MANAGING MIDWIVES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation in

English

by

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Abstract

This study examines the textual midwife to see in what ways the midwife’s unique position—a figure perched between male and female epistemologies, professional and lay identities, religious and state-sanctioned authorities, comedic and dangerous associations—alters our understanding of nationalist and religious causes in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, as well as concurrent issues of class, gender, authorship, and rhetoric throughout the early modern period.

Through intensive historicization, I seek to strip away modern preconceptions of what the midwife should be in early modern texts—always ignorant, always lower class, always dangerous—and instead to elucidate the ways in which political, religious, and social events moved the midwife away from a position of state and religious authority toward an even more complex set of rhetorical associations. This is a narrative of accumulation, and what emerges is a textual midwife that is a highly responsive figure, her position, emphasis, and associations dependent upon the immediate historical moment.

Texts examined in detail include midwifery manuals by Thomas Raynalde, Nicholas Culpeper, and Jane Sharp; dramas by Edward Sharpham, Peter Hausted, Richard Brome, and Ben Jonson; and the complete works of Margaret Cavendish.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures and Illustrations vi
Acknowledgements vii

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter 1. FUNCTIONARIES OF CHURCH AND STATE: ENGLISH MIDWIVES TO 1590 7
  Part I: Integral to the Faith: Midwives in Pre-Reformation England 7
  Part II: Integral to the State: The English Reformation and the Baptismal Debate 18
  Part III: Medical Knowledge, National Function: *The Byrth of Mankinde* 32
  Part IV: Struggles with Authority: Midwives in Translations of Guillemeau and Rueff 50
  Conclusion 65

Chapter 2: MIDWIVES ON THE JACOBEAN STAGE, 1590-1613 67
  Part I: Midwives’ Status in Late-Sixteenth and Early-Seventeenth Century Texts 71
  Part II: New developments: witnesses, tropes, and comediennes 78
  Part III: The First Midwife to Tread the Boards: Mistress Correction in *Cupid’s Whirligig* (1607) 90
  Part IV: Competing Discourses: Angelic, Earthy, and Lewd 102
  Conclusion 108

Chapter 3: FULLY FLESHED: CAROLINE MIDWIVES, 1614-1642 110
  Part I: In the Interim, 1614-1630 115
  Part II: Peter Hausted’s *The Rival Friends* (1632) 126
  Part III: Ben Jonson’s *The Magnetic Lady* (1632) 137
  Part IV: Richard Brome’s *The Queen and Concubine* (1635) and *The Love-Sick Court* (1639) 151
  Conclusion 167

Chapter 4: AN UNCIVIL TIME: INTERREGNUM MIDWIVES, 1643-1660 170
  Part I: Technical Changes: Missing Babies and Missing Bishops 173
  Part II: Midwife as Political Conceit 180
  Part III: Nicholas Culpeper’s Best-Seller: *A Directory for Midwives* (1651) 187
  Part IV: A (Feminine?) Response to Culpeper: *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* (1656) 199
  Conclusion 210
Chapter 5: THE SECOND WAVE: MIDWIFERY MANUALS OF THE RESTORATION

Part II: Peter Chamberlen’s *Midwife’s Practice* (1665) 220
Part III: James Wolveridge’s *Speculum Matricism Hibernicum* (1671) 227
Part IV: William Sermon’s *The Ladies Companion* (1671) 239
Part V: Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book* (1671) 245
Conclusion 250

Chapter 6: MARGARET CAVENDISH’S MIDWIVES: A CASE STUDY 254

Part I: An Unnecessary Labor: Cavendish on Childbirth and Professional Midwives 260
  • Making a Virtue of Necessity 260
  • The Dangers of Maternity 264
  • Lesser Women Will Breed: Lady Gosling in *The Public Wooing* 271
  • No Child But Work: The Platonic Marriage and the Textual Infant 277

Part II: Troping the Midwife: Poetry, Natural Philosophy, and Closet Drama 288
  • The Feminine, Poetic Universe 288
  • Closet Drama: Putting Words in the Mouth of the Reader 291
  • A Trope in the Mouth of an Educated Virgin: *Youths Glory, and Deaths Banquet* 296
    • Marshaling Fecundity for the State: Lady Victoria of *Bell in Campo* 301

Part III: But She’s still a comedienne: The Embodied Midwife of *The Sociable Companions* 305
Conclusion 310

Bibliography 313
List of Figures and Illustrations

Fig. 3.1: Familial relationships in *The Rival Friends* p. 129

Fig. 5.1: Culpeper’s *Directory*, first ed. (1651) p. 218

Fig. 5.2: Culpeper’s *Directory*, sixth ed. (1651) p. 218

Fig. 5.3: *Compleat Midwifes Practice*, first ed. (1656) p. 218

Fig. 5.4: *Compleat Midwifes Practice*, second ed. (1659) p. 218

Fig. 5.5: *Compleat Midwifes Practice*, third ed. (1663) p. 219

Fig. 5.6: *Compleat Midwifes Practice*, fifth ed. (1698) p. 219

Fig. 5.7: Scenes from the frontispiece to James Wolveridge’s *Speculum Matricis* (1671) p. 219
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INTRODUCTION

Managing Midwives in Texts

Early modern midwives have enjoyed increased visibility in recent years, thanks in part to interest in all aspects of early modern sexuality and a concurrent interest in the rise of professions in England. Critics and historians alike make excellent use of midwives to inflect larger issues: politics, religion, drama, medical developments, etc. But what if the midwife were the focus rather than the inflection? This study examines

the textual midwife, not merely for the sake of pursuing an interesting literary and historical figure, but in order to see in what ways the midwife’s unique position—perched between male and female epistemologies, professional and lay identities, religious and state-sanctioned authorities, comedic and dangerous associations—alters our understanding of nationalist and religious causes in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, as well as concurrent issues of class, gender, authorship, and rhetoric throughout the early modern period. The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons for this shift in authors’ perceptions and uses of the textual midwife in early modern England, particularly the ways in which authors’ treatments of midwives are functions of her gender, her profession, and her historical moment.

My methodology—particularly my concerted effort to merge literary representations with nonfictional texts and historically proven realities—is highly indebted to Kathleen Canning’s discussions of the interactions between “experience” and “discourse” in Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class & Citizenship. Midwives, as professionals, are dependent upon and defined by experience, but in print the term “midwife” can be disassociated from that experience, becoming a purely rhetorical trope. Also, in printed works, midwives’ experiences can be co-opted by male authors who, though lacking lived experience in the birthroom, can assert textual authority over it. That authority is not, I also argue, confined to elite textual realms, such as scientific and medical treatises, legal writs, or ecclesiastical courts. The midwife is a character of popular culture; we must look as much to popular interpretations and uses of midwives as to any “official” writings. It is only in doing so that we can illuminate the
complex web of associations surrounding the early modern English midwife that is responsible for her unique status in both printed texts and historical reality.

We tend to think of midwives as static persons, persons whose professional reputation has suffered, who in literature have always been associated with witchcraft or medical malfeasance, who are always elderly, uneducated, or even evil. Recent historians have done much to recuperate the “real” midwife’s lived reality of responsibility and social status, but the disconnection between textual representations and that historical reality continues. Through intensive historicization, I seek to strip away modern preconceptions of what the midwife should be in early modern texts—always ignorant, always lower class, always dangerous—and instead to elucidate the ways in which political, religious, and social events moved the midwife away from a position of state and religious authority toward an even more complex set of rhetorical associations, some of which would, because of the limitations of print and its interpretation, become the sources of that one-dimensional figure to which later centuries would become accustomed.

The organization of these chapters is almost entirely chronological, not in an attempt to create an all-encompassing linear narrative of the textual midwife’s development, but rather to allow us to see moments in which historical events and social disruptions reemphasize certain previously established characteristics. This is a narrative of accumulation, and what emerges is an image of the textual midwife as a highly responsive figure, her position, emphasis, and associations dependent upon the immediate historical moment.
In the following chapters, I examine the evolution of the midwife through the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, focusing primarily on the genres of drama and the midwifery manual. Along the way, however, I include midwifery references in poetry, pamphlets, legal edicts, religious debates, domestic manuals, and broadsides. Chapter 1, “Functionaries of Church and State: English Midwives to 1590,” reexamines the origins of the textual midwife, particularly her implication in the Judeo-Christian narrative and her nationalist role in the establishment of the Church of England and the Protestant Reformation. Although this chapter addresses a multitude of works, texts of primary importance include the religious works of Jacobus de Voraigne, John Mirk and John Lydgate, polemical and legal tracts on the rights of midwives to perform baptism, and the midwifery manuals of Richard Jonas and Thomas Raynalde. The second chapter, “Midwives on the Jacobean Stage: 1590-1613,” demonstrates the evolution of the midwife-as-trope in literary works of the Renaissance, most notably as a gendered figurative expression meaning “to bring forth.” I also argue for the emergence of the comedic midwife in Jacobean drama (as seen in Edward Sharpham’s *Cupid’s Whirligig*, 1607) as having its origins in classical theatre, particularly Terence’s *The Andean Woman*, which was repopularized through a series of reprints in the late sixteenth-century. Chapter 3, “Fully Fleshe: Caroline Midwives, 1614-1632,” discusses midwives’ establishment as integral characters in comedic plots, their professional identities and abilities necessary elements of the dramatic resolution and the reestablishment of social order. This chapter focuses on four main dramas—Peter Hausted’s *The Rival Friends* (perf. 1631; pub. 1632), Ben Jonson’s *The Magnetic Lady*
(perf. 1632; pub. 1640), and Richard Brome’s *The Queen and Concubine* (perf. 1635; pub. 1658) and *The Love-Sick Court* (perf. 1639; pub. 1658)—and the profound effects that these dramatists, with their focus on midwives’ negative characteristics and their exploitation of the midwife’s potential for comedic relief, have on modern critical assumptions. In the next two chapters, I turn primarily to the genre of the midwifery manual. In Chapter 4, “An Uncivil Time: Interregnum Midwives, 1643-1660,” I contextualize the two most popular Interregnum midwifery manuals—Nicholas Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives* (1651) and the anonymous *Compleat Midwives Practice* (1656)—within the broader Civil War-era language of reproduction, the era’s “crisis in masculinity,” and the proliferation of narratives of monstrous births, both literal and as metaphorical. Chapter 5, “The Second Wave: Midwifery Manuals of the Restoration,” addresses the spate of manuals published in the 1670s and argues that, with the political impetus of the Civil War gone, these authors were free to use the midwifery manual as a site for experimentation in modes of establishing reproductive authority. The final chapter, “Margaret Cavendish’s Midwives,” is a case study of midwives and midwifery in the works of Cavendish and her rather unique usage of the language of midwifery and childbirth as a means to claim conceptual spaces, authorities, and rhetorics as unequivocally feminine.

This project’s title, *Managing Midwives*, is the result of a conscious choice to signal the theoretical concept of simultaneity. The word “managing,” like the early modern midwife herself, represents multiple subject positions: those of the midwife, her
author, and the modern critic.² In the early modern period, the term “managing” had an obvious medical connotation, meaning “to control or relieve” a disease, or “to look after” a patient in an appropriate manner, all of which apply to a professional dedicated to the preservation of mother and child. But midwives “managed” births in yet another fashion, their profession requiring them “to handle, wield, or make use of” an object, which could be one of the midwife’s many tools of the trade or even her own hand. As a result of their professional status and place of responsibility in their communities, midwives also needed to enact a third form of management: “to fulfil [sic] the duties of (an office),” in this case, an office signified by an official church license. But the word “managing” also reflects midwives’ liminal positions in their communities and in early modern texts; midwives had to balance precariously between their need “to take charge of, control, or direct” the birthroom, and “to yield to being controlled or directed” by male physicians and church officials who sought to circumscribe their practice. “Managing”—meaning “to plot, scheme, or intrigue”—also reflects the negative early modern stereotype of the midwife as she emerged in late seventeenth-century rhetoric, a means by which male physicians and authors sought “to force out or away; to expel” her from her place of medical privilege. And finally, “managing” can also mean “to deal with or represent in a literary treatment,” which is what the seventeenth authors do to midwives in their texts, and what modern critics are doing to both midwives and those seventeenth-century authors. I can only hope that I manage her well.

² Quoted definitions drawn from *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.
CHAPTER ONE

Functionaries of Church and State: English Midwives to 1590

The midwife of seventeenth century literature was not a figure that sprang fully-formed out of the minds of her creators. By the 1600s, the midwife had hundreds of years of development behind her, both historically, socially, and textually. This chapter will trace the English textual midwife through her earliest incarnations, paying particular attention to the midwives in texts written during the English Reformation. The midwife becomes, both in historical reality and in texts, a member of the “first wave” of defense against heresy, a pattern made doubly important as we will see it echoed a century later during the tribulations of the English Civil War.

Part I Integral to the Faith: Midwives in Pre-Reformation England

Midwives are rarely represented in late-medieval and early-Renaissance English literature, but what few representations there are establish midwives as important functionaries in the history of the Christian church. Until well into the sixteenth-century, the texts dealing with midwives in any specificity were religious: retellings of the Old Testament book of Exodus, various saints’ lives, and the Apocryphal nativity of Jesus. These religious stories, when taken together, established midwives as necessary to Judeo-Christian history, making midwifery itself a spiritual function.

One of the more popular works featuring midwives is Jacobus de Voragine’s thirteenth-century text, Legenda Aurea (or, The Golden Legend), which Caxton printed
and translated into English in 1483. Like many of the later religious texts involving midwives, Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea* firmly establishes a link between the midwife and her potential role as “savior.” The *Legenda Aurea* recounted, in part, the familiar tale of the Hebrew Exodus in which the midwives refuse the pharaoh’s order to execute all male children born to the Jews.

The egypcyens hated the chyldren of israhel / and put them to affliction scornyng and havyng envye at them / & oppressyd byterly theyr lyf wyth hard and sore labours of tyle and claye / and grevyd alle them in suche werkis / The kynge of egypte said to the mydwyves of the hebrews of whom that one was callyd Sephora / and that other phua and comanded / whan so is that the tyme of burth is and that ye shal doo your offyce in helpyng in the burthe of chyldren / yf it be a ma[n] chyld sl[ay] hym yf it be a maid childe kepe it and late it lyve / The mydwyves dredde god / and dyde not as the kyng comanded them / but reservyd and kepte the men chyldren For whom the kynge sente & said / what is the cause that ye reserve and kepte the men chyldren / they answerd / Ther ben of thebrewys wymen that can the crafte of mydwyvys as wel as we / and er we come the chyldren be born / God dyde wel herfore unto the mydwyves

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3 *Legenda Aurea* was reprinted a subsequent nine times: 1487, 1493, 1498, 1501, 1504, 1507, 1512, 1521, and 1527.
And the peple grewe and were gretly comforted / And by cause the mydwyves dredde god / they edefyed to them howses.  

The Hebrew midwives’ tale was of course then reprinted in all English versions of the Old Testament from the sixteenth-century onward, beginning with Tyndale’s 1530 publication of the Pentateuch,  
and followed by Miles Coverdale’s edition of the Bible (1535),  
Henry VIII’s official “Great Bible” (1540),  
and Gregory’s Martin’s translation (1582),  
and in a wide variety of religious commentaries.  This popular Old Testament

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4 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea sanctorum, sive, Lombardica historia* (London: William Caxton, 1483), 54. Publishers and authors of seventeenth-century midwifery manuals quoted this tale regularly as evidence of midwifery’s value as a profession. For example, these verses are quoted on the title page of Nicholas Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives* (1651), and Jane Sharp would make extensive use of the story in her preface to *The Midwives Book* (1671).


6 Reprinted in 1537, 1550, and 1553.

7 Reprinted 1541, 1549, 1552, 1553, and 1561. Further versions of this tale followed in later translations of the Bible, including those of Matthew Parker (1568, 1569, 1572, 1574, 1575, 1584, 1591, 1595, and 1602) and William Whittingham (1560 and 1561).

8 *The holie Bible faithfully translated into English, out of the authentical Latin.* Reprinted 1609.
story reinforced midwifery’s association with salvation and that the midwife’s power
over the life and death of infants was, by extension, the power of life and death over
nations (an association that would bear fruit during the Protestant Reformation).

*Legenda Aurea* contains references to another tale of Biblical midwifery—that of
Rachel’s death in childbirth—which extends the association of midwives from preservers
to witnesses and proclaimers of sex. In this particular case, the midwife, realizing that
Rachel will not long survive the birth of her child, comforts the dying woman by saying
“be not aferd for thou shalt have a sonne.”¹⁰ This brief statement contains the kernel of
several attributes associated with the midwife: her duty to comfort the laboring woman,
her ability to determine the child’s sex, in some cases prenatally, and her responsibility to
proclaim that child’s sex to the public. Like the tale of the midwives of Egypt, this
Biblical tale was repeated throughout all vernacular translations of the Bible. These roles
echo those of another Biblical midwife, not mentioned in the *Legenda Aurea*, who
marked one of Tamara’s twin boys with red string during a breach birth to record the

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¹⁰ Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 49
child’s seniority. Both of these tales, and that of the Hebrew midwives, are predicated upon the midwife’s reliability as witness to births, but the Hebrew midwives’ story simultaneously calls that reliability into question, since the midwives effectively lied to the Egyptian authorities. This Biblical undermining of midwives’ reliability was a point of concern for later English authors during the Reformation when their importance as witnesses became an integral part of the enforcement of Anglican conformity.

But the *Legenda Aurea*’s tales of preservation were not limited to strictly Biblical accounts; Voragine’s incorporation of saints’ lives into his text also emphasized midwifery’s potential as a site for divine intervention. Among such stories is the miraculous tale of Mary Magdalene’s midwiving of a dead pregnant woman (marooned on a Mediterranean island), her miraculous preservation of the infant, and the Magdalene’s subsequent revivification of the mother in the presence of witnesses. The enlivened mother declaims, “O blessyd marie magdalene / thou art of grete merite and

11 Although this tale of Tamara’s labor is not present in Voragine’s text, it is recounted in other extra-Biblical texts of the period. For example, William Hunnis’s poetic adaptation of Genesis, *A hyve full of hunnye* (1578), narrates both Rachel’s and Tamara’s childbed stories (stanzas 19-20 and 40-43 respectively). Incidentally, Hunnis preserves the Biblical language of Rachel’s midwife—“be not afraid”—which necessarily reminds the reader of the angel who spoke the same phrase to the Virgin Mary and reemphasizes the midwife’s inclusion in the divine Judeo-Christian narrative. William Hunnis, *A hyve full of hunnye* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1578).
gloriouse / For in the paynes of my delyveraunce thou were my mydwyf / And in al my
necessytes thou hast accomplisyshid to me the servyce of a chaumberer.”

More popular even than these miraculous tales was the nativity of Jesus as
derived from the apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James*\(^{13}\) and the *Gospel of Pseudo-
Matthew*, an extra-Biblical tale in which midwives play prominent roles.\(^{14}\) Students of
literature will be most familiar with this tale as it appears in the nativity dramas of the N-
Town plays (perf. c.1400-1450)\(^{15}\) and the Chester cycle (perf. c.1480),\(^{16}\) and the narrative
was also popularized in works by John Lydgate\(^{17}\) (*The lyf of our lady*, written c. 1400-

\(^{12}\) Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, 218. Voragine also mentions midwifery in the life of St.
Louis of Marseilles, who reassembled and raised from the dead an infant who, having
been dead in her mother’s womb, had been “by helpe and mysterye of mydwyvee was
had oute one pyece after another” (433).

\(^{13}\) Also called the *Infancy Gospel of James*.

\(^{14}\) Also called the *Infancy Gospel of Matthew*.

\(^{15}\) The N-town plays exist in an extant manuscript copy dated 1468.

\(^{16}\) The Chester plays originate in the late fourteenth-century, but are first mentioned in
writing in 1462. They exist in manuscripts dated c.1475-1500 and were performed until
1575.

\(^{17}\) *The lyf of our lady* was reprinted in 1531. Lydate was a priest and prolific poet of the
fifteenth-century whose work was patronized by the highest levels of English society,
including Henry V.
and John Mirk (The helpe and grace of almighty god, written c. 1380, published 1484). In all versions of the tale, two midwives occupy places of prominence as witnesses, not to Christ’s birth, but to Mary’s intact virginity. One midwife, alternately called Zelomye, Tebell (or Zebell), or Sephora, immediately proclaims the miracle of Mary’s virgin status, in some versions having been allowed either to visually or manually examine Mary. The second, Salome, is the nativity’s version of doubting Thomas who, demanding that she be allowed to examine Mary herself for proof, has her hand withered as punishment for her disbelief. An angel subsequently instructs Salome to touch the hem of the Christ’s garment, whereupon she is miraculously healed. Caroline Bicks interprets these recountings of Salome’s maiming as evidence of “an emerging interest in distinguishing between good and bad midwifery—a distinction that hinged upon the difference between licit and illicit pressings of the virgin body.”

These texts, however, present not one, but four different interpretations as to the specific cause of Salome’s punishment. The Chester cycle supports Bicks’ interpretation, with Salome reaching unbidden to touch Mary’s genitalia, after which she is immediately

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18 The helpe and grace of almighty god was reissued eleven times between 1486 and 1532; this text is also referred to under the title The festyvall, and editions under this name appeared in 1511, 1512, 1515, 1519, 1528, and 1532. Manuscript evidence places the date of composition for this text in the 1380s. Mirk himself was an Augustinian prior living in Shropshire in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries.

crippled. The text of the N-town plays, however, explicitly grants Salome the right to touch the Virgin, with Mary saying, “Yow for to putt clene out of dowt / towch with your hand and wele a-say / Wysely ransake and trye þe trewthe owth / Whethyr I be fowlyd or a clene may.”21

The texts written by canonical authorities are far more specific than the guild nativity plays, and far more explicitly condemnatory of Salome. Lydgate makes Salome’s pain the result not of her touching or examining of Mary, but rather of her lack of proper reverence for the Christ and his mother. “The childe to touche of presumpcion; / And his mothir, with-outen Reuerence, / Devoyded of drede or devocion, / Or eny faythefull, humble advertence, / Done as hir aughte to his magnyfycence.”22 John Mirk’s fourteenth-century works are perhaps the most enigmatical on the subject. In Mirk’s first version of the nativity, Salome “wolde not byleve” Mary’s virginity intact, “but anone


went to our lady and boustously handled our lady (Probare vellet) And she wolde preve it / and even ther with her hondes dryed up.”

But in his second version, Mirk added a new element to the nativity story, one that explains, quite rationally, Mary’s lack of need for midwives’ assistance during the birth itself. Mirk claims that, after Mary received the angelic visitation in which she learned of her pregnancy, she left to reside “with Elyzabeth her cosyn tyll the tyme that saynt Johan was borne / and was mydwyfe to Elyzabeth / & toke saynt Johan from the erthe / and there she lerned all that she neded for to knowe agaynst the tyme that our lorde sholde be borne / and was perfyte ynough therof / thenne mekely she toke her leve and went home agayne to Nazareth.”

Mirk seems both to be taking away the midwife’s authority—making Salome’s examination of the Virgin clearly invasive and blasphemous—and carefully preserving it, making the Virgin’s unaided delivery not the result of divine assistance, but rather of her own instruction in the human art of midwifery. Moreover, his choice of language regarding Salome’s touch, that it was done without “reverence” or “devotion,” makes her manual examination of the Virgin not an issue of a midwife’s right to touch or to determine

23 The helpe and grace of almighty god [The festyvall] (London: Richard Pinson, 1493), [F6r].

24 Lydgate, Life of Our Lady, 94. While it is unlikely that Lydgate devised this element of the nativity himself, I can find no other reference to it in earlier texts. Lydgate insists on the Virgin Mary’s knowledge of midwifery in two separate sections of Lyf of our Lady, “De annunciatione marie virginis” and “De festo sancti Johannis Baptist.” His relation of Christ’s nativity, however, is identical to that in Helpe and grace.
pregnancy, but rather a meta-issue of the touching the divine. We cannot ignore the first midwife in these tales, the believer whose examination—sometimes visual, sometimes manual—is considered reverent and appropriate. Also implicit in these tales is the (rather commonsensical) assumption that a midwife’s presence at the virgin birth would be necessary in order to ascertain Mary’s virginity and establish Christ’s nativity as a bona fide miracle, since presumably no man would be able to do so.

Salome’s behavior seems more to echo the Old Testament tales of the Hebrew priests entering the Holy of Holies and touching the Ark of the Covenant, wherein the priests’ rights to perform those actions were never in question, merely the degree or sincerity of their spiritual preparations for such actions as means to prevent profanation. In fact, any man’s presumption to make such an examination would have been an unqualified sacrilege. Thomas Heywood would make use of this natural assumption—that only a midwife could prove the virgin birth—as late as 1624 in his *Gynaikeion: or Nine Bookes of Various History Concerninge Women*. In Heywood’s text, the priests of the Temple call Mary to testify as to Jesus’ parentage; upon her statement that she was his mother and a virgin, the priests “appointed faithfull and trustie Midwives, with all diligence and care to make proofe whether Mary were a Virgin or no.” Thomas Heywood, *Gynaikeion: or, Nine bookes of various history. Concerninge women inscribed by ye names of ye nine Muses* (London: Adam Islip, 1624), 72. It would not be until the reformation took firm hold in England that the tale of Mary’s midwives would be consistently discredited in an attempt to purge the Church of England of Catholic vestiges; see, for example, John Bridges, *The supremacie of Christian princes over all*
These apocryphal nativities, combined with tales of divine midwifery and the Exodus, establish five important elements of the early modern conception of midwives. First, they demonstrate the prevalence of the popular belief in early modern England that midwives were necessary to the Christian world as saviors, as witnesses, as preservers, and even as functionaries in the divine plan. Second, they reinforce historians’ assertion that midwives had the explicit and singular right to touch the female genitalia for purposes not only of delivery in childbirth but also of witnessing to a woman’s sexual status. What these tales do not support, however, is the modern interpretation of the dangers of a midwife’s “bad touch.” This is not to say that such dangers were not recognized by early moderns; certainly the nativity stories in particular make that danger explicit. But it is a danger posed as much to the midwife as by her, and it underscores the fact that the early modern view of midwives and their profession was in no way one-dimensional or unqualified. Third, these tales establish the birthroom and the practice of midwifery as possible sites for miraculous occurrences. Fourth, they assert that the profession of midwifery is a “good” occupation, one requiring that the practitioner (in the words of Bartholomaeus Anglicus) help ease the mother’s “paine” and “sorrow,” and that she “helpeth & comforteth” the mother in her labors. Finally, these nativity stories may

persons throughout theor [sic] dominions, in all causes so wel ecclesiastical as temporall, (London: By Henry Bynneman, for Humfrey Toye, 1573), 417; and William Leigh’s The first step, towards heaven, (London: Nicholas Okes, for Arthur Johnson, 1609), 17-18.

27 Batman uppon Bartholome his booke (London: Thomas East, 1582), 74.
well have laid the foundation for the midwife’s right to examine women’s bodies and pronounce on their sexual status in early modern court cases, pronouncement often fraught with political, social, or economic importance, moving the midwife slowly, but inexorably, toward the realms of politics and state legislation.²⁸

**Part II: Integral to the State: The English Reformation and the Baptismal Debate**

With the exception of reprints of these Biblical and related tales, very few reference to midwives appear in English print sources until after the establishment of the Church of England. With that religious reformation, however, midwifery took on new religio-political significance, and the subject saw a commensurate rise in textual popularity. Midwives had long been recognized in England as state servants; the Statute of Essoins, enacted in 1318, for example, declared that no woman could excuse herself from a court appearance on grounds of *de servitio regis*, or public duty, “unless she [be a]

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²⁸ Caroline Bicks recounts one such “politically charged” example in *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare’s England*. The “Essex divorce case of 1613 underscored the potentially competitive and political figuration of the midwife’s touch. The Countess of Essex underwent a pelvic exam to determine the status of her virginity; if found to be intact, then she could gain her sought-after divorce from her husband on the grounds of his impotence and marry Robert Carr, Early of Somerset” (75-6).
Nurse, a Midwife, or [be] commanded by Writ *ad ventrem inspiciendum.*

The 1540s, however, saw the convergence of several political, religious, and legislative factors affecting midwifery not only as a practice, but as a subject for texts. No longer merely subjects of apocryphal tales and miracle plays, or medical practitioners recognized as performing public services, midwives moved to the forefront of English politics and religious doctrine as a result of the establishment of the Church of England. Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy (1534) constituted the beginning of prolonged religious upheaval in England as the new Church of England sought to establish a set of clear doctrines on the sacraments, including those in which midwives played a part, such as baptism and churching.

While evangelicalism flourished in England for a few years at 1534, by 1539 Henry VIII had reestablished Catholic doctrine (minus the Pope) as the standard of English worship under the Act of Six Articles. In those five intervening years, however, the sacrament of baptism had come under ecclesiastical scrutiny, and with it, the midwives who were occasionally called upon to perform it. Moreover, with England’s separation from the Catholic Church, midwives were enlisted by the “new” clergy to assist in rooting out any traditions in the birth room that might bear a “Catholic” connotation, turning English midwives into what Mary Fissell has termed “shock troops

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29 *The statutes at large, from the twenty-sixth year of the reign of King George the Third, to the Twenty-ninth year of the Reign of King George the Third, inclusive*, vol. 1 (London: Charles Eyre and Andrew Strahan; and William Woodfall and Andrew Strahan, 1786), 177.
of reform.”

Nicholas Shaxton, Bishop of Salisbury, demanded of midwives in 1538 that they

beware that they cause not the woman, being in travail, to make any foolish vow to go in pilgrimage to this image or that image after her deliverance, but only to call on God for her help. Nor to use any girdle, purses, measure of our Lady, or such other superstitious things to be occupied about the woman while she laboureth, to make her believe to have the better speed by it.

Baptism in particular stood not only as a religious sacrament whose grounds and practices were to be interrogated and amended, but also a site of cultural commonality. David Cressy, in his work Birth, Marriage, and Death, notes that

Ritual performance, in practice, revealed frictions and fractures that everyday local discourse attempted to hide or to heal [. . .]. These rites of passage gave cultural meaning to natural processes, and constructed a social and religious framework for biological events. These activities too drew contemporary criticism and comment. But only when something went wrong, or when the overarching social and religious framework was


31 Ibid., 28, citing Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation, ed. Walter Frere with the assistance of William Kennedy, ii, Alcuin Club Collections 15 (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 23.
under challenge (as it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), would rites of passage become sites of contention.  

By the time Thomas Raynalde published the first edition of his midwifery manual, the revised *The Byrth of Mankinde*, in 1545 (which would become the most popular text of that genre for more than a century), Henry VIII had instituted further legislation that would affect midwifery in England.

In 1542/3, Parliament and Henry VIII passed a statute, known as the “Quack’s Charter,” that allowed any person to administer an external cure, particularly those reliant on mystical invocations, without fear of prosecution, provided that the “physician” received no money as recompense. Historians such John R. Guy have traced the origins


33 “If any person or person . . . use devyse practise or exercyse . . . any invocacions or co[n]turacions of spirites witchcraftes enchauntmentes or sorceries, to the intent to get or fynde money or treasure, or to waste consume or destroye any person in his body members or goodes, or to provoke any person to unlauful love . . . [they] shal be demed accepted and adjudged a felon and felones.” *Anno tricesimo tertio Henrici octavi* (London: Thomas Bertheleti, 1542), [B6r]. The use of symbolic items, such as saints’ girdles, which had been common for women in labor were quickly becoming taboo in the light of the reformation of the English Church, annexed to both anti-Catholic and anti-occult language. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971), especially chapter 7, “Magical Healing.”
of midwifery licensing to this statute, in combination with the 1511 statute that “vested
the licensing of physicians and surgeons in the episcopate.” Taken in conjunction,
these statutes work both to consolidate medical authority under the Church and to
eliminate alternative, “superstitious” practices as a means of providing an income. As
Guy notes, however, the bishopric never received official power to license midwives
either by statute of Episcopal or state law, suggesting instead that the midwives’ power to
baptize infants made such an explicit statute unnecessary. Certainly the licensing of
midwives may well have been expedited by this combination of laws, but English writers
also imply a rising awareness on the part of the public of the need to regulate midwifery
practices in the light of Protestant reforms of the Church and English communities.

This concern for the regulation of midwifery, particularly in its ecclesiastical
elements, came to a head after Henry VIII’s death in 1547 and the ascension of the child-
king Edward VI, beginning a period in which religious precepts were again subject to
widespread reform and debate. By this time, the reaction against Catholic relics in the

34 John R. Guy, “The Episcopal licensing of Physicians, Surgeon, and Midwives,” in
as moche as the scyence and cunninge of Physyke and Surgerye . . . is dayly within this
Realme exercysed by a great multytude of ignoraut persones . . . no persone within the
Cytie of London norwithin vii Myles of the same take upon hym to exercys and occupye
as a Physicion or Surgyon except he be firste examyned approved & admytted by the
Bysshyp of London or by the Deane of Poules . . .” Anno regni Regis Henrici viii Tertio,
(London: Richard Pynson, 1513), C2[r].
birth room had become common enough for John Bale to reference it in the published account of Anne Askew’s torture and confession, saying that any who would torture Protestant reformers under the authority of the Church of England should “serch his owne howse wele. Paraventure he maye fynde aboute my ladye hys wyfe . . . an old midwyves blessyng,” presumably a Catholic hold-over. That same year, Andrew Boorde suggested as the remedy for “the precipitacion or fals lynge downe of the matryx” (a malady caused in part by the “evyil orderynge of a woman whan she is delivered”) that “every midwife shuld be presented with honest women of great gravitie to the Byshoppe, and that they shulde testify for her . . . Than the Byshoppe with counsell of a doctor of phisicke ought to examine her, and to instruct her . . . and were [done] in England there shulde nat be halfe so many women myscarry, nor so many children perished in every place in Engla
nde as there be.”


36 The Seconde Boke of the Breviary of Helthe, (London: William Middelton, 1547), E1[r]. This section has been oft quoted out of context as proof that the licensing of midwives was already a well-established practice; See Guy, “Episcopal licensing,” 537; Thomas R. Forbes, “The Regulation of English Midwives in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Medical History 8.3 (1964), 237. But Boorde’s suggestion, “The bysshoppes ought to loke on this matter [emphasis mine],” makes clear that this idea had either not yet been implemented, or that its implementation was highly sporadic.
suggests (his proposal reinforced by the text’s subsequent five editions), but the midwives’ oath devised by the Church evidences its primary concern with the midwives as Church functionaries, rather than as medical practitioners. Midwives’ primary charges included assuring that the mother named the father of her child, that the midwife herself did not participate in a *post facto* infanticide, and that she did not allow the perversion of the rite of baptism. Indeed, of the seventy-three references to midwives that I have found originating between 1547 and 1589, nearly a third of them are in terms of midwives’ participation in the church rite of baptism. These discussions of midwives’ authority to baptize infants become progressively polarized in that forty-two year period, moving from discussions of the proper way for midwives to perform the baptism according to Church doctrine to arguments exclusively for or against any woman’s right to baptize.

According to Church officials, midwives had an unequivocal right to perform baptisms in the absence of a priest. This authority was predicated upon the belief in the sacrament of baptism as necessary for an individual’s assumption into heaven upon death; should an infant be sickly or weak and no officiating priest be within call, the midwife could perform the baptism in order to ensure the infant’s salvation, should the

*The Breviary of helthe* (London: William Middleton, 1547), E1[r]. Boorde was an itinerant physician, author, and former cleric who worked as an informant for Thomas Cromwell from 1535-1537. He was incarcerated in Fleet Street prison shortly after the *Breviary’s* publication on charges of keeping three prostitutes in his rooms at Winchester. He died two years later, still in jail.

37 Reprinted 1552, 1557, 1575, 1587, and 1598.
child not long survive. Such a baptism did not have to be “re-performed” by a priest at a later date, should the child live; baptism by a midwife was as binding a sacrament as that by a male church official. This principle was a holdover from the Catholic Church, and with the accession of Edward VI, a virulent Protestant, such “Catholic” practices came under increasing fire from the most hard-line Protestant officials and members of the rising Puritan sect. Attacks on the midwife’s ability to perform infant baptisms would follow two basic lines in the following decades: first, that baptism of infants was itself a Catholic practice, the infant’s inability to understand salvation preventing the rite from having any efficacy; and second, that no women of any persuasion had a right to perform any sacrament. The latter position was particularly popular under radical Protestants like John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester and Worcester, whose ideology matched that of Zwingli; while in exile in Zürich, Hooper published An answer unto my lord of wynchesters booke intytled a detection of the devyls sophistrye (1547), in which he argued that any sacrament administered by a woman was both ineffective and heretical. Midwives in such arguments were not isolated for castigation; the retraction of their right to perform baptism had nothing to do with their professional identity, and even John Calvin attempted to assert the midwife’s continuing importance as church officiant whose

38 John Hooper, An answer unto my lord of wynchesters [sic] booke intytlyd a detection of the devyls sophistrye. wherwith he robbith the unlernd people of the trew byleft in the moost blessyd sacrament of the aulter made by Johann Hoper (Zurich: Augustyne Fries, 1547), [E3v].
presence was required at the infant’s baptism as witness.³⁹ But the position of the established Church in England remained the same, though the increasingly Protestant ethic served to somewhat diminish baptism itself, Archbishop Cranmer arguing, for example, that while “al these baptismes [by midwives] be good & alowed of god,” the act of baptism itself was not strictly necessary for salvation.⁴⁰

During the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor, the Catholic rite of baptism was reestablished in its full form and with it, midwives’ rights to perform it. In the last year of Mary I’s rule, Thomas Watson, Bishop of Lincoln and student of Bishop Stephen Gardiner, published *Holsome and catholyke doctryne concerninge the seven Sacramentes of Chrystes Church* (1558). In it, Watson reasserts the full importance of infant baptism and the midwife’s role in it:

> And because it oftent chaunceth that chyldren new borne be in daunger of death, and so be baptised of the Mydwyves or of other women at home: therefore I wyll shew unto you how they must doo when they wyll minister the sayd Sacrament of baptisme . . . yf there come a chaunce or daunger that [s]urely they think it wil not live til it be brought to the sole[m]nization of baptisme, than a laye man, or laye woman in that neede goyng about to baptise the chylde, muste unfeynedly

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³⁹ John Calvin, *A faythfull and moost godlye treatyse concernyng the most sacred Sacrament of the blessed body and bloude of our savioure Chryst*. (London: John Day and William Seres, 1548), F1[v].

intende to do therein that the Catholyke Church of Christ doth . . . let the person that shall christen the chylde, take water, as well water, sea water, or rayne water, or other common water . . . saying thus: John I baptise thee in the name of the father, and of the sonne, and of the holy ghost. Amen . . . yf the water be caste uppon the chyldes heade before the Christener begynneth to saye those woordes or els after that he hathe sayde the wordes, than the chylde is not christened. For the wordes wythoute the water is no Sacrament, nor canne doe no good, nor yet the water wythoute the woordes, and therefore they muste be joyned and go both together after the maner before sayde.41

Despite such clear associations with the Catholic Church, infant baptism remained a mainstay of Anglican doctrine after Elizabeth I’s ascension to the throne in 1558, codified in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England as established in 1563. The Articles, however, only stipulated that “the baptisme of young chyldren, is in any wyse to be retayned in the Churche, as most agreable with the institution of Christe.”42 The Articles made no mention of who possessed the authority to perform those baptisms, and the debate became so acceptable in theological circles that even John Northbrooke, a Puritan who sought to establish his own conformity to the Church of England via his tract *Spiritus est vicarius Christi in terra* (1571), felt confident asserting that “it is no more

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41 Thomas Watson, *Holsome and catholyke doctrine concerninge the seven Sacramentes of Chrystes Church*, (London: Robert Caly, 1558), [14v]-[15v].

42 Church of England, *Articles whereupon it was agreed . . . true religion* (London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1563), 18.
méete and lawfull for a Midwife to baptize children in tyme of necessitie, then it is for her to preache publikelikly, and minister the Euchariste openly.”

The Anglican Bishopric, however, sought to standardize the rite of infant baptism outside of the Thirty-Nine Articles, developing its own method of insuring midwives’ conformity through the administration of a midwives’ oath. The oath administered to Eleanor Pead in 1567 by the Archbishop of Canterbury read, in part, “Also, that in the ministration of the sacrament of baptism in the time of necessity I will use apt and the accustomed words of the same sacrament, that is to say, these words following, or the like in effect; ‘I christen thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,’ and none other profane words . . . and that I will certify the curate of the parish church of every such baptizing.”

Such concern for the sacrament of baptism was only partly motivated by the Church’s attempts to preclude the practice of witchcraft; considering the oath’s development during the latter half of the sixteenth-century, such concern is an element of the Church’s attempt to reorder itself and its rites in opposition to the Catholic Church, and to prevent the baptism of infants into that religion.

The belief that midwives should be properly trained in the Anglican form of baptism was predominant enough to be included in the first edition of John Foxe’s Actes and Monuments (1563), in which he includes “the articles set foorth by Cardinal Poole,

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43 *Spiritus est vicarius Christi in terra* (London: John Kingston for W. Williamson, 1571), 44.

to be enquired i[n] hys ordidnary [sic] visitacion, . . . [such as] whether they [the clergy]
be diligent in teachinge the midwifes how to christen children in time of necessitye.”

But by the 1570 edition, the tide was turning; Foxe includes in this second edition a
miraculous tale of the Virgin Mary serving as midwife to a woman in labor, a tale very
similar to Jacobus de Voragine’s tales from nearly a century before. But in Foxe’s story,
even the Virgin Mary herself (despite the historical anachronism) “durst not Baptise this
childe without a priest.” The argument over midwives’ right to baptize reached its
apogee soon after in the “Admonition to Parliament” debate of 1572. This pamphlet
debate was precipitated by the introduction in Parliament of a bill to reform the Book of
Common Prayer. In 1571, William Strickland’s bill would have eliminated many
ceremonial practices, including wedding rings, kneeling at communion, and private
baptism; the bill was defeated on the grounds that the alteration of ceremony was the sole
purview of the reigning sovereign. After the bill’s defeat, John Field, a radical
Presbyterian, published An admonition to the Parliament in early 1572, in which he
presented a divisive critique of Elizabeth and the English Church, calling for the
establishment of a Puritan practice that would eliminate what Field called “Popish
practices,” among them the performance of private baptisms, which would include those

45 Actes and monuments (London: John Day, 1563), 1571.

46 The first volume of the ecclesiasticall history contaynyng the actes and monuments,

47 Leo Frank Solt, Church and State in Early Modern England, 1509-1640 (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1990), 86.
performed by midwives.\textsuperscript{48} John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, was deputized to respond to the \textit{Admonition}, arguing vehemently, in part, for the preservation of private baptism and, indirectly, midwives’ position in the church as sacramental officiants.\textsuperscript{49}

This same issue reared up again briefly in the late 1580s in response to Anthony Cope’s introduction of a bill to repeal the Book of Common Prayer entirely and replace it with a new text conforming to presbyterian doctrine.\textsuperscript{50} But by this time, the Anglican Episcopate appears to have retracted its assertion that midwives could perform church rites, with John Bridges, Bishop of Oxford, asserting that “The administration of the sacramentes ought to be committed to none, but unto suche as are preachers of the woorde,” making baptism by midwives an explicitly “Papist” practice.\textsuperscript{51} The oath  

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{An admonition to the Parliament. To the godly readers, grace, and peace from God}, (Hemel Hempstead: J. Stroud, 1572), [A5v]-[A6r].

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{An answere to a certen libel intituled, An admonition to the Parliament} (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1572), esp. 93-110.


\textsuperscript{51} \textit{A defence of the government established in the Church of Englande for ecclesiasticall matters} (London: John Windet and T. Orwin for Thomas Chard, 1587), 586. Bridges did not, however, eliminate midwifery and the birth room as potential sites of miraculous events. In \textit{The supremacie of Christian princes}, Bridges relates the tale of a Spanish woman’s labor in which “the virgin Marie . . . came and was the midwife, and at the Christning the Godmother and Christ the Godfather . . .” (424). It was not, therefore, the
administered to the midwife Margaret Parrey by John Aylmer, Bishop of London, in 1588 makes no mention at all of infant baptism, the only significant change to the oath as established by 1567.\textsuperscript{52} And the Puritan author Job Throckmorton commendingly quotes Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester, as having said:

First as touching the baptisme by Midwives, I can assure you that the Church of England, or any that I knowe in place of gouerment therein, doth not maintaine either the baptisme of midwives as a thing tollerable in the Church, or else the condemnation of those children that depart this worlde unbaptized, but doth accounte them both eronius & not according to the word of God. \ldots But for soe much as baptizing by women, hath bin a sore time commonly used and nowe also of rashnesse by some is done, the booke only taketh order & provideth, that if the childe be baptized by the midwife rebaptizing be not admitted. For when it is done according to the forme of the questions set downe in the booke, if it shoulde be condemned as no baptisme, it would in th'opinion of many learned draw some error of doctrine.\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{53} \textit{M. Some laid open in his coulers} (La Rochelle: R. Waldegrave, 1589), 66-67.
But by the 1590s, debates over midwives’ participation in sacraments had fairly well resolved itself into arguments between conforming Anglicans, who approved the practice, and sectarians and separatists, who used baptism by midwives as an example of latent Catholicism in the Church of England.

Part III: Medical Knowledge, National Function: The Byrth of Mankinde

Considering this marked interest, both ecclesiastical and secular, in the practice of English midwifery, originating during the 1540s, it is unsurprising that texts concerning that profession should appear relatively simultaneously to the rise of that interest. For example, the radical separatist Henry Barrow, one of the founding members of the Brownist movement (along with Robert Browne and John Greenwood) spends a great deal of time detailing the ways in which midwives are allowed to baptize children, calling it “baptisme by supposition.” A brief discoverie of the false church, (Dorchester, 1590), 100-101. For Barrow, this is one further proof of the falsity of Anglican doctrine. For more information on religious debate over the sacrament of baptism in the early modern period, and particularly the debate over women’s participation in that rite, see Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, esp. 97-123.

Although obstetrical texts were not unknown in England, even in the vernacular, midwifery had never been a focus of interest before the mid-sixteenth century. The anonymous Trotula texts, which were widely circulated through the sixteenth century, contain almost no reference to midwives or their practice. Midwives are mentioned only twice in the Trotula, neither reference treating them in any detail. Notably, however, of
earliest obstetrical texts in vernacular English were translations of continental works, which themselves often relied on ancient classical sources for their medical information, and we may reasonably look to these early translations for the sources of English midwifery manual traditions. The first vernacular midwifery text in England was Richard Jonas’s translation of Eucharius Rösselin’s *Der Swangern frawen und he bammen roszungarten*, or *The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives*.56

The many directions given to aid in a difficult delivery, the one given directly to the midwife—that of repositioning the child—is the only one that involves touching the mother’s genitalia. *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine*, ed. Monica H. Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), esp. 80-82. The popular tract “The Sekenesse of Wymmen,” a translated section of the Latin *Compendium medicinae* (1240), never addresses either the women or the midwife directly. Monica H. Green, “Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts in Middle English,” in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 14 (1992): 53-88.

56 Eucharius Rösselin wrote and published *Roszengarten* in 1513. According to Wendy Arons, “It was, to judge from its publishing history, an immensely popular book. It was reprinted 14 times between 1513 and 1541 under the same title, and 10 times in an expanded edition between 1562 and 1680 under the title *Hebammenbüchlein (Midwives’ Booklet)*. In 1532, Rösselin’s son, also Eucharius, translated the book into Latin and published it under the title *De Partu Hominis*. From Latin it was further translated into Dutch (28 editions), French (first edition appearing in 1536), Spanish, Danish, Czech,
Immensely popular, Jonas’s 1540 translation and Thomas Raynalde’s reworked version of 1545 stand as the source vernacular texts of the English obstetrical tradition.\(^{57}\) Jonas’s translation, entitled *The Byrth of Mankynde*,\(^ {58}\) established the English practice of preserving the bulk of Continental and classical obstetrical content while significantly altering, or even omitting, the prefatory material that framed the text for its original intended audience.\(^ {59}\) The prefatory material, then, in particular marks this and later translations as “English.”\(^ {60}\) Specifically, Jonas’s rhetoric, his careful positioning of

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\(^{57}\) Raynalde’s version went through nine editions: 1545, 1552, 1560, 1565, 1585, 1598, 1613, 1626, and 1634.


\(^{59}\) In her study of eighteenth-century British midwifery manuals, Pam Lieske includes the works of Raynalde and later English authors “both to illustrate and remind readers that the study of British midwifery inherently means the study of works that have already incorporated, directly or indirectly, ideas, insights and, in some cases, material from authors from antiquity, the Middle Ages, [and] the Renaissance” (xv-xvi). “General Introduction,” in *Eighteenth-Century British Midwifery*, vol. 1, ed. Pam Lieske (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), xv-xvi.

\(^{60}\) Jonas faithfully translated and included the content of Rösselin’s *Roszengarten* as Books I and II of *The Byrth of Mankynde*, containing information on natural and
himself as author in respect to the midwife, and his attempts to ameliorate the negative attitude toward midwives evidenced by his Continental source become hallmarks of the English midwifery manual in translation. In pragmatic terms, a transliteration of Continental texts, including those undermining midwives’ authority, was simply impractical; midwives were still necessary witnesses in cases of divorce, virginity, rape, etc. This is not to say that Jonas’s text is unequivocally positive respecting midwives, both as women and as practitioners, but his rhetorical and ideological hedging, his emphasis on midwives’ authority and knowledge, was necessary in order to reinforce midwives as functionaries of the new Church. As such, midwives had become necessary to the maintenance of England itself, and these early manuals were, inevitably, bound up in the national/religious project of sixteenth-century England.

Jonas’s text exhibits nearly all of the hallmarks of what would become the English midwifery manual. He preserves the bulk of Roszengarten’s obstetrical content—discussions of a woman’s “ordering” during pregnancy, theories of conception, explicit descriptions of the childbirth process, and medicinal recipes—all of which would become commonplace in the later midwifery manuals of the seventeenth-century. Jonas omitted those prefatory elements that marked the text as “not English,” such as Rösselin’s grant of copyright and the dedication to the Duchess of Brunswick, for which he replaced his own address to the Queen, Catherine Howard. Jonas also eliminated the prefatory unnatural births, miscarriages, stillbirths, swaddling, nursing, and cures for children’s diseases. Jonas added to Rösselin’s content his own Book III, concerning theories of conception.
poem “Admonition to Pregnant Women and Midwives,” and Rösselin’s prologue and conclusion, substituting his own “Admonicion to the reader.” Because of this extensive cutting and reframing of the original text, we can reasonably consider this translation as a peculiarly “English” text. Indeed, Jonas’s language marks it as a nationalist project, claiming in his dedication to Queen Catherine his hope that the fruits of his “symple industrye and labor” will be for “the utilite wealth and profet of all Englysshe women accordynge to my utter and hartye desyre and entente.” And while the “reader” described in the “admonicion” is undoubtedly male, the focus of the text, both in terms of content, use, and effect is female. Jonas begs his male reader, for example, to beware the misuse of this obstetrical information to the detriment of England’s women, saying, “I require all suche men in the name of God, whiche at any tyme shall chaunse to have this boke, that they use it godlye, and onely to the profet of theyr neyghbours, utterly eshuynge all rebawde and unseemly communicacion of any thynge contained in the

61 Jonas, Byrth, [AB4r]. According to Mary Fissell, “Jonas’s use of ‘mother tongue’ points both to his awareness of the political and religious implications of publishing in the vernacular and his curious status as a man writing about women’s work” (Fissell, Vernacular Bodies, 30). Certainly, the act of translating into the vernacular must of necessity be “national,” asserting not only the primacy of one’s native language, as unique to one’s country, but the validity of that language in comparison with Latin or other foreign tongues, asserting it as equally worthy of print.
same, as they wyll answere before God.”

Such a concern for defending the subject matter of the midwifery text against the likely possibility of misuse is lifted straight from the Rösselin text and would remain a key ingredient of the English tradition.

Where Rösselin’s primary concern in his prefatory material was to demonstrate the inferior learning of midwives and the necessity of his text to improve their practices,

62 Jonas, *Byrth*, [AB1r]. We may find it surprising that Jonas, and subsequent midwifery manual authors, would address themselves primarily to a male audience, but the tradition of doing so stretches back well into the medieval period. In analyzing the *Trotula* and “The Sekenesse of Wymman,” Monica Green states that only one version of each of these gynecological texts addresses women directly, while “most of the other codices . . . suggest a specialized readership of surgeons and physicians . . . as well as other readers who perhaps approached the texts more out of scientific curiosity than out of medical concern for women’s health” (“Obstetrical,” 58-9). It is Green’s contention that “the evidence, both textual and codicological, suggests something like a tug-of-war between men and women for possession of these [gynecological] texts” (Ibid., 56).

63 Gail Kern Paster makes the argument, in discussing *The Byrth of Mandkinde*, that “Thanks to the textual reiterations of the immodesties of birth, however, this aura of protection [of mother, child, and process] becomes hard to distinguish from one of concealment and shame, from the isolation ordinarily granted to acts of bodily evacuation.” *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 189. I will revisit this issue again with the midwifery manuals of the Interregnum.
Jonas (while evincing a certain amount of concern for midwives’ education) is far more eloquent in defense of his translation of a sexually explicit text against charges of lewdness and inappropriateness and as an example of excellencies in vernacular English. In his prologue, he first defends his text against charges of lewdness concerning the subject matter, then places it in terms of the history of publication itself, of assisting pregnant women, and only finally describes it as a means to educate midwives, balancing between condemnation and respect for these professionals. The bulk of his address to the Queen is spent establishing the pedigree of obstetrical publication as another step in the “enrytching of our mother lang[u]age” and providing knowledge of “greate utilite and profet of all people,” linking his text to the publication both of theological and of other medical works, the translations of which gave

64 Mary E. Fissell notes that Jonas’s text parallels his personal reformist zeal, one that balanced between traditional and ultra-radical Continental tenets, particularly his preferment of vernacular English and his unwillingness to remove birth to the realm of male science. See Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, esp. 29-31.

65 Jonas admonished his readers not “at the commune tables and without any difference before all companyes rudelye and leudelye to talke of suche thynges . . . but only where it maye do good, magnifyeng the myghtye God of nature in all his workes.” *Byrth*, [AB1v].

66 Ibid., AB2[v]-[AB2r].
Englishmen “greate lyght and knowledge of such thynges in the which they have founde no smal conforte and profet.”

Perhaps Jonas’s greatest change to the original text lies not in his deletion of prefatory elements, nor his addition of theories of conception, but rather in his repositioning of women as ultimate authorities, or at least of ultimate concern, in all things obstetrical. Certainly Rösselin was at great pains to achieve the opposite, placing women in a state not merely of subservience to male learning but of self-condemnation, using the traditional Christian argument of original sin to claim women’s birth pain, and all malpresentations and miscarriages, as the result of their own actions. In his address to the Duchess of Brunswick, for example, Rösselin begins with his interpretation of Genesis 3 to the end of emphasizing the necessity of women’s “good behavior” as an exchange for the easement of pain. “The almighty eternal God punished our very first mother Eve for violating the commandment with the curse that she should bear her children in pain . . . and although this pain may not be completely abolished or hindered by any reason wisdom or art yet if pregnant women prepare and behave themselves properly before and during the birth and take precautions with wise learned women and midwives then such pain may be tempered and lessened.” As Mary Fissell has stated, “in the German version of the text, men were positioned as the most important players in

67 Ibid., [AB2r].

midwifery, while in the English version, female midwives became the key to successful childbirth. For example, Rösselin’s poetic “admonition” reads, in part,

Now often we’re so ill-prepared

For what God gives us with such care

That we destroy it totally…

I mean the midwives each and all

Who know so little of their call

That through neglect and oversight

They destroy children far and wide

And work such evil industry

That they take life while doing their duty

And earn from this a handsome fee…

And since no midwife that I’ve asked

Could tell me anything of her task

I’m left to my medical education…

Rösselin’s poetic vitriol is by no means limited to midwives, the pregnant women themselves being reminded that “one finds such evil women / Who give to death a cause and reason / That the fruit from life is driven / If God’s a God on heaven’s throne / They’ll reap from him what they have sown.”

69 Jonas, Byrth, 31.

70 Ibid., 34-5.

71 Ibid., 36.
make up the bulk of Rösselin’s prefatory material, which Mary Fissell has characterized as attempting to “transform midwifery into a male science.”\textsuperscript{72} By the time he reaches the preface proper, Rösselin appears to have forgotten the mother entirely, except so far as she is a vessel for children, claiming the ultimate goal of his book to be the preservation of her children. “Now when honorable modest women become pregnant their fruit might suffer much grief and suffering before during and after the delivery and various diseases and illnesses might befall them . . . Because of which at times the poor suffering babies are wronged and cut off short so that they are robbed of holy baptism and eternal joy[.]

Therefore . . . for the help and solace of poor suffering children and also for the love and service of honorable modest pregnant women this little handbook is published.”\textsuperscript{73}

It would not be difficult to interpret Jonas’s language as deeply derogatory toward women. In fact, Jennifer Hellward has made just such an argument, claiming that Jonas’ text (and Rösselin’s original) had the specific function of “undermining female birth communities and, consequently, important textual and social communities as well.”\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Fissell, \textit{Vernacular Bodies}, 30.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 38-9.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England} (New York: Routledge, 2002), 15. Hellward goes on to say that, “Texts like \textit{Rose Garden} and \textit{Byrth} were dedicated to aiding pregnant women and their midwives in the birth process, but these texts also created a current of suspicion. Clearly, on the one hand, Rösselin’s purpose is genuinely to support women and their midwives by supplying them with vital information. And yet the fervor with which Rösselin warns the pregnant woman about the
But Jonas, while certainly not shying away from negative remarks concerning midwives, has no intention of re-gendering the birth room, and so carefully mediates his castigation of bad midwives with praise for the good and insists upon the primacy of women, both midwives and their pregnant patients. Writing specifically of Rösselin’s text and his own translation of it, Jonas claims *Roszengarten* was written “for the singular utilite and profete that ensueth unto all such as rede it and moste spetiallye unto all women.”\(^{75}\) Indeed, Jonas does not appear to envision a reading audience made up primarily, or even largely, of midwives, asserting, “I have done my symple endevoure for the love of all womanhode . . . humbly desy[r]yng fyrst your graces hyghnes [Queen Catherine Howard] and then consequentelye all noble laydes and gentylwomen with other honeste matrones.”\(^{76}\)

For Jonas, midwives occupy only a small, if necessary, percentage of his reading audience, and only at the conclusion of his preface does Jonas address the issue of educating actual midwives. In doing so he is careful to avoid uniting all midwives under the rubric of “ignorance,” instead setting apart those who are responsible from those who are unskilled and for whom his text would be a boon. “As touchynge mydwyfes as there be many of them ryght expert diligét wyse circumspecte and tender aboute suche danger of ill-trained midwives, particularly in the prefatory poem . . . no doubt caused suspicion and anxiety among women reading the text” (Ibid., 16).

\(^{75}\) Jonas, 1540, [AB2r].

\(^{76}\) Ibid., AB3[r].
busynesses: so be there agayne manye mo full undyscreate unreasonable chorleshe.”
And while his text is absolutely necessary for the latter type of midwife, Jonas is careful to qualify the extent to which it might be useful for the former: “that it myght please all honeste & motherlye mydwyfes dylygently to reade and overse the same . . . [that] theyr understandyngle shall be muche cleared and have some what farther perceveraunce in . . . anye straunge or peryllous case.” His work is a source book for “unusual” cases, to be referenced by otherwise trained and responsible midwives, should such circumstances present themselves. Thus, Jonas does not usurp the position of the midwife in the performance of her regular and normal duties, but merely provides information on uncommon cases that she might not otherwise have the chance to study.

Thomas Raynalde’s reworked version of Jonas’s translation became the standard English form of the Rösselin/Jonas text, and remained relatively unchanged from its original 1545 printing to its final edition in 1654. And while Raynalde deleted Jonas’s preface in favor of his own, his sentiments and justifications for the text remain concurrent with Jonas’ version, including a defense against charges of lewdness, placing

77 Ibid., [AB3v].
78 Ibid., [AB4r].
79 Raynalde’s text went through no fewer than twelve editions in England: 1545, 1552, 1560, 1565, 1572, 1585, 1598, 1604, 1613, 1626, 1634, and 1654. For the most extensive, and useful, history of the text’s printing in England, see D’Arcy Power, The Birth of Mankind or The Woman’s Book: a Bibliographical Study (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1927).
his *Byrth of Mankynde* in a long line of educational works, touting it as a means to defend against the perils of pregnancy, and finally claiming as a means to educate midwives.\(^8^0\)

Raynalde spends a great deal more time addressing the issue of instructing midwives in their profession than did Jonas, but he still expends relatively little effort on the subject, the section on midwives comprising only four pages out of his thirty-five page preface. And Raynalde is very careful not to offend all midwives, even copying Jonas’s text in saying that “as there be many ryght expert, diligent, wyse, circuspecte, and tender . . . so be there agayne many mo[re] full undiscrete, unreasonable, chorlishe.”\(^8^1\)

\(^8^0\) By the time Raynalde’s published *The Byrth of Mankynde*, the English medical book trade was burgeoning. Between the printing of Jonas’s text and Raynalde’s version, Robert Copland had translated and printed Guy de Chauliac’s *The Questyonyary of Cyrurgens* (1542), and Bartholomew Traheron had done the same with Giovanni de Vigo’s *Practica in arte chirurgica copiosa* (trans. 1543; reprinted 1550, 1571, and 1586). And the same year Raynalde went to print with *The Byrth of Mankynde*, Andrew Boorde published *The Breviary of Helthe* (1547), the first original book on medicine written by an Englishman; *The Breviary* would be reprinted in 1552, 1557, 1575, 1587, and 1598. For more on important medical texts of sixteenth-century England, see F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), esp. 36-51.

\(^8^1\) Thomas Raynalde, *The Byrth of Mankynde, otherwyse named the Womans booke* (London: Thomas Raynalde, 1545), D[r].
Raynalde is more explicit than Jonas, however, in his attempts to distinguish good midwives from bad, imploring “let not the goud mydwives be offended with that that is spoken of the bad. For verely there is no science, but that it hath his Apes, Owles, Beeres, & Asses: which as above all other have moost neede of informatio[n] and teachyng.” Raynalde also introduces a new trope, that of the metonymic substitution of the midwifery manual for the living midwife, hoping that his “lytell booke” might “supply the roome and place of a goud mydwyfe.” Hellward would have it that, “By suggesting that midwives are incompetent, and by creating a fear in women that these same midwives tried to suppress this very ‘honest’ text, Raynald attenuates an already existing anxiety about the event of childbirth, thus making a ‘roome and place’ for the male presence and voice in an otherwise exclusive female location.”

But Raynalde clarifies later on that the book should serve primarily as a reminder rather than as an actual physical substitute: Let it be “red before the mydwife, and the rest of the wemen

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82 Ibid., D[r]-D[v]. That Raynalde considers midwifery to be a true “science” is evidenced by his addition of a new section on sexual anatomy, in which he seeks to render in language the experience of viewing an anatomical dissection “as thoughe ye were present at the cuttynge open or anathomye of a ded woman” (Ibid., B3[r]). That Raynalde found such an experience necessary for a midwife’s education, and appropriate for a female reader, is surprising to the modern eye, but the inclusion of detailed anatomical description and illustrations would become common in later manuals.

83 Reproductive Unconscious, 23.
then beyng present: Wherby oftymes the have ben put in remebraunce.” Raynalde may have ameliorated the effects of his trope through this clarification, asserting that the physical midwife was still necessary and that the book can not take the place of a midwife’s training or her presence, but this trope of “book as midwife” would remain a fixture in English midwifery texts for decades to come, and one which echoes the “tug-of-war” for men’s and women’s control of the birth space in texts since the medieval period. 

Raynalde’s commentary on midwives should be placed in the context of his other emendations to Jonas’s text, in which he overtly valorizes women, their bodies, and the miraculousness of their ability to create children. Raynalde’s intention is not to debase all of womankind, but rather to establish a hierarchy in which the midwife has a lower place as a professional. In contrast, throughout the text, Raynalde is categorically insistent that it is the mother who is of primary importance in conception, even referring to the menses, so often constructed in terms of impurity and disease, in positive terms as the source of fetal nourishment. His primary imagery, unlike that of his Continental contemporaries, is both feminine and positive, and as Fissell concludes of Raynalde’s The Byrth of Mankynde,

In its valorization of the miraculous qualities of women’s bodies (drawn from Mundino) it fits well with the late medieval popular religious

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84 Raynalde, Byrthe, C8[v]-D[r].

85 See Green, “Obstetrical.”

86 Fissell, Vernacular Bodies, esp. 31-35.
practices that made connection between Mary’s miraculous motherhood and ordinary women’s experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. In its refusal to adopt its German predecessor’s misogynist views of midwives—indeed, of all women—Raynalde’s text creates an alternative to some of the hardening of gender roles characteristic of the Continental Reformation.87

Raynalde even goes so far as to attempt the construction and delimitation of his readerly audience to women only, writing a “Prologue to the women readers,” to the exclusion of men.88 The only men active within the book are male physicians, and even then that activity is limited to the creation of the text rather than the reading or practice of its contents.89

The English midwifery manual, by the mid-sixteenth century, had a set of established contents, tropes, images, and forms from which future authors would continue

87 Ibid., 35.

88 According to Hellward, “the only evidence so far (at least) that a woman owned a copy of Byrth exists thanks to an inscription found in a 1626 edition: ‘1681, Mary Buxton owns this Book.’ There is as yet no concrete evidence of like nature that a woman owned a copy of either the Trotula or ‘Sekenesse’ manuscripts” (Reproductive Unconscious, 18).

89 Raynalde uses the plural pronoun “we” to refer to himself, Jonas, and Rösselin as a joint authorship (i.e. “In the second booke We shall declare”). Raynalde’s use of the personal pronoun “I” is limited to his work as translator and editor.
to draw, and which would be drastically altered by the end of the following century. The Jonas/Raynalde text included information on pregnancy (in terms of the mother’s self-government), female diseases, theories of conception, sexual anatomy, and various medicines, not to mention very explicit coverage of the birth process itself. It established the pattern of justifying the text’s publication in terms of “utility and profit” for women and contextualizing and validating its explicit material in terms of the need to correct other works’ faults.\textsuperscript{90} \textit{The Byrth of Mankynde} also sets the precedent for delineating audience—speaking directly to potential mothers (addressed as “you”), but also writing for the attendant female gossips (“women”), midwives (“she”), and male physicians and surgeons—and for dedicating the work to the female section of that audience. And while it is women who rule the birth chamber in Jonas/Raynalde, this text also establishes the split hierarchy of women’s and men’s respective areas of obstetrical knowledge and practice. As Edith Snook has noted concerning early modern printed texts, “Persistently infantilized, women, whatever their age, are said to be in need of guidance in their

\textsuperscript{90} The idea that this sort of obstetrical knowledge should not necessarily be common knowledge persists even in later texts written specifically for mothers; Jean Goeurot’s \textit{The boke of children} (1550) does not include much obstetrical information, Goeurot saying that “most of these thinges are very tr[u]e & manifest, some pertainyng only to the office of a midwyfe, other for the reverence of the matter not mete to be disclosed to every vyle person.” Jean Goeurot, \textit{The regiment of life . . . with the boke of children} (London: Edward Whitchurche, 1550), [S8r-S8v].
encounters with books, as in life.’ Later midwifery manuals would alter the gendered space of the birthing room significantly, rebalancing power between the male doctor and female practitioner. For example, the “unskilled midwife,” which had not yet become the “ultimate trope” in the sixteenth-century, would become increasingly important and less counter-balanced with acknowledgments of other midwives’ skill and experience. But the Jonas/Raynalde text would continue to provide a counterpoint to these changes in


92 The idea that midwives were necessarily “unskilled,” or that men were needed to instruct them, was not consistent even through the remainder of the sixteenth-century. A wide variety of medical authors demonstrate this difference of opinion, with authors like William Bullein and Philip Barrough implying a reliance on midwives’ skill and experience, and Johann Jacob Wecker explicitly calling them “unskilful.” Even individual medical authors cannot seem to make up their own minds, with Konrad Gesner calling midwives “skilfull” one moment and accusing them of harming women through “ygnoraunce” the next. William Bullein, *Bulleins bulwarke of defence against all sicknesses* (London: John Kingston, 1562), 47 and 53; Philip Barrough, *The methode of phisicke* (London: Thomas Vautroullier, 1583), 151 and 155; Johann Jacob Wecker, *A compendious chyrurgerie* (London: John Windet for John Harrison, 1585), 114; Konrad Gesner, *The newe jewel of health* (London: Henry Denham, 1576), 46 and 135.
textual power, being published continuously through 1634, keeping this model of gender and professional hierarchy alive and relevant well into the seventeenth-century.93

Part IV: Struggles with Authority: Midwives in Translations of Guillemeau and Rueff

93 It is worth noting that the few changes evident in the later edition of Raynalde’s texts, namely the inclusion of anatomical drawings, were a response to the growing interest in England in human dissections, which were sanctioned the same year that Jonas’s original version was published, with the first dissection taking place two years after the publication of Raynalde’s first edition. Beyond *The Byrth of Mankinde*’s final publication date of 1634, the evidence of library sale catalogues through the eighteenth-century is that this book remained a reference text for male physicians. Catalogues advertising the liquidation of private libraries make repeated reference to a variety of midwifery manuals, included Rueff’s *The Expert Midwife*. I have found reference to the text’s resale in 1707, 1710/1711, 1719/1720, 1740, 1752(?), 1761, and 1793/1794. Of these seven catalogues, four stem from the private libraries of male surgeons or physicians: Charles Bernard (“Serjeant Surgeon to Her Majesty,” 1710/1711), Dr. Humphrey Brook (“Fellow of the College of Physicians,” 1719/1720), Dr. Rathbone and Mr. A Geekie, Surgeon (1740), and Robert Nesbitt (“Fellow of the College of Physicians,” 1761).
Because the midwife was necessarily female, her involvement in issues of religion, nationalism,94 and professionalism were complicated by concurrent issues of gender and questions of epistemology. The tensions, both rhetorical and ideological, caused by these competing forces become increasingly evident in the English translator’s attempts to re-render Continental midwifery texts for a seventeenth-century English lay audience. The first half of the seventeenth-century saw the publication of only two new obstetrical texts in English, translations of Jacque Guillemeau’s *De l’hevrex accouchement des femmes* (1609; trans. 1612) and James Rueff’s *De Conceptu et Generatione Hominis* (1554; trans. 1637). In the Guillemeau, we have an example of a work not originally intended for an audience of women, not even midwives, that was renamed and reframed as a supposed midwifery manual, perhaps in order to capitalize on the success of Raynalde’s *Byrth of Mankynde*. But though it is not a midwifery manual, per se, Guillemeau’s text contributes much to the evolution of that genre, particularly in terms of the author’s rhetorical stance toward midwives.95 Because Guillemeau did not intend his original text to be used by midwives, the English translation, entitled *The


95 Guillemeau’s text remained pertinent at least through the early part of the seventeenth-century, reprinted in a second edition in 1635.
*Happy Deliverie of Women*, evidences extreme tension between the rhetoric of the original author regarding women and midwives and the superimposed rhetoric of his translator, who is at pains to make his text agreeable to a larger swath of readers, taking advantage of the pattern set by Raynalde’s text (which by 1612 had gone through at least eight separate editions).

Guillemeau’s introductory epistle and his English translator’s preface are at odds with each other, directly conflicting not only over the constitution of the text’s intended audience, but also over the position occupied not only by midwives, but by all women, in relation to the male physician and author. Guillemeau, while acknowledging the natural need for a midwife to oversee deliveries, turns quickly from that acknowledgment to an accusation of midwives’ alleged stubbornness and pride, which often lead to the death of child or mother. Speaking of the child, Guillemeau claims “if he be placed awry, or else be weake and faint, or else if the midwife be at the farthest of her skill; then if they will save the child, and so consequently the mother from death: they must call a Chirurgion to deliver her, and bring the child into the world: which (that I may touch it by the way without taxing any) is commonly done too late eyther through the wilfulnesse of the kinsfolks, or obstinacy of the midwife.”

Guillemeau’s child-victim, like the surgeon, is of course male, making the midwife’s “wilfulnesse” a gendered crime, woman against man, with the death or maiming of the mother subordinated to the safety of her son. Such a gendered accusation is unsurprising, however, considering the audience for which

96 Jacques Guillemeau, *Child-birth or, The happy deliverie of women* (London: A. Hatfield, 1612), ¶2[v].
Guillemeau composed his original treatise, namely other male surgeons, whom he addresses through gendered pronouns. These surgeons are in direct conflict with midwives when called into a birth room, and would consequently be invested in a rhetoric that not only asserted their supremacy, but that was also at pains to demean the midwife as far as possible.

The content of Guillemeau’s text bears out this assertion. In the very first chapter, when discussing signs by which a surgeon can determine a woman to be pregnant, he equates the midwife with the parents and child as mere sources of information to be interpreted by the surgeon.\textsuperscript{97} When Guillemeau turns to a discussion of the classical origins of midwives, he is careful to make that chapter’s first sentence highly dismissive of them before addressing them in any detail, saying, “Daily experience doth shew us, that many women are delivered without the helpe of the Mid-wife.”\textsuperscript{98} And while acknowledging that various classical authors have deemed midwives worthy of record, Guillemeau also notes that the origins of midwives’ \textit{faults} can be traced back to antiquity as well, citing Galen’s discussion of “errours committed by Midwives, when they receive the child; an evident testimonie that there were some such in the time of Hippocrat [sic] and Galen.”\textsuperscript{99} According to Guillemeau, the midwife’s errors usually have their sources

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 3. In fact, Guillemeau lists the midwife as last in this list: “The ancient and moderne writers have left some signes whereby we may foretell it [pregnancy], which are collected from the Husband, from the Wife, from the Child, and from the Midwife.”

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 82.
in her overweening pride, admonishing all such women to admit that “Nature surpasseth all; and in that she doth, is wiser then either Art, or the Midwife, whosoever shee bee.”

Concluding his description of the midwife’s person and office, Guillemeau reasserts her equation with all women, rather than her identity as a professional, instructing all women in the birth room to be as passive as possible, not doing “any thing rashly, but suffer[ing] nature to worke,” excepting of course those cases in which the male surgeon should be summoned.

The translator’s preface attempts to ameliorate somewhat the effects of Guillemeau’s caustic rhetoric and entice female readers to read and approve his work. As was established in The Byrth of Mankynde, the translator’s primary concern is the justification of the subject matter to his English audience, and he begins by acknowledging the accusation that his publishing of this sexual material may seem to cheapen the bodies, knowledge, and experience of women. “[I]f I have been offensive to Women, in prostituting and divulging that, which they would not have come to open light, and which beside cannot be exprest in such modest termes . . . I must (as well as I can) defend my selfe from these imputations, and shew my care to keep both learning and modestie illibate, and inviolable.” The translator’s defense is threefold: first, that this subject matter is already available in print, both in English in the original French, and so he is neither adding nor revealing anything not previously accessible; second, that the text

100 Ibid., 85.

101 Ibid., 86.

102 Ibid., ¶¶3[r].
is written “for the Chirurgions, & Midwives” whose employment requires their knowledge of such matters; and third, that it is for the benefit and safety of all women in that “they must be content to have their infirmities detected, if they will have helpe for them.” Perhaps unwittingly, the translator has contradicted Guillemeau by grouping midwives with male surgeons as professionals and in contrast to all other women, and has also elevated the status of the female reader as the most important arbiter of the text’s fitness for public consumption. Even so, the printer’s final decision as to the marketing of this text situates power, if not explicitly in male hands, then implicitly so, fully titling the book *The Happy Deliverie of Women. Wherein is set downe the Government of Women. In the time Of their breeding Child: Of their Travaile, both Naturall, and contrary to Nature: And of their lying in.* This title certainly does not grant power over the birth chamber to a specific male professional, nor does it eliminate the possibility that the midwife should wield that power, but it does demote the pregnant woman to the lowest place on the scale of power and control. She is to be governed, not to govern, to be ordered, not to order. As a whole, then, *The Happy Deliverie of Women*, despite the meager efforts of the translator, stands firmly on the side of male authority in matters obstetrical, though mildly self-contradictory as to what that authority entails. Were we to consider the Guillemeau text alone as the sole evidence of the evolution of the midwifery manual between 1545 and 1637 (when Rueff’s translation appears of *De Conceptu* appears), that evolution would seem to have taken a remarkable turn towards masculine power and away from female experience. But we must recall that, though no other new

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103 Ibid., [¶¶3v].
texts appeared during that ninety-two year period, Raynalde’s *Byrth of Manksynde* both pre-dates and post-dates the Guillemeau text. *The Happy Deliverie of Women* was published only once more (1635) after its original printing in 1612; in comparison, Raynalde’s work ran to its ninth, tenth, and eleventh editions within that same time. So, while the Guillemeau certainly served as an element in the development of the genre, it was at no point the primary or most popular text on the subject of midwifery. We also cannot consider Guillemeau’s, or his translator’s or printer’s, attitude toward women and female practitioners as representative of the entire medical community, much less the population of England as a whole. For example, when John Cotta published his treatise, *A Short Discoverie of the Unobserved Dangers of severall sorts of ignorant and unconsiderate Practisers of Physicke in England*, in 1612, the discussion of women is limited to one chapter out of fifteen, in which Cotta limits his attack to those women who attend sick persons as neighbors and friends, and who in their constant attendance on the sick-room “disswade physicke,” instead “preferring their owne private ointment, plaisters, ceareclothes, drinkes, potions, glysters, and diets, because by time and stome they are become familiarly knowne unto them.”\(^{104}\) Cotta’s vitriol is thus limited to women who prescribe and concoct medicine within their homes—that is, the “average”

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huswife whose home remedies interfere with physicians’ prescriptions—not any women who stand as actual medical practitioners.  


105 It is worth noting that Cotta, who devotes three chapters to practitioners of magic, and who himself defends the existence of witchcraft as a medical evil, never associates midwives with magic or superstition.  

106 During the early seventeenth-century, the progress in development of the midwifery manual was not limited by the paucity of new texts (no new manuals appearing in English between 1545 and 1612, and then again between 1612 and 1637). The production of numerous huswifery texts, from Gervase Markham’s *Countrey Contentments* (1615) to the anonymously authored *Ladies Cabinet Opened* (1639) helped to define the genre of the midwifery manual, and the midwife herself, by their lack of information on birthing. These huswifery texts, like the midwifery manuals, addressed themselves to the same female audience, but their definition of “physick and chirurgery” does not encompass knowledge necessary even to function as an informed gossip, much less as a midwife, instead limiting themselves to series of medicines, distillations, potions, and lotions becoming so popular across England. These texts continued to set the midwifery manual and the practitioners of its contents apart from the average woman and her learning. Moreover, these texts continued the process of “nationalizing” the household and the woman’s place in it, a process hinted at in Jonas’s and Raynalde’s prologues to *The Byrth of Mankynde*. Markham’s publisher even chose to advertise
not, therefore, look to the obstetrical content of *The Expert Midwife* for signs of changing gender structures in the seventeenth-century, and midwives’ places in those structures, but to the elements of the text created by Rueff’s English translator. This anonymous translator introduced new innovations to the midwifery genre and its construction of the character of the midwife through the choice of title, construction of audience, and reorientation of the “unskilled midwife” trope in the context of valorization of male science within the space of the preface. In six books, Rueff’s original text covers the theory of conception, female anatomy, childbirth and its attendant maladies and their remedies, unnatural births, causes of infertility, and as well as cures for a wide variety of female illnesses, and this breadth of coverage is representative of Continental midwifery manuals throughout the sixteenth-century. But Rueff did not intend his original text to serve only the needs of midwives. His original 1554 edition, which became known as *The Expert Midwife* in England, was titled *De Conceptu et Generatione Hominis*, or *Concerning Human Conception and Generation*. Clearly, despite its English title, Rueff’s book was intended for a far wider range of reader than the midwiving

*Counrty Contentments* under this nationalist rubric; the title page describes the second book, *The English Huswife*, as “A worke very profitable and necessary for the generall good of this kingdome.” This politicization of the household and of women’s functions would come to fruition in the midwifery manuals of the Interregnum.

107 Rueff was a surgeon, practicing in Zurich during the mid-sixteenth century.
As historians have shown, midwives had little or nothing to do with the treatment of post-partum illnesses or infertility, and theories of conception would have had little practical use. Why, then, would the anonymous English translator (or his printer) have chosen a title that references only a small section of the intended audience, and that has direct application for only a fraction of the book’s contents? Here we encounter a new trope in the realm of English midwifery manuals: a rhetorical conflation of “midwife” connotations, one that many English authors would make use of throughout the later seventeenth-century. While the author’s intended audience included midwives, whom he directly addresses throughout the body of the text, the English translator may well have utilized the term more for its associations with procreation in all its stages, sexual anatomy, and the body in general in terms of disease and healing. Rueff’s translator makes it clear in his opening address that the inclusion of the term “midwife” on the title page does not limit the audience to licensed practitioners, dedicating the book

108 We cannot ignore the irony that, although Rueff included midwives in his explicit audience, his original edition was printed in Latin, making it practically useless to the vernacular midwiving community.

109 Yaarah Bar-On notes, “Midwives and surgeons did not have an absolute authority during the healing process, and were not even always the most important factor in it.” Bar-On, “Neighbours and Gossip in Early Modern Gynaecology,” in Cultural Approaches to the History of Medicine: Mediating Medicine in Early Modern and Modern Europe, ed. Cornelie Usborne and Willem De Blécourt, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 36.
to both the women of the birth room and to young, male medical practitioners. The translator’s desire to extend his audience to all women seems indicative of his more general reorientation of Rueff’s text toward a more female-friendly paradigm. Rueff’s original text was concerned with reducing woman’s role in conception while increasing that of the man, demystifying the process of childbirth, and depicting women’s bodies as dangerous and unstable by concentrating on monstrous births and the potential for disruption posed by the womb. But even in Rueff, this desire to emphasize the dangers of femininity, which we might term misogyny, does not extend to the midwife herself. Instead, the midwife becomes the regulator of female instability, Rueff commanding her to “exhort [the laboring mother] to obey her Precepts and admonition [and] give good exhortations to other women being present, especially to pour forth devout prayers to God, afterward to doe their duties at once, as well as they are able.” Rueff gives the midwife unequivocal control over the birth chamber and all of its inhabitants, regardless of class, linking her ability to control and manipulate the birth itself (as in his detailed descriptions of malpresentations and their cures) to her right to control and manipulate the disruptive and disorderly women around her.

The translator of The Expert Midwife is at great pains to create another hierarchy, this time gendered, wherein women’s authority, though circumscribed, is maintained in opposition to that of male physicians. Whereas Rueff’s text itself places the midwife in control of all women, the translator’s preface places women in the place of primary

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110 Jacob Rueff, The Expert Midwife (London: E. Griffin for S. Burton, 1637), A2[r].

111 Ibid., 78.
importance over men. The translator first addresses “all grave and modest Matrons, especially to such as have to doe with women in that great danger of childe-birth” and last to a limited number of “young practitioners in Physick and Chirurgery,” namely only those few “whome these matters may concerne.” This translation differs markedly from the pattern established by Raynalde’s *Byrth of Mankynde* by grouping midwives with other professionals—male surgeons and physicians—rather than other women. Such a dedication to both a professional male and professional female audience would, again, become fairly standard in later midwifery texts, as would the trope of the “unskilled midwife,” of which Rueff’s translator makes qualified use. According to him, the “unskilfulnesse and want of knowledge in the midwife…doth questionlesse oftentimes indanger the lives” of both mother and child. Such a statement certainly seems to place the midwife in a subordinate position to the author/translator/physician, but this subordination is tempered by the rhetorical placement of the trope. This anonymous translator, presumably male, makes the “unskilled midwife,” and thus the dangers she causes, the result of the actions of men, particularly those who would forbid any knowledge of anatomy and learned medicine to “grave and modest matrons…[who] may bee assistant and helpefull unto the midwife…and whose paines & labours also are of an

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112 Ibid., A2[r]. The translator clarifies that this phrase—“grave and honest Matrons”—refers to midwives, rather than female gossips and mothers, with the later appositive “grave and modest women (with us termed Midwives)” ([A2v]).
absolute necessity, in the mid-wives absence.”¹¹³ The translator similarly situates female experience (generally the means of sexual education most accessible to women) in the context of male academic knowledge, noting that, of the three modes of learning—
“books penned by skilful Physitians & Chirurgeons,” personal instruction through “conference with the learned and skilful,” and “practicall & longe experience”—experience is both “the surest mistresse, yet is it the dearest, and hath cost the lives of many,” lives that presumably could have been saved had midwives and other attendant women had access to anatomical treatises.¹¹⁴ Thus, the translator has again carefully positioned women, and particularly midwives, as inferior to men in their knowledge, but simultaneously made that inferiority the result of male action in denying a necessary mode of education, rather than the midwife’s “natural” position.

It is also the translator’s choice to give midwives greater control over difficult births than modern scholars would expect, as he retains Rueff’s instructions and illustrations regarding the use of the speculum, apertorium (or cervical dilator), rostrum anatis (the “ducks-bill,” or toothed forceps used for extracting a dead child), and smooth forceps. In later midwifery texts, such instruments would not only be omitted, but the midwife would be admonished that the conclusion of a difficult labor requiring the use of

¹¹³ Ibid., [A3v]. Bar-On also claims, “At moments of crisis, these ‘observer-participants’ became more active. They gave advice, cited examples, told stories, and sometimes even worked shoulder to shoulder with the official healers” (Bar-On, “Neighbours and Gossip,” 43).

¹¹⁴ Rueff, Expert Midwife, A3[r].
such instruments should be left in the hands of the male surgeon; in contrast, Rueff’s translator is at pains not to do so, reiterating the midwife’s gender as he describes, in detail, the use of gynecological instruments.

Therefore with [the ducks-bill], let her take hold of the dead child, and let her draw him out with her right hand, having taken hold of him, but with her left hand let her drive forward both the ports...you may adde to this instrument, the [forceps], the which let her use so convenient, that if it be possible, she may easily pull out that which is to be drawne forth [emphasis mine].

It is in such detailed obstetrical description that we see not only the translator’s intent regarding the midwife’s role in birthing, but his intention regarding the audience for his book. This is not leisure reading for accomplished ladies, as some midwifery manuals would later become, but rather it is an exact guidebook for the physical practice of obstetrics. Such detail obviously has the potential for misuse, but it is not midwives and other women whom the translator fears, but rather the “young and raw heads, Idle serving-men, prophane fiddler, scoffer, jesters, [and] rogues” whom he addresses at the conclusion of his preface, proclaiming “I neither meant it to you, neither is it fit for

115 Ibid., 108. The presence of the second-person address, “you,” certainly opens up the possibility that the translator imagines himself to be addressing a male surgeon, who might supervise the dead child’s extraction, but even so, it is explicitly the female midwife who is to perform the procedure, regardless of the presence or absence of a male overseer.
you.”116 The translator is quite specific in limiting his male audience to physicians and surgeons, presumably since no other man had a “right” to be in the birthing chamber, but he sets no such limits on his female readership; if anything, he seems to anticipate a far larger audience of women than of men. The translator has therefore positioned the general male audience as outside the purview of obstetrics, with the exceptions of physicians and surgeons, and rhetorically subordinated even those professional men to the female midwife, to whom the physical responsibility of birth devolves, and to the women who surround and support her. Thus, though *The Expert Midwife* is a male-authored, and likely male-translated, text, and though the translator is careful not to grant supreme theoretical knowledge to women, this early seventeenth-century manual sets a standard for female authority in the area of birthing. As we will see later, however, this standard did not go unchallenged, nor did all of the rhetorical weapons used in *The Expert Midwife*, such as the “unskilled midwife” and the secretive male academic, stay aimed at the male, rather than the female, reader and practitioner.

One final innovation in the midwifery manual established by *The Expert Midwife* is the inclusion of nationalist rhetoric within the title page—an appeal to a vernacular public—and thus the explicit orientation of the birth room as a political space. This association is not the result of Rueff’s text, or of the translator’s reinterpretation of it, but rather of the printer’s choice in how to market his text to the seventeenth-century reader. On the title page, the printer follows the established tradition of justifying the publication of sexually explicit material in the vernacular. In describing the text’s provenance and

116 Ibid., A5[r].
evolution, the printer claims *The Expert Midwife* to have been “Compiled in Latine by the industry of *James Rueff*, a learned and expert Chirurgion: and now translated into English *for the generall good and benefit of this Nation* [emphasis mine].” Jonas had, of course, linked his text, and through it the birth room, to nationalist causes with his dedication to the Queen and his address to specifically English women, but *The Expert Midwife* is the first time that the author of a midwifery manual uses nationalism a means to market the text to the reading public. It would by no means, however, be the last, and the reverberations of this linkage in midwifery manuals would last throughout the remainder of this tumultuous century.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen, the midwifery manual genre, as originally constituted in England, was in many ways remarkably different from the manual as would be established by Culpeper and other late seventeenth-century authors. While the political element of midwifery, and of texts concerning its practice, was always characteristic of the genre, the condescending attitudes towards midwives evident in the original Continental versions were much ameliorated and balanced by their English translators. These Englishmen made midwives actively involved in the creation of a new “nationalist” birth room, and in doing so made those women necessary functionaries in the creation of “true Englishmen,” a political power markedly absent in many later midwifery texts. Moreover, the textual midwife of these early works was not the one-dimensional figure depicted in manuals of the late seventeenth-century, her failings given
no more emphasis than her virtues, and her power over the birthing process reinforced
and valorized as a first line of defense against Catholic infiltration. The midwife’s position
was not unassailable, the rhetoric surrounding her not wholly positive, but the balance
consistently remained on the side of her value as a required presence in national,
religious, and medical establishments. The continuation of such a position in early-
seventeenth century midwifery manuals, despite the negative and comic figures we will
soon encounter in Jacobean and Caroline drama, implies that popular opinion, and
popular instruction via the printed texts, still held the profession of midwifery in higher
regard than we might expect.
CHAPTER TWO

Midwives on the Jacobean Stage: 1590-1613

The child is born from mothers lappe,
the midwife stout,
Doeth wash and rubbe with salt, and wrappe
in swadling clout.
Shee bindth the partes, doeth cut the string,
at fire he is helde
Lyin gin lappe, to doe every thing
she thus doeth yeelde.
In labour thus and travaile great
the mother is wore,
The poore and they of princely seate
are all thus borne.

- Andrew Willet, “Emblema 40”

As we have seen in the midwifery manuals of Jonas, Raynalde, Guillemeau, and Rueff, as well as the multiple texts referencing midwives’ performance of baptism, the textual midwife of sixteenth-century England was most often a figure of authority, of respect, and of power, a woman whose professional life transcended the privacy of the birthroom and made her an actor in the larger political and religious dramas playing out during the Reformation. Why then have literary critics found it so difficult to locate such a figure in Renaissance and seventeenth-century literary texts? The answer may lie not in ideology, but in methodology—in the tendency for scholars of any discipline to limit

117 Sacrorum emblematum centuria na quae tam ad exemplum aptè expressa sunt, & ad aspectum pulchrè depingi possunt, quam quae aut à veteribus accepta, aut inventa ab alijs hactenus extant (Cambridge: John Legate, [1592?]), F2[r].
themselves to texts within their own genres and primary fields of research. For, if we examine only the dramatic texts published in England between 1590 and 1642, the composite image of the midwife formed by that genre fits all too well with our modern preconception of what an early modern midwife should be. In these dramatic references we find bawds and drunks, baby-swappers and buffoons, and it is no wonder, therefore, that literary and historical scholars have been at loggerheads over the issue of midwifery. Given the literary evidence, historians’ assertions of the midwife’s social position and authority are quite difficult to believe, or even to find applicable to dramatic texts. It is only through an intense historicization of these English dramatic midwives within the largest possible context of literary and non-literary references that we can locate and understand the ways in which they diverge from more common social expectations.

118 I have chosen to end this period of investigation in 1642 both because the closing of the theatres provides a reasonable cap, considering my focus on drama, and because Interregnum texts differ vastly in their midwifery references compared to earlier texts and so must be investigated under different auspices.

119 This project has been made possible only through recent innovations in technology, such as the Early English Books Online (EEBO) and English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) databases, which allow for title, and sometimes even full-text, searches within early modern works. By combining the results of these searches with the more traditional literary research done by previous scholars, I have been able to compile a list of more than 400 discreet uses of the term “midwife” (excluding complex or developed usages as
The focus on drama is particularly apt considering that, between 1590 and 1642, plays contain more than one-third of all new midwifery references in printed texts. Also, this period saw a massive increase in midwifery references in what we might term “literary texts”—verse, narratives, and dramas—and dramas contain more than half of those literary usages. Finally, the period saw the emergence of the most popular and long-lasting usage of the term “midwife,” as a trope meaning “to bring forth” or “to deliver,” and this trope not only originates in drama, but is used most often in that genre, more than half of the occurrences between 1590 and 1642 being made in plays.

But because midwifery does not constitute a full-fledged discourse within any of these dramatic or non-dramatic pieces—the word “midwife” being used most often as a trope or simile rather than as metaphor or character—we must look at the sum total of these brief references, not simply to a single drama or even small group of dramas, to establish any sense of the midwife’s dramatic function. This breadth of inquiry will allow a series of reevaluations, not only of midwives as tropes and characters, but of Jacobean boy companies and attendant issues of gender performance, of issues of class and the theatre, and of Caroline city comedies and representations of the professions onstage. Two periods, the years between 1604 and 1613, and 1631 and 1642, have a high concentration of midwifery references in English drama and evidence a generic trend in

found in midwifery manuals or dramas featuring midwives as characters), a collection of references which, if not exhaustive, represents a wide enough field of references to reveal several surprising trends in the textual usage of “midwife” between 1590 and 1642.
the usage of “midwife,” specifically its prevalence in comedy. Any investigation into midwives in seventeenth-century drama, then, must consider a series of questions raised by this generic predominance in conjunction with the usual percentage of negative midwifery connotations in drama, as compared to non-dramatic references. Is this consistently negative usage ironic, as its prevalence in 1630s satiric dramas might imply? Is it defensive, a response to the perceived “threat” posed by the midwife, as posited by Caroline Bicks and Mary Fissell? Is this negative usage consistent across time, performance company, author, and/or audience class? The following two chapters will attempt to answer these questions by forming a broad context for dramatic midwifery between 1590 and 1642. This chapter focuses on texts published or performed through the first period of high concentration of midwifery references (1590-1613), including an argument for the midwife’s comedic sources in the dramas of Terence, elements of which are picked up by early Renaissance dramatists like Shakespeare in their creation of the midwife as comedic trope. I then focus on the first English drama that features a midwife character, Edward Sharpham’s *Cupid’s Whirligig* (perf. 1607), followed by other literary texts, both dramatic and poetic, that were influenced by Sharpham’s innovations. The subsequent chapter focuses on the second period (1614-1642), specifically on three dramas of the 1630s that feature midwives as speaking characters: Peter Hausted’s *The Rivall Friends* (perf. 1632), Ben Jonson’s *The Magnetick Lady* (perf. 1632), and Richard

120 The closing of the theatres during the Interregnum effectively broke the pattern of evolution for the dramatic midwife, as I have found no further dramatic references to midwives published until well after the Restoration.
Brome’s *The Love-Sick Court* (perf. 1639). Each of these midwife characters provides an opportunity to reevaluate an important aspect of early modern drama: depictions of early modern professions and gender in city comedies, the increasing gap between positive and negative references to midwives, and the ways in which audience class affects the dramatist’s use of rhetoric and gender.

**Part I: Midwives’ Status in Late-Sixteenth and Early-Seventeenth Century Texts**

Before discussing dramatic midwives of the seventeenth century, it is worthwhile to examine references to midwives made in passing during the 1590s and early 1600s, to see whether the respectable midwife of the late-sixteenth century remained a viable model for dramatists of the new century. Despite the decline in their ecclesiastical authority during the 1580s, midwives suffered little overall change in social position. Margaret Pelling claims that we, as modern observers, must correct the impression, dating back to the pioneering work of Alice Clark, that seventeenth-century women were paid to provide care outside the home only if they lacked all respectability—as if caring services were on a par with sexual services, and care offered outside the family was by definition a form of prostitution . . . Female medical practitioners appear to have been tolerated as economic actors in much the same way as were women involved in the food and drink trades. In both sectors, women’s
experience and the respect accorded them varied very widely according to the nature of their employment, their status and their level of prosperity.¹²¹ Midwives’ professional status remained distinct from physicians and apothecaries, and though evaluated separately from these male practitioners, their function was not subsumed under the authority of either.¹²² Even the Royal College of Physicians tended to leave midwives to their own devices, with midwives comprising only four out of 110 prosecuted “female irregulars” over a ninety-year period.¹²³ More common was the condemnation of midwifery as practiced by men as being corrupt and perverse, both in literary texts and in real life. Sir John Davies satiric epigram “In philonem 38” reviles his male character, “Philo,” by making him “the lawyer and the fortune teller, / The schoolemaister, the midwifer & the bawde, / The conjurer, the buyer and the seller...[who] doth practise Phisicke, & his credite growes.”¹²⁴ This Philo is a

¹²² Dekker used the distinction to humorous ends in The Roaring Girl, having Mistress Gallipot respond mockingly to her husband that “y’are best turne Midwife, or Physition: y’are a Poticary already.” Thomas Dekker, The roaring girle. Or Moll Cut-Purse (London: [Nicholas Okes] for Thomas Archer, 1611), F2[r].
¹²⁴ Epigrammes and elegies by I.D. and C.M. (Middleborough, 1599), [C4v].
mountebank, a trickster, a shyster, whose inappropriate, limited, and misused knowledge of a variety of professions stands to condemn him. Negative references such as this serve only to reflect positively on “proper,” female midwives whose talents and responsibilities are degraded by uneducated practitioners.

Midwifery was by no means considered commensurate with an aristocratic woman’s lifestyle, but it was certainly a profession that signified respectability. In 2 Henry VI, for example, William Shakespeare claims of the pretender Cade that his mother was a midwife and his father an “honest man and a good bricklayer” as a means to contrast the character’s perfectly reasonable social origins with his ridiculous aristocratic pretensions. Moreover, midwifery was a profession that denoted identity, not only for the female practitioner, but often for her male relatives, a striking inversion of the usual identification of women with their male relatives. The apothecary John Clarke, in his text proclaiming his unique ability to cure “tertians,” a form of ague, cites among his reputable witnesses “Mistris Norman the midwife dwellin in Bow-lane,” who was herself cured, and “Jeffrey Norman the midwifes son,” who was cured on two separate occasions.

125 Shakespeare, 265. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Shakespeare’s works pertain to The Norton Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997).

126 The trumpet of Apollo sounding out the sweete blast of recoverie, in divers dangerous and desperate diseases (London: P. Short, 1602), [B8v] and C1[r]-[C1v].
The consistently positive references to ancient midwives reinforced midwifery’s distinction as a worthy profession with a significant history of its own. Many works reference the fact, for example, that Socrates’s mother was a midwife, often drawing a connection between Socrates’s understanding of the need for patience and his ability to create wisdom in another’s mind with lessons learned from his mother and her experiences in the birth room. In more traditionally literary works, invocation of goddesses of midwifery was extremely popular, and (via association with classical mythology) again helped to establish midwives as occupying a long-standing and vital social position. In addition, some of the more entertaining religious tales of the time


mixed together the Christian and classical midwifery traditions, as in Richard Johnson’s
*The most famous history of the seaven champions of Christendome* (1596) in which Saint
George’s birth is presided over by Lucina and Proserpine at the request of his laboring
mother.\(^{129}\) The popularity of references to Biblical midwives, including the publication
of the King James Bible itself in 1611, also kept the midwife-as-Christian-actor
association alive and well,\(^ {130}\) and even those texts newly invested in asserting that the

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\(^{129}\) Richard Johnson, *The most famous history of the seaven champions of Christendome*

\(^{130}\) William Barlow, *An answer to a Catholicke English-man* (London: Thomas Haveland
for Mathew Law, 1609), 146; Thomas Bell, *The suvrey of popery* (London: Valentine
Virgin Mary labored of Jesus without the aid of a midwife were simultaneously concerned with asserting that such an absence was not meant to lessen midwives’ position of prestige. Robert Chambers, a Roman Catholic priest in exile, claimed in his work, *Palestina* (1600), that “companie being admitted unto her [Mary’s] labour, the midwife at the least (if not all the rest) would have beene privie unto this misterie, which was as yet to be kept most secret. For the virgins labour was not such as other womens labour are.”\(^{131}\) The midwife’s religious and social duties preclude secrecy on the state of the woman’s body and the parentage of the infant, and therefore the presence of a midwife would have upset the timeline of Christ’s life and revelation as Godhead. Such apologies for the nativity correspond with an increasing literature in which the absence of an officiating midwife stands as one of the more visible signs of a disorderly, possible criminal birth; the midwife’s very presence in the birth room conveys respectability and legality, her absence bringing the parents’, and child’s, virtue into question.\(^ {132}\) Midwifery also stands as a site against which to judge the validity of other cultures, as authors use

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*\(^{131}\) (London: J. Windet, 1600), 92.*

*\(^{132}\) For literary examples, see Francis Rous, *Thule, or vertues historie* (London: Felix Kington for Humfrey Lownes,1598), [M3v] and the *Historie de donne famose* (London: [Edward Allde] for Edward White, 1599), [D3v].*
tales of other people’s birth practices as a means to distinguish the “otherness” of “barbarians.”

None of this is to claim that midwifery went entirely without negative commentary, but most negative references are concentrated in the works of individual authors, rather than being widespread across English publications. Translations of classical and continental authors reiterated the concern, for example, that midwives could violate a maid’s virginity, while the contemporary author Peter Lowe, whose practice as surgeon made him naturally invested in establishing the superiority of his profession by the denigration of another, routinely blamed ignorant and unskillful midwives for a variety of ailments plaguing women. On the whole, however, established midwifery


135 Lowe relates a tale of the spread of the Spanish sickness—for which he claimed to have a cure—which he blamed on an infected midwife who passed the disease on to mothers and children. *An easie, certain, and perfect method, to cure and prevent the Spanish sicknes* (London: James Roberts, 1596). He also claimed in *The whole course of chirurgerie* (1597) that the “unskillfulnes [sic]” midwives could be responsible for
references—those made common before the 1590s and continuing into the seventeenth century—are quite positive.

Part II: New developments: witnesses, tropes, and comediennes

From 1547 to 1589, references to midwives and midwifery were overwhelmingly focused on the realities of a professional practice—medical treatises, discussions of baptismal rites, etc.—while the usages of “midwife” as trope or as dramatic character were significantly less prominent. During the 1590s, however, these balances began to shift. Turning from references to midwives’ strictly medical practice, authors of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries began to focus on new areas: using midwives as tropes, and as sites of humor or comedy, and extending some of the more traditional functions (particularly that of witness) into the genre of drama, using midwives to spur dramatic plot development.

Dramatic usage of the witness-midwife, in all its variations, directly reflected the increasing interest in “real” midwives’ participation in irregular births—from monstrous deliveries\(^\text{136}\) to births of bastards—and cases of infanticide. We should not, however,

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\(^{136}\) Tales of monstrous births were by no means a new development of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but the popularity of print certainly made them more accessible and popular across England. David Cressy provides detailed information in *Travesties and Trangressions* on one of the more famous monstrous births of the Tudor
equates interest with actuality in such cases. For example, in the case of bastard births, David Cressy has noted that “It is well established (by historical demographers) that up to 3 per cent of all live births were illegitimate in mid-Elizabethan England. . . Literary and cultural historians may think this 3 per cent figure is surprisingly low, but the measured percentage was even lower in eastern England and fell further in the generations that followed.”¹³⁷ So midwives’ deliveries of bastards cannot have been particularly common occurrences either; this is not to say that the fear or concern over bastardy, and midwives’ potential for complicity in covering up a child’s true parentage, was not widespread. More likely, that fear was an element of what Susan C. Staub has termed the “high level of popular anxiety about female criminality” between 1569 and 1640, criminality that was most often portrayed in print as being “almost always domestic.”¹³⁸

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period, that of Agnes Bowker’s delivery of a cat in 1568. See Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10-28. Records of this case exist in manuscript form only. Notably, the midwife in the case, Elizabeth Harrison, not only stood witness in the legal case, but also testified to her own modification of the baptism liturgy in an attempt to render the “monster” (actually a mola) harmless, saying “In the name of the father and the son and of the holy ghost: Come safe and go safe and do not harm, not in the name of God” (14).

¹³⁷ Ibid., 10.

The midwife’s witnessing of infants’ parentage, particularly her knowledge of a child’s true father, was of particular use to English dramatists, as in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (perf. 1592; pub. 1594), in which both midwife and nurse are murdered to keep an infant’s birth secret. That a midwife’s testimony could be legally damning, and unassailable, was reinforced by non-dramatic texts as well, such as the 1609 translation of Henri Estienne’s *A world of wonders* in which murderers abduct a midwife, force her to attend a woman in labor, kill the infant before her, and then return her having blindfolded her and disguised the birth chamber to prevent her testimony as to its location.¹³⁹ Midwives were also increasingly used to lend credence to a child’s fate at birth, testifying to any omens prognosticating a child’s future, as in Robert Greene’s *The Scottish Historie of James the fourth* (perf. 1590; pub. 1598) or Shakespeare’s *3 Henry VI* (perf. 1591; pub. 1623).¹⁴⁰ In Greene’s drama, a servant begs a “Mightie and magnificent potentate, [to] give credence to mine honorable good Lord, for I heard the Midwife sweare at his nativite, that the Faieries gave him the propertie of the Thracian stone, for who toucheth it, is exempted from griefe, and he that heareth my Masters counsell, is alreadie possessed of happiness.”¹⁴¹ And the future Richard III claims, in Shakespeare’s *3 Henry VI*, that his future was evidenced by his own monstrous birth in which “The


¹⁴⁰ Although editions of *3 Henry VI* appeared as early as 1595, these earlier copies have been discredited as being reconstructed for publication by audience members. For discussion, see *Norton Shakespeare*, 297-298.

midwife wondered and the women cried / ‘O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!’”.

Non-fictional recountings of monarchic omens also include midwives’ accounts, as in Sir John Hayward’s *The lives of the III. Normans, Kings of England* (1613), in which the midwife alone is capable of deciphering the infant’s prophetic behavior, the other female attendants “laugh[ing] at large” and “prodigall of idle talke.” Other literary tales of irregular or monstrous births include the anonymous work *Morindos*, in which midwives witness the labor of a witch who delivers “seaven monsters.” The midwife and her female associates, however, demonstrate their own virtue by performing their medical duties to the best of their abilities.

These positive images of midwives at irregular births—the interpreter, the reliable witness, the virtuous professional—were not limited to fictional tales. As Julie Crawford’s extensive study of monstrous births has demonstrated, early-seventeenth century monstrous birth literature “draw[s] correspondences between monstrosity and specific women’s behaviors, particularly as they pertain to controversial post-Reformation debates over the legitimate forms of marriage and reproduction.” In the majority of cases, the midwife serves not as an enabler to illegitimate reproductive

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142 (London: R. Barker, 1613), 365.


144 Ibid., 13-14.

behaviors, but rather as an agent of social normativity within that disrupted birth. In I.R.’s *A most straunge, and true discourse, of the wonderfull judgement of God* (1600), the birth of a deformed baby is interpreted by Crawford as “a divinely sent, publicly legible punishment for a woman who breaks her marital contract.” This birth is presided over by three midwives, who are responsible for taking the infant to the church for baptism and calling the minister, thereby bringing the monstrous birth to social light. According to the author of the pamphlet, the only reason for publishing this account is “to do my countrie good,” thus making the midwives complicit in the national goal of containing, controlling, and chastising anything that qualifies as “not an orderly birth.”

Similarly, the presence of Midwife Hatch, “a Midwife of a milde nature, and of good experience,” served as witness to the birth of a two-faced child in 1609, her very respectability and position as known agent of the Church making her reaction of “great fright” to the point of “sink[ing] downe dead to the ground with feare,” a symbol of the birth’s religious interpretation. As Crawford interprets the event, “The monster punished the wandering woman, but it also terrorizes the midwife and her neighbors, reminding them of the power of God, the fallibility of women, and the crucial role they

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146 Ibid., 70.
147 I.R. *A most straunge, and true discourse* (London: [E. Allde] for Richard Jones, 1600), A3[r].
149 *Strange newes out of Kent of a monstrous and misshapen child* (London: T. C[reed], 1609), [A5v-A5v].
play as the go-betweens between childbirth and the maintenance of social order.”

Midwives are, of course, not always present at monstrous births, but often their absence adds to the event’s disorderly nature and is even occasionally cited as such by pamphleteers. In the collection *A world of wonders. A masse of murthers. A covie of cosonages* (1595), the tale of John Urine and his children uses the presence and absence of the midwife on two separate occasions to help distinguish between the normal birth of his daughter (who was presented to the father by the midwife) and the later birth of his monstrous son, whose deformities were a visitation upon the father for his “murmurings” against God for having first sent him a female child.

Beyond the increasing interest in midwives as birth witnesses, the other two developments in midwifery references in Jacobean texts—its usage as trope and its movement into comedy—are linked through the genre of drama. Until the 1590’s, the


151 See for example V. Duncalfe, *A most certaine report of a monster* ([London?] : P.S. for T. Millington, 1595) and I.W.’s *God’s handy-workes in Wonders* (London: [George Purslowe] for I. W[right], 1615). For further information on monstrous births and trends in their interpretations in early modern England, see Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, esp. 36-7. For general implications that these pamphlets had on early modern women, see Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, esp. chapter 2, “‘The mother of a monster, and not of an orderly birth’: Women and the Signs of Disorder.”

use of “midwife” or “midwifery” as a trope was rare; I have found only five occurrences between 1531 and 1589, and each usage is markedly different. In Thomas Elyot’s Boke named the Governour (1531), Elyot extends the classical association of Socrates with his midwife-mother to a trope of “midwife” meaning “one who brings forth”:

[Socrates] resembleth hym selfe to a midwife, sayinge, In teachynge yonge men, he dyd put into them no science, but rather brought for the that, whyche all redy was in them, lyke as the mydwyfe brought nat in the childe, but beynge conceyved, dyd helpe to brynge it forthe.153

This trope of “bringing forth” would not reappear until Shakespeare utilized it in Romeo and Juliet (perf. 1595; pub. 1599, “bad quarto” 1597) and Richard II (perf. 1595; pub. 1597), but once established in the 1590s, it would remain the single most popular usage of the term “midwife” in all English vernacular print, especially in dramatic works.154

Other metaphorical usages of “midwife” before 1590 include referencing a midwife to imply a woman’s loss of virginity (“Why keapte she not her self in? Her Midwife might better answeare this question”),155 as a figure used to imply a desire for death (“The Midwife might have cas’d all this if strangled had I bin, / Then had my soule been saffe

153 Elyot, The boke named the governour, 221.

154 I have found more than a hundred individual usages of “midwife” meaning “to deliver” or “to bring forth” appearing in print between 1590 and 1642.

in blis, that now lyes dround in sin”),\textsuperscript{156} and as a symbol for the importance of “framing” a child’s mind and body correctly (“for as the parts of a childe as soone as it is borne are framed and fashioned of the Midwife...so the manners of the childe at the first are to be looked unto”).\textsuperscript{157}

These few metaphorical usages of “midwife” before 1590 are unified in positive, or at the very least neutral, manner in which they reflect on the midwife’s character and profession. And the first humorous example I have found involving a midwife does the same; in Anthony Copley’s \textit{Wits fittes and fancies} (1595), a midwife serves not as the butt of a joke, but as the source of its wit:

\textsuperscript{156} Thomas Churchyard, \textit{A pleasaunte laborinth called Churchyards chance} (London: John Kyngston, 1580), 12. This usage also appears nearly two decades earlier in Arthur Brooke’s \textit{The tragicall historye of Romeus and Juliet}: “His nurce he cursed, and / the hand that gaue him pappe, / The midwife eke with tender grype/ that held him in her lappe.” (London: Richard Tottelli, 1562), 38

\textsuperscript{157} John Lyly, \textit{Euphues} (London: [T. East] for Gabriel Cawood, 1578), 109. This usage in particular was popularized not only by the twelve editions of \textit{Euphues} to appear by 1636, but also by its reiteration in the Revered Henry Smith’s sermon, “A preparative to marriage,” published first in 1591 and then twenty more times in his collected works between 1592 and 1676. Smith’s eminently quotable version reads: “As the Midwife frameth the bodie when it is yong and tender, so the [parents] must frame the mind while it is greene and flexible, for youth is the seede time of vertue.” \textit{A preparative to mariage} (London: R. Field for Thomas Man, 1591), 101-2.
A yoong wife expostulating with her midwife her neer paines in labour with the childe shee went withall, and affirming that questionlesse shee should never bee able to abide them: Yes (answered the midwife) I warrant you (mistresse) you will refuse white bread and milk that houre.
And so she did indeed, for the Midwife presenting her white bread and milke in that agonie, she refus'd it for verie paine.¹⁵⁸

Later jest books would preserve this pattern of the midwife-as-wit.¹⁵⁹ Yet by the late 1590s, a series of negative tropes would associate the midwife with the butt, rather than the instigator, of humor. In 1599, Thomas Nash claimed that “there bee three things seldom in their right kinde till they bee old, a bawd, a witch, and a midwife,”¹⁶⁰ an image echoed in English translations of Montaigne’s essays.¹⁶¹ William Shakespeare’s way of implying efficacy was to say that something was as potent as “aqua vitae [liquor] with a midwife.”¹⁶² In 1601, Ben Jonson made the midwife’s appearance a source of

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¹⁵⁸ (London: Richard Johnes, 1595), 93.
¹⁵⁹ Robert Chamberlain, Conceits, clinches, flashes, and whimzies (London: R. Hodgkinsonne for Daniel Frere, 1639), esp. [B3v] and F3[r].
¹⁶⁰ Nash, Lenten Stufte, 43.
¹⁶¹ “Socrates was wont to say, that when Midwives begin once to put in practise the trade to make other women bring forth children, themselves become barren.” Michel de Montaigne, Essays (London: Melch. Bradwood for Edward Blount and William Barret, 1613), 284.
¹⁶² Twelfth Night, 1792.
humor, saying of one of his male characters that “he lookes like a midwife in mans apparell.” And two dramas performed in 1605 equate midwives with bawds. By 1607, with Edward Sharpham’s *Cupid’s Whirligig*, the midwife-bawd equation is quite literally fleshed out into a full comedic character. How, in the space of less than a decade, does the midwife, particularly the dramatic midwife, become a comedic figure associated with sex, ugliness, and old age? Certainly, taken together, the discreet, negative dramatic references to midwives might add up to a complete character, but it is highly unlikely that Sharpham was so methodical. Moreover, from where did these negative references emerge? The search must continue elsewhere, since as my research has shown, nearly all sixteenth-century references are positive, and are, moreover, limited to midwives’ professional duties rather than to personal attributes.

One possible source might be the combination of popular descriptions of gossips’ feasts and the increasing influence of classical Roman comedies on Renaissance English dramatists. In the case of the former, descriptions of gossips’ feasts were routinely playful, and, if not entirely comedic, certainly opened up a series of associations and potential jibes. One example is found in Nicholas Breton’s *Olde Mad-cappes new Gally-mawfrey* (1602):

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163 *Poetaster, or His Arraignement* (London: [R. Bradock] for M. L[ownes], 1602), F3[r].
Mother Midwife kindly where she came,
With merry chat would bring the wise a bed,
And take the childe and softly close the head:
Then take the babe and bring it to the mother,
God make you strong, to worke for such an other:
When good olde tales were in the Chamber tolde,
And not a man that might anewst come neere:
But every one, as well the young as olde,
Might be content with all their hearts to heare,
And Ale and Nutmegs made the merry cheere:
Then take the babe, and to the father bring it,
And he must kisse it, while the nurse doth sing it.
And then, good Lord, how like the father tis,
Now God Almighty blesse it, pretty soule:
And every gossip gives the child a kisse,
When hearty welcome fils the Wassell-bowle,
And tongues well tipt, fell merrily to trowle.\textsuperscript{165}

The midwife, in this description, is not particularly humorous, merely one amongst many in a time of good cheer; but discrete elements of this “cheer”—the removal of men from the premises, the sharing of “old” (and therefore possibly “superstitious”) tales, the passing of the wassail, the potential for misattribution of paternity—certainly provide

\textsuperscript{165} (London: [W. White] for Richard Johnes, 1602), [D4v].
ample opportunity for humorists to add concepts related to sex, ugliness, or old age to increase the comedic potential of the midwife’s part in the situation.

The second possible source of the comic midwife takes all of these potentially negative elements of the midwife and makes them manifest. I refer to the unacted, but nevertheless readily available, classical dramas popular during the English Renaissance, particularly Terence’s Andria, or The Woman From Andros. First translated into English in 1520, Terence’s comedy introduces the midwife that we have come to expect—drunken, boisterous, and suspect. Mysis, a young servant woman, characterizes the midwife Lesbia as “a fuddled, muddled wretch, / Not fit to trust with any girl’s first time. / ... Her boozing-fiend, that’s what she is. Let’s hope / Gd gives a good birth here and leaves her scope / For practising her errors elsewhere rather.”¹⁶⁶ Later in the drama, a character laments Lesbia’s garrulous, gossiping nature, specifically that she loudly and publicly details the birth room experience (“She couldn’t give her little chat / On mother and child indoors”), a perverted version of the midwife’s social responsibility to act as witness.¹⁶⁷ And in the concluding section of the play, the midwife’s very honesty is called into question as a male character testifies that the infant might be a changeling, stating that he “spied the midwife’s extra bulk and girth.”¹⁶⁸ Terence’s comedy would have been available to dramatists, not only in Latin, but in English versions published in


¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 23-4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 36.
1588, 1598, and in 1607 (the same year that Sharpham’s play appeared). Terence thus provides a dramatic source for midwifery that is necessarily and entirely comedic, and combining this dramatic antecedent with the growing popularity of humorous, if misogynistic, recountings of gossips’ feasts, it is unsurprising that midwives would remain comedic figures in drama throughout the first half of the seventeenth century.

Part III: The First Midwife to Tread the Boards: Mistress Correction in

Cupid’s Whirligig (1607)

By the end of the first decade of the seventeenth-century, the theatre emerged as the premier site of innovative usage for the term “midwife.” Shakespeare alone was responsible for five different dramatic usages, making “midwife” for the first time a byword for drunkenness and ugliness, establishing the term as a trope meaning “to bring forth,” and even reusing more traditional references, such as “witness to irregular birth.” Shakespeare also helped to popularize the image of the midwife as a preserver in The Winter’s Tale, one of the first instances of this usage that does not describe a Biblical event. But Shakespeare was by no means the only dramatist who found

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169 English translations also appeared in 1614, 1627, 1629, 1641, 1663, and 1694.
170 Twelfth Night, 2 Henry VI, Romeo and Juliet, and 3 Henry VI, respectively.
171 Thomas Heywood developed this usage simultaneously with Shakespeare in his poem, Troia Britanica (London: W. Jaggard, 1609), 18. Heywood’s poem, however, was printed only in a single edition, making Shakespeare the far more likely candidate for rhetorical influence on future authors.
“midwife” as a useful and elastic term with which to experiment, and many of the authors who experimented with the term did so throughout their long careers. Thomas Heywood used the midwife’s function of swaddling the infant as a rhetorical marker of time, with one character exclaiming, “I was ne’er so put to’t since the Midwife / First wrapt my head in linnen.” Thomas Dekker and John Webster first associated the term itself with the speed required to obtain a midwife at the onset of labor, having the fainting Clare beg for someone to obtain a chair “as if you ran for a midwife.” In 1605, two plays contain references to midwives as “bawds,” George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston claiming a character’s speech to be made "more bawdily than a common midwife" and Thomas Heywood referring to a female character as “a common Midwife for trade-falne virginitie [since] there are more maidenheads chargde and

172 Although Shakespeare was quite innovative in terms of using midwifery as a trope or an aside, he has remarkably few references to midwives per se—professional women of the delivery room. As David Hoeniger notes, “Although he alludes to midwives in ten passages, Shakespeare has little to offer on the subject. The most one learns is that even queens and women of high aristocracy were assisted by midwives and not by doctors when they gave birth.” Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance (Newark: University of Delaware, 1992), 42.


175 Eastward Hoe (London: William Aspley, 1605), A2[r].
dischargde in her house in a yeare, then peece at the Artillerie yard."\textsuperscript{176} Between 1607 and 1608, we see an overwhelming popularity of the term “midwife” in dramas written for boys’ companies, a popularity that resulted in several new uses.\textsuperscript{177} The more minor of these would be midwife as trope for “secrecy,” used by John Day and Edward Sharpham in their plays for the King’s Revels Boys,\textsuperscript{178} and Lording Barry’s inversion of Dekker’s equation of the midwife with “speed,” making a character asleep like “a midwife or a Puritane Taylor.”\textsuperscript{179}

The most important change made to the dramatic midwife during this period, however, came not in the arena of tropes and asides, but in the creation of the century’s

\textsuperscript{176} The Second Part, [A3v].
\textsuperscript{177} Of the ten dramas I have found that reference midwives between 1607 and 1608, eight of them were performed by the King’s Revels Boys in Whitefriars.
\textsuperscript{178} Humour Out of Breath (London: [Richard Braddock] for John Helmes, 1608); The Fleire (London: [Edward Allde] for F. B[urton], 1607). Day implies that “secrecy” is a character trait to be passed on from a midwife to her child, with Octanio asserting “My mother was a Midwife” (Humour, D[r]). Sharpham, however, associates the midwife’s duty to secrecy with that of her male medical counterparts, Fleire stating that he could be as secret “As your Midwife, or Barber Surgeon” (Fleire, D[r]).
\textsuperscript{179} Ram Alley (London: G. Eld. for Robert Wilson, 1611), I[r]. Barry also utilized Dekker’s “midwife” as a mark of elapsed time in this same drama, with one character threatening “I will firke / My silly nouice, as he was neuer firkt / Since Midwiues bound his noodle” (Ibid., [E4r]).
first full-fledged midwife character: Mistress Correction, one of the more amusing elements of Edward Sharpham’s comedy, *Cupid’s Whirligig* (perf. c. 1607; pub. 1607).\textsuperscript{180}

*Cupid’s Whirligig* is a typical Jacobean sexual romp, a comedy predicated upon misunderstandings and sexual misdirections. The plot revolves around the sexual jealousy of Sir Timothy Troublesome for his chaste wife, Lady Troublesome. Despite the knight’s belief in her sexual incontinence, Lady Troublesome proves her virtue and her loyalty. Each person in the comedy desires someone whose sexual interest is directed towards another, culminating in the “whirligig” scene in which characters successively enter and exit according to their sexual attractions, all unrequited; the knight repudiates his Lady, who in turn rejects her husband’s servant, Slacke, who then rejects the vintner’s daughter, Nan, who rejects the Welsh Courtier Nuecombe, who ignores the advances of the Lady’s kinswoman, Peg, who then spurns the Knight. In the end, all are united appropriately via a multiple masked marriage, the Knight and his Lady reunited. Outside of this whirligig, however, is Mistress Correction, the bawd-cum-midwife of the town who seeks to divest herself of her third husband and marry Wages, the Knight’s loyal servant. Hers is the only masked marriage that is invalidated, as she is ordered to return to her “original” husband.

While amusing, *Cupid’s Whirligig* presents little in terms of innovation to the scholar of English drama, with the notable exception of Mistress Correction the midwife.

\textsuperscript{180} Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Cupid’s Whirligig* refer to the first printed editions: Edward Sharpham, *Cupids whirligig* (London: E. Allde for Arthur Johnson, 1607).
and even this unique element has been entirely ignored in modern criticism. Very little
critical attention has been paid to the works of Edward Sharpham, particularly since the
eyear twentieth century, and that little attention was, on the whole, highly dismissive.
Martin W. Sampson characterized both Cupid’s Whirligig and Sharpham’s second play,
The Fleire as being similar in their “slow-moveing [sic] plot, the mocking tone of the
dialogue, the jests...the coarseness of language, ... the unpoetical verse, the mock-heroic
rant, the limited range of the dramatis personae.”
Allardyce Nicoll called Cupid’s Whirligig “a coarse play, coarse in theme, coarse in character-delineation and coarse in
texture.” More recent critical attention has been slightly more nuanced; Christopher
Gordon Petter’s critical introduction interprets the play as an allegory of Jacobean court
corruption. “The instability and corruption of the Jacobean court is seen to affect the
moral equilibrium of the city. A satiric and ironic tension in Cupid’s Whirligig arises
from the clever contrast between appearance and reality; between interior and ‘exterior’
virtues in a world which seems to be controlled by fashion.” But Petter pays little

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181 “The Plays of Edward Sharpham,” in Studies in Language and Literature in
Celebration of the Seventieth Birthday of James Margan Hart, November 2, 1909, eds.
Clark Sutherland Northup et al. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), 454-55.
Cockerel Press, 1926), iii.
183 “Critical Introduction to Cupid’s Whirligig,” in A Critical Old Spelling Edition of the
Works of Edward Sharpham, ed. Christopher Gordon Petter (New York: Garland
attention to Mistress Correction, and then only as the wife of “Maister Correction,” rather than as midwife, bawd, or simply as an individual character. Considering the very recent work on female medical practitioners in drama, however, Mistress Correction is of far greater interest than these early critics would have us believe.

Mistress Correction is listed in the dramatis personae as a “midwife,” and if we rely on that inventory, the character of Mistress Correction would appear to be an absolute condemnation and satiric rendering of the typical, city midwife. But when we combine details from the character’s dialogue with our understanding of female medical practitioners in early modern English drama, it is quickly apparent that Mistress Correction, rather than being a satiric rendering of a midwife, is instead a satiric rendering of an anti-midwife, a woman who, rather than ensuring the sexual, moral, and social structure through her licensed profession, instead seeks to undermine it through her unlicensed practice on prostitutes. Lest we think that Mistress Correction’s satiric identification as midwife-cum-bawd might be misinterpreted by the audience as an attack on all midwives, it is worth mentioning that Sharpham had already found success with this comedic ploy in his earlier drama, The Fleire (perf. 1606; pub. 1607). In The Fleire, two young women who turn courtesan are waited upon by Mistress Fromaga, who is identified jokingly by Fleire as being able “to get her living, by midwiferie,” a practice for which only her services as pander can recommend her, being as she is not only intellectually and morally, but also physically unfit, having foul breath, long fingernails, dry hands, and a constantly runny nose.¹⁸⁴ Sharpham’s description of this “false”

¹⁸⁴ Fleire, F3[r]-[F3v].
midwife is a nearly perfect inversion of the physical characteristics of the “ideal” midwife as laid out in Guillemeau’s *Child-birth, or the Happy Deliverie of Women* (1612):

[S]he must bee of an indifferent age, neither too yong, nor too olde: well composed of body:...neat in her apparell, and person: especially hauing little hands not thicke: cleane, and her nailes pared very neere, and euen;...mild, gentle, courteous, patient, sober, chast, not quarrlsome;...wise, discreet, and witty, able to make vse sometime of faire and flattering speeches...to busie and beguile th poore apprehensiue women.\(^{185}\)

Apparently, the audience readily accepted this comedic association between bawdry and illicit midwifery, because Sharpham redeployed and expanded upon it in his subsequent play. In *Cupid’s Whirligig*, Sharpham first introduces Mistress Correction through the description of the servant, Wages, who communicates to young Lord Nonsuch that “mistris Correction the Midwife is turn’d her Maphrodite . . . She is become a Midwife, for as your hermaphrodite hath two members the one to beget, the other to bring foorth, so hath your Midwife too meanes, the one to bring you to beget, the other to

\(^{185}\) (London: A. Hatfield, 1612), 84-5. Although Guillemeau’s text was first translated into English some five years after Sharpham’s works were published, we may reasonably assume that the majority of Guillemeau’s sentiments were in currency, as I have found no references to Guillemeau’s being a particularly ground-breaking or debated work, and as it is in harmony with previous texts.
bring it foorth when tis begotten.” According to Wages, then, Mistress Correction is, by her first trade, a bawd or female pander, \textit{not} a midwife; as midwifery is a trade that, we can reasonably assume, she has been forced to take up on account of her prostitutes’ pregnancies. A licensed midwife was forbidden from serving an unmarried woman, particularly a prostitute, in her delivery, and from serving a woman whose family and immediate marital status were unknown; hence Mistress Correction’s later insistence that the woman brought to bed in her house, Mistress Punckit, is “a younger Brothers Daughter, a kins-woman of my Husbands.” It is Mistress Correction’s manifest unfitness for her role as midwife that makes this attribution of profession a site of humor for this drama, the reference to her “hermaphroditism” accentuating her unnatural state within the social order and signifying her as, like so many early modern monstrosities, an acceptable locus for the audience’s jocund, castigatory, condescending self-congratulation. Rather than a sage female medical practitioner, a source of eventual stability and worldly wisdom, Mistress Correction stands as a comic example of sexuality gone awry, socially perverse if dramatically humorous. In the end, therefore, Mistress Correction’s simultaneous association with bawdry and midwifery serve not to

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Cupid’s Whirligig}, [C4r].

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., F[r]. The foolish Knight, in a move reinforcing his absolute blindness to sexual realities, accepts Mistress Correction’s explanation, despite the “kinswoman’s” name, “Mistress Punckit,” an iteration of the term “punk,” meaning “prostitute,” that entered the lexicon in the late-sixteenth century. This splendidly evocative word was in great and bawdy usage in many contemporary dramas.
undermine the moral and social position of the respectable midwife figure, but rather to reinforce it through the representation of its warped antithesis, Mistress Correction, and her failure to secure her own sexual and marital desires in the face of the resumption of social order in Act V.

Considering the auspices under which Sharpham wrote *Cupid's Whirligig*, Mistress Correction’s inversion of the typical female practitioner role is highly appropriate. *Cupid's Whirligig* was written specifically for performance by the King’s Revels boy acting company,¹⁸⁸ one of the boy companies Andrew Gurr characterizes as

¹⁸⁸ There is a great deal of academic confusion over this particular acting company. By the nineteenth century, theatre historians claimed that the King’s Revels Children were active from 1606 to 1610 and performed at Blackfriars; see F. G. Fleay, “On the History of theatres in London,” in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10 (1882), 126. This breadth of dates and misassignation of location succeeded in confusing historians for decades. According to Andrew Gurr, the King’s Revel Children were founded in 1607 by Michael Drayton and Thomas Woodford; see *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. 232. These dates coincide with Alfred Harbage’s assertion that the King’s Revels Children were active only between 1607 and 1608, taking up brief residence at Whitefriars in 1608; see *The Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, 3rd ed., rev. Schhoenbaum and Wagonheim (New York: Routledge, 1989), 299. The King’s Revels Children disbanded by 1609, selling off its plays to printers in order to assuage financial problems (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, 299). A competing boys’ company, the Queen’s Revels, was playing at the same time.
being self-conscious and artificial, cultivating a repertoire of satirical and citizen comedies. Sharpham’s choice to create a midwife character was perhaps prompted by the inordinate popularity of the term “midwife” in plays performed by these children. Specifically, every single one of the eight extant dramas performed by this boy company contains the term midwife: Robert Armin’s *Two Maids of Moreclack*, Lording Barry’s *Ram Alley*, John Day’s *Humour Out of Breath*, Gervase Markham’s *The Dumbe Knight*, John Mason’s *The Turk*, Thomas Middleton’s *The Family of Love*, and Edward Sharpham’s two plays, *Cupid’s Whirligig* and *The Fleire*. Most of these references are made in passing, such as those by Day and Barry that I have discussed previously. Nevertheless, these references serve not only as a reasonable source for Sharpham’s interest in midwives as potential characters, but particularly his interest in creating such a *comedic* character as Mistress Correction. Significantly, all of these dramas, with the exception of Mason’s *The Turk*, are comedies, and their authors’ usages of “midwife” are themselves markedly humorous, not just in terms of rhetorical usage, but also on the theatrical level of having references to childbirth processes spoken by all male, pre-pubescent children.

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that the King’s Revels Children were active, and they shared many of the same playwrights; the Queen’s Revels Children also took over the Whitefriars space in 1609, changing their name to the Whitefriars Boys, leading some to confuse them with the defunct King’s Revels Children who had played in the same space before them.

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Andrew Gurr has characterized boys’ companies, and the dramas written for them, as intentionally “making audiences self-conscious, flaunting the artificiality of stage pretence with metatheatre, and insisting that audiences became not spell-bound believers but sceptical judges.” The satirical content of these dramatic performances depended on the anti-mimetic nature of the boy actors themselves, their extreme distance from actuality encouraging their audience to remain detached and to join in the mockery of common city types: the gallant, the jealous husband, the fop, the avaricious merchant, etc. Because these are anti-mimetic satires, then, we perhaps should not expect any character, including that of a midwife, to represent social, or even dramatic, norms.

According to William Kerwin, typical dramatic renderings of female medical practitioners bear little resemblance to their historical counterparts, “somatic healers steeped in humoral medicine and often associated with medical innovation. Instead, the drama produces a type of woman professing unconventional learning: mystical, often laughable and socially manipulative.” Mistress Correction fits neither this realistic nor this dramatic paradigm. Kerwin’s composite portrait of a woman healer makes her an active character, one who is actively subversive, oracular, spiritual, one who reverses the

190 Ibid., 184.
process of shaming and ridicule. Mistress Correction’s role is subsidiary, an amusing accessory to the primary plot, and rather than reversing shaming and ridicule, she ends by being the only character unredeemed and chastised at the conclusion of the play. In fact, Mistress Correction’s character arc is an inversion of Kerwin’s archetypal female practitioner; Kerwin’s interpretations would have Mistress Correction beginning the drama in a position of powerlessness and ending assuming “a socially reconstitutive power, an artistic position that, if not Prospero-like in its magisterial voice, still controls the regrouping that reshapes a wounded society.” The sexual perils and pitfalls of Cupid’s Whirligig are indeed resolved and social order reconstituted by the end, but Mistress Correction plays no part in that reconstitution; in fact, the resolution of the subplot relies on thwarting Mistress Correction’s desires.

Although Sharpham’s dramas may not have been the immediate source, later dramatists made use of similar inversions and perversions of midwives as signals of social disharmony and the distortion of virtuous roles into monstrosities. This usage is most apparent in the tradition of the antimasque, particularly in Ben Jonson’s Masque of Queenes (perf. 1609; pub. 1609)—in which the sixth hag is contextualized in terms of a witch/midwife who slaughtered infants in the Malleus Maleficarum—and John Coperario’s The Maske of Flowers (perf. 1613; pub. 1614)—in which the midwife appears in an antimasque with other characters of disorder: the courtesan, the bawd, the usurer, the mountebank, etc. In neither of these works, however, can I find evidence that the audiences attending the performances would have known that the characters were

193 Ibid., 64.
indeed midwives, or at least in Jonson’s case, based on a midwife’s tale. More likely, Jonson’s addendum of the *Malleus* story was made especially for the print version. In both cases, however, the function of the perverse midwife remains the same as that of Mistress Correction: to reinforce the culturally normative midwife as a necessary element of a stable society and to demonstrate the lengths to which the perversion of that practice might lead.194

**Part IV:** **Competing Discourses: Angelic, Earthy, and Lewd**

Sharpham’s midwife may not encapsulate all of early modern England’s associations with midwifery, but the association between bawdry and midwifery was, by 1607, established in print as a matter of course. This particular discourse was not, however, the only one going. In 1609, we see the first resurgence of the genre of prayers for midwives in Thomas Dekker’s *Foure birds of Noahs arke*, the first of such I have found in print since Thomas Bentley’s *Fifth Lampe of Virginitie*, published in 1582. But unlike Bentley’s prayers, which focused primarily on the midwife and other birth attendants’ confessing their sinfulness and reasserting woman’s lowly place and the righteousness of her pain in childbirth, Dekker’s prayer is far more utilitarian, concerned

194 Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queenes, Celebrated from the house of Fame* (London: N. Okes for R. Bonian and H. Wally, 1609), C[r]; John Coperario, *The Maske of Flowers* (London: N[icholas] O[kes] for Robert Wilson, 1614), C[r]. Note that Jonson’s is the only reference I have found that absolutely links midwifery to witchcraft or that cites the *Malleus Maleficarum* in a vernacular text.
with the midwife’s actual, physical, medical practice rather than her place as woman in the social schema. Dekker would instead have his midwife pray thus:

With handes lifted uppe to Heaven, knees prostrated on the earth, & with a soule humbled at thy feete (O Lord) do I beg, that thou wouldst prosper this worke which I am to undertake. Suffer mee not to bee feareful in my office, fainting in my spirits, or too violent in my duetie: but that I may discharge it to thy honor, this thy handmaids comfort (who is full of paine) and to my owne credit. Blesse me (O God) with skil, sithence thou hast placed me as thy deputie in this great and wonderfull businesse: give unto thy servant an easie & speedy deliverance. Give unto me a quick, a constant & a gentle hand. Give unto this new unborne creature (into whom thou hast breathed a soule) a faire & wel-shape[d] body; that thou mayst have glorie by thy works, & the mother gladnesse in beholding her infant, after all her sorrowes. Graunt this, O Father, for thy Sons sake Jesus Christ. Amen.195

The structure and content of Dekker’s prayer reinforces the midwife’s absolute control over the birth procedure and her position as religious and medical intercessor for the laboring woman. Compared to Bentley’s prayers of two decades earlier, Dekker’s construction is made to fit a medical practitioner secure in her training, her position, and her duties, not the passive instrument of God’s will. Thomas Tuke merged the two

traditions some few years later in *The practise of the faithfull* (1613), in which the prescribed rhetoric for the midwife places her firmly below the Lord and far above other women.

O Lord my God, I beseech thee forgive me my manifold sins and wickednes, accept of me, I beseech thee, in thy Sonne Jesus Christ: honour mee with all the graces of thy spirit: grant me wisedoms, modesty, temperance, and a religious heart. Blesse mee in this calling, to which thou hast appointed mee: prosper me, I pray thee, in the thoughts of my heart, the words of my mouth, & the workes of mine hands. Be mercifull (I most humbly beseech thee) to all those women and children with whom I am to deale. Bee mercifull to this thy Servant, that is now in travel: O good Lord, comfort her, strengthen her, and grant her a seasonable and safe deliverance: blesse her burthen, O Lord, and give [the infant] strength & life to be borne: so will I render praise and thanksgiving vnto thee. Heare O Lord, and grant mee my hearts desire, for Christ Jesus his sake, mine onely Lord and Saviour. Amen.196

This language of assured petition is far more reminiscent of male supplication than the traditionally feminine; the midwife’s assuredness that hers is a divine calling, her role as intercessor for a subordinate, the language of “exchange value”—her rendering of “praise

and thanksgiving” in exchange for a safe delivery—all place her on a footing of religious eminence in her field.

Looking back to the genre of drama, Sharpham’s image of midwife-as-bawd was not necessarily even the most popular in the theatre, though she is the only one literally “fleshed out” on the stage. Thomas Heywood and Thomas Middleton posited alternative, more traditional roles for dramatic midwives within a few years of the publication of Sharpham’s works. In Heywood’s The Silver Age (perf. c. 1610-12; pub. 1613), the

197 Despite the assertion in An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama Printed Plays, 1500-1660 that John Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi (perf. c. 1612-1614; pub. 1623) features a midwife, I have chosen not to address this particular play for the simple reason that, upon research, I believe that the character referred to by the Index’s authors is in fact a gossip, not a midwife. Webster does make mention of a midwife, specifically that one had secretly been procured for the Duchess (Act II, scene i), but the speaking character of the “old lady” featured in the next scene is almost certainly another birth attendant. Firstly, the midwife was to be kept secret, so her appearance outside the birth room and speaking to Bosola would be highly incongruent; secondly, the midwife would have several women functioning under her whose jobs it would be to come and go from the birth room in pursuit of supplies, while the midwife would remain behind; and finally, Webster identifies the speaker only as an “old lady,” a description as applicable to any gossip as to a midwife (which constitutes a proof in absentia rather than in fact). See: Thomas L. Berger, William C. Bradford, and Signey L. Sondergard, An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama Printed Plays, 1500-1660, revised ed. (New
midwife attending the birth of Hercules is granted only a single speaking line, but
tellingly it is the one line that holds the key to a successful birth and that demonstrates the
midwife’s superior knowledge of the birth room. Hercules’ mother, Alcmena, has been
enchanted by the goddess Juno, jealous of the human woman’s coupling with Zeus, and
as a result, Alcmena is unable to uncross her legs. While the task of tricking Juno into
lifting the curse falls to another woman, Galatis, it is the unnamed midwife who pinpoints
Alcmena’s physical position as being, quite literally, unnatural, as well as dangerous, and
who provides the solution, saying that if the goddess should “but open her knees and
finger, my Lady [Alcmena] should have safe delivery.”¹⁹⁸ In Heywood’s construction,
then, the midwife’s knowledge of birth extends even beyond the mortal to the divine.¹⁹⁹

Thomas Middleton’s contemporaneous drama, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (perf. c.
1611-13; pub. 1630), delegates to the midwife a more earthly, but no less honorable,
position. Middleton’s silent midwife is quite markedly the only character amongst all

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Heywood, The silver age (London: Nicholas Okes for Benjamin Lightfoote,
1613), [F2v].

¹⁹⁹ This was by no means Heywood’s first positive portrayal of a midwife, though it was
the first time he did so in drama. In 1609, Heywood published Troia Britanica: or, Great
Britaines Troy, an epic-length poem in which the midwife is one of the several women
who save Saturn’s male children from slaughter. Troia Britanica, (London : W. Jaggard,
1609), 18.
those at the christening—gossips, nurse, and mother alike—who is not irreverent, argumentative, competitive and disruptive.200

Finally, from these competing discourses of the bawdy midwife, the godly midwife, and the competent theatrical midwife emerges the midwife character who at least partially fits Kerwin’s description of the fictional female medical practitioner: a woman who is active within the plot, who is responsible for rapprochement, and who redirects shame and ridicule onto different persons than those originally anticipated within the course of the story. Enter Mother Maribones, the midwife of William Fennor’s verse narrative, *Coru-copiae, Pasquils night-cap: or, antidot for the head-ache* (1612). In this lengthy tale, Hercules takes a young bride, Kate, in defiance of her parents’ wishes. Soon after the wedding night he realizes that she is not only deflowered, but that she is carrying the child of another man. Enraged and confused, Hercules betakes himself to “a neighbour dwelling by/ His trusty friend, a Midwife by vocation, / Of great experience, and good estimation.” This midwife, Mother Maribones, has gained her reputation, not through excessive religious virtue, but rather through the accomplishment of pragmatic, earthly goals, all of which serve to maintain the social structure but few of which are entirely within acceptable ethical limits. Mother Maribones could “redresse, and cure disease hidden, / Which doe proceed from lust and surquedrie [excess], / By tasting of those fruites with [sic] are forbidden, / By which

occasion she was well acquainted / With divers Citizens that had been tainted . . .”

True to her pragmatic reputation, Mother Maribones presents Hercules with a plan designed to maintain his position in the community, to solidify his very public marriage, to bring Kate’s recalcitrant parents in to line, and to ensure the perpetual chastity of his wife. Maribones recommends that Hercules privately dispatch his wife to her friends, and let it be quietly known amongst her family that she is disgraced and that he does intend to have her back. To prevent their family’s shame, she claims, Kate’s parents will not only beg him to resume the marriage that they had before protested, but will enrich him in the process in order to ensure that their daughter’s infamy is not made known. Moreover, when Hercules deigns to accept his wife back into his home and bed, she will be so grateful “That she will prove so honest, kind, and chast, / And she will satisfie for all is past. / And all your friends which see her vertuous life, / Will blesse your fortune in so good a wife.”

Conclusion

We have seen drama established as the primary generic site of innovation for the midwife, developing the term as a trope, increasing the midwife’s range of associations, and hosting the first “embodied” literary midwife in Mistress Correction. By 1613, the midwife, as she appears in printed dramas, has an established set of characteristics. She

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202 Ibid., p. 70.
is pragmatic, wise in the ways of the world and in human relationships and a potential provider of resolution or solutions that preserve the established social order, a pattern that we will see reused in the dramas of the 1630s, particularly Ben Jonson’s. The total image of the midwife is not one of unequivocal, idealistic virtue; that is the reserved realm of young virgins and chaste wives. Instead the midwife has an new, expanded function; as her church authority wanes and is deemphasized, she assumes a new secular function as a sage, almost Machiavellian figure whose primary concern is the good of society and the preservation of social norms. This dramatic midwife does not exist in a vacuum of exterior references, however, with traditional religious and medical usages remaining current in a wide variety of texts. But the dramatic midwife is, by 1613, established as a peculiarly “comic” figure, appearing almost entirely in comic pieces, yet another pattern that will continue through the 1630s.
CHAPTER THREE

Fully Flesheled: Caroline Midwives, 1614-1642

By the second decade of the seventeenth-century, I have argued, drama had become the most innovative genre for midwifery references. It is in drama that we see “midwife” developing as a trope and that the rhetorical associations with “midwife”—appearance, sex, witness, etc.—expand and become popularized. But it is not until the 1630s that midwifery in drama moves out of the realm of the occasional (the passing reference, the minor character). In the decade leading up to the English Civil War, midwives finally function in drama as midwives, their professional identity becoming an integral part not only of their individual characters, but of the machinations of the plot. This chapter will address in detail four dramas featuring midwives as fully functioning, vital characters: Peter Hausted’s *The Rival Friends* (perf. 1631; pub. 1632), Ben Jonson’s *The Magnetic Lady* (perf. 1632; pub. 1640), and Richard Brome’s *The Queen and Concubine* (perf. 1635; pub. 1658) and *The Love-Sick Court* (perf. 1639; pub. 1658).

But it is important to examine these dramatic midwives not simply because they “happen to appear” on stage in the 1630s, but *because* they appear in the 1630s. Their appearance in drama can be partially explained through the increasing popularity of city comedy in London; midwives, as professionals, are necessary to a city whose population is growing exponentially, and so their increased visibility makes them obvious targets for inclusion in city comedies. But midwives’ position in the society was also under increased scrutiny. During this decade, Charles I pursued a policy of social stability
through the exercise of royal prerogative, a policy which, if unsuccessful, served to emphasize the fragility of the social framework. Such tensions would necessarily rebound on the profession of midwifery and on those who practiced it; midwives were witnesses to paternity, to legitimate births, to virginity, to monstrosity—all potential loci for social upheaval. Caroline Bicks has argued that early modern midwives played a central role in “forming” subjects, and has traced echoes of that production through many Renaissance dramas, using midwives as conduits through which to examine the larger issue of reproduction. But it is in the 1630s that midwives, in drama at least, emerge

203 Caroline Bicks, *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare’s England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003). Bicks is much more concerned with exploring issues of reproduction in its broadest sense—virginity, birth, women’s bodies, etc.—than with the midwife per se, using the midwife as a mean to access and orient those larger discussions between dramatic and nonfictional texts and to explore early modern constructions and understandings of the female body. Many of her strongest points concern, not midwives, but other female figures, some of whom are only related to midwives at a distance: virgins (*Midsummer Night’s Dream*), wives (*Othello*), Amazons and goddesses (*Comedy of Errors*), and witches (*Macbeth*). Bicks’ conflation of the midwife with other female figures, and her treatment of the seventeenth-century itself as a single, unchanging, amorphous time period, allows her the freedom to raise a series of interesting points concerning women’s reproductive bodies, but it also precludes any insights into the midwife as a separate character, whose identity shifts over time. Bicks’ declared goal “is to elucidate [midwives] participation—not only in the cultural codes of
finally, not as conduits, but as a terminus, a site of investigation and social representation unto themselves.

Considering their potential for disruption, it is perhaps unsurprising to find these dramatic midwives only in comedies, a genre that requires the restoration of order at the conclusion. By generic convention, the midwives’ potential for disorder is precluded from the beginning, and in the case of Jonson, the midwife actively works to shore up the social order rather than presenting surmountable obstacles to it. The midwife characters also are the sources of much jesting within the comedies themselves, both as the witty originators and as the butts of humor. In both cases, the humor is markedly gendered, with these female characters either humiliated as a result of their gender and profession or maintaining a witty superiority over other characters due to that same identity. Most remarkably, these midwives occupy both of these positions—comedic subject and object—simultaneously. Explaining the midwife’s aptness for comedic object is not difficult: “playwrights regularly used the midwife in her less flattering incarnations, bring her body into the world of their stories in the form of bawdy, materialistic and often drunken women. . . . In this state, she is well suited to early modern English comedy in particular, with its investment in heightening and parodying the domestic sphere.”

But reproduction—but in the act of cultural production itself” (9). But in the pursuit of such a broad goal, Bicks neglects questions of genre, of performance, and of textuality, assuming instead that the midwife’s “role in cultural production” must be the same in the real world as it is on the page as it is on the stage.

204 Ibid., 21.
how can we explain the midwife’s position as originator of humor? The plot of these dramas, while comic and contingent upon the midwife’s participation, is not usually resolved with the midwife remaining in a position of respectability or power; too often she is revealed as functionally inept or unreliable.

The answer to the midwife’s comic authority often lies in her language, her ability to “jest” within the context of the play, and the ways in which her audience—both within the drama itself and in the viewing audience—responds to those jests. Pamela Allen Brown has made an extensive survey of women’s jesting in early modern English drama in her book *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (2003). Brown has catalogued the primary characteristics of women’s jesting in dramas, characteristics that place the jesting woman in a superior position to other characters around her:

- A woman is the laugh-getter through her words or actions
- The fiction mentions an internal audience that includes women who approve the actions of the laugh getter
- A male, often a husband, father, cleric, or unwanted suitor, is the butt of laughter brought down on him through the agency of a woman or women
- A woman solves a riddle a man cannot solve or succeeds at a seemingly impossible task
• A woman who has carried out a clever trick or jest is not subjected to internal criticism or a dour concluding moral.  

All or most of these are elements of midwife characters in 1630s dramas, and it is the presence of these elements that allow midwives to occupy the dual position of both originator and target of laughter. And within this comic paradigm, midwives avoid many of the stereotypes popular in tales of other female practitioners. With midwives, we do not see “the standard medical narrative” in which an ignorant woman “does harm to an ignorant, naive, or foolish patient . . . but is exposed by a more thoughtful man.”


This absence might be attributable to that fact that, in the 1630s, men had not yet usurped authority over the birthroom, placing midwives outside this particular medical paradigm. Similarly, the portrayals of midwives in these dramas place them outside contemporary concerns over proper medical care and fears of poison and mismanagement. Tanya Pollard as noted a common seventeenth-century fear, evident on the stage, “that medicines concealed poison and that doctors could be malicious instruments of death.”

Tanya Pollard, “‘No Faith in Physic’: Masquerades of Medicine Onstage and Off,” in *Disease, Diagnosis, and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, eds. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 29. Midwives, who often prescribed similar potions to pregnant and laboring women, are generally not accused of
Instead, we see a woman whose abilities and responsibilities are often integral to establishing and maintaining the social order, standing both as its ultimate threat and its ultimate bulwark.

**Part I: In the Interim, 1614 - 1630**

In terms of types of midwifery references and usages, little changes in the years between 1614 and 1630. The same tropes abound, particularly that of “midwife” meaning “to bring forth.” The occasional references to midwives as witnesses, or to midwives’ right (or lack thereof) to baptize children show up in a variety of genres.\(^{207}\) References to Biblical\(^{208}\) and Christian midwives\(^{209}\) persist. No new midwifery such maleficia, nor is the possibility used by dramatists for either tragic or comic effect.

For more on fears of poisoning, see 29-42.


\(^{208}\) Specifically the Hebrew midwives; examples include John Boys, *An exposition of the festivall epistles and gospels used in our English liturgie* (1615), F4[r], and Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the second book of Moses, called Exodus* (1617),
characters appear, either on stage or in narratives. Sharpham’s *Cupid’s Whirligig* is reprinted only once, in 1616, and Fennor’s *Cornu-copiae* only once, in 1623. Versions of Terence’s *Andrian Woman* appeared in 1614, 1627, and 1629. Also, in legal terms, the midwife’s authority in English society was only strengthened with the passage of “An Acte to Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children” in 1624. This law made not only the murdering of illegitimate babies, but the concealment of the murder, a

republished in *Annotations upon the five bookes of Moses, the booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs, or Canticles* (1622).

A shortened version of Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* appeared in 1615 as *Christs victorie over Sathans tyrannie* and contained many of the same midwifery tales as the original. The idea that the Virgin Mary labored alone and served as her own midwife became more common in texts like John Boys’ *An exposition of the festivall epistles and gospels* (London: Felix Kyngston for William Aspley, 1615), D[r]; and David Heinsius’ *The mirrouer of humilities* (London: Bernard Alsop, 1618), 26. This idea of the Christian woman laboring miraculously alone was extended to Mary Magdalene in Thomas Walkington’s *Rabboni: Mary Madgadlens teares, of sorrow, solace* (London: Edw[ard] Griffin for Richard Whitakers, 1620), 46. But the need to prevent the Virgin Mary’s identification as midwife also continued as an element of anti-Catholicism, as in Samuel Page’s *A godly learned exposition*, in which he condemns “the Popish women calling upon the Virgin Mary to helpe them in their throwes and pangs, as the supreme Midwife of the Church” (London: Th[omas] Cotes and R. Young, 1631), 207.
crime. As such, the midwife’s testimony concerning the occurrence of a birth became necessary not only in the prosecution of unwed mothers accused of infanticide, but of family, friends, and acquaintances who may have assisted her in camouflaging the murder. Relatedly, the midwife continues as an important witness in any irregular birth, including fictional ones, from the birth of George, Lord Falconbridge (the hero of an eponymous prose narrative published in 1616) to the evil Chancellor’s birth in Chapman and Shirley’s drama, The Tragedie of Chabot, Admiral of France (perf. c. 1611-22; pub. 1639). Indeed, the absence of the midwife continues to mark a birth as

\[\text{For a discussion of the specifically gendered language of this law, see Susan C. Staub’s Nature’s Cruel Stepdames (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), esp. 65.}\]

\[\text{“After the Midwife (according to her manner) had trimmed up the sweet Babe, and shewed him naked (to the other weomen her associats) being a man child, upon his breast it had the picture of a golden Faulkon, soaring over a most dangerous bridge, the which being shewed as a wonder in nature, the honorable Ladies in the Kings Court, by whose meanes it was generally reported through the Land, and after called in Christendome, by the name of George Lord Faukonbridge: A title fitting for so noble an Impe of vertue, being descended from so royall a stocke (as was King Richard and faire Clarabell.)” The famous history of George Lord Faukonbridge (London: I. B[eale] for James Davies, 1616), 18.}\]

\[\text{Chapman and Shirley’s text closely echoes Shakespeare’s description of the birth of Richard III: “he was borne with teeth in his head, by an affidavit of his Midwife, to note}\]
being irregular in and of itself, an element utilized by the poet John Taylor to deride William Fennor in a poem devoted to that clergyman and religious author.\textsuperscript{213}

We also see several unequivocal references in literary texts to midwives falsely attributing children to the wrong parents, an element that will eventually be physically realized in the drama of Richard Brome. Obviously, such events were common comic elements, appearing in books of witticisms, such as John Davies’ \textit{Wits Bedlam}: “Luscus, at last, hath got his Wife with Child. / For, tis like him, her bribed Midwife seares: / Which he beleeves: but, for he is beguild, / He hath his false Faith ever by the Eares.”\textsuperscript{214}

his devouring, and hath one toe on his left foote crooked, and in the forme of an Eagles talon, to foretell his rapacitie: What shall I say? branded, mark'd, and design'd in his birth for shame and obloquie, which appeareth further by a mole under his right eare, with only three Witches hairies int, strange and ominous predictions of nature.” George Chapman and James Shirley, \textit{The tragedie of Chabot admiral of France} (London: Tho[mas] Cotes for Andrew Crooke and William Cooke, 1639), 175.

\textsuperscript{213} Taylor humorously describes Fenner as being “begotten in some ditch, / Betwixt a Tinker and a Maundring Witch, / And sure thy birth did equall thy begetting, / I thinke thy Mother in the Su-shine fitting, / Basking her self close to some hedge of Thorne, / And so without a Midwife thou wast borne.” “To William Fennor,” in \textit{All the workes}, 146.

\textsuperscript{214} John Davies, “Epigram 326: Of Luscus his great Faith, and small Performance” in \textit{Wits bedlam—where is had, whipping-cheer, to cure the mad} (London: G. Eld for James Davies, 1617), [H5v].
John Webster gives a full account of such an event in *The Devil’s Law Case* (perf. c. 1610-19; pub. 1623), an element included to discredit the play’s arch-villain, Romelio, by making him illegitimate.

You may be certaine, shee [his mother] would lose no time,

In braging that her Husband had got up

Her belly: to be short, at seven moneths end,

Which was the time of her delivery,

And when shee felt her selfe to fall in travell,

Shee makes her Wayting woman, as by mischance,

Set fire to the flax, the flight whereof,

As they pretend, causes this Gentlewoman

To fall in paine, and be delivered

Eight weekes afore her reckoning...

The Midwife strait howles out, there was no hope

Of th'infants life, swaddles it in a stead Lambeskin,

As a Bird hatcht too early, makes it up

With three quarters of a face, that made it looke

Like a Changeling, cries out to Romelio,

To have it Christned, least it should depart

Without that it came for: and thus are many serv'd,

That take care to get Gossips for those children,

To which they might be Godfathers themselves,
And yet be no arch-Puritans neither.215

But a midwife’s complicity in the attribution of infants to the wrong father was not always depicted either as comic, or as evil; in some cases, the midwife’s complicity was depicted as a kindness towards individual women. Lodowick Carlell makes just such an argument in *The Deserving Favorite* (perf. c. 1622-29; pub. 1629), in which a midwife, with the aid of a doctor and a nurse, attribute a child to a woman despairing of barrenness.216

The few texts and authors of note appearing during this period serve more to reinforce patterns of midwifery references established by 1614 than to alter them. Dramatists like James Shirley continued to use “midwife” as a trope in a variety of contexts, without actually putting a midwife on the stage.217

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215 John Webster, *The devils law-case* (London: Augustine Mathewes for John Grismand, 1623, [H4r]).

216 Lodowick Carlell, *The deserving favorite* (London: Mathew Rhodes 1629), N[r].

217 Shirley used the term “midwife” to denote having had sex in *The Ball* (perf. 1632, pub. 1639) and *The Imposture* (perf. 1640, pub. 1652); anti-masculine medical learning in *The Bird in a Cage* (perf. 1633, pub. 1633); the passage of time since birth in *Changes, or Love in a Maze* (perf. 1632, pub. 1632); a negative appearance in *The Lady of Pleasure*, (perf. 1635, pub. 1637); and as a element of learning best kept to professionals rather than dilettantes in *The Sisters* (perf. 1642, pub. 1652). James Shirley, *The ball* (London: Tho[mas] Cotes for Andrew Crooke and William Cooke, 1639), D2[r]; *The imposture* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1652), [B7v]; *The
Thomas Heywood published a prose text, *Gynaikeion: or Nine bookes of various history* in 1624, a book devoted to discussing historical women, in which he dedicates an entire chapter to “Handmaids, Nurses, Midwives, and Stepdames.” Heywood’s midwifery references run the gamut of established allusions, from classical midwives and Christian tales, such as the Hebrew midwives and the apocryphal midwives testing Mary’s virginity, to explanations of midwives’ necessarily female gender, to the difficulties midwives occasionally have in determining an infant’s sex. Midwifery also continued to be a site of examining cultural differences between Europeans and “occidentals,” as in Pierre d’Avity’s descriptions of India in *The estates, empires, & principallities of world* (1615).

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218 *Gynaikeion: or Nine bookes of various history* (London: Adam Islip, 1624), 426, 427, 272, 367, and 203, respectively.

219 In many cases, D’Avity claims, the native women “are delivered without any Midwife, & then they presently wash their children, & lay them upon Indian fig leaves and so they goe presently about their houshold businesse, as if they had not been newly delivered.” Even those who follow rituals familiar to English readers, such as the child’s christening, are made unfamiliar by their trappings, the midwives following the parents...
Also in the realms of non-fiction, Helkiah Crooke’s *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), the first English anatomy text written by a physician, repeatedly references midwives, and does so in an almost unequivocally positive fashion, following the footsteps of Raynalde and Jonas. While Crooke mentions midwives’ “superstitious” nature once in the text,\(^{220}\) his remaining references are pragmatic and serve to reassert the midwife’s function in creating correct anatomy in children, assuring a complete and healthy delivery, and determining sex. Crooke’s midwife has a “skilfull hand” that “setteth the woman in a due posture or position of parts, receiveth the Infant gently . . . directeth it if it offer it selfe amisse; and finally draweth away as easily as is possible the after-birth.”\(^{221}\) Crooke places himself in a position of some knowledge over the midwife, but more in an effort to underscore the need for proper training and practice than to claim superior knowledge. For example, Crooke explains the effect that the midwife’s pressing on the skull has on the anatomy of the head,\(^{222}\) the care with which they should sever a tongue’s and carrying the infant on a litter “covered with rich cloth made for that purpose.” *The estates, empires, & principallities of the world* (London: Mathewe Lownes and John Bill, 1615), 195 and 191, respectively.

\(^{220}\) While discussing the umbilical cord, Crooke notes that it “is full of knottes, by which some supersticious Midwives gather how many children the Mother shall have.”

*Mikrokosmographia a description of the body of man* ([London]: William Jaggard, 1615), 81.

\(^{221}\) Ibid., 269.

\(^{222}\) Ibid., 438.
abnormal connection to the bottom palate,\textsuperscript{223} and their need for “dexterity” in bringing forth the afterbirth,\textsuperscript{224} but these warnings are not castigatory, nor is there any attempt on the part of this physician to direct the way in which midwives should perform these operations. According to Crooke, midwives are particularly influential in the formation of children’s sex, the length at which the midwife cuts the umbilical cord affecting the length of a male child’s “yard or virile member.”\textsuperscript{225} Midwives are also potentially responsible for the misattribution of sex, though they are by no means exclusively responsible.

\[\text{W}e\text{ may safely say, that there are some women so hot by nature that their Clitoris hangeth foorth in the fashion of a mans member, which because it may be distended and again growe loose and flaccid, may deceive ignorant people. Againe Midwives may oft be deceived because of the faultie conformation of those poarts for sometimes the member and testicles are so small and sinke so deepe into the body they cannot easily be discerned.}\textsuperscript{226}

Crooke’s rhetoric absolves midwives of intentional malpractice, or even negligence in terms of their medical education, the midwives being “deceived” by the women’s bodies rather than actively misreading them.

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 627-8.

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 255.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 210.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 251.
In terms of taste and presentation, however, English attitudes toward midwives and midwifery in print changed dramatically. The repeated printings of Terence’s and Sharpham’s bawdy midwives popularized the comedic midwife. As Jean Howard has proven, “one cannot assume that theatrical representations have an ideological significance which is fixed and unchanging or which is unaffected by the conditions in which the representations are produced and consumed.”227 The repeated print, rather than performance, renderings of *Cupid’s Whirligig* represent perhaps the greatest textual change, removing the anti-mimetic character of the drama, and thus of Mistress Correction, and translating the play from a performative inversion of city types to mere textual representations of “bad” city types. Mistress Correction is no longer the “perverse” midwife, the inversion of the actual, good, midwife; on the page, she reads merely as a “bad” midwife, a bawd and pander who assumes a role for which she is unfit and untrained, and in which she poses a potential danger to society. By the time the young men of Oxford revived Sharpham’s drama in 1631,228 the text would have read in an entirely different way, and its performance, with characters being portrayed by grown, male actors, would have been even further removed from the original performance. With the absence of child actors, much of Sharpham’s humor moves from the parodic to the


comic, the events portrayed still unlikely, still overly sexualized, but within the realm of possibility. Without the aid of anti-mimetic boy players, Mistress Correction becomes a mere bawd, a site for audience castigation; the play’s conclusion, in which Mistress Correction is forced to return to her idiot husband, works to criticize her actions. By the end, Mistress Correction is in a position of authority over no one.

Perhaps as a result of changing tastes in the theatre, Sharpham’s midwife did not emerge as a standard in the 1630s. Women, particularly upper-class women, had become increasingly representative of theatre-goers, and playwrights’ productions changed to suit these new patrons. These women represented not only the aristocracy, with Queen Henrietta Maria commanding her own players and attending their public performances, but also citizens’ wives, the less affluent of whom attended the Fortune with the richer going to Blackfriars.\textsuperscript{229} By the 1630s, Blackfriars and the Cockpit “shaped their offerings to suit the new Caroline respectability and showed a new respect for the ladies in the boxes. The main shifts in taste reflected the female presence and called for refinements in the verbal crudities of the older repertory.”\textsuperscript{230} Under such auspices, it is unsurprising that Mistress Correction’s blatant sexual statements would be unwelcome in the public theatre. And women traditionally made up a high percentage of the audience of private, Cambridge dramas, which is where the next midwife appears on our stage.

\textsuperscript{229} For a discussion of changing tastes in English theatre and the effects of an increasingly female audience, see Andrew Gurr, \textit{Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London}, Third ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{230} Gurr, \textit{Playgoing}, 211.
Part II: Peter Hausted’s The Rival Friends (1632)

In March 1632, the young men of Cambridge University were preparing for a royal visit from King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria. As part of this visit, the royals were to be entertained with two original dramas, both written and performed by the students: Thomas Randolph’s The Jealous Lovers and Peter Hausted’s The Rival Friends. Both texts have been overshadowed by the events surrounding their initial performances. The university audience was predisposed to antagonism, many of them having taken sides in an internal dispute over whose play—Randolph’s or Hausted’s—should be performed first.  

The performances did not go well. Andrew Gurr places the blame squarely on Hausted’s shoulders, claiming that his “seven-hour play . . . was a disaster,” whereas Alan Nelson argues that it was Reynolds’ drama that offended.

231 For the fullest biography of Hausted, including the performance and publication of The Rival Friends, and his later involvement in the Laudian movement of the Anglican Church, see Laurens Joseph Mills, Peter Hausted: Playwright, Poet, and Preacher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). An account of Hausted’s play, gathering together all antagonistic references by Hausted’s contemporaries, see Joseph Quincy Adams, Peter Hausted’s The Rival Friends, With Some Account of His Other Works (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1912).

232 Among other things, The Rival Friends could not be stretched to seven hours. More likely, this time encompassed the performance of both plays as well as other incidentals. For Gurr’s claim, see Playgoing, 53-54.
Queen Henrietta Maria, due to its treatment of women.

Either way, the resulting royal displeasure was such that the university’s Vice-Chancellor committed suicide on April 1.

Given the content of *The Rival Friends*, it is difficult to imagine the king and queen’s becoming angry as a result of the text itself. The drama is convoluted, and not a particularly unique or well-crafted piece of dramaturgy, but its multiple plot lines are quite inoffensive. *The Rival Friends* has several pairs of star-crossed, cross-dressing lovers (all of whom end in appropriate heterosexual couplehood), a smattering of buffoonish lower-class stereotypes (all of whom receive good-natured verbal drubbings), a woman-hating young man who dupes a foolish shepherd and his idiot daughter into being tied to a tree to await Oberon (the father and daughter eventually untied), and an aging clergyman who fears being displaced at the behest of an egotistical patron (the patron’s plan ultimately foiled). In this last plot element, Hausted demonstrated, if anything, particular sensitivity to the politics and tastes of his royal patrons: “Charles I early in his reign gave attention to the condition of the poorer clergy. It is, therefore, not strange that Hausted should think of satirizing . . . the sort of injustice that the king had shown some inclination to remedy.”

And the means of rectifying this injustice, within

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Hausted’s play, is the midwife Placenta, a woman at the center of each plot element and whose machinations are integral to the resolution of each.\textsuperscript{235}

Placenta works to forward the romantic inclinations of the young ladies she has brought into the world, specifically Constantina and Pandora. Constantina has been abandoned in love by her Neander (known also as Cleopes) and seeks to run away from her uncle’s home; to accomplish this, Placenta supplies Constantina with a young boy, whom she dresses in Constantina’s clothing, and who takes Constantina’s place in the household. Meanwhile, Placenta helps Constantina to disguise herself as a young boy and escape. Once Constantina leaves, Placenta turns her attentions to Pandora, who is being pursued by Neander and Lucius (the eponymous “rival friends”), between whom she cannot choose; the two men are themselves of no assistance, each demurring in friendship to the other. Placenta devises a new plot for Pandora, suggesting that she feign a romantic attachment to a third young man, Endymion, ensuring that both Neander and Lucius will see the tryst and be spurred from indulging jealousy to decision making. In the end, predictably, Placenta’s plottings have unintended outcomes. Pandora and Endymion fall in love and marry; Neander feigns a marriage to a young shepherd dressed as a woman in order to induce Lucius to marry Pandora; the young shepherd is, of course, Constantina in disguise and the two remain married. And the young lad Placenta hired to

\textsuperscript{235} That \textit{The Rivall Friends} was meant to be read in a positive, and perhaps moral, light is emphasized by Hausted’s choice of publisher. \textit{The Rivall Friends} is the only drama published by Humphrey Robinson, who otherwise specialized only in religious texts. Hausted would, of course, later himself become a clergyman in the Church of England.
impersonate Constantina is in fact Isabella, who has been in love with Lucius from the beginning and who marries him in the end.

These romantic machinations are not the limit of Placenta’s plottings. The patron, Hooke, throughout the play attempts to “sell off” his deformed daughter, Ursely, in exchange for a living at the parsonage upon the current incumbent’s (Lively’s) death. Hooke eventually strikes a bargain with the gentleman, Terpander, that the mortgage upon the gentleman’s estate will be forgiven upon the marriage of Terpander’s son, the misogynist Anteros, and Hooke’s daughter. At the last moment, however, Loveall (Hooke’s nephew) reveals that Ursely is actually Terpander’s daughter and Anteros’ sister. Apparently, Hooke’s wife had been mistaken in a pregnancy, and fearing public humiliation begged the midwife Placenta to find a baby that she could claim as her own; that same day, Terpander’s wife was delivered of a deformed baby—Ursely—whom Placenta brought to Hooke’s wife to take as her own, Terpander’s wife giving out that the birth had been abortive.

Fig. 3.1: Familial relationships in The Rival Friends
It is in Hausted’s play that we see the midwife first morphing into the Roman comedic character of the *servus*, the clever trickster and faithful servant who works in the service of those above her; the *servus* is, above all, loyal. In the case of Placenta, that loyalty is gender-specific. Placenta is loyal to the mothers whom she delivered and to their daughters. But in the course of Placenta’s actions, she is implicated in schemes that would normally bring mountains of social reprehension down upon her: she sneaks an unmarried virgin out of her uncle’s home to fend for herself; she makes use of cross-dressing to allow a young woman to behave in public with the freedom of a man; she risks another maiden’s honor and reputation by having her “discovered” in a romantic embrace; she substitutes children and feigns abortive deliveries. These actions are not only disruptive in and of themselves, but they all work to defraud male authorities of their control over money, properties, and bodies. Cross-dressing itself “threatened a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, of which women’s subordination to man was a chief instance, trumpeted from pulpit, instantiated in law, and acted upon by monarch and commoner alike.” Risking a young woman’s reputation risked her viability in the marriage market, her “saleability,” and even in drama, “marriage was a means of controlling women to ensure that the children they

236 Jean E. Howard, “Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England,” in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 (1988), 418. This was, of course, the contemporary Puritan critique of acting.
produced were, in fact, the true heirs of their husbands.” And the substitution of children, in the most obvious instance of Placenta’s dangerousness, jeopardizes the correct inheritance of properties within a family.

Why then is Placenta never reproached? How does she manage to escape both internal critique from the other dramatic characters and the external critique of the audience? In the case of her cross-dressing ploys, Placenta has several factors working in her favor. First is the English comedic tradition itself; audience members are used to seeing the ploy of cross-dressing in romantic comedies, and by convention, the audience is aware of each character’s true sex from the beginning. Within the first few lines of Act I scene i, we have the narration of Isabella’s identity and predicament (“here I hope / I may enjoy at least a sight of him [Lucius], / And that is all that ever I must hope for”) as she assumes the role of a boy dressed as Constantina. And the remainder of the scene is devoted to the actual assumption on Constantina’s part of a male identity. With these early revelations, the audience is never caught unawares. In fact, the audience is more knowing than Placenta herself, since the midwife remains ignorant of Isabella’s sex. The audience is far less likely to find Placenta a threatening character when it is in a position

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of such superiority over her. Secondly, Placenta’s actions have no bearing on her profession as midwife. Of course Caroline Bicks argues that the midwife has the power of “sexing” the body of an infant, the child being neither male nor female until she deems it so. But in *The Rival Friends* we are not dealing with infant bodies; Isabella and Constantina *disguise* their sex, not alter it. Perhaps Placenta’s involvement in this cross-dressing is a convenient association with the midwife’s power over sex, but cross-dressing itself is a traditional ploy of English comedy, not a new device created for the midwife. In other words, the comic function and the midwife’s function happen to align themselves well enough to justify her inclusion as a character, not to necessitate it.

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239 The idea of a midwife’s being duped by an adult body, unable to correctly identify its sex from the exterior, was not merely a dramatic ploy. In December 1633, Francis Fletcher, midwife, was questioned in court concerning her admission of a man into a birth room. It was actually the midwife’s daughter-in-law who smuggled a man into the delivery room, dressing him in women’s clothing. “Only the midwife’s recognition of her daughter-in-law’s clothes on a visitor purporting to be someone else’s maidservant aroused suspicion, and led to the intruder’s dismissal...Having heard from the midwife, the court let her go without punishment.” See David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 96.

240 *Midwiving Subjects*. See especially Bicks’ discussion of Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* and the misattribution of Princess Elizabeth’s sex by the midwife.
The audience reaction to Placenta’s complicity in Pandora’s scheme—her apparent romantic tryst with Endymion—is more complicated (particularly since Pandora’s name itself does not bode well). In Act III scene i, when Pandora “slips down” to the ground and “pulls [Endymion] after her,” the audience is as yet unaware that both Pandora’s rival lovers, Neander and Lucius, are spoken for by other women, the identity of Constantia’s love remaining a mystery during her escape. Also, Endymion is, at this point, still merely Lucius’ page, although by the conclusion he will inherit a substantial estate and become a suitable mate for Pandora. So Pandora’s assignation with Endymion is still potentially problematic: he is beneath her in station and in economic possibility, and he is not yet marked as her final love interest, since Neander remains particularly unattached. How then does Placenta remain above audience censure? The answer lies in the conventions of female jesting. Throughout the “Pandora plot,” Placenta is the source of most of the verbal and physical humor, teasing Pandora for her new-fangled, romantic notions of lovemaking and Endymion for his shyness in the face of a willing young woman. At one point, Placenta even schools Endymion in how best to act the lover, and pins the young man’s arms behind his back while Pandora kisses him. Much of this humor is directed at the women of the audience, the jokes being played not only on the two rival lovers and on Endymion, and thus demonstrating two women’s abilities to manipulate the men around them to best advantage, but also working in tandem with Placenta’s wry commentary on romance in general. Placenta’s language is, effectively, an “in-joke” between women, with her suggestion that all women play hard-to-get because “A Lover’s like a Hunter, if the game / Be got with too much ease hee cares not
for’t; Shee that is wise in this our wayward age / Will keepe her Lovers sharpe, make them to ceize / Upon a firebrand for meat.”

Such humor is, if not entirely lost on Pandora, certainly not directed solely toward her. It is not Pandora, but the women of the audience, who truly appreciate the humor of Placenta’s statements, and by sharing in Placenta’s humor, the women of the audience can identify with her and her plottings, becoming somewhat complicit in them.

But it is Placenta’s baby-switching that presents the greatest obstacle to avoiding audience censure. Cross-dressing and romantic trysts hold the potential for long-term disruption—the loss of a young woman’s character, the debasement of her “value” in the marriage market. But changing babies, attributing children to men not their true fathers, represents an absolute impediment to the proper inheritance not only of physical estates but also social standing. Yet this is precisely what we discover Placenta has done, not only placing a child under the wrong parent, but substituting a malformed child. So how does Placenta emerge from this situation unscathed? First, Hausted distances Placenta from the revelation of her scheme; it is Loveall who communicates the truth of Ursely’s parentage, saying that he has learned of it from Placenta herself. “Placenta . . . came running / To me in haste, and cry’d what doe they meane? / It is not fit, nor can it be (unlesse / That they will violate the lawes of Nature).”

In fact, Placenta is never once faced with her misdeeds; even in subsequent scenes in which Placenta’s actions are discussed, and discussed in her presence, they are discussed in the abstract. When

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241 Hausted, Rival Friends, F[r].

242 Ibid., [M4r].
Terpander instructs Anteros to “salute [his] sister, and embrace her,” Placenta is not only silent, but remains apart from the issue, never addressed, never accused, never censured. Placenta follows the pattern for jesting women laid out by Pamela Brown in which “a woman who has carried out a clever trick or jest is not subjected to internal criticism or a dour concluding moral.” By not censuring Placenta internally, Hausted helps to prevent her censure externally. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, Placenta’s plotting helps to restore justice to Terpander and his family, and to Parson Lively, a pattern approved by Charles I himself.

It is only at the conclusion of The Rival Friends that Hausted’s midwife steps somewhat out of the role of the servus, becoming instead an active servitor of social justice. In her previous actions, the midwife’s role in ensuring social stability has been an unwitting one, but in the final scene she actively metes out retribution to members of her own class. Those who have attempted to raise themselves above their stations—the idiot suitors to Ursely, those who played tricks on her husband (Stipes) and daughter (Merda), and even her husband and daughter themselves—all fall to Pandora’s (literal) cudgel. Stipes throughout the play has labored under delusions of grandeur: that he is a better man than his station acknowledges; Anteros at one point preys upon that delusion, tricking Stipes into tying himself and Merda to a tree to wait for the god Oberon to come along and turn Stipes into a gentleman. In the final scene, Stipes and Merda enter, still bent on moving up the social ladder, but Placenta will have none of their ambitions.

Stip I am a gentleman, and I will be a gentleman, I will enclose, and I

243 Brown, Better a Shrew, 10.
will rayse rents—I will be a lower-houseman, and I will be—

Plac. An old cox-combe, and you shall be beaten [She beats him.]

Stip. But does this stand good in law?

Plac. Feare not that; I’le find an old statute for it, doubt it not. You are a gentleman? and you will be a gentleman? I’le make you gentle enough e’re I haue done with you.

Stip. O, O, O.

Plac. And you my sweet lips that wil not call me mother, but looke scuruily, Come on your wayes I have the common law on my side too for this. [She beats Merda.]

Mer. Oh mother, I’le never bee a gentlewoman more while I liue, nor never talke of gold neekerchers, no that I won’t truely. [She beats Stipes again.]

Plac. Yes, you shall bee a Lower-house man, you shall; I’le take yu downe a Pinne, you’r too high now.

Stip. O, O, good-wife—O, O, hony wife.244

This physical comedy, while not particularly complex, completes Hausted’s development of Placenta as the typical jesting dramatic female, with “a male, often a husband, father, cleric, or unwanted suitor [being] the butt of laughter brought down on him through the agency of a woman or women.”245

244 Hausted, Rival Friends, [O2v].

245 Brown, Better a Shrew, 9.
Certainly Placenta’s movement from comedic catalyst to parodic stereotype à la Punch and Judy is not elegantly handled within the play itself, her final slapstick comedy being quite out of character, but this is not the composition of an experienced playwright. In fact, Hausted’s treatment of Placenta throughout the play has been inconsistent; one might even argue that the revelation of Placenta’s baby-switching was merely a convenient ploy thrown in by an inexperienced dramatist looking for a way out of the dramatic corner he had written himself into. What does remain consistent throughout, however, is Hausted’s usage of Placenta in ways that obviate any punishment she might otherwise warrant. This concluding scene with Placenta, although awkwardly managed, solidifies Placenta as a positive character, at least in terms of the social order confirmed within the drama, and presumably approved by the royal audience.

**Part III: Ben Jonson’s *The Magnetic Lady* (1632)**

Hausted’s play, and its midwife, were created for the specific approbation of the king and queen. By the 1630s, another playwright, Ben Jonson, was lamenting that his own works of drama were no longer being presented for such an elite company. Hausted “can count on a spectator, the king, whose judgments are absolute and whose position is fixed, unaffected by the fluidity of market relations.”\(^{246}\) As a result, Hausted could feel certain that his midwife, no matter how ineptly handled by the author, would be interpreted under a particular rubric, one suited to preserving royal prerogative and the status quo. Outside these private productions, however, “playgoing itself could be as

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\(^{246}\) Howard, *The Stage*, 76.
disruptive of established social relations as watching the iconoclastic drama."\(^{247}\) It is this uncertainty, this malleability of interpretation and disruption of authorial intent, that so infuriated Ben Jonson in his later years. “Much to Jonson’s dismay, his art had become rather too much like a Bartholomew Fair commodity liable to judgment by those who can and will pay to see it, whatever their rank, education, and taste.”\(^{248}\) Jonson’s play was still “regal”; the King’s Men performed it at the Second Blackfriars, a noted haunt of Queen Henrietta Maria in the 1630s.\(^{249}\) But Jonson could not be certain that a royal would be in the audience, and although Blackfriars was a more “upper class” theatre than many others, admission could still be bought by anyone who had the price of a ticket, opening Jonson’s drama up to the “vulgar” interpretations of members of all classes. So when Jonson created his own dramatic midwife in 1632, he was far more circumspect and specific in his construction. Like Placenta, Jonson’s midwife, Mistress Chair, is a functionary for the social order within a comedy, but while Chair’s actions may at first seem open to interpretation in modern eyes, Jonson creates her in such a way that she is, in the end, clearly defined as an instrument of social ordering and the preservation of the status quo.

Unlike most of Jonson’s plays, which have enjoyed critical attention from modern scholars, *The Magnetic Lady* is usually considered one of the playwright’s “dotages.”

\(^{247}\) Ibid., 73.

\(^{248}\) Ibid., 76.

\(^{249}\) For more on Blackfriars, see Gurr’s *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*; on Henrietta Maria’s attendance, see especially p. 71.
Part of this critical attitude is due to the original performance of and contemporary response to the play. *The Magnetic Lady* was licensed on 12 October 1632 and performed by the King’s Men at the Second Blackfriars. But unlike many of Jonson’s plays, *The Magnetic Lady* was not a success. Jonson’s drama was taken before the censors, apparently a result of the actors inserting profanity into the text, without Jonson’s knowledge or presence. The resulting language led to charges of Arminianism.\(^{250}\) Eventually, Jonson was cleared, and the play was revived on 24 October 1633, but it never achieved much acclaim, and even now it is most often grouped in with Jonson’s “lesser” works. *The Magnetic Lady* has, in very recent years however, experienced a bit of a critical resurgence, particularly as it exhibits “particular interest in questions of community and that a re-evaluation of the role of women within society was concordant with that concern.”\(^ {251}\)

\(^{250}\) Martin Butler, “Ecclesiastical Censorship of Early Stuart Drama: The Case of Jonson’s *The Magnetic Lady*,” in *Modern Philology* 89.4 (1992): 469-81. All the passages Butler singles out as potential sites for this “profanity” do not involve the midwife; according to Butler, it is the gossip Polish who is the play’s villain, not only in terms of the plot, but in terms of references to Arminianism which may have invoked the censors.

\(^{251}\) Julie Sanders, “‘Twill fit the players yet’: Women and theatre in Jonson’s late plays,” in *Ben Jonson and Theatre: Performance, Practice and Theory*, eds. Richard Cave, Elizabeth Schafer and Brian Woolland (New York: Routledge, 1999), 184.
More than Hausted, Jonson is concerned with instructing his audience, in ensuring that the audience walks away with a clear moral, or at least social, lesson learned. In order to preclude misinterpretation of that lesson, Jonson maintains a near-strangle hold on his dramatic construction (which must have made his actors’ unlawful insertion of profanity all the more frustrating and insulting for him). John Gordon Sweeney III made Jonson’s relationship to his audience and his attempts to control their responses the subject of his 1985 monograph, *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater: To Coin the Spirit, Spend the Soul.*

According to Sweeney, Jonson “asks us to participate in significant theater, theater that promises self-knowledge and realizes the instructive potential of fiction . . . But in addition, Jonson’s theater is immensely self-serving, and its self-consciousness about the way it works frustrates our attempts to participate freely.”

But such frustration is intentional on Jonson’s part, making the audience member’s response to the drama “no longer free expression of a personal experience in the theater, but an index of moral health.”

The main plot of *The Magnetic Lady* involves Lady Loadstone and her niece, Placentia, and the various men who attempt to win them, and the money that each woman possesses. Placentia stands to inherit £16,000 upon her marriage; to remain in control of that fortune, the usurer, Sir Moth Interest, has dissuaded each of Placentia’s suitors.

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253 Ibid., 9.

254 Ibid., 10.
Placentia has been raised, effectively, by Mistress Polish, the gossip present at her birth. In Polish’s own words,

...I did bring up

My Ladies Neice [sic], Mrs. Placentia Steele,

With my owne Daughter...

Her Ladishop well knowes Mrs. Placentia

Steele (as I said) her curious Neice, was left

A Legacie to me; by Father, and Mother

With the Nurse, Keepe, that tended her: her Mother

Shee died in Child-bed of her, and her Father

Liv’d not long after: for he lov’d her Mother!255

Whilst the men of the drama vie to win the rich aunt and her heiress niece, Placentia herself becomes ill with what Doctor Rut diagnoses as a “tympany.” Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the “tympany” turns out to be a pregnancy. At a dinner given by Lady Loadstone for the wide variety of suitors, the men commence arguing, eventually turning violent as Captain Ironside draws his sword, an event which frightens young Placentia into labor.

What the audience, and Mr. Compasse (the leading suitor for Placentia), soon learns is that Placentia is not Lady Loadstone’s true niece. Gossip Polish switched her

child and that of Lady Loadstone’s sister at birth with the aid of Nurse Keepe. Mr. Compasse keeps this knowledge to himself, and quietly marries Polish’s “daughter,” Pleasance. In the mean time, Midwife Chair arrives to deliver Placentia of her child, a live boy. In the interest of keeping the young woman viable in the marriage market, and eventually moving her money out into the world via marriage, Midwife Chair instructs the women of the household in how to hide Placentia’s condition. To unite the quarrelling Gossip Polish and Nurse Keepe, Midwife Chair says, “Come, come, be friends; and keepe these women-matters, / Smock-secrets to our selves, in our owne verge. / Wee shall marre all, if once we ope the mysteries / O’ the Tyring-house, and tell what’s done within.”

In the end, of course, Compasse reveals his marriage to the “true” niece, receiving in turn her £16,000; Sir Moth Interest, who attempted to keep control of his niece’s money, ends by having to pay an additional £10,000 to young Mister Needle, whom he had convinced to marry his “false” niece. And Lady Loadstone herself ends by marrying Captain Ironside, Compasse’s closest friend.

It is critically tempting to interpret The Magnetic Lady purely in terms of magnetism (particularly early modern scientific theories, such as Gilbert’s De Magnete), and many scholars have done so. But while the names of many of these characters certainly do work under the extended conceit of magnetism—Loadstone, Compasse, Ironside, Needle—attempting to force all of the characters, particularly the female

256 Ibid., 49.

characters into a simple “scientific” magnetic scheme is both awkward and unproductive. The plot surrounding Placentia’s illegitimate child, and even the substitution of Polish’s daughter, would seem to have little to do with magnetism, even in its broadest sense. Also, in interpreting The Magnetic Lady in scientific terms only, critics reorient the play in terms of male characters, particularly Compass, at the expense of the more interesting females who are the true center of the tale, often instead making Lady Loadstone the passive attractant with men actively moving about her. Julie Sanders, however, has made a connection between magnetism and the womb, citing Jane Sharp’s midwifery manual that attributed a “magnetic quality” to the uterus.258 This is a little anachronistic, considering that Sharp’s work did not appear until 1671, but the basic concept is attributed even to the writing of Aristotle.259 Under this paradigm, we have not one “attractant,” but three—Lady Lodestone, Placentia, and Pleasance—and Lady Lodestone


259 “Averrois doth say, that the wombe and nature doe draw the seede, as the Lodestone doth yron, and the Agathe steele: but she dooth draw it for the perfection of her selfe.” The problems of Aristotle with other philosophers and phisitions (Edinborough: Robert Waldgrave, 1595), E3[r].
is, in some ways, actually the least powerful of all three. And it is Midwife Chair whose function is to temper, organize, and reorient these powerful attractants, to manage (in magnetic terms) the five motions of coition, direction, variation, declination, and revolution.

In this case, we might define those “magnetic” expressions in terms of the plot. Coition, defined in magnetic language as “attraction” or “an impulse to magnetic union,” we easily read as sexual drive on the part of the false niece, an impulse that Chair seeks to reorient, if not create. Direction—a magnet’s relationship to the earth and the earth’s to the universe—is here depicted as individuals’ positions in society; the false niece has endangered that placement, and so Chair attempt to preserve her “direction” in the world, her position under threat by her sexual lewdness. Placentia is already in a state of “variation,” having been “deflected from the meridian,” or her prescribed path; she has committed a “perverted motion.” Mistress Chair’s final conclusion is to take advantage of “declination,” of the “descent of the magnetic pole beneath the horizon,” which hides

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Brian Woolland has found this interpretation to be born out in his production of The Magnetic Lady. In “The Gift of Silence,” Woolland notes that “in the whole play she [Placentia] speaks only five lines, all of them in the second act, yet she appears in no fewer than ten scenes” (133). By focusing theatrically on silence, Woolland sees one of “the most notable effects” being “a sense that this was Placentia’s play” (134). Brian Woolland, “The Gift of Silence,” in Ben Jonson and Theatre: Performance, Practice and Theory (New York: Routledge, 1999), 133-4.
the position of the north from man’s view, and to maintain “revolution,” the “circular movement” of the status quo reinvesting in itself.\footnote{261}

In Jonson, the midwife, Mistress Chair, is responsible not only for the delivery of an illegitimate baby, but for falsifying the virginity of the child’s mother. These two acts may be conceived of as subversive to the social order, and signify the dangers posed by midwives’ privileged, gendered access to other women’s bodies. However, Mistress Chair acts in the service of the social order, as Jonson makes clear, by attempting to salvage the economic disaster resulting from an heiress’ fall from grace. Notably, it is not she who is chastised for her deceitful actions, but rather those gossips who had originally switched two female children at birth, making a lower-class girl an aristocratic heiress.

Being privy to Placentia’s pregnancy, Midwife Chair is in the impossible position of having two choices: to hide the pregnancy, and preserve Placentia’s economic viability, and so break her oath and the law; or, to reveal the pregnancy, maintain her oath, and destroy an important element of economic worth and potential. In the end, her actions contravene a number of rules, both social and dramatic. On a dramatic level, Jonson was a classicist, and Aristotle’s Poetics demands that complex action contain a “reversal of the situation” and/or “recognition,” and Mistress Chair attempts to amend or hide the former and prevent the latter, so she is a disruptive force not merely within the world of the play but to the genre of comedy itself. As a professional, the midwife must

\footnote{261 All definitions are drawn from William Gilbert, \textit{De Magnete}, trans. Fleury Mottelay (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 73.}
swear to discover the father of the child and publicize it, a duty referred to by Pleasance in Act IV, scene v, saying “Mistres Midwife / Has promis’d to find out a father for it, / If there be need.” This remark is, of course, a double entendre, suggesting that Mistress Chair will attribute an appropriate “father” if it becomes necessary, rather than discovering the true one. Her profession also demands that she be a witness to women’s virginity in legal cases, another duty which Mistress Chair misuses in Placentia’s situation. This semblance of virginity threatens not only to upend the correct order of the drama, but also implies the possibility that other “pseudo-virgins” may be wandering the real streets of London. The correct reading of the hymen was under particular strain in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, “a site of pure ambiguity, a membrane whose material existence is both constantly called into question and vociferously insisted upon.”

A translation of Ambroise Paré’s medical texts in 1634 takes issue with this very problem, as he attempts to discredit the regular existence of the hymen. “In his attempt to refute this anatomical fiction, he also describes the uncertainty and disagreement among midwives over the hymen’s composition and position.”

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262 Jonson, Magnetick, 47.


264 Ibid., 31. Paré’s attitude toward midwives is almost unqualifiedly negative. With the exception of relating a few irregular births, in which midwives function as witnesses, Paré takes every opportunity of blaming midwives for various diseases and malformations, including hydrocephalies and malformations of the womb. Paré regularly
Mistress Chair’s ability to simulate virginity implicates not only her own reliability, but the reliability of the female body and man’s ability to read it.

These elements would seem to mark Mistress Chair as a character to be eventually demeaned and curtailed. But Mistress Chair’s actions are also, in some ways, in the service of the status quo and of the patriarchal order of society, and as Peter Happé has argued, “Jonson’s presentation of the nature and role of midwives should not be seen as derogatory in a play which is generally sympathetic to the predicaments and difficulties of women.”

We must remember that Mistress Chair remains ignorant of Placentia’s true parentage. Without marriage, Placentia’s wealth will remain in the hands of her uncle Interest, and will not enter into the marketplace. Nothing, in social terms, is to be gained by an unmarriageable heiress. Jonson is no feminist. It is a woman’s body, a woman’s incontinence that has created this problematic situation. Placentia functions usually unfavorable language, accusing them of “violence,” “carelessness,” and “foolish rashness.”

The workes of that famous chirurgion Ambrose Parey (London: Cotes and Young, 1634), 289, 594, and 934 respectively. Midwives could also be the agents for curing these same afflictions; John Sadler, in The Sicke Womans private looking-glasse, gives directions for a midwife to cure both the “suffocation of the mother” and “falling down of the mother,” as well as the means to diagnose “inflammation of the womb.” (London: Anne Griffin for Philemon Stephens and Christopher Meridith, 1636), 73-4, 82-3, and 88, respectively.

as one of Gail Kern Paster’s “leaky vessels,” with the breaking of her water in labor, the fluids surrounding the birth itself, the elimination of the placenta, and her inevitable lactation. Paster notes that the discourse of Renaissance medicine “inscribes women as leaky vessels by isolating one element of the female body’s material expressiveness—its production of fluids—as excessive, hence either disturbing or shameful.” We might expect that the midwife would be “contaminated” by this discourse, but if indeed “representations of the female body as a leaking vessel display that body as beyond the control of the female subject,” then Midwife Chair stands as a force for reestablishing control of a female subject, by a female subject, but at the service of men. Mistress Chair’s actions, while contravening all the practices of midwifery designed to maintain the social order and proper inheritance of wealth, still serve the same social purpose as intended by the establishment of those practices. In this way, Mistress Chair stands in juxtaposition to Nurse Keepe and Gossip Polish. Martin Butler would have it that Jonson’s city comedies depend upon “the juxtaposition of unrelated types.” Critics, like Julie Sanders, would have it that Midwife Chair, Gossip Polish, and Nurse Keepe are one and the same, “reprehensible characters, as apt to slander each other as male

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267 Ibid., 25.

members of the community in their onstage diatribes, and are shocking in their lack of care for their medical charge in all but the most materialistic terms.”\(^{269}\) But if we resist the temptation to merge all female practitioners into one overarching type, Mistress Chair’s alliance with the male-ordered system is evident. Mistress Chair is, in fact, the “loyal” woman, the pragmatic character who, if not entirely pure, works in the service of the greater social good. Jonson contrasts her with Polish and Keepe, women who similarly ignore the rules of the patriarchal order, but do so only for their own personal gain, a contrast made all the more explicit at the conclusion of the drama in which Polish

\(^{269}\) “Midwifery and the New Science,” 83. Sanders is not the only critic to find such an elision too tempting to refuse. Helen Ostovich bases her entire interpretation of the play on that very misreading, even going so far as to attribute witchcraft to Midwife Chair based on the midwife’s knowledge of medical lore and the assumption that Keepe and Polish’s slurs against each other, including calling each other a “witch,” somehow reflect on Chair. Helen Ostovich, “The Appropriation of Pleasure in The Magnetic Lady,” in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34 (1994): 425-42. Sanders’ antagonism to Midwife Chair is, however, particularly inexplicable, considering her larger project in *Ben Jonson’s Theatrical Republics* “to politicize their [Jonson’s female characters] import, particularly in the way that they function as communities of women, often as alternative to those communities franchised by conventional and predominantly absolutist politics” Julie Sanders, *Ben Jonson’s Theatrical Republics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998), 49. Mistress Chair’s actions, with the assistance of the women around her, certainly represents such a collective.
and Keepe are subjected to the judgments of the male authorities, while Midwife Chair’s actions are never questioned, never made a subject of male investigation.

Jonson apparently expects that the play’s conclusion is clear enough that it requires no explanation; throughout the play, Jonson punctuates the action with the commentary of what Peter Happé terms a “choric on-stage audience,” in which “the on-stage audience forms a framework for the play and the device is used to formulate concepts about the play, as well as to nudge the play along by drawing attention to such things as developments in the narrative and the appearance of new characters.”

This chorus is notably absent at the conclusion; despite having heralded the beginning of the drama, the chorus does not conveniently bookend the play, and does not instruct the audience in how to interpret the moral lesson. According to Martin Butler, the “conclusion seems a piece of social engineering, in which society’s moral legislation is diverted into the hands of characters who deserve the responsibility.”

As such, then, the absence of Midwife Chair’s prosecution under that legislation must stand, if not as an approbation of her actions, certainly as a tacit acceptance of their having been guided by correct intentions. This interpretation of Midwife Chair’s position also fits with Jonson’s continuing allegiance to royal value systems and interest in maintaining the status quo.

Jonson, even in his later life and after a certain disillusionment with the court in general,

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is “still concerned to construct fables which reaffirmed rather than called into question the social and political hegemony of the court.”

Were Midwife Chair truly a character to be despised and castigated, or even one to be easily misinterpreted, her actions would necessarily have been called into question and explained. The question is what part Mistress Chair plays in this “fable,” this reinforcement of Caroline court values. In essence, Chair is in the service of maintaining that structure to the best of her ability, until the reality of the switched children and the issue of legitimacy is resolved.

**Part IV: Richard Brome’s The Queen and Concubine (1635) and The Love-Sick Court (1639)**

Critics have speculated on the real-life identities of The Magnetic Lady’s choral figures, especially which characters represent aspects of Jonson’s own identity. But not every character is a necessarily a facet of the author himself; Peter Happé speculates that

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272 Ibid., 185.

273 Moreover, it is unlikely that Jonson accidentally omitted Midwife Chair from his condemnation, having proven in earlier texts that he is no particular friend to the midwife in general. Jonson had used “midwife” as a by-word for an ugly appearance in Poetaster (perf. 1601; pub. 1602), and he very explicitly included a tale from the *Malleus Maleficarum* in his printed edition of *The Masque of Queenes* (1609) detailing “a midwife in the Diocese of Bail” who was also a witch. *Poetaster, or His Arraignement* (London: [R. Bradock] for M. L[ownes], 1602), F3[r]; *The Masque of Queenes* (London: N. Okes for R. Bonian and H Wally, 1609), C[r].
the “Boy” is at least partially based on Richard Brome, Jonson’s young dramatic apprentice. Perhaps this is so, but more certainly it is to Brome that we must look for our final Caroline dramatic midwives. Midwives feature in two of Brome’s theatrical pieces, *The Love-Sick Court* (perf. 1639; pub. 1658) and *The Queen and Concubine* (perf. 1635; pub. 1659). With Brome, unlike Hausted and Jonson, we have the opportunity to examine an author who evolves from a regular usage of midwifery as a trope or an aside to characters appearing on the stage in two very different plays, and whom we can reasonably compare to a previous author (Jonson) as being a direct influence.

Like most authors, Brome utilized the term “midwife” throughout his authorial career in a wide variety of manners, most of which were well established before the


275  William Winstanley, in *The Lives of the most Famous English Poets* (1687), describes Richard Brome as “a Servant to Mr. Benjamin Jonson, a Servant (saith one) suitable to such a Master...though divers witty only in reproving, say, That this Broome had only what he swept from his Master: But the Comodies he Wrote, so well received and generally applauded, give the Lie to such Detractors.” (London: H. Clark for Samuelmanship, 1687), L3[r]. Matthew Steggle notes in his monograph on the playwright that “Brome’s plays are often in dialogue with previous drama, and that previous drama is often—but not always—Jonson’s.” Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and politics on the Caroline Stage* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 4.
1630s. And up to the composition of *The Queen and Concubine* in 1635, Brome’s midwifery references followed few discernible patterns. Brome’s first reference to midwifery during this early period of composition solidifies one pattern in his usage, however, and that is his insistence that the midwife is a gendered being who serves gendered bodies; as a result, Brome’s usages of the term “midwife” are usually limited to sexual humor, rather than the relatively genderless and disembodied trope meaning “to bring forth.” In *The Northern Lass* (perf. 1629; pub. 1632), a young woman suffers from a delusional pregnancy; a male character, correctly diagnosing her actual condition claims that, “By and by, I must be a Man-Midwife forsooth and deliver her: for twas past all Womans skill.”276 The cure of a mental issue is made obviously a male prerogative in this reference, and while we might interpret this as derogatory toward the midwife—that her medical knowledge is limited to the lower sphere of mere bodily concern—it also protects her from associations with false deliveries, of which Hausted’s midwife was guilty. In *The City Wit* (perf. c. 1632; pub. 1653), Brome’s humor is directly sexed, if not sexual, as he associates the midwife with an unbridled tongue and drunken behavior, and uses her as means to describe a shrewish mother-in-law: “that woman of an eternall Tongue; that Creature of an everlasting noyse; whose perpetuall talke is able to deafen a Miller; whose discourse is more tedious then a Justices Charge; Shee, that will out-scold ten carted Bawds, even when she is sober; and out-chat fifteen Midwives, though

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276 *The antipodes a comedie* (London: I. Okes for Francis Constable, 1640), [I3v].
fourteen of them be halfe drunk: this Shee-thing hath burst all." In this litany of female vices, the midwife is most certainly not the worst offender, her drunken revelry placing her squarely above the bawds and the mother-in-law, but certainly she ranks beneath the men whose worst offenses are tediousness and a tendency to work in loud places. All of these feminine vices are, however, linked via the rhetoric of “leakage,” which is a well-established schema for referring to the sexualized female body—drinking, bursting, mouths, and tongues. The midwife may not be the most permeable of these bodies, but Brome’s usage certainly does not place her in a position of controlling those leaking bodies either. But Brome’s midwifery references are not entirely negative; in *The Sparagus Garden* (perf. 1635; pub. 1640), one sign of a bachelor’s ridiculous lack of rationalism is his firm belief that no “marriageable maid” could exist, “tho[u]gh she were justified by a jury of Midwifes.” *The Sparagus Garden* is a trickster comedy that includes a feigned pregnancy (a young woman making clever use of a pillow in order to force a marriage), making Brome’s midwifery reference appropriate, if not particularly integral to the play.

The midwife of Brome’s *The Sparagus Garden* may be a source of reliable information and testimony, but Brome did not always treat midwives with due respect. In fact, in the same year that *The Sparagus Garden* was performed, Brome debuted another

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277 *The city wit, or The woman wears breeches a comedy* (London: Richard Marriott and Thomas Dring, 1653), [A6r]. Brome wrote this drama for one of the few remaining boys acting troupes, the King’s Revels Boys.

278 *The sparagus garden a comedie* (London: Francis Constable, 1640), [K2v].
drama, *The Queen and Concubine*, in which a midwife gives false testimony concerning a Queen’s sexual proclivities, resulting in the Queen’s banishment from court.\(^{279}\) This midwife appears embodied on the stage, and though she speaks no lines, her actions, and the descriptions made by other characters, speak volumes. This is not the comic midwife of previous dramas, whose plots and machinations form elements of humor and who stands uncorrected at the conclusion of the drama’s action. This midwife is a new dramatic breed altogether.

The plot of *The Queen and Concubine* follows the fortunes and misfortunes of Gonzago and Eulalia, king and queen of Sicily. Gonzago, having conquered another land and come back a hero, is jealous of sharing his glory with Sforza, the great general who

\(^{279}\) We can reasonably compare Brome’s reference to midwives in *The Sparagus Garden* and his mute midwife of *The Queen and Concubine* not merely because of the proximity of their dates of composition, but because the success of *The Sparagus Garden*, which Brome wrote for the Salisbury Court theatre, directly resulted in his contract to compose more dramas for troupes at that location. The next of these commissioned dramas was *The Queen and Concubine*. (See Steggle, *Richard Brome*, 71.) *The Sparagus Garden* and *The Queen and Concubine* were both performed by the King’s Revels; this acting troupe broke up during the extended theatre closure of 1636-37, most of the actors being absorbed into Queen Henrietta Maria’s Men. Queen Henrietta’s Men went on to perform at Salisbury Court theatre from the reopening of the theatres in 1637 to their closure in 1642. Brome would go on to write at least five more dramas for Queen Henrietta Maria’s Men, including *The Antipodes* (perf. 1638), which will be addressed later.
saved him from his enemies. Sforza is also a kinsman of Queen Eulalia, of whom the king has become tired. Gonzago imprisons the general and trumps up charges of adultery against Eulalia. Having suborned false witnesses, including a doctor and a midwife, Gonzago succeeds in convicting Eulalia, driving her out of court and issuing an edict that no loyal countryman may assist her. Gonzago replaces Eulalia with Alinda, Sforza’s ambitious daughter, and the eponymous “concubine” of the tale. Eulalia, while in the country, is visited by an angelic “genius” who grants her a series of special abilities, including the ability to heal the sick; Eulalia becomes a patron of the countryside. Gonzago sends the perjured doctor and midwife in disguise to assassinate Eulalia, who sees through their plans. In the end, Alinda goes mad with guilt and Gonzago tires of her; repenting his actions, he reinstates Eulalia, who heals Alinda, and abdicates his throne in favor of his and Eulalia’s son.

It is no difficult feat to interpret *The Queen and Concubine* as a didactic text simultaneously making political, religious, and economic commentaries. As far back as 1961, R. J. Kaufmann was placing Brome in the conservative moral tradition of Caroline drama, arguing that the playwright created moral lessons through series of dichotomies. Martin Butler, in *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642*, puts *The Queen and Concubine* in the context of Caroline politics, claiming that Brome is intentionally contrasting the tensions between following the orders of a King who rules by divine right with the characters’ realizations that the monarch is flawed and oppressive. Brome, in this argument, contrasts the King’s government, and his perfunctory consultation of Parliament for the mere rubber-stamping of his decisions, with the fully functioning “parliament”
established by Queen Eulalia in exile. Eulalia’s actions, furthermore, have long been interpreted within religious paradigms, with critics from the 1960s onward arguing that Eulalia is effectively a Catholic saint.\textsuperscript{280} Butler also contends that Brome is actively contrasting elements of Elizabethan nostalgia with Caroline political disenchantment, a contention that Matthew Steggle supports, saying that Brome “combines pointed political discussion of absolutism with a knowing use of Elizabethan naïveté.”\textsuperscript{281} In tandem with this Elizabethan nostalgia is Brome’s evocation of the pastoral tradition as a means to laud a work ethic based around citizen values of productivity, hard work, and organization. Criticism has tended to contextualize Eulalia in terms of her being a model of wifely obedience, meekness, and submission: but in fact Eulalia in the second half of the play runs and manages her own business. ... What this play does is to elide such appropriate queenly activity [needlework] with the working-class cottage industry of lacemaking, thus investing that industry with a reflected courtly glamour.\textsuperscript{282}

\textsuperscript{280} Kaufmann argues that Eulalia is a saint who both performs miracles and is saved by one when her assassin’s hand withers. And Steggle notes that the play “celebrates the activities of a puritan queen whose behaviour is surprisingly close to being that of a Catholic saint,” forming yet another dichotomy “between the miraculous and the satirical” (\textit{Richard Brome}, 90).

\textsuperscript{281} Steggle, \textit{Richard Brome}, 90.

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 87-88.
Brome’s insistence on a positive portrayal of the working class is unsurprising, given that unlike many early modern writers he had first-hand experience of service.\footnote{Ibid., 1. Adding to the argument for Brome’s sentimentality is his dedication of \textit{The Sparagus Garden} to William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, who had a “nostalgia for the Elizabethan court and [a] desire for reforms in the Stuart court.” Ira Clark, \textit{Professional Playwrights: Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and Brome} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 156.}

Despite Brome’s semi-alliance with the working-class, his depiction of the mendacious doctor and midwife belies any attempt to read his class politics in a unilateral fashion. If we accept that there are Elizabethan nostalgic references within \textit{The Queen and Concubine}, then Brome is setting up the midwife as an element of the disruptive, paternalistic, anti-Elizabethan establishment and an enemy of the natural, organic civilization as established in the country by Eulalia. Moreover, by perjuring her testimony concerning another woman’s sexual status and activity, the midwife presents as an enemy to “feminine” interests, being more allied with male goals detrimental to the women she serves. The midwife, and the doctor also, are depicted as susceptible to economic interests, being described as “Two dainty devil / Birds, a Doctor and a Midwife, who accus’d / Themselves for Bawds i’th’ Action ... / These were the Queens own people, and deserv’d / A thousand Crowns apiece, and had it instantly, / Afore-hand too.”\footnote{\textit{The Queen and Concubine} (London: A. Crook and Hen[ry] Brome, 1658), 21.} These two characters are not only willing to perjure themselves before the secular courts, but even to do so in the eyes of God; in their mimed show, according to
Brome’s stage directions, “the King points them [the Doctor and Midwife] to the Bishops, they each deliver Papers, kiss the Bishops Books, and are dismiss’d.”\textsuperscript{285}

And these medical functionaries go beyond mere dissimulation in their pursuit of wealth and in their service to their dishonorable King; in Act III scene i, Eulalia’s ghostly Genius reveals to her that “those th[at] perjur’d Evidence / That suggested thing offence, / Are hir’d the second time to be / Co-actors in thy Tragedie. / They have their Fee, and now are sent / Towards thee with vile intent.”\textsuperscript{286} One of Eulalia’s loyal servants, upon discovering the midwife’s identity, castigates her by likening her murderous intention to the perversion of her professional function: “And are these the Labours you go to, Mistress Mid-night? / Would you bring women to bed this way?”\textsuperscript{287} Surprisingly, the midwife and doctor both survive the actions of the play, but unlike the comedic midwives we have seen before, this midwife does not go unrebuked, nor should her survival be interpreted as tacit acceptance of her actions. Instead, both she and the doctor stand as living witnesses of Eulalia’s goodness and the virtue of repentance, being told by Eulalia to “Go, and pray for grace to mend your lives.”\textsuperscript{288} Both the midwife and the physician represent the working-class’s complicity in the jostling for royal preferment. In \textit{The Queen and Concubine}, medical practitioners provide “a target for all the Caroline professionals, the sycophantic scramble for unmerited preferment to royal

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 122.
favoritism...presenting sociopolitical climbing as sustaining and being fostered by absolutism.”

Three years later, Brome completed another drama, *The Love-Sick Court*, which featured yet another midwife on the stage, in this case a parodic “false” midwife who had connived in the substitution of babies. But rather like the anti-mimetic midwife-cum-bawd of Sharpham’s *Cupid’s Whirligig*, this second midwife is more a commentary on the traditions of the court romance and the stock characters of the Caroline stage than she is a reflection of attitudes toward midwives as professionals. In the years between *The Queen and Concubine* and *The Love-Sick Court*, Brome’s changing attitude toward parody, including parody of his own work and his own treatment of midwives, was becoming evident. For example, in *The Antipodes* (perf. 1638; pub. 1640), Brome pokes fun at the tradition of mum-shows, similar to those that he had included in *The Queen and Concubine*, with the comic character Blaze: “A Mute is one that acteth speakingly, / And yet sayes nothing. I did two of them. / The Sage Man-midwife, and the Basketmaker.” By the time Brome approached the composition of *The Love-Sick Court*, he had entirely abandoned his experiments in tragicomedy and returned to his own best talent, “having an excellent Vain fitted for a Comique Strain.”

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289 Clark, *Professional Playwrights*, 162.

290 Richard Brome, *The antipodes a comedie* (London: Francis Constable, 1640), K3[r]-[K3v].

291 Winstanley, *Lives*, L3[r].
R. J. Kaufmanns’ *Richard Brome, Caroline Playwright* (1961) lists *The Love-Sick Court* as parody of courtier drama, and more recent critics have tended to reassert this evaluation and to expand the vision of Brome’s parody from being limited to dramatic forms to a satire of ideological and political models supported by such generic expectations. Matthew Steggle in particular claims this play to be not an “unsuccessful neoplatonic tragicomedy,” but rather “a savage satirical attack on such woolly thinking.” The content of *The Love-Sick Court* contains a number of self-parodying elements, from dream-visions and dumb shows (present in *The Queen’s Exchange* and *The Queen and Concubine*) to the theme of potential incest (used in *The Queen’s Exchange*). But if Brome is indeed parodying his own earlier works, as well as those of his dramatic forbearers, it stands to reason that he would similarly parody the midwife

292 Richard Brome, 6. Steggle finds it difficult to reconcile Brome’s satire of courtly romance and “civic government” with the play’s performance by Queen Henrietta Maria’s Men, saying “Even though it is an oversimplification to think of Caroline courtly neoplatonism as a monolithic ideology exclusively associated with Queen Henrietta Maria, it is still surprising to find a company bearing her name making such an aggressive parody of a mode of thought that was, rightly or wrongly, particularly linked to her” (139). There seems to be a question of performance for this particular play; Steggle attributes it to Queens Henrietta’s Men and Harbage to Prince Charles’ Men, but Ira Clark’s note that Brome had moved on to writing for Beeston’s Boys by 1639, with *A Mad Couple Well Match’d*, seems reasonably to place *The Love-Sick Court* at the Cockpit with Beeston’s troupe.
figure, making the “dangerous” midwife of *The Queen and Concubine* the “comedic” midwife of *The Love-Sick Court*.

In *The Love-Sick Court*, the king of Thessaly has no son to inherit the throne; instead he decides that the throne will pass to his daughter Eudina’s future husband. If Eudina does not marry by the king’s declared deadline, the throne will be decided by the common people, who favor the ruthless Stratocles. Eudina is incapable of choosing between the twins Philocles and Philargus, sons of a noted general (now dead) and his wife Thymele, the woman who has effectively raised Eudina. To emphasize the parodic nature of these otherwise merely trite plot elements, Brome treats his audience to an amusing scene (II.i) in which Eudina declares her eternal love for Philargus, praising the way he argued his brother’s suit, and sealing her vow with a kiss . . . moments later vowing the same to Philocles . . . for the same cause . . . sealed with another kiss. Eventually, of course, Philocles is revealed to be not Thymele’s, but the dead queen’s son and Eudina’s brother, just as the two are expected to marry. All turns out well; Eudina marries Philargus, and Philocles inherits the throne. In the midst of all this romantic wavering and waffling stands the drunken midwife Garrula, who repeatedly intimates in her stupored speeches that she shares a “secret” with Thymele.

Garrula herself is not merely a parody of the dramatic midwives who have gone before her; she is an amalgam of types, of gossips and nurses, of midwives and bawds, and of all the comic conventions that attend them (including the convention of conflating them). She is the ugly, shriveled hag we have seen referenced so often, referring to all
her own “wrinkles” on her aged “countenance.” She is the garrulous woman that her name implies, a literal “gossip,” full of tales “told in child-bed chambers, / To restore spirit to the pallid flesh.” She is the drunk of Shakespeare’s reference, “sip[ping] oft of a bottle at her girdle.” She is the purveyor of secrets, keeping Thymele in line with “some strange hidden thing, which like as with / A Charm, she keeps [Thymele] in aw[e] with.” She is the creator of false parentage, attributing children to the wrong parents. And like Brome’s own earlier midwife of The Queen and Concubine, Garrula is tempted to subversion and fabrication through greed and a desire for social upward mobility, rewarded “in Gowns, / In Gold, in Jewels, Chains and Rings; and (which / I prize ‘bove all) my syrrops and my sippings.”

Garrula is also the false midwife we saw in Sharpham, though in this case not a bawd who turns her hand to midwifery out of convenience. Garrula is a mere “Country houswife” who became “the Midwife Royal” in repayment for keeping Thymele’s secret. Brome may not have been drawing merely on literary or dramatic models in this particular element; the dangers posed by false, or unlicensed, midwives were made


294 Ibid., 98.

295 Ibid., 99. Brome explicitly directs Garrula to sip from her bottle nine times in the stage directions

296 Ibid., 100.

297 Ibid., 122.
manifest in the 1635 trial of Elizabeth Wyatt, who was accused of drunkenness and adultery. According to David Cressy, “Several witnesses made the point that Elizabeth Wyatt was not actually a licensed midwife, but served merely as assistant or deputy to the local official midwife, Anna Brown,” who later testified that Wyatt was practicing without a license on her own. 298 By reverse, then, equating the unlicensed/false midwife with a slut, in Cressy’s words “a boozer and a home-wrecker . . . a woman lacking self discipline who showed no respect for the vows of matrimony or for the majesty of the law,” equates licensed/real midwives with the opposite virtues of sobriety, domesticity, discipline, reverence, and lawfulness (particularly since the legitimate midwife demonstrated those virtues by testifying for the prosecution). 299 Similarly, and in the same manner as Sharpham’s Mistress Correction, Brome’s parodic midwife merely emphasizes the differences between the ridiculous depictions of debauched midwives and the (usual) realities of their social virtue. 300

298 *Travesties*, 86

299 Ibid., 86.

300 It is tempting to claim for Garrula the same anti-mimetic characteristics of Sharpham’s midwife based on the actors portraying these characters. Both *Cupid’s Whirligig* and *The Love-Sick Court* were performed by boys’ companies—the King’s Revels Boys and Beeston’s Boys, respectively. Unfortunately, Beeston’s “boys” were actually young men in their teens and twenties, rather than pre-pubescent children, so the distance between dramatic performance and reality would not have been nearly as wide.
Brome succeeds in parodying each of Garrula’s inanities by blowing their representations out of proportion. Garrula is not merely a drunk, she is perpetually drunk. She is not merely a keeper of secrets, she makes obvious allusions to those secrets at every opportunity. Such overemphasizing of these plot points make Brome’s refusal to satirize the conclusion all the more marked. The midwife’s end is not particularly emphasized; like many of her dramatic forebearers, she avoids correction and simply fades into the background, becoming a silent, unremarked observer of the play’s resolution. Moreover, it turns out that the reasons for her complicity in the misattribution of parentage, of secreting away the king’s true son and thus endangering the correct inheritance not merely of an estate, but of an entire kingdom, are actually in the service of the status quo not an attempt to subvert it. Thymele reveals that the entire plot was conceived by the Queen herself; in labor with Philocles while her husband, the King, was attempting to put down a virulent rebellion, the Queen decided that her newborn son would not be safe. She was delivered with the assistance of a local housewife, Garrula, who brought the infant to Thymele. Thymele was then in labor with Philargus, and taking the Queen’s son as her own, feigned the birth of twins. Thymele then relates that

At point of death, she [the Queen] strictly did enjoyn
Me and this woman [Garrula], onely conscious with her,
By oath of which she had prepar’d this copy
In her own hand, to keep it silent, till

*Philocles* should be able to secure

Himself from treachery; or that your terme
Of life expiring, or some accident

Of not lesse consequence requir’d detection.\textsuperscript{301}

Garrula’s deception is thus transformed to loyalty, her subversion of the social order to an assurance of its safe and rightful continuance. And, not coincidentally, Garrula’s vices—her garrulity, drunkenness, and deceitfulness—disappear from the moment of this revelation, even before she herself disappears from the stage.

So if Brome’s \textit{The Love-Sick Court} pivots on the concepts of parody and satire, why would the playwright choose to avoid parodying this very obvious conclusion? Why take his most socially and dramatically ridiculous character, Garrula, and leave her to fade into the background? The answer lies, in essence, in the fact that Brome, like the genre of comedy itself, is inherently traditional and conservative, despite his clear and vocal disapproval of the authoritarian and perverse government under which he lived. Brome “combine[s] a radical aversion to tyrannical authority with a strong disapproval of ambitious insurrection.”\textsuperscript{302} Included in this conservativism is Brome’s attitude towards women. “In sum, he consistently castigates oppressive authority and authoritarian abuses, thereby seeming subversive; yet he also adheres uneasily to inequitable received sexual norms and demonstrates inevitable human failures, thereby seeming traditional.”\textsuperscript{303} Brome’s generic traditionalism and conservatism reflect the political necessities of the era in which he lived and the monarch whom he served. Brome seeks

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 166.

\textsuperscript{302} Clark, \textit{Professional Playwrights}, 170.

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., 161.
to preserve women’s abilities and role, in essence, to show in conclusion women doing that which they can to preserve the state without stepping outside their prescribed social roles. This pattern includes even the false midwife, whose very falsity prevents the need for a “real” midwife to step outside her oath to the state and church.

“The main critique that the play [The Love-Sick Court] makes of the cult of courtly romance is that it makes effective civic government impossible.”304 The Love-Sick Court, then offers an equation between sexual drive and political ambition. While both can be dangerous in excess, they are also necessary in moderation for the successful running of a state, and the midwife is a necessary element of maintaining and regulating that sexuality and its results.

Conclusion

Can these dramas of the 1630s support and sustain Bicks’ argument that the midwife represented a threat to masculinity, in terms of “produc[ing] paternity and masculinity” at the moment of birth?305 At first glance, yes. Dramatists need her to achieve comic resolution, but because the midwife is not punished, she leaves the plays’ comic resolutions unstable. Also, having an audience identify with a character who is not punished makes the midwife’s resolution socially unstable. But few comic “midwives” turn out to be actual midwives in the end, or even any type of medical practitioner. All, however, follow Kerwin’s model of the female practitioner to a greater or lesser extent,

304 Steggle, Richard Brome, 139.

305 Bicks, Midwiving Subjects, 42.
particularly that of “begin[ning] in shame or exclusion and end[ing] in victory.” ⁴³⁰⁶ We see only one midwife who exists wholly outside this pattern—Brome’s mute midwife of *The Queen and Concubine*—but in her case, we have a political and religious tale of reformation and confession.

We do see in these four dramas the idea of sex as necessary, and the midwife represents correct maintenance of that necessity, an element of the “check and balance” system to keep sexuality, like political ambition, from getting out of hand and becoming “tyrannical.” If the midwife is so useful, if she is so easily identifiable, why is she not more popular in drama? Perhaps because, as Kerwin notes, “drama defines women practitioners primarily as nonsomatic healers and does not show them doing what most of the historical practitioners did: working with the systems of the body. Playwrights give to women healers the art of staging interpersonal relations, of imagination and manipulation from outside.” ⁴³⁰⁷ The midwife is extremely limited in this case. What is she outside the birth room, or outside the physical manipulation of the female body? We see her as a matchmaker, as in Hausted’s *Rivall Friends*, but this function can be served by sundry other types of characters. We have seen the midwife hiding the identity of a child. But these are her only real exterior functions, and they are not unique to her profession. Perhaps this is why it so tempting for critics to elide midwives with other female characters, as Brome himself did in *The Love-Sick Court*. Dramatists would


⁴³⁰⁷ Ibid., 82.
eventually have found other uses for her, might have expanded her dramatic horizons.

But the English Civil War brought drama, if not to a screeching halt, to a slow, extremely limited crawl, and midwives became increasingly important in the real world, not in theatre; and their new importance was definitely not comic.
A Midwife seene in a dream, is revealing of secrets, and hurt; it is death to the sicke; for she alwayes pulleth out that which is contained, from her which containeth it, and layeth it on the ground: to those which are kept by force it is liberty. . .

—Daldianus Artemidorus, *The interpretations of dreams* (1644)

By the time Nicholas Culpeper published the first “original” English midwifery manual in 1651, radical changes in English politics had transformed the midwifery profession and the cultural significance and interpretation of the birth process itself. In effect, the pendulum swung back away from the literary midwife, which had been in development between 1590 and 1642, and toward an emphasis on the professional midwife and her position in the social, political, and religious realms in England. Gone is the comedic midwife of the Jacobean and Caroline stage; with the advent of Civil War, midwifery was, to speak plainly, no longer funny.

To begin, the profession of midwifery was under intense economic and cultural strain due to the heavy casualties of the Civil War and the vast number of men living away from their families. These factors led to a natural decline in the number of

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*The interpretation of dreams digested into five books by that ancient and excellent philosopher, Artimedorus* (London: Bernard Alsop, 1644), 126.
pregnancies for midwives to oversee. Also, as we saw during the English Reformation, rites such as baptism and churching were placed under social strain, and midwives were still an active element of these rites. One important difference between midwifery in the Interregnum and midwifery during the Reformation, however, is the secularization of the profession; this may be the most important development in Interregnum midwifery. In the 1540s, authority for licensing midwives passed relatively seamlessly from the Catholic to the English Church; with the disestablishment of the Anglican bishopric during the Civil War, however, authority over midwives was “up for grabs,” with medical male professionals vying for the position. As a result of these changes, elements of textual midwifery that had fallen out of fashion in English texts of the previous fifty years saw a resurgence, particularly references to Biblical midwives and debates over female baptism. Others, such as midwives’ function as witnesses, took on a distinctly political tinge, reflecting the renewed importance of midwives as professionals beyond the birthroom as well as in it.

The other major element of change in Interregnum textual midwifery comes as the combined result of the rhetorical politicization of the female reproductive body and the previous fifty years-worth of accumulated new midwifery associations. Midwifery becomes a highly politicized language of complicity; no longer is the midwife a “neutral” trope for “bringing forth,” or a comic bawd. The language of birthroom and of midwives was coopted into religio-political debates and pamphletry. Such was the overwhelming influence of social upheavals and political language that many elements of the textual midwife with which we have become accustomed are almost always tinged with the
political. Peter Heylyn’s descriptions of gossiping midwives in French court, for example, is colored by associations of France with Royalist exiles and the political implications of Catholicism.\textsuperscript{309} Thus the rhetoric of midwifery and the practice of midwifing reinforce each other’s political associations, making it more and more difficult to separate midwifery from politics from religion in the texts of this period.

But why did midwifery become a site of political and religious tension during the Interregnum? Kathleen Canning has theorized that, in times of great social upheaval:

Many who readily conceded that bodies were constituted through webs of discourses or were only knowable through language nonetheless sought to grasp that very process of mediation, the positioning of bodies in discourses, of selves in bodies. Some remained perplexed by the unspeakability of bodily experiences that marked and transformed bodies in times of crisis—war, maiming, torture, sexual violence—and in the more everyday arenas of bodily trauma, such as pregnancy and childbirth . . . Taken less abstractly, this formula called for reflection on the ways in which differently gendered subjects read/heard/accessed/made/participated

\textsuperscript{309} Heylyn claims that French aristocratic women are so lacking in shame that they will speak of female anatomy “even in the hearing of men, as freely, and almost as broadly, as a Midwife, or Barber-surgeon.” \textit{A full relation of two journeys} (London: E. Cotes for Henry Seile, 1656), 44.
in/transferred discourses as they experienced and tried to make sense of their bodily experience.\textsuperscript{310} Canning’s theory provides a basic framework upon which we can build our understanding of the uses midwifery served during the English Civil War. Rhetorically, midwifery, and the language of reproduction more broadly, allowed Englishmen and Englishwomen to create a discourse through which they could make sense of the crumbling institutions and social orders in which they were struggling to live. And the endeavor to recodify the midwifery profession, to reestablish order in the wake of the dissolution of the Anglican bishopric, must have provided a temptingly hopeful microcosm for national distress: If society can regain control over the midwife, over the birthroom, over the procreative future, over the bodies of its own people, then perhaps there is hope for society to regain control of itself.

\textbf{Part I: Technical Changes: Missing Babies and Missing Bishops}

As we saw during the turmoil of the English Reformation, political and military upheavals result in increased attention being paid to midwives and their attendant professional and religious duties. This same pattern recurs during the English Civil War, with a renewal of debates over midwives’ rights to perform baptism and a concomitant resurgence in references to Biblical midwives. But where the Reformation midwife was made an element of Protestant reform, during the 1640s her position becomes much more

fluid. The midwife of the 1540s had to choose between two positions—Catholic or Anglican—one of which placed her outside the established institution of midwifery oversight and governance (via the Bishopric) and one which firmly embedded her in it. But the midwife’s choice a century later is far more complicated; not only is the midwife a line of defense against the proliferation of Catholicism through baptism, but she is also a point of debate amongst a plethora of various Protestant groups, with no group actually agreeing within itself on the efficacy of various forms of baptism. Samuel Rutherford, minister in the Scottish Presbyterian Church, argues for baptism by midwives in cases of emergency, though he does pray fervently that such extreme moments should not come; even so, a midwife who must perform a baptism is, in Rutherford’s terms, “not a mere Private Person,” but also an official of the church.\(^{311}\) Another Scotch Presbyterian, George Gillespie, calls baptism by midwives “a great disorder under the Prelates” that was “justly complained of.”\(^{312}\) And a third, John Tombes, condemns the practice not because of the midwife’s sex, but because of the age of the child,\(^{313}\) an argument that,

\(^{311}\) Samuel Rutherford, Samuel, *The due right of presbyteries, or, A peaceable plea for the government of the Church of Scotland* (London: E. Griffin for Richard Whittaker and Andrew Crook, 1644), 198.

\(^{312}\) George Gillespie, *A treatise of miscellany questions* (Edinburgh: Gedeon Lithgow for George Swintoun, 1649), 36.

ironically, puts him in agreement with the Quaker reformer Samuel Fisher.\textsuperscript{314} And there was no more consensus within the group of Puritans backing Cromwell during the Interregnum, Edward Leigh denouncing baptism by midwives and all other forms of private baptism,\textsuperscript{315} while Thomas Hall disliked the practice because midwives were not, in his opinion, true officials of the Church, though he adamantly defends infant baptism as a general practice.\textsuperscript{316}

The establishment of the Church of England meant that the authority to license midwives had to be transferred to other, secular hands, and the members of the College of Physicians and the men of the Company of Barber-Surgeons quarreled extensively over who should assume that right. In the end, midwifery was judged to be a surgical procedure, and the power to license was granted to the Barber-Surgeons. These men quickly instituted a new process by which midwives had to prove their fitness. According to John R. Guy, “the midwives had to pass three examinations before six midwives and six surgeons. The emphasis dramatically shifted from moral virtue and ecclesiastical function to professional competence.”\textsuperscript{317} Guy questions whether or not the


\textsuperscript{315} Edward Leigh, \textit{A systeme or body of divinity consisting of ten books} (London: A.M. for William Lee, 1654), 676.

\textsuperscript{316} Thomas Hall, \textit{The pulpit guarded with XVII arguments} (London: J. Cottrel for E. Blackmore, 1651), 14 and 67.

\textsuperscript{317} “The Episcopal licensing of Physicians, Surgeons, and Midwives,” in \textit{Bulletin of the}
surgeons’ authority had any more effect outside the city limits of London than did the sixteenth-century statutes of Henry VIII, noting instead that the surgeons’ requirements “for the first time laid the emphasis upon professional and technical competence.”

We must therefore consider, when we look at manuals by Culpeper and the anonymous authors of *The Compleat Midwifes Practice*, whether or not the creation of the first uniquely English midwifery manuals was in direct response to this new requirement of technical proficiency.

In 1649, Richard Garnet recorded the midwife’s oath as it stood in the year Parliament, under Oliver Cromwell, abolished the Church of England. As such, Garnet’s oath stands as our final, clearest glimpse of the pre-Interregnum professional midwife. Most elements of the oath are by now quite familiar: treating all equally, not hiding pregnancy or misattributing paternity, not allowing Catholic baptism, etc. Other elements of the midwives’ oath pertain very much to the practice and preservation of a “trade,” even one authorized by the Church itself. The oath is primarily concerned with regulating fees (“You shall not enforce any Woman being with childe by any paine, or by any ungodly wayes or meanes, to give you any more for your paines or labour in bringing her a bed, then they would otherwise do”); maintaining public standards of decency by not harboring illegitimate mothers, itself a crime (“You shall not consent, agree, give, or keepe counsel, that any woman be delivered secretly of that which she goeth with, but in the presence of two or three lights readie”); maintaining the secrets of the trade itself

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*History of Medicine* 56.4 (1982), 541.

Ibid., 541.
(“You shall be secret, and not open any matter appertaining to your Office in the presence of any man, unless necessity or great urgent cause do constrain you so to do”); ensuring public honesty in cases gone awry (“If any childe been dead borne, you your selfe shall see it buried in such secret place as neither Hogg nor Dogg, nor any other Beast may come unto it, and in such sort done, as it be not found nor perceived, as much as you may; And that you shall not suffer any such childe to be cast into the Jaques or any other Inconvenient place”); maintaining standards of practice (“If you shall know any Midwife using or doing any thing contrary to any of the premises, or in any other wise than shall be seemely or convenient, you shall forthwith detect open to shew the same to me [the officiating Bishop], or my Chancellor for the time being,” and “You shall use your selfe in honest behaviour unto the woman being lawfully admitted to the roome and Office of a Midwife in all things accordingly”); keeping an accurate list of licensed practitioners (“That you shall truly present to my selfe, or my Chancellor, all such women as you shall know from time to time to occupie and exercise the roome of a Midwife within my foresaid Diocesse and Jurisdiction of A. without my License and admission”); and limiting persons accepted to the trade (“You shall not make or assigne any Deputie or Deputies to exercise or occupie under you in your absense the Office or roome of a Midwife, but such as you shall perfectly know to be of right honest and discreet behaviour, as also apt, able, & having sufficient knowledge and experience to exercise the said room and Office”). These elements of the oath demonstrate that midwifery had become much more bureaucratic in the 1640s than it had been a century before, and it is
as a group of tradeswomen that the London midwives chose to address Parliament in defense of their livelihoods.

Reacting to the damages to their profession caused by the Civil War, the midwives of London submitted a petition to Parliament on 23 January 1643, and again on 22 September 1646. Printed under the title *The Mid-wives just Petition: or, A complaint of divers good Gentlemwomen of that faculty*, the first petition begs the end of the war due to the “great losse and hinderance to the Common-wealth; whereby some maydes were deprived of promised marriage, and wives by the hand of death were quickly Widdowed, and with them the hope of posterity was also extinguished.” In making this plea, midwives took upon themselves the right to speak for all women by virtue of their profession, saying

> wee knowing the cases of women better than any other, as being more experienced in what they sensibly suffer since the wars began, living the religious lives of some cloysterd Nuns contrary to their own naturall affections, if they could by any means help it without wronging their husbands: Our Petition shall therfore consist of many branches, whereby the injuries of women in this present age may be clearely discerned, for it

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319 *The Mid-wives just Petition: or, A complaint of divers good Gentlemwomen of that faculty* (London, 1643); *The Mid-wives just Complaint: And, Divers other wel-affected Gentlemwomen both in City and Country* (London: T.S., 1646). These two petitions are identical, a sign that Parliament did not, or could not, satisfy these women’s requests.

320 *Just Petition*, [A2v].
is a great wrong that women should want their husbands and live without comfort, whereby we Midwives are also undone, for as women are helpers unto men, so are we unto women in all their extremities, for which we were formerly well paid, and highly respected in our parishes for our great skill and mid-night industry.  

This concern for the perpetuation of the English population was surely not limited to midwives alone, and we must consider, in the manuals written during the Interregnum period, whether or not these texts are in any sense necessitated by the desire to assert the importance and inevitability of procreation. Similarly, we must consider whether or not the language of the midwifery manual changes during this period to reflect these concerns. For example, does the male element of procreation assume a greater importance in reaction to the fear that too many men were dying in battle? Does the language of male anatomy change in the manner described by Diane Purkiss, as a means for men to assure themselves that “life can be preserved”?  

The fact is, by the Interregnum period, midwives had developed a bifurcated set of responsibilities—spiritual and medical—that were increasingly separate from each other. Unlike the Church of England they served, midwives could not be abolished; their medical responsibilities were, if anything, increasingly important in an era that saw a drastic decline in the number of pregnancies. So while some religious figure debated the

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321 Ibid., A2[r] – [A2v].

pros and cons of infant baptism by midwives (a debate which, granted, is emblematic of the religious strife of the period), the real strain was on the midwifery trade, as evidenced by the midwives’ petitions and the midwife’s oath. The former demonstrates the midwives’ own self-definition as tradeswomen and professionals, which took precedence over their religious affiliations; the latter, that even the Anglican Church, before its fall, was treating midwives more and more as medical practitioners and less as agents of the church.

Part II: Midwife as Political Conceit

Beyond the professional challenges placed on midwives by the turmoils of the Interregnum, change was afoot in the rhetorical realm as well. The 1640s and 1650s did not see a particular concentration of new rhetorical tropes and associations for the midwife; but what did happen was the intense politicization of established midwifery rhetoric. The midwife becomes an important element of what I will call the “language of complicity.” No longer is “midwife” a neutral trope meaning to passively “bring forth” or “deliver;” no, the political language of procreation and monstrosity makes the midwife a culpable rhetorical participant, as midwifery language is put to new partisan uses. For example, consider the trope of the “unskilled and impatient” midwife that we have encountered time and time again. King Charles I (or the author posing as king) takes this language of wasteful ravishment and abortive pain to create an extended metaphor for civil unrest in *Eikon basilike* (1648):
Who ever had most mind to bring forth confusion and ruine upon Church and State, used the midwifery of those Tumults: whose riot and impatience was such, that they would not stay the ripening and season of Counsels, or fair production of Acts, in the order, gravity, and deliberatenesse befitting a Parliament; but ripped up with barbarous cruelty, and forcibly cut out abortive Votes, such as their Inviters and Incouragers most fancied.  

In comparison, Joseph Hall’s collection, The balm of Gilead, or, Comforts for the distressed (1650), offers a moment of solace for the child-bearing woman suffering “the unprofitable labours of Midwives . . . One languisheth to death after the hand of an unskilful Midwife,” a comment which would seem innocuous and neutral were it not for the full title of the work: these are “Comforts for the distressed, both morall and divine most fit for these woeful times [emphasis mine].” The politicization of the midwifery trope in the former text makes it difficult to avoid attributing political allusions to the latter, a difficulty that increases as this charged political language proliferates. During the Civil War period, the tumults and violence of the fighting were often depicted as “birth throes;” whether that birth was to be of a savior or a monster, however, depended on the writer and the historical moment. Likewise, the “midwife’s” attribution and virtue were quite fluid. The Royalist Hugh Peters, preaching after a major battle, equates the pains of war are with the pains of birth, and he justifies the bloodshed.


as being the “midwife” who is an absolute necessity for the fulfillment of God’s natural order. “The best succour and supply must be got: send to Asur and Egypt, Amalek and Ammon, with all that dwel at Tyre . . . yea, even to an Irish Rebell rather then miscarry.”

Within these extended birth metaphors, we can see two new patterns emerging. First, Interregnum political authors often “name” or “attribute” the midwife in their extended conceits, sometimes making the midwife a governing body (Parliament, the judges, the commissioners), sometimes individuals, and sometimes the English

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325 Hugh Peters, *Gods doing, and mans duty opened in a sermon preached before both Houses of Parliament, the Lord Major and aldermen of the city of London* (London: M. S. for G. Calvert, 1646), 12.


people themselves and their ideals. These political midwives are, more often than not, the recipients of blame for the current state of unrest. Nathaniel Hardy, addressing Parliament, says that “our Mother the Church is now in sore travel, you are her Midwives, the Childe shee brings forth will be eyther Ichabod or a Benoni, if it prove the Ichabod of a Toleration, the glory will depart from her; but if the Benoni of Reformation, the Father God will call it Benjamin, the Son of his right hand.” The “beastly” midwife of Gerard Langbaine’s Royalist tract, *A review of the Covenant* (1645), is the English Commissioner who took the baby “Covenant” and “helped to licke it over into some fashion.” And the reverse is equally possible, according to William Somner,

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330 The authors of *Mercurius Pragmaticus* for the week of 27 June to 4 July 1648 lament the Reformation as a “Salking-Horse / Of our Hip Shottten State, / Th’ Appendix of the Publique Purse / and Midwife of our Fate” who, along with “Beldame Conscience” led to war. *Mercurius Pragmaticus* 27 June – 4 July 1648 (London), 1. And the Royalist John Gauden refuses to take on the mantle of “midwife to rebellion” in his work, *The religious & loyal protestation of John Gauden*” (1649): “As not by my assent, so neither by my silence must I have any hand in the midwifery of so monstrous productions, which seeme to threaten the ruine of the King, and the subverting the fundamentall constitutions of Parliament, Lawes, and Liberties” (London: s. n., 1649), [A2r].


who asserts that Heaven itself reformed King Charles, making “good out of ill . . . [in] spight of Hell. / For maugre Men and Devills, hee’s become / So glorious as no Prince in Christendome.”

This idea that the midwife can have some hand in creating the final shape of her political “child” hearkens back to the literal midwife’s responsibility to frame the limbs of an infant and swaddle him. Political authors, however, yoke this responsibility to the image of monstrosity and monstrous births to further incriminate the “political midwives” who stand on the opposing side of the Civil War; and it is this invocation of monstrosity that forms the second pattern of political midwifery rhetoric. Often in these tales, the rhetorical midwife moves beyond the traditional role of the midwife-as-witness to a monstrous birth, and instead becomes implicated in the births themselves, as we have seen. In comparison, the “good midwife” is she who refuses to participate in a monstrous birth, even as witness. The anonymous Royalist author, going under the pen


334 On occasion, this rhetoric bled over into recountings of real life events, as in the popular tale of a monstrous child born in Boston to Familist parents, in which “the Midwife, one Hawkins Wife of St. Ives, was notorious for familiarity with the Devill, and [is] now an active Familist.” Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall antichrist opening the secrets of familisme and antinomianisme* (London: J.D. & R.I. for Andrew Crooke, 1648, 1648), 182. This story is repeated verbatim in Samuel Clarke, *A mirrour or looking-glasse both for saints and sinners* (London: Tho[mas] Newberry, 1654), 222.
name “Mercurius Melancholicus,” who wrote the satiric *Mistris Parliament Brought to Bed of a Monstrous Child of Reformation* characterizes the entire city of London as a “cruel” midwife who refuses to aid the Parliament in her unnatural proceedings.

Depart in the Devil’s Name if thou wilt; thou shalt have no help of mine; I come to laugh at thy sorrow, more than to help thee; thou hast had too much of my help already, and that hath emboldened thee the more to play the Strumpet with security, and to prostitute thy Members to all manner of Wickedness and Uncleanness: No, languish still, till thou hast brought forth the bastard issue of thy own Lust thy own self, which was begot in obscenity, and shall be brought forth in iniquity for me; and may it prove as monstrous in its birth, and as fatal to itself, as it hath been ominous to others.335

335 *Mistris Parliament Brought to Bed of a Monstrous Child of Reformation* (London, 1648), 5. This language is echoed again in the Restoration works on the monstrous births of “Mistress Rump,” which exist in two slightly different versions. *Mrs. Rump brought to Bed of a Monster* (London: Portcullis Damgate, 1660), 1; *The Famous Tragedie of the Life and Death of Mrs. Rump* (London: Theodorus Microcosmus, 1660), 5. Katherine Romack reads these pamphlets as wholly injurious to women’s rights during the Civil War, claiming that “they negate women’s engagement in the arena of public politics by ridiculing the specter of female collectivity and aligning the undesirable elements of statecraft with the bodies of women so that they might be eliminated from the healthy body politic.” “Monstrous Birth and the Body Politic,” in *Debating Gender in Early*
But the area in which we find perhaps the most striking judgments of “political midwives” is in the production of print itself. We have already seen seventeenth century authors utilize the midwifery trope of “bringing forth” their written works, but during the Civil War period, the authors often apply that trope to the printers and booksellers, rather than to themselves, or even their patrons. And these midwives are not always virtuous. Certainly, authors like Robert Wild (a nonconformist preacher and poet) may “look upon the presse as a common Midwife for poore folkes, as well as rich,”\textsuperscript{336} invoking the long-standing clause of the midwife’s oath that she tend all women equally, but for Christopher Love, those same printers who do not discriminate against radical sectarians are “midwives of . . . monsters.”\textsuperscript{337} And the speed and volume with which such printed materials are published leads Nathaniel Hardy to exclaim:

\textit{Modern England, 1500-1700}, eds. Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 218. The presence of the midwife complicates this paradigm, however, since her refusal to cooperate with the politically monstrous event creates a female character who is both an unchallenged participant in these feminized spaces and yet the voice of a political ideology.

\textsuperscript{336} Robert Wild, \textit{The arraignment of a sinner at the bar of divine justice} (London: J. G. for Nathanial Webb and William Grantham, 1656), A2[r].

\textsuperscript{337} Christopher Love, \textit{The naturall mans case stated, or, An exact map of the little world man considered in both his capacities, either in the state of nature or grace} (London: E. Cotes for George Eversden, 1652), A3[r].
I have too often (and not without regret) beheld those monstrous births which have been forced into the world by the unskilfull and injurious Midwifry of Scribblers, Stationers, and Printers, often the death of their pretended Parents; Indeed, who would not be troubled to see the innocent Names of eminent Divines made (as it were) to do pennance in the Printers Sheets, for the incontinency of their wanton Auditors, who between the Pen and the Press, beget and bring forth a Bastard brood of Sermons, which they must Father?338

With each of these invocations, we see authors in uncertain positions seeking to assert rhetorical authority over their surrounding by invoking a gendered rhetoric that places them in an automatically gender-superior position. But this struggle for authority, for containment, and for order was not limited to pamphletry. As we will see next, the English reading public’s taste for reassurance and hope—in the form of texts on domesticity and birth—would lead to the creation of one of the most popular midwifery manuals in English history.

Part III: Nicholas Culpeper’s Best-Seller: A Directory for Midwives (1651)

First published in 1651, Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives was easily the most popular, and most influential, midwifery manual of seventeenth-century England, going through ten separate print runs between 1651 and 1699, and spawning a falsified edition

338 Nathaniel Hardy, A sad prognostick of approaching judgement (London: A.M. for Joseph Cranford, 1658), A2[r].
in 1652.³³⁹ Culpeper’s text is complicated by his relationship to the Commonwealth and to the Royal College of Physicians, with whom he was perpetually at odds. As we will see, these tensions play out in Culpeper’s rhetoric and orientation of gendered modes of authority. Culpeper was not, himself, a licensed medical practitioner, having been apprenticed to an apothecary in his youth but never completing the licensing process.³⁴⁰ Although Culpeper’s works are, today, considered bastions of popular medical texts, his reputation, and the reputation of his works, has not been stable. In 1649, Culpeper incurred the wrath of the Royal College with the publication of *A physicall directory, or, A translation of the London dispensatory made by the Colledge of Physicians in London.*³⁴¹ By translating the College’s Latin *Pharmacopoeia* into vernacular English, ³³⁹ Culpeper’s *Directory* was published in 1651, 1653, 1656, 1660, 1668, 1671, 1675, 1681, 1684, and 1693. Its popularity continued into the eighteenth-century, with print runs appearing in 1700, 1701, 1716, 1724, 1737, 1755, 1762, 1766, and 1777.

Seventeenth-century publishers also reproduced Culpeper, Sennert, and Cole’s later text, *Practical physick: the fourth book in three parts* (published after Culpeper’s death), under the name of *A Directory for Midwives: the second part*, in order to capitalize on the popularity of Culpeper’s earlier work. These reprints appeared in 1662, 1676, and 1681.

³⁴⁰ The Society of Apothecaries repeatedly warned Culpeper’s employer, Samuel Leadbetter, that he should stop employing an unlicensed apprentice.

³⁴¹ Notably, Culpeper’s translation includes a few scattered references to midwives, all of which are negative. The entries for three different herbal remedies are suggested to cure problems caused by “a careless midwife.” *A physicall directory*, trans. Nicholas
Culpeper intruded into the College’s, and Society of Apothecaries’, monopolies on pharmaceutical medicines.\textsuperscript{342} Culpeper’s motive, apparently, was to make medicinal cures cheap and available to all Englishmen and Englishwomen, using only, or at least primarily, native resources. According to Pam Lieske, “During his lifetime, London physicians considered [Culpeper] a dangerous interloper into sanctioned fields of knowledge, while the poor and middle-class patients he treated celebrated his skills and made him famous as an astrologer and healer.”\textsuperscript{343} The author of the preface to Culpeper’s \textit{School of Physick}, known only as “R. W.,” wrote in 1659:

\begin{quote}
To the poor he prescribed cheap, but wholesome Medicines; not removing, as many in our times do, the Consumption out of their bodies into their purses; not sending them to the \textit{East-Indies} for Drugs, when they may
\end{quote}

Culpeper (London: Peter Cole, 1649), 3, 133, and 247. Culpeper uses this same derogatory phrase in \textit{The English physitian} to describe the purpose of feverfew, to “remedy such infirmities, as a careless Midwife hath there caused” (London: William Bentley, 1652) 51. And Culpeper’s translation of Simeon Partlicius’ \textit{A new method of physick} contains a similar sentiment, that the womb can be inverted through the “default of the Midwife.” \textit{A new method of physick}, trans. Nicholas Culpeper (London: Peter Cole, 1654), 462.


fetch better out of their own Gardens . . . [writing] not like an Emprick [sic], who being guilty neither of Greek, nor Latine, of writing well, or spelling true English...is an imagined Aesculapius, so as to tyrannize over the purses and bodies of thousands . . . [Culpeper strove] not only to cure men, but to cure the Art of Curing of men; to reform Physick itself, as many of learnedst of the Colledge of Physicians have freely expressed; one of them being disposed to speak truth of him, said, *That he was not only for Gallen and Hypocrates, but he knew how to correct and moderate the tyrannies of Paracelsus.*

It is into this paradigm of medical reform, of personal adversity and public argument, and of religious radicalism (Culpeper was himself antinomian and a bit of a Fifth Monarchist) that we must situate and interpret not only the obstetrical content of Culpeper’s midwifery manual, but his tense, self-contradictory, and perhaps even awkward positioning of the midwife within the hierarchies both of social gender roles and medical practitioners.

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344 Culpeper, Nicholas. *Culpeper’s School of Physick, or the Experimental Practice of the Whole Art.* London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1659. C4[r] – [C4v].

345 Zachary Lesser suggests that reading early modern plays through the lens of their publishers can provide some insight into the ways in which contemporary readers may have interpreted individual dramas. “Publishers tended to specialize in order to appeal to their customers . . . And because the publisher always has one eye on his potential customers, we can discern, through the publisher’s informed judgment, how the people
Culpeper’s text is divided into nine sections, and serves as a reasonable guide for midwifery contents throughout remainder of the century, beginning with a section on male and female anatomy, followed by information on conception, fetal development, infertility and miscarriage, guides for female behavior during pregnancy, labor, and lying in, as well as directions on the proper choice of a wet-nurse. Again, much of this information is directed at an audience beyond that of the practicing midwife, and Culpeper, or his printer, clearly divides his intended audience into two parts according to the frontispiece, fulling titling his work *A Directory for Midwives; or, A Guide for Women, in their Conception, Bearing, and Suckling their Children*. Culpeper’s use of a bifurcated audience is not merely an inheritance from earlier manuals, but also part of his over-all modus operandi: his desire to instruct laymen in medical healing, what Mary Fissell has described as his “vision . . . to have every man or woman able to heal themselves with herbs growing for free at the edges of roads or in common lands—or at

who bought the play may have read it—or at least how a publisher imagined they would read it.” *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 42. We can apply the same process to Culpeper’s works, as Culpeper’s primary publisher was Peter Cole, a printer whom Elizabeth Furdell characterizes as “an active participant in the City’s political life during the Civil War [who] marketed many of the petitions circulated by Puritan leaders.” *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 42.
least to be able to buy native plants much more cheaply than the expensive imported remedies favoured by elite physicians."\textsuperscript{346}

But further evidence of the \textit{Directory}’s primarily non-professional audience comes as much from what is excluded as from what is included. Unlike Rueff’s manual, which included detailed information on the delivery of breach births and stillborns, with diagrams of medical instruments to be used, Culpeper’s \textit{Directory} is remarkably terse on the subject of the actual birthing process. Anatomical drawings do not appear in the \textit{Directory} until the 1671 and 1675 print runs, and do not reappear in the editions following. Book VII, “A Guide for Women in their Labor,” only briefly addresses the birth of a healthy, living child, noting only that the midwife should not attempt to hasten the birth, and discoursing on classical and contemporary debates on the best length to cut the navel cord. Such brevity is striking in contrast with Rueff’s exhaustive fifteen chapters describing variations of breech births and their appropriate remedies. Culpeper’s section on delivering a dead child is addressed almost entirely to the mother, providing her with multiple means to determine the fetus’s health, exhortations to “be confident your child is dead in your womb,” and ways in which to induce labor.\textsuperscript{347} Surprisingly, Culpeper does not encourage the mothers of dead fetuses to send for male surgeons, though he does briefly reference one abortificant to be kept on hand by midwives for such cases. Culpeper’s unwillingness to provide clear information and procedures that a


\textsuperscript{347} \textit{Directory}, 164-65.
midwife should follow throughout the birth process reinforces the assumption that this text, although titled for midwives, was not written with them solely in mind, and lends credence to Culpeper’s assertion in the preface that midwives alone understand the physical practice of midwifery, he only the theory. Culpeper’s book, even more so than his predecessors, is no manual for practicing midwives (although it undoubtedly contains some information that midwives would find useful and clearly addresses them as audience members); it is instead of primary use for expectant mothers and gossips, women who need to know what to expect in the birth chamber and how to judge the competency of a midwife rather than know the specifics of delivery procedures. What information he does provide is in keeping with his larger project of democratizing physick, making it cheap and national, through the use of local products.

The division and multiplicity of audience becomes most important when interpreting Culpeper’s two separate dedicatory epistles, one “To the Midwives of England” and one to the “Courteous Reader.” In the first, Culpeper disclaims his own superiority of knowledge, and the superiority of male knowledge in general, asserting that women’s knowledge of birthing was divinely ordained, and that, while he may profess theories of obstetrics, “to whom doth the Practical part of it belong but to your selves

Culpeper’s refusal to further delineate midwifery practices is also indicative of his medical reformist zeal clashing with his conservatism in terms of gender relations, in essence, his desire to make medical knowledge available to all while preserving the gendered division of labor. For more on Culpeper’s politics of reform, see Fissell, Vernacular Bodies, 143-50.
In the face of such “worthy matrons,” Culpeper states merely that the anatomical theories he presents may be of use to them, making their work “easie” and preventing them from summoning “the help of a Man-Midwife, which is a “disparagement” to the midwifery profession. He even places his own text, and thus his own knowledge, in a subordinate position to the trained midwife’s skills, claiming not that his text should be kept by the midwife’s side, but rather that it be perused for her edification while at home. His knowledge is not that of the actual birth chamber, but of the theory behind it, which Doreen Evenden has interpreted as his “genuine concern regarding the midwives’ exclusion from formal education.” Culpeper’s first epistle, therefore, implies his adamant denial of male usurpation of feminine authority in the area of labor and delivery; men’s purview is that of the cerebral, women’s of the practical. But Culpeper’s positive positioning of midwives (and humility regarding himself) does not go unqualified. Toward the close of this first epistle, Culpeper finally employs the “unskilled midwife” trope, but unlike Rueff’s translator who makes that lack of skill the result of men, Culpeper makes that lack of skill a result of midwives’ egos, saying “Many

349 Directory, ¶2.

350 Directory, ¶5.

351 This is a marked contrast to later authors, like Wolveridge, who imagine their book as indispensable in the birth room, as the illustrated frontispiece to his manual’s second edition portrays. See Chapter 5, pp. 227-39.

of you are Ancient, but if you be too old to learn, you are as much too proud.” And in case any midwife should doubt her responsibility to appreciate and absorb Culpeper’s knowledge, he reorients himself as an author in direct communication with the divine: “God speaks not now by voice to Men and Women…but he speaks in, and by Men,” specifically himself. Culpeper then concludes with a request to his midwife readers, which, if respectful in tone, is certainly colored by his previous statements: “[I]f you by your own Experiences find any thing which I have written in this Book not to be according to Truth (for I am but a Man, and therefore subject to failing) First, judge charitably of me…[and] Secondly, Acquaint me with them; and they shall be both acknowledged, and amended.”

In the second epistle, however, Culpeper’s rhetoric appears to undermine any earlier pro-female assertions. Culpeper, like Rueff’s translator before him, takes the opportunity to castigate other male scholars for withholding information from non-university educated readers, but in doing so, he appears to undermine the authority of his Directory, ¶11-12. Culpeper’s actual willingness to amend his text remains unproven, his death occurring in 1654, shortly after the initial print runs of the Directory. It was left to his wife to defend the accuracy of his text in “Mris. Culpepers Information, Vindication, and Testimony, concerning her Husbands Books to be Published after his Death,” an essay appended to the 1656 and 1668 editions of the Directory. Alice Culpeper herself became a midwife after her husband’s death, receiving her license in 1665; her husband’s long-time publisher, Peter Cole, served as a signatory witness to her licensing. (Evenden, Midwives, 117-19.)
female midwiving audience. He begins by asserting that the majority of Englishmen (and women) are “prisoners” kept in the “darkness” of ignorance, with elitist scholars as their jailors, preventing access to knowledge. Such vitriolic rhetoric appears to place male scholars in the position of endangering the lives of infants and children, a position identical to that created by Rueff’s translator. But unlike Rueff’s amanuensis, Culpeper creates no delicate balance between the validity of women’s experience and men’s theories, nor does he position the female reader as a creature capable of fully understanding male obstetrical knowledge. He later claims, “For my own part I could have written you deeper Notions in Physick than you shal find in this Book; but I write for Children, and Milk is fittest Food for them.”

Such a statement certainly weakens the authority of his female readers, those announced on the frontispiece as being the primary audience, and it is just such condescending passages as this that have encouraged modern readers in the assumption that most early modern people believed midwives to be unlearned and unskilled.

But we must be careful of taking such passages out of both textual and historical context. Given that the text, as previously discussed, was not written as a guide for practicing midwives, Culpeper’s patronizing comments about his “childish” readers may be directed at his lay female readers, those whom he could rightly, if misogynistically, claim as ignorant in comparison with male physicians with university training, and even licensed midwives. In that case, his language serves to pacify any of his male readers who would object to his publishing medical information in the vernacular, and in a

354 Directory, [A5r].
simplified form. But Culpeper’s language leaves open the possibility that this “childish reader” he imagines, is not a woman, but in fact the intransigent male reader, perhaps one who is a member of the Royal Society with whom he was constantly at odds. This interpretation is supported by Culpeper’s conclusion to this second epistle; for, unlike the epistle to the midwives, this address to the reader ends not with a respectful plea to inform him of any errors in his work, but with a challenge. “Before you dispraise my work, put forth your own like a Man, if not you shew your self but a Beast.” At any rate, whether Culpeper’s intended targets were male or female, the superficial rhetorical effect is to implicate women, including midwives, as being childish and ignorant, and to provide yet another model for later authors to do the same.

One striking omission in Culpeper’s text is that of a defense of the subject matter, an element of prefatory material we have seen in every previous midwifery manual published in England. Mary Fissell notes this omission, and derives from it the conclusion that “Culpeper imagined the human body as a source of stability and an image of appropriate relations between men and women . . . Culpeper did not worry about male readers or about the improprieties of writing about female bodies. He reveled in them. His book became a model for a new kind of writing about women’s bodies that made them representations of larger social relations.” If this is the case, if Culpeper truly

355 Ibid., [A5v]. Culpeper may have claimed a willingness to amend his text in response to the corrections of female midwives, but he and his wife (who oversaw his posthumous editions) showed no such inclination, and his Directory remained largely unaltered.

356 Fissell, Vernacular Bodies, 135.
believed the human body to be a source of stability during an era of political and social crisis, how can we reconcile this stance with the concerns over gender identity and socially positioning brought about by that same crisis? How can Culpeper’s text read as an assertion of stability and normalcy when its very publication emphasizes the instability of social structures (via the dissolution of the Church of England and its licensing practice) and the transience and the uncertainty of procreation in a time of war? The answer lies in Culpeper’s distinctive addition to the midwifery manual: the discussion of male sexual anatomy. For the first time in the English midwifery manual tradition, the anatomy of the man is discussed in great detail, and is placed first in the text, before the traditional discussion of female anatomy. This ordering of the text, according to Fissell, places women in an inferior position to men, a biological representation of what was presumed to be the “natural” social hierarchy. How, then, does this gender hierarchy affect the position of the midwife in Culpeper’s text? His is not a simplistic structure wherein all men are above all women, because Culpeper’s attitude is complicated by his relationship to the members of the Royal College. Culpeper places himself, an unlicensed practitioner, above the university-educated Royal College, through his assertion that their learning is fraught with political and social malpractices—overcharging good Englishmen, keeping good Englishmen and Englishwomen ignorant of that which would preserve their health, forcing good Englishmen and Englishwomen to rely on foreign imports, etc. English midwives do not participate in these questionable acts, making them, as medical practitioners, superior in Culpeper’s hierarchy to the Royal

357 *Directory*, 143.
College, but inferior to himself. Thus, Mary Fissell has noted, Culpeper “sets up a new epistemology of female bodies, one in which women can learn only from men,” and creating himself as the authority on those bodies. But the absence of text concerning the actual birth, and midwife’s real province of authority, leaves open an equal space in which to interpret birth room knowledge as (1) inferior, or beneath male comment, or (2) outside all men’s purview, even Culpeper’s.

**Part IV: A (Feminine?) Response to Culpeper: *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* (1656)**

Five years after the inaugural publication of Culpeper’s *Directory*, a group of four authors, known only as T.C., I.D., M.S., and T.B., took up Culpeper’s gauntlet and published *The Compleat Midwifes Practice, in the most weighty and high concernments of the birth of man* as a direct rebuttal to Culpeper’s and others’ midwifery texts. The authors of *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* utilize many elements of the midwifery manual genre as they inherited it from male authors, beginning the text with a discussion of male anatomy before the female, referring to the fetus/infant as male throughout, and using disparaging language concerning expectant mothers, referring to the onset of childbirth as the mother’s “fault,” resulting from “want of respiration and air,” “want of

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358 This particular manual is often attributed to Thomas Chamberlain and/or Louise Boursier, but neither the content of the text, nor its title page and advertisements, bear out such an attribution. *The Compleat Midwifes Practice, In the most weighty and high Concernments of the Birth of Man* (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1656).
nourishment,” and “narrowness” of the womb. Difficult births are the particular result of
women’s shortcomings, a consequence of “delicate and timorous” natures and their “lazy
and slothful” lives.\textsuperscript{359} Such language is representative of all obstetrical writing, of
course, as inherited from Continental and classical sources. This text would go through
five separate editions by the end of the century,\textsuperscript{360} and each subsequent edition contained
changes from the most minute—arrangements of phrases on the title page—to the most
egregious—the ascription of an entirely new author. Generally speaking, changes in
content comprised sectional additions rather than alterations in preexisting text.\textsuperscript{361} The
internal contents of \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice} do not, therefore, represent any real
changes in the genre.

Instead, beginning with the first edition, it is to the frontispiece, title page, and
preface that we must look for generic innovations, beginning with the assertion that the
author-compilers of this text are women. While the preface to \textit{The Compleat Midwifes
Practice} claims the authorship of several female practitioners, namely “T.C., I.D., M.S.,
\textsuperscript{359} Ibid., 73.

\textsuperscript{360} The first edition appeared in 1651; the second in 1659; the third in 1663; the fourth in
1680; and the fifth in 1698.

\textsuperscript{361} So, for example, the first edition included a preface, discourse on anatomy, and a
translation of Louise Boursier’s midwifery text, as left to her daughter; the second
edition’s contents remained identical, with a new, separate section called “The Supply”
added. The alterations occurring in editions published after the Restoration will be
addressed in chapter five.
[and] T.B.,” these women have never been identified, certainly not conclusively,\textsuperscript{362} and I find it highly doubtful that the text, with the exception of the preface, was indeed the product of female writers. First, unlike the midwifery manual of Jane Sharp,\textsuperscript{363} there is no internal evidence of the author’s gender. The author-compilers do not, for example, address their sister midwives within the obstetrical content, either in the collective first person (“we” or “us”), as they do in the preface, nor even in the second person (“you”). Secondly, the content of the text is largely derivative of male-authored works, and evidences no major changes either in subject or tone. Much of the obstetrical content is lifted directly from earlier manuals, including the sections describing the midwife’s person, attitude, and necessary skill, with no alterations. And, unlike in the later Sharp manual, none of the misogynist rhetoric of male anatomical superiority is qualified or

\textsuperscript{362}Doreen Evenden has claimed the identification of two of these women, Catherine Turner and Dinah Ireland, but I can find no evidence within the various editions of the texts, nor in references to \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice} found in contemporary writings, to support such an assertion (\textit{Midwives}, 8). Certainly these initials changed in the first three editions, the second edition (1659) substituting “R.C.” for “T.C.,” and the third (1663) adding two “new” midwives, “W.C.” and “M.H.” It is, of course, not impossible that the printer, Nathaniel Brooke, consulted a group of midwives with each publication of \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice}, but I find it highly unlikely. Note that by the fourth edition (1680) the ascription of authorship to these midwives on the title page had entirely disappeared.

\textsuperscript{363}To be addressed in Chapter 5.
amended outside the prefatory material. Also, where the publication of female-authored
texts had been quite limited in the earlier half of the century, by the 1650s it was
becoming quite common; therefore, there would have been no particular reason to hide
the name of the authors, particularly once the text had become popular. Finally, the
printer’s marketing strategy is predicated upon the novelty of feminine authorship, both
in the title page’s claim to be the creation of “practitioners” of midwifery, and to be
publishing their text “with the approbation and good liking of sundry the most knowing
professors of midwifery now living in the city of London, and other places.” The
identification of the authors, at least in some sense of detail—district, age, individual’s
years of practice—would have added to the text’s appeal and provided an even greater
source of endorsement. Instead, these women are never identified in any manner.

Even so, the overall effect of this ascription is to assert the content and rhetoric of
the text to be that of knowledgeable women, rather than a man, and so we must consider
the effects that this possibly discrepancy between gender ascription and actual rhetoric
may make on the text’s appearance to the contemporary reader. Certainly the tone and
content of the preface, combined with the repeated attribution of the text to female
authors, give the overall impression that the entirety of the work, if not a unique creation
of these women, has at least been carefully selected and compiled by them. Under this
particularized form of ascription—“author-compiler” rather than “author”—the rhetoric of
the internal obstetrical content drawn from male-authored texts is reinscribed as female-
sanctioned, rather than the reverse. Moreover, the act of compiling, rather than
authoring, distances these women from any negative rhetoric directed by the original
source authors at midwives, or indeed women in general. The overall effect, then, is that it is women, specifically midwives, who have are the final authorities on what constitutes important, valid obstetrical information, not the male physicians who provide that information.

This impression is buttressed by the authors’ criticism of previous midwifery manuals, criticism made in part along gendered lines. Like earlier manuals, *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* includes highly nationalist rhetoric in its prefatory material, but in this case, the authors making such claims are explicitly female and united under the first-person plural voice.

It is high time, there being already published, many Treatises in this kind, for us to discharge our consciences for the good of the Nation, we have perused all that have been in this nature in *English*, and finde them strangely defficient, so crowded with unnecessary notions, and dangerous mistakes, that we thought it fit to give you warning of them, that for the future the unfortunate practisers, may prevent the almost guilt, of the crying sin of Murder.  

These author-compilers are at great pains to compare the national benefits of their “new” text with the national detriments afforded by other texts, saying “It is Admirable to us,\footnote{Culpeper makes a similar claim in his address to the midwives, that his authoring of medical texts is “to the Service of my Country” and in an attempt to prevent injury to “Men & Women, and indeed to the Common-wealth in general” (*Directory*, ¶2-3).}
that our Countrey should be so much deluded, to build all their practice upon such
[classical] Authors that have not at all conduced to any considerable advantage in this so
necessary usefull Art as the preserving of man-kind.\textsuperscript{365} As we have seen, the claim to be
correcting the errors of previous authors is nothing new; Thomas Raynalde made an
identical claim in \textit{The Byrth of Mankynde} (1545). But what \textit{is} new is the authors’ naming
of specifically English texts as the sources for these errors. These anonymous authors list
among the most “miserable volumes” on midwifery Raynalde’s text (a book with
“reasonable intention . . . but very much unfurnished”) and Rueff’s \textit{The Expert Midwife}
(“the worst that have been written in that kind, in French”). But the author’s most
pointed attack is reserved for Culpeper’s \textit{Directory}, calling it “the most desperately
deficient of them all” and asserting “except he write it for [economic] necessity he could
certainly have never been so sinfull to have exposed it to the light.”\textsuperscript{366} Linking Culpeper
to economic motivation has the obvious effect of implying these author-compilers to be
writing for opposite, more truly philanthropic, nationalistic reasons. But Culpeper’s true
error, according to these midwife-authors, is to perpetuate the spread of incorrect and
dangerously flawed information due to his reverence and unquestioning acceptance of
previous (male) authors. “[I]ts almost a miracle to us that \textit{Mr. Culpeper}, a man whom we
otherwaies respect, should descend so low, as to borrow his imperfect Treatise from these
wretched volumes, some of which are before mentioned.”\textsuperscript{367} These author-compilers

\textsuperscript{365} \textit{Compleat}, A2[r]-[A2v].

\textsuperscript{366} Ibid., [A2v].

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., [A2v].
locate the greatest danger to the perpetuation of the English population, not in the ignorant midwife as their predecessors have done, but in the very masculine practice of translating and drawing from classical and foreign authors and reprinting that work verbatim without consideration of its relevance or accuracy.\textsuperscript{368} Of course, these author-compilers are reprinting information from the exact same sources as their male predecessors, so the difference being marked out for this text is not necessarily one of source material, but one of judicious culling, a process for which midwives, with their real-life experiences, are far more qualified for than those male physicians and academics who are limited to theory.\textsuperscript{369}

In contrast to Culpeper, and other male authors, the anonymous author-compilers of \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice} claim that their book is based on their own experiences, and the experiences of other female midwives throughout Europe. “What we have here done for thy good, we shal not only Justified from our own experiences, but fully demonstrate from the writings of the best practisers, both of the French, Spanish,

\textsuperscript{368} I call this practice “masculine” both because the learning of Latin and Greek, as well as other vernacular languages than English, is far more readily available to male students of all social classes than women, and because this idea of translation and transcription without alteration would have been a required part of those all-male Latin and Greek school courses.

\textsuperscript{369} Even male surgeons, whom midwives were to call in cases of difficult or obstructed labors, are limited in their experiences to abnormal, rather than normal births.
and Italians, and other Nations." The stated goal is to "marry" medicine and midwifery to everyone's advantage, but this marriage is markedly skewed toward the valorization of feminine contribution and practice, for rather than having midwives’ knowledge clarify or make a small addition to the male practices of physic and surgery, these author-compilers claim that “medicine married to the Midwives industrie, may teach every one the admirable effects of the Divinity of this art of Midwifery.” At the conclusion of their preface, these author-compilers make room for the usual trope of the ignorant midwife as further justification for writing. “[C]onsider how many have been lost by the unskilfulness of those that attempted this great work; nor should we have prostrated our reputation and private experiences, but to correct the frequent mistake of most Midwives, who resting to bold upon the common way of delivering women, neglect all the wholesome and profitable rules of Art.” But that such is language is in the service of rhetorical positioning rather than actual condemnation is apparent when contrasted with the very authority upon which the authors rely. These same authors who denounce their sister midwives simultaneously depend upon them to validate the text, citing their “approbation and good liking” on the title page. Even in their contention that many midwives make errors in deliveries due to their willful ignorance of anatomy and

370 Compleat, A3[r]. Of course, the only practitioner referenced within the text is Louise Boursier.

371 Ibid., A3[r]-[A3v]. This preface remained unchanged throughout all subsequent printings, while the ascription of authorship on the title page remained fluid.

372 Ibid., [A3v].
“occult diseases of women,” condemnation is tempered with acknowledgment of all midwives’ worthy experience, noting that such midwives are simply relying on “the common way of delivery women,” which serves them well in the majority of cases.373

The printer of The Compleat Midwifes Practice, Nathaniel Brooke, took full advantage of the prefatory content and the femininity of his supposed authors when choosing how to market this text to the reading public. One striking difference from earlier manuals lies in the frontispiece, with The Compleat Midwifes Practice having the first with a picture of a woman, Louise Boursier.374 Culpeper’s Directory contained a frontispiece with a representation of Culpeper himself, as author and famous personage. Similarly, all editions of The Compleat Midwifes Practice feature a woodcut frontispiece of Louise Boursier, whose writings had been translated and included in the text and billed on the title page as “Instructions of the Midwife to the Queen of France (given to her Daughter a little before her death) touching the practice of the said Art.” The author-compilers elevate Boursier to the level of exemplar, saying in the preface that “her reasons are solid experiences” and that it is through her success, both in practice and publication, “that we break the barriers, and boldly stand the brunt of all censures.”375 By including Boursier’s portrait, Nathaniel Brooke is contributing to an overall marketing scheme in which the “femininity” of the text serves both as validation and attraction.

373 Ibid., [A3v].

374 Boursier is also called “Louise Bourgeois” in both contemporary and modern texts.

For the sake of clarity, I will use the name Boursier throughout.

375 Ibid., A3[r].
Boursier remains the sole named female author, and the printer, by including her portrait in such a prominent place and naming her on the title page, draws on Boursier’s fame as he simultaneously creates the impression of a uniquely female text. Judging from the second edition, Brooke’s instincts were correct; the Boursier section was indeed quite popular and quite a draw. Where in the original edition Boursier’s translation comes last in the text and is relatively unmarked, in the second edition Brooke moves the Boursier text to the very front of the book, sectioned off and heralded under the title: “The serious and most choice secrets of Madam Lovyse Bourgioes; Midwife to the Queen of France; which she left to her daughter as a Guid, for her: And also for the Practice of all discreet Midwives, to prevent all dangerous mistakes in a work of so high concernment; necessary to be known by all Child-Bearing Women, and others.”

This framing takes advantage not only of Boursier’s fame, but also invokes yet another popular genre of early modern women’s writing, that of the mothers manual, a genre in which mothers’ writings for their children make their way (intentionally or no) into public print.

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376 The Boursier section is marked merely as “Certain other Instructions grounded upon practical Observations, fit to be known by all Midwives, and Child-bearing Women, &c.”

Ibid., S[r].

377 Ibid., 1.

Brooke also capitalizes on the author-compiler's explicit castigation of Nicholas Culpeper by altering the second edition to include a new “supply,” a section of writing on conception and virginity supposedly kept secret by Culpeper and other male authors. Brooke advertises this edition on the title page as “a Full Supply of those Rare Secrets which Mr. Culpeper in his Brief Treatise of Midwifry, and other English Writers, have kept close to themselves, concealed, or wholly omitted.” In this language, Brooke unites the appeal of a female-authored text as being superior or more accurate, with the fame of Culpeper and association of midwifery with “secrecy,” a potent combination considering the popularity of Culpeper’s Directory and the ever-increasing popularity of “books of secrets.”

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379 For example, beginning in 1661, Nathaniel Brooke often advertised The Compleat Midwifes Practice in conjunction with The Queen’s Closet Open, perhaps in the belief that these two texts would, if not increase each other’s attractiveness, appeal to a similar audience. See: John Phillips, Wit and Drollery, Joviall Poems: Corrected and much amended, with Additions (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1661), [T1v] – T2[r]; John Eachard, Mr Hobbs’s State of Nature Considered, In a Dialogue Between Philautus and Timothy (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1672), [M6v] – [M7r]; John Halfpenny, The Gentleman’s Jockey, and Approved Farrier, 4th ed. (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1675), [V8v].
Conclusion

Despite the continuing popularity of Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives* and *The Compleat Midwifes Practice*, English midwifery manuals, as a genre, came to a developmental halt with the Restoration. The Interregnum period, with its ban on theatrical production and heavy emphasis on political writings, leaves us with a set of midwifery discourses that are widely divergent, and which now serve vastly different purposes. The literary tropes of midwifery would be picked up and used repeatedly over the course of the Restoration, but the figure of the comedic, dramatic midwife was all but erased. And though, as we will see, a handful of authors experimented with the genre of the midwifery manual during the 1660s and 1670s, the impetus for writing manuals—as a means of establishing order and understanding in a time of political upheaval—was gone. As a result, manual become a site for experimentation rather than concerted rhetorical plans, and work in the service of the goals of individual authors, rather than a larger social group.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Second Wave: Midwifery Manuals of the Restoration

In the early Restoration period, a spate of midwifery manuals appeared in print: Peter Chamberlen’s *Midwifes Practice* (1665), James Wolveridge’s *Speculum Matricis Hibernicum* (1670), William Sermon’s *The Ladies Companion, or The English Midwife* (1671), and perhaps the most famous today, Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book* (1671). Each of these authors alters the conceits, arrangement, and rhetoric of the midwifery manual (though not its obstetrical content), as inherited from Culpeper, but each does so in entirely different ways from the others, and none of them in a manner that would be wholeheartedly adopted by their successors. Notably, however, it is the rhetoric of simultaneous disdain and reverence for the midwife that remains a hallmark of the genre throughout this period. These four texts were produced in an atmosphere of midwifery texts and knowledge far different from that of their 1650s predecessors. Midwifery licensing had been passed back and forth between the Church and the guild of barber-surgeons, with the contingent vacillation between emphasizing religious and medical qualifications. Although the power to license was restored to the Church in 1660, this fluctuation must have left many Englishmen and Englishwomen, not to mention midwives, with some ambivalence about the midwife’s primary area of responsibility. Also, the tenor of vernacular print and authorship had altered markedly during the Interregnum, with greater numbers of women claiming authorship for a variety of texts, and with far greater numbers of huswifery, cookery, and home medical texts entering the
print market. Such texts as *The Queen's Closet Opened* (purportedly a collection of recipes by Queen Henrietta Maria) and *The Court and Kitchin of Elizabeth* (a satirical collection claiming the “authorship” of Elizabeth Cromwell) had politicized the huswifery and cookery genre, one markedly similar to elements of the midwifery manual. These two genres would eventually cross paths, bleeding into one another in the latter portion of the seventeenth century. For example, by the 1670s, the same midwifery recommendations and instructions given in midwifery manuals can also be found in ladies’ companions, in which this specialized birth knowledge represents merely one chapter amongst many, equated with (and sandwiched between) topics such as brewing and pastry-making. The midwifery manual, as a genre, is likewise becoming a form of leisure reading, similar to these huswifery-cookery books, and the authors’ rhetoric transforms to suit this new generic function. Finally, the midwifery manuals of 1665-1699 evidence a new awareness of “authorship,” in which the manuals’ authors no longer limit their new compositions to the prefatory material and while lifting the obstetrical content nearly verbatim from earlier texts. These later authors, while still copying a great deal of their content from others, strive to amend and mark the contents as their own, adding commentary, personal anecdote, new recipes, and even personal pronouns throughout the entirety of the book. This chapter examines the new ways in which these writers, with their newfound senses of authority and authorship, utilize the midwifery manual for their own purposes, as well as in reaction to changes in the genre and its audience, and whether those alterations result in new gender positioning of the midwife within those texts.

Nicholas Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives*, which remained in print throughout the seventeenth century, provides a counterpoint to all subsequent innovations in the midwifery manual and its marketing. Indeed, Culpeper’s *Directory* never went more than eight years without the publication of a new edition, and the average time between editions was more often a mere three to four years. So, when we discuss the development or evolution of the midwifery manual, we must recall that these changes did not occur in a public vacuum; with the ubiquity of Culpeper’s book, readers could easily judge the deviations from “standard” present in any new text’s contents, rhetoric, or marketing. Perhaps due to the popularity of the *Directory* itself, or perhaps due to Culpeper’s fame, the title page, as well as the entire contents, of the *Directory* remained nearly unchanged throughout its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century print history (illust. 1). The greatest alteration made was the elimination in 1671 of the title page’s Biblical reference to the divine ordinance of midwifery. In place of Exodus 1:12 (“And it came to pass, because the Midwives feared the Lord, that God built them houses”), the 1671 and all subsequent editions include the note, “Newly Corrected from many grosse Errors” (illust. 2). Perhaps this change was in response to the cluster of midwifery manuals published in 1670/71, an attempt on the printer’s part to reassert the validity and value of Culpeper’s text. If so, he need not have worried. The *Directory* remained the most popular English
midwifery manual, with the “innovative” texts of the later seventeenth century usually not achieving even enough popularity to warrant a second printing.

Such stability of content and appearance cannot be claimed for the other popular midwifery manual of the Interregnum, *The Compleat Midwifes Practice*. As discussed earlier, in the second edition (1659), Nathaniel Brooke added a “supply” of information on conception and moved Louise Boursier’s writings to the beginning of the book, but did not in any other way alter the contents of the texts. The title page for that edition also contained minor changes, namely the elimination (as in Culpeper’s *Directory*) of the Biblical quotes from Exodus 1:17 and 1:20 (“But the Midwifes feared God” and “Therefore God dealt well with the Midwifes”), and the inclusion of a claim to knowledge *not* included in Culpeper’s famous text: “With a Fully Supply of those Rare Secrets which Mr. *Culpeper* [. . .] and other English Writers, have kept close to themselves, concealed, or wholly omitted” (illus. 4). In the third edition (1663), the first printing of *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* after the Restoration, the title page amounts to a blatant misrepresentation of the book’s contents and of the original author-compilers’ intents as stated in the preface. Coexistent with the original claim to contain information *not* presented by Culpeper and other male authors is the new claim to be “From the experience of our English, Viz. Sir Theodore Mayerne, Dr. Chamberlen, Mr. Nicholas Culpeper, and Others of Foreign Nations.” This declaration comes in the dead center of the page, set off by large brackets, both to draw the reader’s attention and to emphasize the supposed masculinity of the text. The advertisement of Mayerne is not without cause; Brooke added “The Contents of Sir Theodore Mayerne’s rare secrets in Midwifry” to the
third edition. But the language of the title page implies the authorship of Mayherne, Culpeper, and Chamberlen within the text, the latter two of which have no relationship to the text whatsoever. Moreover, Brooke ever so minutely alters the language of his traditional claim to include information not provided in Culpeper’s book to leave open the possibility of Culpeper’s authorship: “a further Discovery of those Secrets kept close in the Breast of Mr. Nich. Culpeper, and other English Writers; never made publick till now.” No longer do we have the language of castigation leveled against Culpeper and other male authors for having “concealed” and “omitted” this information in “his Brief Treatise.” Now the language is again of “secrecy,” of “revelation,” and of “discovery,”

380 The Frenchman Sir Theodore Mayherne (1573-1665), Baron of Albon and of Aubon, served as physician to James I and Queen Anne, and later to Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria. Margaret Pelling and Francis White, “De Mayernee, Sir Theodore,” *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640: Database* (2004). Mayherne may have been a small celebrity in his own right by the 1660s. As a physician, he was given a special Parliamentary pass in 1644 to visit the Queen and attend to her ill health. By 1645, however, Mayhern had fallen out of favor with Cromwell’s Parliament, and his previous exemption from taxation was revoked, the monies assessed “to be employed for the Service of the Garison of Henley.” “House of Lords Journal Volume 6: 17 May 1644,” in *Journal of the House of Lords volume 6: 1643* (1802), 556-58; “House of Commons Journal Volume 4: 29 April 1645,” in *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 4: 1644-1646* (1802), 125-27.
implicitly from, rather than despite, Culpeper and his cronies (illust. 5).\textsuperscript{381} These changes remained in the fourth edition (1680), despite the alteration in printer, Brooke’s shop having been taken over by Robert Hartford. The fifth edition (1698) was remarkably different in its title page and claims of authorship, as it was given a new ascription—“Corrected, and much Enlarged, By JOHN PECHEY, Fellow of the College of Physicians, London”—implying not only a complete turn from feminine authority to masculine, but also from the authority of vernacular healers (midwives and the unlicensed Culpeper) and the foreign (Sir Mayherne) to the positively English establishment of the College of Physicians, an institution which, we must recall, had no actual power over midwives (illust. 6). Adding to this reorientation toward sanctioned masculine authorship, the fifth edition of \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice} boasts a new organization, with the Boursier relegated to the conclusion of the work and not even receiving its own heading under the table of contents.

Certainly these changes to the title pages of \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice} do not necessarily prove a shift in either the reading public’s or most printers’ attitudes towards midwives, but they do raise a certain number of questions concerning the development of the genre and its reception that may be best answered by an examination of new texts created at the same time \textit{The Compleat Midwifes Practice} was undergoing these changes. Was there, for example, a gradual but inescapable movement toward famous male authorship, as the addition of the names “Mayherne, Culpeper, and

\textsuperscript{381} We should recall that Culpeper died in 1654; the invocation of his name on later texts is indeed a factor of the publisher’s desire to make his books more saleable.
Chamberlen,” implies? Was the reading public becoming increasingly receptive to male authorship, or rather unresponsive to female authors? Is the College of Physicians asserting itself elsewhere in texts on midwifery, or perhaps on practicing midwives themselves? Could that influence, while not officially sanctioned through statute or ordinance, be playing itself out in the rhetoric of midwifery rather than in the birth chamber? Of most historical significance, do the striking alterations in the fifth edition relate in any way to the political scandals of the late 1680s, involving the supposed substitution of a Catholic baby for the rightful (read Protestant) Prince of Wales?\footnote{382} Relatedly, were Englishmen and Englishwomen experiencing any new pressures in procreative terms, such as the increasing importance of paternity, which would call midwives’ authority into question? Does the genre of the midwifery manual change to take advantage of the popularity of other types of texts, and if so, in what ways and to what end? Conversely, does the continued popularity of *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* and Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives* point to a reluctance on the part of the reading public to accept changes in the genre, or changes in midwives’ and physicians’ respective authorities? And would such a reluctance figure itself in gendered terms, as a form of maintaining gendered forms of knowledge and authority? By examining the midwifery manuals of the Restoration period, spanning the years 1665 to 1671, we may be able to answer some of these questions, but as in so many cases, it may be as much a matter of what innovations in midwifery manuals were rejected during the Restoration as innovations that were accepted. Consider that, of all midwifery manuals written

\footnote{382} These events would become known as the “Warming-Pan Scandal.”
Fig 5.1: Culpeper's Directory, first ed. (1651)

Fig 5.2: Culpeper's Directory, sixth ed. (1651)

Fig 5.3: Compleat Midwifes Practice, first ed. (1656)

Fig 5.4: Compleat Midwifes Practice, second ed. (1659)
Fig. 5.5: Compleat Midwifes Practice, third ed. (1663)

Fig. 5.6: Compleat Midwifes Practice, fifth ed. (1698)

Fig. 5.7: Scenes from the frontispiece to James Wolveridge's Speculum Matricis (1671)
during this period, only two—James Wolveridge’s *Speculum Matricis* and Jane Sharp’s *Midwives Book*—ran to a second edition, and of those, Wolveridge’s two editions were published within one year of each other.\(^{383}\) Each new and innovative Restoration manual thus represents a type *not* made popular and is, rather, a function of authors’ reactions to their particular historical moments, consisting of their own personal biases and motives, the political and social climate of the time, the textual models both available and popular upon which they draw for their own writings, and the considerable “boom” of all “manuals” (huswifery, cookery, physic, etc.).

\[\text{Part II: Peter Chamberlen’s *Midwifes Practice* (1665)}\]

Peter Chamberlen’s *Midwifes Practice* may have been the first English midwifery manual of the Restoration era, but its genesis lay in Chamberlen’s early, pre-Civil War years as a member of the Royal College of Physicians in London; as such, Chamberlen and his manual serve as a bridge between pre- and post-Interregnum attitudes toward midwifery. In 1633, Chamberlen put a proposal before the Royal College that all midwives should be licensed and trained by the Royal College, rather than receiving their licensing through the Anglican Church.\(^{384}\) His scheme was adamantly opposed by the midwives of London, and two of their representatives, Mrs. Hester Shaw and Mrs.

\(^{383}\) The publisher, E. Oakes, printed Wolveridge’s text once in 1670 and again in 1671.

\(^{384}\) I am referring in this case to Peter Chamberlen III (1601-1683), son of Peter Chamberlen the younger (1572-1626). Peter Chamberlen the younger proposed a similar midwives’ college to James I’s Privy Council in 1616.
Elizabeth Whippe, presented their own petition to the Parliament in 1633, alleging in part that Chamberlen “had little or no experience in normal deliveries, having garnered his knowledge of childbirth in ‘desperate occasions’ when he used his surgical instruments with ‘extraordinary violence.’”\(^{385}\) The midwives’ allegations of Chamberlen’s own ignorance and violence were remarkably public and served to inflame the physician’s anger toward them for years to come.\(^{386}\) In 1646, Chamberlen published a scathing


\(^{386}\) Ironically, it is from Chamberlen’s account of these proceedings that we have one of the few surviving references to midwives’ literacy and their awareness of the midwifery manual genre. One of the midwives’ counterarguments to Chamberlen’s petition to “educate” them was that they had access to medical texts in English, “‘which would direct them better’ than his lectures could.” *Midwives and Medical Men*, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (Stroud, England: Phillimore & Co., 1999), 14. Chamberlen’s battle with London’s midwives has become the stuff of legend in women’s studies, with scholars like Elaine Hobby holding up this group of midwives as an exemplar of female power, cunning, and ability to preserve their own spheres of influence when united. Speaking of Chamberlen’s 1634 petition, Hobby says, “the midwives dreamt up the ingenious scheme of turning immediately to the College of Physicians as their allies, presenting the Chamberlen’s plan as an attempt to gain a monopoly which would be equally damaging to midwives and physicians. The physicians were persuaded to request the bishops to reject the Chamberlen’s petition, and Peter Chamberlen himself was prosecuted for not having an
invective again English midwives, *A Voice in Raham: or, The Crie of Women and Children*, in which he accused midwives of murdering countless women and children through their own ignorance of anatomy, while simultaneously valorizing himself as a man driven to publish through his “Compassions”.

The tract’s title refers to Matthew 2:18, in which the Gospel writer describes Herod’s slaying of all children under two years of age, saying “In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”

With this title, then, Chamberlen is not only aligning himself with the children of Israel and with the Gospel author, Matthew, as a speaker of divine truth, but also equating the midwives of England with that greatest of all child-murders, Herod, who sought the destruction of infants and toddlers for his own self-interest.

Chamberlen’s diatribe against midwives did not end with the title page. When referring to their active campaigning against his proposal for a college of midwives, he asks of his reader,

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388 King James Version.
What discredit had it been for a Profession, which lies under common
disgrace and contempt, to attain to the Gravitie and Honour of Order and
Government? What burden had it been for a Calling, which requires
knowledge, to be made more knowing and full of experience? What losse
had it been to increase the number of the Living, which cannot but be an
increase of employment for all sorts of Trades and Professions
whatsoever?...They sold their Quiet for Trouble, their Credit for Shame,
and their Gain for Losse.\textsuperscript{389}

Chamberlen’s vituperation is not merely the result of his desire for the safety and
propagation of mankind, but becomes instead highly personal, accusing midwives of
“degrading my Titles, disabling my Practice, misconstruing all my Christian designs, and
limiting all my studies to the bare manuall operations of Deliveries. And they also
scandalized with Uncharitablenesse and Avarice.”\textsuperscript{390} Chamberlen has thus far positioned
midwives as the ultimate in “sinful” women—they are of Herod’s tribe in their desire to
kill children for personal gain, and they refute the natural superiority of men in their
response to Chamberlen. They are the exemplars of the worst that comes of having
women in a trade or profession, ruining the livelihoods of themselves and all other
tradesmen through their short-sightedness. And they are the quintessential harpies,
slandering a “good” man in public arenas.

\textsuperscript{389} Voice in Rhama, [A2v].

\textsuperscript{390} Ibid, p. A3[r]
So, how much of Chamberlen’s caustic rhetoric of the 1640s carries over into his midwifery manual of 1665? Surprisingly little. With the exception of his two-page address “To the English Ladies & Gentlewomen,” Chamberlen’s *Midwifes Practice* is primarily derivative, drawing much of its language and content from the 1663 edition of the *Compleat Midwifes Practice*.\(^{391}\) What Chamberlen takes the opportunity of doing, however, is repositioning the (supposed) authors of that text from being women who are “the most knowing *Professors of Midwifry* now living in the city of London, and other places”\(^{392}\) to being the authors of “a small Treatise of this Natures, composed of Carping Nonsense, and made as if it were to rail at the Learned, rather then any ways to instruct the Ignorant.”\(^{393}\) But while Chamberlen is at pains to condemn the anonymous authors of *The Compleat Midwifes Practice*, he is at equal pains to create a space for virtuous practitioners of midwifery, if only doing so obliquely. His criticism of midwives in general is limited to two direct statements, both of which he qualifies as referring to “a


\(^{392}\) Title page of *The Compleat Midwife’s Practice Enlarged*, 3\(^{rd}\) ed. (London: Nathaniel Brook, 1663).

\(^{393}\) *Dr. Chamberlain’s Midwifes Practice: or, A Guide for Women In that high Concern of Conception, Breeding,a nd Nursing Children* (London: Printed for Thomas Rooks, 1665), A2[r].
“great many” or “some ignorant” practitioners, reserving instead his recrimination for the aforementioned authors of The Compleat Midwifes Practice whose work stands as an “obstruction” to correct learning. The obstetrical content of Chamberlen’s text, however, is devoid of all commentary on midwives’ abilities or characters; in fact, Chamberlen’s reworked content is in some places, if not more positive, at least less negative toward midwives than his source text. Whereas The Compleat Midwifes Practice, in all editions, warns against “the ignorance of some women, who for haste to be gone to other women, do tear the membranes [of the placenta] with their nail, to the danger, both of the women and of the childe,” Chamberlen notes simply that, if the placenta “break not of its own accord . . . then it’s the Midwifes office, easily and gently to break it with her nails.”

Why might Chamberlen have ameliorated his rhetoric concerning midwives? The effect of his 1646 A Voice in Rhama was to condemn all female midwives as ignorant harpies, inferior to and jealous of the learned male physician. In his Midwifes Practice, he limits himself to placing the authors of The Compleat Midwifes Practice, and such women as follow them, in that subordinate position, and does so only in the space of two pages. Perhaps his recantation was the result of his impolitic assertions about both the church and the local government during the Interregnum. In A Voice in Rhama, Chamberlen (possibly unwittingly) identified the Anglican Church with the vulgar

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394 Ibid, [A2v].

395 Compleat Midwifes Practice, 83.

396 Dr. Chamberlain’s Midwifes Practice, 109.
practices of midwives, and the machinations of the Devil himself. When Chamberlen rhetorically asked what effect might come of the reinstatement of midwifery licensing by Anglican bishops, he answered himself:

It may be when Bishops are restored again, their [demons’] Ordinaries [midwives] will come in to plead their case. Of what? Truly that none shall do good without their leave. That none shall have leave, but such as will take their Oath and pay Money. That taking this Oath and paying their Money with the testimonie of two or three Gossips, any may have leave to be as ignorant, if not as cruel as themselves, and that none shall have the Priviledge to be so certainly forsworn as these who swear impossibilities: but of Instruction or Order amonst the Midwives, not one word.397

On the question of reasserting his proposal for a midwives’ college before the local magistrates and ministers of London, or before the Royal College of Physicians, he said, “I have formerly cast pearls before Swine, and found the issue.”398 By the time he published his Midwifes Practice, Chamberlen had reaped the rewards of his public denunciation of the College, having been expelled from its ranks in 1649, and, though reinstated to his position as physician-in-ordinary by Charles II, he was not so well-considered by the government, complaining in 1670 that he had received little or no remittance for his post for nearly ten years. Certainly, a reiteration of his language in A

397 Ibid., [A8r-A8v]

398 Ibid., [A8v]
Voice in Rhama would have been neither politic nor popular by 1665. Moreover, the extensive reprinting of Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives* and of *The Compleat Midwives Practice* had proven the authorship and publication of English midwifery manuals to be a lucrative trade. And though the “unlearned midwife” remained a common trope in those works, the widespread subversion of the profession was not, nor would it have made common sense to denounce the practitioners of that art while attempting to sell its secrets to the common public. Chamberlen conscientiously opted not to alter much of the tone, content, or positions of power within the genre, an appropriate and understandable choice given his highly contentious relationship with London’s female midwives. But as we will see, Chamberlen’s attempts to bolster male authority while subordinating the authority and knowledge of female practitioners would not go unchallenged in the years following his manual’s publication.

**Part III: James Wolveridge’s *Speculum Matricism Hibernicum* (1670)**

Of the authors of Restoration midwifery manuals, Wolveridge departs from generic convention to the greatest degree. In his text, *Speculum Matricis* (1670; 1671),399 Wolveridge eschews the generic convention of direct address by the author in favor of

399 Because the title of the second edition is shortened from *Speculum Matricis Hibernicum* to *Speculum Matricis*, I will use the shortened version to refer to the text (since the contents remain identical) except when discussing issues of Irish versus English nationalism as they play out on the title pages and frontispieces of both editions. In those instances, I will refer to the editions separately by their respective titles.
writing in an extended dialogue between an imagined physician, Dr. Philadelphos, and a midwife, Eutrapelia. And as his adoption of these two characters implies, Wolveridge seems to have imagined his work more in literary than obstetrical terms, utilizing the conventions of literary publishing to introduce his work in the prefatory material. Wolveridge makes no bones about his intent that his work be considered a literary, rather than a merely scientific, text. Unlike previous midwifery authors, Wolveridge includes a poetic address, not to his reader, other physicians, or midwives, but to the book itself, and Wolveridge explicitly imagines his text in the role of leisure reading, saying “Go little Book, I envy not thy hap, / Mayst thou be dandled in the Ladies lap.” Wolveridge also includes five tributes to himself and his text, all written by different men of standing, in his prefatory material, and all of which are written in verse. These encomiums seem far more appropriate to a work of poetry or published drama than an obstetrics manual, with one Jonathan Ashe calling the *Speculum* a “Production, which from thee / Came like full-ripe fruit dropping from the tree,” and Richard Samson decrying his own lack of

400 Specifically, Jonathan Ashe (a Master of Arts at Oxford), Aquila Smyth (physician), Daniel Coleman (J.V.D.), and Richard Sampson. These encomiums make extensive use of midwifery and birth as metaphorical conceits—“thy brain / Ne’re wanted Midwife, neither felt it pain,” “thou should’st be delivered of they Book,” etc.—peculiarily literary rhetorical devices seen most often in dramatic works of the seventeenth-century, rather than nonfictional works. James Wolveridge, *Speculum matricis hybernicum, or the Irish midwives handmaid* (London: E. Okes for Rowland Reynolds, 1670), [A7v] - [a1v].

401 Ibid., [A7v].
poetic ability to fully describe Wolveridge’s genius, saying “If I were skill’d in Chaldaick, or in Syriack, / As others, who might well thy Praises shew; / My muse would then compel a Panegyrick / Even for the debt which to thy worth I owe.” All are full of admiration for the brevity, clarity, and judicious selection of information that Wolveridge delivers, but even his dedicants do not deny the audience for which it was designed, that not merely for midwives, but for “Ladies” who will no doubt “their glasses . . . neglect / When on thy mirrour they shall once reflect, / Which teaches to preserve their beauties more / Than all their Paints and Washes e’re before.” Wolveridge’s primary concern is clearly to instruct and entertain a lay audience of women for whom the Speculum would serve as a guide to labor and maternity; he is, among other things, careful not to frighten away his imagined female reader, exhorting his book to “shew’st no monstrous births that may affright, / (Though thou might’st do’t) but such as may delight, / With admiration . . .” And indeed, Wolveridge limits accounts of “monstrous” births to those that he terms “preternatural” or “difficult,” such as breech

402 “Chaldean” was, in this time, often a reference to the Babylonian areas of learning, specifically the occult sciences, astrology, and natural magic. Combined with “Syriack” (like Chaldaic, a language of the Old Testament), however, it may point toward the ancientness of these languages and thus create a link with the similarly Biblically enjoined and ancient practice of midwifery.

403 Ibid., [a6r].
404 Ibid., [A7v].
405 Ibid., a4[r].
births and the birth of twins, and even these are presented in terms of their cure—how a midwife ought to solve safely the problem of difficult labors—rather than ascriptions of causes or discussions of possibly negative results. Such concern for feminine sensibilities, however, should not lead us to conclude that Wolveridge places the opinion of his female readers above those of men. If the opening of his address is any indication, his gentlewomen readers are of secondary concern, after “Learned Scholars” but before “Expert Midwives.”

But Wolveridge is able to assert the equivalent value of both midwives’ and physicians’ types of knowledge because he is not invested himself in asserting his own superiority as medical specialist. In his address to the reader, Wolveridge claims it would “only be accounted Arrogancy and Presumption” to think the content of his text would present anything unknown already to “Learned Scholars [or] Grave Matrons.” Instead, Wolveridge hopes that his mode of presentation, rather than the uniqueness of his content, will set him apart from previous midwifery authors. Wolveridge’s greatest achievement in the genre was his introduction of a more efficient format for the midwifery manual; his text is replete with extensive glossing and headers, making it far more useful as a reference work. He abandons the convention of beginning with theories of general anatomy in favor of theories of conception and fetal development and is careful immediately to relate those theories to the practicalities of pregnancy and birth. He provides immediate and clear translations of all Latin references. He includes a brief set of recipes for women’s and infants’ complaints to be used during and after the birth,

406 Ibid., [A3v].
rather than cataloguing innumerable recipes to be used for all types of ailments, like the
gout or a concussion. And, he provides an alphabetized index to his text (unique in
midwifery manuals) for speed of reference. Wolveridge was quite aware that these
innovations in form would be the defining characteristic of his text, rather than any
innovations in content, a fact which he acknowledge in his address to the reader.

Wolveridge’s humble claim is to present that knowledge via the most “plain and
perspicuous a method” possible; his is not new knowledge but new methodology, and as
such is not dependent on asserting the superiority of male over female learning. Instead,
Wolveridge is invested in defending the importance of midwifery as a branch of
medicine, and in ensuring the broadest possible audience for his text, via a Christian
humanist argument.

Man would not only be ungrateful to his Creator, but wanting to his off-
spring, should he not endeavour to improve his whole industry, Reason,
and skill to propagate his kind to all posterity. And therefore, besides
other helps, as Physical, Anatomical, and Diaetetical, &c. The art and skill
of Obstetricie (commonly called Midwivery) is none of the least: It being
no less virtue and prudence to preserve a child when begotten, than
content and pleasure in begetting; in both which, both Sexes are, and
ought equally to be concerned.\textsuperscript{407}

To that end, Wolveridge argues, women are both divinely ordained and naturally inclined
to be midwives, “Women being most fit to help women in their deliveries, by reason of

\textsuperscript{407} Ibid., b[r]-[bv].
the modest of their sex.” 408 And to help women both become midwives themselves and to judge the virtues of others, Wolveridge declares it the “whole subject of this ensuing small Tract, to describe a Midwife, and such a woman too that may be most apt for so necessary an employment.” 409 But what model woman is it that Wolveridge would have the midwife be?

As a result of the “literariness” of his text, Wolveridge’s midwife is much more a gendered “character” than she is a gendered “person” or “professional,” more a female archetype for the “honest matron” addressed in Wolveridge’s preface than a representation of the “Every-midwife.” Because he fashions Eutrapelia as a fictional character, Wolveridge has much more freedom in the ways he uses her, specifically as the counterpoint to Dr. Philadelphos. These two characters are not metonymic stand-ins for actual midwives and physicians; their interaction is very classical, drawing upon the Sophistic mode of instruction by question-and-answer, but in this case, there is no one, clear “teacher” and one “student.” Certainly, the balance of teaching falls on Philadelphos, as the purveyor of theoretical knowledge, but Eutrapelia maintains her own sphere of experiential authority. Their fictional relationship has the midwife functioning as a separate (but not equal) authority on childbirth, rather than as mere receptacle for male knowledge (i.e. Culpeper or Chamberlen) or arbiter of what constitutes “useful” knowledge (i.e. The Compleat Midwives Practice). In positioning Eutrapelia, and through her all midwives, as purveyors of one half of midwifery’s requisite knowledge,

408 Ibid., [b4r].

409 Ibid., [b4r].
and Dr. Philadelphos and other male physicians and purveyors of the other half,
Wolveridge seems to have left little room for himself and his text.

Like Culpeper before him, Wolveridge references the “expert midwife” throughout his prefatory material, and like Culpeper again, he is careful to qualify the midwife’s authority, knowledge, and superiority throughout the text. But Wolveridge eschews the trope of the “unskilled midwife,” Culpeper’s favorite mode of qualification, for a much more extensive and specific mode of positioning the midwife: the format of the dialogue. As stated earlier, Speculum features an extensive conversation between the fictional characters of Dr. Philadelphos and Eutrapelia, and on first examination, this dialogue seems to divide their areas of expertise and authority down a simple line, that of theory versus practice. Whenever Wolveridge turns to abstract concepts—conception, fetal development, anatomy, theoretical causes of difficult births—it is Dr. Philadelphos who speaks. When Wolveridge presents practical, hands-on knowledge—what constitutes a good midwife or gossip, the physical performance of midwiving a birth, ways of managing difficult births—it is Eutrapelia. While this division of labor, as it were, remains constant throughout the text, the language with which Wolveridge characterizes the exchange highlights the unequal levels of authority granted to midwife and physician, an obstetrical version of “separate, but not equal.” When Eutrapelia asks a question of Dr. Philadelphos, he responds in the form of a lecture, his position being one of educator to the uneducated. When Dr. Philadelphos questions Eutrapelia, however, what at first seems an equivalent exchange of information (for example, his question, “How do you deliver the woman” of a given malpresentation, followed by her detailed
response) becomes an exercise in rote memorization, one in which Eutrapelia responds with information that Dr. Philadelphos already possesses. This difference is made clear in part by Eutrapelia’s form of response, her constant use of the passive compulsive “Sir, I must not” as opposed to the imperative “One does” or “You will,” in answering Dr. Philadelphos’ questions. That her responses are merely “good to hear” rather than actually instructive for the doctor is reinforced by the speaker’s name—Eutrapelia, or “pleasantness in conversation.” Secondly, Wolveridge ends the question-and-answer section on preternatural births with Dr. Philadelphos’ statement to Eutrapelia that “I have hitherto troubled you with many Questions, that I might not only be sure of your abilities, but also give testimony of your sufficiency, if need require.” Thus, Wolveridge’s male doctor not only usurps the midwife’s authority by proclaiming his own knowledge of the art, without need for her instruction, but also the authority of midwives and other women in testifying to a particular midwife’s abilities, as was actual legal practice. Wolveridge in this way positions the midwife as knowledgeable and worthy in her own right, but absolutely subordinate to the physician who always already knows midwifery practice without the need for instruction by its female practitioners. And Wolveridge makes the midwife herself complicit in this gendered subordination by having her introduce herself

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410 This term was coined by Aristotle in Rhetoric. See Stephen Halliwell’s introduction to Aristotle’s Poetics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). The doctor’s name, Philadelphos, echoes the nationalistic aspects of midwifery and midwifery manual production; “Philadelphos” is a Greek term meaning “to love one’s countrymen.”

411 Speculum Matricis, 72.
first to Dr. Philadelphos as being a woman “willing (if your Worship, and other Learned Physicians think me fit) to be serviceable . . . and to take upon me that employment [of midwifery].”¹⁴¹² Thus, the creation of a midwife as character in Wolveridge’s manual, which could possibly have been a moment for the rhetorical assertion of the midwife’s power, becomes a venue for the male author’s erasure of that power.

Wolveridge’s gendered power dynamic between midwife and doctor is further complicated by his nationalist rhetoric in both the title and preface of his work. The first edition (1670) was published under the title *Speculum Matricis Hybernicum; or The Irish Midwives Handmaid*. This title was of Wolveridge’s own devising, referencing it as he does in the opening address to the reader in an attempt to “Anglicize” his work:

> Though the Title-Page may arrive [at] your view in an Irish Garb, with her Handmaid bare-foot, and bare-legg’d; or at the best, in Brogues and Kerchers, (according to the Custome of the Country;) yet, be assured, It hath an English dress under an Irish mantle.⁴¹³

The introduction of “Irishness” into his text’s equation complicates the dynamics of power. In earlier manuals, the only nation involved, implicitly or explicitly, has been England; even texts originally from the Continent are made “English” through the act of translation. Wolveridge’s characterization of his book as Irish, and his own Anglo-Irish

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¹⁴¹² Ibid., 26.

¹⁴¹³ Ibid., [A3v].
identity, put into question his position vis-à-vis his English readers.\footnote{414} Generally speaking, the midwifery manual had, by 1670, a set hierarchy, the male practitioner-author and his compatriot-readers occupying the top position, followed, in medical terms, by the experienced female midwife, who assumes an authoritative position over the laboring mother and her gossips, no matter the mother’s social class; the relative positions of midwife and mother/gossip are then “reset” according to their respective classes, once the birth is concluded. But where does an Irishman fall in this hierarchy? By virtue of country, in contemporary thought, he is below an English physician, Ireland being the purported land of barbarity, evidenced in so many early modern texts. Such an ordering is not impaired by Wolveridge’s text or goal; his desire is, after all, not to educate the learned or to present new information, but merely to create a new method for presenting that information. Yet in calling his text Irish, Wolveridge complicates the position of the book as a source of reliable information, “modern” information, and by extension the position of midwife who, presumably, is to learn from it.

Wolveridge’s further discussion of the Irish, which takes up the bulk of his first address, does not improve matters, as he seems single-minded in his pursuit of the “Irish as barbarian” theme. For his text was

\footnote{Wolveridge clearly establishes that particular national identity at the conclusion of this address, calling England “the Kingdom of his Nativity” and Ireland “his Countrey, \emph{whil’st obliged to it} [emphasis mine]” ([A6v]). His dissatisfaction with his country of habitation is quite apparent.}
never intended for the Irish, [. . .] whose fruitfulness is such, that there is scarce one barren among them; and whose hardiness, and facility in bringing forth, is generally such, as neither requires the nice Attendance of diligent, vigilant Nurse-keepers, or the Art of expert Anatomists, or the unwearied pains and skill of dexterous Midwives; being, more like the Hebrew women, [. . .] delivered before the Midwives can come to them.  

This passage is not, as we might interpret it today, a statement of approbation for Irishwomen’s natural abilities, but rather a way to link them more closely with those “barbarian” cultures so often cited in contemporaneous works, one of whose distinguishing features is the way that their women give birth in natural (read “uncivilized” and “animalistic”) ways.  

Wolveridge then expounds for nearly four pages on the case of an known Irishwoman who delivered twins without assistance while following her husband to war, an event testified to by various Irish lords and statesmen. Wolveridge’s goal with such a tale seems to be the implication that his book could be of no use whatsoever to the Irish, any more than it could be “useful to forreign parts, it being published in an English Dialect.” With such language, Wolveridge has signaled both himself and his text as markedly Anglo-Irish, rather than “merely” Irish. That he seeks to identify himself with his English readers becomes painfully obvious at the conclusion of this address, as he switches to referring to himself in the third person,

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415 Ibid., A4[r] – [A4v].  
416 We will see this rhetoric again in William Sermon’s The Ladies Companion.  
417 Ibid., [A6r].
saying “It will therefore consequently be concluded, that it was meant for the English, his Countrey-folk, whether at home, or in forrign Plantations.” Thus, when Wolveridge concludes with his hopes that the book will commend itself “to the Patronage of the most Grave and Serious Matrons of England and Ireland,” his qualification marks those women as truly English women, despite their country of current habitation. And where does the midwife herself lie within this complex nationalist positioning? Ironically, in his discussion of native Irishwomen’s barbaric, if lusty, birthing abilities, Wolveridge has obviated the midwife’s position among the Irish: she is unnecessary. Thus, the midwife herself becomes a mark of civility, an essential practitioner only in advanced societies.

This positioning becomes quite clear in the text’s second edition, wherein the word “Hibernicum,” or “Irish,” has been eliminated from the title, perhaps because its inclusion signaled the precise opposite of Sermon’s intention, that of distancing himself from an Irish identity. Having put the Irish in their “proper place,” then, the addition of a woodcut engraving clarifies visually the hierarchy envisioned by Wolveridge both within and without the realms of the birth room (illust. 7). In the first of the two illustrations, the birth chamber is still a female sphere, with only the midwife, mother, and child depicted, and the midwife performs one of her most important functions, that of physically framing the child through swaddling immediately after birth. The second image, however, shows the midwife, mother-to-be, and male physician discussing together the process of the birth. In it, the male physician’s hand is raised, expounding no doubt upon the great theories of conception, and his attention is turned to the pregnant

418 Ibid., [A6r].
mother. The midwife’s attention, too, is given to the mother, but where the male
physician is giving instruction by memory, the midwife displays in her hand a book,
presumably Wolveridge’s own *Speculum Matricis*. Thus the book itself is placed within
this gendered hierarchy of obstetrics: male physician as primary authority, the midwife as
second *through the knowledge garnered from his text*, and the mother, during the course
of her pregnancy and labor, subordinate to both.⁴¹⁹

**Part IV: William Sermon’s *The Ladies Companion* (1671)**

We have seen various instances in which male authors have used the midwifery
manual as a textual venue for appropriating various forms of authority beyond the bounds
of the birth room. For Wolveridge it is, among other things, a means to assert his
national allegiance to England; for Culpeper, the manual is wrapped up in his personal
tussle with the authority vested in the College of Physicians and the Surgeons’ Guild.
But these were not the only men to utilize the midwifery manual for larger purposes than
obstetrical education. William Sermon’s 1671 treatise, *The Ladies Companion, or The
English Midwife*, is functionally more a guide for the creation of a perfect wife than it is
educative in the area of obstetrics. Sermon’s manual marks the first time in English
midwifery manuals that midwives are *not* included in the opening address to the reader,
and are in fact ignored altogether, with Sermon addressing himself “To the most

⁴¹⁹ We should also note that the garb of these three persons is not that of the “native
Irish.” None of the “Brogues” or “Kerchers” of Wolveridge’s concern is to be seen, and
all three are admirably shod.
Accomplish’d Ladies and Gentlewomen of England.” Older matrons, surgeons, and physicians are likewise excluded, making the ascription of leisure reading as authorial intent all the more likely. Unlike Wolveridge’s manual, Sermon’s contains no illustrations and no detailed descriptions of birthing practices, being limited instead to the sorts of information we can presume Sermon found appropriate for a general female readership. What obstetrical information he does include is derivative, as was usual for the genre, but he is unique in the pantheon of midwifery authors in terms of the degree to which he inserts himself and his own, highly personal tales into the text. He delights in calling attention to his own accomplishments (though none of these are in the birthing room), spending a good portion of the preface detailing how he “perfectly cured his Grace [the Duke of Albemarle] of the dropsie,” and appending instructions on where his medicines can be purchased.  

He opens the main portion of the text by making extensive classical references (Hippocrates, Apollo, Ovid, Galen, etc.) in order to establish his own authority in writing his text, positioning himself as “male physician” in the great pantheon of male scholastics throughout the ages, and placing women’s and midwives’ knowledge outside that great, grand master narrative.

It is, in fact, Sermon’s manual that provides us with the first equation in an obstetrical text of midwives and cunning-women, though that equation was not made to associate midwives with the occult. Rather, it is one of Sermon’s more ingenious, or at least mildly inventive, means of denigrating women’s medical knowledge.

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Among those [women] that have practiced Physick, were many that have applied themselves most of all to deliver women; and that they might be distinguished from others, they were frequently called Cunning Women, or otherwise caused themselves to be so called; for women are of such a disposition (especially in these dayes) that they desire to excel men, or at least would seem to go beyond them.\(^{421}\)

Sermon then proceeds to enumerate the functions delegated to classical midwives, at which most of them are markedly inept: making matches (“very few so cunning to tell it”), delivering babies (which they only have time for after their own childbearing years are past), declaring whether a woman is pregnant (requiring three midwives), and declaring whether a woman is a virgin (“I do believe, that it is impossible for any to know whether a Maid be a Virgin, or not [although] many boast they can”).\(^{422}\) Sermon’s blurring of the “classical” and “modern” midwife is remarkably facile, the errors of one becoming the characteristics of the other at every turn.\(^{423}\)

But more than anything else, Sermon seems invested in creating the perfect, passive, husband-worshipping, dutiful, self-effacing wife, rather than a competent midwife, through his descriptions of women’s pregnancy and labor. Like most authors of

\(^{421}\) Ibid., B2[r]

\(^{422}\) Ibid., [B2v]-B3[r]

\(^{423}\) Sermon’s more specific requirements for a midwife—her physical appearance, deportment, intelligence, and religiosity—are copied nearly verbatim from Section V, chapter 1 of *The Compleat Midwives Practice.*
midwifery texts, Sermon has borrowed extensively from previous authors, the bulk of his text being lifted from the 1612 translation of Jacques Guillemeau’s *Childbirth, or the Happy Delivery of Women*, but his copying of that text serves merely to highlight those additions to the original that he felt inclined to make in order to air his own desires for uniformly passive women. For example, Sermon includes in his text Guillemeau’s Aristotelian reference to the ways in which Native American women purportedly undergo labor and delivery. His additions, however, turn what was an anthropological aside into an illustration of the ideal in feminine behavior.

[T]he women in *America* are so kind to their Husbands, that as soon as they are delivered, (because they take some pains to beget them with Child) presently rise up and lay them in their own room, who are attended and looked after like to women in Child-bed, and in the same manner visited by all Friends. *If English Women would once become so loving to their Husbands, it would certainly prevent them from kissing the handsome Nurses, or visiting their Neighbours Wives, &c.* [Sermon’s additions in bold].

Sermon’s ideal woman seems to be one who would not even require a midwife, who would thus be of little or no inconvenience to her husband or to any other man. These are characteristics that Sermon finds both in “uncivilized” women of foreign nations and women of his own. He is full of admiration for “the wife of *Thomas James*” whose delivery was so painless that he saw her

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424 Ibid., 98.
delivered of a lusty Child in a Wood by her self, which presently after she
took the Child and put it into her apron, with some Oaken leaves, and
marched stoutly with it almost half a mile, to an Uncle’s house of mine,
where she got sufficient entertainment for the time she would stay; and
within two hours her Child and her self being refreshed, she would no
longer be treated . . . and the next day came and returned hearty thanks
[emphasis mine].

And where was Sermon that he should have seen these events in such detail? He asserts
that he witnessed the delivery “being accidentally placed under a hedge” in those same
woods. Not having exerted himself to assist the woman in her labor, he is instead greatly
pleased with her gratitude for the two hours rest she obtained in his uncle’s home. These
pregnant women are, in Sermon’s language, images of perfection, achieving procreation
with little or no disturbance to himself or any to other man. Sermon appears preoccupied
with the subordination of wives to their husbands, rather than the subordination of
midwives to male physicians. He references midwives only occasionally after the
preface, and then does so in order to assure that it is the child, not the wife/mother, who is
the primary focus of the midwife’s care: “the Nurse, or some other woman” to tend to the
mother. Sermon has not entirely abandoned the content of the midwifery manual,
including as he does directions on how to deliver the afterbirth and copious recipes for
labor-related illnesses, but his enthusiasm for the subjects of wifely perfection and his

425 Ibid., 97.
426 Ibid., 108.
own famed gout remedy makes it easy for modern readers to dismiss this text as mere advertisement.\textsuperscript{427} Sermon’s caustic rhetoric toward women and his blatant usurpation of women’s authority certainly explains Doreen Evenden’s questioning of his motives. Evenden claims that “Sermon’s inclusion of material obviously intended for midwives could well have been an attempt to disclose to male midwives, surgeons, and physicians, the way that a normal delivery should be managed,” the implication being that these men could then take over the midwiving process themselves, eliminating the need for female practitioners.\textsuperscript{428} Because Sermon did not include any medical information not available from many other texts, it is unlikely that his particular manual would have been in the service of male practitioners looking to corner the market, but certainly Sermon’s rhetoric

\textsuperscript{427} Audrey Eccles, for examples, has deemed Sermon’s manual a vehicle to publicize his diuretic pills. \textit{Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England} (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 14. If that were the case, then the fact that Sermon’s manual ran only to one edition might not constitute a failure. Instead, it would stand as one amongst many methods through which he dispersed his fame throughout England. His \textit{Advertisement} for the pills appeared in 1670, roughly concurrent with \textit{The Ladies Companion}, and ran to eleven editions in five years (Corley, T. A. B. “Sermon, William.” \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}. 2004). In 1673, Sermon published \textit{A Friend to the Sick: or, the honest Englishman’s preservation}, a collection of cases in which his pills effected near-miraculous cures.

\textsuperscript{428} Evenden, \textit{Midwives}, 10.
marks his allegiance as lying with his male counterparts rather than female (if indeed his allegiance was to anyone but himself).

Part V: Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book (1671)*

In the midst of these male-authored manuals, one text appeared under the name of a female author, Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives Book, or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, and it is this text, which makes the most marked alteration in the gendered authority of the midwife, that would become the most popular midwifery manual written in the 1670s. Sharp’s greatest innovation lies in her use of empirical argument to

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429 Unless otherwise noted, all references are to Elaine Hobby’s edited edition of the text: Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book, Or the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

430 Whereas the manuals by Chamberlen, Wolveridge, and Sermon each ran to only one edition, Sharp’s manual went to four editions, two in the seventeenth century (1671 and 1697) and two in the 1720s. Elaine Hobby conjectures the second edition to have been printed in the early 1720s by John Marshall (“Note on the Text,” in *The Midwives Book*, xxxviii). But the 1697 edition of Obadiah Walker’s *The Greek and Roman History Illustrated by Coins & Medals* (Wing W397 in the Huntingdon Library) lists in its advertisements “*Sharp’s Midwifry*” as being for sale “*by William Miller at the Acorn in St. Paul’s Church-yard.*” This evidence concurs with Elizabeth Furdell’s assertion in *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* that Susannah Miller, having taken over her father’s printing business in 1696, “published a new edition in octavo of Jane
assert feminine superiority in the area of obstetrics, arguing from personal knowledge that the midwife’s practical skill, rather than the male physician’s speculative theory, is of greater importance in the safe delivery of women and children.

Sharp addresses her book to her "sister" midwives, and uses much of the established rhetoric of male-authored manuals, decrying midwives’ ignorance of anatomy and the number of mothers who die as a result. The marked difference is not, therefore, in her sentiments regarding unlearned practitioners, but in her relationship to them. Unlike a male physician who declaims against ignorant midwives, Sharp is not setting herself up in gendered opposition to her audience; she is a woman, she is a midwife, and she is at pains to associate herself with the responsible women who work in the same profession. Whereas previous male authors couch their discussion of “bad midwives” in lengthy addresses either to a lay audience of genteel women or to a professional audience of male scholars, creating both gender and class differentiations between author, audience, and subject, Sharp’s only reference to ignorant midwives occurs in a very brief address to her “sisters,” “the midwives of England,” to whom she is an “affectionate friend.” By addressing herself thus directly to other midwives, she is placing both herself

and them in positions of authority contrasted with “unskilful Midwives” who practice “meerly for Lucre’s sake.” Moreover, the brevity of her address to her “sister” midwives (a mere seventeen lines in the original edition), shows her concern with “ignorant midwives” to be perfunctory, understood, and of no such great importance to her audience as to warrant an extended treatment. Does this imply that she is unconcerned with actual practice? Not at all. But Sharp’s address to her fellow midwives is the only prefatory address in her text. She does not write to gentlewomen, to lay readers, to male scholars, or to male physicians, no one for whom an extensive diatribe would be necessary in order to establish their relationship to, or the importance of, the text, or with whom Sharp, as author, would need to ally herself in order to establish her position of authority. Her only prefatory reference to men is an oblique one, as she takes the opportunity to displace blame for midwives’ ignorance onto the male purveyors of information, noting that she has “been at Great Cost in Translations for all Books, either French, Dutch, or Italian of this kind.” Sharp seems to imply that men intentionally prevent women’s access to the study of anatomy out of the desire for profit, keeping anatomy texts expensive and untranslated. But as with the remainder of the text, Sharp’s calling card is “succinctness,” and this indirect (and amusing) commentary on men is all they warrant in her preface; if she is setting herself, or her “sisters,” in a

431 Sharp, Midwives Book, 5.

432 The Midwives Book. Or the whole Art of Midwifry Discovered (London: Simon Miller, 1671), [A3r-A3v]

433 Sharp, Midwives Book, 5.
gendered position vis à vis male practitioners, she makes it obvious that position is secondary at best to their relationships to each other as female professionals.

In Sharp’s stated spirit of concision, this modest, two-page address to her fellow midwives is the only prefatory material to her original text. But this economy of preface does not entail a concomitant excision of tropes and subjects included by other midwifery authors. Instead, Sharp moves her remarks on midwifery’s Biblical precedence, and the necessary femininity of midwifery’s practitioners, to the book proper, making midwives’ gender and “natural superiority” in their profession part of the understanding of the practice, rather than mere ancillary discussions attendant upon it. Sharp expands upon the established trope of midwives’ Biblical ordinance, claiming in her introduction to Book I five reasons for which women have the exclusive right to act as midwives: 1. “that holy Scriptures hath recorded Midwives to the perpetual honour of the female Sex”; 2. that knowledge through practice is communicated to other women; 3. that even among "barbarous people," women and not men perform the duties of midwives; 4. that, regarding men's learning, "It is not hard words that perform the work"; and 5. that birth is, by its nature, a female concern.\footnote{Sharp, \textit{Midwives}, 12-13.} Sharp enumerates reasons for women’s authority in the matter of birth that draw not only on the Bible, but also on worldly knowledge of even “barbarian” cultures and the language of the “natural.” She has thus established a rhetoric that contrasts with Wolveridge’s “separate, but not equal,” creating a distance between the midwife’s prerogatives and male authority; the one has, in essence, nothing whatsoever to do with the other. Sharp’s Biblical ascription differs radically from
previous authors’ use of midwives Biblical ordinance in two ways. First, her argument is not a justification for midwives existence, which she assumes is self-explanatory, but rather of their gender; God did not ordain the establishment of midwifery, but rather placed that pre-existent responsibility solely under the purview of women. Secondly, she asserts that midwives’ obstetrical responsibility was not ordained in order to preserve women’s modesty, to keep men’s prying away from women’s bodies, but is instead predicated upon women’s inherently better knowledge, a function of their abilities to bear as well as deliver children, and thus a knowledge to which no man can aspire.

Beyond this introductory set of assertions, however, it is Sharp’s presence as female author that does the most for establishing the midwife’s authority in her text. The declamatory style of the manual, which in the hands of a male author like Culpeper functions as a passive vehicle for asserting male knowledge, is here inverted, and instead becomes a passive vehicle for asserting female authority. When Sharp discusses issues of anatomy, doubtful sexual assignments, and the biological reasons for monstrous births, she is, like most midwifery authors, drawing her knowledge from previous scholars, but at the same time, her reiteration of that information reinforces her ability, as a woman, to master those modes of thought and her right, as a midwife, to hold preeminence in communicating that information to the reader.\footnote{For more in-depth discussions of Sharp’s rhetoric concerning the female body per se, see: Elaine Hobby, “‘Secrets of the Female sex’: Jane Sharp, the reproductive female body, and early modern midwifery manuals,” in Women’s Writing 8.1 (2001), 201-12; Elaine Hobby, “Gender, Science and Midwifery: Jane Sharp, the Midwives Book (1671)
commentary and humor—usually at the expense of the male sex—perpetually reiterates both her gender and the gender of her intended audience, making them colluders in sexual humor.

Conclusion

Jane Sharp’s pithy rhetoric aside, the prevailing current of midwifery manuals in the 1670s seems to have been that of female subordination to male knowledge; what began the century as a careful balance between midwives’ and physicians’ authorities slowly tipped in favor of the latter. By the 1680s and 1690s, the language of the midwifery manual had almost entirely changed. The anonymous author of The English Midwife Enlarged (1682) expressed concern primarily for the midwife’s reputation as a woman, rather than for her skill as a healer, exhorting her not to give abortificants to her patients, particularly single women, and above all to be careful whom she housed, since the merest hint of having served an illegitimate mother without reporting her to the authorities could ruin the midwife both legally and socially. These warnings reflect a distinct change in perceptions of midwives, in text if not in reality, since as previously discussed the female midwife remained most women’s obstetrician of choice well into the eighteenth century. But such later texts as these were perhaps setting the stage for the

subsequent shift in favor of male physicians. Robert Barret’s 1699 treatise, *A Companion for Midwives, Child-Bearing Women, and Nurses*, certainly prefigures it. Barret alters the common citation of midwifery’s Biblical precedent by pairing it alongside that of the surgeon, for whereas midwives are first referenced in Exodus, the surgeon can trace his heritage all the way back to Adam in the book of Genesis, his supposition being that

We cannot reasonably suppose that *Adam*, who was so universally Skill’d in the Natures of all Plants, should have been ignorant of their

Vulnerary Qualities: Or that he would not employ this his Skill in endeavouring to cure Wounds, or Hurts . . . *Abel* was wounded and kill’d by *Cain*, and can we imagine that *Adam’s* Prudence would not use its Chirurgical endeavours to redress such disasters when possible.  

Having established the pedigree of surgery, Barret then overtly subsumes midwifery under its aegis, saying, “as Surgery in General, so Midwifry in Particular has been always look’d upon as an Inestimable Art.” The subordination of midwifery under the authority of the male physician would now seem complete.

It would be an easy thing to discount the evolution of the rhetoric of the midwifery manual toward the inexorable end of male usurpation of authority, and thus the slow but steady decline of midwives’ social position as purveyors of specialized

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436 Capability of curing illness and/or healing wounds.


438 Ibid., [av].

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knowledge; after all, these manuals of the 1660s and 1670s were printed within years and months of each other, and do not exhibit a single over-arching concern or gender dynamic. I myself have claimed that this evolution was not steady and inevitable; Jane Sharp’s manual represents a clear example of a different form of rhetoric, and while later manuals, like those of Wolveridge, Sermon, and Barret, are manifestly misogynistic in tone, it is Culpeper’s manual that remained a constant “bestseller” throughout the century, perpetuating his milder brand of male-female tension. All of these manuals, however, including Culpeper’s, remain static after their first printings. They represent, in essence, individual and fairly unrelated moments in time, and as such the superimposition of a linear narrative of evolution appears haphazard and untenable. But one oft published midwifery manual stands outside of this pattern, one that evolved over a period of forty-two years: *The Compleat Midwife’s Practice*. Perhaps it this manual we might revisit to investigate the genre’s evolution and whether or not the genre, and its depictions of midwives, changed according to popular demand.

Certainly, the series of alterations in *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* cannot be held as absolute proof of the genre’s movement from pro- to anti-female attitudes, or as a signal that male practitioners were taking over the field of obstetrics entirely. We cannot even say for certain whether the alteration in this text’s gendered authority from female to male resulted from or created the book-buying public’s demand. Both are likely true. As the authors and printers of midwifery texts emphasized men’s knowledge over women’s, the more the shift became familiar and the readers began to accept that emphasis. As they created obstetrical texts for women that more and more resembled the leisure
reading of a ladies’ companion or cabinet of secrets, the more the reading public’s opinion concerning the midwife and the value and status of her expertise must have shifted along the same lines, her area of knowledge having been relegated to an afternoon’s perusal. Certainly the conflicting characterizations of the midwife as ignorant and learned, illicit and respectable, authoritative and subservient, did not resolve themselves by the end of the century, yet the genre of the midwifery manual seems to have been on a trajectory for that resolution, a resolution which, in the face of historical proof to the contrary, would see the role of the midwife textually, not brought to the apex of medical power, but rather unjustly diminished to that of a purveyor of imperfect knowledge and skill.
CHAPTER SIX

Margaret Cavendish’s Midwives: A Case Study

What makes Margaret Cavendish such an attractive subject for a study of midwifery in literary texts? Certain elements of attraction are obvious: here, at last, we have a female author who is not herself a medical practitioner utilizing the language of midwifery in her literary texts; moreover, she is also a product of the “new world order,” a staunch Royalist who survived years of exile only to return to Restoration England and find celebrity in publishing. What might a woman make of such a uniquely feminine element as the midwife in a world that allowed so many new opportunities for female achievement, or at least notoriety? Will Cavendish establish new usages based on changed ideologies in politics and religion, or even on innovations in drama and the theatre? Does she use the midwife as a response to the new atmosphere of scientific investigation symbolized by the Royal Society? Might she incorporate the midwife into a pantheon of female literary characters that represent a unity of female experience, a valorization of uniquely female knowledge?

Margaret Cavendish’s attraction lies in the fact that she does not fulfill such predictable hopes. Where we seek a woman standing for all women, we find a woman often more explicitly loyal to her class than her gender. Where we expect a discussion of the importance of female epistemologies, we often see in her nonfiction works a woman who is desirous of entering male intellectual society. Where we expect a woman using her lived female experiences—domestic and procreative—in her literary works, we find a
woman who expresses ambivalence about female knowledge and whose own life is often outside the normative experience of a seventeenth-century woman. And where we anticipate an author embracing innovations in genre and form, we find instead an author straddling periods due to her education, adhering often to pre-Interregnum dramatic conventions and remaining loyal to closet drama despite the reinstitution of public theatre.

Another element of Cavendish’s attraction lies in her penchant for rhetorical and generic variety, which also serves her desire for a literary fame in which she has “a reputation free from charges of imitation.”439 As a result, Cavendish experimented with a wide variety of genres and topics, from collections of letters to poetry, writings on experimentalism to closet dramas, musing on natural philosophy to advice on child-rearing.440 Cavendish regularly drew from, adapted, and transmuted elements of her


440 Though Cavendish did not have a thorough education in either the feminine or masculine arts, she was by no means ignorant. Her mother’s indulgence famously left her ignorant of nearly all huswifely skills, the lack of which Cavendish admits in her autobiography. But her marriage to William Cavendish led to her inclusion in Cavendish family interests that, led by her brother-in-law Charles, included anatomy and physiology, microscopy, astronomy, and a host of other elements of natural philosophy.
chimerical education into her works, creating for herself an entirely new dialectic based on her own experiences and epistemologies that provide ample resources to mine for unique usages of midwifery. Cavendish participates in a “creative bricolage,”441 adapting and appropriating a series of genres and rhetorics throughout her canon of works, but what she does not have is an established model for how to treat publicly (i.e. in print) female characters and feminine rhetoric as a female author.

Cavendish deploys the language of midwifery in all three established modes—in reference to a medical profession, as a dramatic (comedic) character, and as rhetorical trope—but these traditional uses are by no means predictable. Cavendish’s references to professional midwifery are colored by her opinions on childbirth in general, which in turn are shaded by Cavendish’s representations of “worthy intelligence.”442 A woman’s

Margaret Cavendish also read a great deal on her own, both before and after her marriage, and was a great fan of the works of Shakespeare.


442 Cavendish’s Plays (1662) is a particularly apt location for an investigation into her uses of feminine language and female professions such as midwifery, considering the plays’ peculiarly consistent bent toward female speech and representation. “In the 1662 Folio, fifteen plays out of twenty-one begin and seven end with women speaking. This is strikingly unusual in the dramatic practice of the time, and insures that we are introduced
innate academic intelligence is the predominant lens through which Cavendish sees gender issues, and she uses midwifery and birth language as a means to distinguish between women who are capable of “greater” lives, and those who should live the accepted norm of a female life—marriage and maternity. Cavendish extends her association of childbirth, and thus midwifery, with the lot of ordinary women, dramatizing childbirth amongst “lesser” women as a natural, socially valid process in The Public Wooing (1662). Cavendish’s attitude toward childbirth becomes increasingly negative between the writing of the 1662 Plays and her later dramas, published in 1668, as evidenced by Orations of divers sorts (1662) and Sociable Letters (1664), culminating in her scathing, but sympathetic, representations of childbearing and midwifery in The Convent of Pleasure (1668).

Because Cavendish was a female author, her relationship to and uses of gendered language are necessarily more complicated than those of her male contemporaries, particularly her use of the well-established midwife trope. For the first time, we have the potential for a literary author who uses the language of a midwife actually to be a midwife, or to personally need the services of one; so, for example, Cavendish’s references to her earliest works as her “children,” and her printer as “midwife,” are more than mere rhetorical ploys. Intentionally or not, such language emphasizes her gender, to play-worlds through women’s eyes and women’s language.” Jacqueline Pearson, “‘Women may discourse…as well as men’ Speaking and Silent Women in the Plays of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle,” Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature 4.1 (1985), 33.
and brings a wide scope of sexual associations into play. Cavendish realized this early in her career with the publication of *Poems and Fancies* (1653), and she is particularly circumspect in her later texts, recognizing the potential of childbirth language, when placed in the mouth of a female author or character, to unintentionally collapse women’s operative rhetorical space.

After her earliest works, Cavendish is quite sparing with her tropological use of midwifery, but in two particular dramas, an important gender-based argument hinges upon this very language. In *The Second Part of Bell in Campo* (1662), Cavendish makes her most daring and provocative use of the midwifery trope, deploying it as an element of Cavalier martial rhetoric in the mouth of a female “heroickess” as a sign of female nationalism and duty to the state. In the case of *Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* (1662), Cavendish deploys the midwifery trope as an element of female oratory and as a means of defending an aristocratic woman’s natural right to language and education. In both of these dramas, however, Cavendish is careful to place midwifery rhetoric only in the mouths of female characters who are sexually stable—a perpetual virgin and a long-married woman. And finally, Cavendish turns to one of the most traditional dramatic uses of the midwife, as a pseudo-Jacobean comic element, in *The Sociable Companions* (1668).

While investigating midwives in Cavendish’s individual texts, we will also review those elements of Cavendish’s life that are most relevant to our interpretations of her midwifery rhetoric, specifically her class, her interest in new science and

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443 Cavendish herself never had children, an issue I will address in detail later.
experimentation, her desire for fame, her idealization of the solitary individual, and least surprisingly, her own childless state. Cavendish’s uses of midwifery impinge at times on maternity and childbirth but also often remain separate issues and rhetoric, and her reasons for including or excluding these attendant modes along with midwifery in individual texts are worth exploring. Cavendish’s relationship to these explicitly gendered rhetorics is obviously complicated by her own gender, with even the most usual of rhetorical flourishes taking on new and complex shadings as we question how aware she was of her own language choice and the ways it may or may not affect the surrounding discourse.

It is precisely Cavendish’s textual and personal juxtapositions, her refusals to fix on a singular, coherent pattern that make her works such rich mines of investigation for midwiving characters and languages. Cavendish’s work may be the ideal place to look for all the possible uses for midwifery for Restoration authors because she is so fluid, changing her perspective, her theories, her genres, and her language to fit her immediate needs. This variety encourages Cavendish to make the most of her language, to mold rhetoric, meaning, and associations, and it makes her canon what we might term a “locus of potential,” a place where we can find, if not midwifery usages fleshed out and explored to their ultimate degree, a pantheon of usages representing the full potential of textual midwifery was in Restoration literature.
Part I: An Unnecessary Labor: Cavendish on Childbirth and Professional Midwives

Making a Virtue of Necessity

Because Cavendish does not treat midwifery as a profession in any profound detail, we are also encouraged to renew the form of inquiry established by Caroline Bicks in *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare’s England*—exploring the relationship of textual midwifery to other languages of childbirth and maternity. Inevitably, perhaps, what attention has been paid to Cavendish’s language of birth and maternity has focused on her own “failure” to produce children. Margaret Cavendish married in 1645 at age 23, but by 1648 she and her husband were consulting the celebrated doctor Sir Theodore Mayernee for aid in conceiving. Cavendish had every reasonable expectation of producing children; her mother and sisters were exceptionally fertile, and her husband had fathered several children by his late wife. Even so, the hoped-for child never materialized. Since the 1980s, it has been en vogue to read Cavendish’s commentary on childbirth and pregnancy, and even the production of her literary works themselves, through the lens of her presumed bitterness over her failure to produce children. Commentators from Antonia Fraser to Sara Mendelson to James Fitzmaurice all argue that Cavendish’s acerbic language concerning pregnant women in *The Sociable Letters* (1664) is evidence of jealousy, guilt, and despair.444

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444 Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Woman’s lot in seventeenth-century England* (London: Methuen, 1985), 70; Sara Heller Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart*
But Cavendish turns this “lack,” both of children and of the authorial status that maternity could provide, to her best advantage, making her (or her husband’s) infertility a reason for her move into public print. On the most obvious level, Cavendish notes in her first publication, *Poems and Fancies*, that, given her lack of children and lack of an English estate, both of which would require her devotion to domestic practice, her time spent writing was not detracting from her natural “feminine” duties. More interestingly, however, is Cavendish’s depiction of her childless state as fulfilling the Platonic ideal of marriage propounded and popularized by Queen Henrietta Maria. Cecile M. Jagodzinski claims that “Cavendish regarded herself as extraordinarily blessed in actually living such a life; her platonic love for the indulgent husband thirty years older than she enabled her to view herself as both married and virginal.” As part of this ideal marriage, Cavendish’s writing parallels the perfect communication and reciprocation of

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the married parties. Kate Lilley had made a clear argument for Cavendish’s rhetorical scheme for “strategically represent[ing] her writing as a conjugal effect.”

Unsurprisingly, Cavendish locates herself and her writing exclusively through elegiac aristocratic precedent and the demonstration of husbandly consent. But Cavendish’s materialist, atomist project of self-authorisation is, in fact, far more audacious, active and rhetorically complex than the feminised trope of witness or permission might suggest. Claiming a symmetrical, even indivisible, relationship between conjoint, conjugal pleasure and responsibility and singular textual ambition, Cavendish suggests that, through writing and publishing, she can simultaneously prove her loyalty to herself and her husband.

Cavendish’s inability to bear children, so easily interpreted as a “lack” that would cause bitterness and jealousy, becomes not only an integral, but a necessary part of her ideal marriage, which in turn enables her publishing as an apt and appropriate means of supporting and distinguishing her husband as much as her self.

I will not claim that Cavendish’s references to midwifery and maternity, childbirth and child-rearing were not influenced by her own childlessness; the fact that she, along with her husband, sought medical assistance in conceiving indicates that it was

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448 Ibid., 21.
a point of concern for her. However, I would argue that her usages are colored not so much by her supposed emotional state, but by her perpetual insistence that knowledge must stem from experience rather than mere theory. Cavendish’s response to the scientific epistemologies of her day, particularly that of experimental science, have been fodder for much debate, but her one consistent assertion throughout her writings—both philosophical and literary—is the value of common sense and lived experience. Lara Dodds, in arguing for the importance of domestic knowledge as a rubric for interpreting Cavendish’s works, notes that Cavendish “writes at the historical moment in which the definition of experience is a fundamental question of natural philosophy.”449 Combined with Denise Tillery’s assertion that Cavendish’s “epistemological values included dismissing work that has no practical application and challenging observations that violate common sense or everyday experience,”450 we have a new lens through which to evaluate Cavendish’s commentaries on midwifery and childbirth: that of the woman lacking lived experience.


The Dangers of Maternity

While Cavendish may have known the details of childbirth, and would certainly have lived with or near women going through pregnancy and post-partum, she likely had no direct experience whatsoever of an actual birth. Women were typically not allowed to participate in a birth until they were married; for Cavendish, this did not occur until 1645. By that time, Cavendish had moved to Paris with the exiled Queen Henrietta Maria, leaving her female relatives and few friends behind in England and making few or no female friends during her stay on the Continent; she therefore was unlikely to be called as a gossip to any woman, and I can find no record of her standing as godmother, which might indicate her presence in a birth room. By the time she returned to England in 1660, most of her female relatives were either dead or past childbearing age.451 Add to this

451 Both Cavendish’s sisters-in-law were dead before her return to England in 1660, and I can find no record of their having borne daughters whose childbeds Cavendish might have attended. (Lady Mary Lucas, wife of Thomas, died in 1653; Lady Anne Lucas, wife of John, died in 1660). Her sister Mary Killigrew died in 1647, her only daughter having predeceased her. Her brother Charles and sister Anne both lived and died unmarried. Only two siblings outlived Cavendish—her sisters Elizabeth Walter and Catherine Lady Pye—both of whom were past childbearing age in 1660. It is just possible that Cavendish might have been involved in the pregnancies of her niece Elizabeth Walter, married in 1659, but I can find no record of this. Likewise, Cavendish’s sister Catherine bore three daughters, one of whom married in 1678 after Cavendish’s death; of the others I can find no record of marriage or birth. Of her husband’s family, her stepdaughter
Cavendish’s own written disdain for following the domestic standards established for aristocratic women, which might have included overseeing some births on her estates, and it becomes highly unlikely that Cavendish ever entered a birth room.

What Cavendish did have the opportunity of witnessing, however, was the extreme danger posed to women in childbirth; she could not have attended the birth of Queen Henrietta Maria’s daughter in 1644, but as part of the Queen’s retinue she most certainly must have observed the aftermath which left the monarch partially blind and

Frances St. John, Countess of Bolingbroke, had no children, and her stepdaughter Jane Lady Cheyne’s children were born between 1656 and 1658. Her stepson, Henry Cavendish, Viscount Mansfield, fathered three children after the Newcastles’ return from exile, and her stepdaughter Elizabeth Egerton, Countess of Bridgwater, also bore at least one child during that period, but Margaret Cavendish remained in relative seclusion in the country at Welbeck during those years; we have fairly clear evidence of Margaret Cavendish’s comings and goings during the early part of the 1660s. These above dates are compiled from The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, Whitaker’s biography of Cavendish (Mad Madge), and The Peerage.com: A genealogical survey of the peerage of Britain as well as the royal families of Europe. Certainly Cavendish did not mention attending any births, nor does her writing indicate first-hand experience, as I will argue further.

Henrietta Anne, later Duchess of Orleans
with such pains in her chest that her doctors predicted her death. After the Restoration, too, Cavendish would have been reminded of these dangers by the death of her stepdaughter, Elizabeth Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater, in childbirth in 1663. This last event may indeed have influenced Cavendish’s writing, since it is her work *The Sociable Letters*, published in 1664, that most critics cite as evidence of Cavendish’s anti-pregnancy, anti-maternity stance. But in fact, Cavendish makes clear in an earlier text, *Orations of divers sorts accommodated to divers places* (1662), not only her belief that child-bearing was an inherently dangerous, painful, and life-threatening process that enslaves even the women fortunate enough to live through it, but also her opinion that childbirth is an opportunity perhaps not worth taking, one which is forced upon women by the men who control their lives. She devotes an entire speech, “A Child-Bed Woman Funeral Oration,” to the subject, in which the speaker claims that

> Women do not only indure the Extremity of Pain in Child-birth, but in Breeding, the Child being for the most part Sick, and seldome at Ease; … the Males to bear no part of their Pain or Danger; ... Men are made for Liberty and Women for Slavery, and not only Slaves, to Sickness, Pains, and Troubles, In Breeding, Bearing, and Bringing up their Children, but

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453 Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the first Woman to Live by Her Pen* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 56.
they are Slaves to Men’s Humours, nay to their Vices and Wickednesses.\textsuperscript{454}

In such circumstances, perhaps the woman who dies in childbirth is, for Cavendish, the luckier one, “Happy, in that she Lives not to Indure more Pain or Slavery.”\textsuperscript{455}

Cavendish, having no experience of the birth room, is at no little pains to express herself on the long-term effects of having children as she has seen in the lives of those around her, and she is by no means convinced that the experience is usually a rewarding one, or one that could coexist with a pleasant marriage for the parents. For while she is full of advice on the ways parents should rear their offspring, she also notes that a child’s death makes many parents “commonly run mad.”\textsuperscript{456} As for those whose children do survive, they are often plagued by what we would call dysfunctional relationships.

Parents are so far from making of Friendship with their Children, as they know less, and are more unacquainted with them, than with Strangers, by their reserved Formalities; or else they are so rudely Familiar with their Children, as makes their Children rudely Familiar with them; in which kind of Natures and Humours can be no tyes of Friendship, neither with their own, nor Strangers.\textsuperscript{457}

\textsuperscript{454} Margaret Cavendish, \textit{Orations of divers sorts accommodated to divers places} (London: [s. n.]) 1662, 182-3.

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{456} \textit{The World’s Olio} (London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655), 156.

\textsuperscript{457} Ibid., 155.
And barring all of these calamities, there is the likelihood of children turning out ill due to a lack of correct instruction in the arts and sciences,

wherefore it is no wonder there are so few wise men, when Children are bred so foolishly; so many so unhandsomely behaved, when Children are bred so rudely; so many Cowards, when children are bred so fearfully; so many deformed, when Children are taught such dangerous, mischievous, and hurtful sports; so many false, when they are taught to tell lyes from their Cradles.458

With such perils and pitfalls for a fertile woman to look forward to, is it any wonder that Cavendish turns philosophically to the unmarried woman’s life as a preferable alternative to the “average” marriage? In her recipe for marriage (though, it must be said, not one to which she would claim her own marriage subscribed), Cavendish lists the woman’s agony of childbirth as one of the bitter ingredients not balanced by positive returns in the marital “olio podrido,” or stew.

A Married life is an Olio Podrido of several Troubles and Vexations mixt together; …Sickness and pain in Breeding and Bearing of Children, are the Limmons and Oranges that are mixed therin. On this Dish a Married life feeds, which produceth no good Nourishment, but breeds raw, indigested, cholerick and melancholy Humours; but a single Solitariness is a Dish, which is made with Ingredients of Peace, Happiness, Pleasure and

458 Ibid., 61.
Delight. This Dish produceth good Nourishment, and the Life oftimes invites the Muses to feed thereon.\(^{459}\)

By the time Cavendish published *The Convent of Pleasure* in 1668, her attitudes toward childbirth had become so established that she took the opportunity to make the midwife the living, breathing symbol of danger and pain. Cavendish uses the midwife as a metonymic stand-in for childbirth itself, as a bringer of pain and danger, and thus more than counter-balanced by the possibilities presented to aristocratic women who opt for a homosocial lifestyle. As the women of the convent put on a series of masques for the Lady Happy and the Princess, each of which displays the inferiority of married life to that of the convent, they present two scenes concerning childbirth in which the entrance of the midwife, or even reference to her, immediately communicates fear. In 3.1, a woman, dressed with a big belly, enters groaning:

> Oh my back, my back will break, Oh! Oh! Oh!

1 Woman. Is the Midwife sent for?

2 Woman. Yes, but she is with another Lady.

Lady. Oh my back! Oh! Oh! Oh! Juno, give me some ease.\(^{460}\)

In this briefest of vignettes, Cavendish establishes the midwife (functioning as a symbol of birth itself) as a *deliverer* of pain rather than a reliever of it, a woman required only in

\(^{459}\) Ibid., 105.

times of agony; and Cavendish communicates, through the midwife’s inability to come, the widespread and (for Cavendish) unfortunately common experience of that agony. Moments later, these women reconvene.

1 Woman. Is the Midwife come, for my Lady is in a strong labour?

2 Woman. Not, she cannot come, for she hath been with a Lady that hath been in strong labour these three days of a dead child, and ‘tis thought she cannot be delivered. Enter another Woman.

3 Woman. Come away, the Midwife is come.

1 Woman. Is the Lady deliver’d, she was withall?

3 Woman. Yes, of life; for she could not be delivered, and so she died.461

In comparison, the convent itself is the inversion of the birth room, a locus of serenity and physical and emotional safety in which the unmarried woman, the virgin, is the only one privileged to enter. As such the midwife, for all her professional training and her standing within “normal” society, is totally unnecessary; should she be invited in, rather like these vignettes, she could only bring pain and danger with her. And despite the eventual marriage of the primary characters, Cavendish “never recants her declaration that marriage is generally bad for women.”462 For Cavendish, reference to the professional midwife is inexorably bound up with the miseries of birth, and in this case, the potential of excruciating death, which no woman, not even a midwife trained to the utmost in the safe delivery of woman, can always prevent. As such, Cavendish very

461 Ibid., 115-16.

rarely references actual midwives in the majority of her work; she is much more concerned with the term’s rhetorical implications, as we shall see.

**Lesser Women Will Breed: Lady Gosling in The Public Wooing**

Implicit in Cavendish’s argument for female education in many of her works is the assumption that only a few women, those possessing a naturally quick “wit,” are deserving of that education, and these few women are peculiarly aristocratic. Cavendish is quite ready to deploy the feminine, lower-class imagery of nurse and midwife in metaphorical service of an argument for that education, but when considering the actual process of procreation and its attendant professions, Cavendish is quick to depict such bodily concerns as appropriate for women incapable of achieving a greater, more perfect mode of living. For example, the plays-within-plays of *The Convent of Pleasure* demand “sympathy for the plight of characters across the social spectrum, including the ‘mean women’ (3.2) and ‘citizen’s wife’ (3.6) who might be expected to be a traditional butt of ‘low’ comedy.”

But these lower classes are not offered other options, serving only as object lessons for upper-class female viewers for whom other options (i.e. virginity) exist. As an examination of *The Public Wooing* will prove, Cavendish’s attitude toward childbirth and child attendants varies widely according to the natural intellectual and social status of the mother. For the intelligent lady, Cavendish depicts marriage and

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maternity as second-best options, filled with dangers and pains; for “simple” women, Cavendish’s opinions are matter-of-fact and (remarkably) sanguine, admitting marriage and motherhood for such women to be acceptable and often preferable to the single state.

According to Gisele Venet, Cavendish’s writings demonstrate a marked “aesthetics of fragmentation [that] corresponds to new needs and allows her to come to terms with modern issues, especially that of the female self claiming to be her own ‘monarch.’” Nowhere is this fragmentary mode more obvious that in The Public Wooing, particularly as Cavendish contrasts the aristocratic idealism of her heroine, Lady Prudence, and her pursuit of the ideal, chaste, platonic marriage with the more mundane marital and maternal experiences of the lower-class Mistress Gosling. The Public Wooing relates the tales of two very different women, Prudence and Gosling, whose lives never directly interact; instead, the reader is left to compare these very different characters’ paths to the marriage state.

In the case of Lady Prudence’s experience, the “public wooing” of the title, Cavendish gives an example of a woman’s refusal to entertain the attentions of morally or intellectually inferior men, presenting us instead with a suitor, a “strange Wooer,” whose disguise of “a wooden Leg, a patch on his Eye, and Crook back’d, unhandsome snarled Hair, and plain poor Cloaths” proves Lady Prudence’s virtue in her choice of him for his

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wit and goodness, rather than his physical charms.\textsuperscript{465}  When accepting his proposal of marriage, Lady Prudence says:

Noble Sir, the Wit wherewith Nature, Time, and Education hath endu'd my tender brains, is like new kindled fire, that sparkling flies about, the fuel being green, and newly laid to burn, there is more smoke than flame: But since the time I heard you speak, a newer fire is kindled in my Heart, which equally doth burn with your profess'd Affections; and though your Person is none of Natures exactest Peeces, yet your Mind doth seem to be compos'd with all her best Ingredients; and sure your Thoughts set notes of Honour, Honesty, and Love, by which your Tongue plays Harmony. 'Tis not the sattin Skin, that's painted white and red, nor neat carv'd Bodies, can win my Love, nor Wealth, Titles, Birth, nor crown'd Power; but Truth, Sincerity, Constancy, Justice, Prudence, Courage, and Temperance, by which, as Magistrates, your life seems to be governed, which life I wish the Gods may Crown with happy days, and in Fames Tower long live your praise. I will not ask you from whence you came, nor what you are: For though you seem but poor and mean, Your Soul appears to me sublime.\textsuperscript{466}


\textsuperscript{466} Ibid., 395.
The implication, of course, is that this is an asexual attraction, at least on Lady Prudence’s part, and even when the “strange Wooer” reveals himself as a handsome young man to his bride, and does so standing next to the bridal bed, his physical attractiveness presents itself as an unanticipated bonus to the wedding night rather than its primary enticement. Like Cavendish herself, Lady Prudence secures for herself that rarest of things, the “ideal marriage” based on mutual intellectual and moral respect.

The marriage of Mistress Simple is not so ideal, but then neither is the woman in question. Mistress Simple is particularly slow of wit, characterized by her matron-teacher as being “the very’st Fool that ever I tutor’d or instructed . . . she hath not a reasonable capacity to learn.”467 Mistress Simple’s lack of intelligence is no active evil; rather than a matter of chosen ignorance, she “hath a defect in Nature.”468 For such women, marriage and motherhood are the best of all possible worlds, for while Lady Prudence may assert her unwillingness to marry an unworthy man, for the women of Mistress Simple’s class and intellect—such as the aptly named Mistress Fondly, Mistress Vanity, Mistress Trifle, and Mistress Parle—women incapable of inspired thought, the conclusion must be that “there is no misery like being an old Maid.”469 And rather than citing philosophers or divines to prove their beliefs, these women look to the “old Songs” that tell of the happiness of wives (“O that I were so happy once to be a wedded wife, / I would fulfil my Husbands will all the days of my life”) and the misery of the spinster (“I

467 Ibid., 370.

468 Ibid., 371.

469 Ibid., 400.
wander up and down, / And no body cares for me”).  Indeed, so impatient are these women for the married life that their “grave Matron” friend teases that their future husbands will quickly be singing “the Song of ‘Cuckhold all a row,’” clearly implicating that the desire for marriage in such women is inextricable from sexual lusts.  

Marriage, in *The Public Wooing*, entails a woman’s translation from the social groups and acts appropriate to a maiden to those of a matron.  Lady Prudence, as the married Princess, we are led to believe, will be living in a world of superior intellectual arts and virtuous actions; this is her reward for her natural wit and her superior wisdom in the choice of a husband irrespective of physical attraction.  For the “common” woman, however, Cavendish narrates a translation not from an inferior to superior sphere, but merely from one group of associates and “less meaningful” preoccupations to another, a change in subject but not in quality.  After Mistress Simple’s marriage, her compatriots discuss going to see her:

Parle.  Shall we go to visit Mistris Simple? she that is now my Lady Gosling, and bid her joy.

Vanity.  Yes, if you will: for I long to see how she looks, now she is a Wife.

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470 Ibid., 400.

471 Ibid., 400.  These single women respond that, “It were better for us that our Husbands should be Cuckolds, than we lead Apes in Hell,” the latter a common phrase referring to the eternal reward of the virgin spinster.  John Lyly uses this adage in *Euphues* (1578), as does Shakespeare in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1623).
Trifle. So do I, and to see how she behaves her self, since she is married.

Matron. She is now, Ladies, for the conversation of Wives, and not for the society of Maids; her discourse will be now of Houshold Affairs, as of Houswifry, and of her Husband, and of Children, and hired servants, and not Suters and Courtiers, not Fashions, nor Dressings; neither will she return your Visits: for her Visitings will be to other married Wives, and her time will be spent at Labours, Christenings, Churchings, and other Matrimonial Gossippings and Meetings.\footnote{Ibid., 401.}

And indeed it is in this world of procreative concerns that the new Lady Gosling finds herself, appearing in one of the concluding scenes as an exhausted gossip, having just attending “the Lady Breeder” at her “sore Labour.” Not only must she now concern herself with childbirth itself, but also with the new social pressures and intrigues at work within this new social network, such as justifying Lady Minion’s not having been called to the labor on the grounds that “she had hardly Time to send for the Midwife.” Lady Gosling is even willing to risk her new husband’s displeasure in the service of this new social network: “Sir Anthony Gosling, my Husband, was very loth I should goe: for (said he to me) prethee sweet Duck do not go: I answer’d and said to him, my hony love I must go, for it is the part of one wife to help another; besides, a gossipping company doth help to ease the womens pains; and if I go not to their Labour, they will not come to mine.”\footnote{Ibid., 418.}

This group of breeding women is the average new-married woman’s most important, and
simultaneously most limited, world, one that is not unworthy, not unvirtuous, but certainly not the grandest reality to which a “witty” woman can aspire.\footnote{474}

Part II: No Child But Work: The Platonic Marriage and the Textual Infant

The pervading fear of death in childbirth (relatively rare though it may have been in reality) provided many female authors with means to justify their publications, an avenue of justification cut off for Cavendish. “Women’s fear of death in childbirth inspired a specific genre, the maternal advice-book intended for children whom the mother might not live to educate . . . Since they were regarded as an extension of women’s childrearing role and were generally printed posthumously, they did not encroach into the ‘male’ realm of publication.”\footnote{475} For Cavendish, of course, these justifications of writing in the service of maternal concern were not available; instead, she turned fear of childbirth on itself, and made a virtue of her own lack of maternal experience, forming it into a pillar of the ideal, platonic marriage in which few women

\footnote{474} Cavendish’s established her rather pragmatic and reasonable, if not effusive, evaluation of this maternal social circle in \textit{Nature’s Pictures} (1656), in which she defends women’s gossip feasts to their male detractors: “And do not Men meet every day in Taverns and Ordinaryes, to sit and gossip over a cup of wine, when Women are condemned for gossiping, once in a quarter of a year, at a Labour, or a Christning, or at the Upsitting of a Childbed Woman?” \textit{Natures pictures drawn by fancies pencil to the life} (London: J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1656), 112.

\footnote{475} Mendelson, \textit{Mental World}, 29.
but herself were fortunate enough to glory, one available solely to the lucky few: the aristocracy.

Perhaps social class is the element that most informs Cavendish’s writings, or at least that influences each of the remaining trademarks of Cavendish’s texts. Cavendish, according to her own autobiography, bound up her sense of identity with her family and its aristocratic lineage and place in the local society. Cavendish was deeply proud of the achievements of her father and elder brothers, and, despite her own retiring nature, she sought social validity herself with an appointment to Queen Henrietta Maria’s court. Her position was secured by her marriage to William Cavendish, later Marquis of Newcastle, elevating Cavendish to the rank of Duchess.

More than these surface elements of aristocratic pedigree, Cavendish’s education and intellectual bent demonstrate the depth to which her aristocratic position penetrated her ideologies, and more particularly her rhetoric. On the one hand, Cavendish was deeply influenced by French feminine salon culture. In a recent biography of Cavendish, Katie Whitaker claims that

Much of Margaret’s writing was influenced by the conversation and literary games of feminine salon culture, with its taste for wit and wordplay. Striking, far-fetched comparisons . . . were a prominent feature of the style, and many of the pieces she wrote consisted largely or wholly of extended similes . . . In the style of the game of ‘wonders’ played at the duchess of Lorraine’s court, Margaret also wrote pieces that created surprising paradoxes in their descriptions of human society . . . In another
salon tradition, Margaret created fifty-five short allegories . . . She also composed a hundred and forty-one ‘short essays,’ much like the proverbs that Flecknoe had created for the company at Beersel to act out... Many of Margaret’s predominant subjects for writing—literature, languages, translation, the nature of wit, fame, friendship, conversation, and society—were the core interests of salon culture.476

Queen Henrietta Maria brought with her a culture of platonic, idealized love and pastoral idyllic motifs, along with the tendency to place aristocratic females on proverbial pedestals of taste and virtue. Cavendish, while shy and retiring, was a keen observer of these courtly ideals as enacted in apartments, and elements of them can be found in many of her literary works.

In 2001, Brigitte Glaser was making the rather macabre claim that by publishing Cavendish “managed to create substitutes both for dead family members and for never-to-be-born children.”477 Glaser creates for Cavendish the spectre of an unborn child perpetually haunting the tormented author, saying that there is a correlation between her [Cavendish’s] literary ambitions, the suppression of the body, and her childless state. Although she never explicitly mentions the fact that she did not or could not have children, this

476 Whitaker, Mad Madge, 122-3.

difficulty, which constituted a serious problem for a woman in the seventeenth century, looms in the background of her autobiography.\textsuperscript{478}

Even those critics not wishing to draw such a sharp affiliation between Cavendish’s childless state and her writings are prone to leave the linkage obvious, if unspoken; take, for example, the editors of \textit{Three Seventeenth-Century Plays on Women and Performance} who assert that, after the publication of \textit{Poems and Fancies} in 1653, “Margaret—who never had any children of her own despite much anguish and grim medical interventions—embarked upon a prolific and varied publishing career.”\textsuperscript{479}

Whereas the common wifely experience might enable most women to serve at the bedside of a laboring woman, to offer her comfort and a sense of shared experience, Cavendish’s rare form of marital bliss—one in which she felt herself to have an intellectual and spiritual, rather than a mere emotional and sexual, bond with her husband—makes Cavendish, in her own words, a “midwife” for the delivery of other married women’s griefs and troubles. Like the professional midwife, whose status as a woman ideally past childbearing makes her both sympathetic to the mother’s pains and yet detached, so too Cavendish’s position as an ideal wife provides her with sympathy for those women less fortunate than herself, yet provides separation enough for her to dispassionately evaluate and represent their miseries. In number 153 of \textit{CCXI Sociable Letters} (1664), Cavendish writes that

\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{479} Chalmers, Sanders, and Tomlinson, \textit{Three Seventeenth-Century Plays}, 33.
TH’ other day the Lady M. L. was to Visit me, and by her sad
Countenance I perceived she was full of Melancholy, ready to be
Delivered of the Burden, as to Vent her Grief through her Mouth, but I
Observing she could not Readily make her Complaints, did as a Midwife,
Help them forth, by asking her what the Cause of her Sadness was; with
that Tears Flowed forth her Eyes, as Ushers to her Complaints; said she,
although I was a Joyful Bride, yet I am an Unhappy Wife…he did seem
not to Love me…he Endeavoured to make me a Servant, nay a Slave to
his Mistress…he Tortured me, nay Threatned Death to me…

But like the true midwife, whose duty is to bring comfort and aid to the pregnant woman,
so Cavendish “perceiv'd her Complaints and my Opinion had somewhat Removed the
Heavy Oppression of Melancholy, and after some time, she took her leave of me, giving
me Thanks both for hearing her Discourse of her own Grief, and for Comforting her.”

For Cavendish,

The celibate life is the closest a woman can come to sharing in the
freedom of men; it is what supports Cavendish’s fighting, studying,
orating, writing, and publishing female characters. Virginity allows for
independence, the proper pursuit of ‘self-love’ (what we might call self-
esteeem), and the cultivation of virtue. . . Only Cavendish herself’ . . . seems

graced with the ability to maintain her personal and artistic autonomy within the social structure of marriage.\footnote{Jagodzinski, \textit{Privacy and Print}, 95.}

It is this pattern of distrust not only of the married state but of the maternal, and her awareness of her own privileged position as being happily excluded from them, that we see echoed in Cavendish’s dramatic works. And Cavendish’s ultimate distrust of all things maternal are of the greatest influence in her choice and deployment of midwifery rhetoric in those dramatic schemes.

At the same time that Cavendish embraced idiosyncratic positions in her writing, however, she also had to maintain adequate conventions of traditionally recognized genres in order to find acceptance, or, at the least recognition, by the male literary establishment.\footnote{See Marina Leslie, “Gender, Genre and the Utopian Body in Margaret Cavendish’s \textit{Blazing World},” \textit{Utopian Studies} 7.1 (1996), 7.} Cavendish’s resolution of these tensions between the requirements for immediate, masculine recognition and the requirements for long-term, individual fame was to create lengthy prefaces to her works. These prefaces are designed to “inculcate a certain orientation towards her career; a view of her oeuvre as panoramic, polemical, experimental and encyclopaedic,”\footnote{Lilley, “Contracting Readers,” 22.} thus making her readers more likely to interpret her varieties of subject, genre, and style as part of a larger purpose rather than the result of a haphazard, “feminine” mind. Cavendish was only partially successful in this attempt to validate her authorial position; not only were many of her works dubiously received by
her male contemporaries, but they have also been subject to the criticisms of modern readers as well. Sarah Hutton, for example, claims that “Margaret Cavendish courted a scholarly readership: she made sure to send presentation copies of her books to the learned men of Europe. Most recipients were duly grateful and said so in letters of unparalleled unctuousness and flattery. The hyperbole is a sure indication that few of them actually read what she sent them.”

In her attempt to integrate herself and her writings into this “male literary establishment,” Cavendish first turned to the established mode of using midwifery and childbirth metaphors for the writing process itself. It was not uncommon for an author to refer to a text as a “child,” with the author either as the “mother” who creates the text or as the “midwife” who brings new ideas forth into the world. But how would such language alter when written by a woman? In the case of Cavendish, we might expect her to eschew this type of language considering her childless state, as reemphasizing her own “lack.” But on another level, a woman seeking to establish herself in the male arena of print might wish to avoid the language of childbirth as reminding her readers of her sex. Although her single claim that her book is her “child” has garnered a disproportionate

amount of critical attention,\(^{485}\) her similar metaphor of male printer as “midwife” to her works has passed unregarded.\(^{486}\)

*Poems and Fancies* (1653) is the only work in which Cavendish invokes the trope of maternity to describe her own creative and publishing process. Not only does Cavendish note her own childlessness as justification for her writing (“I have no Children to imploy my Care, and Attendance on”),\(^{487}\) but she also tropes her text as her true child. More surprisingly, however, Cavendish chooses to gender her text as female.

True, it may taxe my Indiscretion, being so fond of my Book, as to make it as if it were my Child, and striving to shew her to the World, in hopes Some may like her, although no Beauty to Admire, yet may praise her Behaviour, as not being wanton, nor rude. Wherefore I hope you will not put her out of Countenance, which she is very apt to, being of bashfull Nature, and as ready to shed Repentant Teares, if she think she hath committed a Fault: wherefore pity her Youth, and tender Growth, and rather taxe the Parents Indiscretion, then the Childs Innocency. But my Book coming out in this Iron age, I feare I shall find hard Hearts; yet I had rather she should find Cruelty, then Scorne, and that my book should be torn, rather then laught at…\(^{488}\)

\(^{485}\) Cavendish uses this language in the preface to *Poems and Fancies* (1653).

\(^{486}\) *The World’s Olio*.

\(^{487}\) *Poems*, [A7r].

\(^{488}\) Ibid., [A7v].
This language is precisely what one might expect from a female author going in to print, making the act of writing and of printing a domestic, household, even maternal experience. Even Cavendish’s concern over the book itself, its reception, and its printing errors, is marked as maternal concern rather than as authorial or personal concern for one’s own fame and reputation.

Unfortunately for Cavendish, her “child” was not immune to cruelty and scorn, for, while she received letters from some grateful recipients of her book, others accused her of plagiarism. Sir Edward Hyde wrote to Sir William Cavendish praising the book, but suggesting “that a woman, ‘unskilled in any but our mother tongue,’ could hardly have written such a book, so full of learning, with ‘so many terms of art, and such expressions proper to all sciences.’” 489 And Hyde was not alone; apparently, rumors that Cavendish had not actually written Poems and Fancies reached such a height that she was forced to add an epilogue to Philosophical Fancies the next month saying, “Truly I am so honest as not to steal another’s work and give it my own name.” 490 The attacks did not end there; Cavendish’s “child” went from accusations of bastardy to monstrosity, with critics citing its various errors in spelling, grammar, and usage, as well as its misapplication of philosophical and scientific terminology. Not all of these errors were Cavendish’s fault, as she points out two years later in the epistle of The World’s Olio (1655).

489 Whitaker, Mad Madge, 162.

I find I live in a Carping age; for some find fault with my former Writings because they are not Grammar, nor good Orthography; and that all the last words are not matched with Rime; and that the Feet are not in just Numbers: As for the Orthography, the Printer should have rectified that; for I think it is against Nature for a Woman to spell right, for my part I confess I cannot; and as for the Rimes and Numbers, although it is like I have erred in many, yet not so much as by the negligence of those that were to oversee it; for by the false printing, they have not only done my Book wrong in that, but in many places the very Sense is altered… so that my Book is lamed by an ill Midwife and a Nurse, the Printer and Overseer…

This passage is remarkable in Cavendish not only because we see her displacing the faults of her texts onto men whose professional activities she effeminizes, but because this final exchange over the worth of Poems and Fancies is the final time in which Cavendish invokes birth language to describe her creative process, her works, or their printing. Instead, she redirects her argument toward her own innate abilities and the virtues of her social position as justification for her writing and excuse for her errors, errors which only “pedantick” men note to the detriment of the work as a whole.

Those that are nobly bred have no Rules but Honour, and Honesty, and learn in the School of Wisdom to understand Sense, and to express themselves sensibly and freely, with a gracefull negligence, not to be

\[^{491}Olio, 93-4.\]
hidebound with nice and strict words, and set Phrases, as if the Wit were created in the Inkhorn, and not in the Brain; …every one may be his own Grammarian, if by his natural Grammar he can make his Hearers understand his sense; for though there must be Rules in a language to make it sociable, yet those Rules may be stricter than need to be, and to be too strict, makes them to be too unpleasant and uneasy: …Wit may place Words to its own becoming, delight, and advantage, and not alter Language nor obstruct the Sense; for the more liberty we have of Words, the clearer is Sense delivered. As for Wit, it is wilde and fantastical, and therefore must have no set Rules; for Rules Curb, and Shackle it, and in that Bondage it dies.⁴⁹²

It is possible that—having been injured and offended by these attacks, attacks that took specific aim at her gender by questioning her innate ability to write or even to reason—Cavendish found the feminine language of childbirth to be all too open to rhetorical assaults. She certainly takes refuge in her aristocratic identity, rather than her gender, in the epistle to The World’s Olio, and maintains that position throughout her later works as well.

But setting aside the gender connotations of childbirth, we can also consider Cavendish’s desire for eternal fame and her inability to reconcile that desire with the use of childbirth language; birth is markedly corporeal, and every birth must be associated in some way with mortality and the eventuality of death. In her pursuit of Fame, Deborah

⁴⁹² Ibid., 94.
Boyle argues, “Cavendish seems to think . . . what the natural soul wants is the continuation of itself, in the natural world. Yet as we have seen, Cavendish has reason, derived from her natural philosophy, for thinking that the natural soul does not continue in the same form after a creature’s death.” With her preoccupation with continuation, particularly regarding the soul and one’s Fame in this world, perhaps Cavendish avoids birth and midwifery metaphors for her works because such metaphors are functions of the natural world, and thus are unsatisfying to her desire for true, eternal fame. For a woman seeking an infinite reputation, invoking a trope of the finite would certainly be counterproductive, as that which is “born,” which is corporeal, certainly must “die.”

Part III: Troping the Midwife: Poetry, Natural Philosophy, and Closet Drama

The Feminine, Poetic Universe

There is only one work in which Cavendish uses birth and midwifery rhetoric in conjunction with natural philosophy: Poems and Fancies. The obvious questions for this particular use are: How does the language work in terms of Cavendish’s natural philosophical scheme, and why does Cavendish abandon this usage after 1653? In her 2004 article, “Margaret Cavendish’s Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy,” Deborah Boyle laments that there is “very little evidence for attributing [philosophical] protofeminism to

Cavendish. That may indeed be the case for much of Cavendish’s nonfictional writings. But should any ardent feminist wish to hang her hat on Cavendish as an early feminist author, the gendered language of Cavendish’s first published work, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), would certainly belie Boyle’s argument. In particular, Cavendish’s language of childbirth, of maternity, and of midwifery certainly tends toward feminocentric interpretations.

In two notable places within *Poems and Fancies*, she incorporates the language of midwifery into her natural philosophy, regendering the sun itself and its relationship to the earth. In “A Fire in the Center,” rather than having a masculine, energy-giving orb that brings the feminine earth to fruition, Cavendish makes the sun a female “midwife.”

As Heate about the Heart alwaies keeps nigh,
So doth a Fire about the Center lye.
This heate disperses through the Body round,
And when that heate is not, no Life is found.
Which makes all things she sends, to bud, and beare,
Although the Suns hot Beames do ne're come there.
But yet the Sun doth nourish all without,
But Fire within the Earth gives Life, no doubt.
So heate within begets with Childe the Earth,
And heate without is Mid-wife to her Birth.  

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494 *Configurations* 12 (2004), 196.

495 *Poems*, 36-7.
Notably, this regendering of the sun as female midwife is not wholly positive, making the sun, if necessary for delivery of the earth’s fruits, markedly unnecessary for its fertilization. Yet Cavendish appears to correct this underestimation of the sun’s importance in her subsequent “Complaint of Water, Earth and Aire, against the Sun, by way of Dialogue.” In this set of verses, Cavendish marks the sun’s presumed harshness and cruelty towards the other elements as masculine, as the female Earth complains of the Sun’s unthinking greediness in consuming and marring her fertility and ability to nurture.

The Earth laments to Moisture,

Alas, Deare Friend, the Sun, my greatest Foe,
My tender Buds he blasts as they do grow:
He burnes my Face, and makes it parcht, and dry,
He sucks my Breast, which starves my Young thereby.
Thus I, and all my Young, for thirst were slaine,
But that with Wet you fill my Breast againe.\(^{496}\)

The Sun’s defense is to change sex (from male to female) and activity (from consumption to deliverance).

O most unkind, and most ungratefull Earth,
I am thy Mid-wife, brings your Young to Birth:
I with my heat do cause your Young to grow,
And with my light I teach them how to go.
My Sun-Beames are Strings, whereon to hold,

\(^{496}\) Ibid., 62.
For feare they fall, and breake their Limbs on Cold.
The Sun’s responsibility in causing new plants to grow straight and tall, “teaching them how to do,” echoes the midwife’s responsibility in framing the newborn child, shaping the head and swaddling the limbs to ensure their straightness and strength.

Cavendish’s midwifery and childbirth language in these two poems may be provoking, but she does not continue this theme of incorporating that language into her natural philosophy throughout her later works. For example, *Philosophical Fancies*, published one month after *Poems and Fancies*, contains no marked birth language or birth references, nor can I find any in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) or *The Blazing World* (1666). Instead, Cavendish turns to the genre of the closet drama as a more fitting venue for her rhetorical experiments with midwifery.

**Closet Drama: Putting Words in the Mouth of the Reader**

In the latter years of her exile on the Continent, Cavendish turned away from philosophical and poetic writings and began experimenting with drama. What could have prompted such a radical turn in literary output? Emma L. E. Rees makes a convincing argument that Cavendish looked to various generic forms as a means of expressing and reforming her own exiled situation. “It is in her [Cavendish’s] texts of the 1650s…that genre is pragmatically and ingeniously conflated with exile…which threatened to bind the writer in no fewer than three ways: legislatively, politically, and along gender
Despite Cavendish’s self-proclaimed ignorance of generic literary and rhetorical conventions, her dramatic works display both her grasp of conventional modes of dramatic authorship and her willingness to break with those modes “as a way of articulating and negotiating her contrary, triply debarred situation.” Drama becomes for Cavendish “both a category and a technique,” one which provides opportunities for educating her reading audience, safely presenting alternative forms of femininity and female speech, textually embodying the Cavalier values in which she was so much invested, and simultaneously satisfying her desire for individuality and innovation with a need to work within established recognizable forms.

But considering the difficulties Cavendish experienced with feminine language in her earlier works, what unique benefits, or opportunities, does closet drama allow for the language that natural philosophy does not? Cavendish’s abrupt choice to write in the dramatic genre has long presented critics with the temptation to explain away that change as being a well-considered tactical maneuver in Cavendish’s increasingly adept manipulation of her readership. In all likelihood, Cavendish’s closet dramas were often read aloud in groups, rather than silently by individuals; this suggests that Cavendish may have been aware of the opportunities such a group performance creates for making her readership complicit in her own depictions of herself, and her gender and class positions,

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498 Ibid., 29.

499 Ibid., 25.
by putting words quite literally in their mouths. According to Cecile M. Jagodzinski, during the seventeenth-century, “reading itself becomes a public act, readers are actors, and writing (and publication) seems the more private and discreet activity. The habit of oral reading presented Cavendish with the opportunity to unsettle her readers’ assumptions about private and public; those scenes acted out before ‘the Eyes of the Fancy’ not only presented the audience with pictures of virtue, but guaranteed that of their author.”

Sara Mendelson sees Cavendish as using drama benevolently as a means to educate others, but also as a way to self-fashion her own autobiography for her reading public. And in the spirit of the Interregnum Cavaliers, the editors of *Three Seventeenth-Century Plays on Women and Performance* would have us see play-reading, as opposed to physical theatre-going, “as a legitimate activity in its own right and one which acted as ‘a form of political resistance’ for embattled royalists, challenging their marginalization from public life.”

But what is Cavendish’s own, declared reason for transitioning into the genre of *closet* drama? The Epistle Dedicatory to her 1662 collection makes a number of claims as to her wish to have her plays published rather than performed—her lack of wit, her modesty, the lack of trained actors, the length of her dramas, her refusal to follow

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500 Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print*, 108. Katie Whitaker, in her biography of Cavendish, depicts her as writing her dramas in solitude, all the while imagining “groups of people gathering to read her plays aloud and discuss the choices and actions and the moral and intellectual issues presented” (*Mad Madge*, 205).

classical unities. Most telling, however, is her final reason: public performances would allow for too great a variety of interpretations. This statement is the crux of Cavendish’s dramatic form; by authoring closet dramas designed to be read aloud in small groups, she allows herself a greater breadth of subject matter and address (since she cannot be limited by place, finance, time, technology, etc.) and simultaneously limits her readers’ responses to and interpretations of her work. Not only can Cavendish predispose her readers to particular uses and readings through her extensive didactic prefatory material, but by eliminating the actor, Cavendish puts the play’s dialogue directly into the mouth of her reader, including sexual language, arguments for feminine education, and her own opinions of birth itself.

Possibly Cavendish uses childbirth rhetoric sparingly because of its sexual implications. Also, she may eschew it for the same reason she avoids childbirth language in describing herself and her writing process after early works, as it overemphasizes the elements of gender that undermine her argument for women’s speech and equality. As Rebecca D’Monté comments, “Cavendish’s plays show an awareness of this sexualised atmosphere surrounding notions of acting and display. Whilst commenting on the dangers implicit in the power of ‘looking’—surveillance, control, suspicion—she also explores the ambiguous qualities of performance to enhance both her role as a woman writer and that of her female character.”502 The language of midwifery would collapse this gaze and a woman’s (either a character’s or the author’s) control over it in a dual-sex

502 Rebecca D’Monté, “‘Making a Spectacle’: Margaret Cavendish and the Staging of the Self,” in A Princely Brave Woman, 110.
environment, the very word “midwife” invoking the accomplished culmination of sexual desire, rather than its potential. Cavendish dramatizes this very problem in The Female Academy (1662), in which the women of the academy occupy a liminal space between the “perpetual virgin” and the “sexual matron.” The stated purpose (or rationalization) of the academy is to prepare women for marriage, but they and their author seek to control the responses of the male characters and readers to prevent the sexualization of these potential wives. “The spectator/reader watches the men watching the women orators through a grate in the wall. The gaze is therefore doubly controlled—by Cavendish and by her female characters who retain ocular freedom…and freedom of speech.”

Cavendish collapses this space and gaze with a single comment by a “Gentleman”: his companion having complained that the women of the academy allow men only to see and hear them, not to come physically near them, this Gentlemen responds, “Faith if the men should be admitted into their Academy, there would be work enough for the Grave Matrons, were it but to act the part of Midwives.” Cavendish is not merely using the midwife as a trope for sexual activity, which I have shown has an established rhetorical pedigree, but is quite literally marking the way in which sexual activity is presumed to obviate men’s concern for women’s independence. So, it is unsurprising that the language of midwifery arises in Cavendish’s separatist writings, and in speeches by women not threatened by sex: Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet (1662), in which Sanspareille declares her intent to live and die a virgin, and Bell in Campo (1662), in which married women marshal fecundity in defense of the state.

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503 Ibid., 112.
A Trope in the Mouth of an Educated Virgin: Youths Glory, and Deaths Banquet

The right to speech is the predominant theme in Youths Glory, particularly the ways in which women’s access to speech, and thus to reason, is curtailed. Cavendish finds frustrating the “artificial rules” of society that prevent women from virtuously and intelligently utilizing their “natural talent for language,” and she is equally frustrated with society accepting the ignorant results of such artificial limitations as universal truths. According to critics like Annett Kramer, “Youths Glory insists repeatedly and convincingly that any relationship between intellect and gender is arbitrary...[T]hose who can articulate and rename interpretations of experience within a male linguistic economy control it, and those who cannot are either controlled or dismissed.” But in at least one monologue, Cavendish attempts to reinterpret, and perhaps regender, the masculine discourses of education, poetry, oratory, and even war through a careful application of medical terminology available to all, especially to aristocratic women whose domestic duties would include huswifely knowledge of physick and a basic conception of midwives’ duties. And as Cavendish has Lady Sanspareille address herself to an audience of men, it is her reader who speaks the words, not only becoming complicit in the sentiments Sanspareille’s speech conveys, but in her very right as a woman to make such a speech.

504 Pearson, “Women may discourse,” 38.

505 Annett Kramer, “‘Thus by the Musick of a Ladyes Tongue’: Margaret Cavendish’s dramatic innovations in women’s education,” Women’s History Review 2.1 (1993), 58.
In Act V, the Lady Sanspareille addresses herself separately to her four types of auditor, beginning with students. Cavendish is quick to argue that all children enter the world with brains “like plain paper books, where time as a hand, experience as a pen, and practice as Ink writes therein.” Although Cavendish is not explicit in claiming this blank slate to be equivalent between boys and girls, she carefully avoids using gendered pronouns or descriptions for young students, and the implication is clear that young girls are equally included, particularly since these sentiments are coming from the speech of a educated female character. The cure for intrinsic ignorance, according to Lady Sanspareille, is the careful choice of educator:

The most profitablest School is consideration; And the best Tutour is reason, and when the mind is distempered, or obstructed with Ignorance, education is the best Physick which purges it, cleanses and freeth it, from all gross, and foul, and filthy Errours; but the Educatours, which are the Physitians, should be well chosen. Cavendish/Sanspareille makes no claim that women should be the educators, but certainly that they have the right to be educated, for while the physician metaphor implies a masculine teacher, the services provided by physicians cannot be limited to a single gender. Just as all are equally due attentive medical care, so all are due attentive educations. Furthermore, by beginning her series of medical metaphors with a male physician, Cavendish establishes a pattern of assumption that the medical practitioner in

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507 Ibid., 147.
whom the safety and well-being of a child is entrusted must be well educated in order to better ensure that well-being.

As she turns to the practice of public speaking, Cavendish extends this medical metaphor into reality, blurring the lines between nurses as real medical practitioners and nurses as symbols of early education in speech. Sanspareille, describing the childhood of the orator, says

nurses [sic] is their Grammar, and her tongue is their first Tutour, which most commonly learns them the worst parts of Speech, which parts are Eight; as impertinent questions, cross answers, broken relations, false reports, rude speeches, mistaking words, misplacing words, new words of their own making without a signification.\(^{508}\)

The syntax makes it unclear whether Cavendish intends to grant nurses the preeminent place in educating children in grammar, or rather if the nurse is merely another metaphor. But what is certain is that Cavendish is tapping into the traditional depiction of the nurse as an ambivalent figure as capable of harming children as preserving them and likely to pass on many of her own traits—physical and mental—to the child she nurses.\(^{509}\)

\(^{508}\) Ibid., 148.

\(^{509}\) Consider that even Nicholas Culpeper, who limited the majority of his commentary on nursing to medical matters—her health, size, age, etc.—claims that the good nurse must “love Company, and cannot endure to be alone; not given to anger, but infinitly [sic] to playing and singing…[and] well bred; for ill Nurses corrupt good Nature.” A directory
ability to influence the child is argument enough for the education of the female nurse: “Wherefore, parents that would bring up their Children elegantly, and eloquently, they must have a learned Grammar, and a wise Tutour at the first, to teach them.”510

Concerning poetry, Cavendish resumès a more purely metaphorical tone, and it is here that the midwife finally makes her appearance in Cavendish’s medical schema:

[S]ome Poets braines are so happy, that as soon as they have bred, or created any fancy, the tongue is ready to deliver them; but some brains are a long time in breeding, and some fancies puts the brains into great pains, and hot, and painfull throwes; and some tongues as ill Midwifes, strangels strong fancies in the birth, but a volable tongue, is like an expert, and understanding Midwife, which makes easy, safe, and quick dispatch, for wit and judgment.511

Taken alone, Cavendish’s use of the midwifery trope (i.e. “to bring forth”) is simply a reiteration of a literary usage well established for decades. Yet in combination with Cavendish’s other medical references, the midwife is the final and most powerful element in the surreptitious pattern Cavendish has constructed for arguing on behalf of women’s right to speak and learn. Cavendish yokes together the image of the midwife and the “vol[u]able tongue,” ingeniously inverting the typical negative association of the

for midwives or, a guide for women, in their conception, bearing, and suckling their children (London: Peter Cole, 1651), 208.

510 Youths Glory, 148.

511 Ibid., 148-9.
garrulous midwife, in which talkativeness is a vice, and making that seemingly natural female tendency to talk not merely a virtue but a necessity on the part of the true poet. Thus women’s incontinent mouths become talents to be envied, but like the midwife whose practice requires reasonable and thorough education in order to preserve the lives of mother and child, so too does the natural ability to speak require education in order to best express the mind of the poet, male or female.

Through her association of educators with physicians, orators with nurses, and poets with midwives, Cavendish creates a hierarchy in which these three disciplines arranged beneath martial valor as supporting elements, but also creates spaces in which women’s right to achieve and practice at least two of these disciplines—oratory and poetry—is assured through education. It is a most ingenious mode of argument on Cavendish’s part; the primary thrust of Sanspareille’s speech is the validation of male achievements in education, oratory, poetry, and war. With such an acceptable melody sounding in the ears of Sanspareille’s and Cavendish’s male audience, these pro-female harmonies are little likely to attract negative attention, particularly since Cavendish asserts women’s rights to only two of these four arts and since she uses gendered metaphors—nurse and midwife—in which the woman’s natural aptitude is unquestioned. The male audience is also encouraged by a dramatic male voice to approve Cavendish’s contentions, as each of Sanspareille’s lengthy orations is followed by a brief scene written by Cavendish’s husband, “in which Sanspareille’s auditors praise her genius, so that female control of language is shown winning the approval of a male hierarchy in a
very direct way.” Thus in a private dramatic reading of *Youths Glory*, the readers experience only two unified voices, Cavendish’s voice and opinions merging with her character (Sanspareille) and her female reader, just as the Duke of Newcastle’s praise resounds in the mouths of his male characters and readers. And the very act of a woman reading such complex rhetoric aloud enacts Cavendish’s ideal for female oratory, making each and all equally complicit and equally agreeable in Cavendish’s scheme for women’s speech and education.

**Marshaling Fecundity for the State: Lady Victoria of Bell in Campo**

Surely it is tempting to link English nationalism with women’s role as childbearer, but Cavendish’s nationalism, as expressed in her published texts, is very

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512 Pearson, “Women may discourse,” 40.

513 According Jagodzinski, “Cavendish is not the first to send forth her works for potential condemnation or ridicule, but she may be unique in requiring the readers to assume the triple roles of reader, actor, and spectator” (*Privacy and Print*, 108).

514 Such a reading by a woman would confirm Anna Battigelli’s assertion that Cavendish’s closet dramas represent “an important transition in this development” of female actresses on the English stage, “for her vision of readers acting and expanding their roles on the stages of their minds and on the stage of the world extended the powers of shaping self-representation to anyone who cared to read her plays and discover them.” Ann Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 191.
rarely linked to fecundity in any sense.\textsuperscript{515} As we have seen in \textit{Youth’s Glory}, Cavendish considers national service as the preeminent mode of achieving fame, but it is a service which the majority of women cannot achieve. And in sexual terms, Cavendish, like so many female authors, focuses primarily on feminine chastity as a virtue, though one not often rewarded by fame.\textsuperscript{516} Where then is maternity and its service to the state? The one exception to these patterns is Cavendish’s invocation of the married \textit{femme forte}, the “heroic woman” of French literature and associated with Queen Henrietta Maria.\textsuperscript{517} Is there a place for maternity, and thus for midwifery, in this \textit{femme forte} imagery? For Cavendish, the answer is a qualified “yes.” Here we find a new rhetoric of midwifery as Cavendish transfers the traditional argument for seeing childbirth and midwifery in service of the state to a \textit{rhetorical} service, validating female participation in the army.

Katie Whitaker makes explicit the link between Cavendish’s experiences serving Queen Henrietta Maria and her later development of Lady Victoria and the female “heroickesses” of \textit{Bell in Campo}. During the Civil War, Queen Henrietta Maria landed in

\textsuperscript{515} For further discussion of Cavendish’s nationalism, see Jagodzinski’s \textit{Privacy and Print}, especially 102-3.

\textsuperscript{516} Deborah Boyle describes Cavendish’s story, “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” as presenting possibility that “women can be motivated by the desire for honorable fame to pursue the virtue of chastity, just as men pursue the masculine virtues in order to gain honorable fame” (“Fame” 276).

Yorkshire in 1643, returning from a resource-gathering trip to the Netherlands.

According to Whitaker,

Stories were told of Henrietta Maria’s courage during bombardment by parliamentarian warships in Yorkshire...Her role as military leader in the north...was widely reported in the newsbooks...Henrietta Maria was living through a noble ideal that was close to Margaret’s heart. The theme of the heroically spirited woman called from her peacetime occupations to aid her general-husband was one Margaret would later treat in her play Bell in Campo. [...] In the summer of 1643, hearing that the queen lacked the full complement of ladies-in-waiting to attend on her in Oxford, Margaret was inspired with ‘a great desire’ to become one of her maids of honor.\(^{518}\) Queen Henrietta Maria’s war-time exploits inspired Cavendish with the possibility that her own ideal of martial valor and success—which she had always attributed to the men in her family—could just possibly be within the reach of the fewest, most valiant, and most aristocratic women. She creates just such a woman in *The Second Part of Bell in Campo* in Lady Victoria.

Like Henrietta Maria, Lady Victoria takes it upon herself to shore up the flagging defenses of her husband’s army, but Lady Victoria’s mode is entirely gendered: she creates her own, purely female army, her “heroickesses.” And like all of Cavendish’s great heroines, Lady Victoria has ample opportunity for spirited declamations, several of which encourage her female compatriots to reject the “feminine body and men’s opinion

\(^{518}\) Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 43.
that women ‘are only fit to breed and bring forth Children,’” and instead urges them “to view their bodies in a non-sexual way, to train themselves for active service rather than passive domesticity.”\(^{519}\) Cavendish revives that language of women’s “slavery” that she used in her *Orations*, saying through Lady Victoria

> [N]ow or never is the time to prove the courage of our Sex, to get liberty and freedome from the Female Slavery, and to make our selves equal with men: for shall Men only sit in Honours chair, and Women stand as waiters by? shall only Men in Triumphant Chariots ride, and Women run as Captives by? shall only men be Conquerors, and women Slaves? shall only men live by Fame, and women dy in Oblivion? no, no, gallant Heroicks raise your Spirits to a noble pitch, to a deaticall height, to get an everlasting Renown, and infinite praises, by honourable, but unusual actions.

Paradoxically, however, Lady Victoria uses the explicitly sexual language of childbirth—the language of the “mere” biological role to which men had hoped to relegate them—to describe their valorous actions.

> Fame is not got only by contemplating thoughts which lie lasily in the Womb of the Mind, and prove Abortive, if not brought forth in living deeds; but worthy Heroickesses, at this time Fortune desires to be the Midwife, and if the Gods and Goddesses did not intend to favour our proceedings with a safe deliverance, they would not have offered us so fair

\(^{519}\) D’Monté, “Making a Spectacle,” 115.
and fit an opportunity to be the Mothers of glorious Actions, and everlasting Fame, which if you be so unnatural to strangle in the Birth by fearfull Cowardize, may you be blasted with Infamy, which is worse than to dye and be forgotten.\footnote{520} Cavendish inverts the “traditional” idea of childbirth being women’s contribution to the state, grafting that language onto traditionally non-feminine, non-reproductive martial rhetoric. And by making “Fortune” their midwife, under the auspices of “the Gods and Goddesses,” Cavendish cleverly naturalizes martial action—by definition of the time “unfeminine”—as a natural, universally and divinely sanctioned extension of the female role.\footnote{521}

\section*{Part IV: But She’s still a comedienne: The Embodied Midwife of \textit{The Sociable Companions}}

For their collection entitled \textit{Three seventeenth-century plays on women and performance} (2006), Hero Chalmers, Julie Sander, and Sophie Tomlinson grouped John Fletcher’s \textit{The Wild-Goose Chase} (1621) and John Shirley’s \textit{The Bird in a Cage} (1633) with Cavendish’s \textit{The Convent of Pleasure} (1668). Such a grouping is seemingly

\footnote{520}{\textit{The Second Part of Bell in Campo} in \textit{Plays} (London: A. Warren for John Martyne, James Allestry, and Tho[mas] Dicas, 1662), 609.}

\footnote{521}{As an aside, the presence of the “midwife” rhetoric is here oddly amusing since, in the broadside ballads of the Civil War, the midwife is often the means of “unmasking” women who had infiltrated army battalions.}
anachronistic, since we have seen her unique innovations in midwifery and childbirth language, but in many cases, Cavendish’s dramas have far more in common with Jacobean pieces than with Restoration fashions. For, while her court experiences provided Cavendish with a taste of contemporary aristocratic modes, she was simultaneously well-schooled in the rhetorical, philosophical, and dramatic practices of an earlier era. Much of this knowledge she picked up from her husband, a man two decades her senior who “was a generous literary patron” before the Civil War, “eagerly courted by such fashionable Caroline dramatists as James Shirley, John Ford, and Richard Brome. For almost twenty years he was a close friend of … Ben Jonson.”522 Cavendish’s comedic turns echo many of the conventions of these earlier playwrights; in particular, her one midwife character—featured in _The Sociable Companions_ (1668)—uses all of the old Jacobean and Caroline associations: garrulousness, bawdry, lower

522 Whitaker, _Mad Madge_, 65. Cavendish herself references Jonson repeatedly by name, as in the Prologue to her 1662 _Playes_ in which she self-deprecatingly compares her work to that of the men who inspired her: “Noble Spectators, do not think to see / Such Playes, that’s like Ben Johnsons [sic] … / my Playes have not such store of wit, / Nor subtil plots, they were so quickly writ… / Noble Readers, do not think my Playes, / Are such as have been writ in former daies; / As Johnson, Shakespeare, Beamont, Fletcher writ; / Mine want their Learning, Reading, Language, Wit…” (A7[r] – [A7v]).
class identity, site of sexual testimony, and farcical means of (re)establishing social order.523

_The Sociable Companions, or, The Female Wits_ is a post-Civil War tale in which the women of the middling class must contend with the difficulties of finding suitable husbands who still possess an establishment. Peg Valourosa, Jane Fullwit, Anne Sencible, and Prudence Save-all face a dangerous future, totally reliant as they are on their brothers, recently disbanded soldiers, who prefer drinking and rioting to work, and joke that they must “rob on the King’s high-way”524 to earn a living. But whereas the men may have a variety of (semi-questionable) means at their disposal to snare a living, the women must use their wits to ensnare the men. For while “Word-Wit will not make [women] rich,” Jane Fullwit concludes that “Deed-Wit will do us good, wherefore let us

523 Cavendish may well have been exposed to the plays of Richard Brome before she even met her husband. The Lucas family wintered in London during the 1630s. “Sometimes too they went to the theater, patronizing for the most part not the large, open-air Red Bull and Fortune theaters but the more socially exclusive private playhouses—Salisbury Court and Blackfriars, the Phoenix in Drury Lane, and the Globe in Southward on the other side of the Thames” (Whitaker, _Mad Madge_, 29). Brome’s and Jonson’s plays featuring midwives would have been performed during this time, and so, while it is merely speculative to think that Cavendish might have been in attendance, it is not unreasonable to think she may have been aware of them.

endeavour to get rich Husbands.”

The women draw lots to divide the eligible men between them, and recruit the assistance of their brothers to aid in their humorous, if devious, plans.

Peg Valourosa’s lot is to marry the usurer, Mr. Get-All; her chosen method is to claim to have borne Mr. Get-All’s bastard child... despite the fact that Peg and Mr. Get-All have never even met. With the help of her brother, Captain Valour (posing as a friend), Mistress Informer (posing as a Midwife), and her brother’s friends, Peg summons Mr. Get-All to a sham “Court of Justice,” with the Captain’s friend Dick as “prime Judge of the Spiritual Court,” Will Fullwit as a doctor, and Harry Sencible as Peg’s lawyer. Both the “doctor” and “midwife” are called on to give depositions as to the child’s parentage, the ingenious argument being that Peg was impregnated by the very idea of Mr. Get-All. Harry Sencible, as a counselor, claims to have “such a Witness as the Law allow of, which is a Midwife,” who is capable of testifying to “the words of the Labouring Woman.” The midwife’s duty to extract the name of the father during the pains of labor goes back to the earliest midwifery oaths on record, as we have seen, and Cavendish exploits this tradition to its best comedic effect. Mistress Informer, to best impersonate a midwife, takes on the persona of the specifically dramatic midwife that we have seen develop in the plays of Sharpham, Hausted, Jonson, and Brome. Her testimony, rather like that of Brome’s midwife, Garrula, goes on for an unconscionably long, rambling time.

Ibid., 38.
About Twelve a Clock at Night I being in bed, and fast asleep, there comes a Man, and raps, and raps, and—raps at the Door, as if it had been for life, which in truth proved so; for it was to fetch me to bring a sweet Babe into the World; but I hearing one rap so hard, I was afraid, my Door, being but a rotten Door, should be broke to pieces; I ran to the Window to ask, who knockt so hard, but the man knockt on, and I call'd out; which knocking and calling took up half an hours time; but at last, my Tongue being louder then the Clapper, he heard me then; I asked him what was his business?\textsuperscript{526}

She is garrulous beyond the point of the ridiculous, shambling, and incompetent, and credulous. After a good two pages, Mistress Informer / the Midwife finally reaches the crux of her testimony, that “This Gentlewoman hath confest that she was never got with child, nor never had a child, but what Mr. Get-all begot.”\textsuperscript{527} This is the limit of the “midwife’s” role; it is left to the doctor to defend the conception-through-mindpower diagnosis.

This false midwife is certainly no Mistress Chair, no real practitioner participating in feminine intrigues at the service of the social order; but the difference lies merely in the absence of medical training, not in the eventual social outcome. But the absence of a “true” midwife and the substitution of a widowed lady of gentle means accords with Cavendish’s usual aristocratic preferences.

\textsuperscript{526} Ibid., 62.

\textsuperscript{527} Ibid., 64.
This intelligent comedy of intrigue engages directly with the financial difficulties that faced cavalier soldiers at the Restoration... Cavendish tranchantly [sic] locates educated and nobly born women (however impoverished) as a vital source of regeneration and restoration in a culture that has lost and mourns the imagined securities of an earlier male authority. That this privilege (of female agency through the exercise of fancy) is exclusive to upper-class women is equally clear. Not only is this freedom restricted to the nobly born, but it is also firmly confined to the ‘fancy’ itself, which appears to be the property of that class.528 This aristocratic leaning is perhaps Cavendish’s only true alteration of the comic midwife she inherited from Caroline dramatists, and it is one that brings us back full circle to Cavendish’s locus of personal identity, her class position, and the one that most clearly and regularly informs her uses of childbirth and midwifery rhetoric.

Conclusion

With these trademark elements in place—aristocratic loyalty, interest in the new science, desire for fame, idealization of the platonic marriage, and childlessness—we can begin to theorize about the midwife’s relationship to Cavendish’s positions, and Cavendish’s attitude toward and usage of the midwife as both character and trope. To

begin, for example, while midwives are themselves not aristocratic, midwifery language is a fixture in what we might call “upper class” dramas, particularly those of playwrights like Ben Jonson, with whom Cavendish was familiar. On the other hand, in non-fiction terms, midwifery represented a female-based knowledge that was separate from the new science; Cavendish was attempting to separate herself from male, educated experimentalists, and so we could expect her to turn to midwifery in that cause, but Cavendish was also interested in remaining above “mere” feminine knowledge. Therefore, as a basis for knowledge, Cavendish’s relationship with midwifery must be somewhat conflicted. Midwifery also must stand outside both the platonic marriage and the concept of the solitary author idealized by Cavendish, since as we have seen, pregnancy and childrearing undermine both of those patterns. One cannot be platonic and have traditional sexual and familial relations; similarly, one cannot justify being a solitary author alone in one’s study at the expense of one’s duties to raise children and run a household. Midwives might not be a part of that household, but their presence certainly would imply a different mode of living.

In terms of tropes, Cavendish is particularly stinting with this gendered language in her prefaces, especially the language of childbirth, having had a poor experience with the reception of her first book, *Poems and Fancies*. She quickly turned to the closet drama as a more fertile and receptive genre for exploring feminine topics and rhetorics. But despite her rhetorical experimentation in dramas like *Youths Glory, and Deaths Banquet* and *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish’s sole use of the dramatic midwife in *The
Sociable Companions points to her essentially traditional and conservative treatment of midwives as women, as professionals, and as comedic characters.

These are but a few of the conclusions to be drawn from a close investigation of Cavendish’s texts in terms of midwifery language. But future research will have a plethora of other questions to answer as well. Does Cavendish’s usage alter with her visit to the Royal Society? Is her usage dictated in any way by the genres she employs? Does Cavendish use the rhetorical practice of investigating and representing both sides of an issue apply as well to childbirth and midwifery? Does Cavendish make use of midwifery in any political fashion, considering the ways in which childbirth was politicized during the Civil War? Does she use it to link herself and her works with earlier authors, like Ben Jonson? Are there any other ways in which she uses midwifery to mark class? Is Cavendish ever reacting to developments in the midwifery manual genre? Does her use of midwifery language change with her return to England after the Restoration? How does she relate midwifery to her female-only utopian representations? Does the frequency of birth rhetoric change over time? Is it limited to non-philosophical genres? Does it change in any way after Cavendish’s visit to the Royal Society? Cavendish’s published texts span nearly two decades, several countries, political uprisings and revisions, multiple genres, and a mind-boggling array of subject matters. What more fertile landscape could we hope for?
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Education

2009  Ph.D., English                     Pennsylvania State University
2004  Graduate Certificate in Women’s Studies  University of Colorado, Boulder
2003  M.A., English Language & Literature  University of Colorado, Boulder
2000  B.A., English Language & Literature  North Georgia College & State University

Papers Presented

• “Body of Words, Body of Works: Negotiating Language and Performance in the Works of Anna Trapnel.” International Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference, The Ohio State University, October 2003.

Selected Awards and Professional Activities

• Session Chair, “Read All About It!: Print Culture,” GEMCS Conference, November 2008
• Folger Institute, “Vernacular Health and Healing Seminar,” 2006-2007
• Folger Institute Travel Grant, 2006-2007
• University Graduate Fellow, Pennsylvania State University, 2005-2006
• Summa Cum Laude, class of 2003, University of Colorado—Boulder
• Newberry Library Travel Grant, 2003
• Graduate Teaching Assistant Award, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2003
• Salutatorian, class of 2000, North George College
• Associated Press Award, 1995

Teaching Experience (13 sections)

Fall 2004 – Spring 2008  Pennsylvania State University
                       English 15 – Freshman Composition (7 sections; 25 seats)
                       English 129 – Shakespeare (1 section; 120 seats)
                       English 221 – British Literature to 1798 (1 section; 40 seats)

Fall 2001 – Fall 2002  University of Colorado - Boulder
                       English 1001 – Freshman Composition (1 section; 15 seats)
                       English 3246 – Gangster Fiction Recitation (1 section; 25 seats)
                       English 3655 – Survey of Early American Literature Recitation (2 sections; 25 seats)