of multicolored flowers and she found herself in a state of rapture with her ‘Esposo’ (divine Husband). While holding her in his arms, God told her to write about ‘the conception of his Mother’ and that she should title the work *Floresta Franciscana*.¹⁷ She wrote the first chapter for Fray Antonio in Macao, but her work was interrupted when the nuns and other Spaniards were forced to leave China.

At age 68, this voyage cannot have been easy for Sor Magdalena. According to Fray Antonio, they ran into a terrific storm that almost caused the boat to capsize, and ‘the holy nuns were tossed from one side of the deck to the other, spilling their guts with vomiting.’¹⁸ After the tempest, the ship’s captain was forced to land on Cochinchina where entire crew, along with the nuns and their confessor and another friar (Antonio del Puerto), were taken prisoner by a Mandarin king at the port of Turon (modern Da Nang). Fray Antonio narrates the nuns’ saga from October 1644 until April 1645. His account highlights Sor Magdalena’s bravery and her role in converting many Mandarins to Christianity and helping invigorate the nascent Christian

15 A transcription of this letter can be found in Penalva, ‘Carta de relación sobre los sucesos de los castellanos que saliendo de Macan por el mes de Octubre de 1644, arribaron a Cochinchina’, pp. 151–168. The original is located in Rome at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Jap-Sin 68, fol. 48r–59r. See also Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion*, pp. 162–167. Fray Antonio was a prolific letter writer. Transcriptions of his letters, mostly written from China (1648–1662), can be found in *Sinica Franciscana*, pp. 354–606.

16 The two friars also wrote letters to Rhodes during his imprisonment describing the nuns’ ordeal in Cochinchina. See Rhodes, pp. 155–163.

17 ‘Resumen de la vida’, fol. 352r–352v.

18 Penalva, ‘Carta de relación’, p. 153.

community already started by Jesuit missionaries such as de Rhodes, who just so happened to be imprisoned at that time in Pulocambi, Cochinchina.

According to Fray Antonio, the Mandarin king and queen took a liking to the nuns and were awed by the fact that they had cut their hair. A gendered power struggle played out when the King asked the women to remove their veils so he could see their faces, but they refused to do so in front of so many men. They did, however, lift their veils for the queen. At one point the queen had one of her servants reach under the nuns' wimples to touch their bare heads. According to Rhodes, 'The lady touched the head of the oldest one and finding no hair on it exclaimed loudly that it was certainly true. This was considered a very great wonder.'¹⁹ The queen herself had a private meeting with the nuns without any men present and signaled out Sor Magdalena when she took her by the hand. Despite the fact that Fray Antonio described the queen as 'very devoted to idols and temples (*pagodas*)',²⁰ it appears that her female gender afforded her special privileges in the eyes of Sor Magdalena, especially since she allowed herself to be touched on the head by one of her ladies-in-waiting.

While at court, the nuns stayed at the home of a Christian Mandarin called Joachin and his wife Anne. Many Christians and non-Christians alike visited the women. Throughout his account Fray Antonio repeatedly emphasizes the nuns' role in 'showing them the way to heaven' and 'in the ten days that the *madres* and two friars were at court and in the aforementioned house, 54 men and women were baptized.'²¹ Although in this case the exact number is difficult to verify, it is definitely plausible since studies show that between the 1580s and 1800 there were about 300,000 converts to Christianity in China (many from the Jesuit Mission).²²

At 68 years of age, Sor Magdalena made an obvious impression on the Mandarin monarchy and eventually the entire group was allowed to return to Manila. Overall, Fray Antonio stresses the success of their visit, but according to an eighteenth-century Franciscan historian, he also expressed fear that the 'barbarians would commit some indecent act against his daughters.' That fear was also expressed by the nuns themselves, who prayed to the Lord and Saint Clare to save them from this danger.²³ In all of these documents related to the nuns, we never actually hear the word rape and the nuns

19 Rhodes, *Rhodes of Viet Nam*, p. 160.

20 Penalva, 'Carta de relación', p. 160.

21 Penalva, 'Carta de relación', pp. 161–162.

22 Hsia, 'Imperial China', p. 344. See also Alberts, 'Missions in Vietnam', pp. 269–302.

23 Martínez, Domingo, *Compendio histórico*, Vol. II, p. 40.

always seem to miraculously escape physical and sexual violence. Whether or not this was true is difficult to ascertain from primary sources, but they obviously traveled at great risk.

In her excellent study, Alberts delves deep into Fray Antonio's letter along with Alexandre de Rhodes' account.²⁴ On the one hand, Alberts' study highlights the nuns' unique role in the spread of Christianity, but also points to other scholars of Catholic conversion in Japan and China who examine the impacts or lack thereof of western religious women. In the case of Japan, for example, 'local conditions could lead to ambivalent responses to Christianity' since *bikuni* (Buddhist nuns) were respected and admired by men and women alike.²⁵ She also highlights studies by Caroline Brewer, Nhung Tuyet Tran, and Barbara Watson Andaya, all of whom analyze the complexity of gender roles and female participation in religious society of the early modern Philippines, Vietnam, and all of Southeast Asia respectively.²⁶ Indeed, Spanish nuns did not have a monopoly on spiritual agency and we must be careful not to silence the participation of local women in their roles in their own communities.

Once back in Manila, Sor Magdalena felt inspired to continue her *magnum opus*, *Floresta Franciscana*, her own three-volume mystical treatise, ultimately glorifying the Franciscan order. This work probably would not have been possible without the encouragement of Fray Antonio de Santa María. As adeptly pointed out by Jodi Bilinkoff in *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents*, nuns and confessors often formed close bonds, some of which could inspire nuns to become writers. In the case of Sor Magdalena and Fray Antonio, the confessor–penitent relationship was one of much more of an equal standing. His name is on the cover of *Floresta Franciscana* as confessor of Sor Magdalena and he provides annotations for the three volumes. He helps Sor Magdalena cast herself as a mouthpiece of the Lord by asking her to document the ways in which she received inspiration to write this massive work. In a twenty-page introduction, Sor Magdalena responds to his query expounding on the different visions and experiences that help her put pen to parchment. She explains how it all started in December 1643, when the Eternal Father granted her 'grandes favores' ('great favors'). He sent seraphim, who told her to write down all of her experiences gathered during prayer. In her introduction, Sor Magdalena repeatedly emphasizes how she was granted these encounters with her Divine Husband, the Virgin

24 Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion*, pp. 162–167. See also Ward, *Women Religious*.

25 Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion*, pp. 168–169.

26 See Brewer, *Shamanism, Catholicism*; Tran, *Familial Properties*; Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*.

Mary, and angels and says that she had no choice but to document them, because 'nada es mío' ('nothing is mine'). She employs rhetoric of humility, typical to nuns' writings, describing herself as 'tan nada' ('nothing') and 'miserable.' And yet, we can also catch glimpses of Sor Magdalena's voice as a writer and the pleasure she derives from crafting such a monumental work. Reminiscent of present-day authors who refer to 'flow', a feeling of getting lost in the satisfaction of writing, Sor Magdalena explains how 'everything that they give me comes in a lightning bolt of clarity, light, and tranquility'.²⁷ Drawing on garden imagery and in keeping with Franciscan spirituality, she sees her words as fruits of the Lord, comparing the material for her work with bunches of grapes and fruit trees heavy with pears, apples, and cherries. The title itself, *Floresta Franciscana*, pays homage to the verdant grove of the Franciscan order.

Throughout the 62 chapters in three volumes, Sor Magdalena embarks on different biblical scenes such as the creation of Adam and the fall of Lucifer, while others touch on the Immaculate Conception or on important Franciscan figures such as Saint Clare and Saint Francis. This highly polished work, edited by Fray Antonio, was certainly intended for distribution and perhaps publication. One can still peruse extant copies at the Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental in Madrid or at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid.

In conclusion, far from their home communities in Spain and Mexico, the original founders of the convents of Manila and Macao formed together as a writing community in the Far East. Although many of the manuscripts have been lost over the years, most notably because Allied bombing at the end of World War II completely destroyed the Manila convent and its archive, we know that at least six of the original ten founder nuns wrote some type of document, including letters, biographies, autobiographies, poetry, and mystical treatises. Many of the lost documents, such as Sor Jerónima's spiritual autobiography *Carta de marear en el mar del mundo* ('Chart for navigating the worldly sea'), are mentioned in extant letters and other manuscripts. Thankfully, the Franciscan order sent many documents back to Spain before the Spanish American War in 1898 and some of those manuscripts can be found in the original convent in Toledo or in other small archives. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I believe that Sor Magdalena shines at the center of this writing community. Not only did she compose her own autobiography and a three-volume mystical treatise, *Floresta Franciscana*, but she also served as scribe for Sor Juana de San Antonio, and she encouraged Sor Ana de Cristo to write her biography of Sor

27 *Floresta franciscana*, vol. 1.

Jerónima. With the collaboration of friars and confessors, and the inspiration of *santa* Juana, their famous spiritual female predecessor, Sor Magdalena helped her Spanish sisters cultivate their own religious and literary space in the Far East. Clearly, the literary and missionary contributions of these Spanish women should not be minimized.

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13. Accounting for Early Modern Women in the Arts

Reconsidering Women's Agency, Networks, and Relationships

Theresa Kemp, Catherine Powell, and Beth Link

Abstract

While the terms 'agency', 'collectivity', and 'social networks' may seem anachronistic for the study of early modern women, these concepts were very much alive in that era and essential to women's self-actualization. Using social network theory, feminist calls for intervention into history, and conceptions of feminist collectivity (as derived from the 1970s Woman's Building), we examine two examples of women's involvement in professional arts. While some women succeeded by circumventing gendered institutions impeding their agency, others participated in family endeavors that depended on their acting as agents negotiating various networks. These diverse stories provide alternatives to the 'master narratives' according to which early modern women either conformed to or rebelled against the supposedly universal mandate to stay home, obey husbands, and rear children.

Keywords: women and botany; feminist collectives; Rose Theater; The Woman's Building; intersectionality

At first glance, notions of female agency, collectivity, and social networks seem like constructs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Scholars commonly work from assumptions about gender in the early modern social, economic, and political realms that preclude these considerations: many assume that women were universally expected to stay home, obey their husbands, and rear their children. In this chapter, we argue that women

frequently defied these expectations; they participated in the familial economy and were visible in the public sphere.

Our methodological framework derives from contemporary social network theory, feminist calls for intervention into history, and conceptions and rationales of feminist collectivity. With respect to the latter, we draw heavily from the Woman's Building, which opened its doors in 1973, as a model from which we can derive an essential set of premises to identify feminist collectivity, even in its nascent stages. Against that methodological backdrop, we consider two early modern case studies: one from Netherlandish art history and the other from English theater. From these two examples, we tease out the ways in which women relied upon relationships that cut across sex and class in forging a path to success, achieving a measure of independence and agency in the process. Together, the women of our case studies demonstrate that the concepts of agency, networks, and collectivity were very much alive in the early modern period and essential to women's self-actualization.

An alternative to the master (or patriarchal) narrative

The case studies that follow deliberately avoid adopting a monographic or strictly biographic approach. Instead, we turn to the analytical frameworks of collectivity and social networks, which we feel can be more productive and provide new insight. In the first place, stepping away from the individual allows us to engage with narratives that are inconsistent with the traditional 'lone genius' patriarchal narrative, which tends to celebrate only women that are categorized as 'exceptional', or particularly 'worthy'.¹

There is also a pragmatic reason for looking to networks and collectivity: the availability of sources, or lack thereof. With the exception of writers and members of the Republic of Letters (not exclusively but most notably), most early modern women seldom left extensive archives. Whereas men (particularly learned men, members of the nobility or bourgeoisie, or civic elite) frequently left archives containing letters, diaries, account books, collected poems, and so on, women artists or patrons,² for example, did not

1 For an extensive discussion on the diverse types of feminism and the so-called 'patriarchal narrative', see the pioneering essays of Joan Wallach Scott, Joan Kelly-Gadol, and Natalie Zemon Davis, amongst others, reproduced in Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*; Rackin, 'A Useable History' and 'Misogyny is Everywhere'.

2 This remains the case today: Moravec, for example, has noted the 'dearth of feminist artists' archival materials'. Moravec, 'Network Analysis and Feminist Artists', pp. 79–80.

tend to do so—or, at least, they were not preserved as such.³ Although there are of course exceptions, what we find are often only ‘traces’ of women’s existence: in marriage notices and last wills and testaments contained in notarial archives, or altogether subsumed in a man’s archives. Approaching case studies from a non-individualistic perspective allows us to see beyond archival limitations.

The Woman’s Building

Like women who participate in contemporary collectives, women from the past also looked to one another as role models and for road maps of how to navigate a complex patriarchal system. Thus, as we examine the roots of the struggle for women’s rights, agency, independence, and equal personhood over time, a focus on individuality is counterproductive. Yet collectivity is a rarely used concept in treating historical case studies.

The nature of female collectives is particularly complicated because it is difficult to imagine what a structure not built on masculine and capitalist ideas of competition and hierarchy might look like. Our definition of collectives stems from the work of Ramzi Fawaz, who considers collectives as agentic groupings of disparate people who come together ‘acting in concert for the fulfillment of a shared goal.’⁴ Unlike social gatherings or neighborhood communities, these gatherings are intentional and may be driven by efforts to influence social or political change, or by a shared manifesto, a business contract, or a collaborative artwork binding the group together. Fawaz asserts that while collectives are comprised of discreet individuals, the emphasis is on ‘their aggregate engagement as people’ acting ‘for a common purpose.’⁵

Nascent forms of female collectives can be found, for example, in the French and English salons that began in the seventeenth century. Women would open their homes and invite male and female poets, writers, artists, and philosophers from various classes to engage in discussion and debate. These gatherings served as social spaces where women could exchange their ideas (including about the place of women in society) without fear.

3 The very act of collecting and organizing art, papers, and other documents involves a determination: of who and what is important, of who and what should be remembered and preserved for future generations and, critically, of how best to organize this information. For a discussion on the limitations of archival methodology, see Blouin and Rosenberg, ‘Processing the Past’ as well as Randolph C. Head, ‘Documents, Archives, and Proof around 1700’.

4 Fawaz, ‘Collectives’, p. 3.

5 Fawaz, ‘Collectives’, p. 3.

In order to design the most complete analytical framework of collectivity possible we look to a contemporary, quasi-utopian example: the Woman's Building. Opened in 1973 in Los Angeles, the Woman's Building was an ecosystem of businesses, art studios and galleries, offices, and art classes designed to build feminist consciousness and cultivate a self-realization and feminist community sheltered from the corrosive forces of patriarchy.⁶ The impetus for this collective began several years earlier in 1970 when artists and educators Judy Chicago, Arlene Raven, and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville became frustrated with the lack of opportunities and the invisibility of women artists in Los Angeles. They decided to nurture their female undergraduates in a separate institution away from the biting critiques of male professors they felt undercut female students' confidence.⁷ Together, these three women started the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW). In many ways, the FSW acted as a traditional art education space by building students' knowledge of art tools, techniques and history while also tending to students' feminist identity development through consciousness raising.⁸

The FSW found that there were many other organizations in Los Angeles foregrounding the lives and experiences of women as part of their mission. Together with the gallery Womanspace, the National Organization for Women, Sisterhood Bookstore, and other like-minded organizations, they moved into a large building they called the Woman's Building.⁹ Collectivity based on a desire for social and political transformation was at the heart of this new ecosystem. Sheila de Bretteville intended the Woman's Building to be a place where 'women from different sectors of society could gather and meet—heterosexual and lesbian, trust fund babies and welfare mothers, academics, and politicians, and artists' all collaborating.¹⁰

Collectivity was evidenced in the artists' practices as well as the larger organizational functions. The artists of the Woman's Building disputed traditionally masculine ideas of artists as solitary geniuses in favor of collective art making practices.¹¹ The building housed many feminist collectives who worked together to create performances, write publications, and design participatory works of art in the larger community. The leadership of the Woman's Building was also designed to function as an extension of the

6 Hale, 'Power and Space', p. 45.

7 Wolverton, 'Introduction', p. 20

8 Wolverton, 'Introduction', p. 23.

9 Lippard, 'Going Around in Circles', p. 11.

10 Wolverton, 'Introduction', p. 32.

11 Stein, 'Collaboration', p. 226.

groups' feminist philosophy by incorporating collective decision-making often without hierarchy or competition.¹²

According to Judith Stein the collective ethos of the Woman's Building has historical ties to legacies of female networks established in quilting bees and potlucks.¹³ The quilting bee model was a structured collaboration where everyone was allotted an equal amount of space to contribute to a cohesive whole. The women also embodied a potluck structure where everyone decided how they would like to contribute within their means and skill level. These approaches to collectivity attempted to preserve individual agency while working towards a larger project.

Conflict arose when participants had differing ideas about the priorities, process, and mission of the organization. The founders were torn between an 'egalitarian, anti-hierarchical' approach to collectivity on one hand resulting in chaos and disorder, or replicating patriarchal systems of leadership and command resulting in members feeling resentful and disillusioned.¹⁴ While the Woman's Building attempted to bring diverse groups of women together, many participants found that racial, ethnic, and class divisions were overlooked in order to maintain a myopic focus on gender.¹⁵ This limited understanding of what we now term *intersectionality* caused tension and divides within the collective.

Despite the differences in identity and vision that created rifts in the group, there were a number of core tenets uniting participants. According to art educators Faith Wilding and Cheri Gaulke, there were six core values including:

- consciousness raising;
- collaboration;
- an emphasis on personal experience;
- valued female role models;
- the desire to build a female-friendly environment; and
- 'exploding the hierarchies of materials'.¹⁶

The expression of these six core values may appear very much a product of second-wave feminism, but can we find evidence of these values in early modern women's action, networks, and collectives?

12 Hale, 'Power and Space', p. 40.

13 Stein, 'Collaboration', p. 226.

14 Lippard, 'Going Around in Circles', p. 14.

15 For more discussion on race and class struggles within the Woman's Building see Moravec and Hale, "At Home" at the Woman's Building'.

16 Brown, 'Feminist Art Education at the Los Angeles Woman's Building', pp. 148–152.

Social networks

Social networks have a critical impact on individual and group identity, the creation and dissemination of knowledge and opportunities, and sociopolitical discourse.¹⁷ Networks were just as significant in early modern life as they are now. Employment opportunities, marriage, election to civic office—these are just some of the life events that were impacted by the people one knew. From this perspective, it is not surprising that what emerges most from the archival resources at our disposal for early modern women are relationships: links between a husband and a wife, but also between them and the witnesses to the marriage; links between two women whose husbands are best friends; links between women and important men through inclusion in the latter's correspondence; and epistolary relationships. Piecing these ties together enables us to reconstruct, albeit imperfectly, collective thinking on the part of women and their participation in social networks, from which we can gain a better sense of early modern women's sphere of influence and action in sociocultural and even civic activity.

Of course, not all ties are created equal; some links are more tenuous than others. In social network analysis, the principle of embeddedness is designed to capture the strength of a tie between two actors. The stronger the tie, the more embedded it is said to be. In assessing embeddedness, one considers some of the following factors: the duration of a relationship; whether the relationship leads to the creation of knowledge; whether the relationship facilitates the exchange of significant information; and whether the relationship is diverse, meaning whether the actors relate on one level only, or several.¹⁸ Relationships other than purely transactional ones often exist on a spectrum of embeddedness.¹⁹ In the early modern period, where social stability was frequently at stake, kinship was a primary source of friendship (and thus embedded relationships) for both men and women.²⁰ Interestingly, two key findings have emerged from extensive research into embedded relationships: the creation of knowledge takes place almost exclusively within networks of embedded ties; and the presence of trust

17 For a discussion of social network terminology, see Marx, 'Why Social Network Analysis Might Be Relevant for Art Historians' in Brosens, *Family Ties*, p. 25. For more technical definitions, see Wasserman and Faust, 'Social Network Analysis', pp. 17, 20.

18 Marx, 'Why Social Network Analysis Might Be Relevant for Art Historians', pp. 30–31.

19 For a helpful discussion on the dichotomy between embedded and arm's length relationships, see Uzzi, 'Embeddedness in the Making of Financial Capital'; and Podolny and Page, 'Network Forms of Organization'.

20 Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, pp. 14–15.

is a critical factor in the establishment of an embedded tie.²¹ The nature of a relationship, and thus its embeddedness, can be ascertained from historical sources. It is possible to determine whether actors had frequent contacts over a lengthy period of time, or merely came across each other's path from time to time. It is also possible to discern the type of information they exchanged; on how many levels they related (e.g. sisters-in-law, church members, neighbors, patrons of the same artist, etc.). We can reasonably infer whether trust is present based on the fruits of a relationship, its length, whether kinship is involved, whether money lending occurred, etc.

The value of social networks to early modern women has already been recognized by several scholars.²² For example, Carol Pal has explored the role of early modern women in the Republic of Letters, while Elizabeth Robertson and Annelies de Jeu have re-evaluated the role of women in literary publication in England and the Low Countries, respectively.²³ Epistolary relationships, in particular, are ideally and frequently considered through the lens of social network analysis.²⁴ Art historians, however, have not followed course. Elizabeth Sutton, writing recently about early modern women artists and patrons in the Low Countries, lamented the fact that bringing the collective or institutional perspective to bear in feminist art history has proven elusive.²⁵ There is yet to be a book-length study of the use of and reliance upon networks by early modern women artists and/or patrons, although two insightful essays demonstrate the potential of the approach.²⁶ The

21 Uzzi, 'Embeddedness in the Making of Financial Capital', pp. 483–484; Marx, 'Why Social Network Analysis Might Be Relevant for Art Historians', p. 26.

22 For scholarship on the use of social network analysis in relation to historical case studies more broadly see, for example, Wellman and Wetherell, 'Social Network Analysis of Historical Communities'.

23 Pal, *The Republic of Women*; Robertson, *Women and Networks of Literary Production*; de Jeu, *'t Spoor der dichtersessen*.

24 To name only a few, see: Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larsen, *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*; James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture*; Julie Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe*; Diana Robin, *Publishing Women, Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation*; and Kemp, 'Women's Patronage-seeking as Familial Enterprise'. The letters of Protestant women during the reign of Mary I and the related network have been extensively studied by Ruth Ahnert and Sebastian E. Ahnert.

25 Sutton, *Early Modern Women*, p. 14. This is also acknowledged by Babette Bohn. See Bohn, *Women Artists, Their Patrons, and Their Publics in Early Modern Bologna* (in press). The case of Michaelina Wautier, a 're-discovered' early modern female artist, provides a recent example of the difficulties of locating early modern women artists in the archives. See Van der Stighelen, *Michaelina Wautier*.

26 The use of social network analysis by art historians with respect to men is more developed, although also lagging behind that in other fields, particularly intellectual history. Koenraad

first, by Tomomi Kinukawa, considers the epistolary relationship between female artist Maria Sibylla Merian and two learned men—one in Germany, the other in England, in her pursuit of publishing success.²⁷ The other, by Marisca Sikkens-De Zwaan, explores the power of family relationships in a female collector's pursuit of exotic plant specimens.²⁸

Social network analysis has an important role to play in providing scholars with a different toolkit with which to approach the study of early modern women who do not easily fit into traditional models of scholarship and, in turn, bring into the foreground women who may otherwise have been forgotten or marginalized. With advancements in digital humanities, these advantages can be developed further, as noted by Catherine Medici.²⁹ Medici notes that while reconstructing networks 'by hand' can shed important light onto our understanding of early modern women, using digital tools can enable scholars to build networks that are larger and more comprehensive. Computerized network analysis also allows scholars to perform quantitative analysis to reveal, amongst other things, the centrality of a woman in a particular network, or her influence in terms of the number of contacts she helps facilitate.³⁰

Alas, as with most (if not all) database technology, the results depend on the quality of the data. Thus, while epistolary communities are ripe for digital network analysis, establishing the existence of a community of female artists is far more difficult due to the paucity of available data. It is therefore critical to maintain a separate understanding of the type of social network analysis that can be helpfully deployed to understand smaller networks of early modern women, and computer-assisted social network analysis, which can produce great results but requires large

Brosens surmises that this is due, in part, to the lingering power of the 'lone genius' narrative, which naturally guides art historians towards an individualistic analysis. Brosens, 'Can Tapestry Research Benefit from Economic Sociology and Social Network Analysis?' in Brosens, *Family Ties*. Brosens and his colleagues have conducted extensive work on the use of and reliance upon social networks in the production of tapestries in the early modern Low Countries. For an overview, see Brosens, 'MapTap and Cornelia'. Most recently, Tine Luk Meganck published her research into the networks of Abraham Ortelius by using various objects (such as *alba amicorum* and maps) as the products of exchanges between artists and humanists. See Meganck, *Erudite Eyes*.

27 Kinukawa, 'Natural History as Entrepreneurship'.

28 Sikkens-de Zwaan, 'Magdalena Poulle'.

29 Medici, 'Using Network Analysis to Understand Early Modern Women'.

30 For an example of the use of a quantitative network approach to an early modern case study, see Ahnert and Ahnert, 'Protestant Letter Networks', and Lincoln, 'Continuity and Disruption in European Networks of Print Production'. Ahnert and Ahnert focus on early modern women, while Lincoln does not.

amounts of high-quality data. Indeed, as argued at the outset—and demonstrated below by our case studies—the use of social network analysis can be particularly productive in instances where limited archival information is available or where the available archival materials have been preserved and framed in male-centric ways prioritizing narratives of the ‘lone genius’.

Female agency

The tracing of social networks and the formation of collectives also opens space for historicized understandings of women’s agency that do not require autonomy as a defining feature. Agency is a necessary precondition to the analysis and consideration of feminist discourse in this chapter. In order to derive meaning from a woman’s participation in collective action or social networks, agency must be present. However, historical women with agency—whether feminists or proto-feminists, strong or ordinary women—should not solely be identified by virtue of their interests in or ability to transform the patriarchal systems of which they are a part. Privileging autonomy and resistance as a requisite factor of agency not only reinforces the values that have led to the dismissal of all but a handful of exceptional women as irrelevant to history in the first place but also has the potential for anachronism. It is helpful to consider some of the ways in which recent scholarship of feminist agency has addressed these thorny issues before offering our definition of this critical concept.

Building on the ‘pioneering historicist debates’ of Stephen Greenblatt and Jonathan Dollimore, Kathleen Larson notes that ‘the fledgling concepts of subjectivity and creative selfhood emerging [...] in conjunction with humanism and the Reformation [...] already complicate critical attempts to define agency as the action of an individual aware of herself as speaking agent.’³¹ Acknowledging the further limited—and often contradictory—subject positions from which early modern women managed to speak, Larson nevertheless posits an ‘understanding of agency [that] evokes the performative action integral to speech acts’.³²

Following the work of historians such as Joan Wallach Scott and Lauren Berlant, Lynn Thomas makes a particularly useful contribution to the efforts

31 Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation*, pp. 9–10.

32 Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation*, p. 10.

of feminist historians to 'de-liberalise scholarly conceptions of agency' based in nineteenth-century distinctions between freedom and enslavement.³³ While Thomas critiques the limitations of 'agency as argument', she does not abandon entirely the concept.³⁴ Rather, she urges historians to retrieve a more sophisticated story of agency by attending 'to the multiple motivations that undergird meaningful action, motivations that exceed rational calculation and articulated intentions to include collective fantasies, psychical desires and struggles just to get by.'³⁵ Despite its potential 'to enable more compelling, less predictable histories', such historiography is not without its challenges.³⁶ For feminist scholars looking back from the twenty-first century, the agency deployed by people in the past may seem, as Thomas speculates, 'disorienting.'³⁷

Allyson M. Poska's recent proposal of 'agentic gender norms' as a conceptual frame may provide insight into some of the challenges Thomas foretells as the end of her essay. We have reached, as Poska claims at the start of her essay, 'a critical moment in the historiography on early modern women.'³⁸ Poska's discussion is in part derived from her observations about the current state of early modern women's history. As she notes, 'feminist scholars tend to prioritize female solidarity over exploitation' while there continues to be a 'need to contextualise gender expectations within the framework of early modern race and class hierarchies and consider how some women's agency existed because of their ability to constrain the agency of other women.'³⁹

For our purposes, female agency refers to the actions of a woman who is aware of purposefully making decisions to act or speak on behalf of herself or a collective of which she considers herself to be a member. Indeed, in order to legitimately give weight to collective action or insert meaning into a relationship, the female actor must have been aware of the fact that she was speaking or acting in ways reflective of decision-making. Requiring that awareness be a dimension of agency enables us to apply the concept in a non-anachronistic manner.

33 Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 326.

34 Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 329.

35 Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 335.

36 Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 335.

37 Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 360.

38 Allyson M. Poska, 'The Case for Agentic Gender Norms', p. 354.

39 Poska, 'The Case for Agentic Gender Norms', p. 360. Note that, even here, the possibility of women's ability to constrain the agency of some men is not mentioned.

Case study: Agnes Henslowe and Joan Alleyn: mother, daughter, and wives in a patriarchal enterprise

The English Henslowe-Alleyn family, foremost among entrepreneurs on the Elizabethan–Jacobean entertainment scene, provides an opportunity for considering the agency of ordinary women within a context in which class and family alliances rather than those organized around gender could take priority. Early modern England was a time of social mobility, with marriage, family, and kinship playing a vital role in fostering the embedded ties required to successfully navigate patronage networks.⁴⁰ By recognizing women’s agency through the attainment of collective or familial goals rather than solely in terms of autonomy, we can see the significance of Agnes Henslowe and Joan Alleyn’s contributions to their family’s social mobility. The ordinariness of their actions, moreover, is indicative of their access to class power, especially as wives within the context of developing discourses of godly companionate marriage, which posited an analogic relation between household and political governance.⁴¹ Women’s expertise as ‘joint governors of the family’ seems to have carried beyond the household, as indicated by the respect they garnered as decision makers in their family’s business matters. Routinely engaged in matters of business, they promoted the collective interests of the Henslowe-Alleyn family and the Rose Theatre, both of which encompassed their own.⁴²

Although early modern conduct books, sermons, and marriage manuals often hold an overabundance of misogynist attitudes, they also situate women—and particularly wives—in the functioning of companionate marriages in ways that urge a consideration of not only gender but social rank as intersecting categories of analyses. Gender alone will not enable us to fully understand relationships of power in an historical context in which all people, from the monarch below God to the lowliest of workers, were seen within multidirectional hierarchies of service and obedience. Women’s authority to govern others, according to contemporary manuals and guides, was commissioned by analogy between domestic and civil government, both of which require commanders and lieutenants. The popular preacher

40 See Cerasano, ‘The Patronage Network of Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn’, pp. 82–92; and Kemp, ‘Women’s Patronage-Seeking as Familial Enterprise’.

41 In *A Godly Form of Household Government* (London, 1598), for example, John Dod and Robert Cleaver claimed that ‘a household is as it were a little commonwealth’, with the husband the ‘chief governor’ and the wife ‘second-helper’ and ‘fellow-helper.’ See pp. 13 and 60.

42 The women’s inclusion in these interests is manifested when, upon his death, Philip’s estate passed to his widow Agnes, who in turn passed it on to her daughter.

Henry Smith, among others, urged wise husbands to ‘divide offices, and affairs, and goods with [the wife], causing her to be feared and revered and obeyed of her children and servants like himself’.⁴³

Within the taxonomy of household governance, husbands hold authority over wives; but as parents and mistresses, wives hold authority over children and servants, including adult males.⁴⁴ This is demonstrated, for example, in a letter Joan Alleyn receives from John Pig, a ‘boy’ in service to the Henslowe-Alleyns (perhaps as a player). Pig writes deferentially to Joan as his employer and mistress of the household.⁴⁵ But Pig is not a child; rather, he has a wife and children of his own. The term ‘boy’ designates Pig’s status as an indentured worker in the household or theatrical company rather than his age.⁴⁶ As such, John Pig is subject to not only the authority of his master but that of his mistress as well even though he is a ‘man’, thus complicating our understanding of how gendered power relations work in the period.

As the widow of a successful member of the Dyers’ Company, Agnes Woodward (c. 1550s–1617) brought wealth as well as court and other social connections to her marriage to Philip Henslowe (c. 1550s–1616), who had been her husband’s assistant.⁴⁷ By the 1580s, the Henslowes—Philip, Agnes, and Agnes’s two daughters from her previous marriage, Joan (c. 1573–1623) and Elizabeth (c. 1575–?)—were living in Southwark where they prospered through various business ventures, ownership of rental properties and entertainment establishments, including the wildly successful Rose Theatre. The Rose was leased to the Admiral’s Men, and Philip managed the company of players which included the most celebrated actor of the day, Edward Alleyn. In 1592, Edward married Agnes’s daughter (Philip’s stepdaughter) Joan, transforming the financial partnership between the city’s premier theater-owners and their star actor into a familial endeavor as well. This collaboration was personally, economically, and socially successful during the remainders of each of their lives. By 1614, Joan and Edward had purchased the manor in Dulwich, and in 1616 they used their substantial wealth to establish the charitable and educational institute they named the College of God’s Gift and which still operates to this day.

That we know so much of this family—and the business of theater and other Bankside entertainments more generally—is because when he died,

43 Smith, ‘A Preparative to Marriage’, p. 148; see also Gouge, ‘Of Domestical Duties’, p. 8.

44 Gouge, ‘Of Domestical Duties’, p. 155.

45 Henslowe, ‘Henslowe’s Diary’, pp. 282–283.

46 Barrie, ‘Elizabethan Play-Boys in the Adult London Companies’, p. 246.

47 Cerasano, ‘Patronage Network’, p. 8.

Edward left his collection of personal and professional papers, along with those of his father-in-law, to the College. Containing thousands of manuscript pages, the collection famously includes Edward's and Philip's diaries of their day-to-day activities; also included are records of business transactions, loans, and other legal documents as well as various personal and professional correspondences (some of which are simultaneously both). In telling the tale of Philip Henslowe's and Edward Alleyn's success, historians have tended to tease out the predominantly androcentric threads of the archival materials to create a story of Philip and then Edward as theatrical and entrepreneurial geniuses without much consideration of the social structures of networking upon which success depended. Not surprisingly, modern editors have selected only 'relevant' documents to publish, often overlooking information that seems more focused on the women and the family. In assigning single 'authorship' to letters, editors obscure the frequently collective identity of senders and receivers of the various bits of correspondence.

Nevertheless, there remains in the archival fabric evidence that, as wives and daughter, Agnes and Joan played significant roles in the familial business enterprises. Throughout, Agnes and Joan—as well as other women—are named as witnesses to various financial transactions being negotiated.⁴⁸ At other times, Agnes and Joan are recorded as themselves the makers of loans in addition to being named as witnesses to transactions, which they 'deliver'.⁴⁹ As S.P. Cerasano has argued with regard to Agnes, she 'was recognized—in dealings with the local authorities and her husband's business associates—as a substantial individual in her own right'.⁵⁰ As widow, her name appears as the responsible party in a number of legal and civil records. She is among the Southwark property owners ordered by the Sewers Commission to make repairs.⁵¹ Following her husband's death, she assigns (or transfers) leased shares in the Fortune Theatre and the tenant's rights to property that had been her husband's.⁵²

Agnes's expertise in managing finances seems presumed in the arrangements Philip made in his will dated 6 January 1616, naming her his executrix and bequeathing to 'his loving wife' the entirety of his estate minus the payment of debts and bequests.⁵³ It was a substantial legacy. According to Agnes's brother-in-law William Henslowe, who contested both Philip's

48 Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 8, 32.

49 Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 49, 60, 172, 190–191.

50 Cerasano, 'Going Down the Drain', p. 84.

51 Cerasano, 'Going Down the Drain', p. 88.

52 Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project. Muniments, Series 1, Item 53.

53 Honigmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642*, pp. 101–102.

will and later that of Agnes when she willed everything to her daughter, the estate was worth £14,000 plus another £7,000 in 'redie monie & other thinges'.⁵⁴ When Agnes composed her own will on 15 February 1616, she in turn left everything to her 'only and well-beloved daughter, Joane [sic] Allen'.⁵⁵ Although Joan's uncle and cousin again contested the will when Agnes died in April of 1617, probate awarded the estate to Joan on 3 July 1617, indicating the court's recognition of Joan's legitimacy to inherit in her own right.

Like her mother, Joan also was respected by men both within her household as well as in her business dealings outside the home. Her significance to the Henslowe-Alleyn house is especially revealed through her activities while her husband is away from home, performing in the countryside when the London theaters were closed during times of plague. Among Henslowe's accounts for 1593 are notes regarding Joan's receipt of the quarterly rents from their tenants and records of her expenses for such things as nails, cushions, and the services of a joiner to make a bed, as well as payment of their own rent and for the keeping of Alleyn's horse while he is away.⁵⁶ Elsewhere in the family's correspondence, Joan is clearly considered to be not only a loving wife and daughter but also an able agent in the family's financial affairs.

Throughout the records kept between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, neither woman is perceived as challenging authority but rather their actions seem to be built seamlessly into the expectations that they would contribute to the daily business operations and the success of the Henslowe-Alleyn family. By acting as agents in their family's theatrical and other business enterprises, they fulfilled rather than defied the gender expectations for women of their status. Early modern concepts of conjugal household governance afforded them opportunities to act with a degree of power, negotiated simultaneously in collusion with patriarchal authority and in their collective self-interest.

The Henslowe and Alleyn women thus exemplify a story of agency often overlooked in the scholarly 'master-narratives' of submission or rebellion. Agnes Henslowe and Joan Alleyn do not create a utopian separate sphere for women, but rather they work within the existing 'ecosystem'. By taking on the 'divided offices and affairs' of their household, they replicate rather than replace the 'patriarchal systems of hierarchical leadership and command' within the early modern institution of marriage. Using social network

54 Briley, 'Edward Alleyn and Henslowe's Will', p. 324.

55 Honigmann and Brock, *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642*, p. 104.

56 Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 5.

theory in conjunction with an examination of kinship/family provides a way to account for their agency and render more visible their seemingly unremarkable roles in facilitating the business of theater through the creation of strong, lifelong, multilayered, embedded ties. As ordinary women of the middling sort they wielded power in the household, including over adult males who were their servants; and they garnered reverence and respect outside of the home in the male-dominated world of business partners and civil authorities with whom they dealt. Although not necessarily feminist, their power was both real and substantive of their success.

Case study: Maria Sibylla Merian and her daughters—a matriarchal enterprise

Agnes Henslowe and Joan Alleyn wielded their power and developed their networks within the parameters of the institution of marriage. For Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), even the protections of that institution were not available. Furthermore, as a middling class woman—living apart from her husband with two daughters—the artist and naturalist did not have access to the most influential formal institutions to which Dutch scientists and artists could belong, namely the Royal Society in London or the Guild of St. Luke's in Amsterdam.⁵⁷ Merian could not rely on membership within these learned and professional circles for training, resources, or a clientele in the way her male counterparts could.

Yet, from her rented house in Amsterdam, she and her daughters formed a family enterprise not dissimilar to many of the smaller artist workshops in Amsterdam at the time. Their situation, however, was unique: theirs was a business created and run entirely by women, and their success hinged on the formation and creation of networks that existed outside of the framework of formal institutions unavailable to them owing to their gender. Although Merian has been the subject of increased scholarship over the past decade or so, much of it has followed the narrative of the 'great woman'. Meanwhile, her daughters and the women who maintained relationships with Merian have largely remained in obscurity, leaving few (if any) ego-documents.

⁵⁷ St. Luke's was the painters' guild. In Amsterdam, women were not allowed to become members in that guild. In Nuremberg, where Merian began her career, women were allowed into the painters' guild, but subject to limitations. For example, they were not allowed to paint with oil. Whether women were allowed to become members into a guild, and the terms of membership, varied over time and from place to place. Honig, 'Femmes 'artistiques' des Pays-Bas septentrionaux', p. 55.

Through the application of an analytical framework that values collectivity and networks, we realize the breadth and significance of these women's contributions and we can help them step out of the shadows.

Merian was trained as an artist by her stepfather, the still life painter Jacob Marrel (1614–1681).⁵⁸ As was likely expected of her, Merian married one of her stepfather's pupils, the painter and engraver Johann Andreas Graff (1637–1701). She lived with her husband in Nuremberg and they had two daughters, Johanna Helena Herolt (1668–1723) and Dorothea Maria Gsell (1678–1743). In 1681, Merian returned to Frankfurt-am-Main with her daughters to console her mother after her stepfather's death. She would never return to live with her husband, first joining a colony of religious radicals known as the Labadists in Wieuwerd and eventually moving to Amsterdam in 1691. In Nuremberg and Frankfurt, Merian taught young female students, whom she referred to as her Maiden's Company. Her two most promising pupils, however, were her daughters. Merian taught them to collect specimens and preserve them, to prepare vellum for watercolor, to draw, and to paint.

In 1699, Merian and Dorothea Maria sailed from Amsterdam for Paramaribo, in the Dutch colony of Surinam. This was an extraordinary adventure to undertake, especially as women. After all, 'what experience does such a woman have [...] crawling about in forests and thickets'?⁵⁹ Johanna Helena, by then married, stayed behind in Amsterdam, working on the third volume of Merian's treatise on caterpillars.⁶⁰ With the assistance of Dorothea Maria and slave plantation workers, Merian spent two years in the hot and humid jungle of Surinam collecting, nurturing, and observing insects and plants, and recording the results in her study books. While working in the family enterprise, Johanna began receiving commissions herself. A 1698 *Bloemenbuch* of 49 plates bearing her signature, now in the Anton Herzog Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig, Germany, attests to her talent.⁶¹ Dorothea Maria worked closely with her mother until the latter's death, at which point she moved to Russia with her husband, where she worked for Peter the Great.

In addition to countless watercolors, Merian's matriarchal enterprise published several volumes on caterpillars and flowers, culminating in the 1705 *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensum*, a book containing 60

58 For a biography of Merian, see Reitsma and Ulenberg, *Maria Sibylla Merian & Daughters*; and Davis, 'Women on the Margins', amongst others.

59 Artis Library, University of Amsterdam, 'Anonymous Manuscript', ca. 1715, Inv. No. Legk. 37:1.

60 Merian, *Der Raupen wunderbare Verwandlung und sonderbare Blumennahrung*.

61 Band Nr. 24 b.

plates illustrating the insects, flora, and fauna of Surinam.⁶² After Merian's death, Johanna Helena and Dorothea Maria completed the third installment of the treatise on caterpillars she had begun. They included some of their own drawings in the volume, published in Merian's name. As we now know, the watercolors and publications were the work products of an entire family. During the women's lifetime, they reached some of the world's most important collectors, from Peter the Great in Russia to Hans Sloane, an important physician, naturalist, and collector in England.

Merian and her daughters functioned much as a traditional workshop would. Merian relied on her daughters to color plates for her books and to transfer some of her drawings onto copper plates. Together, they assembled model sheets that they could draw upon to produce various compositions, in a method Ella Reitsma has described as 'collage'.⁶³ Most of the drawings dating from the pre-Surinam period are signed in the name of Maria Sibylla Merian — whether she was in fact the author of the drawing or not.⁶⁴ In the workshop context, there is nothing particularly controversial about this practice. The fact that the women adopted the practice, however, signals that they were aware of the reputation and value attached to Merian's name. In addition to teaching them the art of insect and botanical illustration, it is likely that Merian inculcated in her daughters the importance of family legacy in their business. As Natalie Zemon Davis puts it: 'One suspects that she passed on to her daughters, at the expense of their father, the feeling that they were Merians first and foremost.'⁶⁵ Indeed, for the short period of time during which she was widowed, Dorothea Maria took the name Merian, rather than her father's surname, which would have been expected. Interestingly, there are also instances where Merian and Johanna Helena both signed a drawing. This practice, identified by Sam Segal, confirms that the artists collaborated on individual works.⁶⁶ It testifies to a perceived need to highlight the relationship between the artists. The double signature—J.H. Herolt and Maria S. Merian—served the purpose of firmly placing Johanna Helena in her mother's artistic legacy.

The women's practice with respect to authorship provides clear evidence of female agency. In choosing to produce works under the name of Merian and in using the double signature, the women chose how they wished

62 Merian, 'Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium'.

63 Reitsma and Ulenberg, *Maria Sibylla Merian & Daughters*, pp. 158–167.

64 Reitsma argues compellingly that signatures of Merian's name that are larger and more flowing were more likely by the hand of Johanna Helena, Merian's oldest daughter. For a discussion of her findings, see Reitsma, *Maria Sibylla Merian & Daughters*, Chapter 5.

65 Davis, 'Women on the Margins', p. 199.

66 Segal, 'Maria Sibylla Merian als Blumenmalerin', pp. 81–82.

to present themselves to patrons. Furthermore, their workshop process situates their enterprise on the continuum of collectivity. Rather than seek the support of a male partner, as widows often did for example, the Merian women carried on by themselves. They maximized production by generating artworks collaboratively. Theirs was a space where the women could safely develop as artists and share knowledge and commissions.

Thanks to a small collection of surviving correspondence and the presence of Merian's works in many important collections, we can establish that Merian actively cultivated relationships with fellow artists, scientists, civic leaders, and collectors. Amongst other things, these relationships enabled her to continue to develop her knowledge as a naturalist and resulted in some of the most important commissions for her family workshop.

One of these relationships was with Caspar Commelin, a regent of the Amsterdam botanical garden, civic leader, and prolific author and publisher, who would prove to be an important ally and patron. For example, Merian would observe plants in the botanical garden and discuss their properties and characteristics with Commelin.⁶⁷ He also arranged for Johanna Helena to contribute to the multivolume project to illustrate the Amsterdam botanical garden, now known as the *Moninckx Atlas*. Further, he asked her to color the frontispiece of his 1701 *Horti Medici Amsterlaedamensis*, and likely asked her to do the same for some of his other works, such as *Praeludia Botanica* (1703 and 1706). Commelin contributed directly to the Merian family enterprise by writing the Latin commentary for the illustrations in the Surinam book. This enabled the book to reach a wider, more learned audience. Importantly, Merian's relationship with Commelin would have lent support to her own status as a naturalist and testified to the worth of her family workshop.

Another significant relationship for the Merian women was with Amsterdammer Agnes Block (1629–1704), a wealthy patron and celebrated amateur botanist. Block was the owner and developer of Vijverhof, a country estate on the banks of the river Vecht, near Utrecht.⁶⁸ Vijverhof was central to Block's social and scientific relationships as a site of creativity, exchange, knowledge production, and personal identity. By the end of the seventeenth century, Vijverhof was generally considered to be second only to the botanical gardens of Amsterdam and Leiden with respect to the quantity and quality of rare and exotic plants it contained.

Like Merian, Block also maintained a relationship with Caspar Commelin, although her relationship with him differed from Merian's. In addition to

67 Universiteitsbibliotheek van Amsterdam, *Voor de Kruid-Lievende Leser*, pp. 117–118.

68 The most complete work on Block and her life remains Graft, 'Agnes Block'.

exchanging information about plants, the two also exchanged seeds and saplings. Beginning in 1695 and again in 1696 and 1697, Block commissioned Merian and Johanna Helena to illustrate some of the rare specimens in her garden. Johanna Helena likely had extended stays at Vijverhof in 1697, only two years before her mother's travels to Surinam, and possibly had additional stays during her mother's absence. The Block commission would have provided the Merians with financial security during this period of uncertainty. It would also have allowed them extended periods of close observation of plants and exotic birds in Vijverhof's aviary. Between 1701 and 1704 (the year of her death), Block commissioned Johanna Helena to produce a title page for a florilegium.

In addition to providing the women with income, these commissions also placed them within a circle of important botanical artists of the time, who were also working for Block. These included Herman Saftleven, Alida and Peter Withoos, and Jan and Maria Moninckx (of the aforementioned *Moninckx Atlas*)— all useful connections.

Merian's and her daughters' relationships with Caspar Commelin and Agnes Block are but a few in a complex web, the full extent of which is not discussed here.⁶⁹ These relationships were not merely transactional but, rather, could accurately be described as embedded. Merian's relationship with Block and Commelin began in the 1690s, when she first arrived in Amsterdam, and endured to the end of her life. These time-tested relationships were sufficiently strong as to grow to incorporate Johanna Helena and Dorothea Maria. It is reasonable to infer that trust and reciprocity could be found in these relationships. Merian trusted Commelin to produce accurate Latin descriptions for her Surinam book, an important factor in ensuring the successful marketing of the work, on which the economic future of the family enterprise depended. She trusted that Johanna Helena could continue to learn and grow as a botanical artist through stays with Block while Merian was away in Surinam. Specimens were traded, observations and interpretations discussed. Without trust or reciprocity, these exchanges would not have taken place, certainly not over such a lengthy period of time.

Merian and her daughters benefited tremendously from their pursuit of relationships with Commelin and Block. These relationships allowed the women to expand their knowledge of botanical and natural organisms

69 For example, as Kinukawa has noted, Merian's epistolary relationships with the English apothecary Petiver and the German Physician Volkamer were critical in the marketing of Merian's book on Surinamese insects and to growing her reputation internationally. See Kinukawa, 'Natural History as Entrepreneurship'.

and to obtain significant economic benefits in the form of commissions. Furthermore, the networks to which the women belonged conferred upon them increased status and perhaps even legitimacy through their association with individuals of international reputation, which included both Commelin and Block.

Merian and her daughters can accurately be described as proto-feminists. They were women determined to speak for themselves, and worked together to maintain that voice. For them, networks (as flexible, informal organizations) replaced the formal institutions often considered critical in the pursuit of professional success, but from which they were precluded owing to their gender. Networks allowed the women to maintain their autonomy as a small, collaborative family enterprise.

Conclusion: insights and rewards

Our case studies show that the values embodied in the Woman's Building—collaboration, consciousness raising, personal experience, and the significance of the presence of a female role model—existed in the early modern period. They also show the weakness of traditional, individualistic methodical approaches, and the value of collective or institutional (whether formal or informal) approaches.

Maria Sibylla Merian was a 'great woman'—without fear, traveling to a faraway colony and literally getting dirty. That compelling story, however, is only partially accurate: Agnes Henslowe, Joan Alleyn, Dorothea Maria Gsell, Johanna Helena Herolt, and Agnes Block were not necessarily 'great women', or even 'female warriors'. But they were the ones who allowed the great women and great men in their lives to succeed. The roles they fulfilled, as agents, assistants, and managers, assured the existence of the networks on which their households relied upon to function. Merian could only be made 'great' because of the assistance provided by her daughters and because she received important commissions, including from Block. The Rose Theatre was a successful going concern because Agnes Henslowe and Joan Alleyn contributed to the management of its financial affairs.

Yet, of the six women mentioned above, only Merian has benefitted from extensive scholarship, the others remaining in the margins, if not in complete obscurity. Gsell and Herolt rarely even receive a mention in compilations of early modern female artists, and the only book-length study of Block dates to 1943. Similarly, while scholars sometimes give a passing nod to the property and connections Joan and Agnes brought to their marriages,

no attention is paid to their post-marital roles in maintaining and building the networks of embedded ties crucial to the Henslowe-Alleyn family's success. It is only when approaching Merian's work and the Rose Theatre from a collective and/or social network perspective that the important roles played by Henslowe, Alleyn, Gsell, Herolt, and Block are revealed. Other actors still stand in the shadows and on the fringes of the historical records, urging scholars to shine inquiring lights on the roles played, for example, by Surinam slaves and married 'boys'. It is our task as scholars to learn the lessons taught by the Women's Building, to use the values and frameworks to look back with fresh eyes at archival materials we already have, and to seek in new ways to uncover the histories we have overlooked.

It is undeniable that the early modern women of this chapter possessed agency and navigated networks, often in collaboration. The trajectory of feminist consciousness, however, is not a straight line leading inexorably to progress. Rather, it is a map woven of intersections of greater or lesser prominence. A significant challenge to our work as an act of feminist intervention is that historians and archivists have often only unearthed or published the archival sources that fit a linear, Whiggish, 'great person' narrative. Our analytical framework, which eschews an individualistic focus on 'great women' and embraces the concepts of female agency, collectivity, and social networks, seeks to illuminate a different trajectory of feminist consciousness by overcoming these deficiencies. The result reveals the potential for recognizing, recovering, and valuing the lives of historical women and making space for them in a broader, more inclusive, view of history.

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Examining women's agency in the past has taken on new urgency in the current moment of resurgent patriarchy, Women's Marches, and the global #MeToo movement. The essays in this collection consider women's agency in the Renaissance and early modern period, an era that also saw both increasing patriarchal constraints and new forms of women's actions and activism. They address a capacious set of questions about how women, from their teenage years through older adulthood, asserted agency through social practices, speech acts, legal disputes, writing, viewing and exchanging images, travel, and community building. Despite family and social pressures, the actions of girls and women could shape their lives and challenge male-dominated institutions. This volume includes thirteen essays by scholars from various disciplines, which analyze people, texts, objects, and images from many different parts of Europe, as well as things and people that crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific.

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