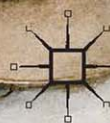


## Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London

TIM REINKE-WILLIAMS



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In *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London*, Tim Reinke-Williams uses the wealth of overlapping sources that the capital provides to allow us multiple perspectives on the cultural position of early modern women. Historians have long noted the difficult, often conflicting and ambiguous, expectations that women of this period were expected to fulfil. Reinke-Williams takes the analysis deeper, to demonstrate the various ways in which women *did* manage to negotiate the different parts they were asked to play, looking at women's active roles in the home, at marriage, at motherhood and in particular at work. He argues throughout that whilst sexual honour was an important facet of female respectability, it was far from the whole story. Past work which has focused particularly on the 'double standard' (that men could misbehave sexually and still accrue status, whereas women were twice damned) has tended to suggest that the only way to be an honest woman was to be passive and invisible. In practice, however, Reinke-Williams demonstrates that women negotiated positions of authority and earned credit in their households and local communities through their hard work and their sociable interactions. The book overall contributes a key new perspective to the field of pre-modern gender studies, and raises important issues for the study of women in any period.

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# Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London

Tim Reinke-Williams

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-1-137-37209-3

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First published 2014 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-47597-1      ISBN 978-1-137-37210-9 (eBook)  
DOI. 10.1057/9781137372109

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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# Acknowledgements

This book is a work of social history which reconstructs the mentalities and experiences of the middling sorts and labouring poor, and I would have not been able to write it, or have contemplated doing so, if it had not been for my training in that particular craft at the University of Warwick. *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London* grew out of parts of my Ph.D. thesis, supervised by Professor Bernard Capp and examined by Dr Alexandra Shepard and Professor Steve Hindle. The comments of Steve and Alex during my viva, the feedback provided by Bernard on several draft chapters, and the suggestions of the two anonymous readers for Palgrave, did much to shape this book, although the usual caveats relating to authorial liability apply. Earlier versions of parts of chapters were presented as papers in London, Oxford and Sheffield, and I am grateful to the conference and seminar organisers for allowing me the opportunity to speak my mind and to the audience members for suggesting ways in which I might want to rethink my ideas.

I have been fortunate to have held temporary lectureships which have enabled me to complete this book. At King's College, London, Anne Goldgar, Ludmilla Jordanova, Lucy Kostyanovsky, Ian McBride, Adam Sutcliffe and, in particular, Laura Gowing were a fantastic group of early modern historians to be around. Stephen Baxter, Jim Bjork, Arthur Burns, Laura Clayton, Serena Ferente, Maddy Jessop, Paul Readman and Jon Wilson also did a great deal to make my time at King's hugely enjoyable. At the University of Nottingham David Appleby, Ross Balzaretti and Elizabeth Harvey helped me to settle in, as did Julia Merritt, who gave me a good deal of useful advice about teaching and publishing. Since 2010 my colleagues at the University of Northampton, in particular Drew Gray, Matthew McCormack, Mark Rothery, Cathy Smith and Jon Stobart, have supported my endeavours to finish this book. The Guildhall Library and London Metropolitan Archives house much of the evidence from which my arguments are constructed, and I've spent productive hours in the British Library, Senate House Library and the Institute of Historical Research too, and I would like to thank the staff of all these institutions for facilitating my research and writing.

In addition to those listed above, several other historians have supported and encouraged me in the writing of this book. In particular

I'd like to thank Ian Archer, Joanne Bailey, Caroline Barron, Judith Bennett, Matthew Davies, Jackie Eales, Mark Freeman, Henry French, Paul Griffiths, Vanessa Harding, Kate Hodgkin, Anu Korhonen, Mary Clare Martin, Angela McShane, Jason Peacey, Adrian Pearce, Laura Stewart and Tim Wales. Many friends were writing their doctoral theses and first academic books whilst I wrote this monograph, and for their support I'd like to thank Ben Bankhurst, Rachel Bright, Will Cavert, Stephen Dean, Jordan Downs, Macdara Dwyer, Will Farrell, Hanna Holmberg, David Magliocco, Emily Manktelow, Simon Sleight, Spike Sweeting, Martha Vandrei and Helen Yallop. Finally, I'd like to apologise to Andy, Penny, Elena, Phil, Jim, Ang, Stu, Han, Martin, Silke and Steve for having to listen to me babble on about long-dead Londoners over the last few years.



# Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
GL	Guildhall Library, London
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
OBP	Old Bailey Papers

# Introduction

He goes a wooing yet the matters so,  
He cares not much whether he speeds or no,  
Cause city wives and wenches are so common  
He thinks it hard to find an honest woman.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1694 Christain Penny, a widow 'late of London' who lived in the Old Exchange, was arraigned and tried at the Old Bailey for clipping coins along with her lodger, William Ayliffe. Christain was acquitted since 'nothing was found in her chamber' and because, although she let two rooms to Ayliffe, 'what he did there, she knew not'. Christain was aided in her defence by a group of unnamed neighbours, who 'justified her reputation' by stating that she had three children and that she 'workt hard for her living by fetching drink from the brewhouse'.<sup>2</sup> Based on the brief report of her trial, Christain Penny was a hardworking mother, employee and landlady, as well as a resident of good standing in her neighbourhood community, and her unexceptional life flickers into view solely because of the misbehaviour of her lodger. Over the past 30 years the scholarship on women in early modern England has grown substantially, but far more attention has been paid to scolds and witches than to honest women such as Christain Penny.<sup>3</sup> Like the people of early modern England, historians of women have been 'eagle-eyed in espying their faults, but dark sighted owles, in perceiving their virtues'.<sup>4</sup>

What follows rectifies this omission by outlining how women of the middling sort and labouring poor in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London could acquire credit and gain honest reputations through their work and sociability. By doing so it provides answers to the aggressive question posed to Anne Call by Jane Sheppard in December 1631 in Green Dragon court in St Sepulchres parish, when Jane defamed Anne as

‘a whore and a base queane’, asking ‘how darest thou so justifie thy self to be an honest woman?’<sup>5</sup> To deflect accusations of whoredom women needed to ‘justify’ themselves, and by acting as good mothers, efficient housewives and domestic managers; by being diligent and hardworking retailers; and by engaging in appropriate sociability with their fellow Londoners many women were able to fashion respectable identities that led them to be esteemed as honest individuals of good credit and social worth.

### **Women, honour and credit in early modern society**

Over 50 years ago Keith Thomas argued that sexual behaviour was the bedrock of female honour in early modern England, and that to maintain positive reputations women needed to protect themselves from sexual predators. Within the theoretical framework of the double standard the extramarital sexual relations of men were treated as minor offences whilst the sexual behaviour of women was restricted severely. Despite attempts by the clergy to stress the importance of chastity for both sexes and the existence of a legal system capable of punishing both women and men for adultery and fornication, it was expected that men would have acquired sexual experience prior to marriage whilst any woman who lost her virginity before marrying was perceived to have lost her honour completely. The double standard appealed particularly to aristocratic and genteel concerns about property transmission and lineage, as well as middling-sort notions of propriety and prudery, but arguably had less, if any, significance for the poor.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently evidence to support the notion that the honour of women rested on their sexual reputations was gleaned from cases of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century slander litigation in church courts across England. In a forceful and eloquent study of the consistory courts in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London Laura Gowing argued that attitudes of Londoners were gendered to such an extent that the moral values they attached to the behaviour of women and men were incomparable. Since courtship and marriage structured gender relations, the reputations of women were defined by their marriage prospects, with perceptions of women’s virtue, credit, honour, reputation and integrity centring on their sexual behaviour. The defamatory word ‘whore’, connoting dishonesty in terms of appearance, consumption, disease, sociability and speech, as well as linking women with animals, foreignness and disreputable areas of London, was used repeatedly to damage the reputations of the female inhabitants of the capital.

Although deployed to bring cases before the church courts that were primarily about matters such as the behaviour of children and servants, disputes over household boundaries and resources, or property and money, the word 'whore' was an inherently sexual insult used primarily by women against women. Men were mocked for being impotent or sexually exhausted, and were called cuckolds, bawds, whore-masters and whoremongers, but although men were prosecuted for illicit sex or for fathering illegitimate children they were regarded as less culpable and their reputations suffered less damage than those of women. Put simply, women talked about sex in the idiom of shameful confession, whilst men bragged and boasted of their sexual exploits.<sup>7</sup>

Yet although studies of defamation and slander litigation prove that attacks on women focused on their sexuality, the extent to which their reputations were destroyed completely by committing sexual acts outside marriage has been questioned in the past two decades. Focusing on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London, Faramarz Dabhoiwala has argued that as long as her sexual reputation was not cast into doubt, the honour, credit and reputation of a woman were based, similarly to that of a man, on a range of factors, including lineage, wealth, appearance, occupational identity, business dealings and social conduct. For elite women their own social rank or that of their lovers meant that their sexual misdemeanours might not be detrimental to their honour, and for a woman of middling or low social rank becoming the mistress of an aristocrat or gentleman might even enhance her reputation.<sup>8</sup>

Dabhoiwala has argued that although the period up to 1640 was one of sexual repression, the events of the mid-seventeenth century helped to bring about a sexual revolution in the century after 1660. Sexual immorality remained a focus of secular policing in the later seventeenth century, with many couples prosecuted for illicit pre- or extramarital sexual relations, and such moves intensified in the 1690s with a new campaign for moral reform, but as the population and surface area of London grew it became increasingly difficult to control sexual behaviour since fewer individuals were willing to take on unpaid voluntary policing roles. As such it became easier for sex offenders to produce sureties or pass themselves off as reputable individuals, whilst adultery and fornication came to be seen as beyond the reach of the law. By the later decades of the seventeenth century women and men from all ranks of metropolitan society were engaging in adultery and 'keeping company' with lovers, sometimes in *de facto* marriages, whilst working women engaging in prostitution as a temporary part of an economy of

makeshifts remained part of wider respectable metropolitan communities, and were regarded by some contemporaries as victims of poverty, parental neglect and rakish libertines rather than as inherently immoral individuals.<sup>9</sup> If Dabhoiwala is correct, then sexual behaviour was far less closely connected to respectability in 1700 than in 1600.

Some individuals have always enjoyed greater sexual freedom than others, and within the framework outlined by Thomas such licence was the preserve of men rather than women, but research into manhood and masculinity has revealed that male sexual behaviour did much to affect the opportunities and abilities of men to be husbands and masters. Young single men boasted of real or alleged sexual exploits, but were aware that if such claims circulated beyond their peer group their employment and marriage prospects might be affected. Office-holders were ousted by rumours of sexual indiscretions, whilst the discovery of a husband's adultery by his wife might damage the material and emotional foundations of the marriage and shift the balance of domestic authority. Some male adulterers reacted violently when they were caught out by their wives, but others sought to conceal their sexual misdemeanours through the use of bribery or intimidation. Accusations of cuckoldry damaged the honour of a husband considerably as they suggested that the man in question was an ineffectual lover who was unable to control his wife, whilst the promiscuity or rape of daughters or servants revealed a man's failure to control and protect his dependents.<sup>10</sup>

This scholarship has argued that sexual behaviour was merely one criterion which was used to define male reputation, and attempts have been made to extend the boundaries of female honour beyond issues related directly to sexual immorality. Anthony Fletcher has noted that women in the upper ranks of English society were commended for teaching practical skills and supervising the religious development of children and servants; for providing the household with food, drink and clothing; for maintaining the cleanliness of the domestic environment; and for assisting with the labours of the male head of the household, whilst Garthine Walker has argued that manual labour, business dealings and household responsibilities enabled women from below the level of the gentry to construct positive social identities and obtain a sense of self-worth, enhancing their status within their neighbourhood, and offering a set of comparable concepts based around notions of honesty, credit and reputation with which to compete with women as well as to downplay accusations of dishonesty levelled against them. Walker has suggested that motherhood was another role by which women enhanced their reputations, noting that some women who bore children

outside wedlock sought to construct reputable images by stressing the efforts they made to care for their children.<sup>11</sup>

Further criticism of the double standard has come from Martin Ingram who has questioned the utility of using the term 'honour' when discussing what constituted appropriate and praiseworthy behaviour amongst the mass of the population, since the concept was associated with qualities and practices which only the aristocracy and gentry were capable of displaying and possessing. Ingram has drawn attention to a broader vocabulary, encompassing words such as 'honesty', 'honest', 'worth', 'standing', 'credit', 'fame' and 'reputation', used to articulate ideas of respectability by the majority of the population.<sup>12</sup> Concepts and practices of credit have been analysed in significant depth by Craig Muldrew, who has argued for their increasing importance after 1550 as small-scale informal economic transactions proliferated, entangling households and individuals in networks based on reciprocal obligations. To have credit meant one could be relied upon to keep promises, pay debts and perform duties, whilst the need to obtain and maintain credit led to an emphasis on mutual trust and responsibility in terms of neighbourliness and civil sociability, as well as the development of an ethics of cooperation based on Christian and humanist teachings that promoted charity and fair dealing. As credit networks grew more complex, the ability to judge honesty grew in importance, and both households and individuals cultivated reputations for charity, hospitality, thrift and diligence in order to promote the communal solidarity needed to generate and maintain wealth.<sup>13</sup>

Women in general lacked the occupational identities which facilitated these sorts of transactions, and had fewer resources to lend or to use as capital to secure loans, but their ability to earn wages, and in some instances own property, meant they became lenders and debtors who were evaluated on their credit.<sup>14</sup> The primary involvement of women in credit networks was through small-scale engagement in buying and selling; and by displaying values of diligence, honesty and thrift, women played key roles in maintaining and increasing their own credit and that of their households. Wives were expected to provision their households, were encouraged to keep accounts of their expenditure and were to assist their husbands in the everyday running of their businesses. Widows had to take responsibility for the estates of their late husbands, whilst single women went to law to recover unpaid debts, and in many cases it was unmarried women who were best able to use acts of charity and involvement in credit networks to achieve economic and social independence, as well as to enhance their reputations.<sup>15</sup>

Exploring concepts and practices of credit has allowed for further expansion of the boundaries of female reputation, as has the ongoing work of Alexandra Shepard into notions of 'worth' as a social and moral category which determined concepts of honesty. Notions of worth were affected by gender, age, social and marital status, incorporating a broad range of monetary estimates and ethical attributes, including hard work, proper treatment and provision for household subordinates, as well as pretensions to civility and decorum. Sexual matters were less important in strategies for asserting honest living than in slander accusations relating to dishonesty, with both sexes making claims to self-sufficiency, honest labour and painstaking industry.<sup>16</sup>

It is now a truism within the existing historiography that sexual behaviour was only one way by which the reputations of women and men were judged in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, but until now there has been no holistic book-length study of early modern women of good repute. What follows examines how patterns and forms of work and sociability affected the reputations of women from the middling sorts and the labouring poor in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London. Drawing on a wider range of printed and archival sources than previous studies of plebeian reputation, examining the whole of the seventeenth century rather than the decades either before 1640 or after 1660, and adopting a definition of work which includes forms of unpaid yet essential labour, such as housework, reproduction and childcare, this study offers new insights into how women shaped their own destinies within a city characterised by strict Protestant values and strong social tensions where misogynist and patriarchal attitudes were rife. By doing so it offers a more rounded impression of how women gained the respect of others and retained the ability to sculpt their own identities in the early modern metropolis.

## **Early modern London**

For the past four hundred years London has dominated the political, economic and cultural lives of the English people, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries offered opportunities for employment, consumption and education that would have been difficult or impossible to obtain in the provinces. From 1550 to 1650 up to one in eight of the English population lived in or visited London at some point in their adult lives, rising to one in six over the second half of the seventeenth century. Fuelled by immigration, the metropolitan population increased more than eightfold from around 70,000 in 1550 to perhaps as much as

550,000 by 1700, when it became the largest city in Europe, whilst its share of the national population rose fivefold from 2.3 to 11.4 per cent during the same period. Over this century and a half what it meant to be a Londoner changed since the most significant growth occurred in Westminster and the extramural suburbs in Middlesex and Surrey, and by 1700 only about a quarter of Londoners lived within the walls.<sup>17</sup> Population growth resulted in a shift in the gender balance too. Prior to 1640 more men than women lived in the capital, with between 104 and 145 men per 100 women in individual parishes, but in the second half of the century the gender balance altered, and by the 1690s more women than men lived in London.<sup>18</sup> Like their male counterparts most female Londoners began their lives outside the metropolis. Between 1570 and 1640 77.2 per cent of women who deposed before the London consistory courts declared themselves to have been born outside the capital, dropping slightly to 69.4 per cent between 1665 and 1725. Around 90 per cent arrived in London in their teens or twenties, with around a fifth coming from the Home Counties and more than a quarter from the Midlands. The commonest explanation given by female migrants for why they had come to London was the death or financial ruin of their fathers, but others referred to being bored with life in the countryside and wanting to sample the freedom and excitement of city life.<sup>19</sup>

In the century and a half after 1550 London grew to dominate British inland and overseas trade. The custom of London entitled every freeman to practise any trade or craft within the bars, regardless of company affiliation, and from the 1570s increasing numbers of men began pursuing occupations other than those to which they were formally affiliated. Around 1550 a quarter of freemen were employed in the production and sale of food, drink and household goods, and two-fifths in the manufacturing of cloth and clothing. Alongside manual labour and domestic service, these remained important employment sectors across the metropolitan area over the next century and a half, but in addition a range of service industries developed in the West End to cater for the royal court and its attendant bureaucrats and professionals, whilst in Southwark the provision of transport and accommodation were important components of the local economy. The increase in imports of raw materials meant that by the end of the seventeenth century London was the leading manufacturing centre in Europe, focusing on construction of buildings, ships and coaches, as well as production of textiles, clothing and leather; finished metal, glass and wooden goods; and chemicals and dyestuffs in the eastern suburbs. At the dawn of the eighteenth century



the metropolis thus had the largest concentration of industrial workers in Britain, many of whom were employed in extramural parishes and escaped the attentions of the guilds which controlled manufacturing within the City walls.<sup>20</sup>

Despite, and perhaps because of such capitalist expansion, London was ridden with economic inequality. Conservative estimates place the proportion of the population living below the poverty line at between 6 and 13 per cent during the sixteenth century, but as much as a third of the population of some parishes needed relief during periods of severe hardship such as the 1590s and the numbers of Londoners struggling to make ends meet increased across the early modern period.<sup>21</sup> During the first half of the seventeenth century 26 per cent of householders in Southwark were so poor that they were buried at parish expense, whilst in St Martin's Westminster 14.9 per cent of parishioners were in need of relief on a continual or occasional basis.<sup>22</sup> Measurements of poverty are difficult to gauge, but even in the wealthier West End parishes 28.4 per cent of households were too poor to contribute to the Hearth Tax in 1664, whilst in the hard times of the 1690s a poor intramural parish such as St Katherine Coleman might have to provide relief for 23 per cent of parishioners.<sup>23</sup> Whilst the poor grew in number the proportion of middle-ranking households fell. In 1550 just over half the adult male population headed households with sufficient financial reserves to pay taxes to their livery companies, but in 1622 only 31 per cent of householders in Southwark had sufficient means to be assessed for the poor rate, whilst 43 per cent had enough to pay for their own burials and occasionally to keep servants, but lacked the resources to contribute to the relief of the poor, and in 1638 a mere 21 per cent of householders renting properties worth more than £20 per year could be defined as substantial.<sup>24</sup>

Yet although inequalities existed, lack of rigid social segregation enabled Londoners to develop solidarities with those with whom they lived in close proximity within the hierarchy of streets, lanes, yards and alleys that subdivided parishes, precincts and wards.<sup>25</sup> Many of the women and men who inhabited these overlapping communities held and appealed to shared neighbourhood values which facilitated formal and informal self-policing, and which were reinforced through sociability in homes, streets, shops and taverns; engagement with local government; attendance at Holy Communion and participation in annual perambulations of parish boundaries; celebration of marriages, lyings-in, christenings and churchings; and by visiting the sick and dying, making testamentary bequests, advising on will-making,

brokering conflicts, acting as compurgators, and standing surety on recognisances.<sup>26</sup> How women from the ranks of the middling sorts and the labouring poor negotiated positions of respectability within these economic and social worlds is the subject of what follows.

## Evidence for female honour and credit

Over the last 20 years historians have turned to legal records to uncover the experiences of and attitudes towards the majority of the English population. Martin Ingram has stated that 'an examination of one jurisdiction alone will provide only a partial view of reputation' since many elements which affected definitions of reputation such as strength, dexterity and skill in a trade, as well as issues relating to generosity and hospitality, lay outside the scope of legal remedy.<sup>27</sup> This study thus draws on the Bridewell hospital court-books as well as to a lesser extent ecclesiastical court records, along with cheap print and play-texts in order to uncover and delineate what forms of behaviour enhanced the reputations of women in early modern London. The need to interrogate a wide range of source materials has been asserted repeatedly by historians of women and gender over the past two decades. Judith Bennett has noted that 'patriarchy was not rooted in any single cause; it was everywhere', a comment which hints at the need to consider as broad a range of forms of evidence as possible, whilst Amanda Vickery has called for an 'inter-textual' approach to the writing of women's history. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford endeavoured 'to open up the range of source materials about women and to demonstrate their possibilities within case studies', noting that 'every piece of evidence provides a partial access to women's lives; frequently one document is illuminated by another type of source', whilst Droh Wahrman has recommended that attention be paid to the resonance or consistent repetition of understandings of gender across as many cultural, generic and social boundaries as possible.<sup>28</sup> By examining a broad range of source materials, this book aims to highlight both areas of agreement and differences of opinion on what constituted appropriate behaviour by women in early modern London. Different forms of text were produced by different types of authors, and were aimed at and engaged with by even more diverse audiences, so by reading and listening to multiple voices the historian is better equipped to understand the historical culture she or he is investigating.

In her study of the London consistory courts Laura Gowing drew attention to how the statements made by witnesses were constructed

through complex processes which revealed that deponents had engaged with and absorbed forms of storytelling in academic discourses, printed texts, everyday speech, religious ideas and stage plays.<sup>29</sup> Much of this material survives in printed form, but each has its own strengths and weaknesses for those seeking to understand the culture in which these artefacts were produced. Conduct manuals based on marriage sermons and written by university-educated clergymen who subscribed to the hotter sort of Protestantism drew on classical and biblical ideas to promote domestic reform and reinforce patriarchal authority. Common themes included advice about choosing a spouse, marital love and affection, caring for children, managing servants, sharing goods and reciprocal responsibilities, but much of what they promoted was unachievable or contradictory. Moreover, the cost of such texts and their assumptions about the nature of domestic life means that their primary readers were probably godly members of the urban middling sorts.<sup>30</sup> One such reader was the wood-turner Nehemiah Wallington who purchased *Of domesticall duties* by William Gouge, a book which inspired him to compile 31 articles which he made every member of his household sign as an intended step towards starting a domestic reformation.<sup>31</sup> Other readers may have been less enthusiastic to accept the messages of conduct books in their entirety. At the end of the seventeenth century Lady Sarah Cowper used selected passages from conduct books in arguments with her husband to emphasise that both spouses had responsibilities in marriage, and to assert her moral superiority by seeking to be a good mother, wife and mistress, but also adapted and ignored precepts which did not match her marital experiences.<sup>32</sup>

The manner in which Cowper engaged with printed material was not unusual. When reading a text or watching a performance early modern people remembered some parts whilst forgetting or replacing others, and although authors and actors intended to convey specific messages, the meanings individuals brought to and derived from engagement with such cultural artefacts varied.<sup>33</sup> Whilst conduct books had an appeal to a specific godly minority, a wider audience was reached by cheap print in the form of almanacs, ballads, chapbooks and jest-books, which could be purchased for between a penny and sixpence from book-stalls and street-hawkers. Light and sensational in tone as well as simple in style, such texts mixed escapism with godly moralising. Many targeted female audiences and tales of love, sex and courtship, receipt books, and manuals on letter-writing and etiquette may have appealed particularly to women. Female literacy rates varied according to social rank,

geographical location and occupation, and London-born women were more likely to be literate than migrants from outside the capital. The signature literacy of women in London as a whole rose from 10 per cent in 1580 to over 60 per cent by 1700, exceeding 80 per cent in occupations such as shopkeeping and midwifery, and as reading was taught to women more often than writing these figures may underestimate their reading abilities. Defining literacy is problematic since some people had difficulty making out simple words and many struggled with roman-type or certain forms of handwriting, but even the illiterate absorbed ideas from texts since no one in London lived far from someone who could read to them. Moreover many texts included images which were pinned or pasted on walls and doors, whilst songs, jokes, news and opinions circulated in domestic, recreational and work environments, with ballads, jests and proverbs incorporated in everyday speech and committed to memory. As a result the content of printed texts shaped the mentalities of ordinary people by providing images and ideas they could fashion for their own ends.<sup>34</sup>

Theatrical productions at public playhouses also disseminated ideas about appropriate female behaviour, and from the 1570s no Londoner lived more than a mile from a theatre. Civic authorities feared that playhouses were frequented by idle apprentices, vagrants and prostitutes, and although social commentators regarded attendance at playhouses as an unsuitable pastime for women, respectable women from the nobility, gentry and citizenry attended theatres as well, either with male companions or in all-female groups. Working women were present too, taking money on the door, selling food and drink, and as paying customers. Women in the audience responded vocally to events on stage, and by the seventeenth century playwrights made deliberate efforts to attract female audiences, suggesting that perceptions of appropriate female behaviour shaped and were shaped by theatrical performances.<sup>35</sup> In 1567 one female-voiced pamphlet observed that 'in a godly play or enterlude ... may be much learning had: for so liuely are in them set forth the vices and vertues before our eyes in gestures and speech, that we may bothe take learning and pleasure in them'.<sup>36</sup>

Cheap print and drama contained various representations of female behaviour. Many reflected patriarchal and misogynistic assumptions which encouraged the subordination and denigration of women.<sup>37</sup> Yet alongside the husband-murderers, witches, and victims of male violence and misogyny were representations of witty female storytellers and satirists ridiculing patriarchal ideals, as well as godly and virtuous

women devoted to their maternal and domestic duties.<sup>38</sup> Some texts praised women for their chastity, passivity and obedience, whilst others admired their affection, tenderness, nurturing abilities and sometimes their active courage.<sup>39</sup> Ballads often focused on themes relating to courtship and marriage, and depicted both the benefits and drawbacks of marriage. Many depicted unsupervised courtship and suggested that marriage for love, and freedom to choose a spouse, were conventional practices, although they also emphasised that seeking approval from family and friends was desirable. Some advocated companionate marriage and spousal cooperation, emphasising women's responsibilities regarding household management and childcare, but others depicted wives complaining of their husbands to their gossips. Fear of domineering women and cuckoldry lurked at the heart of many texts, but ballads also warned couples of the dangers of diverging from prescribed ideals and offered advice about how to resolve disagreements, with many seeking to provoke cathartic laughter in order to release marital tensions and encourage conformity to gender norms.<sup>40</sup> Ballads may have appealed especially to young, unmarried women who were 'particularly attentive to models – both real and representational – that suggested what they could expect in the years ahead'.<sup>41</sup> Cheap print thus offered various models of female behaviour for women to aspire to or seek to avoid.

Such texts had their greatest impact in London where the vast majority were published, and although cheap print depicted events in various locations within England and beyond, those with metropolitan settings were most likely to contain a significant degree of authenticity since most writers and the majority of their audience were based in the capital.<sup>42</sup> Yet even those printed works aspiring to present accurate depictions of events were not unproblematic. The Old Bailey Proceedings contained heavily abbreviated accounts of the trials they reported on, and sought to provide entertainment whilst also projecting a respectable image of authority and effective public policing. The Proceedings reported on convictions at greater length than acquittals and adopted the point of view of the prosecution, but because they aspired to accurate and balanced reportage they were open to a number of readings. Contemporaries noticed omissions, errors and selective reporting, and might identify with the accused rather than the prosecution.<sup>43</sup> As such these proto-journalistic accounts need to be treated with as much caution as the most sensational murder pamphlet or ballad, although all such texts reveal something about the experiences and attitudes of early modern Londoners.

## Women's work and sociability

This book focuses on work and sociability, activities which Keith Thomas has argued gave meaning to the lives of early modern English people, and which helped shape their identities as individuals and members of communities.<sup>44</sup> Chapter 1 examines motherhood, a role which has tended to be seen as almost universally positive, and the perceived vocation of every early modern woman, provided that she was married and the couple were able to afford to start a family. Was a failure to be able to have children perceived as shameful? If so, was the wife or husband blamed and what remedies were sought? How were mothers to nurture and train their children, what was the appropriate balance between affection and discipline, and what kinds of relationship was it appropriate for mothers to have with adult sons or daughters? Not all women bore children, and this chapter also explores how childless women might gain respect and praise by caring for the offspring of friends, neighbours and employers.

Chapter 2 focuses on housewifery. Prescriptive conduct literature suggested that one of the primary duties of a wife was to ensure the efficient running of the household as a socio-economic unit in an unequal partnership with her husband, but the extent of female authority in relation to such matters was not clearly defined. When could a wife complain to her husband about the way the household was being run? When could she use her own initiative or go against her husband's wishes for the good of the household? What tasks did she need to fulfil in order to be an admired and successful housewife?

Chapter 3 investigates the interactions of mistresses and landladies with servants and lodgers, and how they policed the morality of the household. What form should a relationship take between a mistress and her servants? How was a mistress supposed to balance her obligations of discipline, education and care of her female servants, and what was her role to be in relation to male servants, who were in theory to be the responsibility of the patriarchal household head? There has been little work conducted on early modern lodging houses and this chapter asks how a woman was to treat her lodgers. Taking in paying guests formed part of the economy of makeshifts for many plebeian women, and women played a major role in ensuring that lodgers received appropriate hospitality, but lodgers often disrupted domestic relations, and their disorderly behaviour risked bringing shame upon the households of which they were part, something which women sought to prevent.

Chapter 4 moves outside the household and focuses on women as retailers. The earnings of wives and daughters often provided much needed additional revenue to enable the household economy to continue functioning, and single women had to find some form of paid employment in order to subsist, but what sorts of work were women able to pursue, and how did their means of earning a living affect their reputations? Examining women's retail work in marketplaces, shops and public houses, this chapter outlines the restrictions placed on women's economic activities and the means by which women used their identity as honest labourers to fashion reputable work identities.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses women's sociability by examining three concepts: neighbourliness, company and civility. Women were expected to fulfil duties of neighbourliness, companionship and civil sociability expected of Christians seeking to live together in peace and quiet. To participate in civil society a woman had to socialise with both male and female neighbours, but the boundaries between behaving in a sociable manner and gadding around with female gossips were unclear. Similarly, offering hospitality or friendship to a man who was neither her husband nor a relative was deemed to be praiseworthy, but in certain circumstances might arouse suspicions about her behaviour. Drinking often formed a part in female sociability, and this chapter explores the dynamics surrounding women, drink and sociability in a city which offered numerous opportunities for alcohol consumption.

# 1

## Motherhood

This chapter examines how becoming and being mothers, in terms of offering emotional and material support to their offspring from pregnancy to adulthood, affected the reputations and shaped the behaviour of women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London. Many early modern women spent much of their adult lives bearing and raising children, and being a good mother enabled a woman to gain respect within and beyond her household, as well as giving her a sense of pride in her achievements. Motherhood was a constructed role that a woman carried out in the family, but which also connected her with friends and relatives outside the domestic environment.<sup>1</sup> Each woman who gave birth 'participated in a series of commonly shared experiences, performances and ceremonies' each stage of which was 'nuanced by social scripting and social construction' as well as being 'invested with emotional, cultural, and religious significance'.<sup>2</sup> Becoming and being a mother was an individual and exclusively female biological experience, but also a role and a relationship that affected the development of both mother and child.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, although not all women in early modern England gave birth to children, the duties of mothering and childcare were not confined to biological mothers, practices which have been underexplored in existing historiography. Numerous childless women were involved in delivering, feeding, nurturing and educating children, and like the women who bore children they were both idealised and subject to constant scrutiny and criticism.<sup>4</sup> Motherhood thus needs to be studied for what it illuminates about the emotional attachments of women to children, be that their own or those of others, and as a form of gendered and corporeal work which was poorly remunerated or unpaid.<sup>5</sup>

The study of motherhood is also important because of what it reveals about the different parental roles of women and men. Prior to the 1990s much scholarship on childrearing was gender-blind, and the notion