

**Piteous Performances:
Representations and Contexts of Infanticide
in Tudor and Stuart Literature of Stage and Street**



*Massacre of the Innocents (c.1310)
Wallpainting, Croughton, Northants*

A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

of

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by

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Statement

I, Josephine Elaine Billingham confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This research derives from analysis of cases of suspicious infant death recorded in Sussex Coroners' inquests between 1485 and 1688. It examines both infanticides and child murders, following the early modern practice of defining "infant" as up to age seven. The historical records, which are summarised in several theme-based tables, are combined with close readings of imaginative texts, including plays by Shakespeare, Middleton and Webster, broadside ballads, and pamphlets. Archival and literary accounts are examined in the context of early modern works concerning law, religion, and the body, alongside recent studies of women's history, and childbirth. Anthropological theories concerning rites of passage, liminality, waste and abjection invite new ways of thinking about early modern attitudes toward infant life. They reveal the range and complexity of child murder and infanticide, and its motives.

This analysis includes the involvement of men and married women and discusses the structuring of dangerous motherhood by the linguistic similarities of crime pamphlets and breastfeeding literature. It suggests that, far from being unthinkable, infanticide might have been encouraged (by mothers, friends, masters), and could be facilitated by communities' ambivalent attitude toward young life. Communities and authors are seen to be aware of the mental conditions which might have led married, as well as single, women to kill their infants.

Archival and creative texts and visual representations reveal a society imbued with ideas of infant death, and inform us about seventeenth century motherhood.

While the focus is early modern, a concluding Interlude and Epilogue bring the research up to date with a discussion of recent cases and works by writers such as Bond, Ravenhill and McDonagh. These suggest that many modern behavioural patterns, and playwrights' ways of writing about them, have remarkable similarity to those of the early modern period.

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Finally my husband, Norman Billingham, has shown unflinching patience during my numerous panics with the technology and has tolerated living in the company of a woman who must have seemed to have an excessive interest in dead infants and the people who kill them. He has always encouraged me toward the final goal and that I have been able to commit to the research at all is largely down to him. I thank him from my heart.

Author's notes on text

- Italic in primary texts has been converted to Roman unless its original use causes inflection to fall on a particular word.
- Capitalisation of primary texts has been maintained, including in publication titles.
- Original spellings of primary texts have been maintained unless cited from a secondary text.
- When citing early modern texts:
 - u has been transcribed as v and v as w, as appropriate.
 - vv has been transcribed as w.
 - I has been transcribed as J, as appropriate (e.g. Iohn becomes John)
- Place of publication for all pre-1700 works is London unless otherwise specified.
- Citations from Shakespeare are from *The Complete Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells, (Oxford: OUP, 1998) unless otherwise stated.
- When citing Coroners' and Assize records, case numbers are included after the page number. For example: Hunnisett, R.F. ed. *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1558-1603* (Kew: PRO Publications, 1996), (104 #417)
- Dates are variously taken directly from the English Short Title Catalogue, Early English Books On-line, the English Broadside Ballad Archive and archival translations/transcriptions cited, with the exception of Middlesex County Records which uses regnal years. These have been converted to calendar years.
- In bibliographical references, EBBA refers to the English Broadside Ballad Archive: <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>. All ballads are from the Pepys collection unless otherwise stated.
- In bibliographical references, ESTC refers to the English Short Title Catalogue: <http://estc.bl.uk>.
- References to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) are taken from the current online version as at April 2014: <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/>.
- References to the Bible are to the Oxford World Classics edition of the Authorised King James version, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: OUP, 2008), unless otherwise stated.

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Epigram

'Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak;
For I must talk of murders, rapes and massacres,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villanies
Ruthful to hear, yet piteously perform'd.

Titus Andronicus, V.i.63

Introduction: Losses, Lacunae and Liminality

Investigating the invisible

Among surviving seventeenth-century ballads is a single copy of a 1640 work about an infanticide said to have taken place in Lancashire.¹ Where the narrative draws to its close, the paper is worn and eroded on the right of the sheet. The ballad is reduced to incomplete lines which deteriorate into disjointed words and letters which no longer convey the writer's meaning, though the shadow of sense remains:

The Midwife fearin ...
Because she kill'd the ...
Into a Well her sel ...
Where she lay lo ...

Too many such ...
Before out ...
And th ...
As ...

The page could serve as a metaphor for the study of infanticide. Some material survives allowing a partial picture to be seen, but there are gaps, missing details and uncertain outcomes, so that investigating the subject is frequently a study of voids. Such voids invite speculation which is, of course, perilous. Yet speculation already surrounded the subject of newborn child murder in the early modern period, a point apparent from a reference to the crime in a manual for justices of the peace which states:

A Harlot is delivered of an infant which she puts alive in an orchard, and covers with leaves; and a kite strikes at him with its talons, from which the infant shortly dies, and she is arraigned for murder, and is executed.²

Crompton uses this case to demonstrate the circumstances which should lead to a guilty verdict, yet any decision based on these facts is surrounded with speculation concerning intention. An evicted, pregnant woman could go into labour while seeking accommodation, give birth, leave the child under a hedge for protection and, to keep it warm, cover it with leaves – the only thing available – believing it would be found

¹ Anon, *The wicked midwife* (1640).

² Anthony Fitzherbert and Richard Crompton, *L'Office et Auctoritie de Justices de Peace* (1584) (19v), translated in Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803* (New York: New York University Press, 1981) (8). For an outline of early legal references to infant murder see *ibid.* (6).

alive. Both interpretations of the event are plausible and speculative. Similarly, speculation underlies the 1624 Infanticide Act which stipulates that the killers of newborn children were “lewd women”, the children “bastards” and their motives “to avoid their shame, and to escape punishment”.³ And speculation is one of the bases for the sentences upon those who were found guilty, despite their “not guilty” pleas. Ultimately, only the women or men responsible for the crime – if there was a crime – knew the truth and they may have been unclear about their motives.

In some respects, the gaps and lingering questions which haunt the study of infanticide are a frustration; we want to know the “truth”, but we have lacunae. Mary E. Fissell’s reference to “interpretative space” which allows many “different models” to be applied aptly describes these gaps.⁴ In this research I want to treat the lacunae in the Sussex records, which form the main historical source in my research (see p.32) as an opportunity to examine infanticide through the lenses of a range of disciplines and to show how they aid our understanding of the crime. My aim is not to attempt to uncover that ever-elusive “truth”, but, by examining the psychological, emotional, and intellectual landscape surrounding the crime, and its perpetrators, to try to gain a fuller understanding of infanticide.

Infant death was a subject which interested early modern authors who wrote about it, directly and in imagery, in pamphlets, ballads and drama. While creative writers were inventing, clerks were recording instances of the crime in society. The division between documented cases and creative works could break down, with court cases inspiring dramatic works such as *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (1608), and *The Late Witches of Lancashire* (1634), and documented cases sometimes reading like created texts, as in the narratives of Mary Cook and Robert Foulkes (discussed in chapter 5). Reality and fiction thus merged in a manner which challenges the demarcation of sources as “literature” or “history”.

Infanticide has invited discussion as part of many discourses. Writers on history, the law, the family, the social role of women, and the female body often dedicate a few pages to the subject. Those who make concentrated studies frequently take an historical approach, including attempts at quantitative analyses, which can arrive

³ See Appendix 1. Although the law only applies to part of the period under discussion, it expresses assumptions which appear to have existed previously.

⁴ Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) (1).

at conflicting conclusions.⁵ For example, in their extensive study Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull state that it was “not rare” but conclude that it is “impossible” to arrive at a true crime rate, while acknowledging that there were enough cases “to keep the crime before the eyes of the authorities”.⁶ J.S. Cockburn writes that it was “relatively uncommon” as does Keith Wrightson, whose study of court records suggest that it was “surprisingly rare”.⁷ Barbara Hanawalt states it was non-existent in the middle ages, an opinion which contests Richard H. Helmholz’s slightly earlier findings.⁸ A few years on, Catherine Damme wrote that its existence was incontrovertible.⁹ (I consider questions of the crime’s frequency below). Other writers examine conviction rates, again arriving at diverse opinions. Hoffer and Hull find that it was high after the 1624 Infanticide Act but James A. Sharpe writes that “more women were executed for infanticide than for witchcraft”¹⁰ while Garthine Walker refutes the idea that most women were hanged.¹¹

Interesting though such questions are, they are not the subject of my research which is concerned with the manner in which the crime was represented in English literature, and the interactions between literary and historical accounts. Within academic historical discourses some writers do use creative texts in their research, but my work reverses that process, being a literary study which calls heavily on history. This methodology is discussed in detail below. My research inevitably grows out of studies by predecessors. Due to the frequency of references to the crime, the summary of work by writers who deal principally with the Tudor and Stuart period given below is inevitably brief.¹²

⁵ Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain, c. 1600 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013) (26).

⁶ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (xviii, 21).

⁷ J.S. Cockburn, “The Nature and Incidence of Crime in England 1559-1625” in *Crime in England 1550-1800*, ed. J.S. Cockburn (London: Methuen, 1997) 49-71 (58); Keith Wrightson, “Infanticide in European History”, *Criminal Justice History*, 3 (1982) 1-20 (8).

⁸ Barbara Hanawalt, “Childrearing among the Lower Classes of Late Medieval England”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8.1 (1977) 1-22.; Richard H. Helmholz, “Infanticide in the Province of Canterbury During the Fifteenth Century”, *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 8.1 (1975) 379-390.

⁹ Catherine Damme, “Infanticide: The worth of an infant under law”, *Medical History*, 22 (1978) 1-24.

¹⁰ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (25); James A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (London: Longman, 1999) (158).

¹¹ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) (150).

¹² Studies on the eighteenth to twentieth centuries will be mentioned briefly in the Interlude between Chapter 5 and the Epilogue.

While there are different opinions about the frequency of infanticide, writers express remarkable agreement regarding motives for the crime. Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, social historians who sought to place children's needs in an historical perspective, write:

Amongst a class where food was never very plentiful and at a time when individual life was not so highly regarded and the death of an infant no very remarkable thing, the temptation for a woman to escape ostracism and the penalties of the law and rid herself of a responsibility which, without a husband's support, might prove an impossible burden, was not always to be resisted in either town or country.¹³

Other writers continue the idea of single motherhood. Sharpe, for example, later wrote "The typical infanticidal mother was an unmarried servant girl, and her motives were usually a desire to avoid the shame and consequent loss of position which unmarried motherhood would bring".¹⁴ More recently Linda Pollock added:

The existence of infanticide has more to do with the plight of unmarried mothers than with the concept of childhood or relations between parents and children. Those who were charged with killing their babies were invariably isolated women who lacked support networks. [They] committed infanticide to avoid the stigma of illegitimacy: the possible rejection of friends and family, the prospect of losing their livelihoods, and the incurring of church and state penalties.¹⁵

Phyllis Rackin writes that some historical research is not "necessarily inaccurate but [...] it is incomplete".¹⁶ Certainly, the texts I have studied support the theory that most cases of infanticide concerned single women who were accused of killing their newborns, and shame and fear of punishment can be assumed to have been major contributory factors. However, representations of the crime in literature and a focussed sample of archival records (described below) provide a more complex picture of who killed infants, why they did it, and the manner of the killings, suggesting that shame and fear of punishment were among a range of issues. Further, when infanticide is viewed from the perspective of different disciplines (again described below), tidy conclusions about perpetrators and motives become less convincing. Instead my primary and

¹³ Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society From Tudor Times to the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) (210).

¹⁴ Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England* (158).

¹⁵ Linda A. Pollock, "Parent-Child Relations" in *The History of the European Family*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (New Haven: Yale University, 2001) 191-220 (218).

¹⁶ Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) (9).

secondary sources suggest that if you continue to ask the same questions of the same texts from the same theoretical base, you will probably produce similar answers.

In Chapter 1, I aim to show that communities, through negligence or apathy, enabled the crime to take place, and that shadowy accomplices – family, employers, lovers – were also highly culpable if not directly responsible for the deaths. I suggest the women’s actions do not appear to be as considered or premeditated as the motives mentioned above suggest. Rather, they appear to be associated with atavistic instincts about place and abjection, ideas discussed in Chapter 2.

Many recent commentators who have made highly individual observations about infanticide have influenced this research. Some of the most original are outlined below, to give an overview of discourses on the subject. Other, more specific comments will be introduced at the relevant points in the text.

Hoffer and Hull state that infanticide was the result of “violent emotions in a violent age” affected by “economic conditions and indifference to moral codes” but conclude that “motivation is as varied as the personalities of the men and women who attempted it and the situations in which they found themselves”.¹⁷ R.W. Malcolmson captures the unpremeditated nature of the crime, stating that some women were “probably prompted more by confusion and panic, or perhaps the hope for a fortunate miscarriage, and involved no definite notion of what would be done” but had the hope that “some sort of deliverance would occur”.¹⁸ This suggests pregnancy denial which, with other mental states, is considered in Chapter 2. Wrightson, who takes a European perspective, says that bastard bearing was seen as a heinous crime leading to appalling social and physical punishments which drove some women to infanticide.¹⁹ This is discussed in Chapter 3 which includes an examination of ballads, medical, and legal texts, and archival records, all of which tell us more about the circumstances surrounding unmarried pregnancy and the punishments which could be meted out. In Chapter 4, I consider putative bastard bearers, the manner of their representation, and their attempts to deal with their situation.

Throughout their discussions, recent writers, like their early modern predecessors, consider infanticide in terms of single women. Frances E. Dolan is one of

¹⁷ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (132, 157).

¹⁸ R.W. Malcolmson, “Infanticide in the Eighteenth Century” in *Crime in England 1550-1800*, ed. J.S. Cockburn (London: Methuen, 1977) 187-209 (193).

¹⁹ Wrightson, “Infanticide in European History” (8).

the few who deals at any length with non-stereotypical killers. She suggests that when an unmarried woman killed her child, it was an act of self-preservation.²⁰ She writes that married women were more likely to be judged “insane” and describes such killings as destruction of part of the self, whereas infanticide by men was “social suicide”. These two types of perpetrator will be discussed in Chapter 5, in which I consider infanticide by married women and by men, and the manner of its representation.

While most writers construct women as social and legal victims, occasional voices stress their strength. Walker states that the 1624 Act provided opportunities for mitigation which did not exist in murder law, such as lack of signs of violence on the infant body. This made infanticide the only homicide for which women were likely to be pardoned.²¹ She finds that courts applied “normal” standards of proof and that, unlike other female homicides, suspects were granted pardons. Walker also shows that pregnant women deserted by their lovers asserted their rights against men in bastardy cases to “access a concept of honesty that could eclipse the shadow of their sexual activity”.²² Malcolmson also comments on women’s strength. He suggests women who killed their infants may have been of formerly excellent reputation, and used their strength of will and determination to salvage what they could of their lives.²³ In ballads, these women are portrayed tricking and seducing innocents to manipulate their way into the safety of marriage.²⁴

Several papers discuss infanticide as part of discourses concerning the female body, pregnancy and childbirth, and show that contemporary attitudes could contribute to the crime. Laura Gowing demonstrates that the female body was private, but suspicion of unmarried pregnancy meant it could become the subject of public contention and physical examination by strangers.²⁵ She shows that rather than being a sisterhood, other women became a threat. A similar point is made by Linda Pollock in her work on the shared experience of childbirth.²⁶ Her article shows that unmarried

²⁰ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1994) (132, 142). See also Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (64).

²¹ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (152).

²² *ibid.* (232).

²³ Malcolmson, “Infanticide” (205).

²⁴ Anon, *The Norfolk lass: or, The maid that was blown with-child* (1672-1696); Anon, *The Countrey Farmer; Or, The Buxome Virgin* (1672-1696).

²⁵ Laura Gowing, “Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Past & Present*, 156 (1997) 87-115.

²⁶ Linda A. Pollock, “Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England”, *Social History* 22.3 (1997) 286-306.

women could become constructed as outsiders who were given grudging help during labour. In conjunction with this was women's relationship with their bodies. Gowing emphasises women's lack of bodily understanding and the social taboos on discussing the subject.²⁷ Rape and unmarried pregnancy could not be spoken of, which underlines Malcolmson's comment that some women pinned their hopes on an undefined fortuitous rescue – a situation which could lead to infanticide.

Infanticide took place within communities and in a world beset by other issues. In part, the subject is bound up with early modern concerns about bastard bearing, the desire to control women's sexuality, and the fact that an unmarried mother and her infant were a potential draw on poor relief. I discuss this in Chapter 4. Religion also had a part to play. Wrightson suggests that the almost simultaneous laws against infanticide across Europe were because the early Christian church associated it with the paganism which it was so keen to abolish, and attitudes toward infanticide were a central differentiation between the two.²⁸ It was seen as what we today might call a "horror crime", and considered on a par with witchcraft and sodomy. But the crime took place within families and small communities, and it could reverberate through them. Gowing describes it as a "collective trauma".²⁹

The above studies focus on women, particularly single women, and to a greater or lesser extent follow the assumptions of the 1624 Act. However, infanticide is so alien, and the findings so counter-intuitive, that there are lingering questions. Is there more to it than this? Are there other kinds of perpetrators? What are we missing? These are the questions which this research examines. Taking a thematic approach, it will show that infanticide and child killing in early modern England cannot be fully understood by simple explanations. As described more fully below, it opens up the subject in a number of ways. Firstly, while the majority of the examples I discuss concern newborn or very young infants, I also consider older children, based on early modern definitions of "infant", a subject considered below. Secondly, it uses a range of primary sources. These are the ballads and pamphlets of street literature and the drama of the public stage, including those which do not directly refer to infanticide but imply or approach it in the subtext or imagery. These are interwoven with historical accounts,

²⁷ Laura Gowing, "Bodies and Stories" in *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women*, ed. Margaret Mikesell and Adele Seef (London: University of Delaware Press, 2003) 317-332.

²⁸ Wrightson, "Infanticide in European History" (4).

²⁹ Gowing, "Secret Births" (115).

particularly a discrete group of surviving Coroners' inquests. The primary sources, and the rationale for combining them in this study, are discussed below. Thirdly, the research uses a range of secondary sources, including those which refer to early modern beliefs about the body, religion and folklore as well as current ideas about perinatal psychology. Theories about liminality, marginality and rites of passage, which have their roots in anthropology, have proved particularly helpful for understanding infanticide more fully. By applying the expertise of writers from a number of disciplines to representations of infanticide, my aim is to reveal the complexity of the crime.

The age of an infant

Researchers frequently base their definition of infanticide on current English law which defines the crime as the killing of an infant under a year old by its mother, with the murder of newborns and children under one month defined as neonaticide.³⁰ Such a stipulation did not apply in the early modern period. The 1624 Act uses the term "child" or "children" throughout, yet it implies newborns (See Appendix 1). It has become known as England's first infanticide act yet what early modern people understood by "infant" is far from clear.

The Latin *infans* – without language – creates a flexible division between infancy and childhood as speech is acquired at various ages, and it raises the question of whether uttering "mama" constitutes having language. Shakespeare used the term "infant" in the sense of "a child during the earliest period of life",³¹ as in "like the froward infant still'd with dandling",³² and also in the sense of "in its earliest stage, newly existing, ungrown, undeveloped" as in "Old woes, not infant sorrows".³³ Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656) offers the definition "Infanticide (infanticidium) a slaying or killing of infantes, child-murdering; such was that of

³⁰ "Murder, manslaughter and infanticide: proposals for reform of the law: Ministry of Justice Consultation Paper CP 19/08" (July 2008).

³¹ OED

³² *Venus and Adonis* (line 562).

³³ *Rape of Lucrece* (line 1096).

Herod".³⁴ As Herod specified the killing of children aged up to two, this provides another feasible definition.³⁵

All such divisions are arbitrary, but some parameters are required for this research. I will therefore take "infant" to be up to the age of seven and, by extension, the killing of children up to this time as "infanticide".³⁶ The decision is based on "Ages of Man" schemes, a concept familiar from Jaques' speech in *As You Like It* (III.iii.143). His scheme of seven ages suggests that "infant" covers the years from "mewling and puking" to the schoolboy "creeping like snail unwillingly to school" which was one of many ways of dividing life into stages.

Since antiquity, scholars had sought to define the span of man's life in schematic terms, inspired by different philosophies. They created life stages of varying lengths, from the simple three of youth, maturity, and old age, to Thomas Tusser's twelve seven-year apprenticeships described in his poem "Mans Age divided".³⁷ The systems and philosophies supporting the schemes are described by Samuel C. Chew and J.A. Burrow who show that they could be related to the seasons, the apostles, bodily humours, or the five senses, with other schemes providing cycles of six, through to twelve.³⁸ Thomas Fortescue summarised the schemes in *The Foreste* (1571), outlining patterns of three, four, six and seven. He concludes: "But here considering these variable opinions, I know not where, moste safely to arrest my selfe, neither may any man give assured determination".³⁹ As Burrow states: "Anyone who goes to medieval discussion of the ages of man with the intention of ascertaining at what age youth was thought to end, or old age to begin, will find no easy answers".⁴⁰ However, Burrow believes that most people in the Middle Ages explained life's stages in terms of four or seven, and that the

³⁴ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (1656) (X5v).

³⁵ Matthew 2.16; Inconsistencies about the definition of infant are still with us. The OED states "a child during the earliest period of life (or still unborn); now most usually applied to a child in arms, a babe; but often extended to include any child under seven years of age". However, it states "a person under (legal) age; a minor. In common law, one who has not completed his or her twenty-first year".

³⁶ Ascertaining the age of children named in the inquests is not straightforward. Although most are described as newborn, in other instances the age is ambiguous such as "infant" or "child". Occasionally information such as the child being a servant or one of a family of murdered children, gives some indication of age. Any assumptions about age made here will be clarified.

³⁷ Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundreth points of good husbandry* (1573) (56v).

³⁸ Samuel C. Chew, *The Pilgrimage of Life* (New Haven: Yale University, 1962); J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

³⁹ Thomas Fortescue, *The Foreste* (1571) (48v).

⁴⁰ Burrow, *Ages* (34).

Tudors and Stuarts followed similar authorities.⁴¹ Chew shows that the system was familiar from depictions in stained glass windows, engravings and murals, such as that at Longthorpe Tower (below). The schemes were also known through writings including translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – “See'st thou not how that the year, as representing plain / The age of man, depicts itself in quarters four?” – and Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*.⁴²



Fourteenth-century Ages of Man wall painting, Longthorpe Tower, Cambridgeshire.

This research will, as stated above, concentrate on infants up to the age of seven. Writing of the Middle Ages, Shulamith Shahar notes that *infantia* was defined as up to this age. Seven was considered a suitable age for schooling and vocational training.⁴³ For the early modern period, seven complies with Jaques' sequence and the first of Tusser's divisions: “The first vii years bring up as a childe”.⁴⁴ Fortescue shows that a number of early thinkers also put the division at this age, including the sixth-century scholar Isadore of Seville who called this stage *infans* because “when the teeth are not yet well set in place he cannot express himself properly”.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *ibid.* (38, 57).

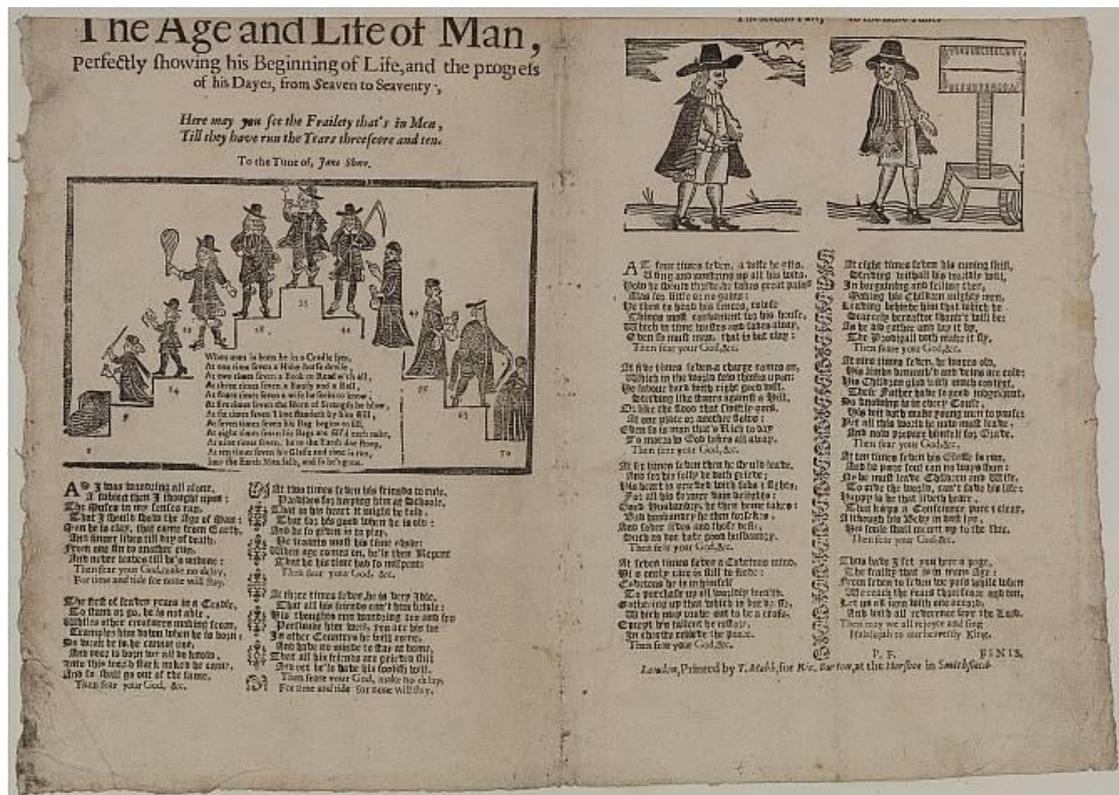
⁴² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. Madeleine Forey, trans. Arthur Golding (London: Penguin, 2002). Book XV, line 222; Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579).XII: December

⁴³ Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990) (23-26).

⁴⁴ Tusser, *Five Hundreth* (fol. 56v).

⁴⁵ Cited in Burrow, *Ages* (83).

At the opposite end of the cultural spectrum, seven is the age described and illustrated in Peter Fancy's ballad *The Age and Life of Man* (below). He writes: "The first seven years in a Cradle / To stand or go he is not able".⁴⁶ At seven boys were breeched and children could be sent away to work.⁴⁷ Tudor homicide trials defined an infant as eight years old or less.⁴⁸ There was clearly a change in attitudes and beliefs about young people around the age of seven when young lives appear to have moved from infant to child.



The Age and Life of Man described and depicted in Peter Fancy's ballad (1650-1665?)

⁴⁶ Peter Fancy, *The Age and Life of Man* (1650-1665?).

⁴⁷ Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580-1800* (Oxford: OUP, 2010) (113, 137, 157).

⁴⁸ Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) (34, n.2). Griffiths' survey of age citations of the accused in archives for Norwich and London shows that "infant" is used to the age of three, but that most in this group were referred to as "child", as were those up to eight. After this, gender specific language – lad, maid, boy, girl – was adopted. Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) (25).

Primary sources

History

This research calls on two groups of primary sources: historical archives and the literatures of stage and street. The rationale for this dual approach is given below, with some description of the sources used.

The project began with my study of inquests conducted by Sussex Coroners whose activities included investigating all violent, unnatural, or unexplained deaths encompassing murder, suicide and accidents.⁴⁹ The 1,367 hearings recorded between 1485 and 1688 are contained in three volumes by Roy F. Hunnisett.⁵⁰ They include many accounts of children's deaths, which often followed tragic accidents on farms, in the home or while playing. They provide a picture of their lives which is similar to that uncovered by Hanawalt for late-medieval England.⁵¹ Early modern boys climbed trees or on doors, rode on carts and practised archery. Girls collected wood, ran errands and looked after siblings. Both boys' and girls' activities led to tragic accidents. Life could also be cruel. In November 1555, six-year-old Agnes Kente's parents sent her to look after a flock of sheep. The inquest tells us that "She was [...] there all that night and died of the cold she then took, through her parents' negligence in that they took no care of her".⁵² This was classified as "a natural death". And there was the sadly-named Fortune Luck, a 9-year-old maidservant. She was sent on an errand by her master's wife and "having the heel and toes of one foot putrefied, she rested in the road and, seized with the cold, died a natural death there".⁵³

The records contain accounts of eighty-two deaths of infants and young people which were considered suspicious. Those involving infant murder gave the impression that the crime was more complex than discourses involving gender and marital status, and discussions about motive, suggested. The accounts revealed micro-patterns which were seemingly inexplicable, such as the frequency of deaths involving water or the

⁴⁹ R.F. Hunnisett, ed. *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1558-1603* (Kew: PRO Publications, 1996) (xi). For a full account of the development and decline of the Coroner's role see R.F. Hunnisett, *The Medieval Coroner* (Cambridge: CUP, 1961).

⁵⁰ R.F. Hunnisett, ed. *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1485-1558* (Lewes: Sussex Record Society, 1985); Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603*; R.F. Hunnisett, ed. *Sussex Coroners' Inquests 1603-1688* (Kew: PRO Publications, 1998). For further information on this source see Appendix 2.

⁵¹ Hanawalt, "Childrearing" (15).

⁵² Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (57 #204).

⁵³ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (25 #111).

throwing of infant corpses. It was also clear that men were more frequently involved in the crime than current discourses show. To Coroners' inquests I have added thirteen cases for which inquests do not exist but which survive in Sussex Assize records. Neither set of records contains the documents about Mercy Gould, a Sussex servant suspected of killing her newborn, a case discussed in detail by David Cressy.⁵⁴ Nor is there any archival record of the killing of several infants by Jane Hattersley which was described in a pamphlet of 1609 and is discussed in Chapter 1.⁵⁵ When these cases are combined, including multiple deaths which were dealt with together by the authorities, the total number of cases of apparent killing of infants in Sussex between 1485 and 1688, which form the historical basis of this research, is approximately one hundred. I will also consider Churchwardens' Presentments for Sussex, as transcribed by Hilda Johnstone, which record those named to church authorities for bastardy, irregular marriages and other perceived crimes.⁵⁶

Looking at a discrete number of examples of infanticide from a limited geographical area – and there is no reason to believe that Sussex was significantly different from other mainly rural counties, though further research might show differently – removes the temptation to select the vivid and exceptional. It makes it possible to study cases individually, as small groups and as a whole, and to examine them closely, thus avoiding the broad-brush approach that is often taken.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas has stated that “whatever we perceive is organised into patterns for which we, the perceivers, are largely responsible”.⁵⁷ This, she states, is our “strongest mental habit”. She continues:

As perceivers we select from all the stimuli falling on our senses only those which interest us, and our interests are governed by a pattern-making tendency [...] In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others. The most acceptable cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built up. Ambiguous ones tend to be treated as if they harmonised with the rest of the pattern. Discordant ones tend to be rejected.

⁵⁴ David Cressy, *Agnes Bowker's Cat: Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: OUP, 2009) (SP 12/123-31).

⁵⁵ Thomas Brewer, *The Bloudy Mother* (1609).

⁵⁶ Hilda Johnstone, ed. *Churchwarden's Presentments (17th century) Part 1: Archdeaconry of Chichester* (Lewes: Sussex Record Society, 1947/8). For churchwarden's role see *ibid.* xxi-xl and Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) (20).

⁵⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark, 1966) (36).

The Sussex cases make it possible to benefit from these pattern-making tendencies by encouraging the examination of cases which do not fit with the broad patterns which can lead us into a deeper understanding of infanticide.

These hundred cases do not indicate the frequency of infanticide in Sussex, partially because many of the records are missing, sometimes for part of the county and sometimes for the whole county.^{58,59} As Hunnisett writes: “Infanticide must have been much more common than the inquests suggest; compassionate neighbours may well have helped to conceal it from the authorities”⁶⁰ thus providing a “shield” between a crime and its being brought to court.⁶¹ Sympathy for the guilty, and the need to pay the Coroner, were other disincentives to reporting crimes.^{62,63} Concealing infant murder was aided by the ease of disposing of an infant body. One Sussex inquest shows the subsequent unfolding of events when such concealment was discovered. Without physical evidence it was rare for Coroners to pursue a case, although again there is one such case recorded for Sussex. It reveals the community tension, mystery and confusion surrounding infanticide. These two exceptional cases are strangely linked and are discussed in Chapter 1. They reinforce statements made by historians such as Sharpe, and Hoffer and Hull, who write of the “dark figure” of unrecorded crime.⁶⁴

Normally inquests were held after viewing the body, and within days of it being found, and the records are usually extremely brief. They begin with the date and place of the hearing, the Coroner’s name and a list of jurors, generally about fifteen men of standing in the immediate neighbourhood.⁶⁵ A typical account of infant death reads:

On 29 November ‘Bennet’ Davis late of Maresfield, ‘spynster’, murdered a female child, to which she had given birth alive at Maresfield, stopping her breathing with both hands and suffocating her.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (xiii); Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (xi); Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (xi).

⁵⁹ Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (27,42).

⁶⁰ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (xxxix).

⁶¹ Clark, *Women and Crime* (45).

⁶² Carrie Smith, “Medieval Coroners’ Rolls: Legal Fiction or Historical Fact?” in *Courts, Counties and The Capital in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Diana E.S. Dunn (New York: St Martin’s, 1996) 93-115 (100).

⁶³ Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (42).

⁶⁴ Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England* (61); Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (6).

⁶⁵ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (xl, xlv).

⁶⁶ *ibid.* (119).

Coroners were required to measure wounds and to state the financial value of the item which caused them, as anything which led to a death was “deodand”, originally a gift to God to expiate the item’s sin by its dedication to the Church though in time it became crown property and a source of royal revenue.⁶⁷ Clerks also recorded the accused’s possessions which, in infanticide cases was typically a variation of “no goods, chattels, lands or tenements”. Documents related to homicide were passed to the Assize or Sessions courts and are maintained at the National Archive. Sharpe points out: “What is in many ways the most fascinating source is the one which has been most often destroyed [...] the deposition”.⁶⁸

However, where information about the trial’s subsequent progress survives, Hunnisett has appended a summary. In Bennet Davis’ case this shows that she was not kept in custody but that a cloth worker and a joiner both entered into bonds for £10 for her appearance at the Assizes. Robert Payne of Maresfield, a yeoman, also entered a bond for £10 to give evidence against her. We do not know why the joiner and cloth worker were sure she would attend the hearing rather than abscond, or why Robert Payne was willing to give evidence against her. We do know that she pleaded not guilty and was acquitted, the child being said to have been born dead. Even in this briefest of accounts there is the sense of the moral courage of the woman who had appeared before a jury of men (thirteen were recorded in this instance, plus the Coroner), and would have to be examined again before another jury of about the same number in the knowledge that a yeoman was prepared to speak against her.

We do not know how frequent infanticide was. As the following chapters show, we often cannot be certain what happened, who might have been present, or who actually killed the infant. We do not know what was said in court, and why virtually identical cases in terms of the accused, method, date and place, received different verdicts. And we cannot be inside the minds of the accused or know why they acted as they did. Literature, however, can provide insights into the crime. Dolan writes of its ability to “scrutinize all of the circumstances, perpetrators, and motives for which the law cannot account”.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hunnisett, *The Medieval Coroner* (20, 32).

⁶⁸ Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England* (35). For a study of surviving depositions see Malcolm Gaskill, “Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England”, *Social History*, 23.1 (1998) 1-30.

⁶⁹ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (126).

Literature

The literary works I shall use are drama and the ballads and pamphlets – street literature – which Fissell says should be read “with as much care and sophistication as [...] other texts”.⁷⁰ Early modern drama is familiar, but street literature may need some introduction.

Ballads – short songs, cheaply printed on a single page – dealt with subjects as diverse as politics, thwarted love, “prodigies” and other purported news. As they were often clandestine in production many were not registered, and as they were ephemeral in nature, many have not survived. Therefore we cannot know how many titles existed, though Tessa Watt estimates somewhere between six hundred thousand and three to four million may have been printed.⁷¹ Their tunes were used repeatedly, and their rough woodcuts were similarly recycled. The genre crossed class boundaries. Ballads were sold at markets, sung by minstrels at great houses, and bought by servants and apprentices, yeomen, husbandmen and tradespeople. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) was among the collectors. His library had examples not only from his own time but from the previous century, after he took over the collection of lawyer and scholar John Selden (1584-1654) probably in the 1680s.⁷² Watt states that theoretically every man, woman and child would have had access to ballads, at least in oral form.⁷³

Pamphlets were often “ephemeral, occasional and frivolous” publications,⁷⁴ comprising “one or more printed sheets, stabbed or sewn together”.⁷⁵ Their subject matter and readership was similar to that of ballads, but their greater length, prolonged argument and more overt didacticism demanded greater literary skill. Many were serious and moralistic or religious. Some dealt with recent court cases,⁷⁶ and include those by prison chaplains who had the profitable right to publish accounts of the life and crimes of the condemned (as in the case of Robert Foulkes, discussed in Chapter 5).⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies* (9).

⁷¹ Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991) (12).

⁷² “*English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA)*” ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/pepys [Accessed 20/9/2014].

⁷³ Watt, *Cheap Print* (37).

⁷⁴ Clark, *Women and Crime* (145).

⁷⁵ Michael F. Suarez and H.R. Woudhuysen, eds., *Oxford Companion to the Book* (Oxford: OUP, 2010) (997).

⁷⁶ Crime pamphlets as a news genre are discussed in Clark, *Women and Crime* (1-32).

⁷⁷ “*A true and perfect Relation Of the Tryal and Condemnation, Execution and last Speech of that unfortunate Gentleman Mr. Robert Foulks (1679)*” Old Bailey Proceedings Online, <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/> [Accessed 1/7/2014]; Robert Foulkes, *An alarme for sinners* (1679).

Rather than describing ballads and pamphlets as vernacular, popular, or cheap literature, which emphasise language, the readers and cost respectively, I will refer to them collectively as “street literature”, following the examples of Clark and Joy Wiltenburg.⁷⁸ As well as the street being one of the principal places of sale, I believe the term emphasises ideas of social mingling, exchange, display, and performance, which are an aspect of many of these works.

Street literature and drama shared many characteristics. They often featured the same cast of characters – the traders, farmers, yeomen, doctors, craftworkers, middling sort and servants of street literature often appeared in drama. These people thronged the streets of early modern London.⁷⁹ In 1642 Henry Peacham wrote of:

The Citie, whether all sorts reside, Noble and simple rich and poore yong and old, from all places and Countries either for pleasure [...] or for profit, as Lawyers to the Tearnnes, Country-men and women to Smithfield and the Markets or for necessity, as poore yong men and maids to seeke services and places, serving-men Masters, and some others all manner of imploiment.⁸⁰

The geographical mix of London’s population is captured in ballads about “Westerne” and “Northerne” lasses, and in city comedies.⁸¹

As the sorts of people who appear in street literature did not have many representations of themselves, the works had the potential to influence actions and attitudes. Clark writes that they “constituted a resource on which they could draw in the construction of social and cultural identities”.⁸² For women in particular, plays and street literature offered a central role, voice, and agency. She points out that in ballads women’s voices stand alone and are not counteracted.⁸³ But ballads also depicted women as voraciously sexual and made them scapegoats for bawdy humour. Northern, “westerne” and country lasses who are seduced by city gents often sing of their plight in ballads. While their woes may have warned others about seducers, many ballads suggest that unmarried, pregnant women would be rescued by enamoured gallants, or that they would be able to dupe an innocent into marriage. Such optimistic narratives

⁷⁸ Clark, *Women and Crime*; Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (London: University of Virginia Press, 1992).

⁷⁹ Jean E. Howard, *Theater of a City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) (8, 40).

⁸⁰ Henry Peacham, *The Art of Living in London* (1642) (A1v).

⁸¹ Robert Guy, *The Witty Westerne Lasse* (1634); Anon, *The lovely Northerne Lasse* (1632).

⁸² Clark, *Women and Crime* (xi).

⁸³ *ibid.* (77).

may have helped to make women easy sexual prey and may ultimately have contributed to infanticide, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Plays and street literature combined verse, prose and music. They presented narratives visually in performance and in ballad woodcuts. Both traversed oral and written culture and they mingled in the theatre and the street. Ballads were sold at playhouse entrances,⁸⁴ built on themes in successful plays, and advertised plays to ballad audiences.⁸⁵ Play characters sang and sold ballads on stage with Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* and Nightingale in *Bartholomew Fair* among the performers, while in *I Henry IV* the “fretful” Falstaff asks Bardolph to “Come, sing me a bawdy song” (III.iii.12).

Ballads and plays, though not pamphlets, shared a similar relationship with their audiences. Their performative nature and direct contact encouraged interaction and participation.⁸⁶ They could invite discussion of touchy subjects such as the influence of the devil, the role of women, or social infiltrators such as beggars and aliens. Both secular theatre and cheap print were new forms and their relatively low price – both ballads and playhouse entry cost one penny – made them accessible and popular.⁸⁷ Naturally, reformers objected. Clark cites William Lambarde’s reference to “pamphletes, Poesies, ditties, songes” as “unprofitable and hurtfull Inglishes bookes”, and Philip Barrough’s writing of “ridiculous toyes and absurd pamphlets”.⁸⁸ Such objections were doubtless fuelled by ballads being pasted on walls of houses and taverns and their illustrations being open to interpretation.⁸⁹ Images of murder and seduction, as in “*The Mourning Conquest*” (below), could appear in the home amongst the everyday, making them ubiquitous rather than extraordinary. This included scenes of infant and child murder (see pages 73, 201 and 229).⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Sandra Clark, “The Economics of Marriage in the Broadside Ballad”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 36.1 (2002) 119-133 (119).

⁸⁵ Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women* (32).

⁸⁶ Watt, *Cheap Print* (329); Clark, “Economics of Marriage” (119); Frederick O. Waage, “Social Themes in Urban Broadside of Renaissance England”, *ibid.* 11 (1977) 730-42 (735).

⁸⁷ Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women* (30); Clark, *Women and Crime* (21).

⁸⁸ Clark, *Women and Crime* (4-6).

⁸⁹ Patricia Fumerton, “*Mocking Aristocratic Place: The Perspective of the Streets*” <http://emc.eserver.org/1-7/fumerton.html> [Accessed 12/6/2012].

⁹⁰ The sacrifice of Isaac, with Abraham halted at the moment of execution, appeared frequently in early modern homes. Hamling writes that it “occurs more often than any other biblical image; it can be found in all decorative media across most geographical areas and in houses of varying status.” (Tara Hamling, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) (240).)

Image redacted for copyright reasons

The shock of images. This illustration appeared in several ballads,⁹¹ with banderoles of varying ribaldry. Here the wording implies rape or seduction. This ballad actually describes male impotency, constructing the man as an object of scorn and emphasising women's sexual desire.

Theatre was similarly vilified, and criticised by writers such as John Northbrooke, Phillip Stubbes and Stephen Gosson who variously argued that it encouraged idleness, challenged ideas about social place, thwarted beliefs about correct apparel, and was not truthful.⁹² In 1580 Anthony Munday wrote:

Al[I] other evils pollute the doers onlie, not the beholders, or the hearers. [...] Onlie the filthines of plaies and spectacles is such as maketh both the actors & beholders giltie alike.⁹³

Plays received contempt in their written form as well as in performance. Thomas Bodley banned them from his new Oxford library, categorising them with other ephemera and dismissing them as “idle bookes & riffe raffes”.⁹⁴

Of course, there were differences between street literature and theatre too. Unlike commercial theatre, ballads could be performed by women.⁹⁵ They continued to

⁹¹ B.S., *The Mourning Conquest* (1674-1679); See also: Anon, *The crost Couple* (1674-1679); Anon, *Loves Captivity and Liberty* (1674-1679); Anon, *The Ranting Whore's Resolution* (1672); Anon, *The Knight and the Beggar-Wench* (1678-1680).

⁹² Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994) (22-46).

⁹³ Anthony Munday, *A second and third blast or retrait from plaies and Theaters* (1580) (3).

⁹⁴ G.W. Wheeler, ed. *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley to Thomas James, First Keeper of the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926) (219).

⁹⁵ Clark, *Women and Crime* (77).

thrive during the Commonwealth in printed form, though performance was forbidden.⁹⁶ Unlike plays, pamphlets and ballads categorically claimed “truth” though, as Clark points out, often this is dubious.⁹⁷ Yet, beyond the dominance of the narrative, street literature reveals how people lived from day to day, with incidental detail revealing aspects of marriage, women as workers, and neighbourly relationships.

Among this everyday detail were tales of murdered infants. They were not great in number, but as Wrightson suggests, we should not expect a correlation between the crime’s frequency and concern about it. Dolan writes of the paucity of representations that it was “as if there is not much of a story in it”.⁹⁸ Clark also notes that “only unusual crimes were saleable commodities,”⁹⁹ describing infanticide by single women as “all too mundane” and later adding “the indigent unmarried mother who kills her newborn infant [...] seems at this time to have no story to be told”.¹⁰⁰ Such tales do exist in the pamphlets concerning Jane Hattersley, Martha Scambler, and in the ballad *No Naturall Mother*, as the following chapters will show, but they are rare.¹⁰¹ This lack of narratives is remarkable – another lacuna in the study of infanticide, for which I will suggest possible reasons in Chapter 2. It is similarly surprising that there was no vocabulary with which to discuss the subject. As we have seen, there was no early modern term for infanticide, or for those who committed it. This invited the appending of adjectives, such as monstrous, bloody or unnatural, to the term “mother”. Nor was there a term for the mothers of bastard infants, though “bastard bearer” is used in academic discourse. Early modern writers resorted to terms of abuse: strumpet or whore. There is nothing equivalent for the fathers of the children, who are more commonly described with phrases such as “begetting a bastard upon the body of” moving the focus from the man to the teeming female body. Nor are there any terms for the parents jointly,¹⁰² a lack which emphasises their not being a couple, though they might well be betrothed, as

⁹⁶ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed. *A Pepysian Garland: Black-letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595-1639* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922) (ix).

⁹⁷ Clark, *Women and Crime* (ix).

⁹⁸ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (132).

⁹⁹ Clark, *Women and Crime* (ix).

¹⁰⁰ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (36, 182).

¹⁰¹ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by Kinde* (1614); Brewer, *Bloudy Mother*; Martin Parker, *No Naturall Mother, but a Monster* (1634).

¹⁰² The one example I found, which follows an apocryphal account of new-born murder, and suggests how hard it is to assess the frequency of infanticide, as discussed below. “How common it is for the Bastard-getter and Bastard-bearer, to consent together to murder their Children, will be better known at the day of Judgement”. John Bunyan, “The Life and Death of Mr Badman”, (1680) (86).

discussed in Chapter 3, resulting in them being guilty of such crimes as “carnall copulation before marriage”. Such absences are notable bearing in mind the preoccupation with bastardy.

While there were few literary representations of infanticide by unmarried women, my research also covers works in which the narratives approach the subject. They include direct threats to infants, as in *The Winter’s Tale* and *Titus Andronicus*, and ballads such as *The Witty Western Lasse* which raises questions about an infant’s fate. I will look at works in which infant death fleets by in violent imagery. My aim has been to avoid seeing those who killed only in relation to the crime. I therefore consider single women’s lives before the crime and their alternative lives as bastard bearers.

Using a dual approach

The lacunae in historical sources allow literature to demonstrate its enlightening abilities. It provides some answers to questions raised by archival sources and invites different ways of perceiving events. Yet combining literary and historical sources has caused consternation in some disciplines. In his defence of the practice, Ralph Hanna III states that the division goes back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and Plato’s objection to poetry because it was a mere imitation of reality.¹⁰³ Sharpe, who includes pamphlets in his study of domestic homicide, clarifies the problem after a vehement attack on the sloppy practice of some historians:

Imaginative literature is imaginative literature: it can be used to illustrate past attitudes or preoccupations, but it should not be confused with historical fact.¹⁰⁴

Injudicious use of archival accounts is also problematic, as in the case of G.R. Quaife’s highly selective examination of Somerset archives which has been widely criticised, including by Paul Griffiths who describes it as representing a society in which people “frolicked whenever opportunity beckoned”.¹⁰⁵ My decision to concentrate on cases from a specific period and location is partly to avoid a biased

¹⁰³ Ralph Hanna III, “Brewing Trouble: On Literature and History – and Alewives” in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 1-17.

¹⁰⁴ Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England* (13).

¹⁰⁵ G.R. Quaife, *Wanton Wenches and Wayward Wives: Peasants and Illicit Sex in Early Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Griffiths, *Youth and Authority* (237).

approach, and also to permit comprehensive attention to the diverse cases they encompass.

Literary scholars value history as a tool for contextualising their criticism and placing discussion within the historical moment. The approach avoids anachronistic interpretations and, as Michael Neill points out, literature can reveal aspects of history which might otherwise be concealed. He writes:

these texts are dense with [...] information about the society and culture to which they belonged – information that may sometimes be directly related to conscious authorial intention but that often found its way more or less unconsciously into the work because it was integral to the world the writers inhabited, inscribed in the very language by which they knew it. It is this that makes literary texts [...] among the richest historical repositories that we possess [...] because they are unfailingly sensitive registers of social attitudes and assumptions, fears and desires.¹⁰⁶

Neill's opinion echoes that of John Selden who wrote: "More solid things do not show the complexion of the times so well as ballads and libels".¹⁰⁷

For the purpose of this study, the richer the range of sources, the clearer our understanding can become, particularly as much information was never recorded or is lost. Although archives and creative literature have become divided, both grew out of the same culture and, despite their different aims, attempted to record it. As a result, they share many characteristics. Both the literary and the historical sources are narrative and largely formulaic in construction. Sometimes they described the same events. Sussex Coroners' records include the case of Ralph Mepham's murder of his wife. It is more fully described in a pamphlet which reveals that the killing was witnessed by their five-year-old son, whose evidence helped to condemn Mepham.¹⁰⁸

Despite their "factual" nature, archival sources contain fictions. Historian Malcolm Gaskill's study of depositions (which have not survived for the Sussex cases on which my research is based) suggests that they confirmed community convictions about guilt, and conformed to conventions of storytelling.¹⁰⁹ He notes that they share motifs with their fictional counterparts and that evidence was often manufactured, and, as Gowing notes, by the time people told their stories to the courts, they would have

¹⁰⁶ Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) (3).

¹⁰⁷ John Selden, *Table-talk, being discourses of John Selden Esq* (1696) (93).

¹⁰⁸ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (118 #447); Anon, *A most horrible & detestable Murther* (1595).

¹⁰⁹ Gaskill, "Reporting Murder". See also Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

told them before.¹¹⁰ Coroners' records which, as the accounts closest to the death, should be less sullied by rumour and conspiracy, have inconsistencies in dates, names, and marital status. Carrie Smith believes they may be more reliable than other records because inquests were held within the community and dealt with people who knew each other.¹¹¹ Yet in a paper on the reliability of inquisitions, Hunnisett argues that they can "seldom be taken at their face value" and refers to their "haphazard mixture of fact, fiction, and error".¹¹² He points out that they contain information which could not have been provided by the jurors, that inaccuracies were caused by copying, and that they had a highly stylized form. Importantly, he states "in many inquisitions the facts were made to fit into stereotyped patterns". Smith warns: "Those concerning the deaths of children should perhaps be treated with particular caution" because of the difficulty of differentiating accident and intent.¹¹³

On the subject of combining literature and history Griffiths writes "the pamphlet, ballad or play must adopt a supporting role to the court book".¹¹⁴ However, rather than using literature as a "support", I use it to provide a viewpoint on infanticide which was contemporary and readily available to early modern readers and playgoers and which allows a fuller understanding of infanticide and its representation by early modern writers than would be achieved by using fewer sources.

Secondary sources

States of being

Some of the secondary sources used in this research might be anticipated. These include those related to the law (on marriage, bastardy, punishment), those related to medicine (the female body, contraception, pregnancy) and those related to religious beliefs (birth customs, prejudices, ensoulment). The specifics of these will be discussed at the appropriate place in the text. Less expected sources, including modern clinical

¹¹⁰ Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: women, touch and power in seventeenth-century England* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003) (14).

¹¹¹ Smith, "Medieval Coroners' Rolls" (115).

¹¹² R.F. Hunnisett, "The Reliability of Inquisitions as Historical Evidence" in *The Study of Medieval Records*, ed. D.A. Bullough and R.L. Storey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 206-234 (206, 227).

¹¹³ Smith, "Medieval Coroners' Rolls" (108).

¹¹⁴ Paul Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London", *Continuity and Change*, 8.1 (1993) 39-63 (53).

psychiatry, psychology, and anthropological ideas about ritual and liminality, are introduced briefly below.

Unhappy minds

Although today the killing of very young infants is widely associated with perinatal trauma or post-natal depression, these possibilities are seldom discussed in detail in academic discourse about early modern infanticide, possibly because the perpetrators cannot be clinically investigated. However, in his defence of the use of psychoanalysis in the study of history, Peter Gay repudiates the argument that “you cannot psychoanalyse the dead”. Its use, he states, contributes to understanding sensitively the thoughts, deeds, sayings, actions, and suffering of people in past centuries. Failure to recognise this, he adds, means that arguments can fall short of full elucidation and questions are not asked which could improve understanding.¹¹⁵

This interaction between mental states and action is acknowledged by some writers on infanticide. Wrightson, for example, states that “hurling of a child into a fire or to the ground may suggest infanticide while the state of the mother’s mind was disturbed”.¹¹⁶ Others refer to “mental disorder”, “disturbed subjectivity”, and “exceptional mental conditions”.¹¹⁷ My study delves more deeply into this subject by calling on psychiatry (as the study of mental illnesses), psychology (as the functioning of the brain in relation to behaviour), and research by psychoanalysts who have listened to those who have killed, or been tempted to kill, their children.

I believe these disciplines can provide us with a more rounded view of early modern infanticide. However like Sharpe, who warns against treating literature as an historical source, Gay emphasises that psychoanalysis should be used with as much care and precision as any other analytical tool. He adds that psychiatry cannot have the precision of other disciplines, stating that people are complex, “buffeted by conflict, ambivalent in their emotions [...]. Human feelings and actions are highly overdetermined, bound to have several causes and contain several meanings”.¹¹⁸ However, without its use we lose what Peter Loewenberg describes as the “dynamic

¹¹⁵ Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: OUP, 1985) (10).

¹¹⁶ Keith Wrightson, “Infanticide in Earlier Seventeenth-Century England”, *Local Population Studies*, 15 (1975) 10-22.

¹¹⁷ Clark, *Women and Crime* (182); Gowing, “Secret Births” (88).

¹¹⁸ Gay, *Freud* (75).

interaction of character, society, and human thought and action,”¹¹⁹ adding that we need to acknowledge the “existence of the non-rational and the irrational in history” and the “emotional and unconscious basis” of thought and action.

The basis of Freud’s theories concerning sexual, egoistic and death instincts – the energies to perpetuate the human race, to protect the individual and to destroy – is a sound starting-point for understanding infanticide. It is a crime in which the conflict between these instincts can be clearly imagined, and the outcome, according to which instinct dominates, can be clearly seen. It shows what Gay refers to as “man’s fundamental and ineradicable ambivalence – the often unresolvable co-existence of love and hatred”.¹²⁰ Seen from the perspective of psychoanalysis, the outcome of any situation (for the current study, say a sixteenth-century bastard birth) is not a straightforward question of self-interests such as shame and fear. In Gay’s words the outcome “may stem from erotic or aggressive drives in search of amorous targets or hapless victims, [...] [or] an attempt to keep anxiety at bay [...] or a mixture of both”.¹²¹

These ideas will permeate this research, particularly work by Theresa Porter and Helen Gavin, psychologists who have examined the illegal killing of newborns, infants and young children. For a review of the last forty years’ research they draw on publications from the fields of crime and the law, and medicine and mental health, as well as their own field.¹²² Their findings reveal that there are remarkable similarities between early modern and subsequent cases including the social profile of the killers, and the methods they use. This contributes to the impression of a shared psychological/emotional orientation across the centuries, despite historical and social differences.

Liminal and marginal states

I have mentioned that a study of infanticide is inevitably troubled by gaps and voids. This thesis suggests that these can be illuminated by theories related to liminality.

¹¹⁹ Peter Loewenberg, *Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach* (Brunswick: Transaction, 1996) (14).

¹²⁰ Gay, *Freud* (100).

¹²¹ *ibid.* (110).

¹²² Theresa Porter and Helen Gavin, “Infanticide and Neonaticide: A Review of 40 Years of Research Literature on Incidence and Causes”, *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 11.3 (2010) 99-112.

The concept of liminality began to be defined a century ago with the work of social anthropologist Arnold van Gennep.¹²³ Studying small-scale, pre-literate societies he recognised that communities, places and individuals have edges or limits and that the passage from one to another, such as crossing a geographic border or progressing from puberty to adulthood, is frequently marked by ceremony or rites. He identified such rites as acts of separation from a previous world (preliminal rites); rites conducted during a transitional stage (liminal or threshold rites) and ceremonies of incorporation into the new world (postliminal rites). After the publication of his theories, van Gennep's work fell into obscurity for half a century but was rediscovered by another social anthropologist, Victor Turner, who, like van Gennep, looked at liminality as one step in a process.¹²⁴ Turner considered liminality as any "betwixt and between" situation and as a state, place and condition worthy of study for its own value. Both researchers' studies of small-scale communities concluded that liminality has defined points of entry and exit; it also has a "master of ceremonies" figure who has been through the ritual and can guide the liminal person through it. Turner also "tentatively suggested that a liminal state may become 'fixed'".¹²⁵ In a publication marking the centenary of van Gennep's far-reaching research, Bjørn Thomassen writes:

Turner realised that 'liminality' served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience.¹²⁶

In this it is connected to the psychological ideas mentioned above. Turner related his findings in small-scale communities to those with large scale structures including Hebrew, Christian, Swiss and court cultures, thus demonstrating the viability of applying the concept of liminality to areas beyond his original focus.¹²⁷ Introducing the 1977 edition of *The Ritual Process*, Turner summarised criticisms of his work as "overgeneralising" and "misapplying concepts" because concepts found in preliterate

¹²³ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: Chicago University, 1960).

¹²⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (New York: Aldine, 1969).

¹²⁵ Bjørn Thomassen, "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality", *International Political Anthropology*, 2.1 (2009) 5-27 (15).

¹²⁶ *ibid.* (14).

¹²⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970) (93).

societies had “limited use in explaining sociocultural systems of much greater scale and complexity”. He stated:

This book has been cited repeatedly by scholars in such diverse fields as history, the history of religions, English literature, political science, theology, and drama, as well as in anthropological and sociological books and articles concerned with ritual and semiotics.¹²⁸

Arpad Szakolczai re-articulates this:

The applicability of the term is wide, potentially “unlimited”. A claim recently voiced by anthropologists that it should be restricted to the narrow horizon of small-scale tribal societies where it was originally developed is not acceptable. Concepts are tools for research; they cannot be copyrighted by the discipline in which they were developed.¹²⁹

This research also draws, to a lesser extent, on ideas related to marginality, a separate concept sometimes treated as synonymous with liminality. According to Szakolczai, Michel Foucault “was interested in marginality in so far as marginal situations were at one and the same time liminal”.¹³⁰ Turner treats marginal and liminal as similar.¹³¹ Although, the concepts have become clearly distinguished, some inconsistency lingers. Manuel Aguirre et al. write:

Although these terms seem to be similar and have on occasion been used interchangeably, “liminality” designates a concept which, unlike “marginality” or “marginalisation”, necessarily suggests the existence of a second territory on the other side. A limen is a threshold between two spaces. If a border is viewed as the line, imaginary or real, which separates these two spaces, then the threshold is the opening which permits passage from one space to the other.¹³²

The many aspects of liminality and marginality which are relevant to infanticide in the early modern period will be discussed throughout this thesis. Sometimes, certain elements of these concepts are not relevant, or apply only in an adapted form. For example, liminality may not be part of a required progression, but a place (mental,

¹²⁸ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977) (vi).

¹²⁹ Arpad Szakolczai, “Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events”, *International Political Anthropology*, 2.1 (2009) 141-172 (165). For an account of applications of Turner’s theories, which also summarises criticisms of his ideas, see Graham St John, ed. *Victor Turner and Contemporary Cultural Performance* (New York: Berghahn, 2008). For recent applications of his theories to literature, see Kathleen M. Ashley, *Victor Turner and the Structure of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990); Roland L. Grimes, *Readings in Ritual Studies* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996).

¹³⁰ Arpad Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2000) (187).

¹³¹ Turner, *Ritual Process* (110).

¹³² Manuel Aguirre, Roberta Quance, and Philip Sutton, eds., *Margins and Thresholds: An Enquiry into the Concept of Liminality in Text Studies*, vol. I (Madrid: Gateway, 2000) (6).

physical or social) in which a person can find themselves, and the liminality discussed here may not have defined entry and exit points. There will sometimes be a “master of ceremonies” who acts as a guide. We also meet “trickster” figures who Szokolczai describes as “universal and very archaic” who “can suddenly become dangerous and take over”, in liminal situations “where certainties are lost, imitative behaviour escalates” so that they “can be mistaken for charismatic leaders”.¹³³ We meet these in Chapter 1 in the shadowy people who appear to encourage or enable infanticide.

By focussing on cases from a single county, together with literary representations, and using a range of disciplines to interrogate them, this research seeks to enrich our understanding of infanticide in early modern England. In my first chapter I look at representations of infanticide in literature and archives, examining the killers, the role of their communities, and those who may have been their accomplices.

¹³³ Szokolczai, “Liminality” (154).

Chapter 1: Killers, Communities, and Accomplices

I am a Damsel now defil'd,
and am exposd to open shame,
For here I find myself with Child,
and have no Father for the same¹

Introduction

In the introduction we saw that the law stipulated that those who committed infanticide were “lewd women”, who sought to “avoid their shame and to escape punishment” (p. 22 and Appendix 1). Much academic discourse continues this assumption, although some authors discuss the subject from the perspective of the body, or acknowledge the women’s possibly disturbed mental state. In this chapter I investigate the manner in which supposed perpetrators and motives are represented in early modern literature and in historical records described earlier, and examine the extent to which they reinforce or contradict the law’s assumptions. I will consider in turn representations of the killers, the extent to which the narratives are set within communities, and the role of third parties.

Literary writers appeared to take little interest in infanticide by single women, perhaps considering it “too mundane” and because there was “not much of a story in it”.² They wanted horror crimes and infant smotherings and drownings, the most frequent ways of killing, which Garthine Walker calls a form of “deadly embrace”, did not interest the market, whereas multiple killings, stabbings, or sudden changes in fortune were more likely to attract audiences. However, there are some literary representations of such cases, and many in the archives. In addition to these, in this chapter I will also briefly consider some infanticides by married women, a subject to which I will return in Chapter 5. The literary examples of infanticide by single women which we do have suggest that writers did not accept the moral certainties set down in law.

¹ Anon, *An Answer to the Bonny Scot* (1672-1696).

² Clark, *Women and Crime* (36); Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (132).

Naomi J. Miller writes that pamphlets “eulogized or condemned individual women”.³ However, I will show that authors of street literature were ambivalent about women who killed infants. They vacillate between vilifying them and empathising with them, sometimes within the same document, as in the pamphlets about Martha Scambler and Jane Hattersley.⁴ They employed a variety of means in describing the women, taking the narratives beyond the account they are writing by making associations with beliefs about monstrosity, or the non-human. In addition to works in which infants are killed, I will consider those in which unmarried, pregnant women sing woefully of their situation, such as *The Witty Westerne Lasse*, which shows the blurred line between acknowledging and denying pregnancy.⁵ The danger of infanticide lurks in the background of such narratives.

I will also show that in street literature and historical accounts, infanticide is described as taking place within communities of families, neighbours and friends, directly or indirectly apportioning some of the blame to them, as in the case of Jane Hattersley.⁶ It is clear that communities overlooked their suspicions of pregnancy and the possibility of a woman committing the crime, as in the case of Mary Cook.⁷

Finally, I will demonstrate that literary and archival accounts show that third parties gave women encouragement or practical assistance in the killing and were thus partly culpable. Such narratives contain a great deal of uncertainty but reinforce the idea that the heavy focus on single women as perpetrators distorts our understanding of infanticide in this period.

The killers: “woemen I cannot call them”

The sensational titles and dramatic title pages of ballads and pamphlets emphasise the unnaturalness of child killing and the texts often describe the women in terms of animality and monstrosity. Yet writers also show compassion for women who killed infants, as in *Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by Kinde* and *The Bloudy*

³ Naomi J. Miller, *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996) (70).

⁴ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*; Brewer, *Bloudy Mother*.

⁵ Guy, *Witty Westerne Lasse*. This mental state, widely termed pregnancy denial and recognised as contributing to infanticide, is discussed in Chapter 2.

⁶ Brewer, *Bloudy Mother*.

⁷ N. Partridge and J. Sharp, *Blood for Blood* (1670).

Mother, discussed below.⁸ Some authors casually dismiss infanticide, using it as a springboard for discussing women's other crimes such as husband murder or heretical religion, or killers' difficulty in arriving at a state of true contrition. Close reading suggests that writers avoided outright vilification, favouring more nuanced approaches.

The animal and the monstrous

No Naturall Mother is a mournful and movingly simple tale, sung posthumously by Besse who, "Like to a dying Swan / pensively, pensively" tells us that she was carefully reared before being "put to service". She acknowledges that her "carriage was too wild" and when she was "got with child" the "father on't fled" but, she believes, she manages to conceal her changing shape.⁹ She gives birth easily, outdoors and alone, and hides the child in straw where it dies. When the crime is revealed, Besse is tried and hanged.

The intimate first-person narrative reduces the scope to criticise the wrong-doer and when Besse sings "it was smother'd" the author partially disassociates her from the killing. Instead he focuses on Besse's self-recrimination and regret. She sings of her shame and compares herself negatively to animals who care for their young: "The Tyger [...] is wondrous tender / And loving to her young [...] And can a womans heart / [...] So willingly depart / from her own baby". Whereas in other works discussed below authors use damning animal comparisons when writing about child killers, in *No Naturall Mother* animals are an aspect of Besse's self-understanding, adding weight to her contrition and her warning to "sweet maidens" not to add murder to the act of fornication. The tone of the narrative, and the ambiguity surrounding the child's death, are far removed from the law's assumption that infanticide was committed by "lewd women" with studied motives (Appendix 1). Instead the ballad gives a sense of the bewilderment of women who found themselves in Besse's situation.

Whereas Besse's narrative belies the ballad's title, *Deeds against Nature and Monsters by Kind*, about the purportedly true case of Martha Scambler, does not. The author's fluctuation between damning and sympathetic representations suggests an

⁸ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*; Brewer, *Bloudy Mother*.

⁹ Parker, *No Naturall Mother*.

ambivalent attitude toward the killer.¹⁰ The pamphlet describes Martha's "delighting in shame and sin", her concealed pregnancy, lone childbirth, the infant's murder, the disposal of the body and its discovery, followed by her trial and sentence. Martha's monstrosity is emphasised by the fact that her story is one of two "deeds against nature" recounted in this pamphlet. The other, the tale of a blasphemous, drunken "deformed creature, an unperfect wretch wanting the right shape and limbes of a man" is unequivocal in its attitude to the man's murder of his equally disreputable "strumpet". He is "a Monster by kinde and the dooer of a deed against nature". His physical deformity suggests monstrosity as a warning sign from God although, as Kathryn M. Brammell points out, by the mid sixteenth century, the term became focussed on monstrous behaviour.¹¹ Both ideas are present in the representation of this killer.

The term is similarly applied to Martha. The ballad begins by describing her as a "lascivious young damsel", one of the "murderous minded strumpets" and a "lewd and close strumpet". She and others like her are unworthy of their own womanhood: "woemen I cannot call them".¹² Like Besse who thought herself less worthy than snakes and tigers, Martha Scambler is repeatedly referred to in animal terms.¹³ Such merging of the human and animal was a component of early modern beliefs and imagination. Keith Thomas states that some considered women to be in a near-animal state, and mentions a semi-frivolous debate about whether women (and animals) had souls, which was "sometimes echoed at popular level".¹⁴ He states that "common people" were portrayed as animals who needed to be forcibly restrained, lust was thought to make men like animals, and gynaecologists emphasised the animal aspects of childbearing. Thus, the non-elite, lustful woman who gave birth was already approaching animal status, which pamphleteers drew on in their descriptions of women suspected of infanticide. Martha is "more savage than a she-wolf" and "more unnatural than bird or beast". Most street literature comparisons are with wild and savage animals rather than farm or domestic creatures – tigers, lions, serpents, wolves – creatures which

¹⁰ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*.

¹¹ Kathryn M. Brammell, "Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27.1 (1996) 3-21 (6).

¹² The gender ambiguity of those who kill infants is considered in Chapter 5.

¹³ The use of the animal and monstrous is discussed further in the next chapter.

¹⁴ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1983) (43).

are in themselves alien and dangerous and live in opposition to humans rather than in harmony with them. Some women possess a particular animal quality, such as Annis Dell whose killing of one child and brutal mutilation of another is promoted by avarice.¹⁵ The pamphlet states:

like birds, who greedily flye to pecke up the corne till they be caught in the ginne: or like fishes, who earnestly swimme to catch the baite, though they be choakt with the hooke: so doe many, how indirectly soever, hunt after riches.

The animal merges with the monster (defined by the OED as “a rapacious person; an extortioner; one who preys upon society”). Frequently the connection is figurative or metaphorical: the woman *becomes* the thing named. Martha Scambler *is* a “caterpillar of nature” – a low, creeping and consuming creature. The term is used by William Tyndale to describe “these begging fryers out of hell”,¹⁶ and Bolingbroke uses it to describe the king’s favourites in *Richard II*, both references suggesting those who corrupt and destroy society (2.3.164). Similarly Martha *is* a “monster of nature” and Jane Hattersley, who is discussed below, *is* a “Chimera, with a Lions upper-part in bouldnesse: a Goates middle part in lust: and a Serpents lower part in sting and poyson”

Gaskell’s research on forms of telling in archives and street literature shows that the “marvellous manifestations of Providence” which are a component of the murder genre, include corpses discovered by animals.¹⁷ (These are frequently dogs, whose association with the underworld I discuss in Chapter 2.) In the account of Martha Scambler’s crime, a dog which is thrown into a tunnel leads to the discovery of the child’s body. Annis Dell’s crime is discovered by men hunting with dogs:

when one of these dogges having scented the child [...] [it] whined and cried [...] [and], wrought a desire in the men to know certainly the cause thereof, and with their long staves turning up the wéeds, found there a Boy to be drowned.¹⁸

The animal imagery might be expected to be strongest after Martha gives birth, but here the representation changes and becomes more sympathetic. Rather than being beast-like, Martha’s human feelings are emphasised. She fears the “disgrace of the world”, and being a “scandall to her acquaintance”. She considers her sin, her shame and her

¹⁵ Anon, *The most cruell and bloody murther* (1606), (2).

¹⁶ William Tyndale, *The whole workes of W. Tyndall, John Frith, and Doct. Barnes* (1536) (367).

¹⁷ Gaskell, “Reporting Murder” (6).

¹⁸ Anon, *Most cruell and bloody* (B3).

lost reputation, which cause “troubled cogitations”. It seems that for a time, the esteemed role of motherhood elevates her, but when it comes to the child’s destruction, she is again “not like a mother, but a monster”.

The “repentance” to readers which ends the pamphlet reverts to Martha’s human qualities and, now in her own voice and in verse, she considers her sin, her “stained credit” and loss of good name, the shame to her friends, and the world’s disgrace. While the “repentance” is clearly related to the tradition of female complaint¹⁹ and the self-analysis of wrong doers described in *A Myrrour for Magistrates*,²⁰ it is hard to account for the use of verse. It seems a direct line to her thoughts, but also draws on popular association between poetry and feigning.²¹ It may suggest that her remorse has elevated her, or could simply be a device to make the story more literary and powerful, and gives resonance and memorability to her closing advice:

Both maides and men, both yong and old
Let not good lives with shame be sold
But beare true vertues to your grave
That honest burials you may have.²²

This reference to “honest burial” sets up a contrast to the “indecent grave” of Martha’s infant and echoes the closing sentiments of the main narrative where, in a sudden switch of tone and concerns, the author addresses his readers with a short prayer: “convert us God of Israel, so that we never be endangered with the like perswasion, which God in his mercy grant: Amen”.²³ The use of verse and reference to the “honest burial” which Martha will lack change the pamphlet’s tone from vilification to compassion. We are no longer invited to see Martha as a strumpet with animal characteristics, but to pity her as a tragic figure.

The animal is also an aspect of the 1616 pamphlet *A pittillesse Mother* which concerns Margret (*sic*) Vincent, a married woman who, after converting to Catholicism,

¹⁹ John Kerrigan, ed. *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and ‘Female Complaint’* (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

²⁰ William Baldwin, *A myrrour for magistrates* (1563).

²¹ See for example *Twelfth Night* (I.v.186); *As You Like It* (III.iii.16)

²² Anon, *Deeds Against Nature* (2Bv). Those sentenced to death were buried in the churchyard of the parish in which the gaol stood, whereas suicides were to be buried at crossroads with a stake through the heart (Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual* (London: Croom Helm, 1984) (72).)

Gittings writes that Christian burial was only denied to those guilty of treason. *Ibid.* (67). However, evidence discussed in Chapter 3 (p. 93) suggests otherwise.

²³ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature* (A4, A2v).

kills her children because her husband will not allow them to join her in her adopted religion. She then attempts to kill herself.²⁴ The description of Margret emphasises the vile influence of Catholicism, an aspect of the work which I discuss below (p. 73).

Here, I focus on her animality.

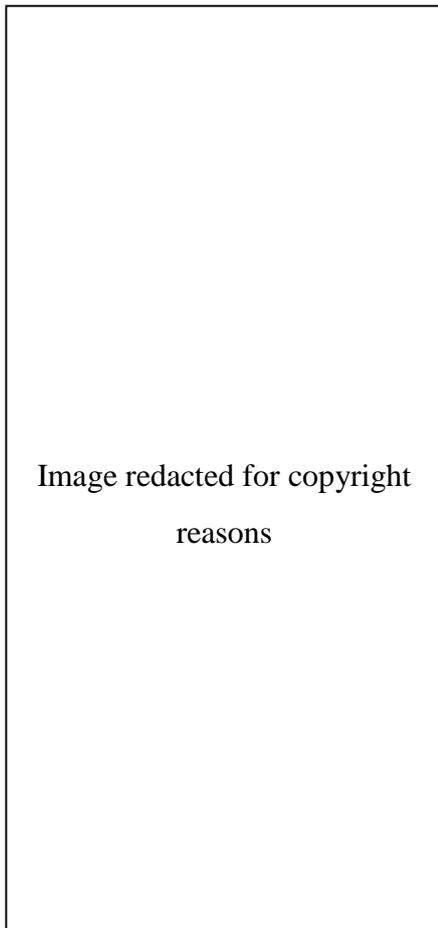
As Margret approaches the killings she is “deserving no name of Gentlewoman” and later she is “this Creature not deserving Mothers name”. Name or title is something you deserve, and like Martha Scambler and other child killers, Margret deserves animal names. She is “more cruell then the Viper, the invenomd Serpent, the Snake, or any Beast whatsoever”, the allusion linking her with mankind’s fall in Eden. The writer also links Margret with cannibalism, though not suggesting that she is guilty of it. The idea of same-species consumption begins with the mention of the “Pellican that pecks her owne brest”, the nurturing image which Margret so clearly fails to emulate (see Chapter 5).²⁵ After the first killing she becomes “This Creature [...] not yet gluttred, nor sufficed with these few drops of Innocent blood”. Later the author writes:

the Caniballs that eat one another will spare the fruits of their owne bodies, the Savages will doe the like, yea every beast and fowle hath a feeling of nature, and according to kinde will cherish their young ones [...] and shall woman, nay a Christian woman [...] be more unnaturall then Pagan, Caniball, Sauvage, Beast of Fowle.

For some readers this passage would have evoked established literary and artistic associations between cannibalism and infanticide. The Roman myth of Saturn devouring his children to prevent fulfilment of the prophecy that his son would overthrow him was popular with Renaissance and early modern artists. It was represented in paintings, drawings, statues and even Tarot cards, with differing levels of horror, in works including a sculpture by Agosino de Duccio (1449-56), and engravings by Heinrich Aldegrever (1533), and Philips Galle (1585). Later works by Gianbattista Tiepolo (1745) and Francisco Goya (1820-23) demonstrate continued interest in this link between child destruction and cannibalism.

²⁴ Anon, *A pittillesse Mother* (1616).

²⁵ The pelican was a symbol of Christian piety as it was believed that it nourished its young with its own blood by pecking its breast. The myth is depicted on the title page of the King James bible (1611).



Left: Rubens: Saturn Devouring his Son (1636); Right: Aldegrever: Saturn (Engraving, 1533)

People talk of cannibalism in both comedies and tragedies, where, normally in a repressed form, it is frequently expressed within a discourse of revenge.²⁶ Lear's rejection of Cordelia states that:

The barbarous Scythian,
Or he that makes his generation messes
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
Be as well neighbored, pitied and relieved,
As thou my sometime daughter. (I.i.116)

The reference is a double play on the Saturn association: like Saturn, Lear attempts to destroy his child, but like Saturn's children, Goneril and Regan wish to displace him.

²⁶ Raymond J. Rice, "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 44.2 (2004) 297-316 (297).

A range of beliefs concerned the consumption and efficacious use of babies' bodies. Some believed the bodies of unbaptised infants were medically valuable. Documents from fifteenth-century France describe a midwife who was asked to obtain such a body to cure a Lord's leprosy.²⁷ Infants' bodies appear in plays concerning witchcraft. The brew in *Macbeth* includes "Finger of birth-strangled-babe / Ditch-deliver'd by a drab" (IV.i.30). In *The Witch*, Hecate gives Stadlin the child's body: "There, take this unbaptised brat; / Boil it well, preserve the fat", the on-stage embodiment of the child implying truth and emphasising horror.²⁸ These literary examples attest to fears and suspicions, rather than proof of an extant belief, and draw on the ideas of works such as *Malleus Maleficarum* and Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*.²⁹

Corpse medicine and cannibalism constructed as "other" those who did not adhere to society's conventions and beliefs.³⁰ Sussex legends include the story of an ogre who devoured babies: he was a Cavalier and said to have had a baby's arm in his pocket when he died.³¹ He is one of four Sussex ogres believed to have consumed infants during this period, and they were all Catholic, the belief in transubstantiation being easily distorted to create the idea. Though these tales may have been no more than stories told to children to prevent them wandering far from home, Jacqueline Simpson suggests that they reflect "the deep religious and political hatreds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries".³² Such infant-related beliefs were part of early modern minds and imaginations, which authors adopted. The representation of Margret Vincent as a "tygress" who kills the first of her children but is left "ungluttet", and her association with cannibals, invokes these religious, artistic, literary and folkloric traditions.

The closing paragraph of the account of Margret's life and fall tells us to "forgive her and forget her". We are not expected either to mourn the dead children or

²⁷ The documents relating to Perrette the Midwife are dealt with in detail in T.R. Forbes, *The Midwife and the Witch* (New Haven: Yale University, 1966) (133).

²⁸ Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. Elizabeth Schafer (London: A&C Black, 1994) (I.ii.18).

²⁹ Anon, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1490) (Part 1, Question XI); Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) (25).

³⁰ See James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) (102-109).

³¹ Jacqueline Simpson, *Folklore of Sussex* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002) (29).

³² *ibid.*

to pity Margret's spouse, although he courageously adhered to his faith at terrible cost.³³ Despite the pamphlet's title which describes an account of "*A pittillesse Mother That most unnaturally at one time, murdered two of her owne Children*", the killings are a foundation from which the writer can build his anti-Catholic argument.

Thomas Brewer's 1609 pamphlet *The Bloody Mother* describes multiple infanticides in East Grinstead, Sussex.³⁴ It concerns the relationship between Adam Adamson and his maidservant, Jane Hattersley, of which Adamson's wife appears to be totally ignorant. Jane carries and bears his children in secret, kills them and conceals the bodies. Brewer's emphasis on Adamson as Jane's helper, and the frequent mentions of the communities in which the crimes took place, make *The Bloody Mother* relevant to all the present themes. Here I suggest that Brewer considers Adamson more responsible for the crime than Jane. While she is described in animal terms, he is punished with illness and a disfiguring disease which turns him into a monstrous figure.

Jane is initially described as a "strumpet", a woman who controls her master and whose attempts to murder her mistress fail only because they were "most strangely and admirably frustrated". She is an "unnatural mother" and a "common and impudent bastard-bearer" with a "hart of steele and eies of marble". This is characteristic of descriptions of women who killed. Randall Martin states that writers of street literature "frame the murder actions as unquestionably wicked" and "impugn woman's character as deeply reprobate". But, as we shall see, Brewer changes his attitude.³⁵ By contrast, Adamson is introduced as a man "in good account and reconing amongst his neighbours", but with a "shew of honestie and good dealing, he covered a masse of dishonest and putrified cogitations". With each pregnancy, and at each step in the account, it is Adamson who receives Brewer's opprobrium, with Jane gradually depicted as his victim. He promises Jane marriage after his wife dies, but when Jane becomes pregnant he denies that the child is his. He resumes their relationship after the first infanticide, and when Jane gives birth to and kills a second child he buries it, and likewise the third. When he sells the orchard where the infants are hidden he instructs

³³ Miller suggests that the pamphlet has an embedded implication that the tragedy stems partially from Margret's attempt to control her husband. Miller, *Changing the Subject* (71).

³⁴ Brewer, *Bloody Mother*.

³⁵ Randall Martin, "Introductory Note" in *Women and Murder in Early Modern News Pamphlets and Broadside Ballads 1573-1697* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) xi-xxii (xiii).

the purchaser not to “digg neere the Box tree” which leads to their discovery. After he and Jane are imprisoned he instructs her that if she denies his involvement and does not claim to be innocent herself, he will obtain a pardon. He does not, but expecting a reprieve Jane does not confess or appear contrite. Instead, she appears “stout and fearelesse”, a demeanour which would have confirmed her guilt, and she is hanged. The pamphlet moves from depicting Jane as the principal wrong-doer and manipulator, to casting Adamson in that role. As it becomes clear that Adamson does not plan to keep his word, but that she does, the passages describing her continued hope, even when the noose is around her neck, suggest some sympathy: her heart begins to fail and the former “strumpet” becomes a “simple wench”.

Brewer’s portrayal of Adamson as the principal wrongdoer is emphasised by his description of his death, in contrast to his apparent compassion for Jane. Though not punished by earthly law, Adamson is punished by heavenly law which inscribes his true nature on his body. Unlike Jane, who was able to disguise the physical signs of her guilty pregnancy with “loose lacing, tucking, and other odde tricks”,³⁶ Adamson’s body displays his sin. It is repulsively and sensationally described, and he becomes monstrous. He is so “greevously tormented” by worms and lice that his neighbours cannot bear to see him: “So loathsome a savour came from his body, that those that went to see him could not stand to give their eyes satisfaction, for the greevous and odious strength of it”. Adamson, whose “putrified cogitations” were mentioned earlier in the pamphlet, now suffers the punishment of his body putrefying in front of his neighbours. The account indicates that God inflicts bodily punishment on sinners before death as well as after, thus making them earthly representations of the fate that awaits others should they commit similar crimes.

Such punishments fulfil contemporary expectations of a concordance between the body and the soul, and the inner self being visible on the outer self. The science of physiognomy which studied the visibility of the person in the body, though principally perceived as a means of self-knowledge and self-improvement, was also “the most basic, primary mechanism through which the dynamic of most ‘face-to-face’ encounters

³⁶ Brewer, *Bloudy Mother* (A4v).

in early modern Europe was mediated and regulated”.³⁷ Yet the prospect that people could appear to be what they were not was recognised: “Nature with a beauteous wall / Doth oft close in pollution” Viola tells the sea Captain in *Twelfth Night* (I.iii.44). That Jane Hattersley and Adamson could be such whited sepulchres was a further endorsement of this lack of concordance. Jane’s pregnancy, though disguised, was a bodily signifier of her sin, and Adamson’s crime must become written on his body. As Robert Elbaz says of the castration and stoning of Abelard, this is “the materiality of the body as the inscribed sign of pure difference – the marking or branding of human flesh as the locus of marginality”.³⁸ Compared to the ultimately compassionate account of Jane’s death, the repeated references to Adamson’s crimes, and the implication that his spirit will not be allowed to rest, suggest that Brewer wants his readers to find Adamson, rather than Jane, the more guilty of the deaths.

We have seen that authors describe those involved in infanticide both as evil wrong-doers, and as innocents who kill due to the influences or circumstances which befall them. Such representations indicate the range of motives which could exist, and suggest understanding of the complex nature of the crime, and uncertainty about how those who committed infanticide should be treated. This is similarly seen in Coroners’ inquests and trial outcomes, which suggest that juries were unsure how to treat a mother who appeared to have murdered her newborn. The non-survival of evidential information, such as depositions, which may have recorded essential differences between what appear to be identical cases, may be why almost identical cases can have very different outcomes. For example, on 11th May 1600 Sibyl Lamboll, spinster:

gave birth to a live female child at Chichester and afterward on the same day murdered her at Chichester, violently strangling her with both hands whence she immediately died. No one else was privy to her crime.³⁹

Two months later, Joan Ambrey, spinster, also gave birth to a live female child, about twenty miles away in Westbourne and:

³⁷ Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: The Art of Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) (322).

³⁸ Robert Elbaz, *The Changing Nature of the Self: A Critical Study of the Autobiographic Discourse* (London: Croom Helm, 1988) (58).

³⁹ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (133 #538).

the same day she murdered her violently twisting and breaking her neck with both hands of which she immediately died.⁴⁰

Both women were sent to gaol by Adrian Stoughton J.P, and when they appeared at the Assize, they both pleaded not guilty. Sibyl Lamboll's child was found to have died a natural death; Joan Ambrey was convicted and sentenced to be hanged. The only known difference between the cases is that Sibyl is recorded as not having fled while no mention is made of Joan's subsequent action. The cases, close to each other in both time and place, suggest the ambivalence which existed in contemporary minds about infanticide. Although missing evidence may explain the different outcomes of the two cases, they nevertheless suggest the lack of clarity of conscience when dealing with those who committed infanticide (as discussed on p. 77).

Infanticide as incidental detail

Some works treat infanticide as incidental information, suggesting indifference to the crime. John Horn's *The efficacy of the true balme* concerns Rose Warnes, a poor married woman, who was tried and sentenced to death "upon strong presumption of her murder of her infant".⁴¹ Horn recounts Rose's decline from respectability, to failing to attend to her friends, to wanton company, a pattern which is typical in criminal accounts.⁴² He adds:

falling with child adulterously, and being delivered in secret, she caused it to be cast forth which God (in severity against her so hainious sinning, yet in mercy to her soul) would have come to light and there by brought her to shame and suffering. (A3)

Despite the existence of a husband and children, this work tells neither a tale of monstrous motherhood nor a family tragedy. The crime of which Rose is accused, and for which she is eventually hanged "upon strong presumption" is incidental to what appears to be Horn's main purpose which is to describe her decline from small errors to "hainious" sins, and his long but ultimately successful attempts to bring her to contrition. This is a confrontation between himself, as the force of good, and Rose, as

⁴⁰ *ibid.* (135 #544).

⁴¹ John Horn, *The efficacy of the true balme* (1669) (1).

⁴² Clark, *Women and Crime* (38).

the force of sin.⁴³ It is written in a voice of sadness during her repeated failure to arrive at true repentance, but also Horn's constant references to himself ("I went to see her", "I went another time to see her", "I told her"), show his perseverance. The work also abounds with Horn's self-satisfied pride: he is so pleased with his ultimate victory that he indulges in a punning epigram:

Rose Warne thy name was, oh that thou hadst been,
Rose Warned thou such mischiefs hadst not seen,
But being not Rose Warned by thy fall
Thou art Rose Warne a warning unto all. (G6, p.71)

In *Sundrye strange and inhumaine Murthers* the death of an infant, and possibly more than one, is of secondary importance. Mistress Padge, having been forced to marry against her will, hires men to kill her husband in connivance with her lover.⁴⁴ We learn that on the night of the murder:

Mistress Padge lay not then with her husband, by reason of the untimely birth of a child whereof she was newly delivered, the same being dead borne: upon which cause, she then kept her chamber, having before sworn that she would never beare child of his getting that should prosper; which argued a most ungodlye minde in the woman, for in that sort she had been the death of two of her own children. (B3)

This staggeringly casual comment is the author's only mention of infant death. What is he suggesting? Is he implying that loathing of her husband prompted her to kill her recently-born child and that others have been similarly treated? That the wife destroyed her husband's children by abortion, whether physically or by cursing them? Is the comment simply made to exaggerate her wickedness? The author's focus on the husband's murder certainly implies that multiple infant murders were less horrific crimes, suggesting that attitudes to infant life were ambivalent (See Chapter 2).

Ballads, pamphlets and archival accounts show that there were many ways of writing about infanticide and uncertainty about how to react to the perpetrators, to the extent that even within one work a writer could fluctuate between vilification and sympathy. Women who kill are described as animals and as monsters – the description of Besse giving birth alone and outdoors and leaving her child in the straw emphasises

⁴³ John Horn[e] was a deacon and priest who had refused the oath of uniformity in 1662 and was thereafter "ejected but tolerated." Sheila McIsaac Cooper, "Horne, John (bap. 1616, d. 1676)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP, 2004).

⁴⁴ Anon, *Sundrye strange and inhumaine Murthers* (1591).

this animality. Yet, Besse's beyond-the-grave narrative is sympathetic, Jane Hattersley becomes a "simple wench", and Martha Scambler suffers from "troubled cogitations". Statements of contrition were a feature of crime pamphlets, and extended to ballads about pregnant, abandoned women. In *The Bonny Brier* a "buxome Lasse", who is expecting the child of her betrothed who has been killed, sings:

What shall I doe, my shame I cannot hide,
my belly will be knowne
And all my friends and kin will me chide
for giving away mine owne.⁴⁵

Whether "mine owne" refers to her lost virginity or implies that she intends to abandon her child is unclear. *An Answer to the Bonny Scot*, which opened this chapter, also mentions the woman's shame.⁴⁶ Similarly, the woman in *Love without Lucke* is forsaken by her family and friends:

My friends despightfully,
have me forsaken:
Father, and Mother; All
Brothers and Sisters,
Lewd Strumpet doe me call.⁴⁷

As we have seen, Martha Scambler's narrative ends with her long "repentance" verse. Besse's narrative is an expression of regret and she warns others "Strive your selfe to free / from shame and slander". Under the heading of vilification, Margret Vincent gets little sympathy. Even after expressing contrition to the "Godly Preachers" we are to "forgive and forget her", though the dramatically illustrated pamphlet ensures we cannot (see p. 73). Contrition turns the sensational news of infant murder into moral lessons, and those who are condemned for infanticide are allowed to become teachers of the godly community.

Communities: "you might have hindred me from doing this"

This section examines the role of communities in street literature about infanticide, using "community" to include family, friends, neighbours and all those with whom a person came into contact. It considers the extent to which a community's

⁴⁵ Anon, *The Bonny Bryer* (c1623-61).

⁴⁶ Anon, *Answer to the Bonny*.

⁴⁷ Anon, *Love without Lucke, Or The Maidens Misfortune* (1631).

actions, or failure to act, enabled women to commit infanticide and shows that those who were close to the perpetrators allowed their suspicions to be overridden by indifference (Chapter 2 examines why this might have been). Thus, ballads, pamphlets, and archives demonstrate that communities missed opportunities to prevent the crime.

To begin with the works discussed so far, Besse, who was “put to service” was moved from her family to another community where her employers failed to prevent her wild carriage, her mistress only intervening after the killing although she suspected the pregnancy and foresaw its outcome:

O *Besse* I am afraid,
thou hast done evill,
Thy Belly that was high,
Is fallen suddenly.⁴⁸

This simple narrative suggests that employers could fail vulnerable servants due to apathy and disregard of evidence, perhaps prompted by guilty failure to order a household correctly. It shows a servant living with a community of just one other close person, capturing the isolation of a girl living away from her home without others in whom she dare place her trust.

In *The Efficacy of the True Balme*, author John Horn tells Rose Warnes:

I have observed that you have been of latter times very seldom in the Company of your faithful friends and negligent when you have been with them, of minding and giving earnest heed to that which might have kept you from this.⁴⁹

Horn tells Rose that he has observed that she was “oft in evil vain and wanton company, and having fellowship with them in such vanity filthyness and foolish talking” but he overlooked this because he did not completely believe the reports and because he thought it resulted from “the fear of want and hoping of getting some advantage, or relief by such friendship”.⁵⁰ It seems that evil and wanton company is acceptable if it advances a poor woman, overlooking what Rose might have to do for this “advantage, or relief”. Horn recognises that he has failed her “truly I must take shame to myself [...] that I have not been more watchful nor more laid to heart what I have observed and heard”, thus warning readers to be more conscientious in their care.

⁴⁸ Parker, *No Naturall Mother*.

⁴⁹ Horn, *Efficacy of the true balme* (4).

⁵⁰ *ibid.* (4,5).

The work shows the complex relationship between an erring individual and her friends. Suspecting herself “with childe” Rose was reluctant to tell them: she was “filled with shame and horror” and “knew not how to break the ice”, because when with them she “met with such powerful reproofs as made her afraid and ashamed of them”. Rose, then, is moving within two separate groups: those who were evil and wanton, and others who had shown her “pitty and kindness, who knew not what she had done” and whose friendship appears to be conditional. Observing all this, but declining to comment until after the crime, is Horn. Although his focus is on guiding Rose to repentance, the shadowy communities in the background suggest that they also had some responsibility for the crime. If they had been less reproofing, and Horn had acted on his fears and observations, Rose might not have cast forth her child.

In *No Naturall Mother* and *The Efficacy of the True Balme*, women commit infanticide when communities observe, but fail to act in, the unfolding story of their lives until it is too late. Similarly, in *The Bloudy Mother*, Brewer alludes to the neighbours, law enforcers, and family who came into contact with Jane Hattersley: real people who commit real errors by ignoring increasingly obvious indications of an imminent crime. The first instance of a society disregarding facts is when Jane becomes pregnant and goes to a family called King. They do not suspect her and the situation is only realised when Jane meets a neighbour’s wife as she is leaving the house with the living but concealed child, which is saved. Her hostess subsequently sleeps with her “mistrusting she would do some mischief to that unhappy issue” but the infant is found dead soon after Jane is left alone with it for the first time.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Goodwife King and the constable conclude that it was accidentally overlain, despite the fact that overlaying was frequently considered a concealed method of infanticide, as discussed in Chapter 5. The ease with which the claim of “accident” was accepted, although Jane was clearly suspected of intending to commit infanticide, places some responsibility for the crime with the law enforcers and the Kings.

Jane returns to Adamson, and when she is suspected to be pregnant a second time she is “searched by women and found to be so” but her denials are believed and she murders the child.⁵² Again the author shows a community allowing an opportunity

⁵¹ Brewer, *Bloudy Mother* (B).

⁵² *ibid.* (B2).

to prevent the killing to slip by. When she is in labour a third time, her cries are heard by a neighbour against whom Jane shuts the door; she spies through a keyhole, believes she hears an infant's cry, and thinks she sees the afterbirth. She fetches the constable, but when she returns "all was most cunningly cleared by her cunning keeper", "keeper" implying financial dependence and imprisonment.⁵³ Both oppose the accusations and are believed, but the crimes are discovered after neighbours overhear arguments between Jane and Adamson in which incriminating threats are made.

Early modern people were vigilant for behaviour which was considered inappropriate, and suspected wrongdoers fill the records of Churchwardens' presentments, including farmers who worked on the Sabbath, unlicensed teachers, or those prone to drunkenness and unruly behaviour.⁵⁴ Sexual misconduct was part of this prurience, communities ever keen to avoid the cost of supporting a mother and her illegitimate child. As a result, a woman could be suspected even when there was no real indication that she might be pregnant. Richard Edwards of Felpham, Sussex reported that he heard William Deane tell Adam Page, "the Parson" and John Couper that he (William Deane) "saw such filthiness betwixt the said John Couper and the servant mayd [...] that Deane thought she might be with childe".⁵⁵ Such prurience can be comic to modern sensibilities, and in this case the accusation is merely a combination of hearsay and supposition, but at a practical level watchfulness could have helped to ensure that infants' fathers became financially responsible for them, and, more importantly, may have prevented women from concealing pregnancy and ultimately resorting to infanticide.

People lived in communities where highly suspicious things occurred, as in the case of Adamson and Hattersley. The not infrequent disappearance of infants can be seen in archives and literature. Some women ran lying-in houses, where the services for unmarried women included not only their care before and during childbirth, but also dealing with the problem of the unwanted child. The Middlesex County Records contain a case from 1608 in which two men took out bonds to guarantee the appearance of Margaret Rutt at the next Session. She was described as "a common harbourer of

⁵³ *ibid.* (B2v).

⁵⁴ For some of the many examples of these behaviours see Johnstone, *Presentments*.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* (33).

light weemen great with child and suffering them to be brought to bedd in her house, and can give no accompt whatt is become of the children”.⁵⁶ The 1658 pamphlet *A true relation* tells of Abigall Hill, a wetnurse who took in parish children but killed four of them:

At the Quarter day, she would borrow Children of her poore acquaintance, and bring them to the Masters of the Parish [...] and having received her pay for them she would returne them againe unto those of whom she had borrowed them”.⁵⁷

Lack of neighbourliness could be an indicator of wrongdoing. In the account of Mary Crompton, who took in children and starved them to death, a tale which was told in ballads and several pamphlets,⁵⁸ neighbours remark that she was “very private, not in the least associating herself with any of the Neighbourhood”.⁵⁹

Further evidence of the confusion and mystery which could surround the concealment of infant death can be found in two Sussex Coroners’ inquests. On 20th April 1667, the Coroners’ jurors met at Hastings “to inquire into the death of an unknown child”.⁶⁰ A week later a jury of thirteen married women was empanelled. “They were all sworn and are noted as having appeared. They returned that they knew nothing”. On 13 May a different group of women served as witnesses, and the account states: “The verdict of the coroner’s quest given us in charge concerning the death of a child. Wee have made diligent search and enquirie theireof and canne finde no discovery theireof and this wee all say”.

This perplexing case is inconclusive and ultimately appears to be no more than an enquiry into nothing. But its value is also exceptional. It reveals something of the suspicion of infanticide which could lurk in a community, that a hint or rumour could grow into a genuine matter for enquiry, that the possible death of an infant was considered a serious matter, and that in matters of childbirth, women’s special knowledge and experience gave them a power which was both unusual and highly

⁵⁶ John Cordy Jeaffreson, ed. *Middlesex County Records Vol II* (Middlesex County Records Society: Greater London Council, 1887) (46).

⁵⁷ Anon, *A true Relation of the most Horrid and Barbarous murders committed by Abigall Hill* (1658).

⁵⁸ Anon, *The injured children or the bloody midwife* (1693); Anon, *The cruel midwife* (1693); Anon, *The bloody minded midwife* (1693); Anon, *The Midwife’s Maid’s Lamentation* (1693); Anon, *The midwife of Poplar’s Sorrowful Confession* (1693); Anon, *A particular and exact account of the trial of Mary Compton* (1693).

⁵⁹ Anon, *Bloody minded midwife*.

⁶⁰ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (122 #475).

public. However, there are also frustrating gaps in its information: Who started the rumour? Why did they make the claim? And why was the community so convinced of its veracity? And of whom was this “diligent search and enquire” made?

The record becomes even more mysterious – but perhaps revealing – when considered in conjunction with another Hastings case in the Coroners’ inquests describing an inquest carried out a decade earlier, on 22 July 1656. It is recorded in English in unusually graphic detail in a style which, in descriptive passages, merges with that of early modern news writing:

Inquest on viewe of a dead bastard child of Elizabeth Cruttenden, late maidservant of Thomas Waller, gent., secretly buried. Goeing upp to the house of Thomas Waller, gent; scituat in the parish of Mary Magdalen and digging in the gardein of the said house under the ground cell of an outhouse there by the directions of one Joane Stedman, widdow, about a two foote under the said cell they found in a cloath the bones of a young child, the scull with haire uppon and one of the kidneyes not consumed, there lately buyried; but whose the said child was and howe it came to its death the jurors aforesaid knowe not.⁶¹

Despite the gaps and uncertainties which permeate these cases they are illuminating. In the 1656 case it is assumed that the victim is a maidservant’s bastard. This form of the crime dominated early modern consciousness and continues to dominate academic debate. It is unclear about the meaning of the statement “whose the said child was [...] the jurors know not”, which could cast doubt over the child being Elizabeth’s. It could also refer to the unknown father as such lack of information is often recorded in the archives. It was equally possible that this was a stillbirth to a married woman whose spouse had buried it because they were unable to afford the funeral or were unwilling to part with their child. The accusation of Elizabeth Cruttenden is not pursued; she has clearly moved on, but is neither summoned to appear nor sought in order to face the accusation, as far as the record relates. The body might have remained hidden for generations, but for the instructions of widow Joan Stedman to dig in the appropriate place. It seems relevant therefore that her name appears again as one of the witnesses in the later case in which a body is sought but not found. It is as if Joan is a conduit across the decade, through whom a folk memory is starting to form. Equally, she could have known more of the original case than she acknowledged at the

⁶¹ *ibid.* (112 #438).

time, or have been haunted by the events she witnessed a decade earlier, or simply have been seeking the importance which her involvement in the discovery of the child's body gave her.

The accounts show that it was possible to give birth and conceal a body in almost total secrecy, as Jane Hattersley is said to have done. They demonstrate that a community could be quick to assume the guilty party when an unexplained and unreported infant death was discovered, in this instance, possibly prompted by the 1624 Infanticide Act. The community complied with the cultural stereotype by assuming the culprit was an unmarried maidservant. The deep burial may indicate that someone helped the mother, as it seems improbable that a newly-delivered woman could dig a two-foot deep hole, suggesting those with assistance could escape prosecution.

Such cases capture the suspicion which lurked in communities, and that they could be aware of what had taken place – no matter what her role had been in the 1656 case, Joan Stedman knew where the body lay. We also see the power of matrons in maintaining community respectability. They served as juries and witnesses for the Coroners' Court in the 1667 case and would have been involved in naming suspects in 1656.⁶² Elsewhere they checked for signs of pregnancy or recent childbirth. Whatever the circumstances surrounding the secret burial of this infant, and what was behind the later rumour of a body, cannot be known, but the cases show that an infant body could be concealed and that communities could have suspicions which they did not act upon.

A severe and direct criticism of a community's negligence is described in the account of Mary Cook's killing of her young daughter. The story is told in two pamphlets, both published in 1670.⁶³ The shorter, *The Cruel Mother*, presumably appeared soon after the trial, whereas the authors of the considerably longer *Blood for Blood*, which is discussed here, claim to have been in the cart with Mary en route to the scaffold. They explain that they are acting on her wishes in telling her story, and explain their delay:

⁶² James C. Oldham, "History of the Jury of Matrons", *Criminal Justice History*, 6 (1985) 1-64; Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (163); Gowing, *Common Bodies* (43, 71).

⁶³ Anon, *The Cruel Mother* (1620?), (A2v); Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood*.

Some days passed after before any thoughts were stirred up in us to publish anything of this nature, during which time some of us could have little rest, apprehending some neglect might be imputed unto us.⁶⁴

The authors describe *Blood for Blood* as a “narrative” and a “sad relation” with an “awakening Sermon thereunto annexed.”⁶⁵ It is written in four parts: the sermon; a description of the crime, which forms most of the work; a description of the state of Mary’s conscience in prison; and “some passages omitted in the former Narritive”. It describes Mary Cook, a 37-year old married woman who today would almost certainly be diagnosed as suffering from post-natal depression if not psychosis. She was “of a melancholic temper [...] common business became a burden, and fears arose in her as to wants” and a “great pressure of melancholy discontent overwhelmed her”.⁶⁶ The association between pregnancy and melancholy in the period has been widely discussed, and I return to the subject of women’s mental states in Chapter 2.⁶⁷ The repeated thwarting of Mary’s attempted suicides is followed by her decision to kill the infant she most loves fearing that there would be no-one to care for her after her death. Again, early attempts are interrupted but she eventually succeeds. Such a brief summary cannot do justice to the long description of the woman and her crime, which approaches a novel in its chilling detail, manner of description, suspense and emotional intensity. Clark writes that in such works it is the “combination of the everyday and the mundane with the horrific which is integral”.⁶⁸ She implies that the work is critical of Mary’s actions yet the repeated references to Mary’s relationship with the community in which she lived suggest that the crime could have been prevented if they had been more caring and diligent. Mary had been “a fortnight sick and weak, and no one took care what she wanted”. She tells the writers “it was done because she was weary of her life, her Relations slighting her. She was “discontented, and thought her Husband and Relations did not love her”.

When describing Mary’s journey to Newgate after her trial the authors emphasise the community’s culpability for her action:

⁶⁴ Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood*.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* (A2v, A3v).

⁶⁶ *ibid.* (10,14).

⁶⁷ See for example Chris Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises of Conception in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) (186).

⁶⁸ Clark, *Women and Crime* (31).

She suddenly turned back and looking at her Relations, used these words, with a doleful countenance: O, if you had been more careful to look after me, you might have hindred me from doing this; the application we commend to whom soeer concerned, and thought it very meet to be inserted, that such a word from a dying woman might not die with her.⁶⁹

They return to the point when describing her imprisonment, when she repeats that she killed because of the “great Discontent” she had “upon her apprehension of exceeding unkindnesses of her Relations unto her, although she had never been undutiful unto them”.⁷⁰ They continue:

It is not the design of this Narrative to accuse them, only to desire they may cal to mind, and lay to heart, and repent of their neglect of duty towards her, wherein they shall any of them be conscious unto themselves of remissness; and that all others who shall reade this sad Relation, may take warning thereby, so to discharge their relative duties, that they do not expose their Relations unto Temptations.

After the detailed account of Mary’s hanging and death the closing sentence brings readers’ attention back to the good life she had led and those who failed to help her:

She was buried in Great Bartholomews Church-yard, being accompanied by a great many Neighbours and Strangers, to perform their last office of love for the dead, that had given them no cause while living, but in this great transgression.⁷¹

The representation, particularly the reference to “love”, is a notable contrast to that of Margret Vincent, and the authors determinedly do not describe Mary as a Medea figure, though the case could have been represented as such. Instead they suggest understanding of her mental condition and the extent to which infanticide was known to be a complex crime committed for many different reasons.

What do these works tell us about the communities in which infanticide occurred? The frequency with which people were reported to Churchwardens for misdemeanours suggests a society which was watchful for wrongdoers. Single women, whether servants, lodgers or neighbours, would have been particular subjects of such prurience as we shall see in Chapter 3. Walker points out that unmarried women were more likely to be convicted for theft and related offences than those who were married, which partially related to contemporary fears about young, single women living beyond

⁶⁹ Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood* (20). (The sermon has signature numbers; modern pagination (from 1) is used for main narrative)

⁷⁰ *ibid.* (34). (Due to a typesetter’s error, page numbering jumps from 22 to 33)

⁷¹ *ibid.* (48).

the bounds of a patriarchal authority as well as with the status of married women.⁷² The works discussed demonstrate social watchfulness, but the authors of *No Naturall Mother* and *The Efficacy of the True Balm* show that this does not prevent killing. Brewer depicts those with whom Jane Hattersley came into contact as gullible people who overlook their own doubts, ignore their suspicions and readily accept Jane's word. Mary Cook's relations fail in their duty toward her. Clearly the circumstances which led to infanticide included community apathy and credulity, and suggest indifference to infanticide, a subject discussed in the next chapter.

Accomplices: "feloniously aiding and abetting"

This final section deals with accomplices, those who by action or encouragement incited mothers to kill their infants.⁷³ Whereas Adam Adamson assisted Jane Hattersley with the disposal of the infants' bodies but not in the acts of murder, the works discussed here concern those who were present at, or immediately before, the death, including "the devil" in various guises, family, and others. While community indifference enabled infanticide, accomplices push women toward the crime.

The devil is frequently named as an "accomplice". In *Deeds against Nature*, Martha Scambler is described as killing her child "by the persuasions of the Divill", and in her "Repentance" at the end of the work she says she was "blinded by the devil". Clark writes that such references demonstrated women's "susceptibility to temptation which was accepted as an aspect of their inferior spiritual constitution".⁷⁴ However, women used this belief in their statements. A Sussex inquest for 1624 records that in the small hours of 24 February, Joan Barnett gave birth to a child which died within half an hour.⁷⁵ She concealed the body during the day and in the evening "threw it down on the rocks into the sea". When asked why she had done this she replied "that it might not be known and that the devil had put it in her mind". Joan, Martha and others who said the devil incited them to the crime may have been using him to rationalise their actions

⁷² Walker, *Crime, Gender* (206).

⁷³ Current law defines an accomplice as "one who aids, abets, counsels or procures someone to commit a crime" (Jonathan Law and Elizabeth A. Martin, "*Oxford Dictionary of Law*" OUP, [Accessed 10/9/2014].)

⁷⁴ Clark, *Women and Crime* (38).

⁷⁵ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (63 #254).

to themselves, or offering an explanation which they felt their listeners both expected and would understand.

However, as the devil was thought to be at large in the world seeking out the unwary, the women who named him may have believed in his presence. Such belief would have been encouraged by his visual representation in street literature, such as the title page of *A Pittillesse Mother*. Miller suggests that this account implies that “this tragedy resulted from a woman’s misguided attempt to direct her husband”.⁷⁶ Yet the image and the narrative place the devil at the centre of this account. He is pictured in a domestic room, handing Margret the physical means of killing her infants, but he is holding an extra rope, perhaps the one with which she will be hanged or will attempt to hang herself. As he is looking at the reader, perhaps it is for others who listen to him.

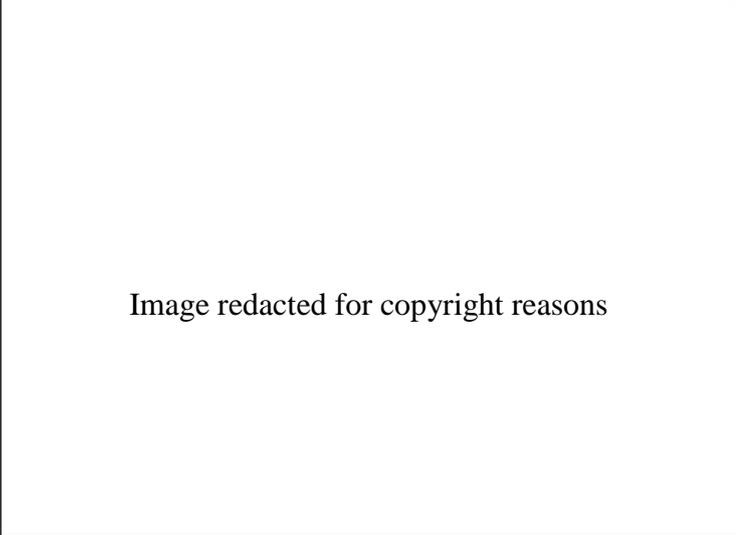


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The title page of A pittillesse Mother enables the non-literate to “read” its narrative.

The author merges Catholicism and the devil, making him the physical embodiment of the religion which the author considers responsible for the deaths. He warns “how soone are our mindes (by the Devils inticement) withdrawne from goodnes” and writes of his “trembling feare” when he thinks that this “unhappy Gentlewoman was bewitched with a witchcraft begot by hell and nursed by the Romish Sect”.⁷⁷ We are told “by the fury and assistance of the Divell, she inacted this wofulll

⁷⁶ Miller, *Changing the Subject* (71).

⁷⁷ Anon, *Pittillesse Mother* (A2, Bv).

accident”, and that she was “assisted by the Devill”, and readers are warned not to listen to the “charming persuasions” of “Romaine Wolves”.⁷⁸ The faith provides Margret with the motivation to kill so that her children are not brought up in “blindnes and darkesome errours” and her action, according to the pamphleteer, was approved by her adopted religion because it was “merritorious, yea, and pardonable to take away the lives of any opposing Protestants”. Why she did not also attempt to kill her husband is unclear, but could be explained by the fact that she is described as believing that her action would allow the children to become saints. This defines Margret’s actions as altruistic, a motive which psychologists Theresa Porter and Helen Gavin write “comes from the continual myth that women are always loving mothers, even during murder”.⁷⁹

Margret’s faith and its “Romaine Wolves” are synonymous with the devil who entices her to kill. She is an “obstinate Papist” who wears a crucifix and has “other reliques” about her, and in prison she is offered an English Bible which she “with great stubbornesse threw from her”.⁸⁰ (Throwing, which suggests revulsion to the thing thrown, is often mentioned in archival accounts of infanticide. Its significance is discussed in the next chapter.) Despite the pleadings of the constable who has her custody en route to the Sessions, Margret only repents her crime after the last-minute intervention of “certaine Godly Preachers”.

As well as being a signifier of alien groups or beliefs, the devil can also be a manifestation of the killer’s unconfrosted desire. Writing of the child-murder pamphlet *Murther Will Out*, Dolan states that Satan is used to “portray the voice of self-interest and practical concern” and describes the text as presenting “self-assertion as violent and as prompted by demonic possession”.⁸¹ In these examples, the devil is constructed as a third party who can be accused, and perhaps acknowledged by juries as partly responsible, whether in partial exoneration of the woman or, as in the case of Margret Vincent, as part of the vilification of both her and her religion.

Alternatively, women were driven to kill their children by their parents or other third parties who saw the expediency of disposing of a perceived problem. This can be

⁷⁸ *ibid.* (A3v, A2v).

⁷⁹ Porter and Gavin, “Infanticide and Neonaticide” (106).

⁸⁰ The date of the pamphlet (1616) and the emphasis on “English Bible” may imply a reference to the recently-published King James’ edition (1611).

⁸¹ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (140).

seen in the case of Alice Shepheard from Salisbury whose infant is killed, and who has the author's compassion throughout. Hers is one of a number of crimes described in *Sundrye strange and inhumaine Murthers*.⁸² Rather than being subject to vitriol, Alice is "a young damsell [...] with childe, and yet never married", and even a "maid". The vocabulary implies virgin birth which, although a physical possibility which is discussed by Jacques Guillemeau,⁸³ also immediately associates the story with the exceptional and miraculous. It gives Alice innocence despite her sexual activity, and suggests a separation between her physical person and her moral person. When she tells her mother and grandmother about her pregnancy, they hire a midwife and later she is "delivered of a man childe, whose neck they presently broke, and secretly buried it in the Churchyard". The location may suggest that the women believed that the infant deserved a form of Christian burial, or that that the churchyard was considered a practical place to conceal the corpse. As in the cases of Martha Scambler and Annis Dell, the body is discovered by a dog, a creature whose special role in retellings of infanticide and other crimes is discussed in Chapter 2.

People perceived that Alice Shepheard's child was "but new born, and therefore concluded that it was the childe of some strumpet, and that she had murdered it", an association of ideas which pre-dates the 1624 Infanticide Act by a generation. Alice is suspected and when she, her mother, grandmother and the midwife are "sent for" they all claim the child was stillborn. The truth comes to light when the midwife's attack of conscience is overheard. She confesses, and the women are recalled and sent to prison "until the last assises, where they received the doome of judgement by death, which of duetye they had deserved for so wicked a deed". An almost identical account is given in the ballad *The wicked Midwife*, in which the mother of the pregnant girl says she will prevent her daughter's shame.⁸⁴ She does this by hiring a midwife who kills the newborn, but when she refuses to pay after the event the midwife reveals the body to neighbours, which prompts the mother to blame the daughter. The daughter is hanged, and it seems the mother and midwife also die, though the ending of this ballad, whose only surviving copy was cited earlier (p. 21), is sadly damaged.

⁸² Anon, *Sundrye strange*.

⁸³ Jacques Guillemeau, *Child-birth or The Happy Deliverie of Women* (1612) (107).

⁸⁴ Anon, *Wicked midwife*.

There were advantages to telling others of the pregnancy, including the possibility of receiving practical and emotional support, which archives, drama, and street literature reveal was forthcoming. Telling someone about the pregnancy avoided accusations of secrecy, and the charge of infanticide, as it implied intention to keep the infant, as did providing linen for the birth – a form of “insurance” which would have been reasonably easy.⁸⁵ The seduced woman in the ballad *The Answer to the London Lass’s Folly* says that: “I then began for to provide / some clouts against down-lying” but after she finds the man responsible for her pregnancy adds: “If I could not have found him then / I grosly had miscarry’d”.⁸⁶ The meaning here is ambiguous.⁸⁷ It could refer to her intentional destruction of her unborn child, or the moral and financial jeopardy which faced unmarried motherhood, which I discuss in Chapter 4.

However, there were also disadvantages, including the denial of assistance. Pollock challenges the idea of women’s solidarity in this period, and states that they were the guardians of female morality.⁸⁸ In Sussex archival records women appear as witnesses, and on juries of matrons whose role included ascertaining whether a woman had recently given birth or whether her claim of “benefit of belly” (claiming pregnancy to receive pardon or reprieve, though they might still ultimately be hanged) was authentic, though confirmation may not have been to their advantage.⁸⁹ We will see in Chapter 4 that the law forbade harbouring unmarried, pregnant women, with the result that an admission of pregnancy could lead to eviction and wandering; in such circumstances, the fate of the child is not always clear.⁹⁰

Confidantes also become accomplices, and in the guise of helping fail to protect the woman from conviction. Records show that mothers are often present at the killings but, unlike their daughters, escape punishment. In June 1589, spinster Mary Mowser “gave birth to a live female child at Southover and immediately afterwards she and her

⁸⁵ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (148); Pollock, “Childbearing” (297); Wrightson, “Infanticide in European History” (11).

⁸⁶ Anon, *The Answer to the London Lasses Folly* (1680-1685).

⁸⁷ In the OED the first example of “miscarry” with the sense “to give birth to a fetus before it is viable” is 1560.

⁸⁸ Pollock, “Childbearing” (290-292).

⁸⁹ The effectiveness of the plea is discussed in Walker, *Crime, Gender* (206); Oldham, “History of the Jury of Matrons”.

⁹⁰ Amy M Froide, *Never Married: Single women in early modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) (90); Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570-1640* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) (286).

mother, Agnes Mowser, spinster, murdered the child [...] Agnes being feloniously present aiding and abetting her”.⁹¹ Both women pleaded not guilty. Mary was found guilty, pleaded pregnancy but was found not to be so, and was hanged. Her mother was acquitted. Similarly, when Alice Baker of Ringmer was indicted at the Sussex Assizes in March 1579 for killing her newborn, her mother was named as an accessory.⁹² Alice was found guilty, but her mother’s verdict was “ignoramus”: we do not know. The record of the August 1588 inquest on Ursula Farmer’s newborn daughter states that she killed her by “throwing her with both hands into a well containing water whence she immediately died and Alice [her mother] being feloniously present aiding and abetting her”.⁹³ At the Assizes, both women pleaded not guilty and were acquitted.

It is hard to interpret the motivation of a mother who encourages or helps her child to kill. Should it be seen as an altruistic action, driven by the desire to ensure that her daughter’s future prospects were not limited by having borne a bastard? Or should it be considered ego-centric, with mothers seeing the newborn as a burden and as evidence that a daughter was beyond control? Were they helping their daughters, or manipulating them? Did the women’s mothers kill the infants but deny responsibility believing that their daughters might be shown more compassion?

It is similarly difficult to imagine how the jury was persuaded that Ursula and her mother were innocent. However, Walker writes that people ascribed to themselves notions of lawfulness and unlawfulness.⁹⁴ Evidence of this is provided by Carol Loar who, using Coroners’ inquests, rather than legal or theological sources, finds that by the end of the sixteenth century conscience had become understood to be “the right or duty of individuals to make moral decisions based on what their own conscience told them”.⁹⁵ This may explain the ultimate decision in the case of Anne Green who survived hanging for infanticide in 1650 and whose story was told in several

⁹¹ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (97 #387).

⁹² J.S. Cockburn, ed. *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex Indictments: Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1975) (140).

⁹³ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (94 #369).

⁹⁴ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (211).

⁹⁵ Carol Loar, “‘Under Felt Hats and Worsted Stockings’: The Uses of Conscience in Early Modern English Coroners’ Inquests”, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XLI.2 (2010) 393-414. For a fuller discussion of conscience in this period see also Keith Thomas, “Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England” in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. John Morill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 29-56. For women and conscience see Patricia Crawford, “Public Duty, Conscience, and Women in Early Modern England” *ibid.* 57-76.

pamphlets.⁹⁶ Her survival was seen as an example of “the great handiwork of God” as it was deemed to be proof that her child had been stillborn and that Anne “received an unjust sentence to be hanged”.⁹⁷ The discovery of infanticide is also often ascribed to God’s instigation of earthly justice. The account of Alice Shephard’s crime ends:

Thus we see that although God suffer the murderer to escape for a time, yet doth he followe them with so sharpe a revenge, as either they desperatlye slay themselves, or reape such shame as the worlde may be satisfied that God had dealt justlye with them. (Bv)

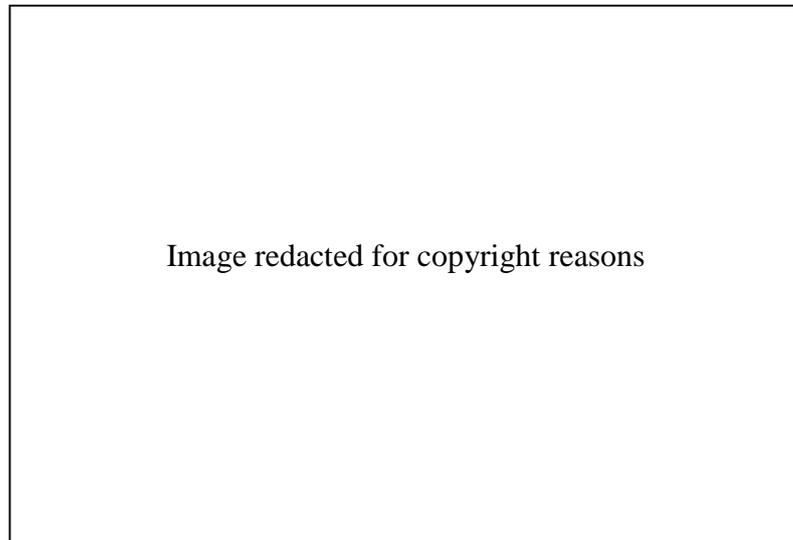
Given the potential to be flexible when interpreting the law, a personal conscience which was answerable only to God, uncertainty about how truly “human” a newborn was (which will be discussed in the next chapter), and social hostility to bastard bearers and their children, it would have been expedient, and not too difficult, for a woman to construct for herself or another the “permission” to deal with the situation in her own way, and not difficult for communities and law enforcers to take a tolerant approach to women such as Ursula and Alice Farmer. It is more surprising that Mary Mowser and Alice Baker, as the mothers of the newborns, are assumed guilty, despite having just given birth and the fact that the older, stronger and more experienced person would have been able to prevent the death, and possibly more capable of causing it. It suggests the ease with which an unmarried woman could be assumed guilty, overlooking the role of those described in inquest reports as “aiding and abetting”. Lack of evidence leaves us wondering about verdicts and how a woman who appears to have aided and abetted her daughter to kill can escape punishment. Archival lacunae again come between us and the facts. When an unmarried woman told someone about her pregnancy, she might have protected herself from a charge of infanticide, but alternatively, her confidante could become an accomplice, the trickster figure described by Szakolczai (p. 48), who encouraged her to kill but escaped punishment themselves. Pamphlets describe Martha Scambler and Margret Vincent as incited to kill by the devil, but the “devil” may have had a very human and familiar shape.

We cannot know what was said and done in the secrecy of a family in which a newborn child was killed, a point which is eerily captured by the remains of the

⁹⁶ Anon, *A declaration from Oxford* (1651); W. Burdet, *A wonder of wonders* (1651); Richard Watkins, *Newes from the dead* (1651).

⁹⁷ Anon, *Declaration from Oxford* (A1).

woodcut illustrating the surviving copy of *The Wicked Midwife* showing only the room, the bed and part of the devil.⁹⁸ The missing section of the illustration, which might have shown the events, suggests the hidden actions in a birthing chamber.



Hidden crime: detail of title page of The Wicked Midwife

However, other times and texts can illuminate our understanding of the subtle enticement which could have taken place, including Euripides' *Medea*. The play was available in Latin (translated by George Buchanan, 1544),⁹⁹ and it has been argued that Shakespeare was familiar with the work in Greek.¹⁰⁰ However, availability of the text is less relevant to my argument than Euripides' demonstration of the intricate and manipulative relationships which could develop when a woman is tempted to kill a child.¹⁰¹ The Chorus, having vowed to be silent about Medea's intended but non-

⁹⁸ Anon, *Wicked midwife*.

⁹⁹ Other versions of the child-murdering Medea were also available in translation including Seneca, *The seventh tragedie of Seneca, entituled Medea*, trans. John Studley (1566); Seneca, *Medea a tragedie*, trans. E.S. (1648).

¹⁰⁰ Zachary Hutchins and Amy Lofgreen, "More Greek than Jonson thought? Euripides' *Medea* in *The Merchant of Venice*", *Shakespeare*, (2014) 1-20; Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 2013) (192).

¹⁰¹ Euripides *Medea* has been praised for its psychological accuracy, a subject which I consider in Chapter 5 (Monica Cyrino, "When Grief is Gain: The Psychodynamics of Abandonment and Filicide in Euripides' *Medea*", *Pacific Coast Philology*, 31.1 (1996) 1-12.)

specific revenge, repeatedly reminds her of her impossible situation, which is similar to that of unmarried, pregnant women, as Chapter 4 will show.¹⁰² It states:

Alas, alas, you pitiable woman,
Wretched in your sufferings.
Wherever can you turn?
Where can you find a host to welcome you,
What home, what country
To shield you from disaster?
For the god has brought you, Medea,
To an overwhelming sea of woes. (357)

Immediately after this speech, Medea determines to kill her children, but the Chorus continues to emphasise her plight:

You, wretched Medea, have no father's house
To seek as refuge from your toils.
Another royal lady has displaced you as wife
And now rules in the house. (445)

When the Chorus later pleads with her not to carry out the murders they are withdrawing their tacit acceptance of the manner of her revenge and become another aspect of the abandonment which is driving Medea.

Do not, we beg you by your knees
Unreservedly, in every way,
Do not kill your children. (854)

They tell the woman who has said "Let no one think of me as weak and submissive" that she will not have the courage to kill:

You will not be able
To wet your hand in their blood
With unflinching heart. (863)

Their words are a challenge to her to live up to her self-ascribed character and carry out her threat.

Medea demonstrates that if women confided their fears to third parties they could indirectly encourage murder by challenging them to continue with the action which they are tempted to carry out. This older, fictional text gives some idea of how

¹⁰² Euripides, "*Medea*" in *Medea and Other Plays*, ed. James Morwood, trans. James Morwood (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 1-38 (260).

events may have unravelled in an early modern home. When an unmarried woman told someone that she was pregnant it could help protect her against a conviction for infanticide. But her confidante could encourage her to kill by offering the motivation, whether that was the survival of the child's soul or even their sainthood, or by painting a bleak and pessimistic future, such motivation being expressed by the killer as the devil's encouragement. The confidante might even become the killer – there are hidden questions behind the Sussex Coroners' inquests in which others are described as aiding and abetting. Popular literature suggests that the truth might be long hidden; to that must be added the idea that it could be permanently hidden.

Conclusion

The ballads, plays and archival records discussed above reveal that in early modern England people had complex and inconsistent attitudes toward infanticide. They were uncertain how to react to the crime, particularly in the case of newborn or very young children. Those who recorded the events, whether as news or as song, sometimes described the women as monstrous or animal, such as the “monster of nature” Martha Scambler and the “Tygerous Mother” Margret Vincent. Others, including Besse and Alice Shephard, were treated with compassion by writers. Representations could fluctuate within a single work, as if the writers themselves were still working out their own attitudes toward those who took infant life. Some authors seem indifferent to the deaths of infants and are content to use infanticide as a basis from which to discuss other (apparently more serious) wrongs, including Rose Warne's wayward life, and Mistress Padge's murder of her husband. Similarly, communities frequently appear not to have been unduly concerned about the crime, overlooking opportunities to prevent it, despite the fact that archival records show that people were watchful for signs of sexual misdemeanour. If people such as Besse's mistress or Jane Hattersley's neighbours had acted differently, their newborns may not have died. And, as we have seen, individuals or groups may have encouraged women in difficult situations to commit the crime, becoming as responsible as those who were formally accused. It is clear that the killing of infants was not uniquely a crime of single women – Rose Warnes, Mistress Padge and Margret Vincent were all married, as was Medea,

the most infamous female killer of young children. Infanticide by married women is discussed in Chapter 5.

The texts discussed above leave us with a picture of inconsistent attitudes, indifference and negligence toward pregnant women and the unborn child. How we can understand and start to come to terms with such a dark situation is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Infanticide and Liminality

Tread softly passenger! for here doth lye
A dainty Jewell of sweet infancie:
A harmlesse babe, that onely came and cry'd
In baptisme to bee washt from sin and dy'd.¹

Introduction

The discussion thus far has shown that archival and literary texts reveal complex and inconsistent attitudes toward infanticide. Suspects could be vilified or treated sympathetically, communities might be partially accountable for the killings due to reticence, and third parties could be directly involved but escape punishment. The abiding impression is that people were uncertain about how to react to stillborn infants and the intentional death of those who were unborn or newborn. This chapter investigates why this might have been, and suggests that early modern attitudes can be illuminated when considered through the lens of anthropological theories about liminality. Examined from this perspective, we can see that ideas about infants and pregnant woman before, during and immediately after childbirth, had many associations with liminality. Women's actions surrounding infant deaths, including the act of throwing, the watery places in which they disposed of corpses, and the manner of writing about incipient or new lives in medical, religious and legal texts, all suggest the liminality of these unformed lives. Liminality is also suggested by the manner in which creative authors wrote about infanticide, particularly the frequent association which they drew between the crime and the liminal figures of monsters, devils and dogs.

The theoretical base of liminality was set out in the Introduction. I will suggest that when brought to the foreground in our thinking about infanticide, we become more acutely aware of influential early modern beliefs and superstitions, and thus better able to occupy a similar emotional and mental territory to the women whose actions are discussed in the majority of this study. To understand liminality we need to draw on folkloric, spiritual and religious ideas which permeated society. While drawing on these disciplines sometimes leads to speculation, I believe that such speculative thinking can be helpful in shedding light on the many mysteries surrounding infanticide. Using

¹ Formerly attributed to George Herbert. Anon, "On a Child" in *Wits Recreations. Selected from the fancies of modern muses* (1630) (Bb5v).

these and other sources, the chapter suggests that the crime was not only prompted by socio-economic factors but could also be the result of complex psychological issues, and influenced by cultural beliefs about the body and that which comes from it.

The liminal child and mother: mental worlds and violent acts

The intellectual environment within which infants were killed is permeated by ambiguity about infant life. In this section I will consider the inconsistencies and contradictions which existed among legal, medical and religious thinkers concerning the point at which an unborn or newborn had, in today's terms, a "right to life". I will suggest that the lack of clarity on this point must have caused confusion about the seriousness of terminating a new life. Existing in parallel with these (mainly male) opinions about the start of new life were women's experiences of miscarriage and stillbirth, glimpses of which appear in their intimate writings and give us a further insight into early modern beliefs.

Between conception and birth – during the development from embryo to newborn – the woman was carrying a liminal being who was simultaneously part of, yet separate from, the human world. The key points in this development – quickening and ensoulment – were the subject of exhaustive discussion by medical, legal and religious writers, some of which are summarised below.

Medico-legal arguments

In his history of contraception and abortion (a subject discussed in chapter 3) medical historian John Riddle shows that destroying an unborn child was only regarded as murder after quickening (when the foetus was first felt to move), somewhere between the fourth and sixth month.² Carla Spivack, who writes of the "indeterminacy" of early human existence, similarly shows that "the pre-quickening foetus, though understood to be alive, was not considered a person in any legal, cultural, or even biological sense".³ Until then it was not "fully human".⁴ She says quickening was the logical moment to believe the child had life and that with movement "it became endowed with the qualities

² John M. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) (94, 129).

³ Carla Spivack, "To 'Bring Down the Flowers': The cultural context of abortion law in early modern England", *OCU Law*, 14 (2007) 107-151 (111).

⁴ *ibid.* (120).

which make it partake of full human reason and spirit”.⁵ Therefore, legally, destruction of the unborn before this point was not homicide.⁶ When homicide did apply was less clearly determined and circled around the idea of being *in rerum natura*⁷ – “being a reasonable creature – that is, having a soul and being capable of reason”.⁸ While some believed it was after quickening, others believed it was when the infant was born alive. But what was the meaning of “born”? Gowing states that “infanticide was treated as murder only if the live child was fully out of the body when it died”.⁹ This could only be confirmed or denied by witnesses.

More uncertainty is provided by Jacob Rueff’s *The Expert Midwife*, addressed to “grave and modest Matrons, such as have to doe with women in that great danger of childe-birth” as well as young practitioners in “Physick and Chirgery”. He attaches particular significance to forty-one days, suggesting Christ in the wilderness and a place beyond society, as well as Lent and general sacred periods of waiting and preparation. Rueff writes that at this time the seed:

is changed into the due and perfect forme and shape of the Infant: and then by the judgement of some learned men, it receiveth life, and therefore afterward it ought not to be called a Feature (*sic*), but an Infant, although as yet, by reason of his tender and feeble condition and state, he wanteth motion.¹⁰

Partially as a result of such theories, there were punitive measures for attacking a pregnant woman, a crime which was considered “particularly heinous”.¹¹ Walker writes that it was tantamount to abortion, a “symbolic act of denigration and destruction” which defiled the woman, her child, her husband, and the household.¹² Edward Coke, whose writings subsequently formed the foundation for English law and who continues to be cited in legal discussions, consolidated this point.¹³ He wrote:

⁵ *ibid.* (127).

⁶ *ibid.* (134).

⁷ The OED defines this phrase as “in nature, in the physical world”.

⁸ Spivack, “Flowers” (135).

⁹ Gowing, “Secret Births” (98).

¹⁰ Jacob Rueff, *The Expert Midwife, or an Excellent and most necessary treatise of the Generation and Birth of Man* (1637) (58).

¹¹ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (60, n.195). I discuss in-utero destruction of infants in Chapters 3 and 5

¹² *ibid.* (61).

¹³ “*Judgments - Attorney General’s Reference No. 3 1994*” House of Lords, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199798/ldjudgmt/jd970724/gneral01.htm> [Accessed 5/7/2014].

If a woman be quick with childe, and by a Potion or otherwise killeth it in her wombe; or if a man beat her, whereby the child dieth in her body, and she is delivered of a dead childe, this is a great misprision, and not murder; but if the childe be borne alive, and dieth of the Potion, batttery or other cause, this is murder; for in law it is accounted a reasonable creature, in rerum natura, when it is born alive.¹⁴

William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood led to the lung test (1653), based on the belief that if a child had drawn breath the lungs would float on water, but the test was unreliable. Modern forensic science informs us that "reliable signs of survival of birth become evident only after several days".¹⁵ So, medical-legal opinions variously suggest forty-one days, quickening, or birth as different points at which life was deemed to exist.

Religious arguments and the infant soul

Religious writers were concerned for the infant's soul. William Hill, a Doctor of Divinity, cites various sources and uses a number of arguments to prove that the soul exists before birth. He writes: "Children [...] could not be conceived and brought forth in sinne, unlesse before the birth of the Child the Soule were in the Infant" and quotes the opinion that:

If any part of the Childe appeareth out of the Wombe, and some other part remayne in the same; yet that it ought to be baptized: yea if the part so appearing be but the hand, or heele (in case that the woman be in danger of death, and by hers the child.)¹⁶

But what of those who were unbaptised? Christopher Kendrick suggests that Pelagius (390-418 CE), who argued "for the rights of unbaptised innocents to their own category and space", was Limbo's "architect".¹⁷ Augustine's rebuttal of the idea versus Christian balking at "virtuous souls suffering eternal fire and tortures" resulted in Limbo as a "compromise".¹⁸ Milton's Limbo, which Kendrick describes as Milton's own invention¹⁹ was the destiny of "Embryos and idiots, eremites and friars"²⁰ and

¹⁴ Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*, vol. III (1644) (50).

¹⁵ Katherine D. Watson, *Forensic Medicine in Western Society: A History* (London: Routledge, 2011) (108).

¹⁶ William Hill, *The Infancie of the soule: or, the Soul of an infant* (1605) (D3).

¹⁷ Christopher Kendrick, "Satire and Speculation in Milton's Limbo", *Milton Studies*, 54 (2013) 229-258 (250).

¹⁸ *ibid.* (236).

¹⁹ *ibid.* (230).

²⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1998) (book III, line 474).

those who were “Abortive monstrous, or unkindly mixed”²¹ Alastair Fowler defines “abortive” as prematurely born.²² Thus Milton’s Limbo evades the issues around *in rerum natura* by allowing miscarriages and stillbirths some status, their destiny nevertheless being a “between” or “no place”. Importantly, it suggests the desire for these lives to be acknowledged and a post-Reformation yearning for an equivalent to Limbo, though not as a place where sin was eventually cleansed.

Popular beliefs about dead infants also demonstrate their betwixt and between status. Keith Thomas writes: “The souls of unbaptized children were vulgarly assigned a great number of animal resting-places: they became headless dogs in Devon, wild geese in Lincolnshire, ants in Cornwall, night-jars in Shropshire and Nidderdale”.²³ Such beliefs suggest uncertainty surrounding newborn and unbaptised infants, and their rightful place in this world and that beyond the grave.

Yet more evidence is found in depictions of ages of man schemes. Images which adopt the stair model of life’s rise and fall sometimes show the cradled infant as not yet upon the stair, as shown on p. 88. Anja Müller points out that infants may also be excluded from the schemes’ age-count suggesting they were “not yet fully human”.²⁴ She warns against reading this as an historical or social reality, and notes the perception of childhood could be shaped by such visualizations.²⁵

In this muddle of medical, religious and legal thinking, those charged with enforcing justice still required to know whether or not a child was living when born. The suggestion of in-between states was not helpful in doing this. Proof was partly provided by evidence from those in attendance at the birth and partly by signs of violence on the child’s body, despite the possibility of the child being harmed during or immediately after birth. As Hoffer and Hull comment:

cuts and bruises on bastard neonates might have resulted from accidents during or shortly after a delivery handled without assistance by a weak, frightened and inexperienced young mother.²⁶

²¹ *ibid.* (book III, line 456).

²² *ibid.* (Book III, line 456, n.).

²³ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (138).

²⁴ Anja Müller, “Childhood in Early Modern Stairs of Life - Envisioning Age Distinctions” in *Childhood in the English Renaissance*, ed. Anja Müller (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2013) 43-56 (49).

²⁵ *ibid.* (55).

²⁶ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (107).



*The ages of man schemes showing infants not yet on the stairway of life.
Above: Cornelis Anthonisz, Die neun Lebensalter des Mannes (1540)
Below: Johann Amos Comenius, Orbis Sensualium Pictus (1658; English
translation 1672)*

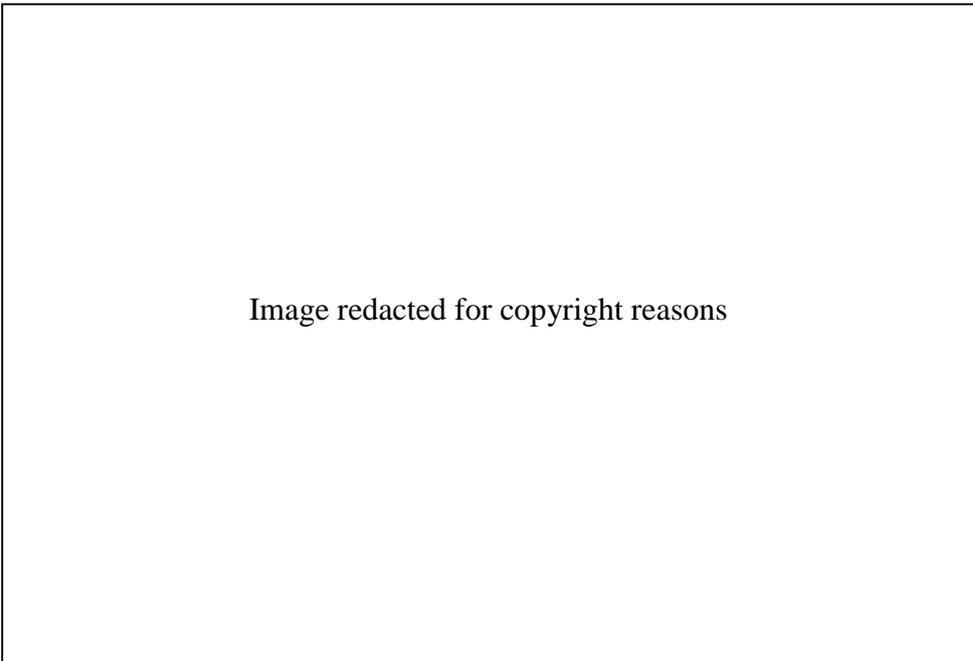


Image redacted for copyright reasons

These issues form part of the case of Anne Green, whose miraculous survival of hanging after her conviction for infanticide became the subject of several pamphlets and verses. Richard Watkins' 1651 account of the case concludes that she was saved because God knew that she was innocent.²⁷ For this to happen, that which had come from her body could not be perceived as having been a living child. Watkins has two suggestions:

That the Childe was abortive, or stilborn, and consequently not capable of being murdered. The other, that she did not certainly know that she was with childe, and that it fell from her unawares as she was in the house of office.²⁸

To prove the latter, the evidence of midwives is sought and he eventually suggests:

it was nothing else but a flux of those humors which for ten weeks before had been suppressed; and that the childe which then fell from her unawares, was nothing but a lump of the same matter coagulated.²⁹

The passage seems to refer to the "moles" or unformed lumps of flesh, believed to be brought about by intercourse during menstruation, which could cause a "travesty of birth".³⁰ Dolan writes that Watkins "translates the foetus from a person deserving legal protection to a discharge of its mother's body".³¹ Green did not give birth to an infant, but to something which occupied a liminal space between body waste or "matter" and infant.

This brief summary of the confusion of ideas which revolved around the question of when life began, and therefore when infanticide was possible, suggests that an ordinary, and perhaps not very educated woman, might have been far from clear about whether that which came from her body should be regarded as a viable being. Nor could these learned (usually male) writers dictate how a woman felt about the subject.

²⁷ Watkins, *Newes*.

²⁸ *ibid.* (6).

²⁹ *ibid.* (7).

³⁰ Helen Hackett, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Volume III: The Comedies*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 338-357 (347); Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities* (65).

³¹ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (134).

Women's expression of feelings

Although discussion of what early modern women felt must inevitably involve speculation, due to the distance across centuries and the limitations of evidence, the subject is worth considering. Early studies of the family and children stated categorically that high infant mortality resulted in lack of affection for children.³² Such views have been discredited. Wrightson, for example, states that “Questionable and basically unsubstantiated hypothesis has gained the status of accepted fact”.³³ A wealth of early modern sources make it irrefutable that men and women cared about their infants. Evidence includes that by some literate women who wrote about their emotions during pregnancy, after miscarriages and stillbirths, and following the death of very young children. Their works consistently show that, no matter what the learned claimed, as much grief and mourning was expended on these incipient or very young lives as on older children. Women show deep sorrow, which is discernible even through the stock metaphors and traditional religious lessons.³⁴ Most remarkable among these is Mary Carey's 1657 work *Upon the Sight of my abortive Birth* which reveals a mother's love for her premature birth:

What birth is this, a poor despised creature?
A little Embrio, void of life and feature?³⁵

In his edition of Elizabeth Walker's writings (1694), her widower, a Rector, tells us:

God was pleased to give her strength to go out her full time of eleven Children; six sons, and five Daughters, besides some abortive or untimely births.³⁶

This terse dismissal of her these “abortive and untimely births” does not reflect Elizabeth's experience. Of those pregnancies which went full term three were stillborn, and her response is tragically captured in her writing, the reference to her “old Enemy” suggesting that such melancholic episodes were familiar to her, and perhaps directly related to her pregnancy. She writes:

³² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1977); Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1962).

³³ Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Routledge, 1995) (107).

³⁴ For discussion of the metaphors of bereavement see Raymond A. Anselment, *The Realms of Apollo: Literature and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cranberry, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994) (72).

³⁵ Mary Carey, “Upon the Sight of my abortive Birth (1657)” in *Kissing the Rod: An anthology of 17th-century women's verse*, ed. Germaine Greer, et al. (London: Virago, 1988) 158-161 (158).

³⁶ Alice Walker, *The Vertuous Wife, or the Holy Life of Mrs Elizabeth Walker* (1694) (61).

God gave me a gracious Deliverance of an eighth Child, a Son, still-born after an hard Labour; December the 11 1660. In this Lying-in I fell into Melancholy, which much disturbed me with Vapours, and was very ill. It pleased God to suffer my old Enemy very impetuously to assault me.³⁷

Both Mary Carey and Rector Walker reveal their thoughts about the eternal fate of these failed progeny. Writing of her “little Embrio”, Carey expresses hope “that this babe (as well as all the rest) / since’t had a soul, shall be for ever blest”.³⁸ The Rector comments in praise of his deceased wife:

And if ever Children were Baptized in their Mothers Belly (excuse the Expression) doubtless hers were so; I mean solemnly Consecrated to God, with fervent, frequent Prayers, and wash’d in a Jordan of her Tears, who bore them as truly in her Heart as Womb.³⁹

In two studies of seventeenth-century, mainly autobiographical, verse and prose commemorating child death, Raymond A. Anselment discusses works dealing with newborn, stillborn and very young children and finds that sorrow obliterates distinctions of gender, age, class and religion adding that the “less educated and unprofessional writers” also sought structure and purpose through poetry.⁴⁰ He shows that people took consolation from religion, and that women who died shortly after childbirth anticipated reunion with their dead child, in contrast to Milton’s apparent placing of abortive (premature) births in Limbo. Anselment’s findings suggest that parents did not consider an infant less because it was stillborn, and consistently desired to mourn.

Gittings reached a different conclusion. She writes of the memorial plaque (below) which commemorates Elizabeth Franklin who died in childbirth in 1622:

She is shown sitting in bed, surrounded by her dead babies. The one who had been baptized appears in chrysom clothes with a bare face, but those who died unbaptised are depicted totally enveloped in shrouds with no visible human characteristics.⁴¹

Gittings continues: “Although the life-spans of these children may have varied literally by a matter of minutes, the distinction, to the people of early modern England, was immense”. However, the plaque is also a memorial to her unbaptized infants and

³⁷ *ibid.* (63).

³⁸ Carey, “Upon the Sight” (158).

³⁹ Walker, *Vertuous Wife* (61).

⁴⁰ Raymond A. Anselment, “‘The Teares of Nature’: Seventeenth-Century Parental Bereavement”, *Modern Philology*, 91.1 (1993) 26-53 (51,53); Anselment, *Realms of Apollo*.

⁴¹ Gittings, *Death, Burial* (84).

suggests the desire for them to be commemorated in church, perhaps acknowledging them as part of her and her life, but certainly not denying their existence.



Burial as an indicator of liminality

Another indicator of society's feelings about dead infants is burial requirements and practices. Gittings shows that infants who had been baptised were buried in the churchyard, while the task of disposing of the bodies of the unbaptized was left to midwives.⁴³ A book of oaths for midwives from 1649 included the instruction that:

if any childe bee 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 that you shall not suffer any such childe to be cast into the Jaques.⁴⁴

Gittings sees this as a “hinted-at exception to the almost universal rule of decent burial in early modern England” and states that it was the lack of baptism which was the defining factor in these infant deaths.⁴⁵ However, writing of the Southwark “Stew-houses”, John Stow describes a practice that suggests the liminality of some mothers, and infants:

I have heard ancient men of good credit report, that these single women were forbidden the rights of the Church, so long as they continued that sinnefull life, and were excluded from Christian buriall if they were not reconciled before their death. And therefore there was a plot of ground, called the single womens Churchyard, appointed for them, far from the Parish Church.⁴⁶

The stipulation that midwives should dispose of infant corpses was insufficient for some parents. Gowing writes that “many women, and not just legitimately pregnant ones, expected more than the simple disposal of the body that was prescribed in instructions to midwives” and, as Walker notes, parsons buried such infants in churchyards though without ceremony or service.⁴⁷ Such actions suggest that, despite doctrine, the church, as well as mothers, valued these tragically short lives.

Archival accounts and literature suggest ambivalent attitudes toward stillborn, or possibly murdered, infants. In the last chapter we saw the discovery of the partially decomposed body of an infant under the floor of an outhouse in Hastings, a location

⁴³ Gittings, *Death, Burial* (83).

⁴⁴ Cited in Forbes, *Midwife and the Witch* (146).

⁴⁵ Gittings, *Death, Burial* (83).

⁴⁶ John Stow, *A Survey of London* (1598) (448). The reputed site in Redcross Way, Southwark, has become a memorial shrine where people attach ribbons, toys, poems, flowers and other items to the railings.

⁴⁷ Gowing, “Secret Births” (110); Garthine Walker, “Just Stories: Telling Tales of Infant Death in Early Modern England” in *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women*, ed. Margaret Mikesell and Adele Seef (London: University of Delaware Press, 2003) 98-115 (103).

which suggests, but does not prove, concealment. Elsewhere, Churchwardens' presentments describe widow Hedger as:

living incontinently and having a childe begotten and borne without any lawfull marriage; [who] was unchristianlie buryed in the gates where the said widdow Hedger dwelt; and having been found by some of the parrish shee confest it to bee her childe, still-borne, and by her there buryed.⁴⁸

Spinster Elizabeth Beecraft gave birth to an infant in 1656. She stated that she did not know if it was a boy or a girl, alive or dead. The records state that:

Some time later she got out of bed, took the child, which was then dead, out of the bed and therefore wrapped it in a cloth, carried it downstairs and laid it in a settle.⁴⁹

Elizabeth's actions could be interpreted as panic and concealment, yet keeping the infant in the bed gives a sense of caring, wrapping has associations with swaddling and preparation for burial, and the settle suggests a coffin. At her trial, Elizabeth was accused of strangling the infant, but was found not guilty, despite four women giving evidence against her. The pamphlet *Sundrye strange and inhumaine Murthers* paints yet another picture. When spinster Alice Shepheard gave birth to a child, her mother and grandmother "secretly buried it in the Churchyard". No explanation is given for this choice of location.⁵⁰ There is a progression here from the outhouse, to the garden, the settle and the churchyard which indicates that people variously considered the dead infant as something to be hidden, or to be kept close as a form of caring, or as deserving of quasi-Christian interment.

Elite and popular literature and culture, and archival records, suggest that miscarried, stillborn and unbaptised infants were liminal beings existing in a betwixt and between. While some sought to clarify their legal and religious rights, and others sought medical definitions, ultimately what individuals believed was a personal matter which could not be dictated to them.

⁴⁸ Johnstone, *Presentments* (65).

⁴⁹ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (112 #439). This is an instance in which Hunnisett has appended a considerable amount of subsequent information.

⁵⁰ Anon, *Sundrye strange* (sig. B1r).

Single women and the newborn

While some women's writings or actions show that they cared about their dead infants, others suggest repugnance. This is clear from Sussex Coroners' records, and while we do not see – and would not expect to see – such emotions recorded by literate women, horror of what comes from the body is supported by the disciplines of modern psychology, psychoanalysis, and anthropology. With this in mind, I wish to return to the subject of infanticide and the actions of some of the accused women and to set them in their contemporary cultural context. This, I believe, can help us understand the manner in which women killed and disposed of their unwanted children.

Notably, fifteen of the one hundred cases in Sussex archives (see Appendix 4) include forms of the verb “to throw” (*proicere*).⁵¹ On 29 March 1621 Mary Delve “gave birth to a male child at Northiam throwing him into a pit full of water with both hands whereby he was drowned, dying immediately”.⁵² Subsequently, she pleaded not guilty and six people gave evidence, but we do not know the nature of this. She was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. In April 1626 Joan Power:

gave birth to a live male child at South Mundham and later on the same day murdered him at South Mundham, taking him in both [hands], violently throwing him onto a mound of earth [tumulus] and suffocating him whereby he [...] [died].⁵³

Although this account suggests the child was a few hours old, Jane was eventually acquitted after pleading not guilty, the jury finding that he had died a natural death.

The inquest on Elizabeth Gery's (*sic*) killing of her newborn in Nuthurst (1575) simply states that “she murdered him there”, but subsequently it emerged that she had done this by “stuffing nettles into its mouth and throwing it in a gutter”.⁵⁴ As so often, the record raises questions. What was Elizabeth's motive for her action with the nettles? If it was an attempt to silence or kill the child it was a strange choice. Or was it a desperate attempt to care for the infant? Nettle was and is a foodstuff and was also used medically. Gesner's *The newe Jewell of Health* states that nettle “draweth downe

⁵¹ The meanings of this verb include: to throw, cast, make projection; send, project propel (from the body); to throw away, discard, reject (especially something unwanted or little valued); to cast out, banish. D.R. Howlett, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, vol. Fascicule XII Pos-Pro (Oxford: OUP for British Academy, 2009).

⁵² Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (54 #222).

⁵³ *ibid.* (68 #273).

⁵⁴ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (33 #153); Cockburn, *Assize Records: Sussex* (113 #569).

the womens Termes, and expelleth the youngling deade”.⁵⁵ Gerard gives several medical uses including its being “good for them that cannot breathe unlesse they hold their necks upright”.⁵⁶ Did Elizabeth throw her child, or simply leave it? Modern forensic science would analyse the force of the action by studying the positioning of the body and physical injuries, but the science barely existed at the time. Elizabeth Gery was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

The statement that a woman had thrown her child appears to be simply a record of events. But how can we understand such treatment of newborns? Can the fact that they were thrown provide any insight into the crime? The action is bewildering at first sight, but modern knowledge about the relationships which can exist between a mother and her unborn child adds to our understanding, particularly bearing in mind that in the early modern period unmarried status may have increased these feelings. Throwing can also be understood from anthropological theories. It conveys a sense of abjection, revulsion towards the body, and a horror of what comes from it. It suggests repugnance toward the newborn that prompts its discarding like other bodily waste: out of the window, in a gutter, on a mound of earth, in a privy.

Complex emotions and life-threatening times

While many aspects of pregnancy are socially and temporally specific, such as unmarried women’s fears about reputation and economic survival, others are universal and eternal, including the mother’s relationship with her unborn child. For this reason I believe that the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis can be enlightening about early modern women. This section therefore considers these modern disciplines in relation to early modern pregnancy.

Research by psychoanalyst Dana Birksted-Breen shows that even welcome pregnancies can be accompanied by complex emotions. She writes of “Doubts, confusion, regrets, anxieties and disbelief [...] The baby inside is felt to be able to read [the mother’s] mind [...] All this is aggravated by the fact that minimal reassurance is

⁵⁵ Conrad Gesner, *The newe jewell of Health* (1576) (47v); John Gerard, *The herball or Generall historie of plantes*, ed. Thomas Johnson (1636) (707).

⁵⁶ Gerard, *Herball* (1636) (707).

available concerning the baby”.⁵⁷ A woman may fear that the child she is expecting is invasive “like a cancerous growth”, and that it knows her secret thoughts and disapproves of them.⁵⁸ Birksted-Breen sees this as related to the woman’s perception of herself in terms of “inside” and “outside”. She writes:

Does she think of herself and the baby as ‘inside’ as opposed to the outside world? Or is the baby an intruder getting into her as a dangerous representative of the outside world? Does the baby, from belonging to the outside, become part of her, or, on the contrary, from being part of her separate out by parthenogenesis?⁵⁹

Such ideas would have been unlikely to be articulated by an early modern woman, but this does not mean that they would not have been felt. An unmarried woman would have had every reason to perceive the child as “an intruder” and “a dangerous representative of the outside world”. This would have been increased by the knowledge that the child was a genuine threat which was difficult to discuss with others, an important point as modern research shows that the ability to express anxiety during late pregnancy can influence a woman’s ability to cope once the child is born.⁶⁰

That findings such as those of Birksted-Breen can result from research with women who were happy to be pregnant and unlikely to be regarded as social outcasts, suggests that an unmarried early modern woman may have regarded the child she was carrying with fear and animosity.⁶¹ Added to this were early modern thinking and social conditions, to which women were subject. Pregnancy was related to the mother’s conveying of original sin to her infant,⁶² a belief captured by Anne Bradstreet “Ah me! Conceived in sin, and born in sorrow”,⁶³ and suggested by her reference to the shame of her own conception “Whose mean beginning, blushing cann’t reveal / But night and

⁵⁷ Dana Birksted-Breen, “The experience of having a baby: a developmental view” in *Spilt Milk’: Perinatal Loss and Breakdown*, ed. Joan Raphael-Leff (London: Institute of Psychiatry, 2000) 17-27 (18).

⁵⁸ *ibid.* (20). These observations appear to give the unborn child supernatural abilities. Similarly, the supra-natural abilities of the “unborn” can be seen in Shakespeare’s depiction of Macduff as not “of woman born.” See Janet Adelman, “‘Born of Woman’: Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*” in *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 90-121.

⁵⁹ Birksted-Breen, “The experience” (19); Tess Cosslett, *Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses of Motherhood* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1994) (117).

⁶⁰ Birksted-Breen, “The experience” (17).

⁶¹ This did not of course apply to all women, many of whom welcomed the prospect of motherhood (Lucinda M. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) (35, 192).

⁶² Greer et al., eds., *Kissing the Rod* (122).

⁶³ Anne Bradstreet “*The Four Ages of Man*” in *ibid.* (121).

darknesse must with shame conceal”.⁶⁴ Unmarried women also had to face the possibility of death with which all women had to contend, particularly if they anticipated facing childbirth alone or with little help. The mortality rate for each pregnancy is estimated at between one and three percent which, for married women with the possibility of ten or more pregnancies during a lifetime, meant that pregnancy-related death could have been twenty-five percent.⁶⁵ Thus, in a poem “Before the birth of one of her Children”, found posthumously, Anne Bradstreet wrote “How soon, my Dear death may my steps attend”.⁶⁶ In the preface to her *Mothers Legacie To her unborne Childe* (1624), Elizabeth Joceline wrote “I may die”.⁶⁷ She ordered her winding sheet within days of quickening, asked to be laid in it immediately after the birth, and died nine days later.⁶⁸

Although records have survived about literate early modern women’s anxieties concerning the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth they do not articulate their thoughts concerning the unborn child, except when a mother attempts to anticipate a child’s nature if she dies giving birth. However, a glimpse of women’s pregnancy-related fears is seen in Alice Thornton’s memory of a dream in 1660:

I, beeing great with child, dreamed one night that I was laid in childe-bed, had the white sheete spread, and all over it was sprinkled with smale drops of pure blood, as if it had bin dashed with one’s hand, which so frightened me that I tould my aunt of it in the morning; but she putt it of as well as she could, and said dreams was not to be regarded; but I kept in my mind till my child died.⁶⁹

Theoretical debates about the significance of dreams went back to the ancients, and Christian teaching about dream divination was a complex attempt to balance a general disapproval with biblical prognostic dreams.⁷⁰ However, just as the learned

⁶⁴ Germaine Greer et al., eds., *Kissing the Rod: An anthology of 17th-century women’s verse* (London: Virago, 1988). (Greer et al. gloss this as referring to sexual intercourse. Post reformation “splintered” cultural views included the belief that celibacy was the supreme state. (William Naphy, *Sex Crimes from Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004) (12).)

⁶⁵ B.M. Willmott Dobbie, “An attempt to estimate the true rate of maternal mortality, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries”, *Medical History*, 26 (1982) 79-90; Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982) (125).

⁶⁶ Anne Bradstreet in Greer et al., *Kissing the Rod* (134).

⁶⁷ Greer et al., *Kissing the Rod* (135).

⁶⁸ *ibid.* (11).

⁶⁹ Alice Thornton, *The autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton of East Newton, Co. York* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) (123).

⁷⁰ Angus Gowland, “Melancholy, Imagination and Dreaming in Renaissance Learning” in *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Yasmin Haskell (Turnhout:

could not stipulate how ordinary people felt about the status of the unborn, stillborn, or newborn infant, they could not govern how they felt about their dreams.⁷¹ Peter Holland suggests that people liked to talk and write about them, and that they were generally taken seriously. He describes Thomas Hill's *The moste pleasante arte of the interpretation of dreames* (1576) as "the most substantial attempt in English Renaissance writing to produce an account of dream theory"⁷² although it was not a "usable manual for dream interpretation". Many dreams express anxiety about childbirth, the premature loss of a child, and the difficulties of the parent-child relationship.⁷³ Alice Thornton, lacking the ability to understand her dream, turned to an older relative for advice. Her action suggests that women may have discussed their relationship with an unborn child with other women. Similarly, emphasising the mother/daughter's shared experience of pregnancy, and suggesting the pregnant woman's complex feelings toward her unborn child, Anne Bradstreet writes of her own birth:

My mothers breeding sicknes, I will spare;
Her nine months weary burden not declare.⁷⁴

To summarise, an unmarried, pregnant woman carried her child for nine months knowing that she had conceived in sin. She might feel that her body had been invaded by an intruding, dangerous visitor from the outside world. She lived with the knowledge that the labour she was to undergo, possibly alone, was life-threatening. When these factors are considered, the throwing of a newborn appears to be more than an act of murderous violence.

Brepols, 2011) 53-102; Katharine Hodgkin, Michelle O'Callaghan, and S.J. Wiseman, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Dream: The Terrors of the Night* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁷¹ For a discussion of competing opinions about dreams, including their prophetic and diagnostic value, see Peter Holland, "'The Interpretation of Dreams' in the Renaissance" in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: OUP, 1999) 125-46.

⁷² Thomas Hill, *The moste pleasante arte of the interpretation of dreames* (1576). Holland, "Interpretation of Dreams".

⁷³ For a discussion of the dreams described by Hill see Carole Levin, "Parents, Children, and Responses to Death in Dream Structures in Early Modern England" in *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) 39-50. See also Carole Levin, *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008) (35).

⁷⁴ From *The Four Ages of Man*, cited in Greer et al., *Kissing the Rod* (121).

Other researchers further elucidate the situation. Describing pregnancy, Julia Kristeva writes of “the collapse of the border between inside and outside”.⁷⁵ She continues: “it is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s ‘own and clean self’ but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents”. As Gail Kern Paster notes, early modern women were inscribed as “leaky vessels”, beyond their own control and therefore threatening, excessive, disturbing and shameful.⁷⁶ They were “moister, more polluted and flowing and as a result, thus more prone to impinge leakily on someone else’s space”.⁷⁷ Sexual impurity magnified women’s polluting ability, and her sense of contaminating others. Literature confirms this. In *The Changeling*, Beatrice-Joanna warns her father of her contagiousness:

O come not near me, sir, I shall defile you:
I am that of your blood was taken from you
For your better health; look no more upon’t.
But cast it to the ground regardlessly,
Let not the common sewer take it from distinction.⁷⁸

Similarly, in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Frankford asks for Anne’s children to be brought to them only to demand that they are removed, punishing her with a form of on-stage ripping of the child from her womb:

Away with them, lest as her spotted body
Hath stained their names with stripe of bastardy,
So her adult’rous breath may blast their spirits
With her infectious thoughts.⁷⁹

Anthropologist Douglas discusses body orifices in terms of boundaries, and that which comes from them as marginal. She writes: “Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body”.⁸⁰ Excreta can be dangerous and pollutant. In her examination of what is meant by “dirt”, Douglas

⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁷⁶ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1993) (25); Gowing, *Common Bodies* (22).

⁷⁷ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London: Routledge, 1996) (121).

⁷⁸ Thomas Middleton, “The Changeling” in *Women Beware Women and Other Plays* ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford: OUP, 1999) 165-236 (V.iii.149).

⁷⁹ Thomas Heywood, “A Woman Killed with Kindness (1603)” in *A Woman Killed with Kindness and other Domestic Plays*, ed. Martin Wiggins (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 70-128 (Scene 12, 123).

⁸⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (121).

concludes that it is “matter out of place” a definition which, she states, “implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order”.⁸¹ “Matter out of place” appears an apt description of how an unmarried woman might have felt toward her newborn.⁸² It provides another reason for infant bodies being found in privies, which is usually explained by their private, concealed location beyond the home. Valerie Fildes excludes such cases from her study of abandonment “since they were more likely to be cases of intended infanticide”,⁸³ but Hoffer and Hull offer a different explanation. They write: “Some young, ill-tutored mothers did not know when they were pregnant, much less so in labor, and their infant might have fallen into a privy by accident, or been placed there after stillbirth”.⁸⁴ Ideas about the body, waste and abjection provide yet another way of understanding why this particular location was chosen, rather than the churches, cloisters, hospitals and entrances to dwellings to which others turned at this time.⁸⁵

While unmarried women may have associated their newborns with dirt and defilement, literature shows pregnancy as a source of power. It enabled women to escape punishment, by pleading benefit of belly, taunt enemies, or to secure marriage. In *2 Henry IV*, Doll Tearsheet stuffs her skirt with a cushion to feign pregnancy, telling the Beadle who is attempting to arrest her “an the child I go with do miscarry, thou wert better thou hadst struck thy mother”. He replies: “If it do, you shall have a dozen cushions again; you have but eleven now” (V.iv.9). Threatened with death in *1 Henry VI* La Pucelle claims “I am with child, ye bloody homicides; / Murder not then the fruit within my womb” and proceeds to taunt the English with a succession of reputed fathers, evidence that York recognises for what it is: “I did imagine what would be her refuge” (V.v.62). In *All’s Well that Ends Well*, Helen’s pregnancy is proof that her marriage to Bertram has been consummated, whereas in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Jaquenetta claims to be pregnant by Don Armado – a social advance for her. The

⁸¹ *ibid.* (35).

⁸² Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (63).

⁸³ Valerie Fildes, “Maternal feelings re-assessed: child abandonment and neglect in London and Westminster 1550-1800” in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990) 139-178 (144).

⁸⁴ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (10). These authors’ research reveals that “juries made various decisions in privy vault cases.”

⁸⁵ Fildes, “Maternal feelings”. Wilson suggests that in such cases the mother may have been seeking a better chance of survival for her child (Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (59).)

reverse situation also arises, and it is only after marriage that men realise that they have been tricked into marrying pregnant women and will have to rear another's child, as in *'Tis Pity she's a Whore*, and the duped newlywed in *Joy and sorrow mixt together* who complains: "My Wife she proved to be with Barn; / The Child it will me father call".⁸⁶

We have seen that while for some unmarried women pregnancy could be a powerful tool for averting threats, taunting enemies or entrapping a husband, for others it was an invasion of the body. A woman may have regarded the infant as an "intruder" which came away from her body's secret places and should be disposed of like any other bodily "dirt" – with force to put it at a distance. The feeling would have been amplified by the difficulties of single status.⁸⁷

When observations from a range of disciplines are considered it becomes plausible that, when an early modern woman is described as throwing her newborn, her action may be an expression of mental, physical and social factors and not merely an attempt to conceal her crime. She may have felt hostility toward the unborn child and have believed that it had supernatural powers, or have associated it with the purely physical embracing aspects of menstrual blood, the body's waste and pollutants. In Douglas' terminology, it may have been "matter out of place". The action suggests enactment of the rejection she received from the child's father. Or, she may have seen the child in the same terms as her society – a burden, a marker of her shame, and a bastard destined to lead a life of hardship.

The liminal world of pregnancy

Paster argues that early modern England constructed "pregnancy as a disease, birth as evacuation, and lactation as a possibly demeaning form of labor", yet pregnant women were subject to precise regimes, if they could afford the time and expense of indulging in them, which gave them iconic status and constructed them as liminal beings.⁸⁸ It was, as Gowing points out, an abdication of control.⁸⁹ Although Adrian Wilson previously accepted van Gennep's theories of separation, transition, and reintegration in relation to childbirth, he now rejects these theories, and Thomas' belief

⁸⁶ Anon, *Countrey Farmer*; Richard Climsell, *Joy and Sorrow mixt together* (c.1635). Other such examples are discussed in Chapter 4.

⁸⁷ The difficulties of single status are discussed in Chapter 4.

⁸⁸ Paster, *Body Embarrassed* (215). I discuss breastfeeding further in Chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Gowing, *Common Bodies* (11).

that the rituals stemmed from popular attitudes.⁹⁰ He favours instead the idea that birth practices reversed power relations between men and women.⁹¹ However, Wilson's and Thomas' theories do not negate the fact that practices such as lying in and churching *did* involve separation, transition and reintegration (see p. 46). Their alternative theories, I believe, partially reinforce the endurance of this ancient and widespread ritual pattern, which can, nevertheless, be founded in popular attitudes and related to alterations in power. The possibilities suggested by alternative theories do not alter the fact that practices surrounding childbirth followed van Gennep's pattern, including the liminal period later suggested by Turner, as discussed below.

The protracted lying-in period made a woman a separate being who existed between the daily life of her household and the death which could be the outcome of her confinement. Lying in a peaceful and airy room especially set aside for her, and with female attendants, she becomes a goddess-like figure attended by votresses. This status was assigned to her throughout her pregnancy, which required special foods, and a careful sleep and exercise regime.⁹² Jacques Guillemeau recommends she be "carried in a chaire or litter between two strong men, and chiefly two houres before meales" and to preserve her beauty she was to "weare a chaine of gold about her necke".⁹³ In the weeks approaching the birth she was to sit in a perfumed bath each morning for fifteen to thirty minutes before being put to bed and massaged with oils.⁹⁴ Special foods and rituals were to continue after the birth. The attendant appointed as her special carer had two principal duties:⁹⁵

The first is, To give the woman in child-bed this drinke.

Take oyle of sweet Almonds newly drawne, two ounces, Syrup of Maidenhaire,⁹⁶ one

⁹⁰ Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (191).

⁹¹ *ibid.* (193).

⁹² Jacques Guillemeau, *Childe-birth or The Happy Delivery of Women* (1635) (20). For the benefits of oils see also Rueff, *Expert Midwife* (70, 72, 79).

⁹³ Guillemeau, *Childe-birth* (22,27).

⁹⁴ *ibid.* (30).

⁹⁵ *ibid.* (101).

⁹⁶ Maidenhaire (*Adiatum*): Gerard writes expansively on the plant, including criticising Dioscorides for inconsistency in writing that it "stancheth blood", shortly after stating that it "draweth away the secondaries & bringeth down the desired sicknes." John Gerard, *The herball or Generall historie of plants* (1597) (984).

ounce, white wine, water of Parielarie of the wal,⁹⁷ and Carduus Benedictus⁹⁸ of each halfe an ounce, Mingle them very well together with much shaking, and so let her drinke it. This medicine will mitigate the lenisie the passage of the throat, and Trachaea Arteria, which have beene heated, and stretched with crying, and groaning.

These recommended adornments, cordials, and foods are semi-medical, semi-ritualistic, and semi-superstitious. They were to care for the woman's mental and physical well-being at a time when the pre-Reformation sanctified objects, such as holy girdles, were denied to them,⁹⁹ although Thomas argues that their use often continued.¹⁰⁰ Today they appear to resemble pagan-like rituals for a goddess, particularly when the midwife's other duty is considered – the sacrifice of an animal, possibly living. This practice existed in strange juxtaposition with the midwife's Christian duty to the child. According to Guillemeau midwives were to:

cause a sheep to be fleaed, and to wrap the womans backe and belly in the skin yet warme, thereby to strengthen and comfort all those parts, which have beene as it were disjointed, and pulled one from another, with much striving in her travaile. Avicen¹⁰¹ thinks it enough to lay upon the womans belly, a Hares skin, newly stript from the Hare being alive.¹⁰²

The special attendance continued in the days and weeks after the birth, as did the offerings to the new mother. He continues:

The first five dayes, let her use Broths, Panades, new Egges, and gelly not glutting herselfe (as commonly they doe) either with flesh or Almonds. In the morning let her take a supping or Broth: and so likewise at dinner [...] The great Ladies of Italy doe use a water made of Capons [...]¹⁰³

The essentially abstemious diet continues with a recipe for chicken broth which could include “leafe of Gold, with a dramme of powder of pearle”.

Rueff suggests a less demanding and more pragmatic approach to pregnancy. He advises women to “be of a merry heart” and to “give their endeavour to moderat

⁹⁷ Parielarie of the wal: Pellitory of the Wall (*Parietaria officinalis?*): Among uses of the herb, Gerard includes that it “helpeth such as are vexed with an old cough” and that “tempered with the oile of sweet almond” it can be “laid to the pained parts” as a poultice. Gerard, *Herball (1636)* (331).

⁹⁸ None of the uses of *Carduus Benedictus*, as listed by Gerard, appear relevant to childbirth or strained throats. Gerard, *Herball (1597)* (1008). The recommendation that Beatrice lay *Carduus Benedictus* to her heart when she complains of a cold in *Much Ado about Nothing* (III.v.68) appears to be merely a pun on Benedick's name.

⁹⁹ Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies* (11,14).

¹⁰⁰ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) (84,222).

¹⁰¹ Avicenna (first century CE) was a Persian physician and polymath.

¹⁰² Guillemeau, *Childe-birth* (101).

¹⁰³ *ibid.* (191).

joyes and sports” and to “take heed of cold and sharp winds, great heat, anger, perturbations of the minde, feares and terrours”.¹⁰⁴ His instructions continue with oils and drinks, at a time when there was little else women could turn to. By setting pregnant women apart from others, such advice reflects van Gennep’s identification of separation from a previous world as part of ritual processes, and their seclusion suggests the enclosure of the tomb and womb. The extent to which these regimes were followed is less important than their construction of pregnant women as special beings, and not all women were subject to such practices. Patricia Crawford writes: “The pregnancies of poor mothers were less a time of indulgence than for women at higher levels of society”.¹⁰⁵

Clearly such cosseting was not available to the unmarried woman whose fate may have been to conceal her pregnancy and give birth alone. Yet even the bastard-bearing (but elite) Francisca in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* is shown as indulging in a special diet. “Come, how much spice and sugar have you left now / At this poor one-month’s voyage?” asks Almachildes who then wonders at the scant amount that remains when he hears her reply “There was thirty pounds, good weight and true” he says.¹⁰⁶ Others also scorned the extravagances of lying-in. The deification of pregnancy and motherhood was clearly visible to the childless, and perhaps embittered, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, who believed that women desired children for social reasons.¹⁰⁷ Her criticisms of pregnant women, quoted by Sara Heller Mendelson, included “Eating more [...] taking pride in their great Bellies” and using their condition as an excuse for “Feigning Laziness” and “the wasteful expense of fancy childbed linen and other accoutrements of the lying in”. Cavendish adds:

Again, to redouble the Charge, there must be Gossiping, not only with Costly Banquets at the Christening and Churching, but they have Gossiping all the time of their Lying-in.¹⁰⁸

However, as mentioned, such female gatherings may have been partially to protect the child from infanticide or accidental death from overlaying, as in the case of Jane Hattersley discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Rueff, *Expert Midwife* (67).

¹⁰⁵ Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children* (117).

¹⁰⁶ Middleton, *The Witch* (II.iii.40).

¹⁰⁷ Sara Heller Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987) (25).

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* (26).

The pregnant woman as deity is also captured in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portraits celebrating women in the late stages of pregnancy.¹⁰⁹ In Marcus Gheeraerts' portrait of Anne, Lady Pope (below), her pearls, emblems of purity and attributes of St Margaret of Antioch the patron saint of childbirth,¹¹⁰ and her white dress, contrasted with her pregnant figure, suggest she can be perceived as both pregnant and chaste, also implying married chastity, regarded by Protestants as the most virtuous state for women. From the pinnacle of the triangle formed by her family group – a position of power – and adorned with a complex headdress and wired collar forming a quasi-halo, she looks at the world of the viewer from the edge of her separate realm of the pregnant woman like a virgin goddess of motherhood.



Marcus Gheeraerts: Anne, Lady Pope with her children (1596)

¹⁰⁹ Pauline Croft and Karen Hearn, “‘Only matrimony maketh children to be certain’ Two Elizabethan Pregnancy Portraits”, *British Art Journal*, 3.3 (2001) 19-24.

¹¹⁰ Karen Hearn and Rica Jones, *Marcus Gheeraerts II: Elizabethan Artist in Focus* (London: Tate, 2003) (46).

The end of the woman's lying-in and her reintegration into society were marked by the rituals of the Churching ceremony, a now seldom-practised custom which has many attributes of the rites of passage identified by van Gennep and Turner.¹¹¹ It was held at the church for the mother and her friends, the former's continuing liminality being signified by the wearing of a veil or sitting apart from the others in church. Churching was surrounded in controversy.¹¹² There was uncertainty about its purpose – whether it was celebration, thanksgiving for the mother's safe delivery, purification, or her welcome back to the community.¹¹³ Religious leaders regarded it as a dangerous survival of Popish and Jewish practices; Keith Thomas says it was considered “one of the most obnoxious Popish survivals in the Anglican church”.¹¹⁴ Social reformers reviled its implication that women who had given birth were temporarily unclean.¹¹⁵ Many objected to a rising lack of decorum at the service.¹¹⁶ Yet the church expected women to go through the ceremony. Margaret Parker of Thakeham was named to Churchwardens because “she came not to give thanks unto Almighty God for her safe deliverance from the payne and perill of childebirth”.¹¹⁷ “Mr Robinson”, the minister at Launsing, was presented to the Archbishops because he “did put of (*sic*) from churching the wife of one William Osborne upon the Sabbath day and is not as yet churched”.¹¹⁸ Such complaints carry within them a suggestion that these mothers continued to be apart from society, an impression which is endorsed by women's desire for the ceremony. This, as well as the denial of the customary lying-in period, may underlie Hermione's complaint that she is brought before the court with “The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs / To women of all fashion”.¹¹⁹ For some, Churching was semi-magical, again linking it with the rituals identified by van Gennep and Turner. There was a belief that a woman who died in childbirth without being Churched should be denied a Christian burial,¹²⁰ which may help to explain why an excommunicated woman became

¹¹¹ David Cressy, “Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England”, *Past and Present*, 141 (1993) 106-16; Adrian Wilson, “The ceremony of childhood and its interpretation” in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990) 65-97.

¹¹² Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (175, 207-209).

¹¹³ Cressy, “Thanksgiving” (145); Thomas, *Religion* (68).

¹¹⁴ Thomas, *Religion* (42).

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* (43).

¹¹⁶ Cressy, “Thanksgiving” (128).

¹¹⁷ Johnstone, *Presentments* (17).

¹¹⁸ *ibid.* (93).

¹¹⁹ *The Winter's Tale* (III.ii.103)

¹²⁰ Thomas, *Religion* (43). The belief endorses the idea of the polluting female body discussed on p. 104.

so distressed by her inability to be Churched that her husband carried out the ceremony, and why a woman Churched herself.¹²¹ Cressy writes of a woman who wanted to be Churched although her child was stillborn, and the desire of another woman who was awaiting execution for infanticide to be allowed the ceremony.¹²²

These beliefs help us to understand why bastard bearers could be Churched. “Here’s a sweet churching after a woman’s labour / And a fine ‘give you joy’” says Francisca, after the birth and abandonment of her infant and Isabella’s speech of admonishment and warning.¹²³ But a poor bastard bearer may have felt ambivalent about Churching. It was an important ritual in a woman’s life, signifying and confirming her role as a mother, yet she would almost certainly remain partially liminal and outside the respectable “matron” group whose status gave them power as assessors of suspects’ virginity or pregnancy, as witnesses in court, and as part of the friendship group who helped others during childbirth.¹²⁴ Cressy believes the main purpose of Churching was thanksgiving and celebration,¹²⁵ but while a bastard bearer may have wanted to give thanks that she had survived the “grim lottery of child-bed”, she might not have been thankful about the situation she found herself in. She may have felt unable to afford the service or the celebration to follow it, or have lacked people willing to celebrate with her. In answer to the question, was it also purification? Cressy answers “Only if she thought herself unclean”, which a bastard bearer may, more than others, have believed. If so, she could be Churched, though archbishops were keen to deny the right until the woman had named the child’s father and carried out penance, thus using her desire for the ceremony to force her to conform to societal demands.¹²⁶ Not taking part in Churching or Baptism could have contributed to a mother’s sense of herself and her child as liminal. The lack of these ceremonies could have emphasised the reality of her situation – that she was between the two traditional cultures of the single woman working to assemble a dowry and find a husband, and that of the married matron and respectable mother. The fact that unmarried mothers had undergone pregnancy and childbirth, even if others had been unaware of it at the time, meant that

¹²¹ *ibid.*; Cressy, “Thanksgiving” (130).

¹²² Cressy, “Thanksgiving” (120,125).

¹²³ Middleton, *The Witch* (iii.II.112).

¹²⁴ Oldham, “History of the Jury of Matrons”.

¹²⁵ Cressy, “Thanksgiving” (145).

¹²⁶ *ibid.* (131).

they had been liminal beings and needed to be reintegrated into their community. But such reintegration was fraught with difficulties, as Chapter 4 shows.

While traditions such as lying in and churching placed the pregnant woman in a liminal space between the worlds of childbirth and the wider society, her own mental state might separate her in a different manner. Recognising pregnancy was not straightforward¹²⁷ and a woman could both believe herself to be pregnant and deny it to herself. The term “pregnancy denial” is a modern commonplace, and Dulit identifies three phases.¹²⁸ These are: hoping not to be pregnant (termed by Porter and Gavin “a simple desire”), denying the condition to others (which they term concealment) and pushing the facts away, which they acknowledge as true denial.¹²⁹ Such mental states would have helped those who were unhappy to be pregnant to cope.

An unmarried, pregnant woman could find herself in a liminal situation, unable to locate herself in either the world of her employers, friends and family, or the world of motherhood. She would have lived with the fact that she occupied, and must continue to occupy, a place between these acknowledged and acceptable spheres of women’s social function. By committing infanticide she could attempt to relocate herself from her liminal state into that of a single woman seeking a husband. Unchaste women who tricked men into marriage, often when pregnant, demonstrate another route out of this liminality. They were popular subjects in early modern ballads, and we shall meet some of them in Chapter 4.

Liminality in retellings: monsters, devils and dogs

We saw in Chapter 1 that woman’s animality during childbearing was emphasised by gynaecologists, and that descriptions of women who killed a child could situate them on the threshold between human and animal: “like a she-wolf”, or as a “monster of nature”. Here I return to this idea to demonstrate that the language of monstrosity was just one of the ways in which writers constructed an association between infanticide and the liminal. References to figures regarded today as mythical, such as monsters, fairies, and the devil, are interspersed with the reality of dogs and of

¹²⁷ This subject is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹²⁸ E. Dulit, “Girls who deny a pregnancy. Girls who kill the neonate”, *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 25 (2000) 219-235.

¹²⁹ Porter and Gavin, “Infanticide and Neonaticide” (105); Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (63).

midwives and their association with witches. Writers thus created a hotch-potch of confused but consistently disturbing associations between infanticide and the liminal.

Monsters are good place to start as the term was applied both to seriously malformed infants and to composite beings. Ambroise Paré distinguished between monsters and prodigies. He writes: “Wee terme that infant monstrous, which is borne with one arme alone, or with two heads”. However, prodigies were “those things which happen contrary to the whole course of nature [...] as if a woman should bee delivered of a Snake, or a Dogge”.¹³⁰

Brammall has identified an increase in accounts of “abnormal births” during the 1550s and 1560s which, she writes, were perceived as warnings to the nation.¹³¹ A pamphlet told readers that conjoined twins, born in 1565, were “a warninge of God, to move all people to amendment of lyfe”.¹³² Other literature points to the vices of the parents.¹³³ In *Richard III* the aspiring monarch blames his mother for his deformities, telling the audience that he is “like to a chaos” because she did “corrupt frail Nature with some bribe” (III.ii.155) (See also *3 Henry VI*, III.ii.153). Yet the author of one pamphlet specifically notes that the parents of a “monstrous Chylde” were “of honest & quiet conversation” and had other children “in natural proportion”.¹³⁴ Alexandra Walsham states that ministers were “struggling to subvert the deeply seated assumption that the conception of such children was a variety of retributive justice directed against their begetters”¹³⁵ and it is notable that street literature often stipulates that the infant was baptised. She adds “At village level, infants with appalling congenital defects evidently cast a terrible shadow over the morals of married couples who had the misfortune to bring them into the world”.¹³⁶ One author warns that such births should not be interpreted as evidence of “some notoryous vyce or offence” in the parents alone, but as “lessons & scholynges for us all”.¹³⁷ Monstrosity could also be linked with God’s wonders, and Paré describes the pragmatic manner in which ordinary people might deal

¹³⁰ Ambroise Paré, *The workes of that famous chirugion Ambrose Parey*, trans. Th. Johnson (1634) (961).

¹³¹ Brammall, “Monstrous Metamorphosis” (10); Wes Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2011) (39).

¹³² W. Elderton, *The true fourme and shape of a monstrous Chylde* (1565).

¹³³ See for example Anon, *Prides Fall; Or, A warning for all English Women* (1663-1674).

¹³⁴ John D., *A discription of a monstrous Chylde, borne at Chychester in Sussex* (1562).

¹³⁵ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 1999) (198).

¹³⁶ *ibid.* (201).

¹³⁷ Anon, *The true description of two monstrous Chyldren* (1565).

with such tragedies. He writes of conjoined twins who “lived half an hour and were baptized” and those born in Verona in 1475:¹³⁸

The novelty and strangeness of the thing moved their parents, being but poor, to carry them through all the chiefe townes of Italy, to get mony of all such as came to see them.¹³⁹

Prodigies – that which is “contrary to the whole course of nature” – also attracted writers (see p. 52).¹⁴⁰ Repeated affirmation of the truth of Autolycus’ ballad of “how a usurer’s wife was brought to bed of twenty moneybags”¹⁴¹ parodies belief in such narratives. In his *Compleat History* of “providences”, William Turner records a “horrible monster” born in 1531:

very wild, having four Feet, a Man’s Head Bearded and Combed, Eagles Feet, Hands almost like a Lions Paws, a Dogs Tail, and his Body of a dark yellow colour.¹⁴²

This description recalls the flamboyant composite figures in medieval manuscripts, on buildings, and church decoration which would have helped readers to visualise such beings.¹⁴³ Thomas Brewer’s description of Jane Hattersley’s character states that she has “a Lions upper-part in bouldnesse: a Goates middle part in lust: and a Serpents lowerpart in sting and poyson” calling on similar imagery.¹⁴⁴ It suggests both her physical and moral corruption and creates an oscillation between the solidarity of the imagined physical image and her concealed immorality. The heinous behaviour of women such as Jane Hattersley never seems to result in such births, although moral married couples were thus cursed.

Similarly, contemporary witchcraft discourses conflated fiction and truth, in that the figure of the witch was easily merged with that of the midwife, who was discussed in Chapter 1. David Harley is among those who have demolished associations between midwives and witches, showing that the former were respected members of society

¹³⁸ Paré, *Workes* (968).

¹³⁹ *ibid.* (964).

¹⁴⁰ Brammall, “Monstrous Metamorphosis”.

¹⁴¹ *Winter’s Tale* (IV.iv.260)

¹⁴² William Turner, *A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences Both of Judgment and Mercy* (1697) (25).

¹⁴³ See for example Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion, 1992).

¹⁴⁴ Brewer, *Bloudy Mother*. Discussed in Chapter 1.

whose evidence was used in court.¹⁴⁵ However, midwives had power over life and death. They witnessed whether an infant was born alive. They inhabited the liminal world of the birth chamber, had access to secrets, and could be suspected of lying. Writers constantly maligned midwives by associating them with malpractice. Autolycus confirms the unreliability of midwives when he asserts the truth of the usurer's wife's monstrous birth by answering Mopsa's "Is it true, think you" with "Here's the midwife's name to't, one Mistress Tail Porter, and five or six honest wives' that were present" (IV.iv.264).

Fictional and historical midwives switched babies as in Jonson's *The Magnetic Lady*¹⁴⁶ and *A true relation*, in which wetnurse Abigail Hill borrows children to show to the parish masters, in place of those whom she has murdered.¹⁴⁷ Fairies were also thought to exchange babies, a belief which may have allowed infanticide to pass unnoticed, or at least provided communities with an expedient and mysterious culprit. The abandoned Perdita is assumed a changeling, and toward the end of *1 Henry IV* the disappointed monarch wishes his own son were a changeling:

O that it could be proved
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
And call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet! (IV 1.1.85)

Mary Ellen Lamb suggests that belief in fairies could be used as a "cover" for infanticide; it was believed they could exchange mortal infants for changelings, and the truth could only be determined through such methods as starvation or throwing the child on hot coals.¹⁴⁸ This may underlie the brutal cases in which children are scorched, which occasionally appear in the Middlesex archives. In Stepney, on 12 December 1614:

Anne Capell late of the said parish spinster assaulted Abigall Scowler, a female infant aged two years, by lifting up her clothes till she was naked from the feet to the shoulders, and exposing her thus stript to the heat of a sea-coal fire, till she was so

¹⁴⁵ David Harley, "Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch", *Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 3.1 (1990) 1-26.

¹⁴⁶ Ben Jonson, *The Magnetic Lady*, ed. Peter Happé, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁷ Anon, *A true relation*.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Ellen Lamb, "Taken by the Fairies: Fairy Practices and the production of popular culture in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51.3 (2000) 277-312 (292).

scorched and burnt by the same fire on her buttocks and thighs, that she died thereof on the 3rd day of January next following.¹⁴⁹

Anne Capell pleaded not guilty and was acquitted. Whether such cases are or are not associated with beliefs about changelings and witchcraft beliefs, such ideas contributed to a social acceptance of cruelty and could allow infanticide to take place in a manner which the community accepted – what Lamb calls “an encoded white lie”.¹⁵⁰

There were other associations between witches and children. The stereotypical witch was childless and the illness or death of a child was frequently blamed on a local woman considered to be a witch. One such case is included in the pamphlet *The Most Cruell and Bloody Murder*, which describes a witch referred to as A.H. who was hanged following her perceived revenge on the child of a woman who had accidentally sprinkled her with water. The author writes:

on the sudde[n] (while she was stept but into a next rowm to ha[n]g up some clothes) the cradle wherein her child lay, was t[h]rowne ouer shattered all to péeces, the child upon the face whelmed under it, & killed. Thus we see the Divell hath such power on these his damnable servants, that neither men nor infants are to be pitied by them.¹⁵¹

The passage returns us to the idea of the devil’s physical embodiment, as depicted on the title page of *A Pittilesse Mother*. People received warnings about his presence and his temptations from families and ministers. His image disappeared from churches with the destruction of Doom paintings during the Reformation, but he continued to be depicted in ballads and pamphlets (see pp. 73, 79), in poetry, as in *Paradise Lost* (1667), and in dramas, such as *Dr Faustus* where he has almost human form. The devil is a liminal figure. He inhabits earth and the afterlife. He could be summoned at will and change his form, an idea used by Marlowe when Faustus commands Mephistopheles, who has just appeared as a devil:

I charge thee to return and change thy shape.
Thou art too ugly to attend on me.
Go, and return an old Fransiscan friar;
That holy shape becomes a devil best.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Jeaffreson, *Middlesex Records Vol II* (106).

¹⁵⁰ Lamb, “Taken by the Fairies” (292).

¹⁵¹ Anon, *Most cruell and bloody* (C3v). The accent appears to exist on all uses of *ée* in this pamphlet.

¹⁵² Christopher Marlowe, “*Doctor Faustus* (A-text)” in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 137-246 (I.iii.23).

He could also appear in multiple forms, as Marlowe also depicts (II.i.83; V.ii.112), and to the unwary. William Prynne, in a diatribe against actors and the theatre, writes of:

visible apparition of the Devill on the Stage at the Belsavage Play-house, in Queene Elizabeths dayes, (to the great amazement both of the Actors and Spectators) whiles they were prophanely playing the History of Faustus [...] there being some distracted with that fearefull sight.¹⁵³

One of the devil's most popular shapes was a dog.¹⁵⁴ In *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), which concerns prenuptial pregnancy, infant death, and witchcraft, Elizabeth Sawyer, a marginal woman at the edges of her community, summons the devil by chance. He appears in the form of a dog,¹⁵⁵ one of the most liminal creatures in cultural beliefs, as discussed further below. In street literature dogs uncover inadequately buried bodies and we have seen that midwives were required to dispose of stillborn infants in places where "neither Hogg nor Dogg, nor any other Beast may come unto it" (See p. 93). *The White Devil* (1612) shows that disinterment was considered a genuine possibility when, after witnessing the murder of her son, Cornelia has a scene of Ophelia-like madness, in which she distributes flowers and sings of his grave:

But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,
For with his nails he'll dig them up again.¹⁵⁶

In street literature the dogs who uncover bodies are beyond control. As we have seen, Annis Dell's crime was discovered by men hunting with dogs. The discovery of Alice Shephard's infant, which was buried in a churchyard by Alice's mother and the midwife, is similarly told:

It happened a dog came over the place where the childe lay buried, and having found the sent of the fleshe, he never rested untill he had with his feete scraped it up out of the ground.¹⁵⁷

In the account of Martha Scambler's crime, "a cur dog" is thrown by a "vardlatt" into the tunnel adjoining the privy in which she has thrown her infant's body. The place

¹⁵³ William Prynne, *Histriomastix: The players scourge* (1633) (556).

¹⁵⁴ The association may derive from their inclusion among Christ's tormentors in (Psalm 22.16).

¹⁵⁵ William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) (V.i.34).

¹⁵⁶ John Webster, "The White Devil" in *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*, ed. René Weis (Oxford: OUP, 1996) 2-101 (V.iv.99-100).

¹⁵⁷ Anon, *Sundrye strange*.

suggests hell, and the dog's "crying for food", which alerts neighbours and leads to the discovery of the body, may suggest the infant's fate as it is unclear whether it was living when it was discarded. We are only told that:

the Devill, put in her mind violently to make it away, and to give it death before the body had well recovered life, whereupon taking the poore tender babe as it were new dropt from the mother's womb, not like a mother, but a monster threw it down into a lothsome privy house.¹⁵⁸

This extract combines ideas of life or death, monstrosity and the relationship between dogs and the devil. Street literature describes dogs as powerful and self-willed. There is a physicality to them: dogs howl with hunger, whine and cry; they sniff the ground and dig with their paws. Yet, while writers emphasise the animality and perhaps diabolic aspects of their natures, their role is essential in the execution of justice.¹⁵⁹ They discover crimes and instigate legal processes, which relates to the positive characteristics such as fidelity, watchfulness and nobility with which they are also credited.

Dogs are also the subject of a mass of classical and folkloric beliefs which reach across elite and popular cultures, and would have been familiar to pamphleteers and their readers. Students of symbolism have identified myriad ways in which dogs have symbolic meaning. The researchers I discuss below call on literature, art, folklore, dreams, alchemy and astrology and use the expertise of theologians, philosophers, psychotherapists and classicists, among others. Their combined sources and expertise, I believe, illuminate several aspects of infanticide, including those related to dogs, and are thus a means of achieving an understanding of infanticide, and representations of the crime.

J.E. Cirlot states that dogs are the "companion of the dead on their 'Night Sea Crossing' which is associated with the symbolisms of the mother and resurrection".¹⁶⁰ Dogs are associated with the underworld. J.C. Cooper writes that the dog is "a keeper of the boundaries between this world and the next, guardian of the underworlds and

¹⁵⁸ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*.

¹⁵⁹ Dogs consume the body of Jezebel (2 Kings 9.10, 36) and destroy Actaeon for spying on the naked Artemis (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (100).)

¹⁶⁰ J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (London: Routledge, 1993).

attendants on the dead”.¹⁶¹ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrandt state that dogs’ familiarity with death associates them with the black arts.¹⁶² Michael Ferber adds “As hounds that harry sinners and symbols of the bestial side of fallen human nature dogs belong to hell”.¹⁶³ There was a belief that they could be intermediaries between the two worlds, as in *The Witch of Edmonton*, and could intercede between the dead and the gods of the underworld.¹⁶⁴ In relation to infanticide, this allows dogs to intercede for murdered children, including those who were unbaptised, when they discover their bodies. In folklore, dogs can see ghosts, spirits, fairies and the Angel of Death. Not only are they associated with witchcraft and the devil, but according to de Vries they are “part of devouring mythological monsters”.¹⁶⁵ He describes them as scavengers, haunting churchyards and devouring corpses – ideas which resonate with the pamphlet accounts in which dogs discover bodies. All these beliefs construct dogs as liminal creatures, with the ability to move between this world and the next, to communicate between them, and to see things which are not of the earthly world. The dogs which sniff out and dig up bodies, and cry out from beneath the surface of the earth are associated with these symbolisms and myths. When authors mention them they create layers of significance in what appear to be merely sensational accounts of crime.

The liminal places: water and infanticide

Amongst the hundred infant deaths recorded in the Sussex Archives are fifteen involving water (Appendix 5). Infants are drowned in ponds, pits and brooks. Their bodies are disposed of in similar places, thrown into the sea and, like the infants frequently mentioned in other archives, in privies. This last, as we have seen, may have been because the infant was regarded as waste matter, and the place suggests defilement and abjection; when a woman placed an infant corpse in a well, as two Sussex women did,¹⁶⁶ it was an act which could pollute a community. Theories concerning dirt, defilement, and matter out of place are endorsed by other watery places where children

¹⁶¹ J.C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978).

¹⁶² Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrandt, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin, 1996).

¹⁶³ Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

¹⁶⁴ Chevalier and Gheerbrandt, *Symbols*.

¹⁶⁵ Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1984).

¹⁶⁶ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (94 #369); Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (86 #348).

were drowned and reinforce the infants as “matter out of place”.¹⁶⁷ Dorothy Wood “did choake and drowne” her newborn twin daughters in “a pitt full of water, mud and other filth”; the pond into which Ann Taylor threw her infant contained “water, gravel, mud and other filth”.¹⁶⁸ In addition to these mire-laden places of death and disposal, are “clean water” locations where infant life was terminated: wells and brooks.¹⁶⁹ I wish to show that women’s choice of water as a method and place of death was more than chance, and that the records can be read as more than historical fact. The frequency of water as a component of women’s actions suggests that the element had a particular significance. Water was, and is, culturally significant in many ways and has a particular association with children, women and childbirth. I will suggest that when infants are drowned or left by water, those who commit the act are performing a quasi-atavistic ritual. However, before embarking on this discussion, some contextualising observations are needed.

Water was ubiquitous in early modern Sussex. The county was bordered on one side by the sea and divided vertically by four long rivers all with extensive tributaries. Water was present in pits, wells, ponds, and in the home. In addition to being constantly nearby, water was culturally important. In elite cultures it was subject to control through irrigation and fountains whose sculptures were a showcase for learning, and rivers were the basis for water entertainments and other leisure activities.¹⁷⁰ For the working people of Sussex, it would have been perceived in terms of utility. It provided food and drink, and was a source of power, through mills, and of transport. At water people laundered clothes, washed themselves and bathed; rivers, ponds, streams and wells were culturally significant as meeting places – communal points, rather than merely features of the landscape.

Although water supported and enhanced life, it was also the site of death. It is not known how many people could swim in this period. It appears not to have been

¹⁶⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (35).

¹⁶⁸ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (129 #501).

¹⁶⁹ For an early modern thesis on the difference between flowing and stagnant waters see Bernard Palissy, *Resources: A Treatise on ‘Water and Springs’ written by Bernard Palissy in 1557*, trans. E.E. Willett (Brighton: W.J. Smith, 1876). For discussion of this work see Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities* (117, 137).

¹⁷⁰ Karen V.L. Syse, “The river as an arena for leisure and pleasure in Early Modern England” *Interdisciplinary Communications* 2008/9, http://www.cas.uio.no/publications_/transference.php [Accessed 2/10/2014].

commonplace, but writers were promoting it as a healthy activity and a practical skill.¹⁷¹ “Had Hero been skilled herein he had not lost his love-sick life in swimming to his Leander”, wrote one pragmatic (though confused) author.¹⁷² Sussex inquests show that accidental drowning was common, such as in the cases of Richard Jeffery who fell into a pond because his eyes were obstructed with mud from a previous fall, and of Agnes Ellyot who:

wente owte of the howsse of John Shortte, her maister, and wente downe to a water pitt where she was wonte to feche water and to wasshe her handes, takyng holde of a stake; and the same stake yeldyd and so she fell into water there, and so she came to her dethe.¹⁷³

John Howe and Richard a Wyke similarly fell to their deaths by drowning, the former falling from a slippery wall into a river and the latter falling from a tree into a pit of water when he was picking apples.¹⁷⁴

Around a third of the accidental deaths of young people and infants were also caused by water. Elizabeth Knight, an infant, fell from a bridge in South Bersted into a ditch of water; Alice Robynson, aged three, drowned in a puddle.¹⁷⁵ Even homes were not safe. Mary Water, aged one year and seven months and whose family name now seems tragically ironic, drowned in her home when the servants who were caring for her suddenly went outside to deal with a swarm of bees.¹⁷⁶ Water places were not only ubiquitous, but established loci of both life and death. Even its autonomous behaviour demonstrated this: it enabled life by its existence, providing an element essential to survival, but also threatened that existence either by its excess and flooding, or by its withdrawal and desiccation.

The high number of accidents in watery areas was doubtless why some water places were believed to be inhabited by figures such as Jenny Greenteeth and Nelly Long-Arms who dragged people, especially children, into the water to drown them.¹⁷⁷ Anthropologist Gary Varner writes that “We must not belittle myth and folklore as they

¹⁷¹ Everard Digby, *A short introduction for to learne to swimme* (1595); William Percey, *The compleat swimmer* (1658).

¹⁷² Percey, *The compleat swimmer* (A2v). (The gender error is Percey’s)

¹⁷³ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (50 #176, 51 #181).

¹⁷⁴ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (14 #65); Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (#28).

¹⁷⁵ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (29 #133, 4 #15).

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.* (12 (54)).

¹⁷⁷ Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: OUP, 2003) (275, 381).

offer an entirely different perspective on our own world, [and] our place in that world".¹⁷⁸ In his international and cross-cultural studies of the significance of water he suggests that the substance is deeply imprinted on the human psyche, which can be seen in societies' tales and legends. Many of the facts unearthed by Varner concern symbolic actions, such as an English custom of tying scraps of fabric onto trees near water, a practice which has existed "for hundreds, if not thousands of years".¹⁷⁹ It is believed that the action was to "switch off" evil influence and to "switch on" positive influence, and is related to the modern custom of throwing objects, such as coins, into wells or fountains.

Such practices enable a fuller appreciation of the cultural environment in which a woman might drown her child or leave it by water. This does not exclude the factual aspect of her actions as Cirlot, quoting René Gueron, makes clear: "There is an over-eager acceptance of the belief that to allow a symbolic meaning must imply the rejection of the literal or historical meaning".¹⁸⁰ The comment underlines the importance of considering a subject from as many perspectives as appear relevant without privileging one over another and reminds us that, particularly with a subject as emotionally and socially significant as infanticide, it should be recognised that, for the women involved in the crime, their actions may have specific meaning or multiple simultaneous meanings.

The power of water to maintain or take life, and the belief in the ability to effect "influences" at water places, make it unsurprising that associations developed which suggested that the border between life and death may have been weakly constructed at these locations. These associations, which are often contradictory, contribute to structuring water places as liminal. Deep waters are connected with the realm of the dead¹⁸¹ and submersion in water meant a return to the primordial state, death and interment.¹⁸² But it is also a symbol of life and regeneration. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrandt, these apparently paradoxical ideas are not "irreconcilable".¹⁸³ Water,

¹⁷⁸ Gary R. Varner, *Water of Life, Water of Death: The folklore and mythology of sacred waters* (Baltimore: PublishAmerica, 2002) (16).

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.* (139).

¹⁸⁰ Cirlot, *Symbols* (xiv).

¹⁸¹ Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia* (188).

¹⁸² Cirlot, *Symbols* (365).

¹⁸³ Chevalier and Gheerbrandt, *Symbols* (182).

they state, is both a creator and destroyer. The symbolisms of rivers include “the fluidity of forms, of fertility, death and renewal”.¹⁸⁴ They add that wells are sacred in all traditions. They are a channel of communication with the realm of the dead and “a kind of epitome of the three cosmic orders Heaven, Earth and the Underworld”.¹⁸⁵ They write: “the cleansing properties possessed by water give it the additional force of the power of redemption. Immersion was regenerative, it effected a rebirth in the sense of it being simultaneously alive and dead”.¹⁸⁶ This clearly suggests Christian baptism.

Water was a holy medium found in churches, but its sanctified nature could extend beyond the confines of the building. In his poem *Holy Baptism* George Herbert writes of the “blessed streams” which “stop our sinnes from growing thick and wide”.¹⁸⁷

Writers on symbolism refer to water washing away, being regenerative, cleansing and sanctifying,¹⁸⁸ and to baptismal water as a voluntary return to the chaotic state, followed by spiritual rebirth and regeneration.¹⁸⁹ This awareness is deeply culturally embedded. Even describing the eventual repentance of Rose Warnes, whose killing of her child was discussed in Chapter 1, Horn adopts the imagery of baptismal water, writing that “She in lust and sin was drown’d” but with “pretious blood” is “washt”. He prays “Lord send us to that fountain too / And thoroughly wash our souls therein”.¹⁹⁰

Many of the legends, beliefs, and symbolisms of water are connected with women, fertility, fecundity, pregnancy, and childbirth. Citing *The Lawes Resolutions*,¹⁹¹ which describes a married woman as “a small brook or little river”, Gowing points out that the passage uses “a familiar metaphor of the fluidity of femininity”.¹⁹² It is also linked to the idea of “leaky women” (see p. 100). Gaston Bachelard describes “natural waters, river lake waters, even sea waters” as serving as “metaphors of milk” and refers to the “fundamental nature of water’s ‘maternity’”.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.* (808).

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.* (1095).

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.* (1084).

¹⁸⁷ George Herbert, “‘Holy Baptism I’, (1633)” in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: CUP, 1640) 151.

¹⁸⁸ Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia* (188, 189).

¹⁸⁹ Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (493).

¹⁹⁰ Horn, *Efficacy of the true balme* (70).

¹⁹¹ Thomas Edgar, *The Lawes resolutions of womens rights: or, The lawes provision for woemen* (1632) (124).

¹⁹² Gowing, *Common Bodies* (52).

¹⁹³ Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Pegasus, 1994) (117).

There are particularly strong connections between children and water, possibly related to their pre-birth existence in amniotic fluid. In a study of this topic a century ago Dan M'Kenzie, after narrating a number of water-related legends concerning children, wrote that "in the minds of the older peoples of Britain [...] there probably existed some mysterious bond of union between children and wells, ponds, and rivers".¹⁹⁴ He provides a worldwide list of water places in which ritual washing of young infants and newborns was practised, and some instances of the sacrifice of children.¹⁹⁵

Shakespeare drew on cultural associations between water, women and children. Thaisa and Hermione, both of whom have recently given birth and whose subsequent withdrawals are a kind of death with echoes of the lying-in period which structured post-partum women as liminal, are both associated with water. Thaisa survives burial at sea. Hermione appears to Antigonus at sea, is described as a "vessel [...] in pure white robes", and addresses him in a speech using the language of a ship, suggesting her as a water being.¹⁹⁶ Thaisa and Hermione's infants both escape watery deaths, as do the infant Miranda and the newborn twins in *The Comedy of Errors*.¹⁹⁷ Perdita's abandonment by water, and the "rotten carcass of a butt" in which Miranda and Prospero are placed, both have echoes of the older narrative of Moses left at the riverside in a basket.¹⁹⁸ Water was clearly a liminal place where life and death, pagan and Christian, purity and defilement met and mingled.

What, then, of the women who drowned their newborns, or left their bodies by water? It appears that their actions are part of a ritual which connects with ancient beliefs and has a long association with infant death. Writing of the Middle Ages, Catherine Damme cites several cases of infants killed by drowning, and Diana Bullen Presciutti writes that "Roman children were being killed and then tossed into the Tiber

¹⁹⁴ Dan M'Kenzie, "Children and Wells", *Folklore*, 18.3 (1907) 253-282 (258).

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.* (275).

¹⁹⁶ The long-established association between a woman in white robes and a ship in full sail is discussed in Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. J.H.P. Pafford (London: Macmillan, 1963) (notes p. 67).

¹⁹⁷ Adults also escape drowning at sea in *Comedy of Errors*, *The Tempest*, and *Pericles*, though not in *The Winter's Tale* storm.

¹⁹⁸ Exodus 2.3.

by their mothers” (see p. 239).¹⁹⁹ These accounts suggest the enduring nature of this method of infanticide.

While many of the ideas discussed above would not have been formally recognised by women with a desperate need to do away with an unwanted child, it is probable that a sense of them existed as cultural knowledge. The use of the water theme in romance and later literature, its association with baptism, cleansing and purification, and those beliefs which aligned water with child-stealing spirits, support the intuitive association which appears to exist between children and water (I return to this theme in my Interlude and Epilogue). The placing of a child in or by water may in part have been ceremonial, a corrupted form of Christian baptism, but this rite is connected to older cultural beliefs about water which exist across time and place. Writing of water places, Varner states “there is a primeval connectedness between humankind and the spirit world through these portals”. They are “healing and deadly, generating life and taking it away – a source of knowledge and a place where knowledge is hidden”.²⁰⁰

Conclusion

I suggested in the introduction that the study of infanticide is haunted by gaps and lingering questions. This chapter has shown the value of considering the subject through the lens of anthropological ideas and theories related to liminality and ritual processes, marginality and psychology. We have seen that writers from the church, medicine and legal professions were unclear about the point at which an unborn or newborn infant should be regarded as having life, being fully human or having a soul, thus creating inconsistencies and confusion about what could constitute infanticide. These uncertainties can be seen in the manner in which the bodies of unborn, newborn and stillborn infants were treated. They help to explain why women were described as throwing infant corpses. Ideas about defilement and body waste lead us to wonder whether the women saw the infant as a “something” which had come from her body and should be disposed of as waste.

¹⁹⁹ Damme, “Infanticide”; Diana Bullen Presciutti, “Dead Infants, Cruel Mothers, and Heroic Popes: The visual rhetoric of Foundling Care at the Hospital of Santo Spirito, Rome”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 64.3 (2011) 752-799.

²⁰⁰ Gary R. Varner, *Sacred Wells* (New York: Algora, 2009) (12).

Modern research into the complex emotions which can exist between the mother and her unborn child is also illuminating. It reveals her possible mental states before, during and after pregnancy, and relationships which can exist with the unborn and newborn child. It shows that women's response to pregnancy could have included elements of the supernatural, including the sense that her unborn infant could read her mind and might disapprove of her thoughts. Such ideas suggest the margins of the female body and their invasion, and would have been magnified in a society where unmarried pregnancy was shameful and possibly kept secret. We have also seen that the pregnant woman was at the centre of ritual processes which placed her, in the last weeks of her pregnancy, in a separate world, that her condition and childbirth was related to the animal, and that her return to the wider world was marked by the ritual process of Churching. This structured all child-bearing women as liminal, but when a woman committed infanticide writers amplified this by describing her in terms of liminal creatures – monsters, devils, and dogs. Finally, we have noted the frequency with which water places, which are culturally perceived as liminal, frequently appear in archival accounts of infanticide.

Taken together, these ideas dilute a straightforward cause-and-effect paradigm and contribute to showing that infanticide could be driven by something other than the fear and shame motives that are usually applied. When a woman killed her infant she may have been in a disturbed mental state beyond rationality; she may have regarded the infant as less than human, and herself as an invaded person who was disposing of body waste by throwing it into a privy or gutter. When she drowned her child, or left it by water, she appears to have turned to this liminal medium as part of an intuitive association between water, women and children, which, as we have seen, was part of ancient myths and remains with us through rituals of baptism. The drowning of a child may have been part of an atavistic ritual of which she was intuitively aware. Her motives may have been deep-rooted, complex, and her actions only partly conscious.

Chapter 3: Love, Law and Liminality

Biondello: I knew a wench married in an afternoon as she went to the garden for parsley to stuff a rabbit.¹

Introduction

The previous chapter considered infanticide from the perspective of liminality. It demonstrated an association between the crime and anthropological theories about ritual processes and rites of passage, and early modern beliefs, including ideas about the unborn child, the customs surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, the actions of the women who committed infanticide, and the manner in which the crime was represented. This chapter looks at the circumstances surrounding unmarried pregnancy. My underlying thesis is that infanticide can only be truly understood by examining it in the context of early modern marriage laws, the punishment for bastard bearing, and how unmarried pregnancy could be prevented. I will continue to draw on Van Gennep's identification of ceremonies which mark movement from one stage of a person's life to another and Turner's development of his ideas.² The three distinguishable phases of this movement which he discussed – separation, transition, and incorporation – are clearly seen in the circumstances surrounding unmarried pregnancy and the punishments which could be imposed on bastard bearers or begetters.

The following pages suggest that changes to marriage laws, and the confusions which existed in relation to long-standing matrimonial customs, could place couples in a “betwixt and between” situation which made women vulnerable to exploitation and desertion if they became pregnant. If a woman became a bastard bearer she had the marginal status of being “neither maid, widow nor wife”.³ She could be subject to punishments containing elements of ritual processes and emphasising her liminality. Punishments may have been a requirement for her re-entry into the community, although restrictions subsequently placed on her suggest that communities were more concerned with indicating her status than in allowing social reintegration. Given the nature of the punishments, women would have sought every possible means to avoid

¹ Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew* (IV.v.25).

² Gennep, *Rites*; Turner, *Ritual Process*; Turner, *Forest*.

³ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* (V.i.176)

pregnancy during courtship. Using historical, medical and literary sources, this chapter therefore also examines the extent to which women were able to control the boundaries of their bodies, and thus negotiate their liminal state by contraception and/or abortion. I will consider what was available, who had the knowledge, how it was transferred, and how effective it would have been.

The “betwixt and between” of betrothal and marriage

Uncertainties surrounding courtship and marriage in this period meant that couples could find themselves in a situation which Frances E. Dolan calls a “grey area”,⁴ in which there was confusion about whether they were legally married, or whether a betrothal or contract to marry permitted them to consummate their relationship. The ambiguity resulted from the legal process of marriage, which had been in place from the twelfth century and would remain essentially unchanged until 1753.⁵ Helmholz writes: “a full matrimonial union was created by the exchange of words of present consent (I take thee, N.)”.⁶ He continues:

The consent of the parties was all that mattered to the question of a union’s validity. Public ceremony, marriage gifts, consent of parents, permission of a lord, endowment of the woman, publication of banns, and the presence of a priest were all, strictly speaking, irrelevant to that question.

If lovers exchanged words in the future tense, “I shall take thee”, it constituted a contract to marry later (p. 524). In *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) William Gouge sets out the correct ordering of the Christian family, adding the phrase “and doe faithfully promise to marie thee in time meet and convenient” after the words “I take thee”.⁷ This, he continues “serveth such a right and property of the one in the other as cannot be alienated without licence had from the great Judge of Heaven”. He goes on to warn of the “abusing” of contracts: “Many make it a very marriage, and thereupon have a greater solemnitie at their contract, then at their mariage: many take libertie after a contract to know their spouse, as if they were married: an unwarrantable and dishonest

⁴ Frances E. Dolan, “Shakespeare and Marriage: An Open Question”, *Literature Compass*, 8/9 (2011) 620-634 (629).

⁵ Richard H. Helmholz, *Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640s*, vol. I, Oxford History of the Laws of England (Oxford: OUP, 2004) (522); Ingram, *Church Courts* (132).

⁶ Helmholz, *Canon Law* (524).

⁷ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) (198).

practice”.⁸ Such marriages created “uncertainties, moral ambiguities and opportunities for deceit and fraud”.⁹ As even witnesses were not required, the proof of a marriage became one person’s word against another’s and, as Helmholtz states: “What cannot be proved cannot be enforced, and where one party had a change of heart or remembered the events differently and therefore denied the contract, the courts of the church would dismiss the couple ‘to their consciences’”.¹⁰

Van Gennepe describes betrothal as a “period of transition” and such loose arrangements clearly placed couples in an uncertain situation¹¹ particularly since, as Wrightson states, it is apparent that restraints “crumbled once a marriage was in sight”.¹² Describing the effect of this ambiguous time Houlbrooke writes: “All too frequently informal or inadequately witnessed contracts took place in shops, fairs, backyards and fields”.¹³ As a result “at each stopping place on his circuit the commissary would be confronted with the spectacle of the unmarried mother-to-be, abandoned by a casual lover and cold-shouldered by an unfriendly community”.¹⁴

Another complication was that the validity of a marriage, and therefore the legitimacy of a child, could rest with the community, as Peter Laslett explains:

It was public opinion and especially the opinion of the local community, the neighbours, which decided whether any particular association could be called a marriage, not only the Church and the law”.¹⁵

Attempts by the church to reform the principle of “exchange of words of present consent” failed, but the financial and social importance of marriage, and the personal misery caused by the existing practice, led to a move toward a ceremony conducted by a priest in a church, with an entry in the church register.¹⁶ The evolutionary nature of these changes, and the confusion concerning what constituted a formal marriage, contributed to a climate of suspicion and watchfulness. Suspected couples could be

⁸ *ibid.* (202).

⁹ Ingram, *Church Courts* (133).

¹⁰ Helmholtz, *Canon Law* (529).

¹¹ Gennepe, *Rites* (116).

¹² Wrightson, *English Society* (85); Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (15).

¹³ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) (55).

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) (109). See also Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (28).

¹⁶ Ingram, *Church Courts* (133).

named to the Archdeacons. The 1621 records for Clapham in West Sussex state: “We present one Hodges and Joane Bowles, which be come together in our parrishe; where they were married wee know not”.¹⁷ Sara Marshall of Wisborough Greene was presented for “unlawfully keeping company with Robert Hooper, glover, as if shee had bene his wife; but (for any thing wee can learne) they were never married”.¹⁸ The account implies that enquiries had been made. The 1625 reports for Arundel state that “Elizabeth Hopkin and Thomas Freene ([...] his late wive’s daughter) are married together, but where or by whome wee know not”.¹⁹

It is unclear whether those who questioned marriages were concerned for morals or feared a bastard birth, and spying did not always prevent a birth outside marriage. William Dyer and “Sibill his Mayd” of Yapton, Sussex, appear twice in the Churchwarden’s Presentments. The first account states that “as the report goeth [...] [they] have been contracted about a yeare since, and yet are unmarried, and live in one house suspiciously together”.²⁰ The suspicion was founded, but the vigilance was futile, as a later entry confirms. “We present William Dyer, for harbouring his wife, Sibill Mascoll, with childe before marriage, and then he marryed her, and shee had a childe within one moneth after her marriage”.²¹ Sibill and William appear to have been contracted to marry but the community required more ceremony before pregnancy was acceptable. Thomas Nicholson of Felpham was named to Arundel court in 1621 for receiving “one Joane Capelin, as shee calleth her self, who being with childe, is thereof lately delivered; wee know not whence shee came nor what she is, but she saith she is married and comes from Burleigh nere Rochester in Kent”.²²

Writing of the gradual changes to the marriage process Ingram states: “The reign of Elizabeth, and to some extent the early seventeenth century, formed an uneasy transition period”.²³ It was a period during which people were uncertain about the validity of marriages. Those who entered informal marriage, and those who were betrothed, occupied a liminal time where their legal and moral position was debatable,

¹⁷ Johnstone, *Presentments* (4).

¹⁸ *ibid.* (123).

¹⁹ *ibid.* (100).

²⁰ *ibid.* (22).

²¹ *ibid.* (34).

²² *ibid.* (4).

²³ Ingram, *Church Courts* (133).

and bastardy was possible due to misunderstanding rather than, in early modern terms, “immorality”.

Unconsummated marriages created another liminal state. This was a personal tragedy rather than a public concern though as Helmholz writes, if the husband or wife “not only would not, but could not, render the ‘marital debt’, a divorce was possible”.²⁴ However, as remarriage was not allowed, people were again abandoned to a liminal situation, the law thus blithely and injudiciously attempting to commit men and women to lifelong celibacy but in reality inviting bastardy. Again, the Sussex archives describe women as pregnant but living apart from their husbands, such as Amy Powell who was “brought abed of a childe, suspected to bee a bastard, by her husbände living apart from her, not lately seene to our knowledge and not knowne whether alive or dead”.²⁵ Similarly, Constance, “servant to John Bymble” was “great with childe; and it is sayd she hath a husband but he hath not resorted to her these two yeares or upwards”.²⁶ Such cases suggest that individuals did not believe that marriage breakdown should commit them to a lifetime of sexual abstinence.

Liminal marital states in literature

The situations described above – the unclear laws which invited exploitation, uncertainty about the legality of a marriage, the personal misfortune of incomplete or unconsummated ceremonies – inspired dramatists who called upon what Margaret Loftus Ranald terms their “osmotic knowledge” of marital law.²⁷ Audiences would also have known something of the confusing legal circumstances to which writers frequently referred. The “betwixt and between” of couples who were not quite single and not quite married, or were in irregular marriages, inspired writers. As Ranald points out, many plays have something to say about betrothals and the legality of marriage, including *Hamlet*, *Much Ado* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. My focus is on plays in which the audiences are confronted with these issues through on-stage re-enactment or reference.

²⁴ Helmholz, *Canon Law* (548, 540).

²⁵ Johnstone, *Presentments* (17).

²⁶ *ibid.* (41).

²⁷ Margaret Loftus Ranald, “‘As Marriage Binds, and Blood Breaks’: English Marriage and Shakespeare”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 30.1 (1979) 68-81 (68). Ranald’s paper goes into some depth on matrimonial laws, how Shakespeare’s work related to them, and the legal loopholes which his characters could have used.

In *As You Like It* marriage, and the courtship which accompanies it, are humorously presented as couples confuse and mistake identities and intentions. When Shakespeare includes a quick marriage ceremony, it slips into the flirtatious mood of the surrounding dialogue almost unnoticed:

Orlando: I take thee Rosalind for wife.

Rosalind: I might ask you for your commission; but I do take thee Orlando for my husband (IV.i.129).

The words – witnessed by Celia – constitute a marriage, and throughout the rest of the play they are man and wife, though Rosalind's cross-dressing prevents Orlando realising it. Alongside this is the interrupted ceremony between Touchstone and Audrey which exposes the cynical exploitation to which a woman could be subjected. The liaison is prevented by Jaques who tells Touchstone, and the audience, how a marriage should be conducted:

Jaques: And will you, being a man of your breeding, be married under a bush like a beggar? Get you to church, and have a good priest that can tell you what marriage is. This fellow will but join you together as wainscot

Touch.[aside]: I am not in the mind but I were better to be married of him than of another, for he is not like to marry me well; and not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife. (III.iii.74)

Similarly Polixenes interrupts a potentially binding betrothal in *The Winter's Tale* although Perdita's later complaint that "The heaven sets spies upon us, will not have / Our contract celebrated" suggests that she believes herself and Florizel contracted to marry and merely lacking the more formal celebration (V.i.203). Shakespeare does not suggest the perilously ambiguous situation in which this places Perdita, or the tragic outcome which exists in his source *Pandosto*. After Dorastus (Ferdinand) and Fawnia (Perdita) "plight their trowth" in an apparently private agreement, they "could not have the full fruition of their love in Sicilia," and a marriage is to be sought.²⁸ Fawnia knowingly warns that "delay bred danger; and that many mishaps did fall out between the cup and the lip". The nature of the danger is unstated, but others recognise what

²⁸ Robert Greene, "Pandosto (1595)" in *Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale*, ed. J.H.P. Pafford (London: Macmillan, 2005) 181-225 (212).

could ensue, the neighbours fearing “lest she went so often to the field that she brought him [the shepherd] a young son” and he in turn telling his wife “I will not give her a halfpenny for her honesty at the year’s end” (213). The ambiguity of her situation allows Pandosto (Leontes) to attempt to “scale the fort of her chastity” (220).

There was also dramatic potential in unconsummated contracts. These are central to the plots of *Measure for Measure* and *All’s Well* in which men unscrupulously take advantage of the marriage law and abandon women to a liminal world of being neither married nor single. In the former, Shakespeare leaves us uncertain about the terms of the “pre-contract” between Mariana and Angelo, but the Duke believes it a marriage which only lacked consummation which, he considers, endows him with the authority to put matters straight:

He is your husband on a pre-contract
To bring you thus together ’tis no sin (IV.i.72).

He later describes Mariana as “Nothing then: neither maid, widow nor wife” (V.i.176), a phrase which defines women by what they were not, as opposed to what they were – a state of non-being, rather than being – further emphasising their liminality. Mariana can emerge from the set-apart, liminal world of her “moated grange” and call Angelo “husband” after the successful bed-trick, but will only remove her veil, an indicator of her liminal state, after Angelo has acknowledged her. In *Much Ado*, Hero similarly un.masks after Claudio’s contrition (V.iii.30). In *All’s Well*, Bertram avoids marriage by not completing the King’s phrase “Take her by the hand / And tell her she is thine” (II.iii.173) and by refusing to consummate the ceremony, stating “Although before the priest I have sworn, I will not bed her” (IV.1.72). His action places Helena in a world between being single and married and, like Mariana, she becomes a liminal person. Her subsequent wanderings in search of Bertram place her geographically outside her community until the bed-trick, which legally completes the marriage, once again resolves the problem and allows her reincorporation into society. Mariana’s moated grange and Helen’s wandering are self-imposed physical expressions of their liminal states.

Shakespeare gives Jaques, Polixenes, the Duke, and Helena the moral high-ground, making them the arbiters of marital justice. Yet these may be seen as dubious characters, though this is masked by the romance of these works. The Duke describes

Jaques as “a libertine / As sensual as the brutish sting itself” (II.vii.65). Polixenes’ relationship with Hermione is never clarified, as Camillo’s remark to him emphasises: “I am sure ’tis safer to / Avoid what’s grown than question how ’tis born” (I.ii.432). The Duke in *Measure for Measure* is arguably a weak leader who clearly knows Mariana’s predicament but only helps her when she becomes a tool through which he can manipulate a reward in the shape of Isabella. Helena in *All’s Well* is, Kathryn Schwarz suggests, an example of “an outrageously intentional, sexual, articulate, and efficient femininity that runs amok without doing anything wrong” and she believes that Bertram “succumbs to something more like exhaustion than bliss”.²⁹ The “anything wrong” here is questionable, bearing in mind the bed-trick to which Diana, a poor widow’s daughter, submits for payment and which makes her the subject of slanders until the play’s final resolution. The development of Diana’s language from the opening scene, which suggests her innocence, to her control and pert manipulation of the King (no less) in the final scene, suggests a dramatic change in her persona. The interim scene, in which she sets up the bed-trick with Bertram, appears to have been ventriloquised by, as well as manipulated by, Helena and the Widow “My mother told me just how he would woo [...] / She says all men / Have the like oaths” (IV.ii.70).³⁰

These characters – Polixenes, the Duke, Helena – are not acting in their own persons, but in disguise, each of them moving about the plot like an avenging spirit of Hymen. They are onlookers, Polixenes spying on his son, Helena observing Bertram in the parade, and the “fantastical Duke of dark corners” forever watching (IV.iii.52). The disguises set these characters apart from others in the narrative yet from these side-lines – margins – they control situations and outcomes. They resemble the trickster figures who emerge in liminal situations, and those citizens of early modern England who spied on their neighbours to ensure marital propriety. Shakespeare’s representation of these guardians of matrimony raises the question of his feelings about these fictional and historical situations, bearing in mind the proximity of his own marriage to the birth of his first child. Significantly, all these plays have supposedly happy endings, but as Dolan writes, there is a question of “whether marriage is a happy ending, and if so, for

²⁹ Kathryn Schwarz, “‘My intents are fixed’: Constant Will in *All’s Well That Ends Well*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58.2 (2007) 200-227.

³⁰ For a discussion of the bed trick see Marjorie C. Desens, *The Bed-Trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power* (Delaware: Delaware University Press, 1994).

whom and by what standard".³¹ The questionably satisfactory endings to plays such as *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well* and *The Winter's Tale*, complement the melancholia which haunts the works – a melancholia due in part to the character who orchestrated the outcome. They suggest that there could be little that was cheering about dubiously contracted marriages.

Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* presents an on-stage marriage. The simple ceremony in this play is, as the Duchess points out, fully legal and she asserts its validity: "I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber / *Per verba de presenti* is absolute marriage" (I.i.468).³² After witnessed exchanges with Antonio she continues "What can the church force more?" and affirms "we are now one" (I.i.478). Clearly, consummation follows. Margaret Mikesell notes that a number of Stuart tragedies deal with dubiously formed marriage and suggests that changing marriage laws and customs were "a useful vehicle for playwrights' exploration of a society in flux" adding that the Duchess's death in Act 4 facilitates audience focus on social dissolution.³³ As the Duchess is murdered after her power has been removed, Theodora Jankowski suggests that she is punished as a private woman partially for violating social custom.³⁴ Although the marriage is legal, her children are treated as bastards and deemed unworthy to inherit due to their father's status. In effect she is murdered as a bastard bearer. This is one of the many examples of bastard bearers condemned by writers to a "literary death sentence", as discussed below.

Balladeers were similarly attracted to narratives of women who were neither maid, widow nor wife, describing many who had been involved in apparently casual liaisons, some of whom appear to have fallen foul of the ease with which informal betrothals could be made.³⁵ The pregnant woman in *A Lamentable Ballad of the Ladies*

³¹ Dolan, "Shakespeare and Marriage".

³² Webster, "Duchess of Malfi".

³³ Margaret Mikesell, "The Formative Power of Marriage in Stuart Tragedy", *Modern Language Studies*, 12.1 (1982) 36-44.

³⁴ Theodora A. Jankowski, "Defining/Confining the Duchess: Negotiating the Female Body in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*", *Studies in Philology*, 87.2 (1990) 221-245.

³⁵ Writers in other genres also used the tradition of informal betrothals in their works such as romances. See e.g. Barnabe Riche, "*Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581)" in *Twelfth Night*, ed. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (Walton-on-Thames: Methuen, 1975) 157-179; Mary Wroth, *Urania* (1640). Unlike ordinary people, who may have left no record of such marriages, when it took place between aristocratic writers, there may be a trail of evidence in their work. See Garth Bond, "'Amphilanthus to Pamphilia': William Herbert, Mary Wroth, and Penshurst Mount", *Sidney Journal*, 31.1 (2013) 51-80.

Fall reminds her lover of his “former promise”, begging him to “convey me to some secret place, / and marry me with speed”.³⁶ The “Lancashire Lasse” in *The Bonny Bryer*, whose lover is killed days before their marriage, describes herself in the same terms as the Duke describes Mariana as: “neither widow, wife, nor maid”, telling the audience that “to wed me in haste he meant” and declaring that “to lose that gem, I wanted wit, before my day of marriage”.³⁷ She is advised to return to her family in Lancashire and claim that her husband was killed in the “Swedish warres”, thus professing that she has been through the marriage ritual which would enable her reintegration into her former community by offering a false narrative with the resonance of truth.

Casual alliances, exploitation of the naive, the ambiguity of marriage contracts, betrothals, confusion about what constituted an acceptable ceremony, and the complications of unconsummated marriage all created liminal states which could potentially lead to unmarried pregnancy. As Ingram writes: “Many unmarried mothers thus differed from pregnant brides only in that they had enjoyed worse luck”.³⁸ They were “stranded by ill-judgement or ill-fortune”.³⁹

Bastard bearing, punishment and liminality

If unmarried pregnancy occurred men and women could be brought before the ecclesiastical or civil courts for the crime of bastardy.⁴⁰ However, women were more likely to be punished, partially because female guilt was written on the body and it was easier for a man to flee the situation. As courts were male-dominated, the idea of being presented to them would have been intimidating to any woman, let alone one whose sexual morality was in question. However, it would be wrong to construct them all as victims. Walker writes that when brought before the courts women “inverted the stereotypes of bastard bearers”, presenting themselves as “honest, lawful, and abused by

³⁶ Anon, *A Lamentable Ballad of the Ladies Fall* (1686-1688).

³⁷ Anon, *Bonny Bryer*.

³⁸ Ingram, *Church Courts* (163); Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (8).

³⁹ Keith Wrightson, “The nadir of English illegitimacy in the seventeenth century” in *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, ed. Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen, and Richard M. Smith (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980) 176-191 (190).

⁴⁰ Majorie Keniston McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour in England 1370-1600* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) (73).

an implicit juxtaposition of male dishonour and female honour”.⁴¹ Elizabeth Wilkinson, who appeared before Middlesex Assizes in 1613, charged both Walter Whithe and Robert Chiltern with being the father of her daughter. The account states:

she upon her examininge at sundry tymes doth in short charge both of them, that as she sayth shee cannot cleere either of them, but that the one of them may as well be the trewe father of the childe as the other, and will not directly charge one but tother also.⁴²

Elizabeth does not construct herself as a victim, and her desire not to encumber the wrong man with the child’s upkeep can be seen as female honour. The men were instructed to share payments. Elizabeth’s sentence is not recorded, but it has been suggested that punishments to which women such as she could be subjected could contribute to infanticide. Walter J. King, cites a writer on the 1609 Poor Law, stating: “some women [...] feared this new statute so much that they murdered their bastards rather than face imprisonment”.⁴³ This was echoed decades later by Wrightson who writes that the “known consequences [of bastard bearing] were sufficiently disproportionate to the offence to terrify some who faced unmarried motherhood alone into concealment and worse”.⁴⁴

Punishments for bastardy fall into two categories: those of seclusion or separation, in which the wrong-doers could be isolated from religious activities or imprisoned, and those of inclusion in which communities participated in rituals which involved elements of theatre and spectacle, such as penance and whipping. Both kinds of punishments have parallels with rites of passage.

Social seclusion and separation

In *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep discusses the rituals which allow, or are essential to, transition from one stage of life to the next. His examination of small communities concludes that their rituals have “a wide degree of general similarity” and can be divided into those of seclusion, separation and reintegration (3, 10, 81). He writes:

⁴¹ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (230).

⁴² Jeaffreson, *Middlesex Records Vol II* (97).

⁴³ Walter J. King, “Punishment for Bastardy in Early Seventeenth-Century England”, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 10.2 (1978) 130-15 (133). King cites A.W. Ashby, “One hundred years of poor law administration in a Warwickshire village” in *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, ed. Paul Vinogradoff, vol. 3 (Oxford: OUP, 1912) 230-243 (86).

⁴⁴ Wrightson, “Infanticide in European History” (8).

“In a semi-civilised society [...] sections are carefully isolated, and passage from one to another must be made through formalities and ceremonies” (26). Individuals who have not been through these “formalities and ceremonies”, he continues, can be isolated. Using the rooms of a house as a metaphor for sections of a society, he writes: “An individual that does not have an immediate right, by birth or through specially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house and to become established in one of its sections is in a state of isolation” (26). These moments of transition include: birth, puberty, marriage and death, as well as entry to new status.⁴⁵ As we have seen, women who had a child before undergoing the marriage ritual were neither maids, widows nor wives but in a liminal state. Their punishments reflected this. McIntosh writes of the early modern period that “If wrongdoers failed to conform to local standards, they could readily be evicted from the community”.⁴⁶ Such eviction constructs wrongdoers as liminal or marginal. The punishments of seclusion and separation to which bastard bearers and begetters could be subjected emphasised this state, and the women’s polluting effect.

Turner writes that during ritual processes, the separation phase “comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual [...] either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions [...] or from both”.⁴⁷ The exclusion punishments to which Courts could sentence people included excommunication, which excluded offenders from church services, or, in extremis, “total exclusion from the church and from the society of Christian people”.⁴⁸ Those who had commercial dealings with them, or gave them food or lodging, could themselves be punished.⁴⁹ This is seen in churchwardens’ presentments from Climping in Sussex. Bridget Holland, who may have been running a lying-in house was:

stayed from communion by our minister for enterteyning Elizabeth Hedger an excommunicated person into her house, Joane Pescod, who lay in of childbed, Elizabeth Nashe, who likewise lay in on childbed.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Genep, *Rites* (3); Turner, *Forest* (94).

⁴⁶ McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour* (206).

⁴⁷ Turner, *Ritual Process* (94).

⁴⁸ Ingram, *Church Courts* (53).

⁴⁹ *ibid.* (53, 286).

⁵⁰ Johnstone, *Presentments* (90).

However, absolution could be achieved “with relative ease”⁵¹ and according to Houlbrooke excommunication began to “lose its edge” with the Reformation.⁵² A 1602 case brought before Horsham Assizes suggests this (my italics):

Mr [Matthew] Alwyne, vicar of Horsham, says that within the last few years two or three harlots in his parish have had bastards *and suffered no punishment other than excommunication*. At this time two of them have three bastards and a third is pregnant.

Gillian Cole of Hurstpierpoint and Elizabeth Masone of Bignor had bastards some years ago and *suffered no punishment other than excommunication*.⁵³

Even if excommunication had “lost its edge”, it was a visible and socially diminishing punishment which indicated offenders’ liminality, which would have satisfied church and community desire for punishment. Among those named in the Sussex records is Elizabeth Gardner who “hath had a bastard and as yet hath never received punishment for the same”, and Joane [Blank] who had been “delivered of a base borne childe” for which it was feared she would be “conveyed away before she hath received any punishment”.⁵⁴ Among the many complaints against the minister of Launsing is one which demonstrates the expectation of visible punishment, and that bastardy could divide a community:

Our minister hath admitted one Mary Washer unto the Holy Communion, having lately had a bastard and is a very lewd huswife, without giving any satisfacion to the congregacion, and did the same tyme put backe from the communion many of the better man’s daughters and servants, having bin communicants a long tyme, for noe cause that we know but of his owne humors.⁵⁵

Another punishment of separation followed a 1576 statute which stipulated that a House of Correction should be set up in every county for punishing “those refusing to work”⁵⁶ where they should be forced to labour and be physically chastised. Houses of Correction, commonly referred to as Bridewells, attempted to place people, including bastard bearers, outside their communities, in a manner similar to the sequestered, pregnant Juliet in *Measure for Measure*. Froide writes that they were “designed for exactly the sorts of petty crime associated with single women: prostitution, living out of

⁵¹ Ingram, *Church Courts* (53, 342).

⁵² Houlbrooke, *Church Courts* (49).

⁵³ Cockburn, *Assize Records: Sussex* (417 #2071).

⁵⁴ Johnstone, *Presentments* (76, 78).

⁵⁵ *ibid.* (93).

⁵⁶ Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law 1531-1782* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) (52).

service, petty larceny, idle and disorderly behaviour, and bastard bearing”.⁵⁷ This last was stipulated in a 1609 amendment to the 1576 statute. It prescribed that “all mothers of bastards supported by the parish welfare to be imprisoned in the house of correction for one year,” although Innes suggests that London people may have stayed only a few weeks, or days.⁵⁸ The Houses reduced the opportunities for warnings to others and for societies to see justice.⁵⁹ That this was a reason for punishment is seen in the Sussex case of the “impudent queane” Mary Robins, who had twice given birth to bastards causing Churchwardens to desire that “some sev[e]re course may be taken with her, to make her an example unto others”.⁶⁰

Despite suggestions that the Houses encouraged infanticide and led to the Infanticide Act of 1624, it is uncertain what life inside them was like.⁶¹ Discretion about levels of labour and punishment rested with the wardens who doubtless had differing views on what was appropriate. Conditions would have varied from House to House, and across time when wardens changed.⁶² It is unclear that they were so dreadful that a woman would consider any course of action, including the murder of her newborn, rather than be sent there, as King claims. Local knowledge may have been different, and as Griffiths states, secrecy could set “imagination racing”.⁶³

Incarceration did not completely isolate wrongdoers from the community as the Houses were open for public visits. In *A true discourse of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell*, which describes the case of a woman who accidentally killed a child when attempting to murder her husband, Gilbert Dugdale writes that “There was many of all sorts resorted to see her, as no fewer some daies then three hundred persons” to whom she gave “good admonitions, wishing that her fall might be an example unto them”.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Froide, *Never Married* (38).

⁵⁸ King, “Punishment for Bastardy” (132). King also suggests that this law prompted infanticide and led to the Infanticide Act of 1623/4. See also Joanna Innes, “Prisons for the poor: English Bridewells 1555-1800” in *Labour, Law, and Crime: An historical perspective*, ed. Francis Snyder and Douglas Hay (London: Tavistock, 1987) 42-76 (57).

⁵⁹ Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (35).

⁶⁰ Johnstone, *Presentments* (68).

⁶¹ Innes, “Prisons for the poor”; Paul Griffiths, “Contesting London Bridewell 1576-1580”, *Journal of British Studies*, 42 (2003) 283-315; Faramarz Dabhoiwala, “Summary Justice in Early Modern London”, *English Historical Review*, CXXI 492 (2006) 796-822.

⁶² This point is discussed in Ruth Ahnert, “The Prison in Early Modern Drama”, *Literature Compass*, 9.1 (2012) 34-47.

⁶³ Griffiths, “Contesting London Bridewell” (289).

⁶⁴ Gilbert Dugdale, *A true discourse of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell* (1604), (B2).

Creative writers also breached prisons' seclusion, by making them settings in works such as *Measure for Measure*, *Two Noble Kinsmen* and Dekker's *Honest Whore* plays. Ruth Ahnert suggests this may be partly because so many writers had first-hand experience of prison, and because such buildings were familiar sights to Londoners.⁶⁵ Dramatists gave audiences visits to fictionalised versions of the institutions, whilst pamphlet authors allowed prisoners' voices to travel outside London. Readers far beyond the capital could read of Rose Warnes' struggle to arrive at contrition, Martha Scambler's regret and warning to others, and Mr Barker's long pre-execution confession (discussed in Chapter 5).⁶⁶ Such accounts, to a greater or lesser extent ventriloquised, are part of the tradition of showing the "good end" made by the guilty.⁶⁷

Balladeers had a lighter approach to incarceration, and ballads, whilst fictional (though sometimes based on real cases), may be close to reality. Works such as the decidedly coquettish *The Bridewel Whores Resolution* and *Whipping Cheare*, both discussed below, are performed by whores who boast their trade and complain of their treatment.⁶⁸ Their ribald comments invite audience participation, if only to guffaw, again breaching "inmates" isolation and indicating that inflicted punishments are ineffective.⁶⁹ Like speeches from the scaffold which, as Frances E. Dolan and others have noted, gave women a chance to speak and have their words recorded, pamphlets and ballads gave women a voice, which honest citizens lacked, though of course this is a constructed male voice over which, as Dolan points out, the women had no control.⁷⁰ Such speeches may have had a degree of authenticity. They were most often statements of regret and contrition, which both taught and invited others to practise an act of Christian forgiveness, though as Dolan again states, others used the occasion to criticise the individuals and institutions which condemned them.⁷¹ So great was the expectation of a "scaffold speech" that when Mary Goodenough, a widow who destroyed her

⁶⁵ Ahnert, "The Prison" (34, 36).

⁶⁶ Horn, *Efficacy of the true balme*; Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*; John Crowch, *The arraignment for hypocrisie or a looking-glasse for murderers* (1652).

⁶⁷ The extent to which the endings of crime pamphlets are formulaic is discussed in Clark, *Women and Crime* (151).

⁶⁸ Anon, *The Bridewel Whores resolution* (1674-1679); Anon, *Whipping Cheare* (1625).

⁶⁹ Works such as *The Honest Whore*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Duchess of Malfi* similarly perforated the isolation which Bridewells were intended to impose.

⁷⁰ Frances E. Dolan, "'Gentlemen, I Have One Thing More to Say': Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680", *Modern Philology*, 92.2 (1994) 157-178 (161).

⁷¹ *ibid.* (169).

illegitimately conceived infant, failed to provide such satisfaction, the authors of her history offered an explanation and published, with the pamphlet describing her crime, her letter to her “Dear and Loving Children” about duty and obedience to God.⁷²

Literary death

The harshest punishment of exclusion for bastardy was what could be called a “literary death sentence”. In *Measure for Measure* Claudio is to be beheaded “for getting Madame Julietta with child” (I.ii.70), a punishment which is considered excessive within the play. Unusually it gives the man a heavier punishment than the woman, although Julietta’s fate after childbirth is never specified. We have seen that, although other reasons can be found for the Duchess of Malfi’s and Antonio’s deaths, at the heart of the situation is the nature of their marriage and the perceived bastardy of her children. Even lack of chastity merited a “literary death”, albeit temporary. After Hero is suspected in *Much Ado* we are told that “Death is the fairest cover for her shame” and that she must be concealed “in some reclusive and religious life, / Out of all eyes” (IV.i.116, 244). Hermione’s seclusion in *The Winter’s Tale* until her honesty is proven fulfils a similar function, the “removed house” secreting her in a kind of tomb. As Dolan suggests:

it was not legally, morally, or socially clear exactly what one should or could do with a woman who had sex outside marriage. What happens to Hero might be viewed as wishful thinking: a woman who is unchaste would simply drop dead.⁷³

Frequently dramatists impose the bastard bearer’s punishment in the form of an effective death, making her invisible and unmentionable: a total punishment of exclusion. Gloucester’s statement in *King Lear* that “yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making” gives some character to Edmond’s mother, though she is never mentioned again (I.i.20). The mother of the bastard at the heart of Richard Brome’s *A Jovial Crew*, which is discussed in the next chapter, is similarly mentioned but not named. Having fulfilled the dramatic function of producing illegitimate children, there is no need for these mothers. Legitimate mothers however are given some presence. In *The Tempest*, we are told that Prospero’s wife was a “piece of virtue”

⁷² Anon, *Fair warning to murderers of infants* (1692).

⁷³ Dolan, “Shakespeare and Marriage” (629).

(I.ii.56). Others are associated with objects – in *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock says Jessica has sold a ring that he “had of Leah when I was a bachelor” (III.i.113) and in *Othello* the Moor tells Desdemona, that the handkerchief belonged to his mother (III.iv.55).

In Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1615) unmarried pregnancy triggers an escalation of blood and death, including that of the bastard bearer. The importance of bastardy to the plot gives particular significance to his adoption of the popular metaphor of birth in his dedication, alongside his references to witches, charms, spells and enchantment.⁷⁴ Middleton calls the work an “ill-fated labour” and his reference to having “made her lie so long in an imprisoned obscurity” suggests the seclusion surrounding childbirth. He continues “she hath thus far conjured herself abroad”, which prefigures Francisca’s escape from the court, and uses the verb “bears”. The play’s action is prompted by Francisca’s illicit pregnancy, as much as by Almachildes’ application to the witches for help, yet the focus of the play’s criticism concerns witchcraft, positioning its tragic events in relation to the supernatural rather than the social reality of illicit pregnancy.

In common with other works, Middleton’s is a male-authored depiction of a female condition and mental state. However, in contrast to the brevity of ballads discussed below, the play form enables Middleton to develop ideas and allows time and space to show the effect of actions upon others, and the resulting events. He goes beyond the mere “springing” baby of *Ladies Fall* (discussed below) or the pregnancy which apparently ends without a baby, as in *Witty Western Lasse*, discussed in Chapter 4. Middleton imagines Francisca’s anger toward her lover and her fear of discovery – “My brother sure would kill me if he knew it” (II.i.60) – indicating that her pregnancy occupies her mind as well as her body. Middleton endows her with subjectivity and psychological depth. He shows that she is anxious about her plans to escape, and she anticipates a birth with all its accompanying mess, telling the audience that she has more need of “old shirts” than a yard of lawn. Middleton’s imagination of a pregnant woman’s psyche, and the genre’s capacity for showing the influence of others on the developing situation and the tension that builds, creates a more credible estimation of

⁷⁴ Middleton, *The Witch* (4).

the emotions of an unmarried and pregnant woman than the conciseness of ballads allows.

Writing in the 1950s, Samuel Schoenbaum states that Francisca derived from the “wenches in the London comedies who lose their maidenheads in the country and go on to make their fortunes in the city,”⁷⁵ calling her a “libidinous sixteen-year-old” and “close to an adolescent psychopath”. My more historicised reading sees her as a victim of contemporary social practices which force her into a series of increasingly complex deceptions resulting in multiple deaths, including her own. This is closer to Middleton’s representation of Francisca which is more sympathetic than critical and which, through her opening soliloquy and asides throughout the play, makes the audience complicit in her actions. Her error was being pregnant and unmarried. As we shall see in Chapter 4, in ballads (Francisca’s true origin) this situation often becomes a comic tale of deception and survival. Middleton, however, shows it developing into death and disaster, thus suggesting the socially polluting effect of illicit pregnancy. He also reveals the extent to which an unmarried, pregnant woman with some position, influence and money could protect herself from many of the difficulties of this situation. Francisca’s escape, the birth, and her subsequent return to her family are all dependent on Aberzanes’ ingenuity and ability to act and move freely within the social structure. In real-life, women would also have needed assistance. Like her counterparts in popular literature, discussed below, Francisca receives a literary death sentence, despite the differences in genre and her elevated social status. Her infant does not die, although its survival is perilous as its abandonment in a specified place does not guarantee its future.

Many single, pregnant women escaped to London as a place where the outcome of pregnancy could be hidden and identities changed, as seen in *The Witty Westerne Lasse* and *A true and perfect relation*⁷⁶ (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively). Paul Griffiths shows that many women abandoned their children there,⁷⁷ but the extent to which abandonment was at the houses of those who might care for them is unclear. Fildes finds that abandoned infants were frequently older, suggesting that the mothers

⁷⁵ Samuel Schoenbaum, “Middleton’s Tragicomedies”, *Modern Philology*, 54.1 (1956) 7-19 (9).

⁷⁶ Guy, *Witty Westerne Lasse*; “*True and Perfect*”.

⁷⁷ Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime and Control in the Capital City 1550 -1660* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

had been unable to overcome the realities of surviving as a bastard bearer, a subject discussed in the next chapter.⁷⁸

Literary death was also part of the ballad tradition. The woman in *The Bloody Miller* is murdered by her lover in one of many works about murdered, pregnant women, discussed in Chapter 5. He sings: “From Ear to Ear I slit her mouth / and stab’d her in the Head”.⁷⁹ This sensational description is accompanied by verses in which he sings his woeful lament, with a refrain emphasising that his sins will be punished. While serving as a warning to others, the ballad attempts to move audience sympathy from the dead woman and her child to the killer:

Let all pretending Lovers
take warning now by me,
Lest they (as I) procure their woe,
and work their misery:
For I myself have overthrown,
as you shall plainly see,
I for my transgression must die.

In *Rocke the Baby* a young man’s wife cares for her husband’s bastard after its mother dies⁸⁰ while in *A Lamentable Ballad of the Ladies Fall* a deserted pregnant woman dies in labour, after forbidding her maid to call either her mother or the midwife:

With that the Babe sprang in her Womb,
no Creature being nigh,
And with a sigh that broke her heart,
this gallant Dame did dye.⁸¹

The “gallant” makes her a figure of courage rather than revilement. It continues with the infant’s death and the arrival and suicide of the lover:

This living little Infant young,
the mother being dead,
Resign’d his new received breath,
to him that hath him made,
Next morning came her Lover true,
affrighted at this news,

⁷⁸ Fildes, “Maternal feelings”.

⁷⁹ Anon, *The Bloody Miller* (1684).

⁸⁰ HG, *Rocke the Babie Joane* (1632?).

⁸¹ Anon, *Ladies Fall*.

And he for sorrow slew himself,
whom each one did accuse.

This juxtaposition of the deaths of mother and child is also related in Lady Jane Cheyne's poem on the death of her sister the Countess of Bridgewater in 1663: "Her new borne Child she asked for which ne'ere cryed / Fearing to know its end she Bowed, and Dyed".⁸² While death of both mother and infant in childbirth was a real possibility, such works suggest the bond between mother and infant, as if the death of one must mean the death of the other. The similarity in expression across gender, genre and functions of the two types of writing, indicates that infant death was a tragedy which united people in emotion.⁸³ Both works acknowledge that an infant is a valid object of mourning whether it be the illegitimate child of a nameless woman or born to a member of the aristocracy.

Although bastard bearers were problematic figures and subject to stringent restrictions, many balladeers represented them as strong and resourceful women who manipulated their circumstances. This is discussed in Chapter 4. However, even in her invisibility the bastard bearer is not impotent as her child often has a pivotal role in many works' narratives, most commonly as a negative influence. In her study of representations of bastards in early modern drama, Alison Findlay comments on authors' need to portray their subversive power or otherness. She writes: "The most obvious way was to present the character's difference as villainous [...]. This encouraged the presentation of bastards as evil, deformed, ugly and terrifying".⁸⁴ As outsiders, they "observe, criticise and rebel". In plays such as *King Lear*, *Much Ado*, and *King John* the illegitimate child is a principal protagonist whose effect is catastrophic. Thus the bastard bearer, a liminal woman who is neither maid, widow or wife is represented as a polluter of the community, who continues her contaminating effect even in death.

⁸² Greer et al., *Kissing the Rod* (118).

⁸³ Anselment, "Teares" (51).

⁸⁴ Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1994) (39).

The rituals of socially inclusive punishments

Those found guilty of bastardy could also be subjected to penance and whipping, punishments in which the communities participated and which had parallels with rites of passage. They were performance-based. Offenders played a central role in their own drama – a form of street theatre, with the community as “audience”, thus blurring the distinction between punishment and theatre.⁸⁵ Such punishments inspired writers, who used them in a comic or moving manner, further lessening the division between historical punishment and literature. I wish to show that they also had many parallels with the rituals associated with rites of passage, thus weakening divisions between rites of passage, punishment and performance.

Van Gennep’s study of rites of passage describes the ceremonies practised when individuals move from one life stage to the next.⁸⁶ In some societies those in transition form an isolated group throughout, or for much of, the ceremony; in others the rituals take place within the community. In both cases, the rites combine aspects of theatre, magic and religion. Recurring elements of the procedures include going or being taken to a special or sacred place, prescribed garments, striking or flagellation, and marking the body. These observances allow individuals to be reintegrated into their societies. Turner cites research which identifies initiation rites as involving “exhibitions, ‘what is shown’; actions, ‘what is done’; and instructions, ‘what is said’”. These, he states, “hold good for initiation rites all over the world”.⁸⁷ Showing, doing and stating are the basis of the community-centred punishments to which early modern bastard bearers were subjected. They emphasised their liminal state.

The penance to which bastard bearers could be sentenced could take various forms.⁸⁸ Pre-Reformation it usually entailed a procession around the church, barefoot and wearing a sheet, preceded by a cross, with the wrongdoer carrying a candle, which he or she placed before the principal image or the high altar: Turner’s “what is done”. Later, people were required to carry a placard or symbol of their sin: “what is shown”. It sometimes included a beating by those holding office in the church: the flagellation

⁸⁵ For a discussion of punishment see Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (19). He describes penance as “a potent piece of theatre”.

⁸⁶ Gennep, *Rites* (78f).

⁸⁷ Turner, *Forest* (102).

⁸⁸ Houlbrooke, *Church Courts* (46); McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour* (113).

which van Gennep noted. Post-Reformation the spoken aspect of the ceremony was emphasised and wrongdoers were often ordered to make a declaration in the church and the marketplace: Turner's "what is said". Penance, with its elements of showing, doing and saying was still in use in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1624. E.R.C. Brinkworth's work on the Ecclesiastical Court records for the town gives several accounts of this form of punishment. Isabella Hall, bastard bearer (no relation to Shakespeare's son-in-law John Hall), was to:

repayre to the parish church of Stratford and there she is to stand upon a matt or seate in the middle ile of the church during all the tyme of Morning Prayer and sermon in white sheets hanging down from her shoulders to her feet and holding a white rod in her hand and untill the end of the sermon to confesse according to a shedle.⁸⁹

Shakespeare may well have witnessed such punishments. The stage directions for *2 Henry VI* state "*Enter Eleanor [barefoot and] a white sheet [about her, with a wax candle], in her hand, and verses written on her back and pinned on*".⁹⁰ Though Eleanor's punishment was for a different crime, the scene shows public participation in the ritual. Gloucester, who has been appointed to watch her penance at a specific time and place, anticipates:

The abject people staring on thy face
With envious looks, laughing at thy shame.
[...]
See how the giddy multitude do point
And nod their heads and throw their eyes on thee. (II.iv.11, 20)

Eleanor complains:

Methinks I should not be thus led along,
Mailed up in shame, with papers on my back.
And followed with a rabble that rejoice
To see my tears and hear my deep-fet groans. (II.iv.30)

Unlike *Measure for Measure*, in which only Claudio is to be punished, in Shakespeare's source *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), we are told that Andrugio:

⁸⁹ E.R.C. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (London: Phillimore, 1972) (166). "shedle" [*sic*] probably implies schedule, at that time "a slip or scroll of parchment or paper containing writing" (OED) Wilson notes that such confessions affirmed that her [or his] actions were wrong (Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (20).)

⁹⁰ William Shakespeare, *2 Henry VI*, ed. Ronald Knowles (London: Macmillan, 1999) (II.iv.17). Italics in original.

For loving too kindlie, must loose his heade,
 And his sweete hart, must weare the shamefull weedes:
 Ordainde for Dames, that fall through fleshly deedes.⁹¹

Penance was also imposed on men. For failing to be catechised, William Bartlet was to appear in the parish church of Stratford “in his usual apparell at the beginning of Morning Prayer [...] untill the sermon [...] and then to confes his fault publickly before the congregacion”.⁹² After Claudio discredits Hero in *Much Ado*, he also performs a penance as a necessary prerequisite to readmission to the society he has wronged. He enters with “*three or four with tapers, all in black*” (what is shown); reads aloud an account of his crime (what is said) and “*hangs the epitaph on the tomb*” (what is done) (V.iii.1).⁹³ Offenders’ public avowals of guilt and repentance, and the gallows speeches described by balladeers and pamphleteers, are a variation of this ritual.

Penance may have given satisfaction to the community that had been offended, as Houlbrooke suggests, or have been an act of purification and absolution, as Adair believes.⁹⁴ However, theories about liminality and pollution suggest that the ritual would have marked the liminal state of being of a woman who was neither maid, widow, nor wife.

Men and women could also be sentenced to whipping for conceiving a bastard. A case in Liminster, Sussex, names “William Berry, for incontineny with Joane Bastow, as the common fame goeth; but he hath been laid by the heeles and whipt already by the maior of Arrundall”.⁹⁵ Another case from the Middlesex records shows that women were also publicly whipped. The account states that Henry Wharton and Elizabeth Mason, a single woman, “have lately to the Highe displeasure of Almightye God and to the evill example of others lived together in incontineny and therein have begotten a base childe upon the bodie of the said Elizabeth”.⁹⁶ Their behaviour was worse because Henry had since married Elizabeth’s sister which was likely to “plucke

⁹¹ George Whetstone, “The Historie of Promos and Cassandra” in *Measure for Measure*, ed. J.W. Lever (London: Macmillan, 1965) 166-193 (169).

⁹² Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court* (163).

⁹³ The designation given here follows early modern cultural practice and usual theatrical practice. For other attributions of the line see Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Claire Mc Eachern (London: Macmillan, 2006) (notes p. 306).

⁹⁴ Houlbrooke, *Church Courts* (56); Richard Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1996) (157).

⁹⁵ Johnstone, *Presentments* (15).

⁹⁶ Jeaffreson, *Middlesex Records Vol II* (157).

downe vengeance from the highest”. Those carrying out the punishment were to bind them to a cart and were instructed:

strippinge them naked from the waste upp you give or in your owne presence cause to be given them sound correction by whippinge them throughout youre towne, to begin with them both in Homerton at the house of goodwife Godfrey (the place where they committed their offence) and soe drive them by the Church through Churchstreet and soe through Marestreete to the further end thereof.

The case appears in the records because James Bowman, a yeoman and one of the parish constables, had “obstinately refused” to execute a previous warrant for the punishment. Subsequently, the court decided to take counsel about the “sufficiency” of the warrant and it is not known whether it was ever executed. Neither is it known whether Bowman’s refusal was due to a point of principle or a point of law. Physical punishment could be commuted with a payment. Evan Rogers of Edmonton, labourer, who “upon his own confession is the reputed father of a bastard child christened Richard Rogers [...] gotten by him uppou Jane Barton of Edmonton” was to be “whipped [sic] in some open place”.⁹⁷ To avoid punishment, Evan was to “pay to the churchwardens of the said parishe of Edmonton to the use of the poore[...] the some [sic] of Twenty shillings”. In drama whipping is inflicted on men for conceiving bastards, and it is comic. The darkly humorous Parolles adds to his defamation of Bertram’s character by claiming “he was whipp’d for getting the shrieve’s fool with child, a dumb innocent that could not say him nay” (IV.iii.191). Similarly, in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* after the announcement that Jaquenetta is “quick, the child brags in her belly,” Costard jokes that Armado, the father, will be whipped (V.ii.672).

Whipping wrongdoers resembles the ritual of flagellation described by van Gennep, but how it should be interpreted is unclear. Van Gennep saw it as a form of purification and an entry rite, which in an early modern context could indicate that it was required to enable a bastard bearer to re-enter society. But he also describes it as serving as an act of separation, equivalent to breaking or cutting.⁹⁸ Marking the body, which is also an aspect of ritual, was an effect of whipping. In *Whipping Cheare* the women sing of their whipping and in their reply the “Roring Boyes” taunt them with

⁹⁷ *ibid.* (153).

⁹⁸ Gennep, *Rites* (174).

“Shew your shoulders printed”,⁹⁹ and those in *The Bridewel Whore’s Resolution* tell the audience “Our backs they do scourge and lash”.¹⁰⁰ In this context the scars seem to be almost a trophy, and part of the entertainment. Such scarring would seemingly have followed the punishment meted out to Joane Lea. The Middlesex records tell us:

Forasmuch as Joane Lea upon her owne petition exhibited in Courte hath confessed that she had a bastard child begot on her body by Thomas Bates: It is therefore ordered that she shalbe openly whipte at a Cartes tayle in St. John’s Streete vpon Saturdaye next untill her body be all bloodye.¹⁰¹

By prescribing the date and time of punishment and giving an account of what they could expect to see, as in the case of Joane Lea, sentencing ensured that whipping, like penance, had elements of theatre and spectacle.¹⁰² In *Worke for Armourours*, his impassioned pamphlet about poverty in London, Thomas Dekker chronicled the contemporary reaction to whipping. Describing the violence perpetrated on a blind bear, he writes that the sight:

moved as much pittie in my breast towards him as the leading of poore starved wretches to the whipping posts in London (when they had more neede to be releevd with foode) ought to move the hearts of Cittizens, though it be the fashion now to laugh at them.¹⁰³

Penance and whipping were rituals which those who had offended their communities must undergo. Highly performance-based, they were spectacles with audiences who could participate through staring and jeering. They were part of the tradition of the body as the locus of punishment which included the pillory and branding, and a component of the death penalty, as in the breaking of limbs, dismemberment, and immolation, until these were replaced by less theatrical representations of pain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁴ With their

⁹⁹ Anon, *Whipping Cheare*.

¹⁰⁰ Anon, *Bridewel Whores resolution*.

¹⁰¹ Jeaffreson, *Middlesex Records Vol II* (92).

¹⁰² Such punishments were similar to the skimmingtons and rough music used to punish or mock sexual misbehaviour. Their popularity as entertainment is suggested by their on-stage enactment in works such as *The Witches of Lancashire* and *The English Moor*. Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), ed. Gabriel Egan (London: Nick Hern, 2002) (IV.iii.44); Richard Brome, “The English Moor, or the Mock-Marriage” in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome*, vol. II (New York: AMS, 1966) 1-86 (B2).

¹⁰³ Thomas Dekker, *Worke for Armourours or The Peace is Broken* (1609) (B2).

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977) (10, 14).

elements of saying, doing and showing penance shared much with the rituals associated with liminality, thus blurring the division between punishment, theatre and ritual. Penance and whipping potentially marked the end of the individual's liminal state. The extent to which this was the case is discussed in Chapter 4.

Self-imposed punishment and liminality

In creative literature women seek punishment for pre-marital fornication and adultery, even if only suspected. Women in ballads mourn their seduction, loss of virginity or unmarried pregnancy, their expressions of remorse resembling the public, spoken confessions of post-Reformation penance, as in *Celia's complaint for the loss of her virginity*.¹⁰⁵ She uses the common metaphor of warfare to describe her seduction – “My spotless virgin's fort / Thou strongly didst assault” – and confesses that she was wrong “So soon to yield / to thee the field”. Others adopt the metaphor of crime. In *An Answer to the Bonny Scot* the author uses a jewel metaphor, the woman telling listeners that “my virgin treasure did he steal”, and that “my splendid glory's gone”. Other ballad women resort to voluntary isolation resembling the separation of ritual processes, similar to that of Hero, Hermione and Mariana. The woman in *Ladies Fall* secretes herself away, and *A love sick maid's song* is a long lament about unmarried pregnancy from a desolate place which suggests the woman's withdrawal to a liminal, no-where space.¹⁰⁶

These Rocks and stones can tell
the sorrowes I substaine
My meate is hawes and hips,
my drink is water cleare:
Nought els my tender lips,
have tasted this halfe yeare.

The idea of punishment by marking the body, van Genneps's “what is shown”, is adopted by dramatists who show adulterous women desiring visual manifestation of their wrong-doing. In his introduction to *Promos and Cassandra*, Whetstone writes of a country where a woman guilty of adultery “should wear some disguised apparel during her life, to make her infamously noted”.¹⁰⁷ After Cassandra submits to Promos' lust to

¹⁰⁵ Anon, *Celia's Complaint for the loss of her Virginity* (1678-1695).

¹⁰⁶ Anon, *A love-sick maids song* (1625?).

¹⁰⁷ Whetstone, “Promos and Cassandra” (166).

save her husband's life, a promise which is not kept, she elects to adopt the appropriate attire:

I have condemnde my selfe to weare these weedes of shame;
Whose congnisance doth showe, that I have (fleshly) sind.¹⁰⁸

The play participates in the "female complaint" tradition¹⁰⁹ and merges with the ballad genre in the style and content of some of the lamenting speeches in which lost honour is mourned before an audience, as in:

For lovers care not how they sweare, to wyn a Lady fayre
And having won what they did wish, for othes nor Lady care.¹¹⁰

In *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Anne wants her betrayal to be physically visible, as acts of penance or whip marks (a word she uses) would have been:

O to redeem my honour
I would have this hand cut off, these my breasts seared,
Be racked, strappadoed, put to any torment;
Nay, to whip this scandal out¹¹¹

At the most extreme end of self-punishment for pre-marital dalliance, women long to die, another form of literary death sentence. Celia sings "Come quickly, Death / To stop my breath / and end my misery".¹¹² This is her fate in *Repentance too late*, another version of Celia's tale in which the author's introduction tells us she "warns all Virgins by her doleful grief [...] then lies her down and dyes".¹¹³ This ballad's illustration of her funeral, dominated by the maiden's garland¹¹⁴ atop her coffin, gives Celia the same funeral rights as Ophelia "She is allowed her virgin rites / Her maiden strewments"¹¹⁵ (V.i.226). The representation of the custom of maiden's garlands in written, visual and performed works, for women who were not (or may not have been) virgins, is another symptom of their liminality.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* (187).

¹⁰⁹ Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*.

¹¹⁰ Whetstone, "Promos and Cassandra" (180. See also 76, 83).

¹¹¹ Heywood, "A Woman Killed with Kindness (1603)" (Sc.13, 113).

¹¹² Anon, *Celia's Complaint*.

¹¹³ Anon, *Repentance too Late* (1663-1674).

¹¹⁴ The garland was part of the special funeral rites allowed to unmarried women. The oldest surviving example (1680) is at St Mary's Church, Beverley, Yorkshire. (Rosie Morris, "The 'Innocent and Touching Custom' of Maidens' Garlands: A Field Report", *Folklore*, 114 (2003) 255-387 (357).)

¹¹⁵ Flowers scattered on a coffin or grave (OED)

Image redacted for copyright reasons

Repentance too late. *The maiden's garland elevates a seduced woman to a virginal state.*

The pregnant woman in *Ladies Fall* also chooses death, telling her lover she will kill herself if he does not marry her. When he deserts her she carries out this punishment by refusing help when in labour, and turning her bedchamber into a quasi-cell or tomb which will eventually contain her corpse:

Weep not, said she, but shut the door
And windows round about
Let none bewail my wretched case
But keep all persons out.

Other defiled women take a more active role in their demise, such as the “desperate damsell” who drew a knife and “*Dido-like / her heart did strike, / Thus dyde the Damsell in despaire*”.¹¹⁶

The requirement for women to behave acceptably, and be believed to be so doing, meant that writers show them accepting punishment even if merely suspected of sexual wrong-doing. They submit to feigned death while their honesty is proved, yet this concealment is a virtual imprisonment, which reflects the social isolation they would have experienced had they been guilty of pre- or extra-marital intercourse. Hero willingly acquiesces to hiding and apparent death so that she can re-emerge once her honour has been proved – “She died, my Lord, but whiles her slanders lived” – her

¹¹⁶ Martin Parker, *The desperate Damsells Tragedy* (1601-40).

veiled entrance suggesting her state of betweenness (V.iv.66), and the pretence that she is a different (but related and similar) woman. She emerges as a “new” woman, a reborn and purified Hero. Hermione is similarly secreted while her shame lives and until the Oracle is fulfilled, her “dead” body only returning from its liminal state when Paulina instructs “’Tis time; descend; be stone no more” (V.iii.99). The isolation and apparent death of these women is a form of punishment and self-imposed liminality during which they both have, and do not have, earthly presence, similar to those who reach out from a liminal world by singing their confessions from beyond the grave. Such actions should have allowed their return to society, though the extent to which it would have been possible in real life is discussed in the following chapter.

Changing marriage customs, and uncertainties about what form of service was acceptable, could place people in a liminal situation – not quite married, and not quite single. This could lead to unmarried pregnancy and bastardy, and put women in danger of being abandoned – a situation which could lead to infanticide. These situations could result in punishments which have many parallels with the rites of passage discussed by van Gennep and Turner, encompassing elements of separation in the form of banishment from religious ceremonies and incarceration in Houses of Correction, or by involving communities in ritual-based acts of penance or public whipping.

Avoiding the shame of pregnancy: “A dose of the Doctor”

Bearing in mind the punishments to which men and women could be sentenced for bastardy, those who occupied the liminal space of betrothal or uncertain marriage, and those in illicit relationships, could use early forms of birth control.¹¹⁷ These, while unreliable, would have helped to prevent the birth of an illegitimate child and the temptation to commit infanticide. With this in mind, this section will consider popular awareness of birth control, the means that could be used, how effective they would have been, and how knowledge was shared.

In the seventeenth-century ballad *Good Sport for Protestants*, an “old bawdy priest” attempts to seduce a “wanton young nun” who resists his entreaties and bribes

¹¹⁷ In this chapter *contraception* will refer to anything which prevents conception and will therefore include abstinence; *birth control* will apply to anything which prevents a live birth and will include abortion. The specifics of individual cases and circumstances will be clarified as appropriate.

for fifteen verses before her duty of obedience convinces her to relent.¹¹⁸ Dolan writes that apart from works which were by or for Catholics, texts about nuns “provoke laughter at the nun’s failed attempts at chastity, her misguided obedience”.¹¹⁹ However, there is little in this ballad to suggest that Betty is a nun or that the man is a priest apart from a single reference to “Holy Father”. The only stipulation of the relationship is in the title, and the nun’s persistent objections hardly suggest that she is “wanton”. She is addressed throughout by the homely and domestic name “Betty”, and the relationship is established as based on her duty of obedience. Betty could be any servant who is seduced by her master. The impression is endorsed by the illustration showing the humble truckle bed on which the seduction is attempted, and servants were frequently those whose fate was unmarried pregnancy.¹²⁰ Betty is a frequent name in ballads, often alongside other named couples, emphasising her “everywoman” role in cheering or hapless tales of courtship, seduction and trickery almost always concerning everyday, simple folk. In this ballad, Betty recognises her danger:

But if it should prove, the disgrace would be great,
I should be the object of all People’s hate.

If pregnancy occurs, the man has the solution:

Should you prove with child, you may murder the brat
With a Dose of the Doctor, next door to the Cat.¹²¹

The dialogue-form ballad is a step-by-step lesson for would-be seducers, with no corresponding advice for women, though it does tell us what Betty should do in the event of pregnancy: she should acquire “a Dose of the Doctor”. Contraception could prevent this situation, though this is not what the seducer suggests and it is unclear whether the “dose” is to cause abortion, or to kill the infant. This does not alter the statement that Betty can take action if she becomes pregnant. *Good Sport for Protestants* suggests that there was popular belief that unmarried motherhood was avoidable, whether by contraception or abortion. References in other street literature

¹¹⁸ Anon, *Good Sport for Protestants; in a most pleasant Dialogue Between an Old Bawdy Priest, and a wanton young Nun* (1682-1700), (109).

¹¹⁹ Frances E. Dolan, “Why are nuns funny?”, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 70.4 (2007) 509-535 (509).

¹²⁰ Ingram, *Church Courts* (264, 286). Gowing, *Common Bodies* (59); Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (37). For an analysis of this situation see Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (11).

¹²¹ This may refer to signs outside properties, used to identify specific buildings.

and historical sources confirm this. The ballad shows that this was not a uniquely female knowledge, and that obtaining “the dose” would be easy. It also suggests the uncertain dividing line between contraception and abortion, which I discuss below.

Availability and effectiveness

The early modern period is generally thought of as a time when women could not prevent childbirth. However, practices did exist and, while unreliable, could have some effect. Certainly, this was the belief of contemporary religious thinkers and moralists, who condemned anything which might inhibit conception. Benedicti, a sixteenth-century Franciscan theologian, wrote: “Those who by potion, drink, or whatever other method prevent conception and generation out of a fear of having too many children, sin mortally”.¹²² No matter what the official attitudes were, studies show patterns which suggest that people limited the size of their families, spaced births, and avoided inappropriate times (such as winter births).¹²³ Clearly, married people practised birth control and the same methods existed for those who were unmarried, though they were not all equally applicable. Both Riddle and McLaren, who have studied the history of contraception, show that abstention, particularly during times of maximum fertility and prolonged breast-feeding, was commonly practised.¹²⁴ *Coitus interruptus* appears to have been frequent, but threw some thinkers into a frenzy of disapproval. For them it was “detestable and abominable in the sight of God”; but by others it was “not considered all that outrageous”.¹²⁵

Physical and verbal violence were other possibilities: the early modern womb was a vulnerable place which could be cursed and bewitched into sterility. The fear and horrors of such possibilities were adopted by Shakespeare throughout his career. In

¹²² Jean Benedicti, *La somme des péchés et le remède d'iceux* (Paris: Hierasme de Marnes, 1595). Cited in Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The perception of fertility in England from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century* (London: Methuen, 1984) (57); Angus McLaren, *A History of Contraception from Antiquity to the Present Day* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) (149).

¹²³ The practice is implicit in E.A. Wrigley, ed. *An introduction to English historical demography: from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) (For example 370). McLaren, *History of Contraception* (146); John M. Riddle, “Oral contraceptives and early term abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages”, *Past and Present*, 131.1 (1991) 3-32 (3).

¹²⁴ Riddle, *Eve's Herbs*; John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); McLaren, *History of Contraception*; McLaren, *Rituals*.

¹²⁵ McLaren, *History of Contraception* (155); McLaren, *Rituals* (76).

Richard III Lady Anne curses “If ever he have child abortive be it” (I.ii.26). Lear prays to the gods “Into her womb convey sterility; / Dry up in her the organs of increase” (I.iv.257) when Goneril demands that he decrease his number of attendants.

The recently-conceived child existed in a liminal space between being and non-being, and could be injured by mental influences. Pregnant women were advised to maintain their equanimity. Rueff warns that women must have particular heed after forty-one days of pregnancy “For then hee is most like to a tender flower and blossome of trees, which is easily cast downe and dejected”.¹²⁶ Therefore, women should avoid “sudden feare, affrightments, by fire, lightening, thunder, with monstrous and hideous aspects and signs of men and beasts, by immoderate joy, sorrow and lamentation”. He later adds that women should be “of a merry hart, let them not be wasted and pined with mourning and cares”.¹²⁷ Anselment states that Elizabeth Freke associated one miscarriage with financial loss and attributed another to unkindness from her mother-in-law.¹²⁸ In *3 Henry VI*, the pregnant Lady Grey will not grieve her husband’s pending fate “Lest with my sighs or tears I blast or drown / King Edward’s fruit” (IV.iii.23).

Emotional turbulence was also thought able to terminate pregnancy or damage the unborn child. Leontes’ abuse of Hermione could be interpreted as an attempt to induce miscarriage of the child he considered to be a bastard. Shakespeare suggests that such dangers extended to infants. Leontes’ abuse of Hermione destroys Mamillius, whose name, Hackett points out, is a diminutive of the Latin for breast, and emphasises the close maternal bond.¹²⁹

Miscarriage could also be caused by physical violence. Striking a pregnant woman in or near her “belly” was often considered an attempt to induce abortion, or to threaten fertility. Helmholtz cites the 1487 case of John Wren, who was charged with having “wounded his wife during the time she was pregnant so that he killed the child in her belly”, a phrase which could signify intent or “with the result that”. Spivack argues that cases of violence towards pregnant women were seen as an injury to the woman,

¹²⁶ Rueff, *Expert Midwife* (58).

¹²⁷ *ibid.* (67).

¹²⁸ Anselment, *Realms of Apollo* (58).

¹²⁹ Helen Hackett, “‘Gracious be the issue’: Maternity and Narrative in Shakespeare’s Late Plays” in *Shakespeare’s Late Plays*, ed. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 25-39 (36).

not the child she was carrying.¹³⁰ In Sussex, a post mortem on Joan Myles and her unborn child states of the dead infant that “the right side of the head near the ear was bruised in three places and the skin was off”.¹³¹ It was known that she had “taken hurt before her troubles” and a women who accompanied her during labour stated “she heard her say that her husband’s brother Francis took her and shook her about 3 days before her troubles, set her down upon the brake and set his knee against the side of her belly”. The perpetrator was charged with killing Joan, not the child.

Violence could be self-inflicted. Elizabeth Williams, of Graffam, Sussex, was named in the Churchwardens’ reports in 1621 “for running up and downe the countrey with a deboyst [debased or debauched] knave, saying he was her husband”.¹³² The report states that “shee confessed that hee was run away from her, and that he was none of her husband, and that shee was with childe by him, and, as she confessed, fell over a stile by mischaunce and so spoyled it”. The Surrey Assizes for 1599 include the case of Margaret Webb of Godalming, a spinster who was indicted for taking ratsbane, an arsenic derivative, with the intention of destroying her unborn child. She was pardoned.¹³³

Women could also imbibe substances which could be perceived as inducing menstruation but actually caused abortion.¹³⁴ The difficulty of reliably diagnosing pregnancy, discussed by Eccles,¹³⁵ would have made it easy to deny to themselves what they were doing, particularly if the unborn child was not *in rerum natura*. Such thinking is seen in *The arraignment of hypocrisie* (discussed in Chapter 5) in which Mr Barker procures savin (*Juniperus sabina*, a known abortifacient), for his kinswoman because the maid told him that it “would bring down those things which used to come monthly, the stopping whereof made her so ill”.¹³⁶ The comment captures the extent to which substances claimed to induce menstruation were used to induce abortion.

¹³⁰ Robert V. Schnucker, “Elizabethan Birth Control and Puritanical Attitudes”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5.4 The History of the Family II (1975) 655-667 (568); Spivack, “Flowers” (129).

¹³¹ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (139 #542).

¹³² Johnstone, *Presentments* (8).

¹³³ J.S. Cockburn, ed. *Calendar of Assize Records: Surrey Indictments: Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1980) (512 (3146)).

¹³⁴ Riddle, *Eve’s Herbs* (27-32); Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion* (Chapter 2).

¹³⁵ Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (58).

¹³⁶ Crowch, *Arraignment for hypocrisie* (np).

Spivack writes that the difference between prompting menstruation and causing early miscarriage “was seen as so minimal as not to warrant discussion”.¹³⁷

Medical practitioners recognised the possibility. Rueff writes:

How many Virgins, how many Widdowes also ensnared and intangled with these Arts and devillish practice [of Witches and Harlots], have commmitted cruell and more than brutish murders of their tender Babes and Infants? [...] They make first experiments by lacing in themselves straight and hard, that they may extinguish and destroy the Feature conceived in the wombe.¹³⁸

He continues that they then go:

by the instinct of the Divell, to some old Witch very skilfull in curing these diseases [...] asking and questioning with them about the cure and remedie of the stopping of their Termes, desiring a medicine and counsell to procure them to issue. The old Witch not ignorant of the matter, willeth them to enquire for medicines of the *Apothecaries*.¹³⁹

Similarly, there were many substances not to be given to pregnant women, and, as Monica H. Green writes, women could “flip” technologies, using those which were to cleanse the womb or bring down the menses, to prompt abortion.¹⁴⁰

However, sometimes the substance’s use was specified. The index to the 1636 edition of Gerard’s *Herball* lists fifty entries “To provoke or bring down the Termes”.¹⁴¹ The table of contents lists three suggestions for “Causing abortment”: stinking gladdon (Iris) sowbread (cyclamen) and fern. The text is less specific, stating that fern “bringeth barrenness, especially to women; and that it causeth women to be delivered before their time”.¹⁴² Of “stinking gladdon” Gerard states:

If it be drunke in Wine it provoketh the termes, and being put in Baths for women to sit over, it provoketh the like effects most exquisitely. The root put in manner of a pessarie hasteneth the birth.¹⁴³

Hannah Woolley’s *The Accomplisht Ladys Delight* explains how “To make a Woman be soon deliverd, the Child being dead or alive” and “Provoke the Terms”.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Spivack, “Flowers” (123).

¹³⁸ Rueff, *Expert Midwife* (59).

¹³⁹ *ibid.* (60).

¹⁴⁰ Monica H. Green, “Gendering the History of Women’s Healthcare”, *Gender and History*, 20.3 (2008) 487-518 (500).

¹⁴¹ Gerard, *Herball* (1636).

¹⁴² *ibid.* (1130).

¹⁴³ *ibid.* (60).

¹⁴⁴ Hannah Woolley, *The Accomplisht Ladys Delight* (1675) (150,154).

The possibility of misapplying the advice is clear. In *The Ladies Dispensatory* Leonard Sowerby offers pages of suggestions to “Provoke Womens monthly Purgations” while “To hinder Conception” he lists eighteen possibilities and “To cause abortion” he suggests over forty substances.¹⁴⁵ Most are herbs, and many are still regarded as poisons, including ivy and lupin. Others challenge rational thinking, such as “Roots of Sow-bread fastened to the thigh”, “milke of a Bitches first Litter drunk”, and “the Samian stone worne about the neck”.¹⁴⁶ The recipes’ existence in books which also contain cures for scurvy, shingles, and dropsy, positions the ending of an unwanted pregnancy as a natural matter, supporting Spivak’s assertion that it was not regarded as serious.

What of the recommendations themselves? A complicating factor is that methods used “To cause abortment” are not very different from those to be used for assisting conception. The overlap may exist because cleansing the womb could either cause abortion or prepare it for conception. Whatever the effect, there appears to have been a belief in a connection between some substances and pregnancy. The doubts about efficacy can be seen in the differences between two editions of Gerard’s *Herball*. Writing about sowbread in 1597 Gerrard warns that pregnant women should not even go near or step over the plant because if they do so “without controversie” they will be “delivered before their times”.¹⁴⁷ This was glossed by Thomas Johnson for the 1636 edition. He notes:

I judge our author to be somewhat womanish in this, that is, led more by vaine opinion than by any reason or experience, to confirm this his affection, which frequent experience shows to be vain and frivolous.¹⁴⁸

These few lines, with their reference to reason and experience, demonstrate that contraception occupied a territory between superstition and rationalism, and suggest that

¹⁴⁵ Leonard Sowerby, *The Ladies Dispensatory* (1651) (146,161,158).

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* (158-161).

¹⁴⁷ Gerard, *Herball* (1597) (694).

¹⁴⁸ Gerard, *Herball* (1636) (845). Sowbread is also mentioned in the late seventeenth-century Jerningham family papers, cited in Linda A. Pollock, “Embarking on a rough passage: the experience of pregnancy in early modern society” in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990) 39-67 (55).

enlightenment could encroach onto ancient beliefs and ultimately lead to their disappearance.¹⁴⁹

Attempts at birth control may have been more effective than we tend to assume. Riddle's research to "evaluate recipes for which modern scientific knowledge may help us to assess efficiency"¹⁵⁰ recognises the possible, but not yet understood, transdermal absorption of toxins. He acknowledges that "the placebo effect is very real in medicine"¹⁵¹ and the effect of psychological factors on the reproductive system.¹⁵² Riddle concludes: "another day may come when judgements about what appears magical to us now will have a reasonable explanation".¹⁵³ He also shows that many of the recommended substances were capable of being effective. Pennyroyal "contains pulegone, which does terminate pregnancies when taken in controlled amounts".¹⁵⁴ The chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus L.*) has abortifacient qualities, and birthwort works as a contraceptive and abortifacient.¹⁵⁵ The savin obtained by Mr Baker did not work, though Riddle quotes research which shows that its oil could cause abortion.¹⁵⁶ Other commonly cited substances include rosemary, rue and willow, which have inevitably fuelled academic discussion of Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet and her possible pregnancy.¹⁵⁷ Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* distributes similar herbs (without attracting comment) although other flowers she names, and many of the spices on the Clown's shopping list (IV.iv.34), are also associated with birth control.

¹⁴⁹ The idea of the broken line of communication which results in the loss of ancient knowledge is discussed in Riddle, *Eve's Herbs*.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.* (69). Riddle's methods have been challenged, partly because animal testing does not prove effectiveness in humans (Monica H. Green, "Flowers, Poisons and Men: Menstruation in Medieval Western Europe" in *Menstruation: A cultural history*, ed. Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005) 51-64.

¹⁵¹ Riddle, *Eve's Herbs* (66, 68); McLaren, *Rituals* (100).

¹⁵² Riddle, *Eve's Herbs* (66).

¹⁵³ *ibid.* (66, 70).

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* (47).

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* (57, 58).

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* (54); Crowch, *Araignment for hypocrisy*.

¹⁵⁷ Among the authors on this subject are Linda Welshimer Wagner, "Shakespeare's Pathetic Plot Device", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14.1 (1963) 94-97; Maurice Hunt, "Impregnating Ophelia", *Neophilologus*, 89 (2005) 641-663; R.S. White, "The Tragedy of Ophelia", *Neophilologies*, 9.2 (1978) 41-53; Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism" in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985) 77-94; Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992) (246, 774, 784); Lucile F. Newman, "Ophelia's Herbal", *Economic Botany*, 33.2 (1979) 227-232.

As well as written advice, information on birth control and abortion was available from midwives, and women shared information. McLaren writes that “women looked not to their spouses but to their female friends and relatives for advice on stratagems to be employed well before or after intercourse”.¹⁵⁸ Rueff, whose comment about witches has already been quoted, says that women who have sought advice “impart and communicate likewise those murdering arts and cruell practices to others, that thereby many murders of sillie Infants are committed”.¹⁵⁹ Angus McLaren states that such sharing of advice “shored up a sense of female solidarity” and considers this, rather than their effectiveness, to be the recipes’ main benefit.¹⁶⁰ Most women would have gained knowledge of these potentially effective practices from their mothers but, as Riddle points out “One mother failing to tell her daughters about what she had learned would be enough to break a chain that was, in many cases, thousands of years old”.¹⁶¹

Men and preventing bastardy

Literary and archival and literary sources indicate that men knew about preventing childbirth. It was hinted at in married women’s letters to their husbands and discussed by unmarried people,¹⁶² as we saw in *Good Sport for Protestants*. In 1624 Joan Barnett appeared before the Coroner at Ryde, East Sussex, accused of giving birth to a “live female child” which died within half an hour due to her negligence.¹⁶³ At the inquest, Joan said the child was born after two instances of intercourse with Thomas Frenchman. On both occasions she asked what she should do if she became pregnant, to which he replied “Take something to do away with it”. She stated that she had not done so, but does not suggest that she did not know what to take or how to obtain it, though such an admission may have created a negative impression. There seems to be complete confidence that the situation can be dealt with should it arise and the nonchalant attitude of Frenchman, who perceives this as a female problem which Joan

¹⁵⁸ McLaren, *History of Contraception* (9).

¹⁵⁹ Rueff, *Expert Midwife* (61).

¹⁶⁰ McLaren, *History of Contraception* (5).

¹⁶¹ Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion* (157).

¹⁶² Pollock, “Embarking” (56).

¹⁶³ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (63 #245).

will have to take care of, is the same as that of the bawdy old priest. Joan was convicted.

However, it was not considered that only the woman's contribution to a pregnancy could be controlled. Riddle states that Artemisia, which causes termination in rats, may interfere with the production of sperm. Sowerby recommends "Rosin of Cedar applied on the mans member".¹⁶⁴ Other male alternatives mentioned by Schnucker included anointing the penis with any of a long list of substances including rock salt, tar, balm, juice of onion and sesame oil.¹⁶⁵ Riddle quotes the 1560 translation of Peter of Spain's *Treasury of Health*, which states: "Hemlockes bounde to a mans stones, take utterly awaye all desyre of copulation".¹⁶⁶ Understandably, men may have been keen to leave the responsibility with the woman until the "small linen covering" mentioned by Fallopio in 1564 as a means of preventing infection began to be used as a contraceptive in the latter part of the early modern period.¹⁶⁷

What does this add to our knowledge of infanticide and liminality? Women could avoid unmarried motherhood by controlling their bodies' boundaries by methods which, though unreliable, did have some effect. Their actions occupied a "between" territory, between preventing conception, and causing abortion. The herbs and spices which could be used were similarly between life-giving nourishment and life-taking or preventing. Riddle writes:

Many of the antifertility plants fall into the category of pot herbs [...] and were served in salads or placed on meat. The woman's salad may have been her control over her life and her family's life, while the men and non-childbearing women ate from the same bowl and saw it as simply a nourishing, tasty meal course.¹⁶⁸

Knowledge about substances which could be taken was itself liminal, existing in a grey area between openly written advice – which was often inadequately detailed to be of practical use¹⁶⁹ – and the private, oral tradition in which women's shared knowledge may have been more precise and accurate. However, it is questionable whether

¹⁶⁴ Sowerby, *Ladies Dispensatory* (162).

¹⁶⁵ Schnucker, "Elizabethan Birth Control" (note 4).

¹⁶⁶ Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion* (148).

¹⁶⁷ McLaren, *History of Contraception* (157).

¹⁶⁸ Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion* (155).

¹⁶⁹ A herb's effectiveness is influenced by the means of extraction (into alcohol or water), the amount of heat applied, the concentration of the substance, the amount and frequency of administration, and the duration of the pregnancy (ibid. (124).)

mothers might have shared such information with their unmarried daughters. Gowing comments that not being able to talk about the body or sexuality could be evidence of chastity or virtue in both married and single women.¹⁷⁰ This may have prevented some women from sharing their knowledge. When a daughter was going into service, for a mother to give her the advice she would first have to admit to herself that the situation she was going into could make her vulnerable. Such an admission may have made it hard to send her away, no matter how much the family was driven by financial or social need. The high number of servants accused of bastardy or infanticide suggests lack of advice from mothers, as well as evidence of predatory masters and liaisons between servants.

In a society in which, according to Sharpe, the objective of infanticide legislation was to control sexual morality as well as to protect infants,¹⁷¹ sharing birth control advice with single women would have allowed them to inhabit the liminal state of being neither maid, widow nor wife, with some protection from pregnancy. Single women could have some control of their bodies' boundaries and thus maintain the semblance of respectability whilst thwarting convention. And of course, once one of them had knowledge, she would be likely to share it with her friends, thus reducing the risks of conception and, ultimately, of infanticide.

Conclusion

This wide-ranging chapter has shown that uncertainty about what constituted a marriage placed couples in a liminal situation between married and single. This could lead to unmarried pregnancy, and bastardy, and put women in danger of being abandoned, a situation which could lead to infanticide. The same legal uncertainties also led to situations which inspired writers to both comedy and tragedy. The liminality of women such as Mariana and Helen is shown by their withdrawal from society and, although their plights are represented using romance motifs, their situations are tragic. Ill-formed marriages could be comic, as for Audrey in *As You Like It*, or deeply tragic, as in *The Duchess of Malfi*. If the literary world of uncertain marriage and bastardy lent itself to both tragic and comic interpretations, in the historical world those who were not

¹⁷⁰ Gowing, "Bodies and Stories" (318); Gowing, *Common Bodies* (11).

¹⁷¹ Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England* (88).

acceptably married would have their wrong socially marked by punishments which have many parallels with the rites of passage discussed by van Gennep and Turner, encompassing elements of separation in the form of banishment from religious ceremonies and incarceration in Houses of Correction, or by involving communities in ritual-based acts of penance or public whipping.

The liminality of a marriage state and, if this led to bastardy, the awareness that it would be emphasised through these punishments, could have a potentially damaging effect on a woman who found herself pregnant, but alone. Her act of mental separation might have begun with her pre-marital sexual liaison and would have increased as she attempted to keep her condition secret, an act which may have encompassed elements of denial.¹⁷² The customary lying-in period of later pregnancy, which would have been unfeasible for those attempting to conceal a secret pregnancy, marked the liminal nature of all pregnant women but, for the unmarried woman, her pregnancy, culminating in childbirth, took her more deeply into liminality, a transitional state where, according to Szokolczai “almost anything can happen”.¹⁷³ She was inhabiting an unknown and undiscussable state to which there was no visible end unless she went through the ritual of marriage, thus complying with the “strictly prescribed sequence” of life, and allowing her reintegration into society. Under these circumstances, her options included, but were not limited to, abandoning her child, or disposing of it.

¹⁷² Dulit, “Girls who deny”.

¹⁷³ Szokolczai, “Liminality” (148).

Chapter 4: Liminal Lives – Social Restrictions on Bastard Bearers

Introduction

When once I felt my belly swell,
 no longer might I abide,
 My mother put me out of doores,
 and bang'd me back and side.
 Then did I range the world so wide,
 wandering about the knoes¹,
 Cursing the Boy that helped me,
 To fold my dadyes Ewes.²

We saw earlier (p. 22) that it is frequently suggested that single women committed infanticide due to their fear of shame and the difficulty of supporting themselves.³ They are often seen as unable to influence their futures and destined to lives of such hardship that some writers believe that this, in conjunction with the punishments described in the previous chapter, contributed to them committing infanticide. As Walker points out, although historians portray them as “hapless victims of a society that forces them to choose between castigation for ‘brazen immorality’ or murder”, this is an assumption, and the extent to which the women were able to change their lives is “an interpretative matter”.⁴

This chapter returns to assumptions about shame and survival. It investigates the nature of these terms for an early modern single mother, and suggests that they are more complex than the phrase suggests. I examine the challenges of finding lodging and employment, and how those who overcame the temptation to kill coped in practical terms with living in the liminal state of being neither maid, widow nor wife. I show that bastard bearers’ liminality continued to be indicated after the ritual punishments of penance and physical chastisement, the isolating exclusion from church ceremonies, and their possible incarceration in a House of Correction. Using ballads, plays and archival records I consider the prospects for the bastard mother and her child: how she might have managed to live, where she might have gone, and how she might have obtained

¹ Probably knolls or hills.

² Anon, *Lovely Northerne*

³ For example see Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England* (158); Pollock, “Parent-Child Relations” (218).

⁴ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (75, 149).

enough money for herself and her infant. I discuss literature which describes how unmarried, pregnant women dealt with their situation and the awaiting dangers. As already seen, some writers impose a literary “death penalty” on the infant and its unmarried parents.⁵ Works discussed below make unmarried pregnancy the subject of bawdy comedy, as in *The Skillful Doctor of Gloster-Shire*, or describe comic situations growing out of past tragedy, such as *Rocke the babie Joane*.

Theories related to liminality will continue to illuminate my discussion. As we have seen, the punishments for bastard bearing marked a woman’s betweenness of being neither maid, widow nor wife. Under the norms of ritual processes this should have indicated the end of this state. Turner writes:

The ritual subject [...] is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined “structural” type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards.⁶

I will suggest that although the woman’s liminal situation might be expected to come to an end after her punishment and as she moved away from the period immediately surrounding childbirth, in fact draconian laws and social practices forced her into a life of daily challenges. Representations in drama and street literature suggest that writers and the women themselves continued to see their position as liminal – in an in-between situation from which they could extricate themselves through marriage, the required ritual that allowed reincorporation into society. Their alternative was the worlds beyond the limen – those of vagabondage and prostitution. I suggest that a perhaps unenvisioned effect of these diverting and sometimes titillating texts about sexually active, single women was the creation of false narratives onto which ill-informed but desperately frightened young women could cling, given enough innocence, terror and a great deal of wishful thinking. Routine closing expressions of regret might have done little to assuage this, and of course the tone of performance would have been hugely influential here as elsewhere.⁷ She may have remained convinced that her situation would be resolved until long after the point at which she

⁵ Anon, *Ladies Fall*.

⁶ Turner, *Forest* (94).

⁷ This point is strikingly made in renderings of *The crost Couple*. Compare e.g. English Broadside Ballad Archive sound recording (“*The Crost Couple*” <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30561/recording> [Accessed 10/1/2015].) and “*The Crost People*” in Penny Merrimants: Street Songs of 17th-Century England (Naxos CD 8.557672, 2005)

could attempt abortion, creating circumstances under which infanticide appeared her only option.

Inhabiting the margins

Seeking a home

A single woman's admission that she was with child could have been the start of her fears. It could lead to loss of livelihood, eviction by her parents, shunning by society, and being forced to wander in search of lodging, work, and security for herself and her child. If her parents turned her away, like the mother of the northern lass whose narrative began this chapter, they were supported by the law.⁸ Richard Selding, of Wiggentholt in Sussex, allowed his pregnant daughter Alice to "sojourne" with him, but was presented by the Churchwardens for his action.⁹ Outside the family, those who offered a pregnant woman a home could be required to carry out penance, and to take out a bond to relieve the parish of charges if the mother fled leaving the child, though these were rare.¹⁰

Wrightson suggests that cases were brought by "common informers".¹¹ They seem to have acted with alacrity, according to the many cases of harbouring recorded in Sussex archives. Thomas Davy the elder, of Horsham, was presented for harbouring a pregnant woman and "suffering her to be brought to bed in his howse. And when he brought the child to church to be baptised, he would not confesse the father of the child nor the mother's name".¹² John Ide of East Wittering appears in the Presentments for 1623. The record states:

We present that there is one Joane [Blank] that is lately come into our parrish, that is delivered of a base borne childe. The reputed father is one James Channell, dwelling as we heare about Poole in Dorsetshire. She hath bin secretly harboured by John Ide of our parrish ever since Michaelmas last, and we are in doubt shee wilbee privily conveyed away before she hath receaved any punishment.¹³

Joane Cowper of Ashurst, a widow, "did in Christian pittie take into her house Alice Sumner, a servant to Mr Bridger, begotten with child as she said (wee think

⁸ King, "Punishment for Bastardy" (138); Ingram, *Church Courts* (286).

⁹ Johnstone, *Presentments* (26).

¹⁰ Ingram, *Church Courts* (290); Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (20).

¹¹ Wrightson, "Nadir of English illegitimacy" (182).

¹² Johnstone, *Presentments* (123).

¹³ *ibid.* (78).

falsely) by Robert Hurst, and she hath secretly departed away unpunished”.¹⁴ The record ominously adds “her child being dead. *Vocentur gardiani*”.¹⁵ The reference to “Christian pitty” sits strangely alongside the Church’s desire to present and punish those who gave support in this way.

Not all women found a neighbour with the goodness of Joane Cowper, and many found the place where they would eventually be harboured by wandering.¹⁶ This reinforced their liminal existence: a life on the road where they had no place of belonging – lost women, in every sense of the term. The frequency of such women in ballads suggests that they were familiar figures in early modern communities. After eviction by her mother, the northern lass did “range the world so wide” and the woman in *The Bonny Bryer*, who is found walking by a man travelling on foot to “Totnam-Court”, is sent back to Lancashire and so forced to become a wanderer. In Richard Brome’s *A Jovial Crew*, discussed below, two women give birth when travelling with vagabonds.

Lack of money

Fears would have continued after the bastard bearer gave birth. She had limited opportunities to obtain money for herself and her child. In his collection of statutes, cases and customs of the law relating to women, Thomas Edgar wrote “All of them are understood either married or to bee married and their desires or (*sic*) subject to their husband, I know no remedy though some women can shift it well enough”.¹⁷ They were, Froide writes, expected to be under the control of a master and their need for “discipline and authoritarian control” required that they live with others.¹⁸ Those who did not, created fear about immorality as single women and prostitution were associated in the early modern imagination.¹⁹ However, work options were few for unmarried women and “shifting it” was tough. Becoming a live-in servant was the preferred option as it put a woman under the control of a master. Earning a living by her own

¹⁴ *ibid.* (58).

¹⁵ *Vocentur gardiani*: The wardens being called.

¹⁶ Ingram, *Church Courts* (287); Majorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005) (63); Wrightson, “Nadir of English illegitimacy” (179).

¹⁷ Edgar, *The Lawes resolutions of womens rights: or, The lawes provision for woemen* (6).

¹⁸ Froide, *Never Married* (19).

¹⁹ *ibid.* (20); Christine Peters, “Single Women in Early Modern England”, *Continuity and Change* 12.3 (1997) 325-345 (329).

skill was not allowed. Eighty percent of those brought before the court (location unspecified) for living “at their own hand” were women.²⁰ Day service was similarly frowned upon, and women working as char maids or day-labourers could be sent to Bridewell.²¹ At every potential opportunity, the needs of the single woman living out of service were secondary to the needs of the respectable widow or those “genuinely” deserving of work or assistance. Remaining options were peddling and victualling, though single women were unlikely to obtain licences as they were not considered among the worthy poor.²² It is hard to think of two more disastrous options. Walking the streets and the countryside trying to sell what she could would have made her physically vulnerable, and as Howard writes: “Those who sold goods could be suspected of also selling themselves”.²³ Working in victualling, with the ominous combination of men and alcohol, was equally perilous. Froide’s description of one single woman seems to apply to many. She describes her as having a “precarious life on the economic margins – moving from job to job, eking out a living, and trying to avoid the notice of the authorities”.²⁴ Such difficulties were amplified for bastard bearers. Even if she could find and pay for a wetnurse, and there is evidence that women did supply this service to unmarried women, prospective employers may have been reluctant to give a home and work to a woman whose sexual immorality was undeniably obvious.²⁵

The ideal solution to the woman’s financial needs was for the infant’s father to pay its upkeep until he or she was old enough to be apprenticed. To this end, communities demanded his name. If she withheld the information the midwife would demand it during labour, as it was thought that when she felt close to death she would be less likely to damn her soul with a lie. The duty to extract a name from single mothers became part of the agreement signed by midwives in the mid-sixteenth century.²⁶ That signed by Eleanor Pead in 1567 included the statement “I will not

²⁰ Griffiths, *Youth and Authority* (358).

²¹ Froide, *Never Married* (31).

²² *ibid.* (29).

²³ Howard, *Theater of a City* (128).

²⁴ Froide, *Never Married* (31).

²⁵ Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (97); Adelman, “Born of Woman” (98).

²⁶ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (14); Gowing, “Secret Births” (103). Wilson notes that the cost of licensing was “huge” and that midwives only took the oath under duress from churchwardens. Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (159).

permit or suffer that [a] woman being in labour or travail shall name any other to be the father of her child than only he that is the right and true father thereof".²⁷ Wilson questions the frequency of this practice.²⁸ However, if exercised, it could work. Elizabeth Diggins of Binderton in Sussex gave birth to a bastard, lay in for three weeks and then fled. Richard Payne was the "reputed" father "as the common fame goeth, and as she confessed in her travail".²⁹ However, some women did endanger their souls by naming the wrong man, considering the truth less important than accusing someone who could afford the infant's upkeep.³⁰ They may also have been anxious to protect the name of a married or influential local person. Communities had their own ideas on the matter as well and sexual slander was a popular way of injuring individuals.³¹ *The Norfolk Lass*, discussed below, is one of many ballads describing comic situations in which women lie and brazen their way out of the situation. Though fictions, they demonstrate that naming a father was a point at which an unmarried woman could start to manoeuvre her life out of the liminal state in which she had existed for months.

While women attempted to move away from a liminal existence by naming false fathers and otherwise "making shift" to be accepted in a community, the authorities appeared determined to ensure that they lived on the social margins: poor, unemployable and morally suspect. A woman could go to the parish for support, but the possibility of such assistance was low for any women not living under authority – they were regarded as "undeserving" on the basis of being "able bodied". This was not purely victimisation of bastard bearers. Parish concerns about making contributions from poor relief funds seem to have been almost phobic.³² If people were believed unable to support a child, the banns might be prohibited,³³ and where such marriages took place between people from different parishes they could be forced to live apart to prevent the danger of either parish becoming responsible for the cost of both.³⁴ These decisions, Steve Hindle points out, were made by the "the inhabitants", "the

²⁷ Forbes, *Midwife and the Witch* (145).

²⁸ Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (26).

²⁹ Johnstone, *Presentments* (69).

³⁰ Quaipe, *Wanton Wenches* (104); Wrightson, "Nadir of English illegitimacy" (179).

³¹ Ingram, *Church Courts* (292).

³² Gowing, *Common Bodies* (12).

³³ Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict* (72).

³⁴ Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550-1750* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) (343).

parishioners”, “the parish” which, he states, implies the whole community but should really be understood to mean the “best” of the inhabitants and the vestrymen.³⁵ For the respectable and socially ambitious parishioner, disapproval of “wanton” behaviour would have been an opportunity to demonstrate moral superiority.

The historical environment sought to ensure that women who gave birth outside marriage continued to live in a marginal state as homeless and unemployable people. This was the background of fears about survival in which many infanticides were committed.

Mirth and misery: Single pregnancy in literature

The frequency of unmarried, pregnant woman in literature suggests that they interested those who bought ballads, and playgoers. Like dubious marriages, they inspired comic and tragic representations. The ballad *Rocke the babie Joane* (“Jone” in the text) describes what could ensue when a woman died after naming the infant’s father, in this case a married man:

The Dad on’t she descried,
Which having done, shee dyed,
This could not be denyed,
alas he knew too well.³⁶

As a result of the naming “The Parish him enforced / To see the Infant nursed” but being poor he takes the infant home to be suckled by his wife Jone, who has just given birth to a daughter. The ballad suggests the confrontations which could exist between the desires of the parish, those of the people intimately involved with the child, and the requirement to show charity to those in need. Jone’s objections are countered with various arguments:

No more can she thee trouble,
And ’twould be charges double,
If every moneth a Noble
I pay for milke and bread.

Jone is concerned for her reputation: “My neighbours will deride me” and it would “discredit” her “For woman never did it / to a Bastard of this kind”. The danger of

³⁵ *ibid.* (345).

³⁶ HG, *Rocke the Babie*.

infanticide lurks in these merry tales, Jone's "What if the brat be starved?" possibly suggesting her intention. (Wetnurses and infanticide within marriage are discussed in Chapter 5). There was also a fear that bastards could take part of the legitimate children's inheritance, the milk serving as a metaphor for what the bastard will take from its adoptive sister. The ballad depicts the confrontation between charitable duty, personal reputation, and pragmatism. Jone will not protect the child without expressing her sentiments toward a husband who has fathered a bastard. Similar emotions are expressed in Robert Greene's *Pandosto* by the shepherd's wife after the arrival in her home of the recently-found Fawnia. "Taking up a cudgel (for the most the master went breechless) she swore solemnly that she would make clubs trumps if he brought any bastard brat within her doors".³⁷ She is persuaded by the gold found with the child, whereas Jone appears to be won over when her husband reminds her of her Christian duty and suggests heavenly reward with the reference to "lasting glory":

Let patient Grissels storie,
Be still in thy memorie
Who won a lasting glory,
Through patience in like sort.

This tale of Grissel's wifely obedience and her forgiveness of her husband after his pretence that he had ordered her children to be killed, again brings the danger of infanticide into the background of the ballad.³⁸

Clark questions the idea that ballads were underpinned by masculine values, and finds they are not "so dominated by a patriarchal endorsement of male control and pre-eminence as one might initially suppose".³⁹ This ballad demonstrates her suggestion that negotiation within marriage was characteristic of street literature.⁴⁰ Jone's eventual acceptance of her husband's bastard appears to promote wifely duty rather than marital

³⁷ Greene, "Pandosto" (200).

³⁸ The narrative of Grissel's stoicism would have been familiar through several works including Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (1620); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (1478); Thomas Dekker, "Patient Grissel (1603)" in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: CUP, 1953) 208-298.

³⁹ Clark, "Economics of Marriage" (119). Familial duty was a recurring literary theme, whether sibling, as throughout the drama of Thomas Merry in Anon. *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (1601), parental, as in *Richard II* (V.ii.85), and *King Lear*, or the wider family, as in *Blood for Blood*, discussed in Chapter 1. Such works suggest the changing nature of early modern relationships.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* (120).

fidelity, yet the two-part refrain invites listeners to participate with separate male (equating to the parish) and female (equating to the individual) refrains:

Suckle the Baby
 huggle the Baby
 Rocke the Babie Jone
 I scorne to suckle the Baby;
 Unlesse it were mine owne.

Clark states that the participation which choruses appear to invite enhanced ballads' "potential as a medium for the expression of communal sentiments".⁴¹ *Rocke the Babie* encourages women in the oral and public defiance of their husbands and both teaches and rehearses them in the act of negotiation. It enables them to demonstrate their own personal moral code against the man's patriarchy, to defy his right to operate his own sexual morality within marriage, but ultimately to show themselves to be merciful and pragmatic about the solution to a problem.

Brazening it out

A woman's determination to escape liminality, and the female community's willingness to help her to do so by misnaming the father is comically told in *The Norfolk Lass, or The Maid that was Blown with-Child*.⁴² It shows suspicion about unmarried, wandering women yet its affectionate and humorous tone suggests understanding and tolerance, and a relaxed attitude to truth. It is one of many works which show women's strength of will and determination to salvage what they could of their lives. In this ballad the Maid arrives at a town where "She thrived so well, and her body so great / Made all the wives in the Town wonder thereat". At the church the "good Women" of the town challenge her with being "with-Child", but she indignantly declares her innocence: "If I be with-Child into me it is blown". The girl is "examin'd" by the Women, though whether physically or verbally is unclear, and she continues to deny her pregnancy, complaining to the questioners that she had "gotten the same of her Mother before". Shortly after, the girl is heard groaning in her chamber, and the woman who goes to her finds "a dainty Boy laid on the flore". Seeing the child "made the Wifes glad / Asking the Mother who should be the Dad". Doubtless the women are

⁴¹ *ibid.* (119).

⁴² Anon, *Norfolk lass*.

“glad” both that their suspicions were well-founded and because they find the child alive. The girl does not name the father. However:

Next Thursday after to Church it was brought,
For to have it Christened, as it did ought:
God-fathers, God-mothers, all that it had,
They all did agree to the name of the Dad.

Finding godparents, and complicity in placing responsibility for fathering the child with a member of the community, appears to be historical reality. According to Wrightson, godparents were found from among those present at the lying-in houses.⁴³ Children were sometimes placed with an unpopular person⁴⁴ and marriage enforced, though this was illegal.⁴⁵ It was another way of punishing someone the community disliked and of providing upkeep for the child.

Although a comic fiction, the ballad describes everyday events surrounding unmarried pregnancy. It encompasses suspicion of a stranger, challenges by the matrons, repeated denials and perhaps self-denial, the suggestion of escape from home to evade detection or eviction, lone birth, an endangered baby, questions about fatherhood, and the withholding of a name. *The Norfolk Lass* is a tale of a woman manufacturing a satisfactory outcome by securing a route out of her liminal state and back into a community. By the end of the ballad she is established in a community, a father has been selected for her child, and it has been appropriately christened. It suggests a happy outcome achieved by the woman simply brazening out the situation and other women acting as a community to find a pragmatic solution to her predicament.

A similarly happy outcome is described in *The Skillful Doctor of Gloster-Shire* which, like *The Norfolk Lass*, combines a comic tale with contemporary realities. Although preposterous, it is worth discussing for its richness of contemporary detail about pregnancy diagnosis and customs, and its merging of social reality and a nonsense resolution. The ballad tells of a Farmer’s attempts to deal with the Maid he has made pregnant.⁴⁶ His initial idea is to bribe a young man to marry her, but he refuses “For I will neither Reap nor Mow / The Bastard-seed that you did sow”. He therefore tries a

⁴³ Wrightson, “Infanticide in European History” (6).

⁴⁴ Quaife, *Wanton Wenches* (202).

⁴⁵ Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage* (80).

⁴⁶ Anon, *The Skillful Doctor of Gloucester-Shire or A New way to take Physick* (1684-1686).

doctor, perhaps hoping for an abortifacient. Instead, for £10, he is instructed to ask his wife to take his urine sample to the doctor, who tells her that “Thy husband surely is with-Child” caused by a rare planetary configuration when they had intercourse. The cure, she is informed, is for her husband to take to his bed with “Eggs, and some choice meats” as well as sack, soft pillows and sweet possets. She must then take to him each night “a lusty Maid / Which to his Belly must be laid” and in this manner, with time, the baby will pass from him to the Maid who will then give birth and they can all pretend that everything has been normal. The ballad concludes:

The Maid in time was brought to bed,
The good wife lay down in her stead:⁴⁷
The man was of his burthen eas'd,
The Child at Nurse, and all are pleased.

Considering this ballad as more than a piece of nonsensical entertainment reveals contemporary ideas and concerns in a fictional situation. These include the man’s attempt to care for a woman and his child by arranging a marriage; the importance of his, and his wife’s, reputation and the financial cost of pleasure – £10 is both the doctor’s fee and the sum proffered as a bribe to the young man. In this ballad, unlike other works, it is the Farmer’s anguish we see, not that of the pregnant woman: “his heart poor man did almost bleed / With inward grief and trembling fear”. In the real world he could have been fined for fathering a bastard or required to serve a penance for harbouring a pregnant woman. The doctor’s solution removes the child’s care from the parish, which communities sought to achieve. Another revealing feature of this ballad concerns the diagnosis of the man’s ailment. It shows the wife as an intermediary in her husband’s treatment and demonstrates women’s involvement in family health, but also suggests that a woman might understand a situation and be complicit in her own duping, as discussed below. It also suggests the practices and difficulties of diagnosing pregnancy, a subject whose relevance to infanticide justifies a short digression.

Urine was central to the diagnosis of medical conditions, based on observation of a sample and its comparison with the colours depicted on a uroscopy wheel. There is disagreement about whether urine was used to ascertain pregnancy. Angus McLaren

⁴⁷ The phrase suggests that the wife participated in the deception by assuming the child-bed role.

have been too late to take any action. Despite the unreliability of uroscopy, many considered that for medical diagnosis it was important, including patients. Lauren Kassell's paper on Simon Forman confirms that people expected their urine to be examined⁵¹ but he was indignant about its diagnostic value and saw astrology as the only accurate diagnostic tool. Certainly the ballad is interwoven with astrological ideas. Horoscopes based on planetary positions at the moment of birth go back to the first century BCE, and during the Middle Ages, each period of gestation was believed to be influenced by the changing combinations of heavenly bodies.⁵² Ancient writers thought that astrology could indicate the most appropriate time to sow seed, and almanacs, whose vendors and readers overlapped with those of ballads, continued to carry such information.⁵³ McLaren writes: "The powers of procreation were too mysterious ever to be disentangled completely from superstitious beliefs".⁵⁴ It is a small step from such theories to the belief that the position of the planets at the moment of intercourse could influence conception.

The prescription of the "lusty maid" correlates with the late medieval belief that the female body was curative.⁵⁵ Old men were encouraged to sleep with young women to help their bodies retain the warmth which medical theories stated was lost in old age.⁵⁶ As well as mocking the medical profession, the ballad parodies the period of seclusion and indulgence which women underwent before and after childbirth. Taken detail by detail, the only real jump in credulity in *The Skillful Doctor* is that the wife believes the diagnosis and cure (if she does).

While the doctor is depicted as espousing the beliefs of both astrology and uroscopy, his advice is an obviously ridiculous suggestion. Yet his "cure" solves the farmer's problem. It also makes the wife a figure of fun to the ballad performers and their audiences. However, should this really be seen as an example of the esteem in

⁵¹ Lauren Kassell, "How to Read Simon Forman's Casebooks: Medicine, Astrology, and Gender in Elizabethan London", *Social History of Medicine*, 12.1 (1999) 3-18 (9,16).

⁵² Keimpe Algra et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) (597).; Riddle, *Eve's Herbs*.

⁵³ Peter Burke, "Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century London" in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay (London: Routledge, 1985) 31-58 (48); Bernard Capp, "Popular Literature" *ibid.* 198-243 (198).

⁵⁴ McLaren, *History of Contraception* (154).

⁵⁵ Michael Solomon, "Women in Medicine and Women as Medicine" in *The Querelle des femmes in the Romania: studies in honour of Friedrike Hassauer*, ed. Wolfram Aichinger, et al. (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2003) 171-182 (179).

⁵⁶ Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) (53).

which doctors' diagnoses and advice were held? Kassell writes that "If a patient did not accept the physician's judgement, a cure could not be effected".⁵⁷ Does the ballad mock the foolishness of country people? Or, would a woman in a similar situation have been perfectly aware of the trick but cooperate to avoid the double shame of neither satisfying her husband nor keeping control of her servants? Maxwell-Stuart confirms that there was plenty of "fraud [...] deception, chicanery and self-delusion" amongst the practitioners of what he broadly terms "the occult", using the early modern definition of something hidden or secret.⁵⁸ He adds "But people of the early modern period were not stupid. They knew they might be deceived or mistaken, and it is patronising to judge their beliefs and aspirations by pointing to the lowest manifestations of both".⁵⁹

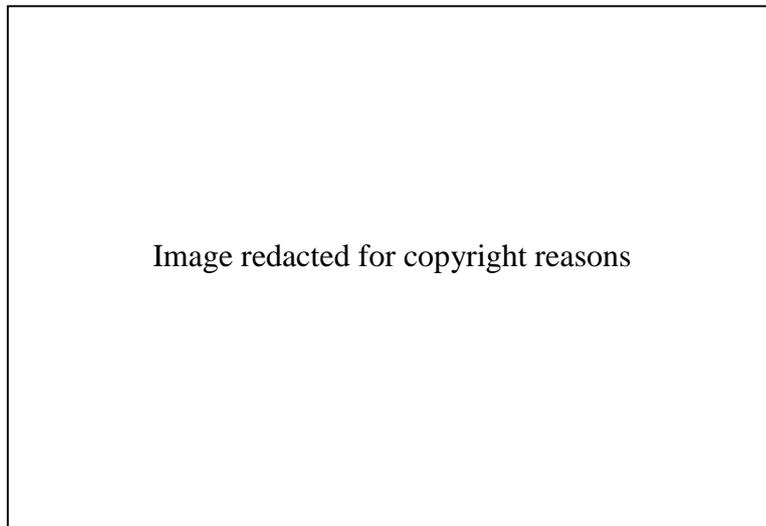


Illustration from The Skillful Doctor. Note, the effect of woodblock printing has reversed the narrative.

⁵⁷ Kassell, "How to Read Simon Forman's Casebooks" (12).

⁵⁸ P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, ed. *The Occult in Early Modern Europe: A documentary history* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) (1).

⁵⁹ *ibid.* (3).

The representation of the farmer's wife may not suggest gullibility so much as a pragmatic response to the situation. In the woodcut illustrating the tale (above) the engraver has depicted the wife's face, surely more difficult than depicting her back view. This draws the viewer into image and she seems to ask "What would you have done in my place?"

Comic ballads such as *The Norfolk Lass* and *The Skillful Doctor* blur social reality and fiction. They raise the question of the extent to which people feigned belief in impossible situations and accepted expedient arrangements which allowed the survival of an errant woman and her infant, whether stranger, family member, or servant. Private, reputation-saving arrangements may have saved many infants.

Seeking marriage and security

Another fear for a single mother was the knowledge that her best option was to find a husband, jostling in a market with her single, morally uncompromised contemporaries. This was not a hopeless task. Ingram writes that marriage opportunities could be limited by scandal but concludes that "it is unlikely that suspicion or even proof of immorality was in normal circumstances sufficient to blight an individual's marriage chances for life".⁶⁰ Richard Adair's research (on east and north-west England) finds that between 1561 and 1640, between fourteen and twenty-eight percent of women married within ten years of giving birth to a bastard, but it unclear whether these were delayed marriages to the child's father, or whether the child had died and no longer presented an obstacle.⁶¹

Ballads are peopled with husband-seeking women who are akin to the tricksters described by Szokolczai – the dangerously anarchic, marginal figures who emerge in liminal situations.⁶² The frequency of such narratives describing fortuitous rescue for the mother and child suggests that audiences favoured comic rather than tragic songs, or may indicate the wish-fulfilment fantasy of writers and audiences. Yet narratives in which men are duped into fathering another's child also suggest men's anxiety about women's purity, questions of property, and their own dynastic line. They could also give unmarried, pregnant women false hope of rescue and thereby encourage secrecy

⁶⁰ Ingram, *Church Courts* (310).

⁶¹ Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage* (81).

⁶² Szokolczai, "Liminality" (154).

about their condition until it was too late to attempt abortion. Some women are rescued under improbable circumstances, such as *The Lovely Northerne Lasse* who is heard lamenting her situation by a young man who is so moved that he vows to marry her:

Thus with a gentle, soft imbrace
he took her in his armes,
And with a kisse he, smiling, said
'Ile shield thee from all harmes,
And instantly will marry thee'⁶³

Closer to reality perhaps is the woman in *The Countrey Farmer and the Buxom Virgin* who relentlessly seduces Ned.⁶⁴ She offers him her “virgin treasure” if he will marry her, describing her love as a “flame of fire” and adding:

I long for to taste of those tender joys,
Of those soft kisses and wanton Toys
That every Maid in her Wedding enjoys
When Lasses with Lovers get lusty Boys.

Ned is won over, but a month after the wedding the buxom “virgin” gives birth to twins.

The Country Lass Who left her Spinning-Wheel loses her virginity to the Squire and discovers that being kept by him would be more profitable and easier than spinning.⁶⁵ Chastised by her mother and warned about pregnancy and social rejection, she answers that:

If at length I should happen to breed,
I'll hasten to my old Love with speed,
The Miller, young Harry, with him I'll marry
He'll serve for Cloak in the time of need.

Similarly, in the two-part ballad *Joy and sorrow and mixt together*, the young man expresses delight at the beauty of the woman he has been paid to marry, before later complaining “my Wife she proves to be with Barn / The Child it will mee father call”. He warns: “Maidens are dangerous fare”.⁶⁶ In *The Witty Westerne Lasse* it is the pregnant woman who mourns her state until the fifth verse when she decides to entrap a spouse.⁶⁷

⁶³ Anon, *Lovely Northerne*

⁶⁴ Anon, *Countrey Farmer*.

⁶⁵ Anon, *The Country Lass Who left her Spinning-Wheel for a more pleasant Employment* (London, 1675-96).

⁶⁶ Climsell, *Joy and Sorrow*.

⁶⁷ Guy, *Witty Westerne Lasse*.

No, no, I will not do so,
 with patience I my griefe will smother,
 And as he that cozened me
 so will I by cunning gull another.

Her plan is to go to London, have the child and then:

I for a maid will passe againe,
 And need not to cry alacke, and welly.
 Some tradsman there I will deceive,
 By my modesty and carriage
 And I will so my selfe behave,
 As by some tricke to get a mariage.

The phrase “I for a maid will pass again” invites male concern about women’s purity, evading the practicalities of proving this, including the fate of the baby. The lass’s statement that she will not “seeke by woe to overthrow / or wrong the first fruits of my belly” suggests concern for the child, although her intention to “smother” her grief implies infanticide. The ballad says nothing about the challenges of “I for a maid will pass again”, a voyeuristic hint at the secret tactics women adopted in their deceptions. Brides’ questionable virginity was a popular topic with creative writers, which can be traced back to medieval literature, reflecting the social and financial value of virginity.⁶⁸ Its endurance is testimony to the constancy of social anxiety.

Women’s ability to fake virginity was a subject of street literature, drama and medical texts. The Lasse’s “by my modesty and carriage” suggests this was achieved by performance, and as most ballads were performed by men,⁶⁹ this first-person narrative emphasises femininity as performance, a concept familiar from theatre. Virginity as performance is recommended by the Courtesan’s mother in *A Mad World my Masters* (1605):

Fifteen times thou knows’t I have sold thy maidenhead
 [...]
 ’Tis nothing but a politic conveyance,
 A sincere carriage, a religious eyebrow.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000) (64).

⁶⁹ Clark suggests that, as women accompanied peddlers, whose wares included cheap print, they may have assisted in performances. (Clark, *Women and Crime* (76); Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010) (243).

⁷⁰ Thomas Middleton, “A Mad World, my Masters” in *A Mad World my Masters and Other Plays*, ed. Michael Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 2009) 1-65 (Li.145/56). Other dramatic works mentioning reselling

Similarly, in *The Changeling* (1622), Beatrice-Joanna rehearses Diaphanta in the performance of virginity to satisfy Alsemero's suspicions.⁷¹ In this work performance is combined with the bed-trick, a similarly popular motif which moves proof from the performed to the biological evidence of the intact hymen.⁷²

Mara Amster writes "The hymen was the single physical indicator of a woman's virginity"⁷³ and medical texts reveal the extent to which women were also believed to feign physical virginity. In *The Midwives Book* (1671) Jane Sharp writes of "astringent Medicaments [used] when whores desire to be maids".⁷⁴ Her matter-of-fact statement suggests belief in their existence and effectiveness, and her non-judgmental tone implies some sympathy for those women – not just whores – who needed to carry out this deception to meet society's expectations. By contrast, in *The Workes*, Ambroise Paré (1634) provides a horrified male view on women's actions:

Some, that having learned the most infamous arts of bawdry, prostitute common harlots to make gaine thereof, making men that are naughtily given to believe that they are pure virgins [...] for they do cause the necke of the wombe to be so wrinkled and shrunke together [...] then they put thereinto the bladders of fishes, or galles of beasts filled full of blood, and so deceive the ignorant and young lecher [...]

Clearly, we are intended to sympathise with naughty lechers who have been mis-sold virgins by deceitful women. Paré believed these physical attributes to be accompanied by performance, his description inadvertently providing a useful manual for literate women who sought to survive the social restrictions of their period:

and in the time of copulation they mixe sighes with groanes, and womanlike cryings, and the crocodiles teares, that they may seeme to be virgins, and never to have dealt with man before.

Some balladeers wrote about fake virginity with a misanthropic sourness of tone which is a notable contrast to the humour of other ballads, Diaphanta's demonstration of

virginity include John Marston, "*The Dutch Courtesan* (1605)" in *Four Jacobean City Comedies*, ed. Gamini Salgado (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 31-108 (II.ii.10).; Thomas Dekker, "*The Honest Whore Part I*" in *The Honest Whore Parts 1 and 2*, ed. Nick de Simogyi (London: Nick Hern, 1998) 5-109 (46).

⁷¹ Middleton, "The Changeling" (I.i.165).

⁷² Desens, *Bed-Trick*.

⁷³ Mara Amster, "Frances Howard and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*: trials, tests, and the legibility of the virgin body" in *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*, ed. Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003) 211-232 (219).

⁷⁴ Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book or the whole art of midwifry discovered* (1671) (268).

⁷⁵ Paré, *Workes* (1634).

the effects of Alsemero's potion, and the Courtesan's mother's speech in *Mad World*. In *The Loving Chamber-Maid*, the narrator, who has had a child herself, depicts all servants as sexually corrupt.⁷⁶ She sings "Cook-maids" are "pack[e]d in the Countrey / when pregnant with child", and insists:

She's a mean Strumpet
That knows not the tricks,
To try with one Maiden-head
Dozens of - - - - -⁷⁷

This, she states, was a skill at which the women of Whetstone were particularly accomplished:

The famous Matronas
of Whetstone will tell
That they can a Maiden-head
sixty times sell.

According to two ballads, women resorted to pedlars who knew precisely what "Maydes" wanted. The seller in *The Pedler opening his Packe* offers trinkets, fabric, beauty products, a love (or seduction) potion, and:

A water can restore
Mayden head that's vanisht
You'le say she is no whoore,
although that it were banisht
long before.⁷⁸

The nastiest of these renewed virginity ballads is *A marvellous Medicine to cure a great paine, / If a Mayden-head be lost to get it againe* which lists nonsense items that the woman should consume. They are uniformly impossible and repulsive: "The first day give her the slime of an Eele, / blowne through a Bag-pipe with the wind of a bladder",⁷⁹ a suggestion weighted with sexual innuendo. The message is that lost virginity is gone for ever and that under these circumstances women should not "make moane". The nature of many of the remedies, which in some cases are similar to cures for insanity, mockingly defiles women. Others parody women's lying-in during pregnancy: "She must have a Woodcocke, or Snipe, or a Quaile, / bak'd fine in an Oven

⁷⁶ Anon, *The loving Chamber Maid* (1672-1696?).

⁷⁷ The six elliptic dashes are in the original.

⁷⁸ Anon, *The Pedler opening his Packe* (1620?).

⁷⁹ Anon, *A marvellous Medicine to cure a great paine* (c.1624).

before it be made”, but then “and mingle it with the blood of a Snaile”. Another ballad concerning lost virginity suggests going to the town crier to implement a search for it:

If any loving Wench
Doth misse her Mayden-head,
And knowes not where she lost it,
Abroad or in her bed
Let her come to the Cryer.⁸⁰

The harshness here is attenuated by the wide range of services the Cryer offers, many of them comic. Nevertheless, the advice mocks the idea of “loss” and the idea of a woman having her loss of virginity cried out in the streets has echoes of public penances for sexual wrongs.

The expectation of bridal virginity was another obstacle for bastard bearers to overcome, and given that it could be feigned by potions or performance, it was another temptation to destroy evidence to the contrary. Although comic in tone, ballads such as *The Witty Westerne Lasse* and *The Loving Chamber-Maid* suggest that if the obstacles could be overcome a woman’s life could return to its previous course. If the western lass’s plan fails, she envisages a life of prostitution – “Ile shewe my selfe to each man kinde” – though she describes this possibility as “hateful” and something she will have to be driven to. On balance, she is represented as a moral woman who is driven to deceit and even prostitution but who, as we have seen, will not harm her child. Yet, the future of that child is left unclear. Gowing suggests that “it was materially and socially impossible for many pregnant single women to imagine themselves as mothers”, as discussed in chapter 2.⁸¹ The possibility of infanticide resulting from never having accepted the pregnancy, or associated it with the existence of a child, would help to explain the unplanned nature of the killings described in the Sussex Coroners’ reports and the superficial attempts to hide bodies.⁸²

For unmarried, pregnant women, ballads in which those in a similar situation find a husband suggest an escape from their situation. For men, ballads about pregnant, and apparently virgin brides contain a warning: the seducer can become the seduced, and be tricked in the process. Many in the audience were doubtless horrified by these

⁸⁰ Anon, *O yes. / If any Man or Woman, any thing desire* (1630?).

⁸¹ Gowing, “Secret Births” (107).

⁸² Dulit, “Girls who deny”.

jolly songs.⁸³ They counterbalance works such as *Ladies Fall* and *Rocke the Babie* with their implicit lessons about unmarried pregnancy and death, discussed in Chapter 3. The narratives in *The Westerne Lasse*, *The Country Lass* and *The Northerne Lasse* potentially implanted ideas in the consciousness of the young people who are believed to have made up a large part of their audience.⁸⁴ If pregnancy occurred, someone would be found to take the blame and financial responsibility. They warn men about women, and women about men, but they also suggest that the problems surrounding unmarried pregnancy could be overcome. They can be seen as an invitation to abandon pregnant lovers and evict pregnant daughters, on the basis that everything would be satisfactorily resolved. Balladeers used narratives of pregnancy to create subgenres within the form, with tragic ballads describing abandoned women driven to infanticide, and comic ballads making light of an unwanted pregnancy by following the comic principles of temporary disruption followed by restoration of social cohesion and possible harmony. While tragic outcomes were moral and instructive, recurring themes of pregnancy-and-rescue make the ballads powerfully subversive.

However, it was possible for a bastard-bearer to return to society, as revealed by a petty grievance about non-payment of a debt recorded in the Somerset archives. The account, summarised by Quaife, concerns Amy Laggot, whose daughter was learning bone-lace making from Elizabeth Salway.⁸⁵ Amy, however, had taken her away because her teacher was “sickly and could not attend to her work”. Amy had then become peeved because Elizabeth had not paid her for some physic which she had obtained on her behalf from the apothecary. Amy complained to her friend Frances that if she had not obtained the physic, Elizabeth “might have gone as other whores did, but she would warrant her freed this time” and that she had told Elizabeth that if “anything came from her” she should “bury it in the garden”. Subsequently it was revealed that Amy had told another friend that she herself had had a “base child” and that “if she had made her [self] acquainted with it [i.e. the physic] in time, her enemies should not have laughed at her”.

⁸³ Watt, *Cheap Print* (11); Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women* (42); Clark, “Economics of Marriage” (199); Capp, “Literature” (199, 256).

⁸⁴ Marsh, *Music and Society* (251).

⁸⁵ Quaife, *Wanton Wenches* (119).

The story is fascinating. It confirms the existence of knowledge on abortifacients, their availability and their effectiveness. It shows us that it was possible to have a bastard, which those in Amy's current home village appear not to know of, though she is happy to tell others of it. It is unclear whether her daughter is the base child to which she refers; if she is, Amy has managed either to marry, or to rear her child alone and organise for her to be respectably apprenticed. Most interesting, though, is Amy's reference to being laughed at. This reveals village attitudes to unmarried pregnancy, and appears to have been the worst of Amy's punishments. It is hard to admire Amy as she is represented. She feigns friendship by helping Elizabeth, who apparently trusted her, and then uses the power she has attained to her own ends. She is a gossip, in the modern sense, and is even willing to expose her daughter to the risk of being shunned for being a bastard. The episode suggests that a woman who became pregnant outside marriage made herself vulnerable if others had knowledge of the fact, but also that it was feasible for a bastard bearer to survive and merge into a community with her past unknown.

The importance of marriage to the status of early modern women carried with it a difficulty as far as the current discourse is concerned because it creates a temptation to see the ceremony as the commencement of a "happy ever after" as in many plays and literary works of the period. This is far from the case. Ingram writes: "The marriages of the poor were often extremely vulnerable".⁸⁶ There was no guarantee that a bastard bearer's marriage would be successful and the circumstances under which it was made may have contributed to its difficulties. The community may have disapproved of the marriage. Others may have resented the polluting effect of "sullied goods" in the village, and that a meagre estate might pass to a bastard. The fact that a woman could be guilty of fornication and bastard bearing yet still achieve women's socially prescribed ambition of a husband and a home, would have been a disastrous example for those trying to instil moral values in their daughters. The network of support which should have been available to all women may have been withheld or given grudgingly. Such statements cannot be made categorically, and must appear with "perhaps" and "may be" because equally others in the community might have been pleased for the couple. Personal morals, beliefs and principles would inevitably have come into play,

⁸⁶ Ingram, *Church Courts* (131).

contributing to a greater or lesser extent to the fear and shame of unmarried, pregnant women.

Beyond the limen

Wandering

When support was not forthcoming from the child's father or the parish, and when a woman was unable to find employment, the worlds beyond the limen beckoned. The bastard bearer could become a wandering beggar although a 1598 statute made this illegal without a licence and "The assumption appears to have been that such licences would be granted rarely and reluctantly".⁸⁷ Just as people harboured pregnant women, it is probable that they also supported the needy. Yet some families slept in church porches, and some died there.⁸⁸ The effect of layers of legislation to control the poor was summarised by Sir Robert Cecil, Secretary of State, in an address to parliament in 1601 on the Enclosures Act. He stated:

yf the poore beinge thruste out of their howses goe to dwell with others, streight we ketch them with the statutes of inmates; yf they wander abroad and be stubborne, they are within the danger of roagues; yf they be more humble and vagrant baggars [sic], then they are within this statute of the poore to be whipte and tormented.⁸⁹

This miserable and potentially dangerous life could lead to permanent liminality. Thomassen cites Turner's belief that a liminal state may become "fixed" adding that "without reintegration liminality is pure danger".⁹⁰ For bastard bearers this fixity could mean vagabondage or prostitution. The ease with which these could meld is suggested by Brome's 1641 comedy *A Jovial Crew*.⁹¹ Superficially, he presents a romanticised and idealised picture of a vagabond society with poets, courtiers, soldiers, an acting priest, and a lawyer who, Rosemary Gaby states, "have all been reduced to begging by the nature of the times".⁹² This community has its own customs and language, and its members travel with companionship, thrive on charity, and entertain themselves and others with merry songs. Gaby acknowledges that it "exposes the sordid realities of the

⁸⁷ Hindle, *On the Parish?* (11).

⁸⁸ *ibid.* (320).

⁸⁹ Quoted in *ibid.* (303).

⁹⁰ Thomassen, "Uses and Meanings" (15, 100).

⁹¹ Richard Brome, *A Jovial Crew (1641)*, ed. Ann Haaker (Nebraska: Edward Arnold, 1968).

⁹² Rosemary Gaby, "Of Vagabonds and Commonwealths: *Beggars' Bush*, *A Jovial Crew*, and *The Sisters*", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 34.2 (1994) 401-424 (411).

beggar's meagre existence", but believes that their "spirit of jovial mirth predominates".⁹³

Yet Brome's comic veil conceals the desperate aspects of life on the road, as Julie Sanders suggests. She looks at beggar plays as commentary on monarchy and rule, and states "a melancholic mood lies beneath much of what happens on the surface".⁹⁴ This includes the hardship and vulnerability of women, as when the charitable Oldrents comments on the noise coming from his barn where the crew is temporarily residing. He is told by Randall:

There's a doxy
Has been in labor, sir. And 'tis their custom,
With songs and shouts to drown the woman's cries,
A ceremony which they use, not for
Devotion, but to keep off notice of
The work they have in hand.⁹⁵

She is denied the lavish lying-in which Oldrents wants to bestow on her: "We will have such a lying in, and such / A christ'ning, such upsitting and gossiping".⁹⁶ However, life is tough for this new mother. Randall explains:

Their work is done already:
The bratling's born; the doxy's in the strummel
Laid by an autem mort⁹⁷ of their own crew,
That serv'd for midwife; and the childbed woman
Eating of a hasty pudding for her supper
And for the child, part of it for pap,
I warrant you, by this time; then to sleep,
So to rise early to regain the strength
By travel, which she lost by travail
[...]
She'll have the bantling at her back tomorrow
That was today in her belly, and march a footback
With it.⁹⁸

⁹³ *ibid.* (413,409).

⁹⁴ Julie Sanders, "Beggars Commonwealths and the Pre-Civil War Stage: Suckling's *The Goblins*, Brome's *A Jovial Crew* and Shirley's *The Sisters*", *The Modern Language Review*, 97.1 (2002) 1-14 (4).

⁹⁵ Brome, "*Jovial Crew*" (II.ii.126).

⁹⁶ *ibid.* (I.ii.134.).

⁹⁷ Autem mort. "In canting language, a married woman." Richard Brome, "*A Jovial Crew: or, the Merry Beggars* (1641)" in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome*, vol. III (New York: AMS, 1966) 341-452 (Persons of the Play, 15).

⁹⁸ Brome, "*Jovial Crew*" (II.ii.146.).

This is the world which waited for the unmarried, pregnant woman. On the road she was vulnerable sexual prey: Jean Howard suggests women who cross-dressed may have done so for protection. She cites the case of Margaret Wakeley, recorded in the Bridewell records (1601) who “had a bastard child and went in man’s apparell”.⁹⁹ Brome reveals women’s vulnerability when Oldrents’ disguised daughters embark on an escapade of vagabondage,¹⁰⁰ and are at risk of rape by Oliver, the Judge’s son. Seeing them, he is smitten by “the handsomest *Beggar-braches* that ever grac’d a Ditch or a Hedgeside” and he convinces himself their seduction is both acceptable and sensible.

Why, Beggars are flesh and blood; and Rags are no Diseases. Their Lice are no French Fleas. And there is much wholsommer flesh under Country Dirt, than City Painting; And less danger in Dirt and Rags than in Ceruse and Sattin. I durst not take a touch at London, both for the present cost, and for fear of an after-reckoning.¹⁰¹

Oliver declares the advantages to him should the girl become pregnant, and continues by convincing himself that getting her with child is almost a duty.

Nor can Beggar-sport be inexcusable in a young Country Gentleman, short of means, for another respect, a principal one indeed; to avoid punishment or charge of Bastardy: There’s no commuting with them; or keeping of Children for them [...] The poor Whores, rather than part with their own, or want children at all, will steal other folks to travel with, and move compassion. He feeds a Beggar-wench well that fills her belly with young bones.¹⁰²

The daughters are rescued by Oldrents’ steward Springlove, who assists the girls throughout acting as their guide (or master of ceremonies) in this liminal world. He later proves to be Oldrent’s bastard, the bastard thus preventing further bastardy.

The closing scene reveals that Oldrents fathered a bastard on a beggar who, unbeknown to him, was the daughter of a formerly wealthy family which had been impoverished by his father. After employing the romance motif of an identifiable memento as an affirmation of identities, Brome completes the tragedy of this unnamed woman when Oldrents asks whether his former lover is alive, and is told “She died

⁹⁹ Howard, *Stage and Social Struggle* (96).

⁹⁶ This is a liminoid experience: “a break from normality, a playful as-if experience [which] loses the key feature of liminality: *transition*.” Thomassen, “Uses and Meanings” (15).

¹⁰¹ Brome, “*Jovial Crew*” (III.ii.51).

¹⁰² Brome, “*Jovial Crew*” (III.i.258). That infants were used as an aid to begging was popularly assumed, for example: “Sometimes I use my Pattens, / and crawl upon all four, / And when my Babes I mention; / I then do get the more”. Anon, *The Merry Beggars of Lincolns-Inn Fields* (1685-1688).

within a few days after / Her son was born”.¹⁰³ She is not worth mourning or further mention, so again the bastard bearer receives a literary death-sentence. Gaby writes that audiences wanted “escape from sordid realities” and “the beggars of Brome’s play, significantly, commit no crimes during the course of the action”.¹⁰⁴ However, seen from the perspective of infanticide the play exposes a different picture. The “doxy” who gives birth to a bastard and chooses to wander the countryside after a night of celebration would, in reality, have been moved from parish to parish and the attempted rape suggests the danger she was in. *Jovial Crew* can be read – and in performance seen – as a narrative of happy beggars and thriving bastards. Other authors expressed a different viewpoint.¹⁰⁵ Contemporary reaction may have been similarly diverse. The play was written when Brome was employed by the Cockpit Theatre,¹⁰⁶ and although there was some overlap with amphitheatre audiences, it was probably seen mainly by “gentry, ladies, wealthy merchants” and young masters of the Inns.¹⁰⁷ However, status does not preclude social conscience, and as Gaby points out, Brome gradually introduces the “hardships and indignities of begging”,¹⁰⁸ which may have prompted some to consider whether beggars’ lives were truly “jovial”.

Prostitution

For those who could not eke out a living as a beggar there was prostitution. Griffiths writes that there were some “‘individual’ operations: wives and widows who worked alone, or the more mobile alley and street whore”.¹⁰⁹ He finds that the women charged were normally “the honest maidservant who was ‘enticed’ from her ‘true’ master”. In some cases, procurement was by the master, or the girl’s parents, and sometimes those charged with prostitution were simply “the wives of absent sailors who left them with a paltry sum”.¹¹⁰ Those who were part of a brothel had the advantages, if they can be so called, of a pimp to raise business, some protection from danger, and a

¹⁰³ Brome, “*Jovial Crew*” (V.i.38.).

¹⁰⁴ Gaby, “Vagabonds” (408).

¹⁰⁵ See for example, *2 Henry VI*, II.ii.149; *King Lear*, III.iv.126; *Pericles, Scene 5*; Dekker, *Worke for Amourours* (B2).

¹⁰⁶ Martin Butler, “Brome, Richard (c.1590–1652)” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (OUP, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) (183).

¹⁰⁸ Gaby, “Vagabonds” (441).

¹⁰⁹ Griffiths, “Structure of Prostitution” (44).

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* (49).

place to live.¹¹¹ A woman would move from her liminal life to being part of a community, albeit a very marginal one. Although the last municipal brothel in London was closed in 1546, private establishments appear to have been widespread.¹¹² Griffiths' research into the industry in the capital has revealed that earnings could be as much as 3s to 10s a visit, though it could be as low as 6d.¹¹³ These are extraordinary sums when compared with paltry poor relief payments – subsistence levels were assumed to be £2.12s to £3.18s a year – but as much as twenty to fifty percent of their fee could go to the brothel keeper.¹¹⁴

Byron Nelson says that the sex workers of early modern England were “an inescapable part of urban life”.¹¹⁵ They were a popular subject for writers, Howard describing them as “omnipresent” in city drama.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, when playwrights included them in their works, they often located the narrative abroad, as in some of the plays mentioned below. This may have been partially because whores were associated with foreignness,¹¹⁷ but also such locations reduced the possibility of being accused of negative social or political comment and allowed writers to discuss English social problems, corrupt government and regicide. Plays such as *The Honest Whore Part 1* (1604) and *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605) suggest that some women operated at elevated social levels and had select clients yet were still subject to revulsion. In the former Hippolyto attacks the courtesan Bellafront in a series of long, vituperative speeches:

You have no soul [...] For your body
Is like the common shore that still receives
All the town's filth.¹¹⁸

In Shakespeare we meet the poor whores of the stews. Although Nelson writes that in *Measure for Measure* and *Pericles* the brothels are “treated comically”, there is a

¹¹¹ *ibid.* (45).

¹¹² *ibid.* (43).

¹¹³ *ibid.* (46).

¹¹⁴ Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988) (81); Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-1700* (London: Academic, 1979) (40). Research based on Terling, Essex in the 1690s.

¹¹⁵ Byron Nelson, “*Marina, Isabella and Shakespeare's Sex Workers*”

http://www.marietta.edu/departments/English/OVSC/Select_Papers/2008/Taft_S&R_2008_Nelson.pdf [Accessed 19/4/14].

¹¹⁶ For a literary study of the subject see Duncan Salkeld, *Shakespeare Among the Courtesans: Prostitution, Literature, and Drama 1500-1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Howard, *Theater of a City* (141).

¹¹⁸ Dekker, “*The Honest Whore Part I*” (44).

vast difference between Mistress Overdone and the Bawd. The former has maintained Lucio's bastard for over a year, has sympathy for Claudio, and appears to interact with her community, while the brothel scenes in *Pericles* emphasise exploitation, disease, and commerce, and virginity as a saleable commodity.

Although Griffiths warns against thinking of prostitution in terms of subculture – which *Measure for Measure* bears out with its close intermingling of social levels – he describes it as a separate sphere.¹¹⁹ It is clear from Howard that entering this sphere was related to the practices of ritual. She writes that “conversion was often [...] quasi-ritualised ceremony”. Part of this was putting on clothes (the “what is shown” of Turner/Van Gennep's marking on the body) and is seen in *Michaelmas Term* in which the Country Wench must change her clothes before becoming a “gentlewoman”.¹²⁰ The Bawd, who is the trickster of liminality – the dangerous figure who can emerge at this time – also serves as Marina's master of ceremonies, instructing her how she must behave (Turner's “what is done”).¹²¹

The desperate mother who was determined to keep her child fits uncomfortably well into this world with its risks of violence, disease and unpleasant death. It is a depressing prospect, even bearing in mind contemporary, near-optimistic comments such as that from a procuress who said that “it is better to doe so than to steal”, and Griffiths' assertion that commercial sex provided “a chance to save money and find lodgings”.¹²²

If this was the route the bastard bearer's life took, it was still not the end of hope of returning from her liminal state. John Dunton's 1696 account of London nightlife describes street prostitutes as “unfit to make a wife”, the juxtaposition suggesting that such marriages might take place.¹²³ This is supported by Griffiths, who states that women “probably” left the “bawdys” when they married.¹²⁴ The feasibility of marriage for a woman for whom there would have been assumed to be no hope, suggests that some bastard bearers could find their way back from the worlds beyond the limen.

¹¹⁹ Griffiths, “Structure of Prostitution ” (54).

¹²⁰ Salkeld, *Shakespeare Among the Courtesans* (I.ii, III.i).

¹²¹ Shakespeare *Pericles* (IV.ii.49)

¹²² Griffiths, “Structure of Prostitution ” (51).

¹²³ John Dunton, *The night-walker: or, evening rambles in search of lewd women* (1696).

¹²⁴ Griffiths, “Structure of Prostitution ” (52).

Conclusion

Compared to the comparative brevity of punishments, daily living was a long-term, unremitting problem for a bastard bearer, and possibly the basis of the fear which drove some to infanticide. If she was not supported by her family or lover she would have needed parish assistance, but she would not have been deemed among the “deserving poor” and would have received little help. Officials seemed determined to make her life hard. People, including parents, were discouraged from providing lodging. Finding work, which was difficult for any woman not living under authority, was further complicated by her need to find care for her child and there is no evidence that unwed mothers cooperated to help ensure their and their children’s survival – possibly seeing each other as competitors for scant work and lodging. The types of work available put already vulnerable women into the perilous situations of travelling to peddle goods, or working in victualling. It is unsurprising that Laslett finds evidence of repeaters among the bastard bearers he studied.¹²⁵ These obstacles of work and lodging could be overcome, but to do so women would have needed strength and determination – to be agents of their destinies rather than victims.

Although some were prepared to offer shelter, work and even marriage, others were prepared to report the women and the concept of Christian charity, which widow Joane Cowper displayed when she helped Alice Sumner, appears to have been missing in many. However, it was possible to employ bastard bearers, and to marry them.

The role of the family was paramount and with their help everything could change. A supportive family or allies could provide lodging, negotiate somewhere to give birth, arrange nursing, adoption or fostering, and negotiate a marriage. Bastard bearers from all social groups could have given birth and then merged seamlessly back into their communities. Many of them would be invisible in the records.

When an unmarried woman found herself with child, what did she believe might happen to her? In parallel with the grim social prospects was the popular culture which suggested a *Deus ex machina* style of rescue for single, pregnant women. A clever doctor, a gallant lad, a naïve tradesman or former lover, kindly villagers, innocent dupes

¹²⁵ Peter Laslett and Karla Oosterveen, “Long-Term Trends in Bastardy in England: A Study of Illegitimacy Figures in the Parish Registers and in the Reports of the Registrar General, 1561-1960”, *Population Studies*, 27.2 (1973) 255-286.

– there was a cast of imagined characters who might, but more probably would not, come to a woman’s rescue.

Between the dream-world and reality lie the desperate acts which some women felt compelled to commit. Fildes has found that of the children who were abandoned, only twenty-six percent were under four weeks old, which she attributes to the mother’s lying-in (the month-long period of confinement following giving birth) and to women’s failed attempts to care for their infants.¹²⁶ She states that most were under six months, which suggests that it was social restraints which forced those who had rejected the possibility of killing their newborns eventually to abandon them.

As stated in my Introduction, shame, fear of punishment and loss of livelihood are frequently cited as motives for infanticide. However, for the unpartnered woman coping with pregnancy, the outlook must have seemed even worse than these, requiring her to survive the daily grind of finding places to live and work to do. Those who consciously decided to commit infanticide may also have been partially prompted by awareness of the liminal and precarious world in which they would have to attempt to survive. They would be liminal women – neither maids, widows nor wives – attempting to survive in a liminal place: non-people in non-places. After the unhappy outcome of her sexual liaison, there was the prospect of worlds beyond the limen – vagabondage and prostitution. Bastard bearers were obstructed at every turn by restrictions which the authorities imposed, but which ultimately their fellow citizens enforced.

¹²⁶ Fildes, “Maternal feelings” (148).

Chapter 5: Not the Usual Suspects

I would the milk
Thy mother gave thee when thou suck'dst her breast,
Had been a little ratsbane for thy sake!¹

Introduction

This chapter concerns the married women and the men who were charged with infanticide or were closely connected with the crime. These were not the usual suspects. Although early modern legislators considered infanticide a crime of single women, western culture's most famous infanticides were Medea, a married woman, and Herod. These older narratives are a reminder that there were different perpetrators, with different circumstances and motives. For the early modern period, this has been masked by the weight of discussion about unmarried motherhood.

In cases of suspicious infant death, married women were seldom indicted unless there were obvious signs of violence on the body, and if a case was examined, they were more likely to be considered to have been "temporarily insane". Citing one such case, Hoffer and Hull state that "The defendant's marital state gave credence to her claim of temporary madness".²

This explanation was not used for single women though, as we have seen, archival and literary accounts suggest something of their complex mental states. The assumption appears to have been that no "sane" married women would have had a motive for infanticide. Certainly they are less obvious than those for murdering illegitimate infants, but Hoffer and Hull state:

Poverty was endemic in Tudor and Stuart England, and the resulting exhaustion, starvation and exposure were real threats to adult as well as child life. For the poor female servant who could not afford to lose her job, much less feed another mouth, just as for the overburdened cottager family with perhaps one too many off-spring already, infanticide might have seemed a matter of survival.³

Infanticide forced by poverty has classical precedents. In the ancient world, some infants were abandoned and may have been adopted.⁴ In literature, Ovid's

¹ Shakespeare, *1 Henry VI* (V.vi.27)

² Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (147); Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (64).

³ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (115).

⁴ James Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1998).

yeoman Lyctus, whose “stocke was simple, and his welth according too the same” hopes that his pregnant wife will have a son because “For girls to bring them up a greater cost do crave / And I have no ability”.⁵ He adds that, if she has a daughter:

Although ageinst my will, I charge it streyght destroyed bée.
The bond of nature néedes must beare in this behalf with mée.

Damme, writing of the medieval period, says that “the taking of an infant’s life, while certainly not condoned, was understood”.⁶ These issues, and the desire not to punish a family for the death of an infant whose status as a person was uncertain, may have contributed to informal acceptance of the crime as long as no-one was too aware of it.⁷

The killing of infants by married women is more frequently represented in street literature than those by single women partially because, as a number of commentators have observed, writers favoured sensational and exceptional stories. Infanticides by single women were, as Clark suggests, “too mundane” to excite much interest.⁸ They merely enabled reiteration of the dire state of women’s sexual morality, whereas those concerning married women touch on something far deeper. They threaten the concept of the unity and sanctity of the family and marriage, corrupting the sacred bond which was one of the stabilising features of society.⁹ It has been suggested that an element of these works was “undermining the power of women as mothers in a patriarchal society by demonstrating how unfit some women were to have any association with children”.¹⁰ Deborah Willis makes a similar point, specifically in relation to witchcraft, suggesting there was increasing “ambivalence about mothers, maternal power and the maternal function”.¹¹ I will develop this idea toward the end of this section and will suggest that

⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (289).

⁶ Damme, “Infanticide” (6).

⁷ The extent to which communities assented to “white lies”, including those which may have disguised infanticide, is discussed in Lamb, “Taken by the Fairies”.

⁸ Clark, *Women and Crime* (335); Susan C. Staub, “Early Modern Medea: Representations of Child Murder in the Street Literature of Seventeenth-Century England” in *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (London: Ashgate, 2000) 333-347.

⁹ Staub, “Early Modern Medea”.

¹⁰ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (83).

¹¹ Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995) (17).

anxieties about motherhood are particularly visible in the similarity of expression used in accounts of infanticide and tracts which discussed maternal breastfeeding.

Infanticide and child murder by men was also more frequent than academic discourse suggests. It is often the subject of street literature. This chapter will show that men of different social levels killed their children for a variety of motives. These crimes are united by their force and brutality. I will suggest that the terms in which such crimes are represented contain echoes of Herod's massacre of the innocents and can be traced back to early depictions of this biblical moment.

Sorrowful wives

In Chapter 1, Medea was discussed when considering the manipulative relationship which could exist between a woman and her intimates, and it was suggested that under certain circumstances they might become Szakolczai's "trickster" figures and incite her to commit infanticide. It is worth returning to Medea as a paradigm for considering early modern married women who committed a similar crime.

Despite its distance in time and place, Euripides' depiction of Medea and the motives and mental processes of a married woman who kills her children is regarded as so accurate that she has provided a model for the modern disciplines of psychiatry and psychology. Subsequent clinical work has resulted in the eponymous mother's name being given to a mental condition – the Medea Complex – whereby a mother seeks "revenge against her former husband by depriving him of his children". Robert M. Gordon writes that the complex involves a mother who is "still pathologically tied to her (ex)husband. She has a great deal of rage [...] rooted in part with a wish to destroy her child. She is unable to let her children separate from her".¹²

The association between Euripides' play and the condition is discussed by Monica Cyrino from the perspective of motive. She compares her findings with the observations of psychiatrists working with patients who had killed their children, or are obsessed with trying to harm them.¹³ She states that Euripides had "an uncanny insight into the tangled psychology of the abandoned woman's motives for child-murder",¹⁴

¹² Robert M. Gordon, "The Medea Complex and the Parental Alienation Syndrome" in *The Mother-Daughter Relationship: Echoes Through Time*, ed. Gerd H. Fenchel (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1998) 207-225 (210).

¹³ Cyrino, "When Grief is Gain".

¹⁴ *ibid.* (7).

and believes that Jason's abandonment of Medea led to her sense of shame which, she considers, is the principal cause of her actions.¹⁵ Medea resembles abandoned early modern women, and the recent cases considered by Cyrino, in that they see themselves as having no other options: they are in an "emotional exile" and kill as a matter of necessity. "There is no other way", says Medea.¹⁶ But Medea also kills to injure Jason. "This would be the best way to hurt my husband", she says.¹⁷ The dramatist shows that the children and Jason have merged in Medea's mind: the pain inflicted on the children is inflicted on their father, and the child serves as a physical manifestation of the person who has deserted the woman, as Euripides again shows:

Jason: So why did you kill them?

Medea: To cause you pain. (1398)

In support of recent data which shows that, in the west, boys are more often victims of infanticide than are girls, Porter and Gavin pose the rhetorical question "Is the male infant somehow symbolic of the woman's male sex partner?"¹⁸ Such a belief would help to explain why accounts of early modern infanticide by single women show that mothers included throwing as part of their infanticidal act, and why bodies were left in privies and on rubbish dumps. The child is unwanted, shunned and rejected, just as the woman had been, and the woman enacts her rejection through the child. She exerts her power in a way she could not over the man.

A number of the women met in previous chapters were married, but their husbands are marginal figures. Rose Warnes' spouse is barely referred to in *The Efficacy of the true balme*.¹⁹ In *Sundrye Strange and inhumaine Murthers*, in which Mistress Padge hired killers to dispose of her husband, infanticide is mentioned as an aside, and in *A Pittillesse Mother* Margret Vincent's spouse exists merely as an obstacle to changing their childrens' faith.²⁰ The tragedy of Mary Cook, who murdered her infant while apparently suffering from post-natal trauma, is the only case discussed so far in which the husband is given any real presence: we see him attempting to reduce his

¹⁵ *ibid.* (3).

¹⁶ Euripides, "*Medea*" (814).

¹⁷ *ibid.* (816).

¹⁸ Porter and Gavin, "Infanticide and Neonaticide" (104). Excluding the Sussex cases which were definitely of older children, those Coroners' and Assize records which record both age and gender show 37 female, and 48 male cases. The difference is barely statistically significant.

¹⁹ Horn, *Efficacy of the true balme*.

²⁰ Anon, *Sundrye strange*; Anon, *Pittillesse Mother*.

depressed wife's ability to commit suicide, and called to bear witness to the crime she has committed.²¹ In contrast, in the works discussed below, the husband is central to the unfolding events.

Early modern Medeas – women who punish

A handful of works about infanticide committed by married women appeared in the second half of the seventeenth century, though whether because there were more instances of the crime or greater interest in it is hard to discern. There may have been increased curiosity about married women in society, and their behaviour and actions, resulting from their visibility at the Exchange, where shops enabled them to exercise their economic power, and in theatres.²² The women described in ballads and pamphlets may not have heard of Medea, yet their emotional response to situations and their destructive actions are echoes of the classical figure. Jason's abandonment of Medea is later echoed by Mr. Fox's withdrawal of emotional and practical support of his family in *The distressed Mother*, discussed below. Mary Cook's criticism of her family's failure to take care of her suggests that she feels socially isolated. The married women whose infanticides are described in early modern literature kill for revenge and to punish their husbands for perceived wrongs. As Dolan shows, rather than defining themselves against the child, they kill from anger directed at other family members, or to ensure their own survival.²³

The ballad *The Unnatural Mother*, which begins by being sung from the grave by Jane Lawson after she has drowned herself and her "two poor Babes" in a well, later becomes a third-person narrative.²⁴ Jane was prompted to kill after a rare argument with her usually caring spouse, which was sufficiently heated to prompt neighbours to intervene, and culminated in his striking her. Her action, involving both her own and her infants' deaths, might be explained by what Dolan calls "fluid boundaries between parent and child" linking the murders with self-destruction, so that killing the child is

²¹ Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood*.

²² Howard, *Theater of a City* (37, 73, 128); Laura Gowing, "'The freedom of the streets': women and social space, 1560-1640" in *Londinopolis*, ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 130-150; Howard, *Stage and Social Struggle* (73).

²³ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (140, 144).

²⁴ Anon, *The Unnatural Mother being a true Relation of one Jane Lawson* (1680).

killing part of the self.²⁵ Another possibility is that the murders are “altruistic suicides” which arise, Hoffer and Hull state, when women feel they “cannot abandon their children when they commit suicide”.²⁶ Yet behind such ideas is what Porter and Gavin call “the continual myth that women are always loving mothers, even during murder”.²⁷ Another aspect of Jane Lawson’s narrative is that of an early modern Medea who kills the children and herself to injure her husband.

In the single-page account *The distressed Mother* the author writes with extreme pathos of Katherine Fox’s clear-minded decision.²⁸ Her husband is profligate and violent. Through “riotous Living” he has consumed his fortune and when she goes to him in a “Publick House” to “seek Relief from his hands, for her, and her poor Children” he beats her “as he thought, he had left her Dead, and past Recovery”. At home the children speak piteously of their hunger: “*Mother, said one, a little Food, or I die Mam*”.²⁹ To end their suffering Katherine cuts their throats: “*Better it is to Die with one Stroke than to languish in a continual Famine*”. When her husband returns and sleeps she cuts his throat too: “*Thou shalt Die, thou negligent Man, since thy ill Government hath been the Ruine of me and my Children*”. The shared weapon links the deaths by combining the father’s blood with that of his children, emphasising his blood connection with them. The pamphlet, written after Katherine’s arrest but before sentencing, ends with her “Admonitions to the numerous Spectators, which tended, *That Wives should beware of too much Fury, and Husbands to be more circumspect in their Families*”. While Katherine admits the fury which led to the deaths, the final criticism is of her spouse.

Bloody Newes from Dover is sensationally illustrated.³⁰ It concerns Mary Champion who, like Margret Vincent (discussed on p. 73), kills her infant because of religious difference. Mary’s husband wants their infant christened but Mary, an Anabaptist, does not. Her solution, worthy of Jacobean revenge tragedy, is to take “a great knife and cut off the Childs head,” and when her husband returns home she

²⁵ Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (142).

²⁶ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (149).

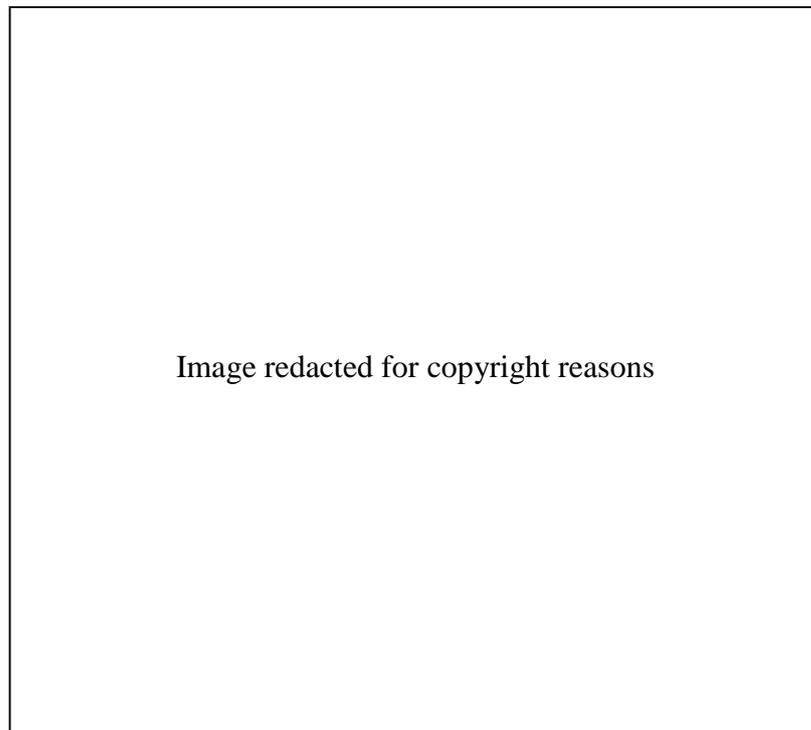
²⁷ Porter and Gavin, “Infanticide and Neonaticide” (106).

²⁸ Anon, *The Distressed Mother or Sorrowful Wife in Tears* (1690). The partial use of italics is perhaps to draw the reader’s attention to the pamphlet’s pedagogic role.

²⁹ Dolan writes that children are always represented as “innocent lambs, submissive sacrifices who prattle and smile”; *Dangerous Familiars* (141).

³⁰ Anon, *Bloody Newes from Dover* (1646). (Unnumbered pages)

announces “Behold husband, thy sweet Babe without a head, now go and baptize it; if you will, you must christen the head without a body: for here they lye separated”. The statement may have been received as both darkly comic and horrific, emotions which, as Nicholas Brooke points out, can readily co-exist.³¹ Dismemberment is treated humourously in the domestic tragedy of Thomas Merry³² and Shakespeare demonstrates the laughter caused by extreme bloodshed in *Titus Andronicus* when Titus, Marcus, and Lucius argue about whose hand could best be sacrificed, (III.i.160) and in Titus’ “Ha.Ha.Ha.” when presented with his sons’ heads. (III.i.265).³³



Mary Champion’s crime is illustrated in a manner worthy of Jacobean tragedy. The labels ensure that even passers-by who do not purchase the pamphlet are reminded of religions’ rights and wrongs.

Bloody Newes participates in the treatment of the body as a locus of punishment, including amputation.³⁴ The head, as the strongest personal identifier, the seat of knowledge and, as this pamphlet suggests, the contested place of baptism, makes decapitation particularly significant. Regina Janes writes “Like other detached body parts, ambulatory hands or forlorn feet, a detached head is a sign we privilege [...] It

³¹ Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (London: Open Books, 1979).

³² Robert Yarrington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (1601).

³³ Such dark humour was an aspect of Grand Guignol, discussed in my Interlude.

³⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (10, 14).

can enter into a variety of discourses and its meanings will derive from the discourse(s) of which it forms a part".³⁵ Part of the shock of the ballad image is that the punishment is inflicted on an infant, a symbol of purity and innocence, who is punished in place of the man, a frequent occurrence in infanticide literature.

This might seem to be another pamphlet about revenge, but the description of Mary ensures it is more subtle:

Many wofull expressions are heard to proceed from her, being very penitent for her unhappy Crime, her Conscience being much troubled and her eyes sad and distracted, by beholding such strange Visions. For she can no wayes fixe her eyes upon any thing, but presently (she conceives) the poore Babe to appear before her without a head.

Though partially fictionalised, these accounts provide the insights and detail which was not recorded in archival accounts. They feed the imagination and help us to raise questions and envisage circumstances. For example, the historical case of Joan Homewood is similar to that of Katherine Fox, in that she kills her children, though in Joan's case she then commits suicide rather than murdering their father, but the inquest provides no supporting detail. We are told that on 11th July 1606 the coroner and his jurors held an inquest on four bodies. The record states:

On 15 July [sic] Joan Homewood, sen. Late of East Grinstead 'spynster' murdered her children, Richard, Thomas and Joan jun., at East Grinstead with a knife worth 1d which she held in her right hand and with which she 'did cutt their throates', giving each of them a wound 1 inch long and 1 inch deep of which they immediately died; and afterwards, on the same day, she feloniously killed herself at East Grinstead, cutting her own throat with the same knife and throwing herself into a pond full of water and drowning herself.³⁶

³⁵ Regina Janes, "Beheadings" in *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elizabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1993) 242-262 (250). Cited in Lynne M. Robertson, "Getting ahead in a warrior culture: Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the problem of identity", *Connotations*, 7.1 (1997) 33-43. The sight of disembodied heads was not uncommon in early modern England. Heads of executed prisoners were displayed, and were frequent in theatrical performance. A contrivance for achieving this on stage (Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* ((Facing 353)).)) is reproduced in Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) (183).

³⁶ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (12 (54)).

Although Joan is described as “spynster”, the father of the children is named as Richard Homewood.³⁷ Was he her husband? Was this a case of revenge? Was it the tragic end to marital discord? If so, did it concern hardship, religion or some other difference? As with events in birthing chambers in which infants apparently die during childbirth, we are left with a lacuna in our knowledge.

The crimes of Joan Homewood, Katherine Fox and Mary Champion are perhaps more shocking because knives are used. Knives’ phallic resonances might make them incongruous weapons for women, yet Walker’s observations provide a different perspective. Referring to a case of infanticide in which a woman (Katherine) gives birth to a stillborn child and uses a knife to dig a grave in which to bury it, she writes:

Knives were very personal things in early modern society. Katherine would have eaten her food with this knife; she would have carried it with her, about her person, every day, wherever she went.[...] [It] is part of a discourse of domesticity – of food preparation, of eating, of cutting threads or flowers.³⁸

The knife links the horrific with the everyday, which we also see in pamphlet images of infanticide where the killing takes place within the home, surrounded by the furniture, fabrics and implements of daily life. Such images emphasise the possibility of infant murder even within the average marital home.

Other pamphlets also describe the tormented states of wives, as we saw in *Blood for Blood* (discussed in chapter 1) concerning Mary Cook who killed her infant when suffering from a “great pressure of melancholy discontent” believing that her family did not care for her.³⁹ *A true and perfect relation* tells of Mary Philmore who drowns her 9-week old infant in a pail of water, at her second attempt.⁴⁰ The insight which the author gives into an early modern marriage is surprising and hauntingly moving. He describes a caring husband who had been awake with her in the night “because she had been ill,

³⁷ The use of the term spinster was changing in the early modern period, and records often described women as both spinster and wife. For a discussion see Carol Z. Wiener, “Is a Spinster an Unmarried Woman?”, *The American Journal of Legal History*, 20.1 (1976) 27-31; J.H. Baker, “Male and Married Spinsters”, *American Journal of Legal History*, 21.3 (1977) 255-259. In cases of infanticide, according to Valerie C. Edwards, if the woman were married the crime was seen as murder and the burden of proof rested with the Crown; if the woman were single she could fall under the remit of the 1624 Infanticide Act, which assumed the guilt of unmarried women whose pregnancy was concealed and whose child subsequently died. Valerie C. Edwards, “The Case of the Married Spinster: An Alternative Explanation”, *ibid.* 260-265. The case cited above, however, predates this Act.

³⁸ Walker, “Just stories” (103).

³⁹ Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood* (10,14).

⁴⁰ Anon, *A True and Perfect Relation of a most Horrid and Bloody Murtehr (sic)* (1686).

and taken a Sweat” (4). After some “wrangling words”, while he is sleeping she takes the baby from his arms, replacing it with the older child so that he will not notice. After drowning the infant, she confesses to the godmother and then “pursu’d by the terror of her guilty conscience” she “wandred up and down like a dissatisfied or rather distracted Woman” until late at night when “she sate herself down upon a Dunghill and there continued till about Two of the Clock on Monday morning, when the Watch coming by apprehended her” (6). There could hardly be a clearer image of misery and abjection or a sharper contrast to the earlier detail of the infant sleeping in its father’s arms. Earlier the ballad describes Mary as a “kind Wife to her Husband, and careful Mother of her Children”, and it ends by describing her care of the murdered infant until the moment of his death (A2). The author writes that the Coroner’s Inquest found the case to be “wilful murder”, but added that “The Child was wrapt in its Blankets, with clean Linen, and all things in as good order as an ordinary mans Child could be desired” (7). Despite her infant’s death, Philmore is ultimately described with the same sympathy as Mary Cook en route to the scaffold.

At the other end of the spectrum is Elizabeth Kennet’s horrific murder of her newborn, described in the single page account *The Unnatural Mother*.⁴¹ Elizabeth’s husband is a good spouse “one that is well to pass, and has likewise the Repute of a very honest Man, and always very kind unto Elizabeth” and he wonders that she does not “provide things for the Child against she was brought to Bed”. Her answer, which is sinister with hindsight, is that “he need not trouble himself, for she was provided well enough”. Elizabeth gives birth alone, and it is thought that “she wrapp’d the Child in a Cloth and flung it in the Fire”. After discovery, she accuses a neighbour of drowning the infant then claims that the bones found in the fire are “Bones of Lamb which she had the day before,” finally admitting the crime but stating “it was a Monster [...] having two Heads, and she was asham’d the World should see it”. The combination of fire, with its associations with hell, and Elizabeth’s repeated lies, destroys the reader’s ability to feel the sympathy they might have for the other women described above. Her crime is described as “one of the Cruellest and most Unnaturallest [of] the Age”. It is presented as far more horrific than any of those by single women.

⁴¹ Anon, *The Unnatural Mother Being a Full and True Account of one Elizabeth Kennet* (1697).

In summary, while Medea and ideas of revenge and rage go some way toward allowing us to understand the crimes of Lawson, Fox and Champion, modern theories about perinatal psychology might also contribute to how we see these crimes. The distress and detachment of Champion hallucinating in her cell and Philmore seated on a dunghill suggest both post-natal trauma and the effect of their actions. Elizabeth Kennet's failure to prepare for the child she is expecting implies pregnancy denial, as described by Porter and Gavin who write of women who are "cognitively aware" of their pregnancies but do not alter their behaviours or form any prenatal attachments, and ultimately murder the newborn.⁴² Rage, revenge and mental conditions were not the monopoly of married women, but when writing about single women this was not authors' focus. In married woman narratives authors describe companionable marriages and shared parenthood, yet they also convey the many motives for infanticide, including disharmony, misguided altruism, revenge arising from spouses' cruelty or indifference, depression, and financial hardship.

Works which describe infanticide and child murder by married women are part of wider concern about infant vulnerability, but they also expose anxieties about motherhood. The belief in a sacred bond between mother and child, and evidence that it could be broken, were matters of patriarchal concern, particularly when the child was the legitimate carrier of the family line through its blood. Women were central to maintaining this family line and, as Willis writes, Protestant authors constructed motherhood as women's "special vocation".⁴³ Anxiety about motherhood extended to the employment of wetnurses which, Willis states, became the subject of "heated debate".⁴⁴ In the following section I wish to show that writings about breastfeeding revealed a belief that there was potential infanticide in all women. This supports Pollock's theory that one reason for women's presence in the birthing chamber was to ensure that the child was not harmed, and to protect the mother against charges of infanticide.⁴⁵

⁴² Porter and Gavin, "Infanticide and Neonaticide" (105).

⁴³ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture* (18).

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Pollock, "Childbearing" (297); Wrightson, "Infanticide in Earlier Seventeenth-Century England" (15); Wrightson, "Infanticide in European History" (10).

Death and the maternal breast

Early modern anxiety about the vulnerability of infant life was natural at a time of high infant mortality. However, writers go beyond concerns about death from natural causes, and show a fear of sudden, violent and intentional infant death, including the threat posed to infants by witches, a subject discussed in contemporary writing and subsequent academic debate.⁴⁶ Literary authors also expressed anxiety about the corrupted, lactating breast, which becomes associated with death, as in La Pucelle's father's wish in *I Henry VI*, which heads this chapter, and in Lady Macbeth's "Take my milk for gall" (I.v.47), which I discuss at the end of this chapter.

Despite beliefs in the corrupted maternal breast, contemporary writing argued that the mother was the only suitable person to breastfeed her infant. Street literature about infanticide draws on, and modifies, early modern discussions about breastfeeding and, by adopting an approach, language and imagery similar to discursive works, constructs an association between mothers' failure to breastfeed, and infanticide. Although Becker suggests that pamphlets participate in structuring some women as unfit to have any association with children, the medical and moralising texts discussed below demand mothers' closer association with them.⁴⁷ Clearly there was, as Willis states, ambivalence about mothers and the maternal role.⁴⁸

Women of all social levels had used wetnurses for centuries, although disdain for mothers who did not breastfeed appeared in Roman discursive and medical works, as we shall see below.⁴⁹ However, "attacks on wet nursing only really began in England after the Reformation", as Valerie Fildes points out.⁵⁰ From this time, the subject was discussed, in a virtually univocal manner, in sermons, medical books and conduct manuals, by authors such as Guillemeau, Paré, the Countess of Lincoln, the Church of England clergyman Henrie Smith, and the early fifteenth-century Venetian senator

⁴⁶ Anon, *Malleus Maleficarum* (Part 1, Question XI); Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (25); Purkiss, *Witch in History* (101); Willis, *Malevolent Nurture* (66).

⁴⁷ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (17).

⁴⁸ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture* (83).

⁴⁹ Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children* (46); Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1986) (48, 99).

⁵⁰ Valerie Fildes, *Wetnursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) (68); Rackin, *Shakespeare* (40).

Francesco Barbaro, whose *De re uxoria* was translated into English by “a person of quality” and published in 1677.⁵¹

Despite their opposition, many writers advised on the selection of a nurse, a task which may have fallen to the child’s father.⁵² As well as guidance on her appearance, health, character and morals, they provide copious information on the desired quality of her milk. Guillemeau writes “The choice of good Milke is, that it be of a middle substance, that is to say, such as shall be neither too watrish, or too thicke”.⁵³ He continues “As for the quantity of Milke: a Nurse should rather have too much than too little,” and so on. Paré similarly entitles a chapter “Of the choice of Nurse”, listing ten qualities which should be sought covering:

her age, the habit of her body, her behaviour, the condition of her milke, the forme, not onely of her dugges or breasts, but also of her teats or nipples, the time from childbirth, the sexe of her last infant or childe, that shee bee not with childe, that shee bee sound and in good health.

She must also be “of good habit”, and “quicke and diligent in keeping the childe neate and cleane”. Other paragraphs advise on her character, morals (as her characteristics could pass to the child), and actions, and provide a test for the quality of her milk.⁵⁴

Writers ensured that those who employed nurses had plenty of cause for anxiety, particularly if a child was nursed away from home. Felix Wurtz’s *The Children’s Book* (published in Basel in 1563 and “Englished” in 1656) is a pessimistic catalogue of the woes and illnesses which can befall a child, with corresponding advice. He describes it as:

Treating of infirmities and defects of new born Children, and of the faults and abuses, which wet or dry Nurses commit among and against little Children; and of Medicins and Cures, of such Children which received hurt in that way.⁵⁵

At the top of Guillemeau’s list of anxieties about nurses is that “the child could be changed and another put in his place” thus alluding to myths and fears about

⁵¹ Jacques Guillemeau, *The Nursing of Children, bound with Child-birth or The Happy Delivery of Women* (1612). Paré, *Workes*; Elizabeth Clinton, Countess of Lincoln, *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie* (Oxford 1622). Henrie Smith, *The sermons of Maister Henrie Smith gathered into one volume* (1597); Francesco Barbaro, *Directions for love and marriage in two books*, trans. A person of quality (1677).

⁵² John Dee clearly chose his children’s nurses. Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies* (156).

⁵³ Guillemeau, *Nursing* (Ii2, p. 5).

⁵⁴ Paré, *Workes* (906, 908, 909).

⁵⁵ Felix Wurtz, *An experimental treatise of chirurgie in four parts* (1656) (Xx2, page 339).

changelings.⁵⁶ The substitution of infants was a popular folkloric myth. It is central to Jonson's comedy *The Magnetick Lady* and many romances, but its sinister aspects are described in the pamphlet *A true relation*.⁵⁷ This tells of Abigail Hill who undertook to nurse parish infants who she allowed to starve, borrowing neighbours' children to show to the overseers so that she continued to be paid. Wrightson states that "Clear evidence of the disposal of bastard children through the system of nursing exists", and provides a number of examples.⁵⁸ Fears were fuelled by such tales in street literature. The story of Mrs. Atkins, who appeared as a ghost to reveal the burying place of infant corpses, was the subject of a ballad and many refutations in news periodicals.⁵⁹ The case of a Mary Crompton, "the midwife of Poplar", who starved and allowed at least eight infants to die, was told in several ballads and a pamphlet.⁶⁰ Readers are warned:

You mothers that have Children sure,
you nere will Money give,
That you for that may never more
your Child see while you live.⁶¹

It was also feared that a nurse might kill a child by accidental overlaying. Guillemeau writes: "the child, being wholly left to the discretion of the Nurse, may by some ill chance be stifled, overlaid, be let fall".⁶² Traces of such accidents appear in physical and literary memorials. The death of one month old Anne Consant who "died suddenly at nurse" is prosaically recorded,⁶³ but the moving *Elegie Upon the Death of my pretty Infant-Cousin M[ist]ris Jane Gabry*, in which the possible responsibility of the nurses is both expressed and repressed, captures the emotions which such deaths

⁵⁶ In the medieval period, a child who was weak, sick or cried a lot could be regarded as a changeling. People tried to force the fairies to take it away and return the parents' own child by "beating, scalding with boiling water, and by intimidating it by pretending to burn it." Or the child might be left at the junction of three roads, the parents only returning to it when it cried. Methods of curing sick children similarly threatened their lives through fire, savaging by animals, or cold. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (132); Damme, "Infanticide" (6); Thomas, *Religion* (731).

⁵⁹ Jonson, *The Magnetick Lady*. Anon, *A true relation*.

⁵⁸ Wrightson, "Infanticide in Earlier Seventeenth-Century England"; Fildes, "Maternal feelings" (163).

⁵⁹ Anon, *The Midwives Ghost* (1680). For a summary of newspaper refutations see Hyder Edward Rollins, ed. *The Pepys Ballads*, vol. III, 1666-1688 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930) (31).

⁶⁰ Anon, *Injured children*; Anon, *Bloody minded midwife*; Anon, *Midwife's Maid's*; Anon, *Midwife of Poplar's*; Anon, *Cruel midwife*.

⁶¹ Anon, *Injured children*.

⁶² Guillemeau, *Nursing* (li2v).

⁶³ Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies* (195). For more on memorialisation see Patricia Phillippy, "A Comfortable Farewell: Child-loss and Funeral Monuments in Early Modern England" in *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) 17-37.

caused. The title continues “Who died within the Month, not without some suspicion of being Overlaid by her Nurses”. The anonymous author, who like other writers on premature child death emphasises the infant’s innocence, tells us that:

We shall not load thy Nurses with complaints
Whose very sin might serve t’increase the Saints.
There may be loss, not guilt, without the Will;
Sometimes the Innocent the Innocent kill.⁶⁴

Mothers feared such accidents. Writing in 1654-67 of her daughter’s early life, Alice Thornton recalls “She had many preservations from death in the first yeare, being one night delivered from beinge overlaid by her nurse” who had “fallen asleep with her breast in the childe’s mouth, and lyeing over the child”.⁶⁵ Paré insists that mothers are “farre more vigilant and carefull in bringing up and attending their children” yet there is no reason why a child might come to more harm from overlaying by a nurse than by its mother.⁶⁶ Both Shahar and Fildes point out that nurses had every reason to take care of infants to protect both their income and their reputation⁶⁷ and it is worth noting that in works such as *The Yorkshire Tragedy* and *The Pittilesse Mother*, infants are saved from infanticide because being at nurse protected them from dangerous parents.⁶⁸

The danger of maternal overlaying was recognised by the Church and often considered a disguised form of infanticide, as in Brewer’s *The Bloody Mother* (discussed in Chapter 1).⁶⁹ From the thirteenth century women were being advised not to share beds with their infants and there followed a succession of Ecclesiastical laws on the subject which further contributed to constructing the breast as a place of death.⁷⁰ John Myrc’s poem (c.1450) which gives “directions how priests with little book-learning or experience were to teach the faith of their flocks” includes a long series of questions for them to ask.⁷¹ Among those for husbands is:

⁶⁴ Anon, *An Elegie Upon the Death of my pretty Infant-Cousin* (1672).

⁶⁵ Thornton, *Mrs Alice Thornton* (91).

⁶⁶ Paré, *Workes* (907); Guillemeau, *Nursing* (Ii2v).

⁶⁷ For an overview of the laws on this subject see Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (130); Fildes, *Wetnursing* (100).

⁶⁸ Thomas Middleton, “*The Yorkshire Tragedy*” in *William Shakespeare and Others: Collaborative Plays*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (London: Palgrave, 2013) 472-502.; Anon, *Pittilesse Mother*.

⁶⁹ Brewer, *Bloody Mother*. See also Helmholz, “Infanticide”.

⁷⁰ Damme, “Infanticide” (3); Fildes, *Wetnursing* (47).

⁷¹ Edward Peacock, ed. *Myrc’s Instructions for Parish Priests* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1902).

Hast thou also by hyre I-layn,
And so by-twene you the chylde I-slayn? (1367)

The question suggests fear of death from overlaying was far from rare at this time, and death at the maternal breast was sufficiently common for Shakespeare to adopt the image:

Here could I breathe my soul into the air,
As mild and gentle as the cradle-babe
Dying with mother's dug between its lips. (*2 Henry VI* 3.3.39)

So much guilt was attached to both to the maternal breast, and its denial, that even women incapable of breastfeeding received little sympathy from writers such as Henrie Smith, whose sermon attacking women who refuse the breast also heaps guilt on those unable to breast feed. He writes:

But whose breasts have this perpetuall drought? Forsooth it is like the gowte, no beggars may have it, but Citizens or Gentlewomen. In the ninth chapter of Hosea, drie breasts are named for a curse: what lamentable happe have Gentlewomen to light upon this curse more then other? Sure if their breasts bee drie, as they say, they should fast and pray together, that this curse might be removed from them.⁷²

Writers opposed to wetnursing gained momentum when they turned their criticism to the mothers. Here, their association with infanticide is strengthened by the shared modes of expression of medical and moral works, and of sensational pamphlets about infant and child murder. A link between failing to nurse and destroying the (unborn) child was already being made in the second century. The Roman writer Aulus Gellius states:

Many of those unnatural women try to dry up and check that sacred fount of the body, the nourisher of mankind, regardless of the danger of diverting and spoiling the milk, because they think it disfigures the charms of their beauty. In doing so they show the same madness as those who strive by evil devices to cause abortion of the fetus itself which they have conceived [...]. But since it is an act worthy of public detestation and general abhorrence to destroy a human being in its inception [...] how far does it differ from this to deprive a child, already perfect [...] of the nourishment of its own familiar and kindred blood?⁷³

This sentiment was taken up by Guillemeau. According to him:

⁷² Smith, *Sermons* (59).

⁷³ Aulus Gellius, *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, trans. John C. Rolfe, vol. II (Book XII) (London: Harvard University/Heinemann, 1982) (355).

Aulus Gellius did not amisse in putting no difference betweene a woman that refuses to nurse her owne childe; and one that kills her child, as soone as shee hath conceived; that shee may not bee troubled with bearing it nine moneths in her wombe.⁷⁴

Paré calls on Aulus Aurelius, the author of *De Medicina*, stating that:

Those that doe not nurse their owne children cannot rightly be termed mothers: for they doe not absolutely performe the duty of a mother unto their childe [...]. For this is a certaine, unnatural, imperfect and halfe kinde of a mothers duty, to beare a childe, and presently to abandon or put it away as if forsaken.⁷⁵

The references to abandoning, putting away and forsaking, with their undertones of abjection, are the language of infanticide. Rose Warnes “being delivered in secret, [...] caused it to be cast forth”; Martha Scambler “made away with the fruit of her own womb” and Margret Vincent’s children were “made away by their owne mother”.⁷⁶

This is just one of the ways in which those who argued against women who did not breastfeed their children, and those who wrote about women who committed infanticide, used a similar vocabulary of expression. Another was their emphasis on the unwomanliness and unnaturalness of denying the breast and killing an infant, the two criticisms often merging. The idea of unnaturalness (*prodigosae mulieres*) was used by Aulus Gellius and, as quoted above, Paré also describes the use of wetnurses as “unnaturall”.⁷⁷ Yet some husbands forbade their wives to breastfeed,⁷⁸ motivated, it has been suggested, by belief in negative effects on the wife’s health, figure and beauty, the desire to maintain her at maximum fertility to ensure multiple heirs,⁷⁹ and ensuring that she and her breasts were sexually available to him.

Among such wives was the Countess of Lincoln whose distress at this proscription is discernable in her work on the benefits of maternal breastfeeding which, with its repeated use of biblical references, places the publication as one which is both learned and intended for re-reading, study and contemplation. She writes of the “true naturall affection” of a woman feeding her own child, saying that to do otherwise is “monstrous unnaturalness”, and stating that it is “unnatural to thrust away your own

⁷⁴ Guillemeau, *Nursing* (li2).

⁷⁵ Paré, *Workes* (908).

⁷⁶ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*.

⁷⁷ Paré, *Workes*.

⁷⁸ Clinton, *Nurserie*.

⁷⁹ Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies* (102); Rackin, *Shakespeare* (127); Paster, *Body Embarrassed* (204).

children”.⁸⁰ In pamphlets, Jane Hattersley is described as an “unnatural mother”, Margret Vincent “most unnaturally at one time murdered two of her owne Children” and is “a creature not deserving a mothers name”, and the author of *Deeds against Nature* writes of Martha Scambler and others like her “woemen I cannot call them”.⁸¹ The ballad about Jane Lawson, who killed her children and herself to punish her husband is titled *The Unnatural Mother*.⁸²

Works on breastfeeding and street literature also share a use of animal imagery and comparison. The bodies of Martha Scambler and Annis Dell’s infants are found by dogs – that liminal creature with diabolic associations (see p. 114).⁸³ Guillemeau casts wild animals in the role of killers, and does so in graphic terms inviting the visualisation of the event. After warning mothers that by using a wetnurse the child “may by some chance be stifled, over-laid, be let fall, and so come to an untimely death”, he adds “or else may be devoured, spoiled, or disfigured by some wild beast, Wolfe or Dog, and then the Nurse fearing to be punished for her negligence, may take another in its place”.⁸⁴ This again raises the spectre of changelings but also has echoes of the midwives’ oath, which includes the instruction that stillborn infants be buried in a place safe from hogs, dogs and other beasts.⁸⁵ In Guillemeau’s text, the horrendous and painful death theoretically reserved for sinners, the unnatural reversal of the consumer/consumed paradigm, the defiled body, and the fear of changelings all merge to form a multi-faceted argument against wetnurses, inducing fears in mothers and associating non-nursing mothers with killing mothers. The image of devouring, spoiling, and disfiguring is also seen in street literature. As discussed in Chapter 1, Martha Scambler is “more savage than a she-wolf” and “more unnatural than either bear or beast ” and Margret Vincent is a “Tygerous Mother”. The author reminds us that:

the Caniballs that eat one another will spare the fruits of their owne bodies, the Savages will doe the like, yea every beast and fowle hath a feeling of nature, and according to kinde will cherish their young ones [...] and shall woman, nay a

⁸⁰ Clinton, *Nurserie* (B.2 page, 3 C.v page 10, D.2 page 19).

⁸⁰ Anon, *Pittilesse Mother*. Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*.

⁸² Anon, *Unnatural Mother*.

⁸³ Anon, *Most cruell and bloody*; Anon, *Deeds Against Nature*.

⁸⁴ Guillemeau, *Nursing* (Ii2v).

⁸⁵ Cited in Forbes, *Midwife and the Witch* (146).

Christian woman [...] be more unnaturall then Pagan, Caniball, Sauvage, Beast or Fowle.⁸⁶

In a sermon, Henrie Smith adopts a similar image of animals' superiority to women in treatment of their young:

Every beast and every foule is bred of the same that did beare it, onely women love to bee mothers, but not nurses. Therefore if their children prove unnaturall, they may say thou folowest thy mother, for shee was unnaturall first in locking up her breasts from thee, and committing thee forth like a Cuckow to be hatched in a Sparrowes nest.⁸⁷

Barbaro writes of the importance of breastfeeding "That which we perceived in the terrible Bear and savage Beasts is also a great argument (if they would imitate them) to induce women to employ their greatest care in adorning [*sic*, but possibly "adoring"] their Children".⁸⁸ The Countess of Lincoln also takes this approach, stating that "God hath not done so much for the[m] as to worke any good, no not in their nature, but left them more savage then the Dragons, and as cruell to their little ones as the Ostriches".⁸⁹

Why were the discourses of opposition to wetnursing and of sensational treatment of infanticide so similar? I believe answers can be found in early modern physiological, cultural and religious ideas. Physiologically, humoral theory saw blood and milk as the same substance. Guillemeau asserts "The milk is nothing else but blood whitened, beeing now brought to perfection and maturity".⁹⁰ Paré writes that the infant should be fed by its mother because her milk "is nothing else but the same bloud made white in the dugges, wherewith before it was nourished in the wombe".⁹¹ Mary E. Fissell discusses this association with particular reference to infanticide, women's dairy work, and the Eucharist. In her comments on infanticide she states that:

⁸⁶ Anon, *Deeds Against Nature* (Bv).

⁸⁷ Smith, *Sermons* (58). In this sermon Smith takes as his text 1 Peter 2.2: "As new borne babes desire the sincere milke of the word, that ye may growe thereby." Théodore de Bèze, *The Geneva Bible* (1576).

⁸⁸ Barbaro, *Directions* (I.v, 114).

⁸⁹ Clinton, *Nurserie* (B.4v, page 8). The comparison to ostriches is drawn from the Bible reference to the bird deserting her eggs after laying (Job, 39,13-16). In reality, the dominant female of the male's ostrich harem of up to seven mates discards eggs laid by weaker females when it is time to cover them in their communal nest.

⁹⁰ Guillemeau, *Nursing* (Ii2).

⁹¹ Paré, *Workes* (907).

the connection between blood and milk [...] echoes infant feeding practices as a way of demonstrating the perverse nature of these mothers who kill. Instead of spending their own blood in the form of breast milk, they shed the blood of their children.⁹²

This blood/milk connection means that the refusal to breastfeed and the killing of the infant amount to essentially the same thing through the idea of shedding blood and wasting milk. The similarities in metaphorical language take the connection between the nurse-nourished child and the mother-murdered child beyond the stage of the newly conceived foetus, and extend it to the newborn. Denying the infant the blood (milk) which had hitherto fed it in the womb becomes aligned with starvation; destroying, wasting or spilling the milk becomes little different to destroying, wasting or spilling the blood of the child, whether literally by the use of a knife, or metaphorically by stopping its flow. This idea appears in the Countess of Lincoln's *Nurserie*, which also draws on the theory that infants take in the mother/nurse's characteristics through her milk:⁹³

If it be unlawfull to trample under feete a cluster of grapes, in which a little wine is found; then how unlawfull is it to destroye and drie up those breasts, in which your owne child [...] might finde food of syncere milke, even from Gods immediate providence, untill it were fitter for stronger meat?⁹⁴

The use of a wetnurse wastes the mother's milk which belongs to the child, and the infanticidal mother wastes the infant's (metaphorical) blood but, from the perspective of humoral theory, the substances are the same. Refusing to nurse the child, as Aulus Gellius and Guillemeau say, becomes little different to killing the child but, whereas they refer to the unborn child, the similarities of expression in pamphlets extend this assertion to the newborn.

Culturally, the extent to which refusing to nurse a child was an abandonment of woman's appropriate work as the carer and nourisher of children was constantly reinforced by images of Charity, in which the virtue is depicted as a woman breastfeeding one of her children – the opposite of denial. Women were counselled to be charitable in conduct books such as Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties*, which, in a treatise on "wives particular duties", instructs them that "workes of charity must be

⁹² Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies* (84).

⁹³ For more on this idea see Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities* (229).

⁹⁴ Clinton, *Nurserie* (17).

done, and almes must be given of such things [...] as we have, or which are in our power to give”.⁹⁵ Denying the breast to the infant thus becomes the denial of the fundamental social duty to be charitable, an idea popularly sustained by images such as a ballad illustration depicting a daughter giving her breast milk to her imprisoned father, to prevent his death from starvation.⁹⁶ The ballad, which calls on the Roman myth of Cimon and Pero, appeared in several editions.



The nourishing mother: the image of Charity

Left: Caritas. (Umbrian School, c.1500) The artist associates the woman as nourisher with the pelican’s emblematic role as a symbol of Christian piety and sacrifice.

Right: Charity. (Lucas Cranach the Elder, after 1537) The breastfeeding mother beneath the apple tree suggests Eve and the innocence of mankind before the fall.

However, changing attitudes to the poor which meant alms should only be given to the “virtuous” or “deserving,”⁹⁷ combined with the growing dominance of small family units, reduced the number of people from whom charity, in the broad sense of kindness and benevolence, could be expected. This lack of familial charity was

⁹⁵ Gouge, *Domesticall Duties* (305).

⁹⁶ Anon, *A Worthy example of a Vertuous Wife* (1611-1775?). Dates estimated by EBBA.

⁹⁷ Thomas, *Religion* (642).

glimpsed in the pamphlet describing Mary Cook's crime: "if you had been more careful to look after me, you might have hindred me from doing this".⁹⁸ This, taken in conjunction with the fact that employing a wetnurse diluted the family group, either by bringing an outsider into the intimacy of the family, or by removing one of its number to a different location, suggests that the presence of a breastfeeding mother in the home gave esteem to the role of motherhood. It offered a domestic image of the charity which was declining elsewhere.

In religious terms, in post-Reformation England, the association of *Virgo lactans* images with Catholic idolatry meant a reduction in their number, though it lingered in literary imagery,⁹⁹ and, as Rackin notes:

Medieval images of the lactating Virgin, of the Church allegorized as a nursing mother, and of souls sucked at the breast of Christ, which associated breast milk with charity and spiritual sustenance, were still current in the Renaissance and still powerful.¹⁰⁰

Christian piety was frequently represented by images of the pelican pecking her breast, or feeding her young with her blood. The pelican was "one of the most common of all Renaissance emblems", and often a symbol of Christ as self-sacrificing redeemer.¹⁰¹ Both images of the allegory, and those of Charity, gave men and women a constant reminder of the self-sacrificing mother and the succouring mother. The pelican was depicted in fine art and emblem books but also decorated objects which were part of quotidian life. Its appearance on headcloths, lace, furniture and household items such as culinary rollers, towels and cushions, would have made its significance familiar to people in even quite humble occupations.¹⁰²

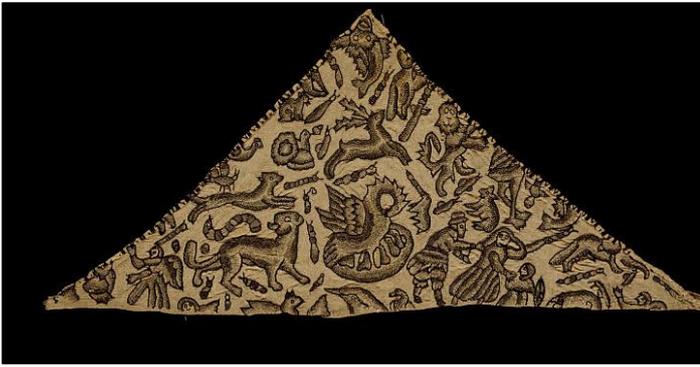
⁹⁸ Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood* ((20)).

⁹⁹ Elizabeth J. Grindlay, "'Some out of Vanity will call Her the Queene of Heaven': Iconography of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin in post-Reformation England, 1580-1616" (PhD Thesis, UCL, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Rackin, *Shakespeare* (122).

¹⁰¹ Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Random House, 2003) (82).

¹⁰² For images of the pelican on domestic objects see Elizabeth Braidwood, "The Medieval Pelican" <http://donna.hrynkiw.net/sca/pelican/index.html> [Accessed 10/5/2012]; "Victoria and Albert Museum, London: collections search" <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/> [Accessed 10/5/2012].



Two of the many surviving personal and household items which carry the pelican emblem

Left: embroidered forehead cloth (England, 1625-50)

Right: stoneware tankard inscribed 'Christvs besprenget vns mit sein blvt, wie der pelican sein ivngen tvht' (Christ sprinkles us with his blood, as the pelican does its young) (Germany, 1662)

The metaphor was also used in popular ballads as an exemplar of kindness and succour: “farre more kinde then is the Pellican” sings one young man of his lover.¹⁰³ In the pamphlet *A pittillesse Mother* the author refers to “the Pellican that pecks her owne brest to feed her young ones with her blood,” and states that Margret Vincent was “not yet glutted, nor sufficed with these few drops of innocent blood”. Fissell comments that “rather than feeding on her children’s blood, this mother should have been feeding them with her own blood”.¹⁰⁴ Such a strong image could also be reversed by emphasising the cost of sacrificial blood to the giver. Shakespeare uses the allegory in this way in *King Lear*, when Lear refers to his “pelican daughters” (III.iv.71) and the dying John of Gaunt tells Richard II “That blood already, like the pelican, / Hast thou tapp’d out and drunkenly carous’d” (II.i.127-8). Both men, adopting a female metaphor, express their destruction by those have fed on them.

In summary, we can see that discourses concerning the rights and wrongs of maternal breastfeeding, and popular pamphlets and ballads about infanticide, drew on similar imagery and terminology. References to abandonment, suggesting the abjection of the child, criticisms of mothers as unnatural and unwomanly, the use of animal imagery, and the idea of devouring, carry within them suggestions of the liminality discussed in Chapter 2. The existence of diatribes about denying the maternal breast can be partially explained by contemporary physiological, cultural and religious ideas. The people of early modern England received constant visual reinforcement of the

¹⁰³ Anon, *The Maids Comfort or the kinde young Man* (1619-29).

¹⁰⁴ Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies* (84).

importance of the feeding mother through imagery in fine art, and on personal and domestic items.

In a society in which companionate marriage was increasingly seen as the basis of family formation, and the self-contained and self-sufficient Protestant family was regarded as the ideal, people may have drawn comfort from the idea of the infant maternally nourished in the home, as the ballad *The injured children* states:

For 'tis a comfort for to see
the Mother Nurse its Child
And then no Midwives Cruelty
can ever you beguile.¹⁰⁵

Through shared languages of expression, literature in different genres constructed an association between women who did not breastfeed and women who committed infanticide, thus suggesting a potential for murder in all married mothers.

The sins of the fathers

Thus far, this research has focussed mainly on women, but men killed children too. Rather than vilifying the culprits, the authors of works concerning infant murder by men invite readers to form their own opinions of the killers, but they steer those opinions by the vivid and horrific detail of their descriptions. Sussex archival records include eighteen cases in which men killed, or had direct involvement in infant deaths. These records, and literary accounts, suggest that men killed violently and bloodily. They killed infants in the womb, newborns, and older children. The men who committed these crimes were from all social levels, and they killed for a range of motives. For every frightened, poor or abandoned woman who killed her illegitimate newborn, there was a father who had left her with the sole responsibility for subsequent events. These murdering men can be met in street literature and drama. In archival accounts, they are often seen at the edges of the crime and are sometimes described as “aiding and abetting”. Similarly, they exist at the edges of academic discourse. This section sets out to investigate this normally overlooked aspect of infanticide and to question some of the assumptions which underlie current academic discourse. I want to reveal the weight of archival and literary evidence which, in its sheer quantity, shows

¹⁰⁵ Anon, *Injured children*.

the frequency of the direct or indirect involvement of husbands, lovers and others. I will examine the extent and reasons for men's infanticide, discuss the manner in which the crime was communicated, and show the connections between early modern representations and those which preceded them which reveal that ideas and images of infant murder have a remarkable durability. The archival cases I discuss below, and the literary works I examine, show that infanticide by men was often more violent, hypocritical and devious than that committed by women.

With a crime prompted by complex and overlapping motives, there is a danger in categorising works, but there is value in drawing out dominant themes. Those discussed below include the destruction of the unborn child by killing its mother, and reasons for this which include alcohol, money, and the desire to escape from unhappy relationships. The section will examine the murder of newborns and older children and the motives of money and sexual shame. Finally it will look at anxieties surrounding dynasty, and show that men used the infant as a weapon against individuals or societies.

The unborn child

In Chapter 2 we saw that the pregnant wife could become structured as a quasi-goddess, set apart from her household, and attended by female celebrants who made special dietary offerings to her and to her revered condition. Alongside this nurturing of women were the dangers they and infants faced during pregnancy, labour, and the weeks that followed. Archives and street literature show another aspect of this danger in accounts of pregnant women who were murdered, the assailant taking the inseparable lives of mother and child.

Sussex coroners' inquests mention eighteen infant deaths directly involving men (see Appendix 7). They include the case of Henry Pellyng whose wife was "close to giving birth" when he assailed her with an axe in the middle of the night.¹⁰⁶ He appears to have died in prison. Alice Smyth, a pregnant spinster, was attacked by Roland Medowe, aided and abetted by Nicholas Gower.¹⁰⁷ He stabbed her in the neck and throat, "cutting and opening her abdomen and removing a child from her womb". Both men were hanged. Destruction of the unborn child also appears in both elite and

¹⁰⁶ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (5 #24).

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* (100 #398).

popular literature. Leontes and others whose abuse could have caused a woman to miscarry were discussed in chapter 3. In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, after Giovanni has killed Anabella, who is pregnant with his child, he enters with her heart on a sword. The language, with its interwoven references to heart, wound, and nine months, suggests that the heart merges with the foetus and symbolically represents it, so that the bloody object can be seen as one, the other, or both simultaneously.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, street literature suggests that infanticide by murdering the pregnant woman was not uncommon, and could be prompted by marital disharmony, alcohol or money.

Marital disharmony

Pamphlets describing the murder of pregnant wives show the simmering anger and suspicion which could lurk in early modern marriages. William Barwick's wife was pregnant when they wed and it is "very probable that being then constrained to Marry her, he grew weary of her". We are told that going out of the house, he "drill'd his Wife along till he came to a certain Close [...] where he found the Conveniency of a Pond, [where] he threw her by force into the Water". Having drowned her and concealed the body, he later claims that she had gone to stay with his uncle. Her corpse is discovered after a ghost appears to her brother-in-law which "seem'd to Dandle something in her Lap, that look'd like a White-Bag"¹⁰⁹, which suggests an infant. The apparition, statements from neighbours and the forensic evidence of "several Bruises on her Head, occasioned by the Blows the Murderer had given her to keep her under Water" condemn Barwick. Similarly, Thomas and Mary Watson had lived in disharmony for some time: "He had often threatened his Wives Death, and [...] she herself had said oftentimes [...] that she was afraid her Husband would be the Death of her," which implies domestic violence.¹¹⁰ Watson is a weaver and Mary, despite being heavily pregnant, helps him by delivering his work and taking cloth to the dyers, perhaps indicating marriage partnership, or possibly enforced work during pregnancy when she should have been sequestered at home. The crisis results when he is "jealous" of her "imbezzling" his money after she pawns some cloth "for Money to supply her

¹⁰⁸ John Ford, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore" in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays*, ed. Marion Lomax (Oxford: OUP, 1995) 167-239 (V.vi.10).

¹⁰⁹ Anon, *A Full and true Relation* (1690), (1, 2).

¹¹⁰ Anon, *A sad and true relation* (1686), (6).

present Necessity” suggesting hardship at this vulnerable time. After confrontation in the street, and despite the intervention of neighbours, he stabs her.

The nameless couple at the heart of *Bloody News from Clerkenwel[l]* also lived miserably together: “he was generally a very bad Husband, and froward and unkind to his Wife, who yet loving him very well, endeavoured to take no notice of it”.¹¹¹ During one of his frequent absences as a journey-man cooper she sells clothes to buy food for their children. Despite her being “great with child”, when she asks for money to buy physic from the apothecary for their sick child, he knocks her to the ground with an adze, a tool of his trade, “and then continued striking backwards and forwards till he had given her several mortal wounds[...] and left the mangled body weltring in it’s [sic] own Gore upon the Floor”.¹¹² When neighbours arrive he is pacing the room with another of their children “as if in Triumph for that Hellish victory” and they rescue the child “before he had done it any harm”.¹¹³ At his trial he says he was “sorry for nothing but that he had not dispatcht some more of them”. The vivid descriptive language lets readers visualise these violent events, and juxtaposes the man’s mania and the good neighbours with whom they can identify.

Alcohol, money, and infidelity

Alcohol is frequently an aspect of men’s violent destruction of the unborn child, often alongside another marital problem. Alcohol possibly prompted the journey-man cooper’s violent and murderous outburst, the author writing that it was “probable an Ale-house had taken up the greatest part of his time”.¹¹⁴ Robert Foulkes, who is discussed below, states that he spent “too much of my time, too much of my Money in publick Houses, [...] and drank to intemperance”.¹¹⁵ We are also told that when Nathaniel Smith and his wife return from the alehouse he:

Demands the Coin she took that day.
She being with Child, and fretful too,
What he commands she would not do;

¹¹¹ Anon, *Bloody News from Clerkenwel[l]* (1623-1661).

¹¹² *ibid.* (6).

¹¹³ *ibid.* (7).

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* (5).

¹¹⁵ Foulkes, *Alarime for sinners* (11).

Which, with his drink, began a rage,
Nothing but Murther could asswage.¹¹⁶

Alcohol, and the social freedom of women in these works, also led to suspicions of infidelity and contributed to their danger. Mary Watson's going abroad to distribute her husband's cloth could have led to doubts about her sexual morality. Jean E. Howard writes: "Those who sold goods could be suspected of also selling themselves and the city afforded women numerous opportunities to lead public lives that involved being visible to many people, including strangers".¹¹⁷ This may be implied in *The Bloody Butcher* when the author writes:

This Butchers Wife did keep a Seat
I' th Market-place to sell her Meat;
And was by all report that's made,
A careful house-wife in the Trade.¹¹⁸

Howard writes: "there are strong semiotic parallels between a chaste woman placed at the door of a shop to attract trade and the widely reported practice of positioning whores at the thresholds of brothels for the same purpose".¹¹⁹ The references to the seat in the marketplace, the wife's selling of her "meat", and the reference to "the Trade", seem deliberately ambiguous.

John Marketman, a sea surgeon, had been "debauched and distempered in Drink" when, noting his wife's absence after he takes "a nap", he leaps to the conclusion that she is "at least too familiar" with a neighbour.¹²⁰ As in *The Winter's Tale*, the jealousy explodes onto the scene from nowhere. The author writes:

where Jealousie once finds entertainment in the heart of any Man or Woman, there is little hopes of any quiet life, and often begets ardent desires of secret Revenge, which oftentimes launches forth into such extreams.¹²¹

Marketman hunts down his wife, and killing the unborn child is a specific part of his intent: "his passion was so violent that nothing could asswage it but the loss of her own and her poor Babes life".¹²² He stabs her with a blow which "proved fatal to both

¹¹⁶ Anon, *The Bloody Butcher* (1667?).

¹¹⁷ Howard, *Theater of a City* (128).

¹¹⁸ Anon, *Bloody Butcher*.

¹¹⁹ Howard, *Theater of a City* (129).

¹²⁰ Anon, *The true narrative* (1680), (2).

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.* (3).

Husband Wife and Child”. These are not polemical anti-alcohol pamphlets. Instead, its mention implies that no thinking man would murder his pregnant wife, and that such a crime requires disconnection from their sentient world. Drunkenness is used to separate the men from their brutal crimes in a manner similar to Henry Pellyng, who murdered his pregnant wife and was described as “lunatick”.¹²³

Thomas Pettitt suggests that “murdered sweetheart” narratives were part of the “ambient mindset” and that ballads about the subject “stand at the intersection of the themes of love and violence”.¹²⁴ However, whereas in murdered sweetheart ballads the child’s imminent existence prompts the murder, pregnant wives are murdered because of their perceived behaviour. Despite the “*in rerum natura*” debates (see chapter 1), such killings are written of as double murders and two of the works give the unborn child life. Again these are highly visual and emotive accounts, suggesting horror, describing the inhumanity of the killers, and inviting revulsion in the readers. They also reveal attitudes to the murder of unborn infants. After William Barwick drowned his pregnant wife he “had the Cruelty to behold the Motion of the Infant, yet warm in her Womb”.¹²⁵ Thomas Watson’s infant “was Drowned in its Mothers Blood or else struck to the Heart with the aforesaid Dagger”.¹²⁶ These lines relocate the unborn child from the womb to the world, emphasising the death of the infant as well as the mother. They demonstrate the vulnerability of infants from the moment of conception, a fact which remains true today.¹²⁷

Newborn and very young infants

We have seen that men killed unborn infants. They also murdered very young infants, or were present at the death, or strongly implicated in it. One of the most tragic Sussex coroner’s inquests concerns the Barnerde family. It states that on 17th February

¹²³ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (5 (24)).

¹²⁴ Thomas Pettitt, “Journalism vs. Tradition in the English Ballads of the Murdered Sweetheart” in *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain 1500-1800*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 74-89 (75).

¹²⁵ Anon, *Full and true Relation* (2).

¹²⁶ Anon, *Sad and true relation* (6).

¹²⁷ Kathleen Marion Baird, “Domestic Abuse, violence and mental health” in *Mental Health in Pregnancy and Childbirth*, ed. Sally Price (Philadelphia: Elsevier, 2007) 167-188 (181). Research shows that twenty percent of domestic violence begins during pregnancy.

1553 the Coroner and fifteen jurors met to hold an inquest on two bodies.¹²⁸ The record tells us:

Richard Barnerde of Hellingly copulated with his daughter Joan, who conceived and gave birth to a girl in her father's house in Hellingly without the company of women. Afterwards, between 8 and 9 am on 13 February Richard took the infant in his hands, hid her under 'a towbe'¹²⁹, placed 'a byttell' [sc. a beetle or mallet] worth 1d on her chest and murdered her. The next day, reflecting on his horrible crime, he went to a well in a close called the Grove at Hellingly and feloniously drowned himself.

Hunnisett's detailed note to the case describes subsequent events. From this we learn that two members of the Devenysse family, one described as esquire and the other as gent[leman], and other rioters:

broke and entered Barnerde's house after his death, expelled his 3 children (the oldest being not more than 12) and took away his goods and chattels, viz. silver spoons, feather-beds, bolsters [...] brass, pewter, corn and other goods worth about £14.

This heart-rending account demonstrates how events – in this case both incest and infanticide – could reverberate through a community. It encompasses the anger and the sense of contamination which such crimes engendered. But the culprit here is a man, and his wrongs are amplified by members of the community, who participate in inflicting disaster and an unknown destiny on three young children while opportunistically enriching themselves.

While the Barnerde case is exceptional, the killing of infants by men, and the extreme violence of such killings, is not as rare as subsequent academic discourse implies. Remaining solely with the Sussex archives and cases involving infants whose age is measured in weeks or months rather than years, we learn that Thomas Cranley was accused of crushing a newly born infant's head.¹³⁰ A yeoman's wife gave evidence against him, but he was released after claiming that the child was killed by "John at Death", one of the fictitious names used in Sussex and elsewhere when finding a prisoner not guilty because an unknown person committed the crime.¹³¹ Other pseudonyms, such as John Nok and Tom Staff, also suggest violence and transgression.

¹²⁸ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (47 #165).

¹²⁹ Possibly a tub.

¹³⁰ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (104 #417).

¹³¹ Louis A. Knafla, "'John at Love Killed Her': The Assizes and Criminal Law in Early Modern England", *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 35.3 (1985) 305-320.

Such names, which are always male, constitute ghostly figures in the archives, masking events by merging factual accounts with fiction and folklore. There were other ways of escaping the noose. Richard Jones, a labourer, was accused of killing his 8-week old daughter by “violently striking her with his right hand on the left side of her head and giving her ‘one mortall bruise’ of which she immediately died”.¹³² At the assizes, his “wife alias Elizabeth Jones, spinster” was charged with aiding and abetting him. He pleaded benefit of clergy and was acquitted, and Elizabeth was discharged. John Swyft gave fatal “nipes and bruises” to his six month old son, Francis, and was imprisoned on suspicion of murder, but did not stand trial.¹³³ However, sometimes justice was exacted for the deaths of these young infants. At the Horsham assizes in March 1666, three people gave evidence against Henry Beale for murdering his daughter “when she was lying asleep in a cradle in his dwelling-house, by clutching her in both hands, violently striking her on the chest, stomach and abdomen and giving her a bruise of which she immediately died”.¹³⁴ He was hanged. Robert Willard, a butcher, was sentenced to death in 1567 for beating to death the male child of Joan Marden, spinster.¹³⁵

Aiding and abetting

The cases discussed above suggest the slippery nature of justice when an infant was killed by a man. This is endorsed by accounts which show that, when newborns were killed, men were often accused of being present or aiding and abetting. They lurk in the shadows but escape severe punishment. At the trial of widow Ann Comber in 1657, John Puttocke was accused of being “feloniously present aiding and abetting her so that they both murdered the child”.¹³⁶ Ann was hanged, but Puttocke was charged with unlawful intercourse with her and committed to gaol for three months. In 1574, both Anthony Fisher and Joan Marshe were tried for having killed her infant and buried it. They were found not guilty.¹³⁷

Other archival records concerning men and infanticide also suggest uncertainty about events. In 1592 an inquest was held on an infant said to have been born “mute

¹³² Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (132 #512).

¹³³ *ibid.* (19 #81).

¹³⁴ *ibid.* (119 #466). The accounts are inconsistent about the age of the infant stating half a year, 15 and 50 weeks.

¹³⁵ Cockburn, *Assize Records: Sussex* (46 #214).

¹³⁶ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (113 #442).

¹³⁷ Cockburn, *Assize Records: Sussex* (104 #515).

and dead of the body of Mildred Barnes".¹³⁸ Hunnisett's account of the case suggests that the circumstances were thought questionable. At the inquest Mildred, Robert Awcocke, her master, and his wife were required to appear at the Assizes to answer charges against them. At the trial no charges were made against the Awcockes, but Mildred was remanded on suspicion of felony. She was later "delivered by proclamation".¹³⁹ In May 1621 Mary Hemsley was suspected of infanticide after giving birth in Nicholas Reynoldes' house.¹⁴⁰ At the assizes Reynoldes was charged with "feloniously inciting" Mary to commit the felony, and his wife Katherine Reynoldes was charged with "feloniously comforting and aiding [Mary] [...] knowing she had committed the felony". Mary pleaded not guilty and was acquitted, but suspicion lingered around the Reynoldes couple who were bailed to appear again. Nicholas was later delivered by proclamation, but there is no further record of Katherine. In another inquest we learn that Margaret Pollard gave birth to a live male child in January 1678.¹⁴¹ The account states that:

on the same day, she, William Pollard late of Edburton, 'laborer', and Jane his wife alias Jane Pollard late of Edburton, 'spinster', murdered him there: Margaret violently striking him on the back of the head with 'a bedstaffe' [...] and giving him 'one mortall bruise' of which he immediately died; and William and Jane being feloniously present aiding and abetting her.

Killing a newborn by striking is so typical of men's method of killing that it raises a question about whether William Pollard gave the fatal blow. He died a natural death in gaol before the Assizes, but his wife was convicted and hanged, and Margaret was acquitted. Such cases emphasise the impossibility of knowing exactly what happened, and create uncertainties about the extent and reasons for the man's involvement, and who ultimately was responsible for the deaths. They also leave the impression that men "got off lightly" by pleading benefit of clergy or by being found guilty of a lesser charge.

We have seen that it is beyond question that infanticide was frequently committed by men. The eighteen archival cases of the killing of newborn or very young

¹³⁸ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (111 #450).

¹³⁹ The phrase is obscure but clearly means that the suspect was freed. Karen Jones, "Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: The Local Courts in Kent", *Law and History Review*, 26.2 (2008) 435-436.

¹⁴⁰ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688* (55 #225).

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* (128 #496).

children which mention varying levels of male involvement, represent a significant fraction of the total. This is only part of the picture. Every one of the cases discussed in previous chapters dealing with the actions and fates of unmarried women involved a man as the father of the child she was accused of killing. They may be largely invisible in the archives, but they were present in the women's lives.

Literature's murderous men

Dolan writes that literary accounts of infanticide "scrutinize all of the circumstances, perpetrators, and motives for which the law cannot account".¹⁴² Certainly, motives are largely missing from the archival accounts. In this section I investigate this area. I will show that literature suggests that poverty, shame and fear of discovery applied to men as well as to women. We will also see that powerful men, such as Herod, had infants killed because they feared losing authority, and that infants were used as weapons in war and in the home. I will show that, when writing about these topics, early modern writers followed similar patterns of representation to their literary and artistic predecessors.

Money and motive

We have seen that single women are believed to have abandoned or murdered their infants because they feared they would be unable to survive financially. Lack of money, caused by squandering, and the suspicion or greed it could engender, is also an aspect of infanticide by men, and within marriage. The pregnant Mary Watson was killed because her husband suspected her of embezzlement.¹⁴³ In *Sundrye Strange and inhumaine Murthers* "one Lincolne" kills three of his children (age unspecified) as part of a plot which will enable him to marry a rich widow.¹⁴⁴ In other works, loss of money is part of downward spirals involving debauched and profligate behaviour which culminates in infant murder. *The Unnatural Father* describes John Rowse's decline from financial security into penury, caused by his adultery, "Ryot, excessive drinking & unproportionable spending" and subsequent duping by a friend.¹⁴⁵ Welcomed back by

¹⁴² Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (126).

¹⁴³ Anon, *Sad and true relation*.

¹⁴⁴ Anon, *Sundrye strange*.

¹⁴⁵ John Taylor, *The Unnatural Father* (1621), (A3v).

his wife after abandoning her for his lover he recognises that “he had nothing left him but poverty and beggary, and that his two Children were like to be left to go from doore to doore for their living”.¹⁴⁶ Finding a pretext to send his wife away, he drowns his two daughters in a stream of “excellent spring water in the Sellar of his house”, carefully lays out the bodies and covers them with a sheet. This is a slow, methodical, premeditated and chillingly described crime, combining planning and organisation with a sense of his mental disconnection from his actions. The true case of Walter Calverly, who also lost his fortune but killed his children in a public and dramatic manner, is told in *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and the pamphlet *Two Unnaturall and bloodie murthers*.¹⁴⁷ In the former, the unnamed and undeveloped characters – “wife”, “husband” – are reminiscent of morality plays which, Henry Hitch Adams states, were the antecedents of such domestic tragedies, from which “gradually the abstract vices and virtues assumed the characteristics of men and women of the middle class”.¹⁴⁸ Calverly is characterised as a Herod-like figure (see below) who does little but rant until, in an isolated moment, he recognises the effect of his profligacy on the family line:

I am mad to think the moone was mine; Mine and my fathers and my forefathers – generations, generations: downe goes the howse on us, down, downe it sincks. Now is the name a beggar, begs in me! that name, which hundreds of yeeres has made this shiere famous, in me, and my posterity runs out.¹⁴⁹

His solution is to end the shame by murdering his family. Both accounts include dramatic scenes of confusion, struggle and violent slaughter in which two infants are murdered. The pamphlet describes the physicality of the killing in strong, emotive language, which captures some of what would be seen in stage performance. We hear that he holds the body of one child aloft, throws the maid downstairs and struggles with his wife for the child she is holding “which she sought to preserve with words, teares, and all what a mother could do from so tragicall an end”. He stabs at the child in her arms, killing it and wounding his wife. Both Rowse and Calverley’s narratives inculcate “lessons of morality and religious faith in citizens [...] by offering them

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* (Bv).

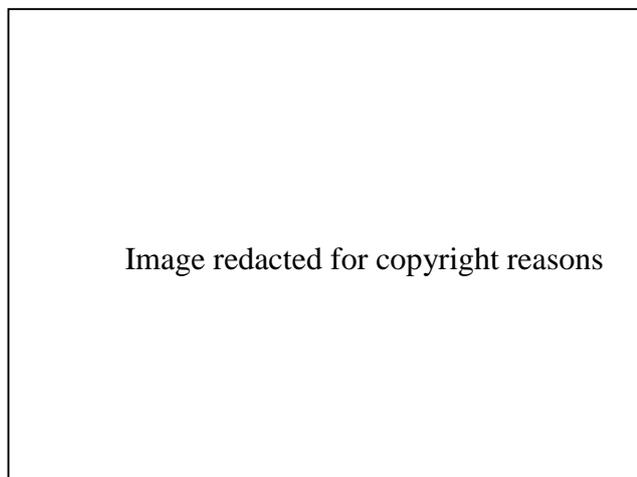
¹⁴⁷ Middleton, “*Yorkshire Tragedy*”; Anon, *Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers* (1605).

¹⁴⁸ Henry Hitch Adams, *English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy 1575 to 1642* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1971) (54).

¹⁴⁹ Middleton, “*Yorkshire Tragedy*” (Sc.IV.54).

examples drawn from the lives and customs of their own kind of people,”¹⁵⁰ This puts them into the category “homiletic tragedy” (though in different genres) in which, Adams states, writers use the “common man as protagonist for a tragic story”.¹⁵¹ Their histories are similar, in that both lose their fortunes, are discontented with their marriages, and seek solace and excitement elsewhere in women, gambling and drinking. Dolan, who draws attention to the fact that such murders take place “at the extreme end of a continuum of prodigality and self-consumption”, states that this kind of killing is “social suicide” but also an indication that the fathers, like some mothers who kill, are perversely taking responsibility for their children through murder.¹⁵² However, whereas in *The unnatural father* Rowse fears for his family’s future, Calverly’s care is for its future *and* its relationship with the past. As seen in the speech above, shame is an aspect of his motivation.

The very different mental states and modes of killing of these murderers are clear in the woodcuts which illustrate them, though neither is an exact representation of the events described. Rowse’s crime is solitary and secretive and the peaceful scene (below) shows the calmness and organisation of the events described in the pamphlet.



Woodcut from The Unnatural Father

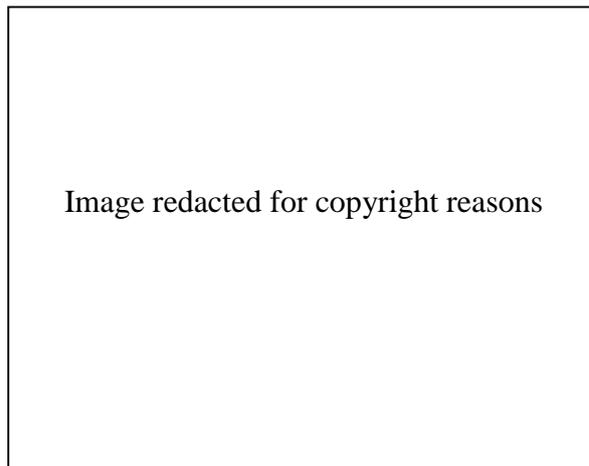
There is a sense of cleansing or baptism in an idyllic place, and the infant bodies are undamaged, yet his gaze and posture are distinctive, possibly shameless, possibly caught in the act. The Calverly illustration (below) is adapted from an earlier

¹⁵⁰ Adams, *English Domestic* (viii).

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* (74).

¹⁵² Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (142).

pamphlet.¹⁵³ His crime is watched by the devil (left) and his action appears frenzied and violent. It suggests defiled bodies and bloodshed, linking it with the destruction of his family bloodline. The movement and confusion of bodies echoes the events described in both the play and the pamphlet, as well as images of the massacre of the innocents, a subject discussed below.



Woodcut from Two most unnatural and bloodie Murthers

Sexual shame and motive

Sexual shame is often cited among unmarried women's motives for infanticide, but some men felt shame too. This section demonstrates that narratives concerning men's shame reveal exploited women, and deceitful clergy, and show that blame might be equally apportioned, or placed solely on the man.

The arraignment for hypocrisie comprises comments made by Mr. Barker, "a minister of Gods word", and his answers to questions, while awaiting execution for infanticide after he was "tempted to his lust" by a kinswoman in his care.¹⁵⁴ The murder is revealed because he is seen digging a grave and burying an infant's body in the garden by "a little Boy [...] in an Apple-tree gathering Apples", which associates Barker's crime with man's fall through the image of the garden, the innocence of the

¹⁵³ A more complete image, showing more of the Devil, surrounding scenery and a dog discovering a body, appears in Anon, *Sundrye strange*.

¹⁵⁴ Crowch, *Arraignment for hypocrisie*.

child, and the apple.¹⁵⁵ The woman, her maid, and Barker are found guilty and sentenced to hanging. The pamphlet mainly concerns Barker's regrets, including his crime's potential negative effect on others' belief and trust in his religion, and his fear of loss of salvation "Oh that I was assured of being his Servant! [...] Oh that the Lord would lift up the light of his countenance [...] Oh that the LORD would open up one little crevice to mee" and so on.¹⁵⁶ The questions put by visitors reveal something of his trial. He readily blames others, insisting that he had no hand in the murder. Asked "why and for what end he made the grave" his explanation is that "they told me [...] it was to receive such things as modest men and women may easily conceive what".¹⁵⁷ Asked why he had procured savin¹⁵⁸ (chapter 3) for his kinswoman, he answers that the maid had told that him "if she had some of that to take, it would bring down those things which used to come monethly, the stopping whereof made her so ill".¹⁵⁹

Although by the date of the pamphlet (1652) the murder of newborns had been defined as a crime committed by single women, despite Barker's denials in court, and despite the fact that he is ostensibly a respectable minister, he is condemned. Remarkably, this is on the evidence of a woman who has borne an illegitimate child, a maid who was probably of fairly lowly status, and a boy. They are all believed when the minister is not. The women later claim that they were lying, the maid saying it was "her bane", indicating her sense of guilt, and the infant's mother saying that she was "thinking to save her life".¹⁶⁰ Those in power clearly saw it differently as Barker and the women were hanged, the blame thus being equally apportioned.

The case of Robert Foulkes, another minister found guilty of infanticide, is described in two pamphlets of 1679. The first, *A true and perfect relation*, is a third person account of his crime, his and his lover's trial, and his condemnation.¹⁶¹ We learn that when the young woman whom he managed to "debauch to his bed" became pregnant he took her to London "under pretence of preferring her" and resolved to stay

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* (Av).

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* (A4).

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* (A5v).

¹⁵⁸ Savin, or juniper, is a known abortifacient and still in use. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs* (54).

¹⁵⁹ Crowch, *Araignment for hypocrisie* (A5v).

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* (A8v).

¹⁶¹ "True and Perfect". The name is given as Foulks in this publication.

with her “till the pains of Delivery should be over”.¹⁶² The writer then describes the subsequent events:

At length the fatal hour of her dreaded Travel approacht, and she by her lowd shrieks began to call for the welcome assistance of her own Sex, which is both decent and necessary in cases of that nature, but that it seems was utterly denied her by Mr. Foulks, who sternly oblig’d her to silence, protesting no body should perform that Office but himself. What pangs the poor woman endured by so painful a Delivery is best judg’d by those who have been experienced in those labours; but the wicked intent of this barbarous usage, could refer to nothing but the designed destruction of the unfortunate babe, whom he no sooner receiv’d into the world; but he cruelly cram’d it down a house of Office.¹⁶³

This extraordinary account penetrates the birth chamber in a manner redolent of medical texts.¹⁶⁴ Foulkes’ refusal to obtain female assistance during labour puts the woman’s life at risk, and would have been physically shaming at a time when even doctors performed any necessary obstetrical actions with the woman’s lower body covered. After the murder, Foulkes abandons the woman, but because of her “indisposition” she admits to another woman that she has given birth and the crime is revealed.

The representation of this case is unlike those which condemn women with their almost automatic assumption of their guilt. Here the man is vilified. Although both Foulkes and the woman plead not guilty, the references to her “dreaded Travel”, “lowd shrieks”, and the “pangs” of the “poor woman” are set up in direct opposition to the description of Foulkes’ “barbarous usage” when he “utterly denied” assistance and “sternly oblig’d her to silence”. We are told that “she not in the least consenting to the Murder, was both pittied and acquitted”. In contrast to this empathy for her ordeal, Foulkes, as a minister, receives no sympathy. We are told that “the Evidence against him was very clear and apparent” and after the verdict the author writes:

However obstinate Mr. Foulks seem'd in his Tryal, he quickly chang’d his carriage after Condemnation, for then he not only openly acknowledged his Guile, but very sorrowfully bewail’d the heynous nature of his horrid crime, which on better consideration he said, appeard to him in so terrible a shape, that it discompos’d and affrighted his very Soul.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² *ibid.* (np).

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ For a discussion of the privacy of the birth chamber see Paster, *Body Embarrassed* (186).

¹⁶⁵ “*True and Perfect*”.

After Foulkes' entreaties win him a nine-day reprieve he writes his *Alarme for sinners* which contains his "confessions, prayers, letters, and last words".¹⁶⁶ If this document was intended to elicit sympathy, the hindsight of centuries has the effect of making him look considerably worse. There is plenty of verbal self-flagellation as he admits the shame of his sexual liaison. "[I] delivered my self to work all uncleanness with greediness; I had eyes of adultery that could not cease from sin" (5). He admits being "a very slave to my lust, and in absolute vassalage to my flesh"; "I am a Dog" (5,9). But he emphasises that the cause of all this is the woman and she and others of her sex are constructed as whores. "She was easily tempted by me, and proved afterward a constant temptation to me" (6). From the prison, and later from the place of execution, the adulterous murderer warns readers:

be not ensnared by a Whores charms; trust not to her kindnesses [...] they lead on to all manner of sin; they will waste your Estate, divide your Family, ruin your Health, destroy your soul; and if ever you need her friendship, she will most perfidiously betray you (7).

It gets worse. Having admitted his sexual shame, his subsequent actions are shameless. Accusations have been made against Foulkes, which he now denies because he does not want those at the trial to have "their belief warpt to uncharitableness". He was told that at the trial he had been seen "Gazing about the Court and the Galleries, where Sate several Gentlewomen". Foulkes responds that he was "formerly too apt to delight in such sights" but on this occasion he sought to "spy out some Witnesses I thought Material, which though they were in Court I could not find, and so lost their Evidence". Other accusations were made by the woman Foulkes refers to as his "Partner in the Guilt and Tryal, though not in the Condemnation". He denies her claims that he was her guardian since her minority and that he attempted to "vitate her" when she was nine years old. He also denies her accusation that he was solely responsible for the killing: "both her Eyes did see, and her Hands did Act in all that was done". However, like Mr Barker who was condemned on the evidence of the woman, her maid, and a child, the woman Foulkes has wronged is believed rather than a man of the church.

¹⁶⁶ Foulkes, *Alarme for sinners*. The pamphlet includes Foulkes' letters to his wife, his children, to his successor in his parish, and to the parishioners there.

These pamphlets, like works discussed in earlier chapters, show the lack of clarity surrounding the murder of newborns and men's attempts to deflect guilt onto the woman. They demonstrate the alternative versions of events which can surround cases and the extent to which accounts can hover between factual accuracy and fiction, often deploying emotive language and/or rhetoric to direct the reader's sympathy, and revealing early modern attitudes.

As in the Robert Foulkes case, woman's innocence in contrast to the man's evils is an aspect of *The Strange and Wonderful Relation*, in which infanticide is represented through the lens of anti-Catholicism.¹⁶⁷ The murderer is Robert Brown, a "Romish-Priest" who uses "Diabolick Intreague" to seduce a "very beautiful young Virgin" and thereby satisfy his "insatiate lust" (6). When his argument to her that "*Though marriage was forbid, enjoyment was not*" has no effect he resorts to "certain powerful Drugs to incence and stir up an impatient desire to venereal Copulation" which he administers in a glass of wine, suggesting perversion of the Eucharist (6,7). He later knocks at her chamber door and when she "most obstinately denyed" admittance, he tells her that "he had business of importance (he being her Confessor) and so with much intreaty and many protestations of civility, obtained entrance". Then "partly by violence and partly by the operation of the Drug, with her consent he obtained his desire and blasted all her Virgin honours" (7). Realising a "growing shame" would be the result, he tries to arrange a marriage for the woman, and when that fails he attempts unsuccessfully "to spoil conception or to cause an obortive [*sic*] delivery". We are then told:

She was delivered of a Son, unknown to any but the Priest, her self, and her Maid-servant; no sooner was the Infant born, but the aforesaid Brown (as he pretended to prevent discovery and save the Gentlewomans credit) did with a pennknife barbarously murder it, and for a more secret conveyance, cast it into a pond in the Orchard, with a mossy stone about its neck (8).

When the crime is discovered the woman is found guilty of being an accessory and sentenced to death but "by the mediation of Friends, at much cost and trouble, obtained a reprieve".¹⁶⁸ The pamphlet abhors Brown's papistry as much as his crime, and even his lechery is set up as a negative aspect of his religion. It shows a priest's betrayal of trust when invited to take up residence with a family, and his abuse of his role as a

¹⁶⁷ Anon, *The strange and Wonderful Relation of a Barbarous Murder* (1679).

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.* (8).

confessor which allows him access to the woman's bedroom after she has retired. It emphasises the danger of sharing a home with a priest, and the habit of secrecy which this encouraged. These ideas of sin, downfall and Brown's corruption of innocence are reflected in the pamphlet's biblical imagery, an important aspect of this work which merits further investigation.

The language used to describe the woman's action when she is offered wine "which the young woman drank of" reflects the prelapsarian innocence of Eve: "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Genesis, 3.6). The oblique reference establishes the priest as the snake, the precipitator of man's fall, while prefiguring the woman's imminent downfall and her experience of God's curse in childbirth: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis, 3.16). Of the priest, however, the author writes:

So cruel and inhumaine are all those who bear the mark of the Beast in their foreheads, and worship the Scarlet whore who is made drunk with the blood of the Saints.¹⁶⁹

This passage uses the apocalyptic language of Revelation, referring to the mark on those who worship the Antichrist and will receive God's wrath. It suggests St John's vision in which angels pour vials upon the sea which "became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea" which links with Brown's defiling of water by throwing the newborn's body into a pond after cutting its throat.¹⁷⁰ His Catholicism is also deprecated by the reference to the Whore of Babylon who, in Revelation, appears "arrayed in purple and scarlet" and holds a cup "full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication", recalling the glass of wine which Brown gave the woman.¹⁷¹ In Tyndale's *The Practyse of prelates*, the whore stands for the Pope: "now if that great baude the whore of babylon were destroyed, then wold the bordel and stues of our prelates shortly perish".¹⁷² The idea is further developed in the Geneva Bible: "This woman is the Anti-christ, that is, the Pope with the whole bodie of his filthie creatures". By the date of the pamphlet the whore's scarlet may also have become associated with

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Revelation, 16.3-4.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.* 17.5-6

¹⁷² William Tyndale, *The practyse of prelates* (1548) (2Cv).

the red of cardinals' robes.¹⁷³ These allusions also call on Revelation's description of imminent infanticide. Nancy Grubb writes:

There are good women in Revelation and there are wicked ones, serving as opponents to and allies of the beasts. The woman clothed with the sun makes her first appearance at the same point [...] as the great red dragon, and their immediate conflict symbolizes the battle between good and evil. The woman (identified by many commentators as a symbol of Israel or Jerusalem) is preparing to give birth; the dragon stands before her, ready to devour the newborn baby (symbol of Christ and the church). As soon as her child is born, he is whisked away up to the safety of God's throne.¹⁷⁴

Death at the moment of birth is the fate of infants fathered by the men of the church discussed above. Mr. Barker, Robert Foulkes, and Robert Brown can all be seen as the "red dragon" who waits to "devour" the newborn, though whether readers believed these infants were indeed "whisked away up to the safety of God's throne" would have depended on their beliefs about the need for infant baptism to ensure salvation. This point troubled Robert Foulkes:

It is indeed, a great Aggravation of my Sin against that poor Infant; [...] For by that barbarous Act upon its Body, I have done what in me lay to Murder its Soul, by depriving it of the ordinary means which God had ordained for its Salvation, The Sacrament of Baptism [...] I never once so much as considered this; so that the poor innocent and harmless Babe, is only beholding to the Mercy of its Heavenly, and not at all to that of its Earthly Parent for the Happiness I hope it now enjoys.¹⁷⁵

Fear, shame, cynical prior planning or panic have contributed to an action which went against Foulkes' most fundamental beliefs and all the teachings of his profession.

While it remains true that most infanticide was committed by women, it is clear that the role of men was also significant. Sussex Coroners' reports include men as killers or having a direct role in infant deaths. Infants were at risk from men before and immediately after birth, and during their early years. Literature supplies the detail missing in the archives. These accounts show that, as when a woman committed infanticide, the fear of poverty and sexual shame could be motives for men. Alcohol, never mentioned in female cases, might also contribute.

¹⁷³ de Bèze, *Geneva Bible* (Ch.xvii, v.4, note f).

¹⁷⁴ Nancy Grubb, *Revelations: Art of the Apocalypse* (London: Abbeville, 1997) (55). The reference is to Revelation (12.3-4).

¹⁷⁵ Foulkes, *Alarme for sinners* (21).

Literary and archival accounts indicate that two factors distinguish the killings by men from those by women. Firstly, we have seen that literature depicts the men's crimes as more calculated; they ensure lack of witnesses (John Rowse), take women on doomed walks (William Barwick), or rent London accommodation (Robert Foulkes), all suggesting a greater ability to construct events surrounding the crime or to create false narratives around their actions, and to control money. Secondly, both literature and archives describe men's killings as involving extreme violence – stabbing, beating, crushing (see Appendix 7). Whereas infanticides committed by women often involve the “deadly embrace” of smothering or strangling, those by men suggest overwhelming strength.¹⁷⁶ Sussex archives show that with women there is the sense of liminality through the return to water (Appendix 5), or of abjection and disposal (Appendix 4). With men the dominating sense is of bloodshed and destruction.

The infant and dynasty

As well as infants and young children who are killed because of money, mental disharmony, shame, or alcohol there are others who are killed for dynastic reasons. Herod's massacre of the innocents is the most infamous infanticide in western culture. His motive is dynastic: he orders the killing of male infants in Bethlehem because it is prophesied that out of that town “shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel”.¹⁷⁷ This section looks at early modern literature in which men commit infanticide for dynastic motives. It examines the representational decision which writers, particularly playwrights, had to make concerning whether the infant killings should be shown or merely described; the use of the dynastic child as a weapon; and the use of infant killing in dramatic imagery.

Showing and telling

The biblical account of the massacre of the innocents describes Herod ordering the killings, and the mothers' grief which fulfils Jeremiah's prophecy: “a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children [...] because they were not”. It does not describe the slaughter.¹⁷⁸ Those who created the

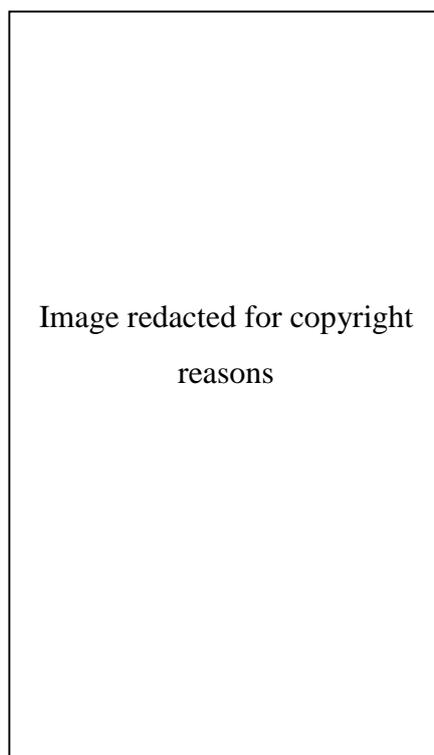
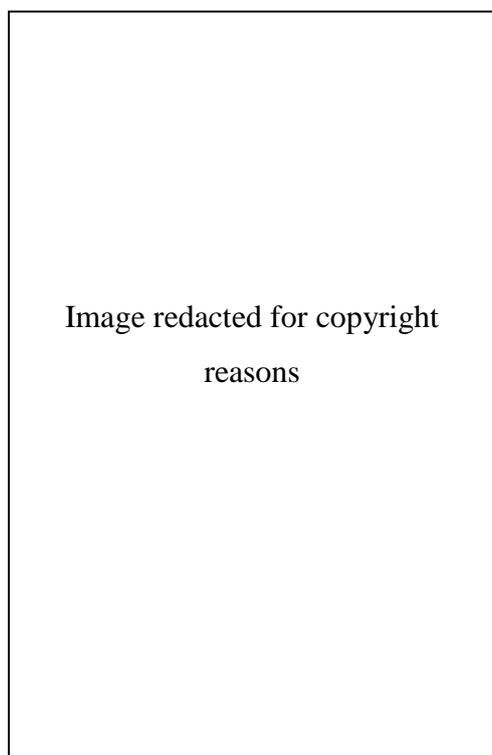
¹⁷⁶ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (156).

¹⁷⁷ Matthew, 2.6.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew, 2.18; Jeremiah, 31.15.

earliest representations of the massacre had to choose whether or not to include the killings, as seen in the earliest visual representations of the story.

The fifth-century mosaic on the triumphal arch in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, (below left) has a highly public presence suggesting the image's didactic role. Its three sections depict important points in the Nativity: the Annunciation, Adoration of the Magi, and the Massacre. There is no despot giving the order to kill, possibly for political reasons, and no children are slaughtered. Instead, the mothers are shown protecting their infants, emphasising care rather than carnage. It is a pure, sanitised image in which rulers are slaughterers only by implication, and mothers are nourishers.



Contrasting representations. Left: Triumphal Arch, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Right: Augsburg Gospel

In contrast, the ninth-century Augsburg Gospel illumination (above right) is a private image which would have been seen by few and was probably intended as a stimulus to contemplation. Again, it divides the story into three parts, though this time they are Herod's order to his soldiers, the massacre, and the women's mourning. There is blood, but no drawn swords are seen. The children are flung to their deaths, recalling Psalm 137: "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth / thy little ones against the

stones”.¹⁷⁹ The cruciform structure links the children with the crucifixion, and their role as the first Christian martyrs.

In England, the massacre was depicted in (now deteriorated) medieval wall paintings, whose creators also had to decide the extent to which to show the killings. The depiction at Croughton, Northants (below), which is more legible than most, focuses on both the mother’s role and the violence of the killers, including the “dangled infant” (centre back), an image which recurs through the centuries.¹⁸⁰



*Massacre of the Innocents wall painting,
Croughton, Northants, c.1310*

Some visual representations show Herod witnessing the massacre, emphasising his physical as well as moral responsibility for the deaths. As his is normally the largest figure, condemnation of corrupt regal power is an aspect of the images. Depictions of the massacre by later artists, such as Giotto (1266/7-1337)¹⁸¹ and Caroto (1480-1526/9),¹⁸² give the women a dominant presence and depict their courageous physical confrontation with their aggressors, as well as their grief.

¹⁷⁹ Psalms, 137.9

¹⁸⁰ Anne Marshall, “*Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*” www.paintedchurch.org [Accessed 4/1/2013].

¹⁸¹ Giotto (1303-05), Capella degli Scrovegni, Padua.

¹⁸² Giovanni Francesco Caroto (1501), Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

For those creating works for performance, the choice between graphic description or visual implication which faced artists became a question of whether to show the massacre on stage or only the reaction to it. This choice faced the creators of Corpus Christi cycles, and the Coventry Shearmen and Taylors' play. In these works, Herod's role is large and frequently involves ranting "I stampe! I stare! I loke all aboutt!"¹⁸³ The massacre is always included, though the manner of its representation varies, particularly the women's defiance of the soldiers. The one-to-one series of confrontations in the Wakefield cycle gives a sense of formality, although the women clearly attack physically and verbally. "Out on thee I cry! Have at thy groin / Another!"¹⁸⁴ The women's rhyming verses in the York massacre suggest control and dignity:

Alas for dole, I die,
To save my son shall I
Ay-whiles my life may last.¹⁸⁵

Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King write that this play is in a "largely lyrical and passive vein" and avoids the "keening and screaming" and "coarse invective" of other plays.¹⁸⁶ Yet other texts give a greater sense of the confrontational commotion. The East Anglian *Ludus Coventriae* cycle gives the single stage instruction "*Tunc ibunt milites ad pueros occidendos*" (Then the soldiers go to the children who are to be killed) – followed by two verses of female lament which describe the effect of the soldiers' actions:

With swappyng swerde now is he shorn,
the heed right fro the nekke!
Shanke and shulderyn is al to-torn!¹⁸⁷

In the Chester and Coventry plays the women are stronger and more feisty. In Chester they kick and fight with distaffs. In the Coventry play the killings are preceded by a moment's calm with the mothers singing the "Coventry carol" before the soldiers

¹⁸³ Hardin Craig, ed. *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays* (London: Early English Text Society, 1902) (779).

¹⁸⁴ Martial Rose, ed. *The Wakefield Plays* (London: Evans, 1961) (233).

¹⁸⁵ Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, eds., *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: OUP, 2009) (95).

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.* (88).

¹⁸⁷ Stephen Spector, ed. *The N-Town Play* (Oxford: OUP, 1991) (92). Martial Rose suggests the effect was achieved by using dolls with detachable heads. Rose, *The Wakefield Plays* (262).

enter. In a scene of mounting tension, mothers beg for their children's lives with pleading: "But on my child have pytte" – and they fight with ladles.¹⁸⁸ After the slaughter a soldier says: "Who hard [*sic*] eyuer soche a cry / Of wemen thatt there chylder have lost",¹⁸⁹ again confirming the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Beadle and King's criticism of such "keening and screaming"¹⁹⁰ overlooks the dramatic and emotional impact of the moment on contemporary audiences, and the humanity the play adds to the cool biblical account of the events.

Early modern dramatists, like medieval artists, had to decide whether infanticide should be implied, described, or shown. Shakespeare confronts the killing of infants in several plays, using different modes of representation. His works concerning power-hungry monarchs – *Richard III*, *King John* and *Macbeth* – are variations of the instruction/murder/mourning structure seen in visual depictions (p. 238) and early drama. In the first two he follows the instruction/mourning patterns.

Richard III, a king with Herodian characteristics, instructs the murderers, and although the killing is off-stage, we hear the mother mourning the deaths – "My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets" (IV.iv.10) – in a metaphor which extends the imagery used by the killer after the murders: "Their lips were four red roses on a stalk" (IV.iii.1). Shakespeare shows the emotional impact on the killer, who calls his action a "tyrannous and bloody deed" and "The most arch-act of piteous massacre" (IV.iv.10). In *King John*, it is clear who orders Prince Arthur's death, but Shakespeare focuses on Hubert's inability to commit the act: "I must be brief lest resolution drop / Out at my eyes in tender womanish tears" (IV.i.35). Refusal to murder a child is also seen in *The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors*, when a soldier questions Herod's order: "To see soo many yong chylder dy ys schame / Therefore consell ther-to gettis thou non of me" (though the threat of the gallows changes his thinking).¹⁹¹ In *King John*, as in *Richard III*, Shakespeare describes the reaction to infant death. In response to Arthur's accidental on-stage death, we are told:

¹⁸⁸ Craig, *Coventry Plays* (849).

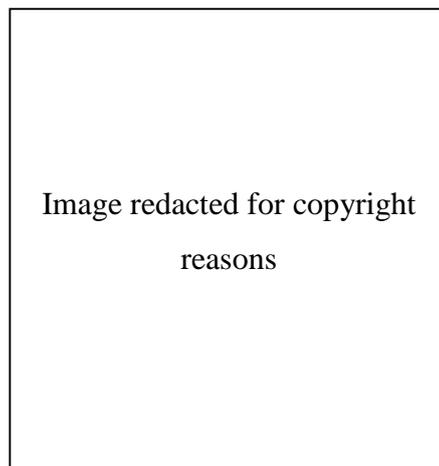
¹⁸⁹ *ibid.* (870).

¹⁹⁰ Beadle and King, *York Plays* (88).

¹⁹¹ Craig, *Coventry Plays* (795).

Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths,
And when they talk of him they shake their heads
And whisper one another in the ear (IV.ii.188).

Macbeth, the latest of these works, is Shakespeare's most explicit representation of child murder and closest to the representation of the massacre of the innocents in the Coventry play, which Shakespeare may have seen.¹⁹² As Sarah Wintle and René Weis note "the play continually comes back to its concern with children and babies".¹⁹³ These are frequently "children old enough to take part in the action,"¹⁹⁴ though they appear to be within the early modern definition of "infant", as discussed in my introduction. The play is also imbued with the violence of infant death, as in the witches' "finger of birth-strangled babe, / Ditch delivered by a drab" (IV.i.30). Their prophecies, represented by a "bloody child" and a "bloody arm", suggest the dismemberment of the witches' brew. Lady Macbeth's image of the destruction of a breastfed child (in a scene I discuss further below) again emphasises the ease of terminating an infant's life. Her assertion that she would have "dash'd the brains out" of her child rather than break a promise recalls the image from the ninth-century Augsburg gospel and is uncannily like a fifteenth-century mural in the Hospital of Santo Spirito, Rome in which the killer's expression is strangely trance-like.¹⁹⁵



"I would have dash'd the brains out" Detail of the mural in Ospedale di Santo Spirito, Sassia, Rome (late 1470s)

¹⁹² Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) (241).

¹⁹³ Sarah Wintle and René Weis, "Macbeth and the Barren Sceptre", *Essays in Criticism*, XLI (1991) 128-146 (129).

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* (130).

¹⁹⁵ For an illuminating discussion of the history and significance of these murals see Presciutti, "Dead Infants". Image, © Eunice D. Howe, reproduced from this paper.

Like Herod, Macbeth orders the children's death because they endanger his kingship and we see them murdered in a violent scene in which the mother defends her children, as in the mystery plays. Again, Shakespeare shows the grief of child death:

Macduff: All my pretty ones?
Did you say all? – O hell-kite! – All?
What, all my pretty chickens, and their dam
At one fell swoop? (IV.iii.216)

Representations of infanticide in Shakespeare are juxtaposed with the effects of the infant deaths: the conscience provoked by the princes' deaths, the nation's mourning at Arthur's death, and Macduff's mourning of his children. He contrasts rampaging monarchical power with children's precocious wisdom (a parallel with Christ's amazing of the elders in the Temple). Such infants fill despots with fear, as expressed in Richard III's "Foes to my rest and my sweet sleep's disturbers" (IV.ii.72), and King John's "a very serpent in my way" (III.iii.61), in a manner similar to Herod's fear of the infant Christ.

The dynastic child as weapon

In drama, children perceived to be dynastic obstacles are also used as weapons. In *The Duchess of Malfi* a complex combination of motives stimulates Ferdinand's actions. In addition to his "incestuous passion for her",¹⁹⁶ he suspects the children's bastardy, and disdains Antonio's status: "Shall our blood / The royal blood of Aragon and Castile, / Be thus attainted? (II.v.22); "A slave, that only smelled of ink and counters" (III.ii.71). He also realises his own greed is thwarted: "I had a hope [...] to have gained / An infinite mass of treasure" (IV.ii.282). However, when he reveals the apparently dead bodies of the Duchess's children "To bring her to despair" (IV.i.117) they have become a weapon against her.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes' denial of Perdita uses the child as a weapon against Hermione. When Paulina lays the infant down, she is using it as a weapon against Leontes – the equivalent to throwing down of gages in chivalric challenge. Leontes transfers the challenge to Antigonus – "Take up the bastard / Take't up, I say" –

¹⁹⁶ Webster, "Duchess of Malfi" (xix).

commencing a verbal duel between the two men (III.ii.74). More complex use of the infant as a weapon is in *2 Henry VI*:

Like an offensive wife,
That hath enrag'd him on, to offer strokes,
As he is striking, holds his Infant up,
And hangs resolv'd Correction in the Arme,
That was uprear'd to execution. (IV.ii.210)

The metaphor hangs between male and female aggression. The child is a shield and the lines draw on the idea of a crucifix or Bible, symbols of good, held up against an Antichrist. Yet, the wife is also using the infant as a weapon against her aggressor who would himself die if he killed the child.

Shakespeare uses gruesome images of child carnage, juxtaposed with the mourning of women, to describe the horrors of conflict. In *2 Henry VI*, when Young Clifford realises that he has killed his father in battle, he sees his enemies' children as an appropriate sacrifice through which to exert revenge and punishment:

Meet I an infant of the house of York
Into as many gobbets will I cut it
As wild Medea young Absyrtus did. (V.ii.56)

Mark Antony foresees such horrors resulting from Caesar's assassination: "Mothers shall but smile when they behold / Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war" (*Julius Caesar* III.i.270). Infant slaughter is part of Timon's rancour toward mankind: "Spare not the babe [...] Think it a bastard [...] mince it sans remorse" and do not be moved by "yells of mothers, maids, nor babes" (*Timon of Athens* IV.iii.19). In *Henry V*, the king uses children and mothers' grief to force the citizens of Harfleur to surrender: if they resist they must look to see:

Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen. (III.iii.121)

These descriptions of infant slaughter spoken by men share the language of butchery: spitted, gobbets, mince, quarter'd. They are placed late in long speeches of building emotional intensity, with infant destruction toward the climax of mounting horrors. They dehumanise children, reducing them to sacrificial creatures, using them as a symbol of societies' or families' survival, of oppression, or social pollution. Yet,

despite their brutal content, these lines also humanise the child. They assume parental affection not just in the world of the play, but in the audience. Without it, the shock of this imagery would be ineffective.

Image redacted for
copyright reasons



The enduring image of infant butchery. Left: Details from the Paris Psalter, early 13th c., French; Right Tapestry in Collegiale de Notre Dame, Beaune, 15th c.

Just as brutal slaughter and weeping mothers can be traced to medieval sources, so too can the visual and written representations of child butchery (see above). In *Ludus Coventriae* a soldier, returning to Herod, boasts:

Upon my spere
A gerle I bere,
I dare well swere.
Lett moderys howte!¹⁹⁷

The infant body carried on a spear, with its elements of trophy, the spoils of the hunt, and the spiked heads of executed traitors, emphasises the violence of these murders. Like the idea of the dashed child, it is an enduring image.

More violent than liminal

A lingering question is, are there aspects of liminality in these narratives about men and infanticide? To an extent, yes, in that accounts occasionally imply a liminal mental state when describing the men's actions, suggesting that they may be physically

¹⁹⁷ Spector, *N-Town Play* (109). Howte: cry out, hoot.

of this world, but mentally not quite part of it, such as the archival account of the “lunatick” Henry Pellyng who murdered his pregnant wife. Literary accounts suggest drunken rages, with men separated from logical action by alcohol. Beyond that, the effect of drawing male child-murderers out of the archival and academic shadows in which they seem to lurk reveals little that can be seen as liminal.

Instead, focussing on men and infanticide reveals other points. In literature, we have seen that men of all social levels and occupations could be guilty of, or directly implicated in, the crime: butchers, coopers, clergy, those of the “better sort” such as Rowse and Calverly, nobility and monarchs. Their motives vary as much as their status – it could be money, sexual shame, jealousy, or power, or the crime could be apparently motiveless.

Accounts of men and infanticide describe their lies. Certainly, women must have done this too, but in street literature women are represented as accepting their guilt, whereas the accounts draw attention to men’s denials. John Rowse tells his wife that the murdered children are with a neighbour; William Barwick tells neighbours that his wife is with a relative. The “Bloody Miller” tells us that “my bloody fact I still denied”,¹⁹⁸ Foulkes calls the infant’s mother his “Partner in the Guilt and Tryal, though not in the Condemnation”.¹⁹⁹

However, the most noticeable difference between infanticide by men and women, is the way they murdered. Most, though not all, of the killings by women recorded in Sussex archives suggest water, spirituality, and “deadly embrace”, as described in Chapters 1 and 2. Killings and attempted killings by men are distinguished by extreme brutality and force, such as the case of William Spookes, who beat his six-year-old son to death. The account is more detailed and descriptive than most, which may suggest the horror of those recording the events. We are told that Spookes:

bound his hands and feet, hung him up by the shins, struck him, giving him many wounds so that blood fell from his body to the ground, and then allowed him to fall to the ground. As he lay there, Spookes struck, punched and trampled on him, crushing his body.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Anon, *Bloody Miller*.

¹⁹⁹ Foulkes, *Alarme for sinners* (20).

²⁰⁰ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558* (37 #132).

After the child's death Spookes buried him in his barn, face down. Due to defects in the inquest, he was later pardoned. In street literature, older children are similarly violently killed. *Strange and Lamentable News* tells of a water seller whose twelve-year-old son died after he attacked him with a cudgel "cruelly and excessively".²⁰¹ *The Cryes of the dead* describes a weaver who violently assaulted apprentices: "Spurning and kicking them, / as if dogs they had beene".²⁰² When he beats one boy "from top to toe, / With a coard full of knotts" the boy dies of the wounds. The illustration shows an action which is similar to the Spookes case, and the description of Walter Calverly "holding up the bleeding childe at his armes length"²⁰³.



The violence described in archives, pamphlets and plays can be seen in the illustration from Cryes of the dead

Many of the street literature accounts discussed above involve a knife, but there is no suggestion of them being intimate domestic objects. Instead they suggest masculine spheres – hunting, war, animal slaughter, and butchery. Though women did use knives, and men did drown infants, on the whole the crimes by men are bloody compared to those of women. As we have seen, this bloodiness can be traced to early Christian images of the massacre of the innocents and medieval Corpus Christi plays. These crimes are not liminal but, like the killings ordered by Herod, they are brutal and demonic. Authors emphasise this. Their accounts of killings by men are highly

²⁰¹ Anon, *Strange and Lamentable News from Dullidg-Wells* (1678), (5).

²⁰² Anon, *The cryes of the Dead* (1620); Griffiths, *Youth and Authority* (313).

²⁰³ Anon, *Two most unnaturall* (13).

descriptive, concentrating on the details of the murders, rather than the killers. They encourage visualisation of violent, bloody and manic actions, and are thus highly emotive.

Conclusion: *Macbeth*'s recurring themes

Macbeth has been mentioned several times in this chapter and I wish to conclude by returning to this play, which unites ideas of maternal infanticide (in Lady Macbeth's infanticidal fantasy), the deadly or denied breast (in her desire to replace her milk with gall) and men as killers (in Macbeth's instruction to kill Macduff's family and its on-stage performance). Shakespeare's handling of these ideas is not straightforward and they appear, as Wintle and Weis observe, in a work which continually returns to ideas of children and infants, and places infanticide at the centre of its analysis of what it is to be human.²⁰⁴

Lady Macbeth's reference to infant slaughter is frequently taken to mean that she was infanticidal, perhaps because its descriptive richness gives it verisimilitude:

I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn (I.vii.56).

Marguerite A. Tassi, for example, states that the lines show "the malevolent maternal will to kill one's own progeny" and "a wife's steely relinquishment of maternity and progeny for the sake of her marital bond",²⁰⁵ whereas Stephanie Chamberlain argues for the importance of what the child signifies.²⁰⁶ Another viewpoint is offered by Burrow, who suggests she is "attempting to transform herself into an ancient Scottish equivalent to Seneca's Medea".²⁰⁷ However, "would have" is a conditional statement in the past with no chance of fulfilment. As Coleridge clarified centuries ago, she is claiming she would have done "that which was most horrible to her feelings" rather than break an oath and that she "considered no tie so tender as that which connected her with her

²⁰⁴ Wintle and Weis, "Macbeth" (129, 140).

²⁰⁵ Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011) (62).

²⁰⁶ Stephanie Chamberlain, "Fantisizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England", *College Literature*, 32.3 (2005) 72-91.

²⁰⁷ Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (191).

babe".²⁰⁸ Tassi calls it "a potent rhetorical act".²⁰⁹ The play does not suggest that she could have done what she describes. On the contrary, the blood-steeped imagery of the sleepwalking, in which she recalls the massacre of Macduff's family, suggests her inability to have acted on her claim. Nor can she murder Duncan who, as Adelman points out, Shakespeare partially constructs as a child, making him androgynous (as were infants) and drawing attention to his construction as a sleeping, satiated child with "infantile vulnerability".²¹⁰ Lady Macbeth's reasoning – "had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't" (2.2.12) – another past conditional statement – suggests that familial blood is important to her and, as Phyllis Rackin points out, she has no taste for real blood.²¹¹ She can envisage the killing of the "infant" Duncan and her own (non-existent) child, but she cannot act on her imaginings. That her rich imaginative life develops into sleepwalking nightmares appears psychologically accurate. Rather than being "capable of discarding her gender and killing children"²¹² she has murderous imaginings which emerge as nightmares. Her claimed ability to have committed infanticide exists in a liminal, dream or fantasy world, not an embodied one.

Fears of the infanticidal wife merged with those concerning the deadly breast. We have seen that tracts which criticised mothers who did not nurse their own children shared rhetorical features with sensational pamphlets about infant murder, and subverted the traditional image of the breast as a symbol of charity and nourishment, by turning it into a potential site of death. This rhetorical similarity is seen in shared motifs of casting forth or making away, of unwomanliness or unnaturalness, of animality, and of devouring or disfiguring the nurtured infant. This, I suggested, is associated with changing attitudes to charity and the family and a nostalgia for pre-Reformation imagery. The idea of the deadly breast recurs in *Macbeth*. The reference to Lady Macbeth dashing (or casting forth) her feeding infant and the murdered and dismembered infant of the witches' cauldron both contribute to constructing a dangerous world for infants, which culminates in Macduff's family's murder. However, Lady Macbeth's "Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers" (I.v.47) reverses pamphlet discourses which discourage the

²⁰⁸ Cited in Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. K. Muir (London: Macmillan, 1984) (notes 42).

²⁰⁹ Tassi, *Women and Revenge* (62).

²¹⁰ Adelman, "Born of Woman" (103).

²¹¹ Rackin, *Shakespeare* (124).

²¹² Tassi, *Women and Revenge* (61).

use of wetnurses by constructing the *maternal* breast as death-inducing. Rackin suggests that in *Macbeth* Shakespeare seems to advocate maternal breastfeeding “as a distinctively female activity which expresses the gendered gentleness that is the natural disposition of all women in every time and place”.²¹³ Yet this is a corruption of the image of maternal nurture, as in the *Henry VI* plays mentioned above in which infants die at the maternal breast, or milk can be substituted with ratsbane.

As well as participating in discourses about infanticidal wives and breastfeeding, *Macbeth* centres on questions of gender.²¹⁴ Adelman states that the play “gives us images of a masculinity and a femininity that are terribly disturbed,” as in Lady Macbeth’s “Unsex me here [...] / Stop up the th’access and passage to remorse” (I.v.41), which, she suggests may be an attempt to “undo reproductive functioning”.²¹⁵ Such questioning of gender appears to be a prerequisite for Shakespeare to link women with infanticide. The gender of the witches, who use dismembered and bloody infants in their brew and their prophecies, is challenged: “You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so” (I.iii.45). Similarly, in *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora’s “christen it with a dagger’s point” (IV.ii.70) is preceded by Lavinia’s “O Tamora, thou bearest a woman’s face” and “No grace, no womanhood” (II.iii.136, 82). Lady Macbeth fears Macbeth is “too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness” to kill Duncan (I.v.16.), later asking “are you a man” (III.iv.57) and describing him as “unmanned” when he believes he sees Banquo’s ghost (III.iv.73). Before these characters commit infanticide, Shakespeare represents them as degendered – neither male nor female – suggesting the betweenness of liminality as a place where such crimes can be committed.

However, the task of killing infants falls to men, and it is hasty. Both Macbeth’s instruction to commission the deaths (IV.i.150) and the murderous act, (IV.ii.80) are quick and textually sparse. Like Herod, Macbeth needs infants killed for dynastic reasons and, like his biblical predecessor, he delegates the work. As in the Mystery plays, the killings are on-stage and brutal and followed by mourning, this time by a man (Macduff) in another questioning of gendered roles, emphasised by Malcolm’s assertion

²¹³ Rackin, *Shakespeare* (115).

²¹⁴ The subject of the confused gendering of the Macbeths is discussed in Wintle and Weis, “Macbeth”; Adelman, “Born of Woman”; Rackin, *Shakespeare*.

²¹⁵ Adelman, “Born of Woman” (97).

that Macduff must “dispute it like a man” (IV.iii.220). Macbeth’s commissioning of the deaths reflects the pattern we have seen in street literature which repeatedly demonstrates male ability to organise, structure and manipulate events in a manner which appears to separate them from the killings.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare represents the range of ways in which infant lives were threatened by the violence of murderous mothers, the death lurking in the maternal breast, and omnipotent men. This suggests social awareness of the infanticidal potential of these people and situations. We have seen in this chapter that infanticide was both a genuine fear and a social reality: married women did kill their infants, often within the framework of apparently companionate marriages which went wrong. As we have seen above and in Chapter 3, infanticide can be due to perinatal trauma, but married women also killed for revenge, and sometimes to make a point about their perceived ill-treatment. Whether nourished by its mother or a nurse, an infant was in danger at the breast. They were also in danger from men, no matter what their social level, who might destroy them because they were discontented or disappointed with their lives, or might feel the need to destroy them as perceived obstacles.

The majority of the historical and literary examples of infanticide in the Tudor and Stuart periods were carried out by single women, yet drama, street literature and archives show that married women, and men, were also guilty of the crime. These cases, which this chapter has discussed, come together in *Macbeth*, a play which emphasises the complex and multi-faceted nature of the crime and which continues the image of Medea, the child-murdering wife, and Herod, the dynastic slaughterer of infants.

Interlude: Infanticide in Literature and Culture 1700-1950

The period 1700 to 1950 has been the subject of many dedicated investigations, such as Mark Jackson's and Lionel Rose's historical studies and Josephine McDonagh's work on the motifs of child murder in literature.¹ The purpose of this short interlude is not to reiterate their discussions, but briefly to highlight some of the principal social changes which took place during this period and to demonstrate that, during the 250 years bringing us to the mid-twentieth century, literature continued to associate infanticide with the liminal.

The abundance of archival material for this period demonstrates that the crime remained complex and its circumstances individual. It also reveals a continuation of motives recurring throughout this study. Poverty, fear, shame, abandonment, and reputation remain constants against a background of changing laws, dramatic industrial development, and new perceptions of children and childhood.² After the 1803 repeal of the 1624 Infanticide Act women were assumed innocent unless proven otherwise, with evidence required that the child was fully born and existing independently of the mother when it died.³ However, a cruel amendment to the Poor Law in 1834 made it more difficult for an unmarried woman to claim support from the child's father, and was believed to have led to infanticide.⁴ Ann R. Higginbotham quotes the man at the centre of Frances Trollope's 1843 novel *Jessie Phillips*: "It is just one of my little bits of good luck that this blessed law should be passed precisely when it was likely to be most beneficial to me".⁵ The comment echoes Oliver, the would-be seducer in Brome's *The*

¹ Mark Jackson, *New-born child murder: women, illegitimacy and the Courts in 18th-century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Mark Jackson, ed. *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder in British Culture 1720-1900* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Lionel Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain 1800-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

² Mark Jackson, "The trial of Harriet Vooght: continuity and change in the history of infanticide" in Jackson, *Infanticide*, 1-17.

³ Further changes to the law in 1922 and 1938 made infanticide a form of manslaughter. Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents* (10).

⁴ Jackson, "The trial of Harriet Vooght"; Ann R. Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age': Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London", *Victorian Studies*, 32.3 (1989) 319-337 (325); Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents*.

⁵ Higginbotham, "'Sin of the Age'" (322).

Jovial Crew, discussed in Chapter 4: “There’s no commuting with them; or keeping of Children for them”.⁶

The liminal mother

We saw in Chapter 2 that the complex emotions surrounding pregnancy suggested a liminal mental state and women’s detachment from their actions. Awareness of, and sympathy for this increased with time, and insanity and similar pleas were frequently presented as defence.⁷ Recognition of the effect of appalling social conditions – people existing on the social margins – also invited compassion and there were fewer hangings.⁸ Christine L. Krueger suggests juries’ and public understanding may also have been influenced by representations in literature.⁹ This included the fraught relationship which can exist between a mother and her unborn child. Wordsworth’s Gothic poem “The Thorn” (1798), based on the true story of Martha Ray, describes her wandering in the hills before the murder, and her derangement:

Sad case for such a brain to hold
Communion with a stirring child!
Sad case, as you may think, for one
Who had a brain so wild!¹⁰

Krueger writes that works such as “The Thorn”, Walter Scott’s *Heart of Midlothian* (1818) and George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859) constructed infanticide as pastoral,¹¹ an association which suggests its existence beyond the urban – a marginal place where different social practices persist. Yet in the urban environment a different kind of

⁶ Brome, “*Jovial Crew*” (III.1.258).

⁷ Dana Rabin, “Bodies of evidence, states of mind: infanticide, emotion and sensibility in eighteenth-century England” in Jackson, *Infanticide*, 73-92; Jackson, “The trial of Harriet Vooght”; Hilary Marland, “Getting away with murder? Puerperal insanity, infanticide and the defence plea” in Jackson, *Infanticide*, 168-192.

⁸ Margaret L. Arnot, “The murder of Thomas Sandles: meanings of a mid-nineteenth-century infanticide” in Jackson, *Infanticide*, 149-167; Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (149)..

⁹ Christine L. Krueger, “Literary Defenses and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain”, *Victorian Studies*, 40.2 (1997) 271-294.

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, “The Thorn” in *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: OUP, 1969) 157 (157).

¹¹ Krueger, “Literary Defenses and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain”. Krueger states that infanticide was not a subject of bourgeois literature in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895). However, Margaret Harkness’ *A Manchester Shirtmaker* describes a widow’s killing of her sickly daughter and is discussed in Catherine R. Hancock, “‘It was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, and she had killed it.’: Three versions of destructive maternity in Victorian Fiction”, *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 15:3 (2010) 299-320.

separation can exist, as suggested by the baby tumbling from its mother's arms in Hogarth's *Gin Lane*. The image suggests her alcohol-induced liminal state, and is another representation of the deadly maternal breast.

The liminal child

While the 1803 act helped to define the border between life and death, people appear to have continued to regard infants as liminal. Despite Rousseau's revering of the natural child (*Emile*, 1762) and Philippe Ariès' suggestion in *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) that childhood was discovered during the eighteenth century, it has been noted that at this time "the greatest increase in the exposing of children occurred".¹² Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital was established in 1741 due to the frequency of infant abandonment and "the shocking spectacles he [Coram] had seen of innocent Children who had been murdered and thrown upon Dunghills".¹³ The description suggests the disposal of body waste described by Douglas, discussed in Chapter 2, and echoes the abjection of Mary Philmore who "sate her self down upon a Dunghill" after murdering her infant.¹⁴ Further evidence of an off-hand attitude to newborns is seen in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722). Moll recognises that paying to have a child taken away could mean "having it murder'd, or starv'd by Neglect and Ill-usage".¹⁵ She describes it as a "contriv'd Method for Murther" calling it "killing [...] Children with safety". The practice was common in the nineteenth century and the subject of successive scandals,¹⁶ fanned by such cases as that of Amelia Elizabeth Dyer, a baby farmer who strangled infants and threw their bodies in the Thames instead of arranging adoption.¹⁷ She may have killed as many as 400 babies between 1880 and 1896 and, like the horror crimes of the early modern period, captured the public imagination and inspired a contemporary ballad, *The Ogress of Reading*.¹⁸

¹² Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers* (137).

¹³ Foundling Hospital, *Account of the Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children* (1749) (A2).

¹⁴ Anon, *Distressed Mother*.

¹⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, ed. G.A. Starr (Oxford: OUP, 1972) (173).

¹⁶ Jackson, *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives* (11); Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents* (93, 108, 159).

¹⁷ "Amelia Elizabeth Dyer, Killing > murder, 18th May 1896." Old Bailey Proceedings Online, <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t18960518-451> [Accessed 21/7/2014].

¹⁸ Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents* (161).

This disregard for young life contributes to the impression that children were less than fully of this world. It is further borne out by child exploitation in an increasingly industrialised society, a plight taken up by Charles Dickens and captured earlier in William's Blake's "The Chimney-Sweeper" (1789).¹⁹ The boy occupies a liminal world of darkness and invisibility, and sings:

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smiled among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

Writing of the 1830s, Josephine McDonagh mentions newspapers' "seemingly incessant accounts of infant violation, as child casualties of industrial accidents jockey for space with equally pathetic victims of domestic mishaps [...] A strong sense emerges that a generalised threat to infant life lies abroad".²⁰ In contrast were poems such as Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" (1798) and Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" (1802/3) in which children are revered and constructed as objects of worship, suggesting another kind of liminality

Liminal places: water

Writers continued to describe mothers as drawn to water places to dispose of infant bodies. In the narrative ballad concerning Marie Hamilton, she places her newborn in or on water:

O she has rowd it in her apron,
And set it on the sea:
"Gae sink ye, or swim ye, bonny babe."²¹

After Martha Ray has drowned her infant, its spirit is associated with water:

Some say, if to the pond you go,
And fix on it a steady view,
The shadow of a babe you trace,
A baby and a baby's face,
And that it looks at you.²¹

¹⁹ William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, ed. Richard Wilmott (Oxford: OUP, 1990) (30).

²⁰ McDonagh, *Child Murder* (97); Kilday, *Infanticide in Britain* (149).

²¹ Wordsworth, "The Thorn" (157).

In Dickens' *The Chimes* (1844), Tobias Beck is horrified by a newspaper account of a desperate woman attempting to drown herself and her infant, in which only the infant dies. He dreams that his daughter's life follows a downward path so that she is driven to similar action. "She wrapped the baby warm, [...] To the rolling River, swift and dim [...] To the River! To that portal of Eternity, her desperate footsteps tended".²² Elsewhere references to infants' watery deaths are briefly mentioned. Describing Casterbridge, Hardy writes of "the pool, wherein nameless infants had been used to disappear".²³ In contrast to works such as Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in which the authors directly confront infant death, here infanticides are an aspect of the landscape and the community's collective memory.

Water as a place to dispose of infant corpses was not merely a literary contrivance. Like "The Thorn", *The Chimes* is based on a real account, that of Mary Furley who was sentenced to death in 1844 when her infant died during her attempted suicide. Writing of an "apparent epidemic of child murder", McDonagh quotes an 1866 account of the Reverend Henry Humble which states: "metropolitan canal boats are impeded, as they are tracked along by the number of drowned infants with which they come in contact".²⁴ Even allowing for the Reverend's exaggeration, he is marking an association between infants and water.

Not the usual suspects

As in the early modern period, infanticide was also committed by married (or widowed) women, a subject dealt with in novels such as Lucy Clifford's *Mrs Keith's Crime* (1885) and Margaret Harkness's *A Manchester Shirtmaker* (1890) which concern widows who kill their children to prevent their suffering, thus supporting the theory that "women are always loving mothers, even during murder".²⁵ By contrast, in George

²² Charles Dickens, "The Chimes" in *A Christmas Carol and Other Stories*, ed. G.K. Chesterton (London: Dent, 1969) 85-162 (157).

²³ Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Dale Kramer (Oxford: OUP, 2004) (131).

²⁴ McDonagh, *Child Murder* (123).

²⁵ Porter and Gavin, "Infanticide and Neonaticide" (106). The novels are discussed in Hancock, "It was bone".

Moore's *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), the child dies due to maternal neglect, a situation used to malign the theatrical profession.²⁶

Literature and archives show men were also guilty of the crime, as in the fictional case of Jessie Phillips whose infant was killed by her lover. Melissa Valiska Gregory's study of nineteenth-century newspaper accounts reveals male killers were described as working class fathers who were unable to control their violence or sustain their families.²⁷ But as she points out, none of the Victorian infanticides by men inspired literary works.

This brief overview shows that infanticide and its representation maintained a fairly constant pattern between 1700 and the early twentieth century, with recurring themes of liminal mothers and infants, murderous nurses, and a variety of perpetrators. Authors wrote about infanticide in various ways. McDonagh states that their approaches included the sentimental, morbid, dispassionate and parodic, and points out that some authors, such as Jonathan Swift, found fun in this "grim topic".²⁸

The comedy of infant death was not new. A 1680 ballad concerning "The Drowning of three Children on the Thames" warns "You'l say it is no laughing matter, / To see poor Children Drowned".²⁹ It describes the frozen river and:

Three children sliding thereabouts,
upon a place too *thin*,
That so at last it did fall *out*,
that they did all fall *in*.

The lines are redolent of early twentieth-century cautionary tales of children's deaths brought about by disobedience, a variation on folktales about Jenny Greenteeth and Nelly Long Arms (see Chapter 2). Performances, such as Stanley Holloway's rendering of Marriot Edgar's "The Lion and Albert" (1931), ensured that new generations enjoyed recitals of comic infant death.

²⁶ Renata Kobetts Miller, "Child-Killers and the Competition between Late Victorian Theater and the Novel", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 66.2 (2005) 197-226.

²⁷ Melissa Valiska Gregory, "'Most Revealing Murder by a Father': The Violent Rhetoric of Paternal Child-Murder in *The Times* (London) 1826-1849" in *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print 1722-1859*, ed. Jennifer Thorn (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003) 70-90.

²⁸ McDonagh, *Child Murder* (13).

²⁹ Anon, *The lamentation of a bad Market* (1674-1679).

Throughout the period covered by this Interlude people have been entertained by Mr Punch, whose first recorded London appearance was in 1662.³⁰ These puppet shows have much in common with early modern ballad performances. George Speaight writes that they were “presented in open air, before a shifting, casual audience, with all the noises of the street in competition”. He adds “The show must be lively in action [...] no story [...] just a bit of knock-about fun”.³¹ The loose plot is believed to have developed in response to glove puppets’ limited capacity for manipulation (they can hold small objects and hit things) and audience response, so that it was “moulded by the laughter of street urchins”.³² Though it is uncertain when Mr Punch’s act of infanticide was first included, Speaight suggests it may have been when he accidentally dropped the baby and got a big laugh.³³ Why laughter? Speaight suggests “This atrocious act brings to the surface the momentary emotions of every parent of a howling baby!”³⁴ The baby now lives because there is no hangman to allow retribution,³⁵ but Mr Punch’s sociopathic violence still evokes laughter. People were, and are, also entertained by the Grimms’ *Fairy Tales* (first English edition 1823). These stories of “gore and sexuality” include child abandonment and infanticide, crimes whose frequency, Maria Tatar observes, moves their portrayal from the sensational to the realistic.³⁶ But realism needs to be kept in check. Stephen Evans suggests that “Children – some children – do seem to like the darkness of horror but, perhaps, not if it becomes too realistic”.³⁷ The effect of the imagination appears to be important as readers experience the events from a safe place with limitations imposed by their own imaginations. Perhaps that is why adults can find them more “scary” than children. Like Punch and Judy, the Grimms’ *Fairy Tales* continue to be retold in many media.

³⁰ An entry in Samuel Pepys’ Diary for 9 May 1662 regarding a visit to Covent Garden states: “Thence to see an Italian puppet play that is within the rayles there, which is very pretty, the best that ever I saw.” Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley (London: G. Bell, 1923) (219).

³¹ George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (London: Robert Hale, 1990) (182).
³² *ibid.*

³³ Speaight states that Baby was known to exist in the 18th century. *Ibid.*

³⁴ Speaight, *History* (220, 193). Acknowledgement of this emotion continues in Adam Mansbach and Ricardo Cortes, *Go the F**k to Sleep* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011).

³⁵ Informal discussion at Covent Garden May Fayre and Puppet Festival, 3/5/2013. This annual event celebrates Pepys’ diary entry.

³⁶ Stephen Evans, “*Are Grimm’s Fairy Tales too twisted for children?*” BBC Worldwide, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130801-too-grimm-for-children> [Accessed 30/11/2013]; Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³⁷ Evans, “*Grimm’s Tales*”.

From 1897, people could enjoy the Grand Guignol theatre in Paris, which specialized in naturalistic horror shows. Several dealt with infant deaths due to altruistic murder, insanity, twists of fate, and abandonment,³⁸ such as *The Woman who was Acquitted*, which concerns a governess who had strangled three children but is never punished.³⁹ The theatre closed in 1962, its final director, Charles Nonon, writing “We could never equal Buchenwald. Before the war, everyone felt that what was happening on stage was impossible. Now we know that these things, and worse, are really possible”.⁴⁰

Yet interest in performed horror did not wane. On the contrary, writing about revenge tragedy, Helen Hackett points out that twentieth-century atrocities may explain a new interest in the violent and the shocking, resulting in a revival of these works.⁴¹ Wendy Griswold suggests that the genre appealed to the “dogged optimism of [the] era”, because ultimately justice is served, and while governors might be corrupt, there were high hopes for their institutional successors.⁴² A renewal of interest in Jacobean tragedies also suggests a need to comprehend the events and mental states which lead to such acts, including our abiding need to understand infanticide which, as we shall see in my Epilogue, continues to be a subject of new theatrical works.

³⁸ Mel Gordon, *The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (New York: Amok, 1988) (57, 97).

³⁹ *ibid.* (105).

⁴⁰ “Outdone by Reality,” *Time Magazine* 1962.

⁴¹ Helen Hackett, *A Short History of English Renaissance Drama* (London: Tauris, 2013) (196).

⁴² Wendy Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576 - 1980* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986) (164).

Epilogue: Echoes of the Past

[*Suddenly and violently flinging the doll to the ground.*] I'll bash its brains out. I'll kill it. I don't want his baby [...] I don't want to be a mother.¹

Introduction

A 26-year old, unmarried woman became pregnant but found other reasons for her weight gain and was confused and shocked when she went into labour. She gave birth alone at night, without calling for help from her parents with whom she lived, and when the baby seemed to have been born dead, she wrapped it in the things she had been wearing and took it to a nearby river where, she later said, she placed it on the water and watched it floating away. These events took place near Stratford-upon-Avon in 2006, though their resemblance to what we know of early modern cases is self-evident.²

During this research it seemed that accounts of recent infanticide, newspaper articles debating the point at which life begins, and descriptions of brutal child cruelty, appeared almost daily. It became impossible to ignore the extent to which the subjects I was investigating were being echoed in the present by documented cases. It also became clear that these topics continue to inspire today's creative writers and artists. Playwright Mark Ravenhill describes James Bulger's murder in 1993 as a "tear in the fabric",³ a phrase which reverberates at many levels. It contains associations with the tearing of the temple curtain at the moment of Christ's death.⁴ It also suggests the rending of garments, a traditional symbol of grief and mourning, the ability to glimpse

¹ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (1958) (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) (75).

² A newspaper article which reported the discovery of the body stated that police described the child as having "several serious injuries, including a fractured skull and collarbone" which "were not caused by childbirth." Jeevan Vasagar, "Police believe baby found in plastic bag near river was battered to death," *Guardian*, 24 May 2006. Six months after these events, Rachel Davies, the child's mother, was traced, but denied all knowledge of the event. At her trial she said she had given birth standing and after leaving the baby had returned to her car and cried for an hour before continuing to her place of work. Lizzy Fitzsimmons, "Baby Lily's mum tried to hide birth," *Stratford Observer*, 4 April 2007. In sentencing, the judge acknowledged that it was highly likely that the child was stillborn, and concluded that Davies should be treated with "compassion rather than by way of punishment." "Mum who dumped baby in river is spared jail," *Birmingham Mail*, 21 August 2007.

³ Mark Ravenhill, "A Tear in the Fabric: The James Bulger Murder and New Theatre Writing in the Nineties", *Theatre Forum*, 26 (Winter/Spring 2005) 85-92. Two-year-old James Bulger was abducted, tortured and murdered by two ten-year-old boys in February 1993.

⁴ Matthew 27.51

something hitherto unseen, and weeping. Ravenhill believes that this crime was the impetus for him to take up writing and the fact that many important writers emerged at this time, he suggests, indicates the profound emotional and intellectual impact of the crime.⁵ More recently, other writers whose works are discussed below have used documented cases of infanticide in their work,⁶ while others' work involves fictional deaths. I therefore wish to conclude by showing how the themes of this study are still relevant, and examining possible reasons for their endurance.

There are also, of course, differences. Knives are now rarely used, deaths being more likely to be what Walker describes as "deadly embrace",⁷ and in the dominant culture single motherhood is no longer shameful and materially hard to survive. Yet women still kill their newborns, married women kill to injure their spouses, and parents kill to protect their children. I will look principally at questions of reality and fiction; killers, communities and accomplices, and again liminality. I will conclude by suggesting that, although some aspects of infanticide are shaped by historical period, it continues to run deep in our consciousness.

Reality and fiction

Just as we often cannot be certain about the events surrounding infanticide in early modern England, uncertainty remains an element of today's cases. Early accounts of the Stratford case strongly suggested that the infant had been murdered. At Rachel Davies' trial, the prosecution said that it was "physically impossible" for the child to have floated on the water.

Uncertainty is similarly an aspect of literary works concerning infanticide. Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1998), which space forbids me to discuss in any detail, deals with many of the aspects of infanticide which I have considered in this study, particularly in its breaking down of the history/fiction separation by its imaginative retelling of a documented case, a mother's altruistic killing to prevent her infant from experiencing her own appalling life, and the suggestion that *Beloved* exists in a liminal

⁵ Ravenhill, "A Tear". Ravenhill notes that there are aspects of the crime in his first three plays: *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), *Faust is Dead* (1997) and *Handbag* (discussed below) (1998).

⁶ Niklas Rådström's *Monsters* (2009), which deals with James Bulger's murder, and Sue MacLaine's unpublished play *A Place of Safety* (2010) concerning the death of Maria Colwell.

⁷ Walker, *Crime, Gender* (156).

place between this world and the next.⁸ Ultimately the novel conveys the impossibility of accessing truth where infanticide is concerned. *Beloved* is, to adopt Ann Snitow's phrase, a "fractured narrative", and leaves readers uncertain who or what "Beloved" is or represents.⁹ Readers have to piece together the story from fragments in a manner similar to readers of the ballad *The Wicked Midwife* which opened this study (p. 75).

The impossibility of knowing the truth is also the subject of Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*.¹⁰ It concerns Katurian, who writes "stories" in which children die horrible deaths, and who is interrogated by the totalitarian state in which he lives because children are being killed in the manners he describes. The play blurs the line between what has and has not happened. For example, McDonagh gives the impression that Katurian's brother, brain damaged by his parents' torturing, dies early on, but he does not. The parents are reported dead, but return. Katurian warns his brother, and the audience:

Katurian: A man comes in to a room, says to another man, 'Your mother's dead.' What do we know? Do we know that the second man's mother is dead? [...] All we know is that a man has come into a room and said to another man, 'Your mother is dead'. That is all we know.¹¹

Later, Katurian says to his brother:

Katurian: What did you tell him?
Michal: Just the truth.
Katurian: Which particular truth?¹²

Storytelling also arises in Ravenhill's *Handbag*, a retelling of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* which includes an infant's death due to its carers' lack of knowledge.¹³ Ravenhill manipulates time by moving between Victorian and present-day narratives which finally merge in another challenge to what we perceive, as does a present-day scene, in which rent-boy Phil tells his life story, re-creating it as one of peace and contentment. Just like the claims of those accused of infanticide, the play raises issues of the difference between what happened, what is remembered as having

⁸ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2005).

⁹ Ann Snitow, "Death Duties: Toni Morrison Looks back in Sorrow" in *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's "Beloved"*, ed. Barbara H. Solomon (London: G.K. Hall, 1998) 147-152.

¹⁰ Martin McDonagh, *The Pillowman* (London: Faber, 2003).

¹¹ *ibid.* (39).

¹² *ibid.* (51).

¹³ Mark Ravenhill, *Handbag* (London: Methuen, 1998).

happened, and what is said. Rachel Davies may have needed to believe that she saw her child floating away. Phil needed to construct his past as happy. Tony Selby, an actor in the original production of Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965), in which a baby is stoned to death in its pram, recalls that he "didn't throw a stone" despite photographic evidence to the contrary.¹⁴ In each instance there is a separation between self and violence, a separation which seems often to be demanded in stories or experiences of infanticide.

Killers, communities and accomplices

Killers

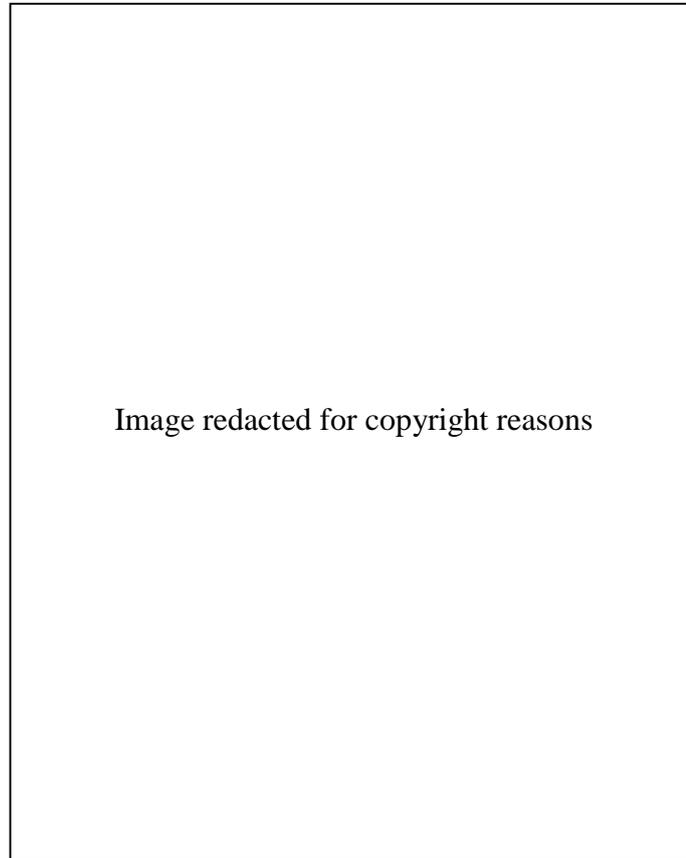
As in the early modern period, today's media focus on the extraordinary and exceptional. They concentrate on cases in which there are multiple deaths, or which involve particular violence, whereas accounts of murdered newborns and abandoned babies flash into the news media then virtually disappear, becoming a matter of local, rather than national, significance.¹⁵ Even cases involving older children, or extreme or sustained violence, are quickly relegated to minor news (see next page).

Early modern writers constructed two kinds of killer. There are those whom readers would have recognised as "just like us": tradespeople, clergy, neighbours, who are illustrated in familiar, domestic environments, surrounded with the objects of daily life. Conversely, some early modern killers are represented as "other". They are drunken, belong to the "wrong" religion, are beyond the control of husbands or masters. Similarly, today's killers may be depicted as strikingly ordinary people who commit an extraordinary act. Lianne Smith, who killed her children in 2010 when "gravely disturbed" and "suffering from a degree of mental disturbance", is in other ways described much as any other parent. She treated her children to a "perfect" holiday

¹⁴ Maddy Costa, "A killing in the park," *Guardian (G2)*, 10 October 2011.

¹⁵ For statistics on infant and child murder in England and Wales see NSPCC, "*NSPCC: Child Homicides Statistics*" http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/statistics/child_homicide_statistics_wda48747.html [Accessed 30/7/2014]. For an analysis of the statistics see NSPCC, "*NSPCC: Explaining the Statistics*" http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/briefings/child_killings_in_england_and_wales_wda67213.html [Accessed 30/7/2014].

before killing them, afterward “giving [them] a cuddle and spending the night beside their bodies”.¹⁶



Pushed aside: three young deaths are reported in the left hand column. (Metro, November 13th 2013)

After Jael Mullings was arrested in 2012 for the murder of her two infants, aged two and three months, detectives said “This is a local family, a fairly close family with two young children who everybody adored and doted on”.¹⁷ Felicia Boots “lived with her investment banker husband in a salubrious area of London” and they seemed like a “typical middle-class couple”, until she suffocated her two infants in 2012.¹⁸ In each instance newspapers included photographs of the location of the killings – familiar-looking houses and hotel rooms.

¹⁶ Sam Greenhill, “*Mother who killed her children in hotel on Costa Brava*” Daily Mail, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2161522/Mother-Lianne-Smith-killed-children-normal-happy-fell-spell-TV-psychic.html>. [Accessed 5/6/2014].

¹⁷ Helen Carter and Sandra Laville, “*Doctor alerted police to ‘distressed’ mother hours before child killings*” Guardian Online, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2008/nov/14/child-protection-mental-health-manchester> [Accessed 5/6/2014].

¹⁸ Alexandra Topping, “*‘Good mum’ admits to killing her two babies*” Guardian Online, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/oct/30/woman-admits-killing-two-babies> [Accessed 8/8/2014].

But, like their early modern predecessors, killers may also be represented as “other” in creative literature and the media. In *Saved* people are set apart by their inability to feel or articulate emotions; drug use, social displacement and sexual orientation are the background to *Handbag*; the dehumanising effect of the plays’ worlds features in *Saved* and Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995). In the former, language is diminished to almost non-communication, the play ending in a silent scene in which a character painstakingly attempts to mend a broken chair. In the latter, a war-torn state and alcohol prompt a catalogue of violence, sex, and abuse, including the death of an infant which is subsequently eaten by a starving character. Despite this, *Blasted* is less disturbing than other works concerning infant death, due to its lack of psychological depth and deliberate shock tactics. Yet this in itself demonstrates how easily we can become inured to violence. In the media, some killers are depicted as “other” due to their beliefs. Modern witchcraft has concerned authorities since eight-year-old Victoria Climbié was murdered by her guardians in 2000, partially because they thought she was “possessed”. Alexandra Topping writes: “African groups have warned that belief in witchcraft is increasingly common in some communities and that [...] children in the UK are ‘suffering in silence’ after being branded as witches”. In Greater London an average of eight children a year are victims of witchcraft-related abuse.¹⁹

We have seen that in the early modern period people killed their infants for so-called “altruistic” motives, such as fear of their being reared in the “wrong” religion or the impossibility of surviving poverty.²⁰ Similarly the altruistic motive appears in modern drama. In *The Pillowman*, children fated to live unhappy lives succumb to apparently accidental deaths in order to avoid years of suffering. But, as Katurian states, “The Pillowman’s job was to get that child to kill themselves, and so avoid the years of pain that would just end up in the same place for them anyway”, and thus make their deaths easier for the parents to bear.²¹ Later Katurian explains “The Pillowman was a thoughtful, decent man, who hated what he was doing”.²² The softening effect of

¹⁹ Alexandra Topping, “*Accusations of witchcraft are part of growing pattern of child abuse in UK*” <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/oct/30/woman-admits-killing-two-babies> [Accessed 20/11/2013].

²⁰ See for example Anon, *Pittiless Mother*; Anon, *Distressed Mother*. These are discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 respectively.

²¹ McDonagh, *The Pillowman* (44).

²² *ibid.* (52).

Pillowman's explanation – the means of coming to terms with child death – is differently expressed by Tony Selby. Interviewed in connection with a 2011 revival of *Saved* he stated “In actual fact the baby is saved. It's saved from a non-existent life”.²³

Newspaper reports show, and literature suggests, that there are still situations in which women kill infants because they cannot see a way forward. Lianne Smith, who feared her children would be taken by social services, said “It was the end of the road. I knew they were going to take my children [...] I felt I was in a corner”.²⁴ This is also the case in the novella *Beside the Sea* in which a poor, bewildered and depressed woman uses the last of her money to treat her children to a seaside visit, and murders them in the hotel room in the desperate belief that they would always be together.²⁵ Such cases and works suggest motives and actions which are almost identical to those of early modern women.

The men who constructed the 1624 Infanticide Act were confident that those who killed infants were “lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children” and that they did it to “avoid their shame, and to escape punishment”, but it is clear that this assumption is wrong.²⁶ Infants were killed by single women, certainly, but also by married women and by men. The punishments for bastard bearing – public penance, whipping and latterly Houses of Correction – were certainly gruelling and shaming. Penalties for bastard bearing no longer exist in the dominant British culture, yet even in the 1950s unmarried pregnancy could cause shame. In *A Taste of Honey* (1958), an early example of Britain's new theatrical realism, the central character, a young, unmarried, pregnant woman, hides herself away because she doesn't like people looking at her, suggesting a bodily shame redolent of early modern women.²⁷ She only appears fully to acknowledge that she is pregnant when given a doll “to practise a few holds on”, flinging it to the ground in an act of abjection.²⁸

²³ Costa, “A killing in the park.”

²⁴ Stephen Burgen, “Mother Jailed for 30 Years for Killing her Children,” *Guardian*, 4 July 2012.

²⁵ Véronique Olmi, *Beside the Sea*, trans. Adriana Hunter (London: Peirene, 2010). The novel was adapted into a monologue and performed by Lisa Dwan at the Purcell Room, London in March 2012.

²⁶ See Introduction and Appendix 1

²⁷ Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* (1958) (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) (50, 61).

²⁸ *ibid.* (75).

Communities

Who is responsible when an infant is killed? We saw in Chapter 1 that early modern pamphleteers sometimes pointed to the wider community in which the crime took place such as those who described Mary Cook's murder of her infant and their request that others "call to mind, and lay to heart, and repent of their neglect of duty towards her [...] that they do not expose their Relations unto Temptations".²⁹ Similarly, Brewer mentions many people who failed to recognise Jane Hattersley's pregnancies and suspicious actions, and therefore contributed to her infants' deaths.³⁰

Today, enquiries after high-profile cases attempt to uncover how infant death could have happened. Polly Toynbee writes that killers "always turn out to be an unworthy vessel for society's fury" adding: "Conveniently, social workers are always there to fill the role required by a frenzy of media hate. They failed to save a child: they are the true killers".³¹ But a change may be afoot here. Increasingly the media appear to question how serious crimes can have taken place within communities: How could people not have realised? Why did they not intervene?

This point is confronted in Niklas Rådström's *Monsters* which deals with the murder of James Bulger.³² Theatre critic Michael Billington describes it as it a "sober, unsensational enquiry into a tragic case, rather than a piece of theatrical exploitation".³³ Rådström requests a neutral stage and no characterisation by performers because "We can never presume to penetrate a course of events such as that shown in this play, and to recreate it". The play combines a Greek-style chorus with scenes based on police and court transcripts. These, and the production ethic, remind us of the timelessness of the crime. One scene catalogues cases between 1748 and 1988 in which children killed other children. It is preceded by the chorus stating: "Nothing like this has ever happened before. But it has happened before. It will happen again".³⁴

Although interrupting goes against theatre convention, Rådström writes: "Throughout the performance, the audience is informed that it is possible to intervene at any time in the events that are related on stage" (15):

²⁹ Partridge and Sharp, *Blood for Blood* (34).

³⁰ Brewer, *Bloudy Mother*.

³¹ Polly Toynbee, "This frenzy of hatred is a disaster for children at risk," *Guardian* 18 November 2008.

³² Niklas Rådström, *Monsters* (London: Oberon Modern Plays, 2009).

³³ Michael Billington, "Review - *Monsters*," *Guardian* 9 May 2009.

³⁴ Rådström, *Monsters* (46).

I don't know if you are prepared to handle what has already happened
 and will happen here [...]
 I don't know what you intend to do about it [...]
 Are you prepared to be a witness?
 If so will you only be a witness?
 Or are you prepared to intervene?
 Are you prepared to step in and prevent what is about to happen? (17)

The play emphasises that thirty-eight people saw James Bulger with his abductors and after he had been injured, but did nothing. Billington writes “It implies we all have a measure of responsibility for James Bulger’s murder [...] but the play fails to justify its accusation of collective guilt in the manner of [...] *Saved* which argues that a profoundly unjust, violent society will inescapably lead to acts of individual brutality”.³⁵

In a preface to *Saved*, Bond writes that violence occurs “in situations of injustice. It is caused not only by physical threats, but even more significantly by threats to human dignity”.³⁶ He continues that victims of injustice “may merely react violently because of an unconscious motive, an unidentified discontent. When this happens their victims may be innocent”.³⁷ Introducing a later edition, he writes that working people had lost their traditional place in national culture and consequently had lost a sense of themselves. “This was the beginning of a strange new modern form of violence. It is caused not by the traditional needs of poverty but by the need for respect. [...] The young people murder the baby in the park to regain their self-respect”.³⁸ Both arguments echo the early modern period: the injustice perceived by abandoned women or wives of profligate husbands, and the sense of being a lost or displaced person, at the margins of the society in which they live. An early modern woman might certainly kill to gain her self-respect, but also to allow her to maintain the respect of others in a society in which a woman who was neither maid, widow nor wife was outside social structures.

Although witnessing is central in *Monsters*, the scenes take place after the murder. In contrast, in *Saved* the audience sees the infant subjected to a violent death, as in the Mystery plays (though in *Saved*, a pram provides some separation). We later learn that Len “the likeable character, through whom the viewer is introduced to this

³⁵ Billington, “Review - *Monsters*.”

³⁶ Edward Bond, *Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1996) (13).

³⁷ *ibid.* (15).

³⁸ Edward Bond, *Saved* (London: Methuen, 2011) (np).

world”, watched and failed to intervene, like the audience.³⁹ But as Jenny S. Spencer writes: “No particular moment leads the squeamish to shut their eyes”.⁴⁰ Similarly, in Fred Watson’s unpublished play *Infanticide in the House of Fred Ginger* the infant death – the inevitability of which is in the work’s title – occurs on stage as the culmination of unconsidered actions.⁴¹ One critic described it as “human beings stumbling towards a killing they do not seek”.⁴² It echoes early modern themes including premarital pregnancy, desperation, financial hardship, and abandonment. The drunken youths who intimidate the babysitter into abandoning the infant attempt to quieten it with gin. The directions state “*With his back to the audience he [Charley] tips the gin bottle in to the child’s mouth. Cries of alarm and protest follow within a few seconds. They grow in volume*”.⁴³ Again, the audience is separated from the death by the actor’s turned back, and the youths are distanced from their action by the alcohol which dislocates them from reality.

Accomplices

In Chapter 1 we saw the frequency with which accomplices, or trickster figures, were a component of infanticide. No such figures appear in twentieth-century drama but they are visually represented in Dame Paula Rego’s work. Rego’s art is highly narrative, making it akin to written texts, and her working method, which involves living models and fabricated doll-like figures, suggests performance. “Every picture tells a story”, she says of her own work.⁴⁴ She is often inspired by others’ writings but her work crosses genres: if the story does not fit the need of her art, she changes the story. She has created a visual telling of McDonagh’s *The Pillowman* and the playwright insisted that note be taken of her images for the sets and costumes of its Broadway production.⁴⁵

³⁹ Jenny S Spencer, *Dramatic Strategies in the Plays of Edward Bond* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) (32).

⁴⁰ *ibid.* (31).

⁴¹ Fred Watson, *Infanticide in the House of Fred Ginger* (Unpublished; RSC Archive 1962). Premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the New Arts Theatre Club, London, 29 August 1962.

⁴² G.G., “Stumbling towards unsought killing,” *Bristol Evening Post*, 31 August 1962.

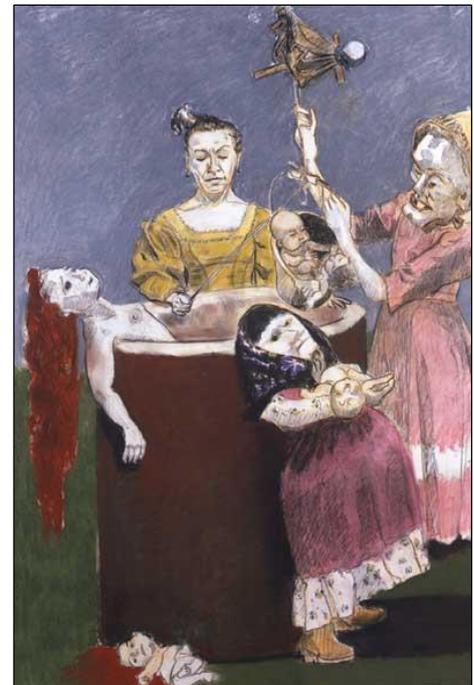
⁴³ Watson, *Fred Ginger* (2.29).

⁴⁴ Jake Auerbach. “Paula Rego: Telling Tales” Interview with Paula Rego, (London, Barbican, 29/11/2012)

⁴⁵ John McEwen, *Paula Rego: Behind the Scenes* (London: Phaidon, 2008) (150).

As well as infanticide, many of the other themes discussed here appear in her works including rape, abortion, abandonment, reference to water as death or purification, monstrosity, the mother's body, the born or unborn, inside and outside. Because Rego's viewers have to create their own narratives, based on experience, expectation and evidence, an element of the impossibility of knowing what happened or is happening always lurks in her pictures, which show nightmarish worlds of horror and brutality. The works' timeless quality, including the clothing, contributes to their ability to illuminate periods outside the century in which they were created.

In a series of works which culminated in *Oratorio* (2010), a mixed media triptych produced for The Foundling Museum, Rego depicts infanticide, the alternative to abandonment for desperate mothers. The scenes include *Rape*, *Birth*, and a series of images in which babies are being tipped into a well, another water place.



Paula Rego: Left: Down the Well I (2009); Right: Well (2009)

In each image the woman does not dispose of the children on her own, but is accompanied by other figures. In *Down the Well*, the most dominant of these is older and appears to smile as babies fall from a bucket. The figure seems female yet androgynous and her sinister face suggests the monstrosity ascribed to early modern child killers. Her relationship with the other woman is one of the uncertainties which Rego leaves the viewer: the older woman could be mother, midwife, or the physical

manifestation of the inner voice which seems to instruct the younger woman in what she should do – in early modern terms, the devil. Like the mothers in Sussex who “aided and abetted” their daughters in the killing of their newborns, it is unclear whether she is attempting to ensure the salvation or the damnation of the younger woman who looks on expressionless and numb, showing no anger, fear or remorse. The action seems routine, and her face suggests that this is merely a grim job which has to be done, and one from which she is disassociated, placing herself in a place separate from the act.

Similarly indecipherable is the smaller figure in the foreground of the drawing. In *Well*, she looks at the viewer, reminding us that communities are as culpable for the destruction of infants as the women who stand over the tumbling infants. The three figures connect this drawing to the Fates who judge destinies and decide when life ends. It also suggests the liminal worlds of witches. Sarah Kent writes:

The well stands in the centre of each picture. It looks more like a bathtub or a cauldron for boiling clothes or cooking stews than a well, which makes one wonder if the babies aren't also being stewed and puts cannibalism on the agenda alongside murder.⁴⁶

In all versions of the infanticide scene the small figure is bringing another baby to its death, or perhaps this unnaturally wizened child is holding a doll, witnessing and acting out the sexual exploitation which may be her destiny. Whether the child in the *Oratorio* image is holding a baby or a doll, her presence suggests a chain culminating in infanticide, in a manner similar to a ninth-century manuscript from Dijon (opposite), which also shows newborns being drowned. The twilight scenes suggest the liminal time that borders day and night, and the scene also takes place in the liminal place beyond the city walls.

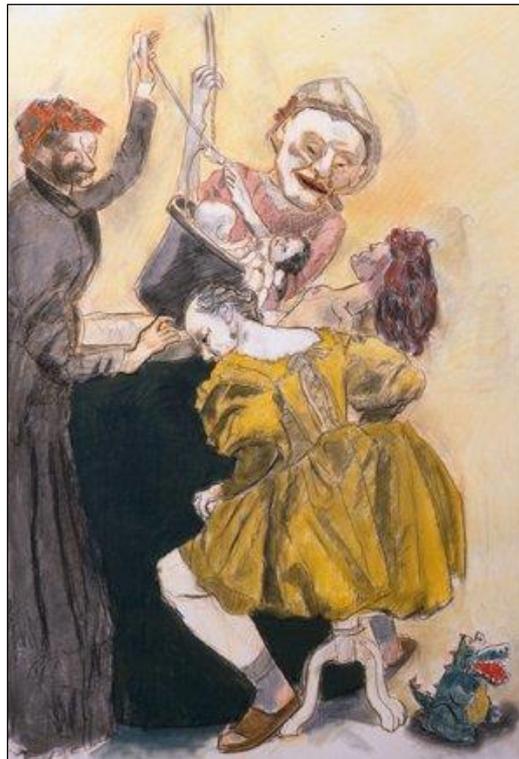
In *Well* a manikin, puppet or doll-like figure rises, perhaps a spirit, perhaps another indication of lost innocence. The young woman in the well, possibly the infant's mother, may suggest water as ritual purification, if she is being bathed, but water as death if she is drowning. The figure suggests the findings of psychologists and anthropologists: the uncertainty about whether the child is inside or outside, part of her or a separate being, is seen in her tumbling red hair, or blood, which is echoed in the

⁴⁶ Sarah Kent, “*Oratoria [sic]: Marlborough Fine Art*” Theartdesk, www://theartdesk.com [Accessed 4/10/2013].

body of the newborn who appears to have been thrown on the ground, in an act of abjection and manifesting bodily pollution.

Image redacted for copyright
reasons

*Unknown Burgundian miniaturist, Infants
Thrown in the Tiber ca. 1450–67.⁴⁷*



Paula Rego: Oratorio (detail) 2009

⁴⁷ Image from fol. 7r of the *Histoire en image de la fondation de l'Hôpital du Saint-Esprit de Dijon*, illuminated manuscript on vellum, ca. 1450–67. Classé Monuments Historiques le 10/10/1891. Dijon, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire (CHU). © F. Petot, Archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or.

In another image from *Oratorio* (above) a shorn woman sits astride a stool, as if she has just given birth, and babies are tipped into the well, again by the old woman this time assisted by another dark figure. Alongside the seated woman, or inside her, is another long-haired woman, suggesting the innocent self which she is losing with the act of infanticide, and again showing the separation of the physical and mental selves. Jarringly, a toy alligator is to the right of the drawing – perhaps an abandoned toy representing the woman’s untimely loss of childhood, or a fiercely toothed mouth depicting the pain of childbirth, or of separation.

The Portuguese novel *The Sin of Father Amaro* (1875; English translation 1962), in which a priest ensures the death of the infant he has fathered on a young woman, Amelia, has also been the subject of images by Rego, such as that below. After Amelia is hidden from public view, and gives birth, assisted only by an aunt, Amaro deliberately places the infant with a nurse – an accomplice – known to kill infants in her care. The novel tells us Amelia “spent her days dirty and untidy, not wishing to care for her sinful body”.⁴⁸



Rego: *Looking Out* (1997)

⁴⁸ Eça de Queiroz, *The Sin of Father Amaro*, trans. Nan Flanagan (London: Black Swan, 1962) (343).

Rego says of the image (above): “Her bottom half is polluted – she cannot show it”.⁴⁹ Again, the parallels with the early modern period are clear: a visual representation of Mary Douglas’s theories about the polluting body which we have seen manifested in early modern literature.

Liminality and marginality today

Liminality and marginality, the themes which have recurred throughout this study, are still surprisingly in evidence, though not all aspects are visible today. Pregnant women are no longer secluded or isolated, but some are given a kind of liminality by “pregnant celebrity” images in contemporary media.⁵⁰ These construct women who are already revered as flamboyant and idealised models of pending motherhood, giving them a kind of “otherness” and suggesting the role fulfilment of early modern pregnancy portraits. Due to better understanding of psychological states we no longer describe women who kill their newborns as “evil”, or as “monsters” or other liminal beings, though other killers may be thus depicted. Advances in medical science have made the questions surrounding the status of the unborn or newborn child even more complex. Ideas of the supernatural or uncanny still crop up. The subject of nurture and feeding is touched on in several contemporary plays, and issues related to maternal breastfeeding are of topical interest.

The liminal child and mother

In January 2014 the MP for East Worthing presented a Ten Minute Motion to the House of Commons requesting leave to bring in a Bill which would allow parents to register the death of a child “stillborn before the threshold of 24 weeks gestation”.⁵¹ The Bill, which went to a second reading but was not passed for debate, would not have affected the legality of abortion up to 24 weeks, though discussions on this topic are always poised to resurface.⁵² The result would have been laws which both recognise

⁴⁹ Auerbach, Interview with Paula Rego, (London, Barbican, 29/11/2012)

⁵⁰ See for example “*In Style*” www.instyle.co.uk/celebrity/pictures/pregnant-celebrities. [Accessed 1/8/2014].

⁵¹ Tim Loughton, *Registration of stillbirths*, Hansard HC Deb 14 Jan 2014 Col 693.

⁵² See for example Ben Quinn, “Health secretary backs 12-week legal limit on abortions,” *Guardian*, 6 October 2012; Catherine Bennett, “Why does Jeremy Hunt want to turn the clock back on the abortion debate?,” *The Observer*, 7 October 2012; *ibid.*; Tracy McVeigh, “How new call to cut the abortion term has rekindled bitter debate,” *Observer*, 7 October 2012.

and deny the infant unborn at 24 weeks. It seems we are as confused as our early modern predecessors about the moment at which a foetus should be regarded as having human existence, a confusion which is seen in today's practices and academic debates. In 2013, Judge Howard Levenson, citing an earlier ruling, wrote "an embryo or foetus *in utero* does not have a human personality and cannot be the victim of a crime of violence [...] it does not have the attributes to make it a person".⁵³ Yet a woman who aborted her baby at forty weeks was jailed for eight years (reduced to three and a half) for a crime whose "seriousness [...] lay between manslaughter and murder" according to Mr Justice Cooke who, passing sentence, said the child was "capable of being born alive".⁵⁴ By contrast, when an infant died in hospital at five days the staff arranged for him to be buried in a pauper's (shared) grave with up to twelve other infants.⁵⁵ The grave was insufficiently sealed and the infant's body was removed by a fox. Such cases suggest disrespect for the newborn but legal protection of the unborn child. However, a man whose partner miscarried after he punched her in the stomach received a sixteen-week sentence, because it was impossible to prove the connection, whereas the same newspaper reported that a man who punched a police horse was sentenced to a year's imprisonment.⁵⁶ Such uncertainties are captured in the postscript to a paper which discusses the rights and wrongs of abortion and infanticide from a philosophical perspective. Mary Anne Warren writes: "In this country [USA], and in this period of history, the deliberate killing of viable newborns is virtually never justified".⁵⁷ She continues (my italics) "This is in part because *neonates are so very close to being persons* that to kill them requires a very strong moral justification – as does the killing of dolphins, whales, chimpanzees, and other *highly personlike* creatures".

Dramatists also represent this uncertainty by showing people treating infants as less than human. The baby stoned to death in *Saved* is referred to as "that" or "it" throughout the play and Fred, who is convicted for the killing, says "It was only a

⁵³ Judge Howard Levenson, "Decision of the Upper Tribunal (Administrative Appeals Chamber)" <http://www.west-info.eu/files/JR-1201-2011-00.pdf> [Accessed 10/9/2014].

⁵⁴ Martin Wainwright, "Woman jailed for self-abortion at 39 weeks," *Guardian*, 18 September 2012.

⁵⁵ David Cohen, "A 'miracle' baby for couple in fox horror," *Evening Standard*, 8 March 2011. The ensuing outcry led to a change in practices.

⁵⁶ Aiden Radnedge, "Outrage as thug who punched pregnant girlfriend in stomach the day before she lost unborn baby jailed for 16 weeks," *Metro*, 30 October 2013.

⁵⁷ Mary Anne Warren, "On the moral and legal status of abortion" in *The Problem of Abortion*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1984) 102-119 (116).

kid”.⁵⁸ Tony Selby, who appeared in the original production recalls seeing “bored, neglected kids hurling stones at squirrels” and suggests that “from there to killing the baby [...] takes only one little leap of the imagination”.⁵⁹ *Monsters* deals with the beating to death of James Bulger; in *Handbag* the dead infant is burnt to try to get it to breathe; and in *The House of Fred Ginger* the infant is killed when it is fed alcohol in an attempt to stop it crying.

The mother, unwelcome pregnancy and the infant as waste

An aspect of liminality considered in Chapter 2 is the mother’s relationship with her unborn child and its potentially hostile nature, a subject which continued to interest twentieth-century writers who often connect unborn infants with monstrosity. A character in *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), in which a group of women is impregnated by aliens, describes the emotions of a woman who finds herself unexpectedly and reluctantly pregnant: “To know there’s something growing there – and not to be sure how, or what”,⁶⁰ later adding that it is:

“As if one were not a person at all, but just a kind of mechanism, a sort of incubator [...] And then to go on wondering, hour after hour, night after night, *what* – just *what* it may be that one is being forced to incubate.”⁶¹

Similarly the narrative of the film *Rosemary’s Baby* (dir. Roman Polanski, 1968), played out in a semi-dreamlike state suggesting pre- and post-partum mental disturbance, invites pregnant women to fear the child they are carrying. The narrator/author of the epistolary novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, who was ambivalent about becoming pregnant, writes of the ubiquity of film images of dystopian pregnancy, citing *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979) and *Mimic* (dir. Guillermo del Toro, 1997) as well as *Rosemary’s Baby*.⁶² She describes her own experience as “infestation, colonization by stealth”, and describes feeling “swallowed by a big biological project that I didn’t initiate or choose”.⁶³

⁵⁸ Bond, *Saved* (69).

⁵⁹ Costa, “A killing in the park.”

⁶⁰ John Wyndham, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (London: Penguin, 2008) (73). The novel became a successful film, *Village of the Damned*, dir. Wolf Rilla, in 1960.

⁶¹ *ibid.* (87).

⁶² Lionel Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (London: Profile, 2005) (58). Matt Bettinelli-Olpin’s film *Devil’s Due* (2014) continues the genre of dystopian pregnancy.

⁶³ *ibid.* (51, 58).

Unwanted infants are still treated as detritus. The body of an infant was found on the conveyor at a recycling plant in Scunthorpe and a badly injured “very young baby” was found at the bottom of a garbage chute in a block of flats in Wolverhampton.⁶⁴ A newborn was rescued when a security officer in Manila noticed movement in a rubbish bag taken from a plane recently arrived from Bahrain. It was believed that the infant was born on the flight.⁶⁵ Dramatic media footage of the rescue of a live baby from a sewer in China, where the mother had claimed it had fallen, was followed a month later by a newspaper account of a two-day old baby rescued from a drain in Alicante.⁶⁶ Related to this is abandonment. The abandoned, living baby recurs in historical accounts and in literature, from the tragedy of Oedipus onwards. The practice continues, such as the case of the baby recently left at a priest’s house in Reading.⁶⁷ Abandonment has led to the revival of the medieval practice of “baby boxes” in which unwanted infants can be left. There are 200 in continental Europe, though in Britain they remain illegal.⁶⁸

We remain doubtful about when the unborn or newborn should be considered fully human, echoing the early modern period. However, better psychological understanding regarding perinatal states means that in Britain women accused or suspected of infanticide are treated with compassion. Such crimes are almost always recognised as resulting from disturbed mental states, and as a social failure, in both the woman’s intimates and wider society, though some groups would still consider it indicative of a moral lapse. Today, the killing of a newborn provokes dismay, rather than disgust.

Performing modern Medeas

The enduring figure of Medea as a woman who kills her children continues to be seen in contemporary events and performance. The case of Fiona Donnison, which also

⁶⁴ “Dead baby found at recycling unit,” *Guardian*, 4 May 2012. “*Baby found injured under rubbish chute in Wolverhampton*” BBC Online, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-19546855 [Accessed 12/6/2014].

⁶⁵ “Newborn baby found dumped in aircraft lavatory bin,” *Telegraph Online*, 13 September 2010.

⁶⁶ Tania Branigan, “China shocked after newborn’s rescue from sewer pipe,” *Guardian*, 29 May 2013; “Mother held after baby rescued from drain,” *ibid.*, 24 June.

⁶⁷ “*Mother called abandoned baby Amelia*” Reading Chronicle, <http://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/news/roundup/articles/2012/05/05/59336-mother-called-abandoned-baby-amelia/> [Accessed 6/5/2012].

⁶⁸ Randeep Ramesh, “Europe’s ‘baby boxes’ condemned by UN,” *Guardian*, 11 June 2012.

has parallels with Lady Macbeth, suggests that not only do real life crimes inspire fiction, but fiction can influence real life.

In January 2010 Donnison, of Heathfield, Sussex, suffocated her two children, aged two and three. She had left their father two years previously, taking their children with her, and the couple had recently agreed to end their relationship formally as he had met a new partner. The morning after the murders, having apparently attempted suicide, Donnison went to Heathfield police station and reported her crime. As with other modern and early modern accounts of infanticide, early reports of the events were accompanied by pictures of the former family home, a visual representation of middle class normality which had become the locus of tragedy.

As events were revealed during the trial a vivid picture emerged. The officer to whom Donnison reported her crime told the court that she was pale and swaying from side to side, and said she had killed her children. When asked how many children she had “She answered ‘two – three – four –with a space in between’”.⁶⁹ The officer reported that Donnison went “floppy” and collapsed. She “grabbed her stomach very tightly and screwed her face up and then let out the most horrific noise. At one stage, she was unconscious but then her eyes opened and were just rolling”. The police later found the infants’ bodies in the boot of Donnison’s car, parked near the home she formerly shared with her partner. It was believed that she planned to kill him as there was evidence suggesting that she had lain in wait armed with two kitchen knives.⁷⁰ Defence claims that Donnison was “not in her right mind” at the time were dismissed by prosecutors who pointed to the level of planning involved in the killings and the fact that, after her arrival at a mental health facility, her behaviour did not suggest serious depression.⁷¹ Claims of amnesia and inability to remember killing her children were similarly dismissed by professionals, based on several behavioural indicators. One clinical psychologist told jurors she believed Donnison “100% likely to be feigning” psychological problems or symptoms.⁷²

The reports show the difficulty of distinguishing between performed and diagnosed “madness”. Elaine Showalter has demonstrated that Victorian familiarity

⁶⁹ Helen Carter, “Mother accused of killing her children confessed at police station,” *ibid.*, 12 July 2011.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ “Mother guilty of murdering her children to hurt the father,” *ibid.*, 9 August 2011.

⁷² *ibid.*

with Shakespeare prompted asylum attendants to pose their charges with Ophelia-like clothes, gestures, and props when being photographed.⁷³ Thus the style and manner of expression for “mad young women seeking to express and communicate their distress” became a construction which blurred the division between what was true and what was performed. Donnison’s actions also suggest performance – “feigning” –, in her case adopting the image of female “madness” provided in Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene. Donnison’s counting “two – three – four” and her “horrific noise” after she reported her crime to the police, echo Lady Macbeth’s “One; two” and “Oh! Oh! Oh!” (V.i.49). There are also parallels with performances of Medea, a narrative with which the Donnison case has remarkable similarities. Her actions fuel the assumption that a woman who kills her children will be supposed “mad”. It seems unlikely that Donnison was deliberately adopting Lady Macbeth or Medea as a model, but rather suggests a subconscious awareness of “mad women’s” stereotypical behaviour.

The relevance of Medea to modern times has been observed by recent stagings of Euripides’ play and Charpentier’s opera *Médée* (1693), updated to the present, or the recent past. These were high-profile productions by important companies (including the National Theatre), with big-name casts and directors, and received outstanding reviews. As Medea, Rachael Stirling was described as showing a “mix of power and powerlessness”, and the play depicted “how depression can tilt into tragedy”.⁷⁴ The familiarity of settings and clothing emphasised the omnipresence of the murdering mother.



Image redacted for copyright reasons

People and places we know: Left: Sam Curran and Rachael Stirling in Medea, adapted and directed by Mike Bartlett for Headlong (2012). Right: Sarah Connolly in David McVicar’s production of Charpentier’s Medea for English National Opera (2013)

⁷³ Showalter, “Representing Ophelia” (86).

⁷⁴ Kate Kellaway, “A thoroughly modern Greek tragedy,” *Observer*, 9 October 2012.

To an extent, such productions present modern audiences with a feminist ideal: strong, articulate, intelligent women – a type far more familiar and acceptable today than in ancient Greece or early modern England. “I admire her” says actor Rachael Stirling. “Obviously the course of action she takes is extreme, but I like the fact that she doesn’t accept that her husband runs off, as society expects of her”.⁷⁵ Fiona Shaw, another actor who has played the role, comments on Euripides’ skill in setting up a situation in which Medea’s previous actions have “cornered” her.⁷⁶ She says “There is absolutely nowhere for her to go. Thereafter the audience feel sympathetic, right until the moment when she says: ‘I must kill the children’”. At this point she crosses a boundary, moving from being the injured woman to the one who inflicts injury.

Audiences’ willingness to witness a woman crossing this boundary, even if the deaths are offstage, is evidence of enduring interest in the mental state of women who murder infants.⁷⁷ Today, the interest is more profound than it was for those in early modern England thanks to the modern discipline of psychology which gives us the understanding and vocabulary to analyse the effects of betrayal and loss. But there are limits to this understanding, and when a real-life case closely echoes that of Medea, as in Donnison’s murder of her infants, described above, she is described as using the children as the “ultimate pawns” to hurt her partner “in the most extreme way possible”.⁷⁸

The feeding mother

We saw in chapter 5 that early modern debates about mothers who deny the maternal breast construct her as a wrongdoer and, by using a similar mode of expression as pamphlets about infanticides, create an association between her and infant death. In relation to a recently proposed financial incentive to persuade more women to breastfeed, articles mentioned that it protects babies against the “life-threatening

⁷⁵ Maddy Costa, “*Medea*: the mother of all roles,” *Guardian*, 2 October.

⁷⁶ Fiona Shaw, directed by Deborah Warner, played the role in London, Dublin and New York, 2000-2003.

⁷⁷ The killing of infants by abandoned parents is not a uniquely female phenomenon. It was believed that Paul McBride, who killed his six-month old son after separating from the mother, acted out of revenge. (*Metro*, Sept 16 2011) Similarly, Michael Pedersen killed his two young children a few weeks after separating from his wife. (*Guardian* 2 October 2012) Both committed suicide.

⁷⁸ “Mother Guilty.” Donnison was sentenced in 2013 to a minimum of 32 years imprisonment.

condition necrotising enterocolitis”.⁷⁹ In a highly prejudiced article about the environmental impact of bottlefeeding, the modern alternative to employing a wetnurse, The Association of Breastfeeding Mothers states that it “causes the death of one and a half million babies per year and ill health in countless others”.⁸⁰ The article describes environmentally destructive actions which governments are forced to take to enable them to repay national debt which partially results from importing products such as bottles, teats and milk for women who do not breastfeed. They “tear down forests, degrade land, pollute air and water”. We are told that “Forests, fisheries, grazing lands and soil” are “liquidised” which has led to “flooding, drought, erosion, landslides and climate change”. Whereas early modern writers called on religion to justify the maternal breast, and supported their arguments with the Bible, today’s writers call on environmental fears supported by science. And, whereas early modern women who employed wetnurses were merely “unnatural” those who bottlefeed today appear to be responsible for no less than the destruction of the planet. Though the concerns are different, mothers who do not breastfeed are still constructed as wrongdoers. Yet denying the breast remains socially patterned, although today it is “women in low-income areas of the country” who treat bottle-feeding as the norm, a reversal of early modern patterns.⁸¹

Feeding and the maternal breast, or its denial, continue to interest creative writers. In *Handbag*, the Victorian wife (Constance) believes breastfeeding will help her to feel affection for the infant to whom she is indifferent but her husband (Moncrieff) objects, echoing the sentiments of the Countess of Lincoln’s spouse:

Constance: Must do my duty.

Moncrieff: Not the duty of an animal.⁸²

The mother in *Saved* also has no affection for her baby, which is referred to as “it” throughout. The stage directions to a domestic scene state “*Slowly a baby starts to cry. It goes on crying without a break until the end of the scene*”.⁸³ Its increasingly

⁷⁹ Sarah Boseley, “Researchers to offer shopping vouchers to mothers who breastfeed,” *ibid.*, 12 November 2013.

⁸⁰ Andrew Radford, “*The Ecological Impact of Breastfeeding*” Association of Breastfeeding Mothers, www.abm.me.uk [Accessed 11/1/2014].

⁸¹ Boseley, “Researchers to offer.”

⁸² Ravenhill, *Handbag* (78).

⁸³ Bond, *Saved* (30).

distressed off-stage cries are ignored by the mother (Pam), who says to Mary (the infant's grandmother):

Pam: Put it on the council.

Mary (shrugs): They wouldn't 'ave it if they've got any sense.⁸⁴

The crying, hungry baby invites the audience to participate in its distress, amplifying the sense of realism, and the shock when it is subsequently abandoned in the park and stoned to death. Elsewhere, the feeding image is corrupted: the gin which is forced on the crying baby in *Fred Ginger*; the muddled attempts to care for the infant in the modern-day scenes in *Handbag*. Both moments describe bizarre actions in which attempted care becomes damage, and, as both infants have been left with carers, the plays question the mothers' culpability. Thus the denial of the maternal breast remains an aspect of infanticide in recent works. Yet a positive image of the caring mother/mother substitute is found amongst the violence and destruction of *Blasted*. Cate, the "good" figure who offsets the mayhem which dominates the play, instinctively names the infant "Baby" (in contrast to the "it" of *Saved*) and wants to care for it;

Cate: Got to get something for Baby to eat.

Ian: Needs its mother's milk.⁸⁵

When the baby dies she buries it beneath the floorboards, and constructs a cross for it, thus marking its existence, in contrast to the treatment of the real-life neonate recently buried in a pauper's grave (see above).

Liminal beings

In the early modern period monstrosity was associated with divine judgement and God's retribution for mankind's wrongdoings. Today the term is used of extreme crimes which are perceived as outrageous, sometimes with the "shock horror" tone of early modern pamphlets. Wakefield Prison in West Yorkshire, set up in 1594 as a House of Correction and now "home to a roll call of the most violent, perverted and murderous prisoners in the British penal system" is nick-named Monster Mansion.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *ibid.* (34).

⁸⁵ Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (London: Methuen, 2002) (53).

⁸⁶ Jeremy Armstrong, "Monsters of Monster Mansion," *Mirror*, 6 October 2007.

Child killer Ian Huntley is described as a “monster” while Fred and Rose West “could behave monstrously – but seemed like the rest of us”.⁸⁷

When early modern women talked about “the devil” they were providing an explanation for their acts which they, and those who questioned them, would understand – it was a way of describing their mental state. Today, most people do not believe in the devil or, increasingly, in the idea of absolute evil, a term which artists use with caution. Ravenhill warns “A carefully laid out set of liberal platitudes start to topple once the ‘E’ word enters the conversation” but adds “I still can’t absolutely deny that it never ever exists”.⁸⁸ Niklas Rådström says “I don’t believe in evil as a metaphysical force [...] but I do believe that there are evil situations in which we all find ourselves, and that sometimes in those situations people lose the civilised part of themselves”.⁸⁹ Tilda Swinton, who portrayed the mother in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, says “There is always this word ‘evil’ pulled out of the drawer [...] It’s a very quick response”.⁹⁰ Our post-Freudian perception leads us to view motives for infanticide in studied, but less clear-cut, ways than those of our predecessors, involving attempts to understand the mind of the perpetrator. Early modern explanations, which separated the doer from the act, are a different period’s attempts to comprehend actions which society cannot understand. They involve the idea of a force outside the person (the devil), the force of evil within, or the suggestion of the monster disguised in human form, each containing ideas of unnaturalness.

Why?

Why do writers continue to be drawn to use infant death in their creative works? Why do readers and audiences continue to want to examine it? Of course, these questions are linked: creative writers might abandon the topic if there were no public interest, though I will question this assumption.

Examinations of infant death are part of a wider interest in murder. Charlie Brooker has written of our “innate lust for murdertainment”,⁹¹ which has recently included docudramas about Fred and Rose West, *London Road*, a play concerning the

⁸⁷ Neil McKay, “A glimpse of pure evil,” *Guardian*, 1 August 2011.

⁸⁸ Ravenhill, “A Tear”.

⁸⁹ *The Guardian*, 6 May 2009

⁹⁰ Kira Cochrane, “I didn’t speak for five years,” *Guardian*, 12 October 2011.

⁹¹ Charlie Brooker, “Haven’t we had enough of murder on the telly?,” *ibid.*, 4 June 2012.

murder of prostitutes in Suffolk, and a novel about Myra Hindley. Just as early modern pamphlets examined “all of the circumstances, perpetrators, and motives” of crimes,⁹² so today’s literary works can present a different viewpoint to newspaper accounts (when they deal with a real crime). They can take readers or viewers into the minds of those involved, and thus help them to understand. They also allow audiences to participate in the crime from a safe distance, as a form of catharsis. This need is clear from the ritual of spontaneous memorials erected at places of shocking death to which people bring flowers, candles, images and, in the case of children, toys. The significance of toys is complex. Are they bought especially, or is another child making a sacrifice of a loved (or unloved) toy as their own act of (adult prompted) mourning? A toy suggests the dead child living in the present or in a liminal place as if, like the ghosts of early modern literature, the child cannot rest until justice has been carried out. Perhaps such memorials should be seen as a form of community apology for having failed to notice and act upon the danger a child was in, again a suggestion of the community culpability we have seen directly expressed or implied in pamphlets.

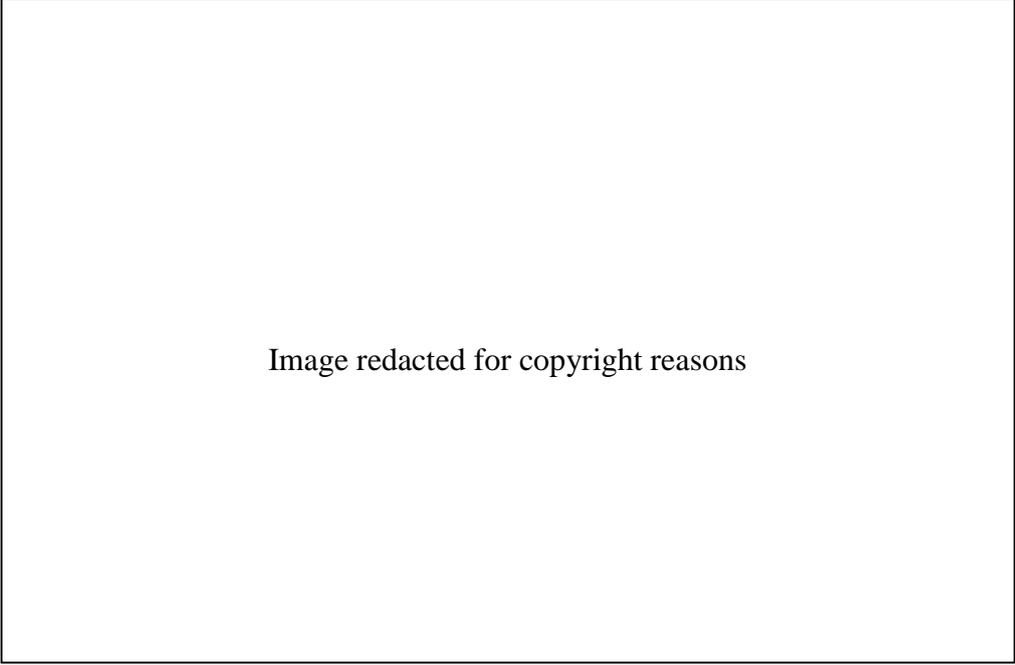


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Some of the hundreds of items left in memory of three-year-old Mikael Kular, who was murdered by his mother in January 2014.

⁹² Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (126).

By writing about infanticide creative artists present and examine a subject people may be reluctant to think about. Writer Sue MacLaine is still refining her play *A Place of Safety* which deals with the death, in 1973, of seven-year-old Maria Colwell, after years of abuse by her stepfather.⁹³ She suggests that when we hear a child has died we find it hard to imagine the manner of that death.⁹⁴ It is, she says, “a failure of the imagination” and she believes that “we do not want to look”. She adds: “It is hard to watch infanticide – it is frightening to see what we have turned our eyes from”. As a writer, MacLaine likes to “tackle issues” and says “I go to those places so that other people don’t have to”. She sees her role as a broker between the audience and the unseeable, describing herself as a guide. The play, set twenty years after the enquiry into Maria’s death, examines it from the perspective of Diana Lees, the social worker who was blamed, and examines the “personal cost to those involved in child protection” and the “impossibility of her task”.

Modern, reality-based works raise issues similar to those we have seen in early modern literature – culpability (*Monsters*), the effect on the community (*London Road*) questions of individual blame (*A Place of Safety*). The creative techniques are also similar to those of early modern pamphleteers who wrote (or claimed to write) accounts based on interviews and verbatim (though probably ventriloquized) speeches. *Monsters* draws on interrogation transcripts and court documents; *London Road* is based on the authors’ interviews with the community; *A Place of Safety* includes verbatim words from the enquiry.

Monsters and *A Place of Safety* are exceptional in being based on real cases of infanticide. Most creative works deal with fictional examples, so again, why are writers drawn to constructing these fictional situations? Murder is dramatic and emotive, and inevitably means characters with possibly complex motives, dark secrets, who weave alternative narratives constructed on deceptions. Their appeal to writers is self-evident. Examinations of violence reveal the variety of humankind’s nature, and what Derek Cohen describes as its “terrible seductive power”.⁹⁵

⁹³ Sue MacLaine, *A Place of Safety* (Unpublished work, 2010). Rehearsed readings have taken place, most recently at the Studio Theatre, Brighton, in 2010.

⁹⁴ This and subsequent comments taken from a telephone conversation with Sue MacLaine, 9/5/2013.

⁹⁵ Derek Cohen, *Shakespeare’s Culture of Violence* (New York: St Martin’s, 1993) (127).

In fictional narratives there may be considerations around who is culpable, but there is no ambiguity about the victim's innocence. The infant or child is a blank canvas, a *tabula rasa*, a symbol of hope, optimism, a belief in a future, whose intentional death is also the death of these positive emotions and beliefs. The automatic innocence of the child frees writers to use the crime as the basis for discussing other matters, such as "society", and the metaphor of the blameless child is easily unravelled, freeing audiences to concentrate on broader questions. So in fictional works such as *Fred Ginger, Saved* or *Blasted* audiences can consider issues such as society, education, employment, marital relationships, power, the dehumanising effect of war, just as early modern writers used infanticide as a basis for examining erroneous religions, marital power, and promiscuity. When such topics are viewed through the lens of child death, fictional infants allow writers to make "loud" statements.

But, why the audience interest? As the Chorus states at the opening of *Monsters*:

I don't know why you came here
 [...]
 You probably want to know why
 Why did that which will soon happen here already happen?⁹⁶

Commenting on representations of early modern mothers who kill, Staub writes: "The construction of the mother [...] becomes enmeshed with [...] anxieties about family relations, religion and economics".⁹⁷ These subjects were in upheaval during the early modern period, as now, which may explain this.

Our fascination with infanticide does not fade with the passage of time. Explanations are still being sought for the remains of ninety-seven newborn babies from the Roman period discovered in Buckinghamshire. Early theories favoured the dramatic: a brothel and consequent infanticide.⁹⁸ Subsequently, Brett Thorn, keeper of archaeology at the Buckinghamshire County Museum, suggested the site may have been "a shrine where women went to give birth, and get protection from the mother goddess

⁹⁶ Rådström, *Monsters* (17).

⁹⁷ Staub, "Early Modern Medea" (333).

⁹⁸ "Baby deaths link to Roman 'brothel' in Buckinghamshire" BBC Online, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10384460> [Accessed 27/6/2013].

during this dangerous time”.⁹⁹ He believes they may be the bodies of infants who died during labour. The point of interest is that we continue to be intrigued by infant death, have an on-going need to understand it, and may even favour violent explanations.

Of course audiences like to be frightened and shocked,¹⁰⁰ a need which goes back to childhood and may have psychological benefits. Evans’ article elicited on-line comment about the benefit of Grimms’ Fairy Tales. One respondent writes that they help children “to negotiate the scary outer world and to negotiate through their own interior world including fear, anger etc. They allow you to experience and survive”. Another wrote of their ability to “allow us to contain dark and murderous fantasies”.¹⁰¹ However, I would disagree with the suggestion that they are “a convention with no relation to reality”. As we have seen, extraordinary cruelty and violence toward children is all too real, and has a long history.

Conclusion

It was always my intention in this research to use the Sussex Coroners’ inquests as a starting point for asking questions, while literary works would be the main material I studied. As well as combining historical and literary critical approaches I also wanted to call on other disciplines such as anthropology and psychology which might help to provide an understanding of infanticide beyond the idea that unmarried women killed their infants because they feared shame and doubted their ability to survive. In the course of this study we have seen that creative writers had diverse ways of depicting the accused, that they stated or implied the culpability of communities, and that sometimes mysterious accomplices appeared equally guilty. The fact that so many Sussex infants were drowned or thrown invited the introduction of anthropological ideas about liminality, marginality, and abjection, including the liminality of pregnant women and the unborn or newborn child.

Once it became apparent that these theories illuminated hitherto disregarded aspects of infanticide, it was clear that they were also revealing about other aspects of the crime. Confusion about what constituted marriage could lead to liminal situations in

⁹⁹ Louise Ord, “Roman dead baby ‘brothel’ mystery deepens” BBC Online, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-14401305> [Accessed 15/9/2013].

¹⁰⁰ Some play reviews challenge this, such as those of *Fred Ginger*, *Saved* and *Blasted*.

¹⁰¹ Evans, “*Grimm’s Tales*”.

which women were neither maids, widows, nor wives. Strident laws against bastard-bearers virtually ensured that such women were forced to live on the margins of society, while punishments for bastardy followed many performance aspects of ritual. Although Herod and Medea remain the most notorious infanticides in western culture, early modern men and married women lurk at the margins of academic literature about the crime. This research drew them from the shadows and into the spotlight revealing differences of motive and method.

Throughout, the ideas have been enriched by the wealth of early modern creative works. Street literature and drama are central to the themes of this study because they were popular media – new, exciting, disapproved, performed, but above all enjoyed by huge numbers of all social groups. For many – tradespeople, country-dwellers – they were a rare representation of themselves. What was described by these media is what people consumed on a virtually daily basis. It was how many learned of male seducers, abandoned pregnant women, artful bastard-bearers, forlorn lovers, vengeful husbands and wives – and infanticide.

It remains true that most women accused of infanticide were unmarried, and therefore extremely probable that many of them were both ashamed and fearful about their survival. But this research has revealed that their circumstances, actions, and motives were more complex than these bald facts suggest. We return to where we started. Infanticide is a dark, hidden crime. A close study of a small geographic area has revealed much; anthropological theories about liminality have taken us further and offered a different perspective. Other sources and disciplines could add more. While we may find no ultimate “truth”, we should keep looking in order further to aid our understanding of the men and women involved in infanticide, and the children and infants who fell victim to the crime.

A quotation from Samuel Beckett offers an appropriate afterword to this study:

“They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more”¹⁰².

¹⁰² Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958) (89).

Appendix 1: The 1624 Infanticide Act

Chapter 27 of the statute of 21 James I

An act to prevent the destroying and murdering of bastard children.

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

II. For the preventing therefore of this great mischief, be it enacted by the authority of the present parliament, That if any woman after one month next ensuing the end of this session of parliament be delivered of any issue of her body, male or female, which being born alive, should by the laws of this realm be a bastard, and that she endeavour privately, either by drowning or secret burying thereof, or any other way, either by herself or the procuring of others, so to conceal the death thereof, as that it may not come to light, whether it were born alive or not, but be concealed: in every such case the said mother so offending shall suffer death as in case of murder, except such mother can make proof by one witness at the least, that the child (whose death was by her so intended to be concealed) was born dead.

Transcription taken from Hoffer, Peter C., and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803* (New York: New York University, 1981) (20).

Appendix 2: Note on Sussex Coroners' inquests

Sussex has a high level of survival for records of Coroners' inquests (1,367 survive for the years 1485 to 1688, as well as others from beyond the early modern period). They are stored at the National Archive and are subject to the inevitable ravages of water and burn damage.

The inquests, which clerks recorded in Latin, have been translated by Roy F. Hunnisett, who was principal assistant keeper of public records at the National Archive.¹ His desire was to make public records available to others. He does not interpret the documents (though he does make some statistical analyses with brief comments). Where clerks resorted to the vernacular, Hunnisett indicates the fact by single quote marks. This is the practice I have followed.

Although the inquests have been "edited", the term does not indicate selection and the volumes contain all known surviving records. In an editorial note Hunnisett describes his editorial process. He says the originals "contain much repetition and are sometimes excessively verbose".² To demonstrate this he includes one inquest both in Latin and in a verbatim translation, which shows the constant repetition in the accounts. To take one short extract from the verbatim translation:

of which mortal wound thus given by the aforesaid Henry Younge in the aforesaid form the same Thomas Botcher on the aforesaid sixth day of August in the aforesaid twenty-seventh year immediately died at Lewes aforesaid in the aforesaid county;³

Hunnisett writes that he has omitted words stating what is self-evident, such as "feloniously", but otherwise has deleted "nothing of substance". He acknowledges that this may make the records appear uniform.

It must be recognised that the clerks may have overwritten events with their own cultural perceptions, a fact which applies to all written documents. However, the inquest records are the accounts made closest to the time of the deaths, normally within days of the body being found. They are therefore less subject to the influences of retellings and community pressures than reports on later steps in the legal process may be.

¹ Hunnisett, *Inquests 1485-1558*; Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603*; Hunnisett, *Inquests 1603-1688*.

² Hunnisett, *Inquests 1558-1603* (xvli).

³ *ibid.* (xlvii).

Appendix 3: Sussex Cases of Violent, Unnatural, Unexplained Infant Death 1547-1686

Complete list of cases from archival and other sources^a

Case ^b	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
1/132	1547	Feb	William Spookes	Merston		m	6	beating	~	murder	outlawed	Child was bound, hung up, beaten; trampled; buried face down. Spookes fled.
1/150	1550	Dec	Joan Bakon	W.Grinstead	spynster	f	0	murdered	~	waived	~	Hid infant on bench in father's house and fled.
1/165	1553	Feb	Richard Barnerde	Hellingly	father and grandfather of child	f	0	crushed	~	~	~	Barnerde fathered child on his daughter. After killing the child he committed suicide. Rioters broke into his home, took property and evicted three other young children.
1/204	1555	Nov	Robert and Elizabeth Kente	Aldrington	parents	f	6	[cold/exposure]	~	accidental	~	Parents sent daughter Agnes to guard neighbour's sheep resulting in her death because they "took no care of her".
* 17	1559	Mar	Alice Woode	Little Horsted	spinster	f	child	drowned	pregnant	guilty	~	Pleaded pregnancy.
* 106	1599	Mar	Alice Bankes	Berwick	spinster	~	child	thrown from window	~	~	~	
2/5	1559	Nov	Alice Warner	Sidlesham	mistress, spynster	f	8	stab to head	not guilty	acquitted	~	Had goods valued £5.12s.
2/24	1565	Apr	Henry Pellyng	Lindfield	husband	~	unborn	bludgeoned pregnant wife	not guilty	convicted	lunatic	Attacked wife when "frantick". Judged "lunatic". May have died in prison.
2/25	1565	May	Sibyl Elyett	Kirdford	spynster/wife	m	infant	broke neck	~	guilty	to hang	Sibyl spinster/wife of William murdered an unknown infant, encouraged and later harboured by her husband. Pleaded not guilty "Christian Grantham" blamed; couple harboured her. All convicted. William pleaded Benefit of Clergy; Sibyl died in prison.
* 214	1567	June	Robert Willard	Buxted	butcher	m	~	beaten	~	guilty	to hang	Joan Marden was child's mother.
2/111	1572	Dec	Richard and ? Kyte	Hollington	wife	f	9	cold [exposure]	~	natural death	~	Fortune Luck, servant, died of the cold after being sent on an errand by Kyte and wife.
* 467	1573	June	Joan Powlter	Wivelsfield	spinster	f	infant	killed	~	not guilty	~	Described as "unbaptised" infant.

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
* 515	1574	Oct	Anthony Fisher/Joan Marshe	Playden	labourer/ spinster	~	~	killed	~	both not guilty	~	"They killed her infant and buried it".
2/153	1575	Sep	Elizabeth Gery	Nuthurst	spinster	m	0	nettle in mouth	not guilty	convicted	death	Pleaded pregnancy. Untrue.
* 623	1576	Dec	Margaret Comber	Fletching	spinster	f	infant	killed	~	not guilty	~	~
2/171	1577	Mar	Agnes Berye	Halisham	spinster now wife of John "Berries"	f	?	beaten	not guilty	acquitted	~	Agnes accused of killing daughter of John Berries, now her husband. Blows were heard after cries stopped. Accused "John Nok".
#	1577	~	Mercy Gould	Cuckfield	spinster	m	0	stillborn/infanticide	~	~	~	Extensive enquiry discussed by David Cressy. See below.
2/200	1578	Mar	Joan Farnecombe	Catsfield	spynster	m	10+	drowned	not guilty	convicted	death	Child was Leonard Farnecombe.
* 712	1579		Alice Baker	Ringmer	spinster	m	child	drowned in pond	~	guilty/ ignoramus	~	Alice's mother, Elizabeth, suspected accomplice.
2/226	1579	Apr	Maud Godley	West Burton	spinster	m	0	suffocated by hand	confessed	~	~	Died in gaol.
2/239	1580	Jan	Margery Porter	Rye	spinster	m	infant	murdered	not guilty	convicted	hanging	John Mody, infant's father, to be whipped around the town.
2/287	1582	Oct	Mercy Drowling	Dallington	wife of Richard Drowling	f	0	born dead	~	natural death	~	~
* 861	1582	Dec	Bridget Standford	Lindfield	spinster	~	0	strangled		guilty	to hang	~
2/360	1588	Mar	Joan Browne	Etchingham	spinster	m	0	crushed, neck broken	not guilty/ pregnancy	sentenced	~	Body thrown under stairs. Pleaded pregnancy and found to be so. Sentenced to death July 1590.
2/369	1588	Aug	Ursula Farmer/ Alice Farmer	Rotherfield	spynster	f	0	thrown in well	not guilty	acquitted	~	Ursula aided and abetted by Alice, her mother. Did not flee.
* 1125	1589	Jan	Constance Stevens	Washington	spinster	f	infanticide	~	~	both guilty	remanded (pregnant)	Elizabeth Watson cited as accessory.
2/380	1589	May	Elizabeth Reader	Framfield	spinster	m	10	beaten with a staff	not guilty	acquitted	released	At trial said child (Edward Cooper) found to be killed by Tom Staff.
2/387	1589	June	Mary Mowser	Southover	spinster	f	0	disembowelled with knife	not guilty/ pregnant	Mary guilty, mother acquitted	Mary hanged, mother freed.	Mary killed her newborn. Claimed pregnancy, but untrue. Agnes aided and abetted.

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Place	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
* 1202	1589	Nov	Joan Baker	Eastbourne	spinster	f	0	with a knife	~	guilty	to hang	~
2/398	1590	Jan	Roland Medowe/ Nicholas Gower	Penhurst	labourers and assailants	m	unborn	cut Alice Smyth's throat; removed child from womb	~	convicted	hanged	Gower aided and abetted.
2/417	1591	July	Thomas Cranley	Pulborough	"Yoman"	m	0	crushed newborn's head	not guilty	released	~	Wife gave evidence against Cranley at Sessions. He was acquitted. John at Death said to be responsible.
2/420	1591	Sept	~	Burwash	?	f	0	natural death	~	~	~	"Godley" Walker, ... who had been born about 8 am ... died a natural death ... and not otherwise".
2/425	1591	Dec	~	Burwash	~	m.	0	stillborn	~	~	~	"An unknown woman gave birth to a dead male child".
2/450	1592	Dec	Mildred Barnes	Heathfield	spinster/servant	f	0	"born mute and dead"	.	suspected of felony	delivered by proclamation	Natural death. Employer, Awcocke and wife discharged. Mildred suspected, but released.
2/468	1594	Apr	Margret Fuller	Westfield	spinster	m	0	stillborn	natural death	~	~	~
2/480	1595	Apr	Elizabeth Lyndsey	Eastbourne	spinster	f	0	thrown into pit and drowned	not guilty/ pregnant	acquitted	~	Pleaded pregnancy. Received special pardon.
* 1572	1595	May	Agnes Nokes	Ticehurst	spinster	m	child	drowned in pail of water	~	not guilty	~	~
2/483	1595	Dec	Bennet Davis	Maresfield	spynster	f	0	suffocated? born dead?	not guilty	acquitted	~	Evidence given against Bennet as infant stillborn.
2/502	1597	Apr	Alice Hide	Henfield	"spicer"	m	0	thrown and drowned in pit	~	~	~	Women testified against Hide.
2/535	1600	Mar	Richard ap Beaven	Lewes	yeoman	f	6y 11m	raped, languished and died	~	Beavan "at large"	~	Agnes Davies ('spicer'/wife) of Hugh Davies harboured Beaven knowing he had committed the crime.
2/538	1600	June	May Sibyl Lamboll	Chichester	spinster	f	0	strangled	not guilty	natural death	~	~
2/544	1600	July	Joan Ambry	Westbourne	spinster	f	0	"twisted and broke neck"	not guilty	guilty	to hang	~
3/10	1603	Dec	Alice Lyghe	Ticehurst	spinster	m	0	premature and stillborn	~	natural death	~	~
3/19	1604	Sept	Helen Gates	Chichester	spinster	m	0	born dead	~	natural death	~	~

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Place	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
3/51	1606	Apr	Joan Mauser	Mayfield	spinster	m	0	born prematurely	~	misadventure	~	-
3/54	1606	July	Joan Homewood	East Grinstead	spinster/wife?	m,m,f	?	cut throats of her three children	~		Joan cut her throat and drowned herself	Richard Homewood was father of the children.
3/71	1608	Feb	Rebecca Henberye	Lamberhurst	widow	m	0	born prematurely	~	misadventure	~	Gaoled on suspicion of murder. Appears not to have stood trial.
§	Pre-1609		Jane Hattersley	East Grinstead	~	~	0	~	Not denied	guilty	hanged	Three newborns at different times. Aided by their father Adam Adamson. Described in pamphlet. See below.
3/81	1609	June	John Swyft	Worth	infant's father	m	6m	nips & bruises	~	suspected of murder	~	Multiple wounds, caused by hand. Suspected of murder Fled, retaken but not tried.
* 200	1611	Apr	Agnes Swyft	Lancing	spinster	f	0	strangled	~	not guilty	~	~
* 221	1611	Nov	Agnes Smith	Ditchling	spinster	m	0	strangled	~	not guilty	~	~
3/108	1612	Jan	Agnes Pavy	Lamberhurst	spinster	m	0	broke neck	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/123	1613	Mar	Agnes Cheesman	Wivelsfield	spinster	m	0	struck & bruised head	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/126	1613	May	Katherine Haddes	Rottingdean	spinster	f,f	0	strangled, gave bruises	not guilty	convicted	hanged	Gave birth to female twins; Strangled and choked one child. bruised other, thrusting it into the 'hoole' of a post.
3/171	1616	April	Isabel Woodgat	Brighton	wife of Robert, gent	f	"servula"	multiple injuries	~	waived	~	Injuries to Joan Giles, husband's servant comprising staves, straps, hot tongs, striking, whipping, pinching. Accused at large.
3/186	1617	Jan	Mary Reynoldes	Hailsham	widow	m	0	suffocated	not guilty	acquitted	acquitted	Note says she did not flee.
3/542	1618	July	Francis Myles	Rye	baker	~	0	struck pregnant woman	~	~	~	Myles killed pregnant woman and her unborn child.
3/211	1620	Jan	Unnamed	Lewes	~	m	0	premature; died next day	~	~	~	Child was Nicholas Newton.
3/222	1621	Apr	Mary Delve	Northiam	spinster	m	0	drowned	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
3/225	1621	May	Mary Hemsley	Willingdon	spinster	m	0	smothered	not guilty	acquitted	~	Nicholas and Katherine Reynoldes accused of encouraging/comforting Mary. Both to appear at Assize. Nicholas delivered by proclamation.
3/235	1622	Apr	Eleanor Warwicke	Selmeston	spinster	m	0	choked, smothered, strangled	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/244	1622	Dec	Ann/Agnes Hebbenden	New Fishbourne	spinster	f	0	languished and died	natural death			~
* 647	1623	Jan	Alice Thatcher	Bodiam	spinster	m	0	thrown from window	~		not guilty	~
3/254	1624	Feb	Joan Barnett	Rye	~	f	0	wiful negligence/thrown onto rocks	Devil put it in her mind	convicted	~	Thomas Frenchman, child's father advised Joan to "take something" if she became pregnant but she did not do so. Newborn died after half an hour and body thrown onto rocks and into the sea.
3/272	1626	Apr	Joan Blackman	Ringmer	spinster	f	0	strangled/suffocated	not guilty	acquitted	~	A Richard Howell and wife gave evidence against Joan.
3/273	1626	Apr	Joan Power	South Mundham	spinster	f	0	thrown onto mound of earth and suffocated	not guilty	natural death	acquitted	~
3/287	1628	Mar	Joan Higgons	Ferring	spinster?	f	0	thrown down naked in garden	not guilty	convicted	hanged	"Intending she should die" and "deprived of any human assistance".
3/327	1633	Aug	Rachel Burtenshaw	Hartfield	spinster	f	0	cut throat	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/341	1634	Dec	Joan/Alice alias Willis	Cliffe	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/348	1636	Feb	Elizabeth Sparshall	South Harting	alias widow of Henry	m	0	drowned in well	not guilty	acquitted	released	~
3/353	1636	Dec	Jane Evans	Lindfield	spinster	f	0	cut throat	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/367	1638	Dec	Joan Chesle	Barcombe	spinster	m	0	threw into field. Died of cold/ lack of nourishment	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/404	1648	Apr	Elizabeth Launder	E.Chiltington	spinster	m	0	thrown into brooke of water	not guilty; pregnant	convicted	~	Jury of matrons found her to be not pregnant.

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
3/439	1656	Nov	Elizabeth Beecraft	Rye	spinster	f	0	strangled	not guilty	acquitted		Wrapped dead infant and laid it in a settle. Gaoled pending two sureties
3/466	1665	Apr	Henry Beale	Petworth	father	f	15 or 50 weeks	struck in chest	not guilty	convicted	hanged	Child, his "natural daughter", was asleep in her cradle.
3/472	1666	Sep	Joan Harmer	West Firle	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	acquitted	released	~
3/475	1667	Apr	?	Hastings	?	?	?	?	~	~	~	Enquiry into "death of a child". Witnesses called but "canne findeno discovery theiroy".
3/478	1667	Feb	Jane Dobson	Maresfield	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
3/479	1670	Mar	Ann Gates	Goring	spinster	m	0	born dead? Strangled?	not guilty	convicted	hanged	Trial assumed infant born alive.
3/496	1677	Dec	Elizabeth Baker	Worth	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	convicted	pardoned	Produced a pardon and released; "paid her fees".
3/497	1678	Jan	Jane Pollard	Edburton	infant's grandmother	m	0	struck with bedstaffe	not guilty	guilty	hanged	Assize record states William and Jane Pollard killed newborn infant of Margaret Pollard. William died in gaol; Jane hanged. Margaret acquitted.
3/500	1679	Jan	Ann Batchelor	Framfield	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	acquitted	~	Paid her fees.
3/501	1679	July	Ann Taylor	Patching	spinster	m	0	thrown in pond of water	not guilty	convicted	sentenced	Pleaded a pardon (allowed) allowed. Released. Paid fees.
3/506	1682	Feb	Mary Gardiner	Amberley	spinster	f	0	premature birth	not guilty	Born dead	~	Later women accused her of strangling; acquitted.
3/507	1683	Mar	Elizabeth Bennett	Findon	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	acquitted	released	paid fees
3/512	1685	Aug	Richard Jones	Slinfold	father	f	8 wks	bruise to head	not guilty/ benefit of clergy	convicted	~	Robert and Elizabeth Smith (spinster) accused; he convicted (murder) but pleaded benefit of clergy; Elizabeth pardoned.
3/516	1686	July	Margery Barham	Sedlescombe	spinster	m	0	strangled/thrown into well	not guilty	acquitted	to be released	Two men aided, harboured and comforted Margery.
3/518	1686	Dec	Mary Peirce	Frant	spinster	m	0	strangled	not guilty	acquitted	~	~

a All records are taken from the three volumes of Hunnisett's translations from the latin unless otherwise indicated. b Records from Hunnisett's translations are indicated as volume no/case no

* Assize Court records.

Records held among State Papers at The National Archives. The case is fully described in 'Mercy Gould and the Vicar of Cuckfield' in David Cressy, *Agnes Bowker's Cat: Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England*, Oxford University Press (2009). § Described in Thomas Brewer's pamphlet *The Bloody Mother* (1609).

Appendix 4: Sussex Infant Deaths Involving Throwing

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
360	1588	Mar	Joan Browne	Etchingam	spinster	m	0	crushed, neck broken	not guilty/ pregnancy	sentenced	~	Body thrown under stairs. Pleaded pregnancy and found to be so. Sentenced to death July 1590.
369	1588	Aug	Ursula Farmer/ Alice Farmer	Rotherfield	spynster	f	0	thrown in well	not guilty	acquitted	~	Ursula aided and abetted by Alice, her mother.
480	1595	April	Elizabeth Lyndsey	Eastbourne	spinster	f	0	thrown into pit and drowned	not guilty/ pregnancy	aquitted	~	Pleaded pregnancy. Received special pardon.
502	1597	Apr	Alice Hide	Henfield	"spicer"	m	0	thrown and drowned in pit	~	~	~	Women testified against Hide.
* 106	1599	Mar	Alice Bankes	Berwick	spinster	~	child	thrown from window	~	~	~	~
* 647	1623	Jan	Alice Thatcher	Bodiam	spinster	m	0	thrown from window	~		not guilty	~
254	1624	Feb	Joan Barnett	Rye	~	f	0	willful negligence/thrown onto rocks	devil put it in her mind	convicted	~	Thomas Frenchman, child's father, advised Joan to "take something" if she became pregnant but she did not do so. Newborn died after half an hour and Joan threw body onto rocks and into the sea.
273	1626	Apr	Joan Power	South Mundham	spinster	f	0	thrown onto mound of earth and suffocated	not guilty	natural death	acquitted	~
287	1628	Mar	Joan Higgons	Ferring	spinster?	f	0	thrown down naked in garden	not guilty	convicted	hanged	"Intending she should die" and "deprived of any human assistance".
367	1638	Dec	Joan Chesle	Barcombe	spinster	m	0	threw into field. Died of cold/ lack of nourishment	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
393	1646	Dec	Elizabeth White	Shermanbury	spinster	m	0	thrown into cellar intending death from cold/ lack of nourishment	not guilty	convicted	hanged	Thrown into cellar of John Langford, her master.
404	1648	Apr	Elizabeth Lauder	East Chiltington	spinster	m	0	thrown into brooke of water	not guilty; pregnant	convicted	~	Jury of matrons found her to be not pregnant.

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
442	1657	Mar	Ann Comber/ John Puttocke	Lurgashall	spinster/widow	m	0	threw into pit full of water, mud, filth	-	convicted	hanged	John Puttocke charged – with aiding (acquitted); but sentenced to three months for unlawful sex.
501	1679	July	Ann Taylor	Patching	spinster	m	0	thrown in pond of water	not guilty	convicted	sentenced	Pleaded a pardon (allowed). Released. Paid fees.
516	1686	July	Margery Barham	Sedlescombe	spinster	m	0	strangled/thrown into well	not guilty	acquitted	to be released	Two men aided, harboured and comforted Margery.

* Assize Court records

Appendix 5: Sussex Infant Deaths Involving Water

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
* 17	1559	Mar	Alice Woode	Little Horsted	spinster	f	child	drowned	pregnant	guilty	~	Pleaded pregnancy.
200	1578	Mar	Joan Farnecombe	Catsfield	spynster	m	10+	drowned	not guilty	convicted	death	Child was Leonard Farnecombe.
* 712	1579		Alice Baker	Ringmer	spinster	m	child	drowned in pond	~	guilty/ ignoramus	~	Alice's mother, Elizabeth, suspected accomplice.
369	1588	Aug	Ursula Farmer/ Alice Farmer	Rotherfield	spynster	f	0	thrown in well	not guilty	acquitted	~	Ursula alided and abetted by Alice, her mother. Did not flee.
480	1595	April	Elizabeth Lyndsey	Eastbourne	spinster	f	0	thrown into pit and drowned	not guilty/preg.	acquitted	~	Pleaded pregnancy. Received special pardon.
* 1572	1595	May	Agnes Nokes	Ticehurst	spinster	m	child	Drowned in pail of water	~	not guilty	~	~
502	1597	Apr	Alice Hide	Henfield	"spicer"	m	0	thrown and drowned in pit	~	~	~	Women testified against Hide.
222	1621	Apr	Mary Delve	Northiam	spinster	m	0	drowned	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
348	1636	Feb	Elizabeth Sparshall	South Harting	alias widow of Henry	m	0	drowned in well	not guilty	acquitted	released	~
404	1648	Apr	Elizabeth Launder	East Chiltngton	spinster	m	0	thrown into brooke of water	not guilty; pregnant	convicted	~	Jury of matrons found her to be not pregnant.
416	1650	Dec	Alice Bassett	Eastbourne	spinster	m	0	threw into pond of water; drowned/ choked	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
442	1657	Mar	Ann Comber/ John Puttocke	Lurgashall	spinster/widow	m	0	threw into pit full of water, mud, filth	-	convicted	hanged	John Puttocke charged – with aiding (acquitted); but sentenced to three months for unlawful sex.
456	1662	Mar	Dorothy Wood	Ticehurst	spinster	f,f	0	cast into pit of water	not guilty	convicted	sentenced	Pleaded pregnancy and found to be so.
501	1679	July	Ann Taylor	Patching	spinster	m	0	thrown in pond of water	not guilty	convicted	sentenced	pleaded a pardon (allowed) allowed. Released. Paid fees.
516	1686	July	Margery Barham	Sedlescombe	spinster	m	0	strangled/thrown into well	not guilty	acquitted	To be released	Two men aided, harboured and comforted Margery.

* Assize Court records

Appendix 6: Sussex Infant Deaths Involving Bloodshed or Extreme Violence

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
132	1547	Feb	William Spookes	Merston		m	6	beating	~	murder	outlawed	Child was bound, hung up, beaten; trampled; buried face down. Spookes fled.
165	1553	Feb	Richard Bernarde	Hellingly	father and grandfather of child	f	0	crushed	~	~	~	Barnerde fathered child on his daughter. After killing the child he committed suicide. Rioters broke into home and took property and evicted three other young children.
5	1559	Nov	Alice Warner	Sidlesham	mistress, spinster	f	8	stab to head	not guilty	aquitted	~	Had goods valued £5.12s.
24	1565	Apr	Henry Pellyng	Lindfield	husband	~	unborn	bludgeoned pregnant wife	not guilty	convicted	lunatic	Attacked wife when "frantick". Judged "lunatic". May have died in prison.
* 214	1567	June	Robert Willard	Buxted	butcher	m	~	beaten	~	guilty	to hang	Joan Marden was child's mother.
171	1577	Mar	Agnes Berye	Halisham	spinster now wife of John "Berries"	f	?	beaten	not guilty	acquitted	~	Agnes accused of killing daughter of John Berries, now her husband. Blows were heard after cries stopped. Accused "John Nok".
360	1588	Mar	Joan Browne	Etchingham	spinster	m	0	crushed, neck broken	not guilty/ pregnancy	sentenced	~	Body thrown under stairs. Pleaded pregnancy and found to be so. Sentenced to death July 1590.
380	1589	May	Elizabeth Reader	Framfield	spinster	m	10	beaten with a staff	not guilty	acquitted	released	At trial said child (Edward Cooper) found to be killed by Tom Staff.
387	1589	June	Mary Mowser	Southover	spinster	f	0	disembowelled with knife	Not guilty/ pregnancy	Mary guilty, mother acquitted	Mary hange; mother freed.	Mary killed her newborn. Claimed pregnancy, but untrue. Agnes aided and abetted.
* 1202	1589	Nov	Joan Baker	Eastbourne	spinster	f	0	with a knife	~	guilty	to hang	~

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
398	1590	Jan	Roland Medowe/ Nicholas Gower	Penhurst	labourers and assailants	m	unborn	cut Alice Smyth's throat; removed child from womb	~	convicted	hanged	Gower aided and abetted.
417	1591	July	Thomas Cranley	Pulborough	"Yoman"	m.	0	crushed newborn's head	not guilty	released	~	Wife gave evidence against Cranley at Sessions. He was acquitted. John at Death said to be responsible.
54	1606	July	Joan Homewood	East Grinstead	spinster/wife?	m,m,f	?	cut throats of her three children	~		Joan cut her throat and drowned herself	Richard Homewood was father of the children.
171	1616	April	Isabel Woodgat	Brighton	wife of Robert, gent	f	"servula"	multiple injuries	~	waived	~	Injuries to Joan Giles, husband's servant: staves, straps, hot tongs, striking, whipping, pinching. Accused at large.
327	1633	Aug	Rachel Burtenshaw	Hartfield	spinster	f	0	cut throat	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
353	1636	Dec	Jane Evans	Lindfield	spinster	f	0	cut throat	not guilty	convicted	hanged	~
455	1662	Mar	Thomasin Pollington	Framfield	spinster	f	0	cut neck	confessed murder	~	hanged	Fled but later appeared an Assize hearing.

* Assize Court records.

Appendix 7: Sussex Infant Deaths Showing Direct Involvement of Men

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
132	1547	Feb	William Spookes	Merston	~	m	6	beating	~	murder	outlawed	Child was bound, hung up, beaten; trampled; buried face down. Spookes fled.
165	1553	Feb	Richard Barnerde	Hellingly	father and grandfather of child	f	0	crushed	~	~	~	Barnerde fathered child on his daughter. After killing the child, he committed suicide. Rioters broke into home and took property and evicted three other young children.
204	1555	Nov	Robert and Elizabeth Kente	Aldrington	parents	f	6	[cold/exposure]	~	accidental	~	Parents sent daughter Agnes to guard neighbour's sheep resulting in her death because they "took no care of her".
24	1565	Apr	Henry Pellyng	Lindfield	husband	~	unborn	bludgeoned pregnant wife	not guilty	convicted	lunatic	Attacked wife when "frantick". Judged "lunatic". May have died in prison.
25	1565	May	Sibyl Elyett	Kirdford	spynster/ wife	m	infant	broke neck	~	guilty	to hang	Sibyl spinster/ wife of William murdered an unknown infant, encouraged and later harboured by her husband. Pleaded not guilty "Christian Grantham" blamed; couple harboured her. All convicted. William pleaded Benefit of Clergy; Sibyl died inprison.
* 214	1567	June	Robert Willard	Buxted	butcher	m	~	beaten	~	guilty	to hang	Joan Marden was child's mother.
111	1572	Dec	Richard and ? Kyte	Hollington	wife	f	9	cold [exposure]	~	Natural death	~	Fortune Luck, servant, died of the cold after being sent on an errand by Kyte and wife.
* 515	1574	Oct	Anthony Fisher/Joan Marshe	Playden	labourer/ spinster	~	~	killed	~	both not guilty	~	"They killed her infant and buried it".
239	1580	Jan	Margery Porter	Rye	spinster	m	infant	murdered	not guilty	convicted	hanging	John Mody, infant's father, to be whipped around the town.

Case	Year	Month	Accused	Place	Status	m/f	Age	Method	Plea	Conclusion	Sentence	Additional Details
398	1590	Jan	Roland Medowe/ Nicholas Gower	Penhurst	labourers and assailants	m	unborn	cut Alice Smyth's throat; removed child from womb	~	convicted	hanged	Gower aided and abetted.
417	1591	July	Thomas Cranley	Pulborough	"Yeoman"	m	0	crushed newborn's head	not guilty	released	~	Wife gave evidence against Cranley at Sessions. He was acquitted. John at Death said to be responsible.
§	Pre-1609		Jane Hattersley	East Grinstead	~	~	0	~	Not denied	guilty	hanged	Three newborns at different times. Aided by their father Adam Adamson. Described in pamphlet
542	1618	July	Francis Myles	Rye	baker	~	~	struck pregnant woman	~	case rejected	~	Myles killed woman, and her unborn child. Grand jury rejected indictment.
225	1621	May	Mary Hemsley	Willingdon	spinster	m	0	smothered	not guilty	acquitted	~	Nicholas and Katherine Reynoldes accused of encouraging/comforting Mary. Both to appear at Assize. Nicholas delivered by proclamation.
442	1657	Mar	Ann Comber/ John Puttocke	Lurgashall	spinster/widow	m	0	threw into pit full of water, mud, filth	~	convicted	hanged	John Puttocke charged with aiding (acquitted); but sentenced to three months for unlawful sex.
466	1665	Apr	Henry Beale	Petworth	father	f	15 or 50 weeks	struck in chest	not guilty	convicted	hanged	Child, his "natural daughter", was asleep in her cradle.
497	1678	Jan	Jane Pollard	Edburton	infant's grandmother	m	0	struck with bedstaff	not guilty	guilty	hanged	Assize record states William and Jane Pollard killed newborn infant of Margaret Pollard. William died in gaol; Jane hanged. Margaret acquitted.
512	1685	Aug	Richard Jones	Slinfold	father	f	8 wks	bruise to head	not guilty/ benefit of clergy	convicted	~	Robert and Elizabeth Smith (spinster) accused; he convicted (murder) but pleaded benefit of clergy; Elizabeth pardoned.

* Assize Court records.

§ Described in Thomas Brewer's pamphlet *The Bloody Mother* (1609)

Appendix 8: Chronological List of Literature Referring Directly to Infanticide (Pre- and Post-Partum), Including Threats

Works dealing with the same historical cases are bracketed thus)

Capitalisation of early modern works as in original

Pre-early modern representations

Classical

Medea: plays by Euripides, Seneca. Subsequently multiple representations in literature, music, film and art

Saturn: (Greek and Roman myth) Multiple representations in art

Ovid: *Metamorphoses* (Procne Bk VI, lines 424-674)

Biblical

Exodus 12:29; Leviticus 26:30; Numbers 31:17; 1 Samuel 15:3; 11-18; 2 Kings 6:28-29; 15:16; Psalms 135:8; 136:10; 137:8-9; Isaiah 13:15-18; Jeremiah 11:22-23; 19:7-9; Lamentations 2:20-22; Hosea 13:16; 2.

The Mystery plays

Massacre of the Innocents in the York, Towneley, Ludus Conventraie, and Chester cycles, and Shearmen and Taylor's play

Early modern representations

Anon: Sundrye strange and inhumaine Murthers	1591
Shakespeare: <i>1 Henry VI</i>	1591
Shakespeare: <i>Titus Andronicus</i>	1593
Robert Greene: <i>Pandosto</i>	1595
Shakespeare: <i>Richard III</i>	1597
Shakespeare: <i>King John</i>	1597
Shakespeare: <i>Henry V</i>	1599
Shakespeare: <i>Timon of Athens</i>	1604
Anon: Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers	1605
Anon: The most cruell and bloody murder committed by an Innkeeper's wife	1606
Shakespeare: <i>Macbeth</i>	1606
Shakespeare: <i>King Lear</i>	1608
Thomas Middleton: <i>The Yorkshire Tragedy</i>	1608
Thomas Brewer: <i>The Bloody Mother</i>	1609
Thomas Middleton: <i>The Witch</i>	1609/16
John Webster: <i>Duchess of Malfi</i>	1612/13

Shakespeare: <i>Winter's Tale</i>	1611
Anon: Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by kinde	1614
Anon: A pittiless Mother	1616
Anon: The cryes of the Dead	1620
Anon: Good sport for Protestants	17 th c.
John Taylor: The Unnatural Father	1621
Matthew Parker: No Naturall Mother, but a Monster	1634
Anon: The wicked midwife, the cruell mother, and the harmlesse daughter	1640
Anon: Bloody Newes from Dover	1646
Anon: A declaration from Oxford)	1651
Anon: A wonder of wonders)	1651
Richard Watkins: Newes from the dead)	1651
John Crowch: The araignment of hyprocrisie	1652
Anon: A true Relation of the most Horrid and Barbarous murders	1658
Punch and Judy Shows	1662
John Horn: The efficacy of the true balme	1669
Anon: The cruel mother)	1670
Thomas Partridge: Blood for blood)	1670
Anon: Bloody News from Clerkenwel[1]	1670
Anon: An Elegie upon the Death of my pretty Infant Cousin	1672
Anon: Strange and Lamentable News from Dullidg-Wells	1678
Anon: The true and perfect Relation Of the Tryal and Condemnation)	1679
Robert Foulkes: An alarme for sinners)	1679
Anon: The Unnatural Mother being a true relation (Jane Lawson)	1680
Anon: The Midwives Ghost	1680
Anon: The true Narrative	1680
Anon: The Bloody Miller	1684
Anon: A sad and true relation	1686
Anon: True and Perfect Relation of a most Horrid and Bloody Murtehr [sic]	1686
Anon: The Distressed Mother	1690
Anon: A Full and true Relation	1690
Anon: Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants	1692
Anon: The injured children or the bloody midwife)	1693
Anon: The cruel midwife of Poplar)	1693
Anon: The Midwives Maids Lamentation)	1693
Anon: The midwife of Poplar's sorrowful Confession)	1693
Anon: A particular and exact account of the trial of Mary Compton)	1693

Anon: The bloody-minded midwife)	1693
Anon: The Unnatural Mother being a Full and True Account		1697
Anon: The Bloody Butcher		1697
Later Representations		
Daniel Defoe: <i>Moll Flanders</i>		1722
Jonathan Swift: <i>A Modest Proposal</i>		1729
Anon: Marie Hamilton		1790
William Wordsworth: The Thorn		1798
Walter Scott: <i>The Heart of Midlothian</i>		1818
Charles Dickens: <i>The Chimes</i>		1844
George Eliot: <i>Adam Bede</i>		1859
George Moore: <i>A Mummer's Wife</i>		1885
Lucy Clifford: <i>Mrs Keith's Crime</i>		1885
Margaret Harkness: <i>A Manchester Shirtmaker</i>		1890
Anon: The Ogress of Reading		1896
André de Lorde: <i>The Woman who was Acquitted</i>		1919
Shelagh Delaney: <i>A Taste of Honey</i>		1958
Fred Watson: <i>Infanticide in the House of Fred Ginger</i>		1962
Edward Bond: <i>Saved</i>		1965
Harrison Birtwhistle: <i>Punch and Judy</i> (opera; libretto: Stephen Prusslin)		1966
Toni Morrison: <i>Beloved</i>		1987
Sarah Kane: <i>Blasted</i>		1995
Mark Ravenhill: <i>Handbag</i>		1998
Martin McDonagh: <i>Pillowman</i>		2003
Lionel Shriver: <i>We Need to Talk about Kevin</i>		2005
Niklas Rådström: <i>Monsters</i>		2009
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