

**ATTITUDES TOWARDS INFERTILITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND AND
COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND, c. 1620-1720**

Marisa N. Benoit

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford

Christ Church, University of Oxford

Trinity Term 2014

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Short Abstract

This thesis examines attitudes toward infertility in early modern England and colonial New England from c.1620 to 1720 through infertility's representation in contemporary medical, religious, and literary sources. This study uses an expanded definition of infertility, namely a 'spectrum of infertility', to capture the tensions that arose during periods of infertility and experiences of reproductive failure such as miscarriages, stillbirths, monstrous births, and false conceptions. A spectrum, more than a modern definition, more accurately represents the range of bodily conditions experienced by early modern women and men that indicated reproductive disorder in the body; by extension, the language of infertility expressed fears about disorder in times of social, religious, and political crisis in early modern society. The two societies' relationship was often described through reproductive language and the language of infertility appears in both societies when order - within the body, within marriages, or within and between communities - was threatened. This thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship on infertility in early modern society by analysing its presence in communications within and between early modern England and colonial New England. It argues that understanding the English origins of the colonists' attitudes toward infertility is fundamental both to understanding the close connection between the two societies and to providing context for the colonists' perceptions about their encounters with new lands, bodies, environments, and reasons for emigration. As a result, this thesis seeks to break new ground in providing an overview of social, medical, and cultural reactions in both England and New England, demonstrating that similar language and tropes were used in both regions to communicate concerns about infertility. Exploring the interplay between the many sources addressing this health issue more accurately represents the complexity of early modern attitudes toward infertility, and the intimacy of the relationship between the fledgling New England colonies and their metaphorical Mother England.

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Long Abstract

This thesis examines attitudes toward infertility in early modern England and colonial New England from c.1620 to 1720 through analysis of a wide variety of contemporary sources. To compare early modern England with its own ‘child’, colonial New England, is to examine two societies linked by cultural and religious norms but facing different challenges. These challenges are explored by analysing infertility’s representation in popular, religious, and medical literature and personal writing from both societies. The two societies’ relationship was often described through reproductive language, and this thesis argues that analysis of the exchange of information about infertility provides a different angle from which to view the relationship between ‘Old’ and New England while highlighting the connections between the sources and societies themselves. The subject of infertility provides the opportunity to untangle the web of contemporary medical theories, social ideas about gender relations, the family, and the importance of children, and religious ideas about generation that characterised attitudes toward reproduction in the early modern period.

This thesis argues that early modern descriptions of infertility were more inclusive than modern clinical definitions and included a range of reproductive challenges. Infertility in this study is therefore redefined and applied to cases of unsuccessful reproduction, including difficulties with conception, stillbirths, false conceptions, moles, multiple miscarriages, and monstrous births. Broadening the definition of infertility enables this thesis to capture and

assess the apprehension that accompanied periods of infertility and experiences of reproductive failure. Infertility is therefore not limited to cases of lifelong childlessness but rather extended to exhibit the spectrum of reproductive challenges experienced by men and women that caused personal anxiety and sparked medical and social commentary.

This thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship on infertility in early modern Europe by considering its presence in the exchange of people and ideas in the Atlantic World in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It builds on the work of social historians and medical historians in its analysis of the social context of infertility in the cultures of early modern England and colonial New England. Historians such as Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner have written longer national histories of infertility for the United States, but they do not focus on the English origins of tropes and stereotypes of infertility during the colonial period. As this thesis shows, understanding the English origins of the colonists' ideas about infertility is fundamental to understanding both the connection between the two societies and to providing context for the colonists' perceptions about their encounters with new lands, bodies, environments, and reasons for emigration. As a result, this thesis seeks to break new ground in providing an overview of social, medical, and cultural reactions in both England and New England, demonstrating that similar language and tropes were used in both regions to communicate concerns about infertility. As New English settlers came into contact with, recorded, and communicated their interactions with the new environment and Native bodies, the relative fertilities of both groups in this new landscape, and even the fertility of the landscape itself, were weighed, measured, and expressed through familiar English ideas found in medical literature, Biblical stories, and popular literature. Medical history thus provides a fruitful angle for the analysis of the transplantation and representation of these ideas in the Atlantic context.

By highlighting the frequency of fears and anxiety about infertility found in personal, medical, legal, religious, and popular records, this thesis provides an approach to infertility that is substantially different from demographic history. Demographic histories of early modern England and colonial New England minimise the effect that infertility had by relying wholly on population data showing very low rates of infertility, especially in colonial New England. This thesis uses this data differently by arguing that low rates add another layer of complexity when reviewing the amount of information available in written accounts detailing public concerns and personal reflections about infertility. Moreover, the many manifestations of infertility that are present in the literature from the early modern period, such as multiple miscarriages or false conceptions, are not represented in these statistics. Rather than reconstructing rates of infertility, this thesis focuses on the social representations and repercussions of the condition and its connection to anxieties about disorder. This thesis thus argues that the concept of a spectrum of infertility, rather than a modern definition, more accurately captures the range of bodily conditions experienced by early modern women and men that indicated reproductive disorder in the body; by extension the language of infertility expressed fears about disorder in times of social, religious, and political crisis in early modern society.

This study is a social history of infertility, as it uses a wide variety of sources – religious, medical, popular, and legal - to more accurately reflect attitudes toward and responses to cases of personal and public reproductive failure. These sources illustrate the channels through which information about infertility was transmitted within and between these two societies. Whether communicated through the pages of English midwifery manuals or preached from the pulpits of colonial New England meetinghouses, messages about infertility appear across many genres of writing from the early modern period. The most notable influence was the Bible, and the barren women of the Old Testament and parables of

heroic births formed most people's understanding of female infertility. But stories of infertility appeared outside religious sources as well, as archetypes of the barren woman or the impotent man were spread in pornography and satire. Court records from marital disputes and witchcraft trials further establish infertility's place in popular consciousness while family histories reflect ideas expressed in the medical, religious, and popular sources. More broadly, these records also provide details about real relationships between early modern men and women and how ideas about infertility were inherently linked to the gender hierarchy. Early modern pornography illustrates popular stereotypes of infertility that mirrored theories proposed in medical literature. Similarly, the promotional and travel literature from the New World exhibits how these tropes were reproduced on a new landscape, imposed on new reproductive bodies, and communicated specific anxieties about population.

The thesis is structured around the types of sources that included information on infertility in these two societies. The comparative aspect is contained within chapters, and there are examples and analyses of sources from both England and New England in each chapter that illustrate continuities and differences between the two regions. By comparing English and New English sources within chapters, the English foundations of colonial tropes of infertility are clearly established and the close relationship between the two cultures is tangibly demonstrated. This methodology demonstrates that the anxieties about population that New England colonists felt were not inherently different from anxieties about population back in England, but the particular stresses that moulded those anxieties are exhibited through their writing about infertility: namely, the competing tropes about the prospect of the fertility of their New Canaan and the 'barren deserts' of the colonists' metaphorical and actual wilderness, their attitudes toward Native American bodies, the immediacy of their connection with Old Testament models, and constant comparison with their Native American competitors and English counterparts.

Chapter 1 examines infertility through the lens of early modern medical and legal authorities on the subject. These two early modern authorities reinforced each other in terms of providing terminology and establishing parameters of infertility. Medical works provided definitions and explanations, and courts determined the consequences of infertility when it caused, or reflected, disorder within households and communities. Moreover, medical practitioners, such as midwives, were given legal and social authority to exercise their knowledge about the reproductive body. Medical and pseudo-medical works are vital in understanding early modern concepts of both physiology and folklore associated with infertility. Midwifery manuals are particularly helpful, and the titles included in this study were chosen on the basis of their wide-spread use and, frequently, their presence and use on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, the works of Nicholas Culpeper and the collection of works on the ‘secrets of generation’ attributed to Aristotle were circulated in New England during this early colonial period. Close reading of the sections on barrenness within these medical works illustrates that infertility was a problem shared between couples. While often buried in the sections devoted to women’s ‘barrenness’, male infertility, or the infertility of a sexual union was also cited as a reason behind ‘what hinders conception.’ This first chapter outlines the terminology used in medical literature to explain the bodily conditions associated with infertility. It also examines the early modern worldview and the close connection of medical and social ideas about female and male infertility. The medical works examined include midwifery manuals, sex manuals, and treatises on specific reproductive pathology, and information about identifying ‘true fruit’, preventing miscarriage, and strengthening wombs is spread throughout the works.

From witchcraft trials in colonial New England to marital disputes in early modern England, infertility was often an issue that was dealt with by the legal system of each region. Court cases provide the opportunity for a thorough discussion of the legal ramifications of

impotency and also how the different court systems in the regions dealt with impotent men. The themes of deception, both within a singular body, and within a relationship, characterize much of the medical and legal literature on infertility. A woman's body could deceive her with 'distempers of the womb' masquerading as the signs of pregnancy, and likewise a man could deceive his wife and community by being a 'pretending husband', unable to perform his masculine duty to his wife and also to his community. The language and views about infertility from medical and legal authorities articulated in this chapter are subsequently analysed in further detail.

Chapter Two focuses on the Biblical archetypes of the 'barren woman' in early modern society. The significance of these mostly Old Testament parables is reinforced by their appearance in early modern medical works, sermons on marriages, religious advice to pregnant women, and in the personal writing of men and women dealing with infertility. God was often cited as being at the root of an individual's struggle with infertility. This chapter illustrates how the stories of Sarah, Hannah, Leah, and Rachel were used to teach early modern men and women different lessons about infertility. While ministers on both sides of the Atlantic used the story of Sarah and Abraham to convey ideas about marital relationships and fidelity, the story of Hannah's fervent prayer and unwavering faith seemed to be most powerful in expressing the anguish of the personal struggle of infertility. Leah and Rachel's story was used in promotional literature of the New World, as the 'Fruitful Sisters of Israel', and Rachel's bitterness about her barren state was contrasted with the story of Hannah, whose patience and virtue were extolled by Puritan ministers. By using these well-known archetypes, early modern women were presented with the right and the wrong way to bear the burden of infertility. The strategic retelling of these Biblical stories of barrenness is a particularly important set of sources when considering the cultural exchange and pre-eminence of organizing principles of Puritan doctrine in the settlement of New England. The

physical and medical landscape of New England was different to England and gaps in the infrastructure were filled by clergy. Most of the published literature addressing infertility circulating within, and coming out of, New England was the work of religious leaders such as Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman. Their works address infertility as a spiritual problem, and their advice to congregants uses the same language and stories of the Old Testament that were employed to describe the colonial venture in general.

Chapter Three looks at how the use of popular literature reinforced cultural conceptions and characterizations of infertile or childless men and women. Writers in both societies expressed their population concerns through the language of infertility, and this chapter analyses the language of infertility across a wide range of literature, including pornographic novels, cuckold poetry, colonial promotional literature, and New England captivity narratives, to establish when and how stereotypes of infertility were used and manipulated. In these works, infertile men's and women's bodies and behaviours exhibit disorder. In England, the language of infertility provided the script when social boundaries were crossed and gendered hierarchies were challenged, as explored by Laura Gowing in her study of the use of sexual language in early modern society. In pornographic novels, morally-suspect women privileged sex over reproduction, and prostitutes were shown to be physically incapable of producing healthy babies. Cuckold literature exposed the dangers of inverted gender relationships. That same language was adopted and adapted by colonists in New England to deal with their new reproductive rivals, the Native Americans, both in terms of land and offspring, and to effectively describe and discredit Native America. Competition for land and resources with native populations provided a new sense of urgency about reproduction, and the literature from New England, from early promotional treatises to captivity narratives, attached familiar, negative stereotypes of infertility to new bodies. This chapter argues that these popular stereotypes of infertility displayed the tension within and

between these two societies and provided corporeal representations of fears about deception and disorder.

Chapter 4 is composed of two case studies chosen for their significance in the historical record and also for their representation of the social and political issues that infertility raised in the distinct cultural climates of colonial New England and late seventeenth-century England. Infertility cases that were famous in early modern society are important not only for the rich source material that they leave for historians, but also for the questions they raise regarding contemporaneous debate and diversity of opinion. Cases from both sides of the Atlantic are analysed in this chapter. The New England case study concerns the controversy over the monstrous births that occurred during the turmoil of the Antinomian controversy in the late 1630s. Religious dissident Anne Hutchinson and her friend and follower, Mary Dyer, suffered reproductive failures that were then used strategically by their opponents in propaganda publications about the religious controversy back in England. The events surrounding these particular unsuccessful reproductive scenarios reveal how infertility was sometimes used as a lesson, and as a warning, in times of social, political, or religious unrest in the first years of the New England colonies. Similarly, the role that infertility played in the succession controversies of the late Stuart monarchs illustrates the ramifications of reproductive failure in early modern England. This thesis argues that historical analysis of the dramatic 'Warming Pan Scandal' of 1688 must also consider the role that Catherine of Braganza's prolonged struggle with infertility in the previous reign played in fuelling anxieties about Mary of Modena procuring a male heir. Catherine's miscarriages were publicly scrutinized and contrasted with Charles II's many illegitimate offspring, and the lack of a legitimate male heir ultimately put Catholic James II on the throne.

With this comprehensive approach to the sources in mind, this thesis analyses the continuities and divergences surrounding attitudes about infertility and examines Old and

New England's mother/child relationship on a societal level. The comparative approach does not identify a stark difference between these two societies but rather contextualises the knowledge produced by both societies and addresses the effect that the different social, legal, and physical landscapes had in shaping attitudes toward infertility. This thesis argues that the language of infertility often shaped rhetoric about colonial successes and failures, exhibiting the tension between the two societies and how particular anxieties about population and national strength were expressed in each place.

This thesis explores the tensions that appeared in early modern society when the responsibility to have children was not met, and the repercussions – physical, social and emotional – that were recorded within and across a surprising number of sources. Infertility was a topic that was explored in a variety of media, in private and public spaces, and frequently appeared in the written communications between these two societies. While the interpretation of infertility could be affected by particular pressures relevant to each society, at its heart, the underlying threat of infertility was a culturally and politically relevant topic in both early modern England and colonial New England.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is several years and thousands of nautical miles in the making, and throughout this journey I have been supported by an ever-growing family on both sides of the Atlantic.

First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Margaret Pelling and Erica Charters. Erica and Maggie are role models in addition to being supervisors, and I am truly grateful for their comprehensive support. I am inspired by their talent, work ethic, and kindness, and I am incredibly thankful to have been guided by such amazing women.

I would also like to thank the various institutions and individuals who have supported me financially through scholarships and grants. I am grateful to Michael Saylor for his generosity. A joint scholarship from Christ Church and the Oxford History Faculty enabled me to take my D.Phil. place, and the American Friends of Christ Church supported my studies throughout the duration. The Massachusetts Historical Society provided funding and a congenial atmosphere during a research fellowship, and the Rothermere American Institute contributed toward a trip to archives in Boston.

I had the opportunity to share developing sections of this thesis at various conferences and seminars, and I have benefited from conversations with many historians. Participants at the 'From Generation to Reproduction' seminar at Cambridge (particularly Lauren Kassell), Early Modern Britain Seminar at Oxford, and the scholarly community working on early modern infertility have all provided valuable comments and asked challenging questions. Pietro Corsi, Martin Ingram, and Steven Gunn provided helpful feedback during my transfer and confirmation interviews. I am thankful for the help of many librarians at the Bodleian Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard University libraries, and the Wellcome Library. Belinda Michaelides at the Wellcome Unit has provided support and sunshine throughout my time at Oxford. I was introduced to the study of colonial New England by my professors John Demos and Rebecca Tannenbaum during my undergraduate days at Yale University, and I am indebted to them for sparking my scholarly interest in the stories from my homeland.

I could not have completed this D.Phil. without the encouragement of many friends. I am so thankful for the generosity and heartfelt support of the Weickart family. Rowena Archer has been a mentor since I first arrived at Oxford as a visiting undergraduate, and her friendship means the world to me. The kindness of Alice and Gordon Barrett, Graham Swain and Danielle Gransby, the Clarke family, and the Very Reverend Christopher and Rhona Lewis has sustained me throughout my time at Oxford. I am grateful for the camaraderie that I have found at Christ Church, particularly the friendship of Dr. Jessica Draper Smith and Luke Smith, Oliver Murphy, fellow members of the Graduate Common Room, Katherine Allen, and my colleagues at the Wellcome Unit. Capt. Glen Allen and the crews of *M/Y Our Toy* and *M/Y Harle* have become my sea-going family, and I am constantly aware of the support of these shipmates and dear friends.

Finally, I would like to thank my actual family: my parents, Capt. Richard and Sarah Benoit, my brother Tristan, and my sister-in-law Katie. They have always encouraged my academic endeavours, and I could not have done this without their inexhaustible patience, generosity, and good humour. This thesis is dedicated to them, and to the memory of my grandfather, Roger W. Bates, whose love of colonial New England and history inspired me at an early age, and whose kindness continues to inspire me today. My family has been with me every step of this journey, and I have relied on their steadfast love from across the waves.

List of Abbreviations and Conventions

Abbreviations:

ODNB: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, eds. H.C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>].

OED: Oxford English Dictionary Online, Oxford University Press, [<http://dictionary.oed.com/>]

Pepys: Pepys, S., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, eds. R. Latham and W. Matthews (10 vols., London, 1983).

A note on quotations, references, and dates: Original spelling and punctuation have been retained in quotations, and 'sic' has been used only where the original quotation could suggest an error of accuracy. For the purposes of this study, the new year will commence on 1 January.

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INTRODUCTION

The English minister John Oliver declares in the opening pages of his *Present for Teeming Women* (1688) that pregnant women

have their particular duties, and their peculiar motives to diligence in them; and their number is considerable. They are a worthy part of the Community, then especially, when breeding; for much of the comfort of the present generation, and the honour of God, and future being of his Church in succeeding generations, is concerned in those Infants yet un-born.¹

Oliver structures his text around these duties, outlined in fourteen chapters, and lists meditation, dedication of the child to God, and preparation for death among the responsibilities that a woman must keep in mind over the course of her pregnancy. But Oliver's first chapter, perhaps surprisingly, is largely dedicated to the subject of infertility. He claims that he has been encouraged to focus on infertility by 'a reverend Minister in London' who informed him that 'diverse Godly persons to whom God have denyed children, desired that [Oliver] would enlarge upon this point'. He does so through the use of Biblical parables, questions about personal faith, the role of sin, and even entertains the possible merits of being childless. Oliver's convoluted first chapter highlights popular concerns about infertility, the complicated attitudes toward 'unfruitful wombs' in the early modern period, and the disorder that the issue of infertility introduced into contemporary discussions about childbearing.

As Oliver's opening pages also illustrate, infertility in the early modern period was also inextricably linked with concepts of responsibility. Having children in pre-industrial society was an important but sometimes difficult responsibility for prospective parents to bear. The obligation to procreate was a central issue that shaped dialogue (written, spoken and unspoken) within the network of relationships that formed early modern society --

¹ John Oliver, *A Present to be Given to Teeming Women* (London, 1688), Epistle to the Reader, p. 3. The second edition of the work was also published in Boston in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1694.

relationships forged between husbands and wives, preachers and congregants, monarchs and their subjects, men and women's bodies and their own minds. This dialogue occurred on many levels, ranging from the public to the very personal. So while historians cannot be certain of the personal attitudes toward children shared between all couples, we can contextualise late seventeenth-century midwife Jane Sharp's claim that 'to conceive with child is the earnest desire if not all yet of most women' by means of the historical study of the personal and public value of children in early modern society. Sharp follows her statement by acknowledging that 'some there are who hold conception to be a curse, because God laid it upon Eve...: but forasmuch as increase and multiply, was the blessing of God, it is not the conception, but the sorrow to bring forth that was laid as a curse.'² Her declaration also then stands as a sombre reminder of the complex web of medical, religious and popular knowledge that formed people's attitudes toward reproduction in the early modern period as well as the pain and fear that could accompany this particular responsibility. Those hopeful, yet frustrated, in their attempts to have children were able to turn to a variety of written sources and authorities to gain information and seek advice for their bodily problems.

With this comprehensive approach in mind, this thesis assesses the relationship between these two societies, early modern England and its 'child', the Puritan colonies in New England, through their use of the language of infertility. This is not a strict comparative study that identifies a stark difference between these two societies. Rather it contextualises the information produced by both societies and addresses the effect that the different social, economic, legal and physical landscapes of early modern England and colonial New England had in shaping attitudes toward infertility. It tackles this subject by examining the mother/child relationship on a societal level. New England's unique relationship with its metaphorical 'Mother' England is one that is reiterated in a variety of period texts and adds

² Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book, Or, the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered* (London, 1671), p. 16.

another layer of complexity when considering issues of infertility. The population of England was continually compared to its burgeoning colonies and to France, and the literature of the period confirms anxiety over 'Mother' England's ability to keep up. Infertility is therefore particularly pertinent, and more complicated, when considered within the culture of reproductive competition that dominated this period and especially when compared to its own fecund 'offspring', the New England colonies. What effect did New England's small community size, largely homogeneous religious character, and confrontations with the native populations have on attitudes toward infertility? Colonial New England, in particular, has long been celebrated by demographic historians for its large family size and high natural fertility rates. Exploring attitudes toward infertility within that particular culture of growth provides the opportunity for another layer of historical analysis of a health problem with socially-significant consequences. Charged with the additional responsibility of populating this new territory, the colonists used the familiar language of infertility to describe the bodies of their competitors, the Native Americans, and express their fears in times of religious, social, and political crisis. This thesis contextualises these demographic anxieties, in the case of England, and considers the experience of infertile couples amidst this remarkable period of growth in the American colonies.

Rethinking Infertility: A 'Spectrum' of Reproductive Challenges

As the pressure to produce offspring was a burden that weighed heavily on early modern couples, it is similarly a difficult responsibility for the modern day historian to attempt to piece together a history of infertility from this time period. It is largely a history comprised of the unwritten bodily, social, and emotional struggles experienced by those who desperately hoped for children but suffered a disappointing range of unsuccessful outcomes instead. Therefore it is unsuitable to attach modern, clinical parameters to the early modern

experience of infertility.³ For this reason, infertility in this study is expanded and applied to cases of persistent, unsuccessful reproduction. Periods of infertility and different types of reproductive failures, including delay in conception, miscarriages, stillbirths, monstrous births, and false conceptions are included to capture the experience of, and reactions to, a range of bodily experiences. Many of the women and men who feature in this thesis were not childless, but their experiences during times of reproductive challenge, and the interpretation of their challenges, provides a more comprehensive study of attitudes toward infertility. Broadening the definition of infertility enables the historian to capture and analyse the apprehension that accompanied cases such as the English gentlewoman Sarah Savage, who wrote anxiously in her diary during the first years of her marriage in the late seventeenth century about her inability to conceive, suffered a devastating miscarriage, and then went on to give birth to nine children.⁴ Savage's diary encapsulates the 'uncertainty of pregnancy' that Cathy McClive addresses in her article 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly,' and it also highlights the opportunity to develop this idea further and apply it to the study of popular attitudes toward infertility in general. McClive's article correctly asserts that 'ambiguities surrounding the understanding of pregnancy extended to the whole experience, not just the birth scene.' But McClive's study is rooted in French sources and is limited to the experience of pregnancy, with ambiguities starting, as she claims, 'at the moment of conception.'⁵ I argue that by looking at early modern English sources that address infertility, these ambiguities and anxieties can be identified both pre and post-conception. In cases of reproductive failure or sustained challenge, concerns about infertility formed their own part

³ The modern clinical definition of infertility is the 'inability in a woman to conceive or in a man to induce conception after regular unprotected sexual intercourse for two years: 'Infertility', *Concise Medical Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2010. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. University of Oxford. 7 February 2011, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t60.e4999>.

⁴ ODNB, s.v., 'Sarah Savage', accessed 18 June 2012; See Patricia Crawford, 'Attitudes to Pregnancy, from a Woman's Spiritual Diary, 1687-8', in Crawford, *Blood, Bodies, and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), pp. 38-40.

⁵ Cathy McClive, 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe', *Social History of Medicine*, 15 (2009), pp. 209-227.

of the reproductive cycle. Early modern medical and midwifery texts often contain chapters focusing exclusively on ‘What Hinders Conception’ and prescriptions for ordering the body through changes in diet, hygiene, or even sexual partner. The seventeenth-century diarist Samuel Pepys monitored his wife’s periods and carefully recorded sexual advice from matrons in an attempt to understand and resolve his frustrated attempts at becoming a father.⁶ Both types of source illustrate the anxiety associated with infertility and expand McClive’s argument regarding the uncertainty of pregnancy during this period. They also highlight the variety of sources, and writers, who address this issue. As Jane Sharp notes, even in cases of successful conception, falling pregnant was only one step in a long, doubt-ridden process, and outcomes could vary substantially. Analysing the social or culturally-derived responses to, and uses of, these varied reproductive outcomes in early modern England and colonial New England is the central aim of this study. As this thesis examines, a monstrous birth in Puritan colonial New England sparked a serious political and social reaction, as did the series of royal reproductive failures that characterized the Stuart succession controversies in late seventeenth-century England. Each case deserves a thorough examination in consideration of the social climate within which the respective rhetorics were shaped.

Early modern descriptions of fertility problems in medical literature were more inclusive than modern medical definitions of infertility, but two descriptors from the early modern period were typically used to highlight the presence of fertility problems. Barrenness was the common term used to describe infertility in women, its roots well-established in the Bible. The stories of eight Biblical women, ranging from Sarah (wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac) to Hannah (mother of Samuel, the judge and prophet), and their respective struggles with infertility firmly established barrenness as a familiar parable in early modern

⁶ Pepys, 26 July 1664.

society.⁷ Messages about barrenness were often preached from the pulpit, particularly in Puritan colonial New England, and its heavy religious connotations shaped popular attitudes when encountered as a personal health problem. Impotence, or male sexual malfunction, is also a condition that appears in medical, legal, and popular literature of the period.⁸ The gendered manifestations of infertility provide the opportunity to explore gender relations in society as a whole, as infertility in both women and men came with its own set of socially-significant stereotypes. Infertility also provides the opportunity to explore these conditions and what they can tell us about the relationships *between* men and women and how disorder in sexual relationships and gendered hierarchies was explained through the language of the malfunctioning reproductive body, both male and female.

But to limit oneself to these two definitions of infertility would be to ignore a host of additional source material related to reproductive problems. In addition to the specific language of barrenness and impotence, this investigation of infertility extends to include a variety of fertility problems including false conceptions, multiple miscarriages, and monstrous births. Similarly, it discusses the relationship between persistent fertility challenges and cases of lifelong childlessness to distinguish a spectrum of infertility in light of early modern medical ideas of when and how conception occurred. When, where, how and by whom these distinctions were made is contextualized by the respective cultures of each society.

This expanded definition of infertility better suits the way in which information about these issues was communicated in early modern medical literature and popular lore. While there are sections in midwifery texts dedicated seemingly exclusively to combating ‘what

⁷ See Rachel Havrelock, ‘The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible’, *Biblical Interpretation*, 16 (2008), pp. 154-78.

⁸ Thomas Foster, ‘Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 56 (1999), pp. 723-44; Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History* (Chicago, 2007).

hinders conception', there is also information on infertility scattered throughout the body of these works. Infertility is also addressed in chapters on menstrual disorders, injury to the reproductive organs, false conceptions, monstrous births, and the prevention of miscarriage, and a range of classical authorities and contradicting theories are cited. The disorderly arrangement of the information mirrors the diversity, confusion and sometimes downright contradiction that comprised attitudes toward reproductive challenges during the early modern period. This jumble of information, and range of source material within the texts, provides ample opportunity for analysis of this complicated subject and the varied sources that informed and reflected popular opinions.

Tensions arose when the responsibility to have children was not met and the repercussions – physical, social and emotional – were recorded in a variety of sources. This study seeks to use many different kinds of information in order to assess attitudes toward infertility in the early modern Atlantic world and to determine how and when they overlap. Medical works, like Sharp's midwifery manual, were heavily influenced by religion and folklore and therefore reflect the contemporary cultural ideas of the society that produced them. This thesis builds on the work of social historians such as Patricia Crawford, Mary Fissell, and Sarah Toulalan to analyse the social context of infertility in early modern England and colonial New England. Infertility was explained in medical works, agonised over in diaries, satirized in popular literature, and discussed at dinner parties. This particular health problem was a topic that was explored in a variety of media and in private and public spaces. Exploring the interplay between the diverse sources addressing this issue captures the complexity of early modern attitudes toward infertility.

Individuals faced with infertility issues had access to a host of information from a variety of authorities. Similarly, attitudes, experiences and interpretations of infertility were recorded in many different ways. Analysis of a wide variety of source material produces a

fuller picture of both the questions raised by infertility, and the answers provided to those going through the experience of reproductive failure. It is also important to survey a variety of material in an attempt to assess the social and economic value of children in society, as these messages can be found in everything from promotional literature for the early settlement of the North American colonies, to political arithmetic tracts from both sides of the Atlantic. The ability of a health condition like infertility to transcend the boundaries of medical literature is telling in itself, but most valuable are the sources that represent cultural attitudes or, when possible, personal reflections on this issue. Ranging from anxiety, despair even to humour, the range of emotions illuminated by the sources allows for a rich investigation into, and potential contrast, between published opinions and personal writings. Uncovering attitudes toward infertility through the variety of sources in which they were reflected illustrates the close relationship between physical conditions and social representations of bodily disorder in the early modern period.

There is a sliding scale of information on generation produced in the early modern period, ranging from midwifery manuals such as Nicholas Culpeper's *Directory for Midwives* (1656) and Jane Sharp's *Midwives Book* (1671), to works claiming to unlock the 'secrets of generation' such as *Aristotle's Masterpiece* (1680), *Rare Verities* (1658), and or the English translation of Nicholas Venette's *Conjugal Love Reveal'd* (1703). All of these works were often read for reasons other than the medical information they contained. The distinctions are difficult to make and the intended audience even more difficult to ascertain, as several historians have shown in their analysis of the texts and their readership during this proliferation of the medical vernacular in the late seventeenth century.⁹ This thesis explores stereotypes of infertility as they appear in books that seemingly had nothing to do with

⁹ See Patricia Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England, 1500-1750', in her work *Blood, Bodies and Families* (Harlow, 2004), pp. 54-79.

medicine and analyses how medically-based ideas about infertility make an appearance in their pages.

This study builds on the work of social historians who examine these types of sources, both published and personal, to obtain a better understanding of the social worlds of the early modern period, but it also is supported by work that has been done by medical historians examining the different elements that informed and advanced medical knowledge during this period. A comprehensive study of infertility must cross the boundaries of several historical categories in order to contextualise attitudes toward infertility as it is addressed, and used strategically by, writers within these two separate but related communities. This thesis does not define infertility as a medical problem, but instead explores the complexities stemming from its blend into popular culture and assesses attitudes that were shaped and interpreted by circles well outside the medical profession. Biblical parables and stereotypes in popular literature also informed people about infertility, and the early modern 'medical' texts themselves were infused with moral opinions, popular lore, and religious messages. The words of those writing about and experiencing infertility are put into context in this thesis as they are considered along with contemporary writing addressing larger issues of population, gender roles, and social order and disorder.

Historiography

This study fully explores the social influences and ramifications of infertility, rather than treating it as an aside in areas such as the history of maternity and childbirth, or virtually dismissing its significance by only considering its relatively small impact in demographic history. As several works in diverse disciplines of history touch briefly on infertility, this study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship about infertility in early modern culture. The uncertainty of birth and anxiety over prospective outcome, the popular rhetoric

surrounding the responsibility of having many children, the contemporary medical knowledge that informed practitioners and those they attended, and even the larger issues of gender relations with the early modern period – all of these different strands are brought together to better articulate early modern attitudes toward infertility.

This work builds also on a larger framework of gender history in the early modern period. Infertility typically ties into gender history on two levels: 1) in the more theoretically-based history of the body and sexuality and 2) in its discussion within social histories of marriage and family construction in the early modern period. The first, corporeally-based approach, concerns investigations into the early modern mysteries of generation that are paramount to the understanding of what early modern minds conceived infertility to be, but they lend themselves to an equally diverse interpretative framework. Consequently, the historiography surrounding early modern notions of conception is almost as contentious as the original debates. Thomas Laqueur's landmark work, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, and its reception by other historians, is a fitting example of the subject's complicated historiography. Coining the term the 'one-sex model of the body', Laqueur argues that women were viewed as imperfect men and that biological differences were discussed in a pre-modern world where 'at least two genders correspond to but one sex, where the boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of kind, and where the reproductive organs are but one sign among many of the body's place in a cosmic and cultural order that transcends biology.'¹⁰ On issues surrounding infertility, Laqueur discusses mostly Galenic, two-seed, theories about humoral dispositions and regulation of bodily temperature.¹¹ This one-sex model of the body is originally Aristotelian, and rather than discuss specific fertility problems, Laqueur devotes most of the book to the larger, overarching theme of establishment of sexual difference versus cultural constructions of

¹⁰ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), p. 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

gender. Laqueur also concentrates on the gradual adaptation of the Aristotelian model (in which the female contributes no seed to conception and is in essence, a vessel that houses and nourishes the foetus) to the Galenic and eventually Hippocratic idea that both sexes contribute seed.

The respective theories are difficult to untangle and are indeed often used interchangeably within early modern medical works. The role of each sex in the pivotal moment of conception is the point at which they diverge. Within Laqueur's 'one-sex model of the body', therefore, he also identifies two theories of generation: the 'one-seed' Aristotelian theory versus the later Galenic/Hippocratic 'two-seed' theory. Laqueur marvels that, 'what we would take to be ideologically charged social constructions of gender – that males are active and females passive, males contribute the form and females the matter to generation – were for Aristotle indubitable fact, "natural" truths.'¹² Laqueur explores the complexities of early modern philosophical theories of generation through the language of modern gender theory, but the Galenic/Hippocratic humoral model is repeated in most early modern medical works at least through the early eighteenth century. Laqueur does address this slow transition as well as the multitude of conception theories that characterised information about generation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From animalculists to ovists, debate raged over each sex's specific contribution in procreation, and, as Laqueur acknowledges, it was also through these debates that the relationship between men's and women's bodies also changed. While it is true that differences between men and women are largely discussed in terms of fluid balance and temperature in early modern medical literature, it is also clear that women's bodies, while often described in comparative terms to men's, are regarded as having their own unique anatomy. The midwife Jane Sharp, for example, is unequivocal in addressing the differences between men and women in her work,

¹² Ibid., p. 28.

first published in 1671, but she also frequently uses male body parts to describe the shape or function of female ones.¹³ It is this use of comparative language, as well as the sheer multitude of sources and theories about the generative organs of both sexes, that Laqueur uses to support his approach, but this also highlights the shortcomings of his model.

Laqueur built his central hypothesis on the analysis of the language of sex in these ancient works, and his book has provoked varied responses. Praising the book for its wide array of literary and graphic sources, reviewers Katharine Park and Robert Nye support the integration of the history of sexuality with cultural history, but they determine that Laqueur's project ultimately fails in its attempt to substantiate a sweeping pre-modern 'one-sex' conceptualization of the body.¹⁴ Like Park and Nye, Michael Stolberg applauds Laqueur's achievements in 'rightly insist[ing] that scientific concepts and representations of the human body are always closely and inextricably bound to their respective social, cultural, and political context'.¹⁵ Laqueur's study, and its critics' responses, unearth the many sources that people in early modern society turned to for knowledge about their own bodies and explicitly link them to larger social themes, but historians have only recently ventured further in regard to infertility. *The Making of Sex* is more useful in its expansion and clarification of themes introduced in pre-existing gender history literature, such as ideas explored within

¹³ See Elaine Hobby's introduction to her modern edition of Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book* (New York, 1999) in which she explains how 'the differences in detail [between *The Midwives Book* and male-authored midwifery texts]... result in a fundamental shift in the way in which sexuality and gender are conceptualized.' (Hobby, p. xxix).

¹⁴ Katharine Park and Robert Nye, 'Destiny is Anatomy', *The New Republic*, 51 (1991), p. 54. Park and Nye find numerous faults with Laqueur's work, criticizing its heavy reliance on analogous language, inaccurate interpretations of the diametrically opposed Aristotelian and Galenic/Hippocratic theories of conception, and confusing chronology. Also see Helen King, *The One-Sex Model of the Body on Trial: the Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Aldershot, 2013).

¹⁵ Michael Stolberg, 'A Woman Down to Her Bones: the Anatomy of Sexual Difference in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Isis*, 94 (2003), pp. 274 – 99. Stolberg specifically addresses Londa Schiebinger, 'Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy,' *Representations*, 14 (1986), pp. 42-82. For an extended investigation of gender and scientific discovery, see Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). Also see Winfried Schleiner, 'Early Modern Controversies about the One-Sex Model', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53 (2000), pp. 180-91.

Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, than it is in accurately describing an overarching theory about the bodily-based ideas about gender before the Enlightenment.¹⁶

Methodological tools from gender history are used in this thesis to understand the complicated relationship between personal experience and social attitudes toward infertility in the early modern period, but there is a considerable challenge in establishing causation when examining these issues. For that reason, it is best to adopt Laura Gowing's opinion that Laqueur's 'one-sex model' as only 'part of the landscape of early modern bodies, not the whole world.'¹⁷ Exploring attitudes toward infertility continues to fill in this landscape by acknowledging the diversity of opinion that informed it.

Infertility dramas always involve two people and this point is not lost on early modern writers. It is often explored, even in medical writing, through the language of marital responsibilities, therefore framing biological responsibilities within social constructs and placing it solidly within the realm of gender history. It has been well-established that gender history is not just women's history, or men's history; rather it is a particular method of understanding male and female interactions over time.¹⁸ This approach is therefore helpful in examining attitudes toward infertility in that men and women's bodies each had their own responsibilities to contribute in the reproductive process and within their relationships with each other. By extension, gender is also a helpful construct to provide insight into the order of early modern society, or, a particular way of understanding communities that people lived or

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth, 1990). Foucault's seminal three-volume study precedes Laqueur's book and argues for the development of the 'scientia sexualis' in the nineteenth century. Laqueur specifically credits Foucault and his work on the relationship between sexuality and the body in his first chapter of Laqueur, *Making Sex*, pp. 10-13. Also see Karen Harvey, 'The Century of Sex? Gender, Bodies, and Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 899-916.

¹⁷ Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2003), p. 19.

¹⁸ See Joan Scott's seminal essay 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1980), pp 153-75; Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London, 2004); Ruth Harris and Laura Lee Downs, 'What Future for Gender History?' in Robert Gildea and Anne Simonin (eds.), *Writing Contemporary History* (London, 2008); J. Boydston, 'Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis', *Gender and History*, 20 (2008), pp. 558-83; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990); Konstantin Dierks 'Men's History, Gender History, or Cultural History?', *Gender History*, 14 (2002), pp. 147-151.

socialized in, the structure of households, or characteristics of popular culture. Gender can be used as an organising principle in debates about continuity and change, separate spheres, social relations and power relationships within certain societies. All of these issues must be considered in the study of early modern attitudes toward infertility. Extending this idea to examine how these relationships then ordered society is an especially useful angle from which to study the early modern period of English history – a period that, as historian Anthony Fletcher claims, ‘exhibited features of crisis’ in a long-established patriarchal system.¹⁹ Several historians, such as Mary Fissell, have taken this idea further and argued how many seventeenth-century social crises manifest themselves in debates about authority over women’s reproductive bodies.²⁰ The seventeenth century, then, is a particularly tumultuous period when considering the gender issues raised by infertility. Issues such as assignment of blame between the affected man and woman trapped in an infertile marriage, or discussions about the morality of each sex and physical manifestations or repercussions of sexual dysfunction-- are all actively debated and explored within the writing of the period. This thesis builds on these types of investigations into the interplay between social interpretations and bodily experiences, and refocuses them on a specific area of inquiry: infertility. Doing so allows for a more focused study of tensions affecting these power structures when women’s and men’s reproductive bodies failed to produce desired results. This study addresses attitudes toward women’s and men’s bodies, the relationship between those bodies, and those bodies’ respective responsibilities as they were represented in early modern culture.

Recent scholarship by Jennifer Evans, Sarah Toulalan, Catherine Rider, and Daphna Oren-Magidor focuses on the medical, social, and religious attitudes toward infertility in

¹⁹ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995), p. xvi.

²⁰ See Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2004).

early modern England.²¹ Sarah Toulalan’s work rightly emphasises the important bond between reproduction and sex in early modern England and how the physical appearance and age of the sexual body was viewed with respect to its fertility.²² Jennifer Evans makes the connection between infertility treatments and aphrodisiacs as well as identifying a gendered approach to diagnosis and therapy when distinctions between male and female infertility were difficult to ascertain.²³ Catherine Rider’s work examines infertility in medieval England and provides a helpful foundation to discern how early modern attitudes emerged from earlier ideas in medical and religious texts about infertility’s connection to morality and magic.²⁴ Lisa Smith’s recent work studies infertility within the domestic sphere and focuses on the ‘lived experience’ of both male and female infertility as expressed in personal writing and recipe books in early modern England and France.²⁵ All of these studies identify infertility as a medical and social problem in medieval and early modern English society and relate

²¹ The work of all of these historians will be featured in a forthcoming special edition of *Social History of Medicine* focusing on infertility in early modern England, expected publication in 2015. I am grateful to the editors, Catherine Rider and Daphna Oren-Magidor, for sharing the unpublished articles with me, and to the contributors for sharing their insights and developing work at conferences and seminars.

²² Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2007); ‘“To[o] much eating stifles the child”: Fat Bodies and Reproduction in Early Modern England’, *Historical Research*, 87 (2014), pp. 65-93; ‘“The Act of Copulation Being Ordain'd by Nature as the Ground of all Generation”: Fertility and the Representation of Sexual Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Pornography in England’, *Women’s History Review*, 15 (2006), pp. 521-532; with Kate Fisher (eds.), *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present* (London, 2013); with Kate Fisher (eds.), *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present* (Basingstoke, 2011).

²³ Jennifer Evans, ‘Female Barrenness, Bodily Access and Aromatic Treatments in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Historical Research*, 87 (2014), pp. 423-443; ‘“Gentle Purges corrected with hot Spices, whether they work or not, do vehemently provoke Venery”: Menstrual Provocation and Procreation in Early Modern England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 25 (2012), pp. 2-19; ‘“Bewitched in their privities”: Medical Responses to Infertility Witchcraft in Early Modern England’ *Societas Magica Newsletter*, 27 (2012), pp. 1-3; ‘“It is caused of the womans part or of the mans part”: the Role of Gender in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Sexual Dysfunction in Early Modern England’, *Women’s History Review*, 20 (2011), pp. 439-57. Also see forthcoming book, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility, and Medicine in Early Modern England* (Martlesham, 2014). Unfortunately, Jennifer Evans’s *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility, and Medicine in Early Modern England* appeared late for this thesis to fully benefit from its research.

²⁴ Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2006); ‘Women, Men and Love Magic in Late Medieval English Pastoral Manuals’, *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, 7 (2012), pp. 190-211; ‘“A Defect of the Mind or Body”: Impotence and Sexuality in Medieval Theology and Canon Law’, in Jill Ross and Suzanne Akbari (eds.), *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture* (Toronto, 2013), pp. 193-210.

²⁵ Lisa Smith, ‘Imagining Women’s Fertility Before Technology’, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 31 (2010), pp. 69-79; ‘The Body Embarrassed? Rethinking the Leaky Male Body in Eighteenth-Century England and France’, *Gender and History*, 23 (2011) pp. 26-46; ‘The Relative Duties of a Man: Domestic Medicine in England and France, ca. 1670-1740’, *Journal of Family History*, 31(2006), pp. 237-56.

medical explanations of reproductive problems to social and religious ideas. This thesis contributes to this emerging body of research in considering how these social messages about infertility were shared between England and the New England colonies and used in times of crisis in both societies. As this thesis shows, understanding the English origins of the colonists' ideas about infertility is fundamental to understanding both the connection between the two societies and to providing context for the colonists' perceptions about their encounters with new lands, bodies, environments, and reasons for emigration. The language of colonization was rich with reproductive metaphors, and it was similarly rich in the language of infertility in periods of anxiety concerning population and fears about social disorder. By using a spectrum of infertility, this thesis also captures and assesses the apprehension that accompanied periods of infertility and different experiences of reproductive failure.

This thesis relies on the work of many scholars who have examined the social construction of the reproductive body in early modern English culture. Patricia Crawford develops her study of reproductive bodies by reconstructing the social and physical experience of maternity (from conception through childbearing) in early modern English society. According to Crawford, 'the continuance of human society has always depended upon the woman's ability to give birth: an obvious point, but one frequently overlooked.'²⁶ This line of thinking deserves more consideration in respect to attitudes toward infertility, and specifically in relation to the early modern maternal constructs that Crawford identifies. On infertility, she acknowledges the influence of 'female lore' on matters of conception, personal reflections on the desire for children, and social responsibilities such as inheritance and

²⁶ Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow, 2004), p. 80. Crawford's essay on 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-century England' can also be found in Valerie Fildes's edited collection of essays, *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London, 1990), pp. 3-38.

succession, but she stops short of further analysis. This thesis explores what it means to fail in so 'natural' a task as parenthood, and measures the social ramifications of this failure.

Crawford is well supported in her pursuit to connect the histories of women's bodies to developments within the larger social history of early modern England. Mary Fissell and Laura Gowing have both provided insight into the interplay of society and culture with women's bodily histories. In exploring these tensions with regard to infertility, Gowing expands her argument to conclude that 'for women, like men, infertility was readily related to a failure to conform to gender norms: inadequate men and dominant women might both miss their biological destiny.'²⁷ As with Crawford and Fissell, Gowing's treatment of infertility is a brief aside, just one possibility in a larger discussion of women's reproductive bodies. The approach that these historians take is convincing, however, and provides a base of rich legal and literary source material that clearly illustrates the presence of infertility in the popular consciousness. Gowing's brief mention of defamation cases sheds light on the social stigma of infertility, as does its persistence in popular literature such as ballads, broadsides and advertisements. Careful reading of early modern popular literature such as the seventeenth-century ballad, *The Female Doctress, or, Mother Midnight's Cure for Barrenness in Women* (1685) reveals many stereotypes about infertility and illustrates the popular language used to communicate ideas about challenges in reproduction.²⁸ This ballad is only one example that provides insight into popular attitudes toward infertility in early modern society and is representative of the diverse source materials from which these attitudes can be studied.

This thesis also examines how infertility relates to the responsibilities of marriage and the institution of the family in early modern England, and argues that the language of infertility was used to reflect fears about social order and disorder. Numerous scholars have

²⁷ Gowing, *Common Bodies*, p. 115. Also see Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (Basingstoke, 1997).

²⁸ Anon., *The Female Doctress, or, Mother Midnights Cure For Barrenness in Women* (London, 1685).

placed the family at the centre of social and religious order in early modern England and have analysed the roles of its respective members.²⁹ As Garthine Walker and others have shown, disharmony in the family unit could, on a practical level, result in litigation, or, on a more abstract level, fears about a complete upending of the gender hierarchy, signifying a more malignant, pervasive disorder that threatened the stability of society and even the laws of the natural world.³⁰ Alan MacFarlane suggests that infertility was more a personal ‘misfortune than [a] terrible tragedy and humiliation’ in early modern English society, and argues that would-be parents lamented the lack of children from an emotional standpoint rather than an economic or social one.³¹ I do not think that these concerns can be so easily separated in early modern English and colonial New English society, where personal misfortune and bodily health was often interpreted with respect to events happening in the community or imbued with religious meaning. While MacFarlane is correct to emphasise the emotional toll that infertility took on individuals, his study does not extend to reflect the effect that the language of infertility had when it was applied outside the immediate family unit. The social ramifications, and the pervasive use of infertile stereotypes in early modern society, illustrate that the clear lines between personal misfortune and public humiliation were difficult to discern. In the charged social and political atmospheres of Stuart England and colonial New England, the distinctions were even hazier as metaphors and reproductive language reflected anxieties over a nation’s population and even the survival of a colony.

The historiography surrounding New England colonists’ attitudes to these same themes is markedly different from the works investigating social discourse about women’s

²⁹ For a comprehensive and well-organized bibliography on the many approaches to the history of the family in early modern England, see Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (eds.), *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp.233-240.

³⁰ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003); Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2007); Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985).

³¹ Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), p. 61.

bodies in early modern England, but similar problems remain with regard to infertility's cursory historical treatment in the majority of studies. Notably two books include the colonial period in longer studies of infertility in American culture. Both works, however, treat Puritan New England as a starting point in longer national studies of infertility, rather than closely analysing the colonial period's attitudes in their own right. Elaine Tyler May argues that, in early New England, 'reproduction was both a religious and an economic necessity....It was incumbent upon the early settlers to "be fruitful and multiply", not only because God commanded it, but because material necessity required it. In this atmosphere, childlessness was a serious problem.'³² In addition to prescriptive literature from the Puritan divines such as Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman, May also examines court cases involving witchcraft accusations to highlight the dangerous allegations that abnormal reproductive scenarios could provoke. Hers is a helpful study and a multifaceted approach to understanding the social constructions around infertility in this unique culture, but by simply highlighting certain cases and the diverse source material, May invites a deeper study of these attitudes. May's study can be contrasted with another work on American infertility, Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner's *The Empty Cradle*, a work that begins with the scant early American medical literature around infertility and traces its development from the colonial era to the present.³³ Both studies are helpful in their inclusion of colonial attitudes in longer national histories and do an excellent job of contextualizing these trends and projecting them forward to ideas of early nationalism and the dawn of Republican Motherhood. But both books neglect to connect these ideas back to their English roots. Likewise, focused studies of women's social and medical experience in colonial New England by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and others fail to connect to crucial aspects of the themes so clearly advanced by early modern English social

³² Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 23.

³³ Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner, *The Empty Cradle: Infertility in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore, 1996).

historians such as Fissell, Gowing, and Crawford.³⁴ Gloria Main's work, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, does use some English sources to examine how English colonists' cultural institutions compared to, and eventually affected, the practices of the natives of southern New England, but Main focuses on the fecundity of English colonists and the settlers' expansion throughout the colonial period.³⁵ Main's work is helpful in its scope and in its social historical approach to examining differences in cultural institutions such as the family, gender relations, and labour between the colonists and Native Americans. This thesis helps to continue to explore these exchanges by examining how infertility was experienced and represented within and across the British Atlantic world.

Beyond tying the colonial period into longer national histories of infertility, two themes are common when considering infertility within the social history of colonial New England. The first concerns the highly religious nature of the New England colonies. Sermons such as Cotton Mather's *An Ornament to the Daughters of Zion* (1692) stand as examples of the didactic rhetoric women were exposed to in regard to promoting fertility and women's specific contribution to Puritan society.³⁶ Classic social studies of early New England history such as Edmund Morgan's *The Puritan Family* and John Demos' *A Little Commonwealth* touch on these themes and are useful in their depiction of the specific religious language around a society built upon the strict hierarchies and reproductive responsibilities within families. But while they are valuable as studies of family life and gender relations, they do little to elucidate the experience of maternity (or lack thereof) in colonial New England. Useful comparisons can be drawn, however, to the importance of family as an organising principle in contemporary rural English communities, for example,

³⁴ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Goodwives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York, 1980).

³⁵ Gloria L. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Colonial New England* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (Boston, 1692). As Chapter 2 of this thesis illustrates, this sermon is really a piece of conduct literature and stresses the duties of virtuous women using Old Testament women as role models.

Richard Gough's parish of Myddle. Called by the editor 'the most remarkable local history ever written', Gough's *History of Myddle* (1700) is structured in a unique order. It is organized by family, and each family's respective history is recounted by Gough in elaborate detail. Gough provides valuable insight into ideas of honour and morality, also into the close interweaving of personal and community lives in the seventeenth century. Myddle is brought to life as a small community that is built on a long tradition of families. People are described as sons, daughters, husbands and wives, and lives are connected through marriage and remarriage. Community members are described in terms of their kinship networks, and the importance of children and family is clearly communicated in its pages.³⁷ The importance of producing children within the family networks of Gough's Myddle can be compared to the rural communities of colonial New England in the late seventeenth century, where a small population size, rural economy, and largely homogeneous religious culture, combine to give a specific significance to the security of family networks and multiple offspring.

The same approach to counting people and organizing them into family units can be seen in William Bradford's work *Of Plimoth Plantation* (1651), in which he records the history of the colony's first years of settlement in New England. Thirty years after the arrival of 'about a hundred souls' on the Mayflower, Bradford carefully records these passengers' subsequent births and deaths as a means of measuring the colony's success. He notes that 'seeing it hath pleased Him to give me to see thirty years completed since these beginnings. And that the great works of his Providence are to be observed I have thought it not unworthy my paines, to take a view of the decreasinges and increasings of these persons, and such changes as hath passed over them and theirs in this thirty years.' He notes that 'James Chilton and his wife also dyed in the first infection. But their daughter Mary is still

³⁷ Richard Gough, *The History of Myddle*, ed. David Hey, (Harmondsworth, 1981). Gough was a gentleman and a respected member of his small community. Myddle was a remote Shropshire village (160 miles from London), with a population of around 450 people.

living and hath nine children; and one daughter is married and hath a child; so their increase is ten.’³⁸ Bradford hoped that his efforts ‘It may be of some use to such as come after’, but his writing also provides insight into how New England leaders conceptualized birth and death in their small frontier communities and in relation to the survival of the colony as a whole. Fertility signified both physical survival and the favour of God towards the colonial experiment. As this thesis shows, its converse, infertility, prompted questions about both in times of crisis.

Along these lines, the second theme in the historiography of colonial New England’s experience with infertility considers the importance of children in terms of economic and demographic survival. Historians Philip Greven and Kenneth Lockridge are associated with this approach for New England, developing detailed micro-histories of the colonial Massachusetts towns of Andover and Dedham respectively and reconstructing their settlement and community patterns over the course of several generations.³⁹ Their works are detailed studies built on fertility rates, land distribution information, and basic demographic data. While this approach is helpful in sketching a clear picture of the demographic evolution of two New England towns in the colonial period, these works do not fully enter into the contemporaneous cultural development of early New England.

A third body of literature that this study draws on is the history of medicine in early New England, and specifically authorities on women’s health. Rebecca Tannenbaum has argued that women acted as healers within their homes, medical witnesses in court, and as commercial practitioners within their colonial New England communities.⁴⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s well-known work, *A Midwife’s Tale*, combines all of these roles and brings them to

³⁸ William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Samuel Eliot Morison (ed.), (New York, 1952), pp. 441-2, 446.

³⁹ Philip Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970). Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York, 1970).

⁴⁰ Rebecca Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2002).

life through the diary of eighteenth-century Maine midwife Martha Ballard.⁴¹ Information about women's reproductive bodies passed within similar, gendered, circles in both early modern England and colonial New England. It is therefore noteworthy when and how these reproductive tropes were represented outside these feminine circles and in popular and religious literature. As Mary Fissell has argued with her work on *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, women sharing information about the reproductive body was considered suitable and the 'secrets of generation' only became scandalous when appropriated and misused by male readers and wider audiences.⁴² This thesis examines those wider applications of the language of infertility and how they were used to spread political, religious, and social messages outside the birthing chamber.

Beyond Demography

Addressing the economic value of children and monitoring of population in both societies usually falls within the realm of a very specific type of historical inquiry that measures issues such as fertility and mortality rates. Historical demography for this period is a field dominated by facts and figures and one in which the more qualitative data about infertility is often lost. Looking at the numbers, infertility was a problem that affected few couples in early modern English society and even fewer on the American frontier, but the fear of childlessness during times of reproductive challenge affected many more. Anne Laurence states in her work *Women in England 1500-1760* that a quarter of early modern marriages in England were childless, and that infertility accounted for about 12% of those marriages not producing children (the rest of the families being childless due to child death).⁴³ While these numbers are minorities, children were important for familial and even societal survival, and

⁴¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: the Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York, 1990).

⁴² Mary Fissell, 'Making a Masterpiece: The Aristotle Texts in Vernacular Medical Culture', in Charles Rosenberg (ed.), *Right Living: An Anglo-American Tradition of Self-Help and Hygiene* (Baltimore, 2003), pp. 59-89.

⁴³ Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760* (London, 1994), p. 76.

difficulties in having offspring could prove detrimental for the economic viability and sustainability of some families. Remedies to this problem could in turn change the make-up of the family unit, as couples sought to bring in labour in the form of extended family, adoption or hired servants.⁴⁴ Laurence, like most social historians of the early modern period, uses the data compiled and trends outlined by E.A. Wrigley and Roger Schofield in their seminal work *The Population History of England 1541-1871*. This study provides a useful backbone of hard data that provides important angles to consider when analysing the writing from this period. It is therefore very helpful to use this demographic survey as a framework but also recognise that this thesis takes a completely different methodological approach when considering cases of infertility. Wrigley and Schofield assert that nuptiality, or the age of marriage, was the decisive factor in population change in early modern society, a determinant largely dependent on social trends, and with different results in England and New England in the period 1620-1720. New England's remarkable growth during this period has similarly been attributed to nuptiality, as women in colonial New England tended to be younger at the age of marriage than their English counterparts. The result was substantially higher rates of natural fertility, with each New English woman typically giving birth to eight children during her childbearing years.⁴⁵

Daniel Scott Smith explores these trends and also argues for further investigation into the 'socio-economic context of the colonial demographic experience.' Smith identifies a dip in the New England population boom around 1700 and cites socially motivated reasons for

⁴⁴ Alan Macfarlane has argued that 'the failure to produce an heir did not lead to the widespread adoption of heirs' in early modern England (Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 61). The same seems to have been true for New England. As John Demos and others have shown, New England families often included hired servants and were supported by wider kin networks (Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, pp. 107-18). Formal adoption practices are therefore not a focus of this study. For more on this topic, see Erin Ellerbeck, 'Domestic Dialogue: the Languages and Politics of Adoption in the Age of Shakespeare' (unpublished University of Toronto doctoral thesis, 2010). For a comparative study of the practice of binding out children for labour, see Steve Hindle and Ruth Wallis Herndon, 'Recreating Proper Families in England and North America: Pauper Apprenticeship in Transatlantic Context', in Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray (eds.), *Children Bound to Labor: the Pauper Apprentice System in Early America* (Ithaca, 2009), pp. 19-36.

⁴⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land*, p. 25.

this drop, contending that family limitation may have occurred due to anxieties about deprivation and disorder within this reproductive cohort.⁴⁶ In this vein, I also argue for a more nuanced approach to this demographic data when considering attitudes toward infertility. Rather than cast those struggling with infertility as the unfortunate, extreme minority, I contend that it is even more important to consider their stories within this particular environment. The cultural climate of a period of such incredible growth provides meaningful context to situations involving fertility problems. The language that the colonists used to describe their new land, Native American neighbours, and their own reproductive experiences illustrates how the spectre of infertility appeared in popular culture during times of social unrest. Similar language can be analysed with respect to the social and political upheaval in England during this period as writers expressed anxiety over war, disease, and depopulation. Trends in marriage patterns and by extension, fertility patterns, bring these questions of the relationship between men and women in the early modern period full circle. Smith's research reminds us that fertility largely rests on human behaviour and is heavily affected by social conditions. This study builds on this theme of complexity and broadens it to consider cases of reproductive failure as well as the more traditionally-studied stories of success.

This thesis argues that demographic history is just one approach to studying infertility, and that early modern attitudes toward infertility can be better understood by extending one's focus beyond childlessness. Identifying and analysing periods of infertility within men's and women's reproductive lifecycles provides a more accurate representation of attitudes toward infertility in early modern society and captures the range of emotions,

⁴⁶ Daniel Scott Smith, 'The Demographic History of Colonial New England' *Economic History*, 32 (1972), pp. 165-83: p. 165. Smith cites the limit of geographic expansion, and King Philip's War (1675) as two factors that may have influenced fertility rates within this reproductive cohort and suggests that this 'demonstrates the potential of an early modern population to respond to a perceived disequilibrium between numbers and resources' (p. 183). Scott also explores the relative age of the husband in relation to the fertility of the wife, yet another factor that depends on relationships and highlights the role of both sexes in fertility rates.

interpretations, and anxieties that accompanied different types of reproductive failure. Identifying cases within this spectrum of infertility also provides the opportunity to analyse those cases not represented in demographic charts but captured in letters exchanging ideas about a monstrous birth in New England or in a diary of a married woman waiting to fall pregnant. Going beyond demography then resituates the study of infertility back into social history and makes use of the diverse source material in which infertility is discussed in the early modern period.

To consider infertility's place in the rhetoric of colonial New England is to analyse it in light of fertility's centrality in the literal birth of a nation as well as revealing the competitive streak of its anxious mother country. Population trends in the late seventeenth-century support some of the anxieties expressed surrounding a decrease the number of people living in England. Wrigley and Schofield argue that 'the combination of low fertility, heavy emigration, and relatively high mortality in the second half of the seventeenth century reduced numbers quite sharply, and the peak population total of 5.28 million reached in 1656 was not again surpassed until 1721.'⁴⁷ These figures can be analysed in a qualitative way, then, by comparing attempts at population monitoring and specific use of reproductive language in published literature in late seventeenth-century England and colonial New England.

The work of political arithmeticians and their ideas about 'populousness' provide additional opportunities to examine attitudes toward infertility within the respective societies. Counting people, and its use in measuring a nation's health in relation to other countries and colonies, became a significant preoccupation in the early modern period and interest only

⁴⁷ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History of England*, p. 402.

heightened with colonial expansion.⁴⁸ Herald and political economist Gregory King's work *The Natural and Political Observations upon the State and the Condition of England* (1696) illustrates a late seventeenth-century attempt at this type of study. Building his study on demographic data from the Bills of Mortality, King predates Malthus' famous work in an attempt to assess the population of England in respect of its natural resources. King's analysis contains careful calculations of resource use and population growth. He traces England's population back to Roman times (in fact, even back to 'the Flood') which is significant due to his insistence on the long history of England and its strong attachment to Biblical times. Making overt connections between Biblical times and seventeenth-century English society supports the real-world application of religious tradition and the adoption of religious history. This strong connection between these Biblical parables and 'real life' experience in early modern England provides another example of the way that early modern people, especially Puritans, made sense of their own lives through the use of Biblical stories, such as the lessons from the barren women in the Old Testament, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

King's study also importantly addresses why procreation is lower in cities, and reiterates popular ideas about cities as corrupted, polluted spaces that inhibit procreation. Citing soft living, increased moral corruption in the form of adultery and fornication, more 'intense' social interaction and business dealings, and even environmental pollution, King couches his disapproval in reproductive language as he frets over the state of England's dwindling and increasingly urban population.⁴⁹ The changing landscape of England, then, was directly linked to its problem with population. King also comments on the social institution of marriage and its relation to his concerns over fertility in warning his readers that 'whence it

⁴⁸ See Mildred Campbell, "'Of People Either Too Few or Too Many": The Conflict of Opinion on Populousness and its Relation to Emigration', in W.A. Aiken and B.D. Henning (eds.), *Conflict in Stuart England* (1960), pp. 169-201.

⁴⁹ Gregory King *The Natural and Political Observations upon the State and the Condition of England*, reprinted in Joan Thirsk and John Phillips Cooper (eds.), *Seventeenth-century Economic Documents* (Oxford, 1972), pp.770-790.

follows that a just equality or too great an inequality of age in marriages are prejudicial to the increase of mankind, and that the early or late marriages in men and women do tend little to the propagation of the human race.’⁵⁰ King thus addresses nuptiality and, while a bit misguided in his calculations, rightly identifies its pre-eminence in establishing population growth.

The vast opportunities and fecundity of women in New England featured as promotional material for the colonies and many felt a direct affront to struggling Mother England. Advertising the fertility of New England was an important marketing strategy amongst early settlers such as Francis Higginson who spread the message that the new land held a ‘store of blessings for the comfortable sustenance of Mans life in New-England.’⁵¹ Benjamin Franklin picks up these themes in his 1751 essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.*, in which he expounds upon the natural strengths of the colonies’ economic landscape and symbiotic relationship with the reproductive success of their young mothers. Franklin’s work echoes the earlier writings of colonists and companies seeking to draw the first waves of individuals to New England.⁵² With questionable arithmetic, Franklin estimates that high rates of fertility would enable the colonies’ population to double ‘by natural generation only’, every twenty-five years, and, ‘this increase continuing, would probably in a century more, make the number of British subjects on that side of the water more numerous than they are now on this.’⁵³ Franklin’s provocative claim has since been analysed by demographic historians and proved incorrect in its projection, but his essay

⁵⁰ King, *Natural and Political Observations*, p. 778.

⁵¹ Francis Higginson, *New-Englands Plantation* (London, 1630), p. 9.

⁵² See Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, 2001) for analysis of early colonial promotional material and descriptions of the relationship between environment and colonial bodies. For information on early demographic interests in America, see James Cassedy, *Demography in Early America: Beginnings of the Statistical Mind 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1969).

⁵³ Benjamin Franklin, *The Interest of Great Britain Considered, with Regard to Her Colonies, and the Acquisitions of Canada and Guadaloupe. To which are added, Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.* (London, 1761), p. 23.

highlights the pride in fertility associated with the New England colonies and its use as political propaganda.⁵⁴ Indeed, many historians choose to celebrate colonial New England's remarkable demographic growth and find ample evidence in its well-kept records. New England's amazing fertility is thus projected, observed, and promoted throughout the colonial period and even dominates modern historiography. It is therefore important to examine its converse, infertility, within those social constructs and to approach the subject from a different angle. What did it mean *not* to be able to contribute to New England's celebrated population growth, and what happened when the promise of fertility was challenged? While those infertile couples in colonial New England were certainly in the minority, how did infertility manifest itself in medical, religious, and popular literature? These are the questions lost within the pages of demographically-based historical work on New England's robust population growth in the colonial period.

The societies of both early modern England and colonial New England were preoccupied with reproduction, taking great pains to calculate growth rates and to keep tabs on their competition. Both King and Franklin touch on modern demographic ideas of nuptiality, for example, but their interpretations and projections are clearly products of their own societies. Such tracts can therefore be seen as examples of social messages about issues directly (even if inversely) related to infertility.

Social messages about infertility also appear in the encounters, and particularly in the crises, between English settlers and Native Americans. Joyce Chaplin has argued that the origins of racial difference and resultant hierarchy originates from these early encounters, and that the 'English elaborated ways to denigrate Indians' mental and technical capabilities' in

⁵⁴ See Robert Wells, 'The Population of England's Colonies in America: Old English or New Americans?', *Population Studies*, 46 (1992), pp. 85-102. Also see Daniel Scott Smith, 'The Demographic History of Colonial New England' for a full demographic survey.

order to assert their pre-eminence in America.⁵⁵ They also attacked their fertility. Differences between bodies, particularly reproductive bodies, were used as evidence in the campaign to promote English dominance over the new land, and Chaplin is correct in identifying competitive reproduction as a cornerstone of these encounters. Attaching English ideas of infertility to native bodies at once reinforced the hierarchy and enabled the settlers to understand native (mis)behaviour in a familiar framework.⁵⁶ This thesis builds on Chaplin's ideas of the centrality of the body in the colonial exchange and focuses on the origins of the language and stereotypes of infertility as they were used strategically in these encounters and conflicts. Jim Egan similarly argues that New England colonists used their bodily experiences on the frontier to legitimate their authority and to re-evaluate and reinforce their connections to their mother country.⁵⁷ In this vein, I stress the connections and continuities between Old England and New England and note the replication of English language and ideas on the colonial landscape by showing how the language of infertility was used by both. This study then also contributes to the large body of scholarship on perceptions of the New World in Europe and the exchange of information between the two.⁵⁸ Treatises, letters, and pamphlets emerging from New England introduced ideas about the new land, Indian bodies, and the adaptability of English bodies. This cultural exchange influenced the simultaneous exchange of people and goods during the colonial period. This thesis analyses when the language of infertility appeared in this exchange and how it was tied to popular medical, social, and religious ideas in both societies.

⁵⁵ Chaplin, *Subject Matter* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 9.

⁵⁶ Anne Marie Plane has discussed this idea in reference to marriage. See Anne Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca, 2000).

⁵⁷ Jim Egan, *Authorizing Experience: Refigurations of the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England Writing* (Princeton, 1999).

⁵⁸ See Karen Ordahl Kupperman (ed.), *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Williamsburg, 1995); John Elliott 'Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World' in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 3-14; John Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge, 1970); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991). Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: the History of a Polemic*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh, 1973).

Questions surrounding the personal experience of infertility also comprise an important part of this thesis. Case studies and stories of individuals experiencing a range of reproductive challenges illustrate how early modern minds interpreted medical and religious ideas about infertility with respect to their own bodies and social roles. Through case studies and individual examples of reproductive challenge, this thesis illustrates how all the bodily, familial, and community-based dramas of infertility played out on a larger stage and how anxieties about the personal and public responsibility for children appear in the broader reproductive rhetoric of early modern England and colonial New England.

Sometimes, those far-reaching responsibilities seemed to rest within just one womb. In England, no female body was held more responsible for successful reproduction than that of the queen. Charged with producing healthy male heirs to the throne, a female ruler's suspected infertility could escalate to national crisis and lead to civil unrest. The Stuart succession controversies of the late seventeenth century are a clear example of the importance of reproductive health in early modern English society. The speculation and observation recorded in numerous writings, both public and personal, about the legitimacy of Mary of Modena's pregnancy, sparking the so-called, 'Warming Pan Scandal', have attracted the attention of many historians who seek to tie the controversy to themes in gender and social history. Lisa Forman Cody uses the scandal as early evidence in support of her argument that 'a paradigm shift occurred in the eighteenth century that places the social significance of sex and birth centre stage in British thought'.⁵⁹ Cody's book is a comprehensive work that tackles the social reception of reproductive abnormalities, eighteenth-century debates over population, and development in attitudes toward fixed racial distinctions. It is helpful in establishing the social importance of reproduction and

⁵⁹ Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Science, Sex, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons*, (Oxford, 2005), p. 23. Also see Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Interrogating the Concept of Reproduction in the Eighteenth Century', in Fay Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (eds.), *Conceiving the New World Order: the Global Politics of Reproduction* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 369-86.

investigating the many debates it generates. Her discussion of theories of national health and imperial concern opens the door for an in-depth comparison with colonial New England. My chapter connecting the fertility struggles of two Stuart queens, Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena, takes a similarly social approach and provides a rich opportunity for a case study in early modern attitudes toward infertility. It also connects the story of two individual queens struggling with fertility problems, relating the cases to each other and to the wider questions that such public cases of infertility raised. The monitoring of the female monarch's reproductive body is another theme that emerges from this particularly rich case study and a fitting example of the personal, bodily drama of infertility played out in a public arena.

This idea of frustrated maternity is also a useful paradigm to use in thinking about the relationship between England and colonial New England during this period. The heart of this study focuses on the different societies' contextualization of infertility, and the unusual maternal relationship that characterised the connection between these two societies is therefore also contextualised, as each society voiced its own fears, hopes and ambitions concerning their populations. As Robert Wells contends, the question of 'American uniqueness' is a familiar theme in American history, and in many ways underscores the historiography of early American demographic trends.⁶⁰ Addressing the question of infertility depends on the valuable demographic data compiled but also provides a new perspective regarding the growth of the colonies. In this way, it interprets the demographic figures differently, and gives a voice to those left out of the numerous tables trumpeting the significant population growth in the American colonial period. It also looks back across the Atlantic and acknowledges the frustration of England, a maternal figure whose own fertility paled in comparison to its prolific offspring.

⁶⁰ Wells, 'The Population of England's Colonies in America', p. 85.

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 1 examines infertility through the lens of early modern medical and legal authorities on the subject. Medical and pseudo-medical works are vital in understanding and developing concepts of both physiology and folklore associated with infertility. Midwifery manuals, compilations of domestic medicine, and sex manuals all contained information on infertility. Midwifery manuals are particularly helpful in their discussion of infertility, and the titles included in this study were chosen for evidence of their wide-spread use and, when possible, their presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, the works of Nicholas Culpeper and the collection of works on the ‘secrets of generation’ attributed to Aristotle were circulated in New England during this early colonial period. Most printed medical information was directly brought over from England, and the colonial presses only published their first medical text, also a version of Culpeper’s *English Physician*, in 1708.⁶¹ Close reading of the sections on barrenness within these medical works illustrates that infertility was a problem shared between couples. While often buried in the sections devoted to women’s ‘barrenness’, male infertility, or the infertility of a sexual union were also cited as reasons behind ‘what hinders conception.’ This chapter outlines the terminology used in medical literature to explain the bodily conditions associated with infertility. It also examines the early modern worldview and the close connection of medical and social ideas about female and male infertility. The language and views about infertility from medical and legal authorities that are articulated in this first chapter are analysed in further detail in subsequent chapters of the thesis.

From witchcraft trials in colonial New England to marital disputes in early modern England, infertility was often an issue that was dealt with by the legal system of each region. Court cases provide the opportunity for a thorough discussion of the legal ramifications of

⁶¹ Kevin Hayes, *A Colonial Woman’s Bookshelf* (Knoxville, 1996), pp. 94-9.

impotency and also how the different court systems in the regions dealt with impotent men. The themes of deception, both within a singular body, and within a relationship, characterize much of the medical and legal literature on infertility. A woman's body could deceive her with 'distempers of the womb' masquerading as the signs of pregnancy, and likewise a man could deceive his wife and community by being a 'pretending husband', unable to perform his masculine duty to his wife and also to his community.

Chapter Two focuses on the Biblical archetypes of the 'barren woman' in early modern society. The significance of these mostly Old Testament parables is reinforced by their appearance in early modern medical works, sermons on marriages, religious advice to pregnant women, and in the personal writing of men and women dealing with infertility. God was often cited as being at the root of an individual's struggle with infertility. This chapter illustrates how the stories of Sarah, Hannah, and Leah and Rachel were used to teach early modern men and women different lessons about infertility. While ministers on both sides of the Atlantic used the story of Sarah and Abraham to convey ideas about marital relationships and fidelity, the story of Hannah's fervent prayer and unwavering faith seemed to be most powerful in expressing the anguish of the personal struggle of infertility. Leah and Rachel's story was used in promotional literature of the New World, as the 'Fruitful Sisters of Israel', and Rachel's bitterness about her barren state was contrasted with the story of Hannah, whose patience and virtue were extolled by Puritan ministers. By using these well-known archetypes, early modern women were presented with the right and the wrong way to bear the burden of infertility. The strategic retelling of these Biblical stories of barrenness is a particularly important set of sources when considering the cultural exchange and pre-eminence of organizing principles of Puritan doctrine in the settlement of New England. The physical and medical landscape of New England was different to England and gaps in the infrastructure were filled by clergy. Most of the published literature addressing infertility

circulated within, and coming out of, New England was the work of religious leaders such as Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman. Their works address infertility as a spiritual problem, and their advice to congregants uses the same language and stories of the Old Testament that were employed to describe the colonial venture in general.

Chapter Three looks at how the use of popular literature reinforced cultural conceptions and characterizations of infertile or childless men and women. Writers in both societies expressed their population concerns through the language of infertility, and this chapter analyses the language of infertility across a wide range of literature, including pornographic novels, cuckold poetry, colonial promotional literature, and New England captivity narratives, to establish when and how stereotypes of infertility were used and manipulated. In these works, infertile men's and women's bodies and behaviours exhibit disorder. In England, the language of infertility provided the script when social boundaries were crossed and gendered hierarchies were challenged. In pornographic novels, morally-suspect women privileged sex over reproduction, and prostitutes were shown to be physically incapable of producing healthy babies. Cuckold literature exposed the dangers of inverted gender relationships. That same language was adopted and adapted by colonists in New England to deal with their new reproductive rivals, the Native Americans, both in terms of land and offspring, and to effectively describe and discredit Native America. Competition for land and resources with native populations provided a new sense of urgency about reproduction, and the literature from New England, from early promotional treatises to captivity narratives, attached familiar, negative stereotypes of infertility to new bodies. This chapter argues that these popular stereotypes of infertility displayed the tension within and between these two societies and provided corporeal representations of fears about deception and disorder.

Chapter 4 is composed of two case studies chosen for their significance in the historical record and also for their representation of the social and political issues that infertility raised in the distinct cultural climates of colonial New England and late seventeenth-century England. Infertility cases that were famous in early modern society are important not only in the rich source material that they leave for historians, but also for the questions they raise regarding contemporaneous debate and diversity of opinion. Cases from both sides of the Atlantic are analysed in this chapter. The New England case study concerns the controversy over the monstrous births that occurred during the turmoil of the Antinomian controversy in the late 1630s. Religious dissident Anne Hutchinson and her friend and follower, Mary Dyer, suffered reproductive failures that were then used strategically by their opponents in Massachusetts and subsequently in England. The events surrounding these particular unsuccessful reproductive scenarios reveal how infertility was sometimes used as a lesson, and as a warning, in times of social, political, or religious unrest in the first years of the New England colonies. Similarly, the role that infertility played in the succession controversies of the late Stuart monarchs illustrates the ramifications of reproductive failure in early modern England. I argue that historical analysis of the dramatic ‘Warming Pan Scandal’ of 1688 must also consider the role that Catherine of Braganza’s prolonged struggle with infertility in the previous reign played in fuelling anxieties about Mary of Modena procuring a male heir. Catherine’s miscarriages were publicly scrutinized and contrasted with Charles II’s many illegitimate offspring, and the lack of a legitimate male heir ultimately put Catholic James II on the throne.

Thinking about the study of infertility through the language of ‘duties’, as expressed so eloquently by John Oliver, thus opens this study up to a host of possibilities and presents the opportunity to study infertility in the early modern period in an intertextual way. Reading the medical literature as culturally-informed documentation is therefore highly appropriate

due to the diversity of sources that address this issue. Determining where and when individuals were sharing information or opinions about infertility is equally important. In many ways, the questions far outweighed the answers when infertility was studied or experienced in the early modern period, but the associated anxiety and frustration is communicated clearly in the range of circumstances, environments and literature in which these questions were raised.

Rather than telling a story of divergent cultures, this thesis examines the strong connections between early modern England and colonial New England and illustrates how English ideas about infertility took shape in the colonial context. This study shows that, while the interpretation of infertility could be affected by particular pressures relevant to each society, at its heart, the underlying threat of infertility was a culturally and politically relevant topic in early modern England and colonial New England. Socially-constructed ideas could influence the personal experience of infertility, and vice versa. The topic of infertility thus provides the opportunity to untangle a web of medical theories, ideas about gender relations, the family, the importance of children, religious ideas about generation, and the complicated relationship between England and its own 'child', the New England colonies.

CHAPTER 1

MEDICAL AND LEGAL AUTHORITIES

In the early modern world, infertility was an experience that signified disorder within and between two natural bodies, a woman's and a man's, which were mutually dependent for successful procreation and wholly able to influence the reproductive abilities of each other. Disordered bodies were often the result of disordered relationships between the sexes, and various medical and pseudo-medical texts that addressed themselves to early modern couples struggling with infertility acknowledged this fact. This chapter examines infertility in both men and women through the lens of early modern medical and legal authorities on the subject. These two early modern authorities reinforced each other in terms of providing terminology and establishing parameters of infertility. Medical works provided (frequently convoluted) definitions and explanations and courts determined the consequences of infertility when it caused, or reflected, disorder within households or within communities. Moreover, medical practitioners, such as midwives, were given legal and social authority to exercise their knowledge about the reproductive body. Examining infertility's presence in medical and legal sources illustrates how the disorder and deception that infertility embodied was conceptualised and combated on both bodily and societal levels.

Advice about infertility from the authors of midwifery texts and sex manuals focusing on 'the secrets of generation' was put into practice by a variety of healers including midwives, surgeons, ministers, and, increasingly from the late seventeenth century onwards, medically-trained male midwives.⁶² By examining infertility's presence in printed medical

⁶² Much has been written about the advent of the male midwife in the late seventeenth century: see Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England 1660-1770* (London, 1995); Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-professional Rivalries and Women's Rights* (London, 1977); Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth Century London* (Cambridge, 2005); Hilary Marland (ed.), *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe* (London, 1993); Samuel Thomas, 'Early Modern

and pseudo-medical literature, and how that advice was shared and interpreted by both sufferers and healers, the modern reader gains access to the early modern lexicon of infertility, a health problem the roots of which were traced to a physical malady or social or spiritual disorder – and which was usually an amalgamation of all of the above. Signs of disorder in an infertile couple appeared in both women and men’s bodies, and perhaps more importantly, disorder in one body could be affected or even remedied by appropriate sexual interaction with the opposite gender. While most early modern medical texts discuss the faults of women’s bodies at length, the inclusion of diagnostic tests, female infertility as a result of ill-matched partners, and discussion of male infertility and sexual dysfunction illustrate that the burden of infertility in the early modern period was not necessarily placed on women’s bodies alone.

Medical advice about infertility illustrates early modern perceptions about women’s bodies, men’s bodies, and ideas about how the interaction between them could have varying results. Healthy, well-ordered relationships were reflected in the functional fertility of both sexes, but its contrast, infertility, signified a problem with one or both of the bodies involved in the sexual act. Therefore while the focus of these texts is seemingly on physiological ailments, in fact much of their advice centres on dysfunctional relationships between the sexes and the direct impact of these on the reproductive organs. Ulinka Rublack explores these issues in her discussion of early modern concepts of disease and embodied experience, connecting communal health and bodily health and arguing that ‘illnesses thus opened up a

Midwifery: Splitting the Profession, Connecting the History’, *Journal of Social History*, 43 (2009), 115-38. For information on midwives in early America, see Rebecca Tannenbaum, *The Healer’s Calling*, pp. 93-113; Richard and Dorothy Wertz, *Lying In: A History of Childbirth in America*, (New York, 1977), pp. 1-28; Ann Giardina Hess, ‘Community Case Studies of Midwives from England and New England, c. 1650-1720’, (unpublished Cambridge University PhD thesis, 1994).

narrative space that individuals could use to explain their disorders in terms of disordered relationships rather than just disordered physiology.’⁶³

Infertility was also inextricably linked with ideas about deception. Both internal and external representations of dishonesty are found throughout the texts and reflect the power of gender stereotypes and the repetition of larger social and cultural norms in the medical literature of the early modern period. A woman could be deceived by her own body, believing herself to be pregnant while in fact suffering from a ‘windy womb’ or a ‘false conception’, and a man could deceive society by being a ‘pretending husband’ unable behind closed doors to satisfy his wife sexually. In cases of such deception, authorities were needed to determine the truth, and midwives assumed this role in print and in the birthing chambers and the courtrooms of early modern England and colonial New England.

Medical information about infertility in early modern England and colonial New England was tied to the themes of order and disorder that so dominated early modern European popular culture.⁶⁴ The infertile body was a disordered one, suffering from a host of physical infirmities caused by irregular bodily temperature, humoral imbalance, or deformity of the genitals in either sex. Advanced age, fatness, thinness, venereal disease, excessive sex, or injury to the reproductive organs could all cause the body to lose its natural state of fecundity. An infertile male or female body was disorder in the natural world writ small. Such bodies were permeable, influenced by environment, diet, and the stars, their defects caused by ‘internal or external’ factors.⁶⁵ Infertility could be lifelong or it could be temporary, or ‘accidental’, in the Aristotelian use of the term.⁶⁶ Ideas about reproduction, or

⁶³ Ulinka Rublack, trans. Pamela Selwyn, ‘Fluxes: The Early Modern Body and Emotions’, *History Workshop Journal*, 7 (2002), 1-16: p. 11.

⁶⁴ See Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York, 1988); Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁶⁵ John Sadler, *The Sick Womans Private Looking Glasse* (London, 1636), p. 14.

⁶⁶ OED, s.v. ‘accident, n.’: In Aristotelian thought: a property or quality not essential to a substance or object; something that does not constitute an essential component, an attribute’, accessed 14 July 2014.

lack thereof, fit firmly within the early modern worldview that hinged on the close relationship between God and the natural world. God, the physician to the soul, was ultimately in control of a person's reproductive capabilities, from their appropriate partnering in marriage to the health of their bodies through pregnancy. The medical advice offered in texts and distributed by healers took advantage of the medicines that God provided.⁶⁷ Nowhere was this worldview more apparent than in the small Puritan communities of colonial New England. While very few medical 'home-grown' texts were published in the first hundred years, the preacher-physicians of the colonies spread their own message regarding the pregnant woman's body and its pivotal role in both the family and society at large. The medical information exported to the colonies from England was digested in a different landscape which was discovering its own reproductive potential, and one in which the gaps in the medical marketplace were regularly filled with religious physicians serving both the body and soul.⁶⁸ These concepts of disorder are captured in several types of texts and through which early modern men and women learned about their reproductive bodies. By looking at authorities' words in both early modern England and colonial New England, the modern reader can begin to unravel how early modern minds made sense of fertility problems and the relationship between their reproductive bodies and the larger natural and spiritual world.

A proliferation of texts about women's bodies appeared in the mid-seventeenth century in the midst of a flurry of vernacular medical publishing aimed at lay audiences. Numerous historians have written about this publishing phenomenon and have argued convincingly about the timing and significance of the emergence of this newly available information on women's bodies, tying it to larger political and social events of the mid-

⁶⁷ Andrew Wear, 'Puritan Perceptions of Illness in Seventeenth Century England', in Roy Porter (ed.), *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 55-100: pp. 81-2.

⁶⁸ Watson, *Angelical Conjunctions*, pp. 1-3.

seventeenth century or to an evolving sense of the 'self.'⁶⁹ Sarah Toulalan examines these popular works on generation as a form of early modern pornography and as a way for men and women to learn about sex under the more respected guise of reproduction.⁷⁰ Audrey Eccles charts the trends in publication of these women's health texts from the mid-sixteenth century and traces the gradual establishment and refinement of obstetrics and gynaecology in the eighteenth century.⁷¹ The work of these historians, and the breadth of sources that they have identified, illustrate the complexity of defining 'medical' texts from this period, and the impossibility of isolating them as a distinct genre. As Sarah Toulalan has noted with respect to early modern pornography, the difficulty in definition depends on the question of the intentions of both the authors and the readers of the literature.⁷² The study of infertility also aligns with other medical historians' work on early modern concepts of health and disease by providing another opportunity to write about the body's troubled interaction with the natural world and the other bodies that inhabited it.⁷³

The intention of the authors in these early midwifery works on women's bodies was often explicitly, if sometimes disingenuously, addressed in the opening pages of the works and betrays the tensions surrounding men and women's knowledge about female bodies. Nicholas Culpeper implored his audience, the midwives of England, to correct any incorrect information in his *Directory for Midwives* (1656) reminding them 'for I am but a Man, and therefore Subject to failings'.⁷⁴ In the introduction to his *Masterpiece*, 'Aristotle' justifies his authority to educate women about distempers of the womb by arguing that 'my being from A

⁶⁹ See Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*; Eve Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Seattle, 2007); Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2003).

⁷⁰ See Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 62-91.

⁷¹ Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (Kent, OH, 1982), pp. 11-16.

⁷² Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 4-36.

⁷³ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge, 2000).

⁷⁴ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives* (London, 1651), Dedication.

Woman, I thought none had more Right to the Grapes, than she which Planted the Vine.’⁷⁵

Such statements illustrate that men educating women about their own bodily problems was a source of the tension behind opening ‘the closet’ and divulging ‘secrets of generation’ and associated reproductive complications.

The lengthy justifications, veiled humour, and mischievous wordplay used by the male authors highlight potential disorder in relationships between men and women in the self-conscious attempt to explain the purpose and appropriateness of their authorship on matters about women’s bodies. The idea of distrust and dishonesty surrounding information around reproductive bodies thus emerges as a dominant theme, and the tensions between the sexes, apparent in the defensive prefaces, are most clearly exhibited in the sections on infertility. These works were read for reasons other than the acquisition of medical knowledge and were considered ‘bad books’ in the wrong hands.⁷⁶

Read together, these printed sources illustrate the sliding scale of information available in the early modern period that was devoted specifically to the reproductive body. They are representative of the information available to women and men by virtue of their wide publication and availability in England and, when possible, by their recorded presence in New England.⁷⁷ As Eccles and others have shown, there was a plethora of texts covering obstetrical and gynaecological issues published over the early modern period, but Culpeper’s

⁷⁵ Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Masterpiece Completed* (London, 1698), Introduction.

⁷⁶ See Ava Chamberlain, ‘Bad Books and Bad Boys: the Transformation of Gender in Eighteenth-Century Northampton, Massachusetts’, *The New England Quarterly*, 75 (2002), pp. 179-203. Mary Fissell has argued that *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* was considered appropriate literature for female readers and that most of the controversies and negative connotations about the work stem from their misappropriation by men. See Fissell ‘Creating a Masterpiece’, p. 74.

⁷⁷ Kevin Hayes’s study identifies *Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives*, the Aristotelian works, and, later in the period, Chamberlain’s English translation of François Mauriceau’s *The Diseases of Woman with Child* (1697) as being circulated in colonial New England: Hayes, *A Colonial Woman’s Bookshelf*, pp. 92-7. On the circulation of *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* in early New England, see Otho T. Beall Jr., ‘Aristotle’s Masterpiece in America: A Landmark in the Folklore of Medicine,’ *William and Mary Quarterly*, 20 (1963), pp 207-22; Vern L. Bullough, ‘American Sex Manual, Or, Aristotle Who?’ *Early American Literature* 7 (1973), pp. 236-46. Mary Fissell, ‘Hairy Women and Naked Truths: Gender and the Politics of Knowledge in "Aristotle's Masterpiece"', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 60 (2003), pp. 43-74.

Directory for Midwives (1651) and Sharp's *The Midwife's Book* (1671) were among the most popular of these printed works and suggest the endurance of specific information that was printed and reprinted from a mix of classical sources and translations of Continental works and transported across the Atlantic with the colonists of New England.

The Humoral Body: A Balance of Fluids

The early modern reproductive body was one that was defined and prescribed treatment based on the Galenic humoral system. While each body had its own blend of the four humours – blood, black bile, yellow bile, phlegm-- that made up its unique constitution, it was the balance of these humours that determined sickness or health in a body. These humours, tied to the four elements – air, fire, water, and earth -- were characterized through the qualities of heat, cold, dryness and wetness, and bodies were prescribed physic, recommended specific diets, or bled in order to combat an imbalance of these qualities. For women seeking to conceive or maintain a healthy pregnancy, the balance of these humours, and the moderation of temperature and consistency of their bodies, were particularly important. Broadly speaking, men were hot and dry, and women were cold and wet – but moderately so. Fertility problems arose when women's bodies suffered from an overabundance of one type of humour or if other humours were depleted. Women's bodies were believed to be more likely to be disordered, and their overly cold, leaky bodies, evacuating menstrual blood each month, left more room for potential imbalance. The interpretation of the temperature, viscosity, amount, and movement of these bodily fluids, including the manifestations of the all-important seed exchange upon which generation depended, took centre-stage in these texts devoted to women's health and midwifery.

The English translation of Nicholas Fontanus's work, *The Womans Doctour* (1652) includes a test for men and women to establish infertility. Fontanus focuses on the seeds of

each sex, stating that ‘the seed of both the man and woman, if it be prolificall and fruitfull, will be of a white, and shineing colour, not thin and waterish, but of a thick, and compacted substance... and being put into water, it will sinke to the bottome; but that which is unfit for generation will swim upon the top of the water’.⁷⁸ As this test indicates, the balance and exchange of seed in both sexes was the most crucial determinant of successful reproduction, and seed was the immediate culprit if problems with fertility surfaced. Sadler declared, ‘barrenness is a deprivation of life and power which ought to bee in the seed, to procreate and propagate; for which end both man and woman were made.’⁷⁹ Most cases of barrenness could be explained by the deficient, diseased nature of seed in either men or women. In women, seed was kept healthy through regular purgation, i.e., menstruation. Menstrual problems could be both the cause and symptoms of reproductive disorder in a woman’s body and suppression or overflowing of the menses could result in infertility. It was believed that menstrual blood was extra blood not needed to help the woman’s body function properly and that it would ferment and become noxious, necessitating monthly evacuation. The blood could be useful for a woman’s body during certain times in her reproductive lifecycle. Aristotle claimed that it nourished a foetus while pregnant, turned into breast milk after parturition, and both Aristotle and Galen thought it to be essential in the process of conception.⁸⁰ Sara Read has examined how different kinds of vaginal bleeding marked transitional stages through an early modern woman’s reproductive lifecycle. Her work uses a variety of personal writing and literary sources to reinforce the popular attitudes toward menstruation as expressed in the medical texts.⁸¹ As a cornerstone of functional fertility, then, any disorder in the menstrual cycle was closely linked to cases of barrenness, and the seemingly contrary ailments of the suppression and overflowing of the menses were both

⁷⁸ Nicholas Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour* (London, 1652), p. 131.

⁷⁹ Sadler, *The Sick Womans Private Looking-Glasse*, p. 107.

⁸⁰ See Patricia Crawford, ‘Attitudes toward Menstruation in Seventeenth-century England’ in her work, *Blood, Bodies, and Families*, pp. 19-53.

⁸¹ See Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2013).

linked to infertility. Suppression of the menses was also linked to the age of the woman, and Culpeper and others acknowledged that ‘you must have regard to the age of the party.’⁸² Culpeper notes menarche as occurring around age fourteen in girls while menopause, or the complete cessation of the menses, occurred at around fifty. Sarah Toulalan has argued that early modern attitudes toward sex in old age reflect these concerns about the loss of fertility.⁸³ Throughout a woman’s reproductive years, menstruation was supposed to be orderly, the blood of the correct appearance, quantity, and appearing at regular intervals (if the woman was not already pregnant).

Barrenness in Women

These texts provided the reader with a host of possibilities for the causes behind infertility and cures for those who ‘hath not the requisitions for Fruitfulness’.⁸⁴ With sections devoted to women’s ‘barrenness’ appearing alongside other forms of reproductive problems, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and false conceptions, these texts addressed the spectrum of reproductive problems experienced by early modern men and women.

Barrenness was specifically addressed in texts about women’s health problems and included in works on midwifery dating back to antiquity. Medieval and early modern versions of the older works, such as the *Trotula*, were often a reprinting or reformation of classical information on the subject and incorporated classical writers’ ideas on generation and the health of the human body.⁸⁵ The theories of authorities such as Aristotle, Galen, and Hippocrates were repeated and used interchangeably throughout the early modern period, and their slightly different takes on human reproduction are used intermittently throughout the

⁸² Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 74.

⁸³ Sarah Toulalan, “‘Elderly years cause a Total dispaire of Conception’: Old Age and Infertility in Early Modern England”, seminar paper, Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine seminar, University of Oxford, 12 May 2014. I thank Dr. Toulalan for sharing her draft paper which has been submitted for inclusion in a journal on special issue on infertility in medieval and early modern England.

⁸⁴ Mauriceau, *Of the Diseases of Women with Child* (London, 1697), p. 8.

⁸⁵ For pre-modern information on women’s medicine see Monica Green, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 14-51.

works. In these early modern texts, barrenness is at once defined and deconstructed, isolated and then related back to other 'disorders of the womb' that plagued early modern women and troubled the medical minds seeking to understand the complicated, and potentially dangerous, female reproductive system. Physician John Sadler devotes one of the fifteen chapters of his work *The Sick Womans Private Looking-Glasse* to barrenness. Like other authors, he attributes barrenness to women's physiological problems:

Barrenness is caused by overmuch heat and cold; that drying up the seed, and making it corrupt, this, extinguishing the life of the seed making it watrish and unfit for generation. It may be caused also by the not flowing or overflowing of the courses, by swelling ulcers and inflammations of the wombe, by an excrescence of flesh growing about the mouth of the matrice: by the mouth of the wombe being turned unto the backe, or side: by the grossnesse and fatnesse of the body, whereby the mouth of the matrice is closed up by being prest with the Omentum or cause: and the matter of the seed is converted into fatnesse. Or if shee bee of a leane and exhaust body, to the world shee proves barren, because shee doth conceive yet the fruit of the wombe will wither before it comes to perfection for want of nourishment.⁸⁶

Sadler's passage succinctly lists the many causes behind an unproductive womb while at the same time illustrating the strong connections between each of the causes recorded. Sadler's text also makes the important point that women experiencing barrenness were thought to be 'sick.' Fecundity was an indication of good health, and barren women were thought to exhibit illness in other ways as well. Nicholas Fontanus echoes this belief in *The Woman's Doctour* in noting that 'barren women are more tormented with sicknesse, then those that are fruitfull.'⁸⁷ Healthy was fertile, and infertility could result from, and was an indication of, a host of other physiological problems. Immoderate temperature, body weight and age, physical deformity, and injury to the generative parts from previous difficult childbirths could all be tied to uterine disorders, such as stopped menses, which led to barrenness. As such, often one could be blamed for the appearance of the other. New England mother Sarah Rood articulated such concerns when she wrote to the Connecticut physician John Winthrop, Jr., in 1653, to request his help for a uterine prolapse. Sarah directly linked her infirmity with

⁸⁶ Sadler, *The Sick Womans Private Looking-Glasse*, p. 110.

⁸⁷ Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour*, pp.6-7.

previous childbirth, writing that ‘I have ben trobled with the falling out of the wome these 3 years & more It came A munth after I had my f child & is wors sins my 2 child’.⁸⁸ As other works on midwifery and general health repeated throughout the early modern period, careful maintenance of the moderate body was essential to successful reproduction. Broadly speaking, the balance of fluids in the body and the health and form of the reproductive organs, often interdependent, determined the woman’s ability to conceive or hold a pregnancy to fruition.

Physical reasons for women’s barrenness listed in these medical and pseudo-medical works can be separated into two categories: ‘accidental’ or ‘natural’, that is, curable and incurable. Nicholas Fontanus distinguishes these types of barrenness in his *Woman’s Doctour* (1652) in which he notes that ‘barrenness is either naturall, and acquired from the first Elements of the Conformation, or introduced by Sicknesse’.⁸⁹ Most ‘accidental’ barrenness was temporary and curable, resulting from imbalanced humours that could be corrected through carefully-prescribed physic, blood-letting, or diet. Accidental barrenness was often tied to other gynaecological problems, such as menstrual problems, inflammation or ‘schirrositie’ of the womb, or other vaginal discharge such as ‘the whites’. Nicholas Culpeper lists all of these problems in his section on ‘accidental’ causes of barrenness, in which he describes seven types of gynaecological disorder. Like Fontanus, Culpeper distinguishes ‘accidental barrenness’ from ‘natural barrenness’ by its reversibility, stating that ‘I call that Accidental Barrenness, which comes by reason of some casual Infirmity upon the Body of the Man or his Wife at a time, which being taken away, the Effect ceaseth.’⁹⁰ He includes the suppression of the menses, the overflowing of the menses, the flux of the womb, the falling out of the womb, the inflammation of the womb, the windiness of the womb, and the heat and

⁸⁸ Boston, MA., Countway Library of Medicine, B MS 56.2, Sarah Rood to John Winthrop.

⁸⁹ Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour*, p. 128.

⁹⁰ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 64.

dryness of the womb in his discussion of accidental barrenness. Windiness of the womb, in particular, could give the appearance of pregnancy, and Culpeper warns that a woman appearing ‘puffed up’ could only be correctly ‘discerned... by the Eye of Reason.’⁹¹ In such cases, a woman might believe herself to be pregnant and therefore be deceived by her own body.

According to Culpeper, suppression of the menses could be blamed on green-sickness in young girls, or fatness, in which the excess blood turned to fat in the already narrow veins of a woman, or could be caused by sores in other parts of the body, such as ulcers, haemorrhoids, or even cankers in the breast.⁹² Stopped menses, with its accompanying ailments, was largely attributed to either a cold or a hot distemper. Fontanus also notes that ‘if the Matrix be too hot, it consumes the seed, as a little water thrown onto a fire, is presently dried up’.⁹³ If too cold, it was marked by a ‘dulnes, sleepiness, slowness’ and a ‘pale, whitely, or leaden colour’ – the opposite being true for suppression caused by a hot distemper, which was outwardly recognizable as well. Culpeper prescribes sweating and various combinations of herbs such as the widely-known abortifacient pennyroyal, as well as calaminth, sage, and juniper berries, to be taken in order to provoke menstruation and return fecundity. He does so, though, with a strong warning about the side effects of ‘bringing down the terms’ that is, that such medications could also induce miscarriages if taken when pregnant. Under the clear heading ‘Cautions’, Culpeper warns his readers about the potential consequences of provoking menstruation, admonishing them to ‘give not any of these to any that is with Child, least you turn Murderers; wilful-murder seldom goes unpunished in this world, never in that to come.’⁹⁴ While many historians have cited such remedies as evidence

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁹² On green-sickness, see Helen King, *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis, and the Problems of Puberty* (London, 2004).

⁹³ Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour*, 128.

⁹⁴ Culpeper, *Direcotry for Midwives*, p. 78.

of the circulation of information about abortifacients, Jennifer Evans has argued that such emmenagogues should instead be linked more closely with aphrodisiacs.⁹⁵ Early modern medical writers believed that promoting a healthy menstrual cycle also promoted fecundity, and Evans's work clearly outlines the humorally-based similarities between the remedies prescribed for both the provocation of venery and of the menses.

But while too little menstrual blood was a problem, so was too much. Overflowing of the menses was also considered a disorder than impeded fertility and needed correction via physic, diet, or lifestyle change. Indeed, any immoderate discharge from a woman's vagina could indicate fertility problems, and Culpeper devotes a separate section on 'fluxes of the womb' in his chapter on barrenness. The colour of the discharge, Culpeper notes, depended on exactly 'what humour offends', that is, red from blood, white from phlegm, with 'the cure be[ing] as different as the cause'. Each humour was ascribed its own set of instructions to stop the offending flux, although Culpeper concludes the chapter with three general rules for this particular cause of barrenness linked to fluxes, warning patients to 'forbear violent motions, passions, and perturbations for mind', to avoid 'all sharp and salt meats, and such things as provoke Urin' and to take the flowers of 'dead nettles'. Each flower's colour corresponded to the relevant colour of the 'flux' from which the woman was suffering. Culpeper's section on 'fluxes of the womb' highlights the importance of distinguishing and monitoring the colour and type of fluid that seemed to flow out of women's bodies and its effects on their sexual and general bodily health. His 'general rules' at the conclusion of the chapter summarise his opinions about the causes of 'accidental' barrenness (essentially

⁹⁵ Evans, 'Menstrual Provocation and Procreation in Early Modern England', p. 2. Also see McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals*, pp. 57-88; Cornelia Hughes Dayton, 'Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 48 (1991), pp. 19-49; Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, pp. 67-70; Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 156 (1997), pp. 87-115; John Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1992); Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca, 1994).

disorder stemming from violence to the body or mind), the diet to maintain in order to avoid suffering, and a herbal cure, nettles, matched to specific fluxes plaguing the body.

Physical deformity of the uterus or any of reproductive parts could also be blamed for barrenness, but the reason for the deformity was often tied back to irregular humours and temperature. Fontanus links the temperature and form of the reproductive parts in stating that, in a barren woman, ‘of these errors is the straightnesse of those passages that lead to the matrix, [are] sometimes so narrow that they hinder the right transmission of the seed into the vessels of Generation.’ He goes on to note that ‘another error is the wideness of those parts, into which although the seed be duely ejaculated, yet it presently slips out again, because the capacity of the Matrix is too wide.’⁹⁶ If the passages too wide and cold, the man’s seed would slide out (aided by the slippery nature of the womb), and if too narrow and dry, the seed would never make it to the matrix, the seat of generation, in the first place. Correctly formed generative parts with moderate temperatures and conditions were necessary for conception and in order to hold a pregnancy full-term.

Jane Sharp echoes Culpeper’s sentiment in attributing barrenness in women to disordered female reproductive parts. Her work closely resembles Culpeper’s and many of the homely anecdotes and colourful language in Culpeper also appear in her *Midwives’ Book* and, indeed, at times it is almost verbatim with Culpeper’s text. She argues that ‘the chiefest cause of womens barenness to be from the womb of them that is ill formed or ill disposed’, but, like Culpeper, she promises correction to these ill-formed parts by use of strong herbal concoctions, lifestyle advice, or even surgery. Sharp defines ‘accidental barrenness’ as a temporary state that a woman can be delivered from if instructed correctly. Like Culpeper, she distinguished this temporary condition from lifelong infertility, or ‘natural barrenness’, and describes several causes and their associated cures. Sharp also warns against blood-

⁹⁶ Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour*, pp. 128-9.

letting in young girls in an anecdote that is virtually the same as in Culpeper. Sharp differs from Culpeper in that her descriptions of barrenness are spread throughout the work and her ‘chapter’ on barrenness is brief and even cursory in its description of the condition. She states that ‘the principal cause of barrenness lieth in the generative parts, and if children be born defective it is not we that are Midwives can cure it, what Nature wants, Art can hardly make perfect’ , thus acknowledging that some forms of barrenness are without cure.⁹⁷

Neither accidental nor natural barrenness could be separated from the multiple ‘disorders of the womb’ discussed in the pages of women’s health texts and midwifery manuals from the early modern period. In such cases, and by the very definition of its inability to produce offspring, the womb was unhealthy. The various ailments provide a host of physical symptoms that exhibit these disorders as they manifested themselves within the female body, and various remedies are prescribed to bring the body back to its natural, balanced state. Diseases of women, young and old, fat and thin, fertile and infertile, were the result of these imbalances of fluid and temperature, affecting the form and texture of the reproductive organs. Treatments designed to combat these imbalances were described and prescribed within the pages of midwifery manuals and other medical books designed to teach women about the correct ordering of their bodies. Whether concerning the amount of copulation, exercise, or diet, early modern medical authorities stressed moderation for the maintenance of a healthy body.

Infertile Couples

But the drama of infertility always involved two people. The instability of male and female reproductive systems mirrored the instability of human relationships and dysfunction in one had dire effects on the other. Barrenness was often explored as a condition described through relationship issues between husbands and wives, and the texts’ inclusion, albeit often

⁹⁷ Jane Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 165.

brief, of men and men's bodies betrayed anxieties about impotence or male sterility. These messages about the potential for male infertility to occur are often lost in the long list of female reproductive ailments in midwifery texts and are most often found in sections devoted to female 'barrenness'. Culpeper opens his section on 'natural barrenness' by warning his readers that 'the Man and the Wife that are both of one complexion, seldom have Children', stating that 'the reason is clear from the Universal Course of Nature, which being formed by an All-wise God of a Composition of Contraries, cannot be increased by a Composition of likes.'⁹⁸ Culpeper advises that God correctly guides partners to find each other, seemingly a contradiction within itself, as a beginning to a section that proceeds to discuss 'natural barrenness.'

Norwich physician John Sadler supported the idea that the fecundity of a couple depended on the quality of their interaction with each other, and could affect the health of each partners' respective reproductive bodies, or, as he expressed it, 'Another main cause of barrenness is attributed to the want of a convenient moderating quality, which the woman ought to have with the man, as if hee bee hot, shee must be cold; If hee bee drie, she must bee moist.' Therefore the *union* of particular men and women can be barren, whereas their individual bodies are not, 'for he or she which before as the barren fig-tree, being now joined with an apt constitution becomes as the fruitfull vine.'⁹⁹ Thus barrenness could be situational, indeed, accidental, the result of an improper match. Fontanus explains this phenomenon, noting, 'one and the same woman may have had Children by a former husband, and yet no children by a second husband, not because she is now barren, or unfruitfull, but she is so called because of her husband, by whom she hath now no children, the case is likewise the same on the mans part, respectively of the woman'. The difference, he explains, has to do with the interaction of the present couple's seeds, 'because the proportion and temperature of

⁹⁸ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 59.

⁹⁹ Sadler, *The Sick Womans Private Looking-Glasse*, p. 110.

both the seeds, which ought to concur generation, are contrary the one to the other'.¹⁰⁰ Henry Bracken expanded on these ideas in his eighteenth-century *Midwife's Companion* (1737) when discussing the merits of second marriages in relation to lifelong versus 'initial infertility'. He reassures the reader that many times seemingly barren individuals go on to have children in second or third marriages, and, surprisingly, acknowledges that women who first have illegitimate children by other men seem to then successfully bear their husbands' legitimate children (though he leaves further speculation on this subject to his predecessor Cheyne).¹⁰¹ Absent from Bracken's account is the usual judgmental and moralistic tone attached to the popular cuckoldry literature of the period. Without going so far as to call adultery or fornication fertility-aids, he recognises the benefits of such sexual deviance without making any moral judgment.

Jane Sharp ties these ideas about disordered relationships more securely to the body. She maintains that 'physicians judge barrenness proceeds from too great similitude of persons; but I should rather think from some disproportion of the Organs.'¹⁰² It is notable that she does not identify what organs, belonging to which gender, specifically. In both arguments, it is clear that barrenness was in fact a problem that resulted from bodies that were inappropriate when matched. Culpeper's 'natural' reasons behind the physical state of barrenness are in fact the contrasting situations of people coming together who are either too similar, or fundamentally at odds. Culpeper and Sharp cite the want of love and carnal copulation as common reasons behind barrenness, and both authors warn against the power of the 'seed of hatred' in destroying any hopes of fertility in a union. Culpeper even goes so far as to use rape as an example of a union that never produces children.¹⁰³ In arguing this

¹⁰⁰ Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁰¹ Henry Bracken, *The Midwife's Companion* (London, 1737), p. 22.

¹⁰² Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, p. 99.

¹⁰³ For more information on rape in early modern society, see Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 55-63; Garthine Walker, 'Re-reading Rape and Sexual

specific point, both authors repeat a parable from antiquity about the strong ties between barrenness and hatred. Both authors also blame parents and the pressures of early modern society for barrenness as well, complaining that some overbearing parents arranged loveless, and therefore potentially childless marriages, for their young sons and daughters. Culpeper asks, ‘then if their Heart be not United in love, how should their Seed Unite to cause Conception?’¹⁰⁴ Similar advice is particularly apparent in sex manuals such as the mid-seventeenth century English translation of Sinibaldus, *Rare Verities* (1658), and the late seventeenth-century bestseller *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* (1684).¹⁰⁵ Sinibaldus notes that ‘Experience tells that Virgins ravished are never with child’ and that ‘sad and weeping women never conceive.’¹⁰⁶ The right attitude, desire for sex, and ideally love, between partners was required for successful reproduction.

The abundant advice on sexual positions, frequency of sex, and picking the right sexual partner also highlights the fact that infertility was a burden shared between men and women, a fact made most clearly in sexual advice manuals that emerged in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. Sinibaldus makes all of his recommendations under the auspices of promoting ‘generation’, and his advice ranges from the best age to marry to the best sexual position in order to conceive. He provides a detailed analysis of men and women’s dispositions, facial and bodily appearances, height, weight, and their connection to lustfulness. Of the seasons of the year, Sinibaldus notes that ‘Women are most lustful in the summer, and Men in the winter’, rationalized by their respective humoral compositions, and

Violence in Early Modern England’, *Gender and History*, 10 (1998), pp. 1-25; Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp. 90-1.

¹⁰⁴ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁵ *Rare Verities* was published in English anonymously in 1658 as a translation of Giovanni Benedetto Sinibaldus’s *Geneanthropia* (1642). Its authenticity as a single text is dubious, however, as its content was most likely drawn from other texts as well. See Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, p. 20, n. 74. For more information about these types of sexual advice manuals, see Roy Porter, ‘The Literature of Sexual Advice before 1800’ in Roy Porter (ed.), *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes toward Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 134- 51.

¹⁰⁶ Sinibaldus, *Rare Verities* (London, 1658), p. 62.

he concludes that ‘Spring is to be chosen as the best season of the year for generation’.¹⁰⁷ Sinibaldus also includes recommendations and recipes for aphrodisiacs to inspire lust in a couple looking to conceive. Correct ordering of the mind at the time of copulation was just as important as correct ordering of the body, and both Sinibaldus and Aristotle include information about the state of mind that partners should be in, in order to conceive. Aristotle agrees with Sinibaldus in that ‘anything of Sadness, Trouble and Sorrow are Enemies to the Delights of Venus’ and emphasises that each partner must be equally desirous of sex. In deciding to copulate, he stresses that ‘in their mutual Embraces they meet each other with an equal Ardour: For if their Spirits flag on either part, they will fall short of what Nature requires; and the Woman either miss of Conception, or else the Children will either prove weak in their Bodies, or defective in their Understandings’. The responsibility of producing healthy offspring, then, was a burden placed on the bodies and minds of both partners involved. Correctly-ordered sex required correctly-ordered both male and female bodies and minds in order to conceive successfully.

Many of these medical works also include diagnostic tests designed to identify the defective party in a relationship. While these tests were often folkloric in their approach, their appearance in the midwifery texts reinforces the idea that infertility was a problem that could be attributed to either a female or male body in a marriage and that it was a situation occurring *within* a couple that necessitated diagnosis and treatment. While it was more likely that a woman would be the infertile partner in the couple due to the plethora of ‘disorders of the womb’ that women were subject to, the very presence of these tests in the works affirms the possibility of ‘symptomless’ (or separate from impotence) male infertility in the early modern period. Nicholas Culpeper includes the barley test, repeated in Sharp, as part of his introduction to ‘accidental barrenness’: he recommends taking a handful of barley, steeping it

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

in the urine of a man and a woman struggling with infertility, planting the barley grains in pots (keeping the urine separate), and monitoring their growth. As Culpeper claimed, ‘all men and women desire to be fruitful, and the Urin of one that is fruitful (probably) is more likely to make a Seed grow, than the Urin of one that is not fruitful because there is a principle of fruitfulness in the one, not in the other.’¹⁰⁸ But Culpeper immediately distances himself from the test by stating, ‘If it hold true, well and good; if not, I cannot help it, for I never tried it.’ He follows his description of the test by stating that

Barrenness Accidental is either common to both man and wife, i.e., either of them may be troubled with the infirmity, or else it is proper to the woman only, this (as I told you) is most frequent; neither is it my purpose here to speak of Diseases incident to men, which may cause Barrenness for the time being; but of such as properly cause it; for the Instruments of Generation in one man being perfect, his diet and exercise according to rules.... I know no accidental causes of Barrenness in him, if his body be in good health.

In this passage, Culpeper repeats the ambiguity that pervades the topic of barrenness in general and its appearance in one or both sexes, stating that ‘the chief cause of barrenness in a woman lies in her Womb, and its infirmities’.¹⁰⁹ Women’s parts could be inherently disordered, but men’s parts needed to be consciously ignored or abused to result in barrenness in a couple. The instruments of man were created perfectly and could potentially remain that way, but women’s wombs were more likely to be imperfect in their creation and susceptible to disease. Culpeper’s statement also fits into more general ideas about health and disease in the early modern period, in that maintenance of the body was a responsibility granted to men by God who also gave them the tools to maintain optimum health. It was wholly possible for men to discard God’s gift of perfect reproductive health by disordering their bodies through gluttony, excessive sex, or similarly immoral behaviour.

¹⁰⁸ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.74.

Culpeper's views exhibit the complexity of early modern understandings of infertility and also how ideas about male infertility were often buried in sections focusing on barrenness in women. By mentioning the barley test, he allows for ambiguity in the attribution of blame for barrenness within a couple – while 'the chief cause of barrenness in a Woman lies in her Womb', either party could potentially be the root cause behind the inability to conceive. But he further discredits this test with the following lines about woman's parts being more prone to disorder, and the remainder of the chapter focuses on the various gynaecological ailments (suppression of menses, overflowing of menses, etc.). He states his preference not to take the time to discuss the infirmities of men's bodies in the text, but the idea has already been established by Culpeper's inclusion of the diagnostic test and his discussion about the diet, exercise and 'general health' of the bodies of men. To Culpeper, men's genitals may have been created perfectly, but men, and certainly men within a barren relationship, had the potential for imperfection.

Male Infertility

Barrenness, then, could be the result of a woman's ill-formed reproductive organs, incompatibility of the genital parts, or even the unhappiness of one or both sexual partners. There are very rarely explicit references to men's 'barrenness', that is, male infertility without impotence or sexual dysfunction, but a few can be found. Fontanus distinguishes barren men by their physical appearance and personality. He writes that 'barren men are commonly beardless, slow in imagination, and dull in practice, because their seed is cold, and contains not any spirit to tickle, and warme their Phantasies, but they sit like images, and are sad, and insociable'.¹¹⁰ By contrast, fertile men were recognizable through their opposite, overly-social behaviour and wholly different, and overtly masculine, physical appearance. Fontanus explains that 'hairy men....are cheerefull, affable, ever frequenting the young

¹¹⁰ Fontanus, *The Womans Doctour*, pp.131-2.

company of Maids, and Virgins, being excited by the fragrancy of their eyes to Venerous dalliances, and lustfull speculations’, yet again tying fertility to social behaviour with the opposite sex. Men who are infertile because their seed lacks ‘any spirit to tickle’ are barren due to their effect on women and even are dissuaded from interacting with them at all, as opposed to their fertile counterparts.

While male ‘barrenness’ is rarely included in discussions of infertility, a variation of male infertility, impotence, or sexual dysfunction, is much more common. Like female barrenness, impotence was tied to the disorder of physical parts and could be brought on by venereal disease, depletion of the seed by masturbation, advanced age, and poor diet. It could also be prompted by too much sex demanded by an insatiable wife. Disorder of the male reproductive body, then, was also a key consideration during the early modern period, and impotence was a well-recognized health problem addressed inside and outside the pages of medical and pseudo-medical works.

While female infertility was tied to various, and sometimes vaguely described, ‘disorders of the womb’, impotence was tied more specifically to one reproductive organ: the penis. John Marten, London ‘chirurgion’ and early modern pornographer, devotes a lengthy section in his tract, *Gonosologium Novum* (1709), which divulged ‘all of the Secret Infirmities and Diseases Natural, Accidental, and Venereal in Men and Women’ to describing the virtues of the penis:

The Ancients ranked the Yard of Man among the number of their gods, and gave it the name of Fascinus, as having power to drive away Witchcraft, to shew us what Empire it had acquired in the World; for that no charms or Enchantments can equal it. And not only the Antients, but in our age also, it is a Part had in great veneration; because it engenders Love, and is the Father of Humane Kind, and the Origin of the rest of the Parts we are composd of. It was had formerly in so much veneration, that as in the History of France, is observ’d, one Villandre committed High Treason, in touching with his Hands the Privy Parts of Charles IX. King of that Country. The Law of the Old Testament, orders the Woman’s Hand to be cut off, that should scornfully or injuriously have handled those Parts; and that same Law, as well as the new, doth

not allow any Man that has any defects in the engendering, or Privy Parts, to be admitted into the Church of God; in such veneration had they those Parts.¹¹¹

Marten gives several reasons for ‘divers Infirmities and Diseases that attend the Virile Parts of Man, and hinder Copulation and Generation’ and describes a variety of physiological disorders. Like other medical authors, Marten argued that size really did matter when it comes to male virility, and that a penis either too short or too long proved detrimental in matters of fertility. Sarah Toulalan has argued that the centrality of the penis in pornographic literature reinforces the connection between reproduction and sexual pleasure, and these ideas as they appear in popular literature are further examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis.¹¹²

Marten builds on longstanding negative stereotypes of large penises as expressed in midwifery manuals such as Jane Sharp’s *Midwives’ Book* of the late seventeenth century. Sharp warns that ‘some men, but chiefly fools, have Yards so long that they are useless for generation.’ She ties these negative stereotypes to the popular early modern superstition of midwives’ potentially dangerous control of deciding the length of umbilical cords at birth and its close relationship to penis size. Sharp warns that

it is generally held, that the length or proportion of the Yard depends upon cutting the Navel string, if you cut it too short and knit it too lose in Infants it will be too short, because of the string that comes from the Navel to the bottom of the bladder, which draws up the Bladder and shortens the Yard: and this beside the general opinion, stands with so much reason, that all Midwives have cause to be careful to cut the Navel string long enough, and when they tye it, the Yard may have free liberty to move and extend itself, always remembering that moderation is best, that it be not left too long, which may be as bad as too short.¹¹³

¹¹¹ John Marten, *Gonosologium Novum* (London, 1709), p. 13.

¹¹² Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 69-73.

¹¹³ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, pp. 24-25.

This warning is directed at midwives performing the operation as well as prospective parents of newborn males. It serves as another example of the anxiety surrounding the power of midwives in early modern society as well as another illustration of women's control over the most basic and central physical part of men. Caroline Bicks analyses the anxiety caused by early modern midwives' roles in physically controlling the length of men's penises and thus determining their virility in a very physical way.¹¹⁴ She correctly identifies midwifery as a profession where medical and legal authority overlaps and emphasizes midwives' unique power in determining male potency at different stages of life. In doing so, she helpfully draws connections between larger ideas of gendered power structures and the physical and literary spaces that they inhabit. Female midwives did have an unusual amount of authority for their sex in early modern English and New English society, and their authority often extended from the birthing chamber to the courtroom.

Midwives often had the chance to publicly exhibit their expert knowledge about the reproductive body in court cases on both sides of the Atlantic. Midwives could be called to testify about a birth scene in an infanticide case, or to examine a woman's body in a witchcraft trial.¹¹⁵ As Samuel Thomas notes, a midwife's authority was enhanced if she had children herself. Thomas cites the case of a childless London midwife who faked her own pregnancy in order to 'preserve her credit to her employ which she thought somewhat prejudiced by the imputation of barrenness.'¹¹⁶ As this case shows, midwives could also be the defendants in court cases. Mary Beth Norton also illustrates this phenomenon in her

¹¹⁴ Caroline Bicks, 'Midwiving Virility in Early Modern England', in Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh (eds.), *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 49-64: p. 50.

¹¹⁵ See Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Past & Present*, 156 (1997), pp. 87-115; Clive Holmes, 'Women: Witnesses and Witches', *Past & Present*, 140 (1993), pp. 45-78; Rebecca Tannenbaum, 'Women Healers as Witnesses and Authorities', in *The Healer's Calling*, pp. 93-113; David Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch', *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990), pp. 1-26.

¹¹⁶ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 17 April 2008), June 1677, trial of a Midwife (t16770601-6) quoted in Samuel Thomas, 'Early Modern Midwifery: Splitting the Profession, Connecting the History' *Journal of Social History*, 43 (2009), pp. 115-38: p. 119.

analysis of the extended litigation surrounding midwife Alice Tilly's arrest in mid-seventeenth-century Boston. The legal trail left by Alice Tilly similarly provides a chance to see women exerting power in the patriarchal society of the early Massachusetts Bay Colony, although the women exuding the power, in this case, were the 'matrons of Boston' who petitioned the Massachusetts Bay Colony's Court of Assistants on the midwife's behalf.¹¹⁷ Tilly was arrested in 1649 after being accused of 'the miscarrying of many wimen and children under hir hand' by Susana Phillips, a childless woman whose unfortunate childbearing history Norton presumes to be the reason behind the accusation.¹¹⁸ After her arrest, the women of Boston and Dorchester signed six separate petitions calling for her release from prison. Through careful analysis of the fragmentary records, Norton reconstructs the childbirth community that Alice Tilly served, showing it to be a network of female family members that created a distinct community across multiple towns and several generations.¹¹⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, the childless London midwife's and Alice Tilly's court cases illustrate how the presence of infertility could undermine midwives' authority. As the acknowledged experts on female bodies and the 'secrets of generation' until the late seventeenth century, midwives wielded a degree of social power that was unusual for their sex. The combination of their professional expertise and social authority results in their regular appearance in legal records from the early modern period. But as the cases cited above illustrate, midwives could also appear in legal records due to infertility – either their patients' or their own. Such evidence thus demonstrates an important point of intersection between the realms of medical and legal authority in the early modern world.

¹¹⁷ Mary Beth Norton, " 'The Ablest Midwife That Wee Knowe in the Land': Mistress Alice Tilly and the Women of Boston and Dorchester, 1649-1650", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 55 (1998), pp. 105-134. Norton maintains that this is the first collective women's political action in America, and that this case represents the strength of the women's childbirth community: p. 106.

¹¹⁸ Norton, 'Mistress Alice Tilly', pp. 111, 110.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

The power that midwives had over male virility and knowledge about the female body can also be connected to midwives' reputation as bawdy older women and to the distrust of the gossip that was rumoured to occur in the birthing chamber, where women would allegedly share sexual knowledge. If something as vital as determining the length of a man's penis could be decided within the women's world of the birthing chamber, then virility was an issue by which men were exceptionally vulnerable from their birth, a fundamental bodily function dangerously decided by a group of women.

The delicate nature of male virility and its relationship to female sexuality is also a common trope in cuckoldry literature from the period, in which young, lusty wives commit adultery due to their, often elderly, husbands' sexual inadequacy. The young wife in the ballad *The Scolding Wives Vindication, or, an Answer to the Cuckold's Complaint* (c.1680) laments that her husband 'lyes like a lump of clay', and, despite her efforts to stir his ventry with special foods with aphrodisiac qualities, she finally she must 'run astray' due to his impotency.¹²⁰ The impotent, cuckolded husband was at once humorous and pathetic, a wholly inappropriate match for his sexually voracious bride. As explored by Angus McLaren, Roger Thompson, and David Turner, this humorous genre carried many social and even political messages within its bawdy humour. Thompson notes that 'masculine impotence or at least inadequacy was a seventeenth-century obsession' and he links its prominence in literature to power struggles within early modern society.¹²¹ He argues that 'in the majority of the cases it is the disability of two groups: the aged and the bourgeoisie, often Puritan. Like cuckoldry, [impotence] is a form of insult, less important in itself than for what it

¹²⁰ Anon., *The Scolding Wives Vindication, or, An Answer to the Cuckold's Complaint* (London, 1680), reprinted in McLaren, *Impotence*, p.64.

¹²¹ Roger Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears: a Study of Pornographic, Obscene and Bawdy Works Written or Published in England in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1979), p. 105; also see David Turner's chapter on 'Cultures of Cuckoldry' in his work *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility, 1660-1740* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 83-115.

symbolizes.’¹²² Virility was a way for young, poor and otherwise powerless men to seek the possessions of their older and more politically or economically-powerful counterparts. The ability to attract young, sexually-unsatisfied wives became central in this power-struggle and, as Thompson explains, ‘the more or less easy seduction of May is the obvious way of ridiculing January.’¹²³ Social competition between age and class was therefore played out in the satirical pages of works such as *The Ten Pleasures of Marriage* (1682) and *The Art of Cuckoldom* (1683) as anxieties about societal change were addressed in a comical manner revolving around the domestic sphere. While cuckolded husbands were not always impotent in this literature, male sexual dysfunction provided the opportunity to ridicule older men and at the same time emphasise the sexual voracity of women in these bawdy works.

Cuckoldry was not an obviously humorous topic in Puritan New England as compared with the plethora of ballads and broadsides on the subject printed in England. Adultery was no laughing matter in the Puritan colonies and was included under the list of offences that could warrant divorce. Women could face divorce and public humiliation if caught in adultery scenarios. Nancy Cott addresses this ‘sexual double-standard’ about divorce and adultery in colonial Massachusetts. She maintains that colonial culture, and reflectively law, were equivocal on this matter.¹²⁴ If there was a double-standard, it decreased throughout the eighteenth century. She also addresses the timing of these changes and links it to ideas of public and private virtue leading up to the Revolution. Rejection of British corruption implied a critique of the traditionally loose sexual standards for men of the British ruling class. The republican ideology of private as well as public virtue also produced an emphasis on marital fidelity, because it focused on the family as the training ground for future citizens. Thus in a way the Puritan ideal of the marital bond (both civil and religious) was strengthened

¹²² Ibid., p. 105.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 106.

¹²⁴ Nancy Cott, ‘Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 33 (1976), pp. 586-614.

throughout the eighteenth century, leaving little room for humour revolving around broken households and unstable paternity. Separation from British corruption and tales (even humorous ones) of such debauchery reinforced the idea of a new society built on the foundations of a strong and honest family.¹²⁵

But cuckoldry was also discussed outside the pages of British satire and was a common inclusion in medical literature. The dangers of cuckoldry were addressed by Jane Sharp in the opening lines of her discussion of male genitalia. In the section entitled ‘Of a Man’s Yard’, she addresses the issue immediately, using familiar agricultural imagery and with yet another warning about women’s dangerous sexuality. She states that

The Yard as it were the Plow wherewith the ground is tilled, and made fit for the production of Fruit: we see that some fruitful persons have Crop by it almost every year, only plowing up their own ground, and live more plentifully by it than the Countryman can with all his toil and cost: and some there are that plow other men’s ground, when they can find such lascivious women that will pay them well for their pains, to their shame be it spoken, but commonly they pay dear for it in the end, if timely they repent not.¹²⁶

This unusual warning is placed at the forefront of a discussion on the sexual parts of man, and it lends a distinctly social message to the following systematic discussion of each constituent part of the male genitalia. The social ramifications of cuckoldry and women’s sexual deceit are intrinsically linked to basic anatomical information. Deceit was at the centre of cuckoldom, and Sharp’s passage connects these ideas back to concerns about the production of ‘fruit’. ‘Fruitful persons’ only ‘plow their own ground’, and those who do not heed Sharp’s advice will ‘pay dear for it in the end.’

¹²⁵ See Susan Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, & Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill, 2009) for more information on attitudes toward fertility in the later colonial period and early Republic.

¹²⁶ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 23.

Many medical and pseudo-medical works addressed impotence first as a physiological problem. In addition to concerns about penis size, authors attributed impotence to humoral imbalance. The hot, lusty male seed could be encouraged by consuming a variety of herbal and food-based remedies. As Jane Sharp explains, ‘the Yard is stretched and made to swell by reason of fullness of Seed and plenty of wind, and therefore all windy meats, as Pulse, Beans and Pease and the like will make the Yard stand’. Satyrion (orchids), chocolate, eringo (candied sea holly), dates, garlic, and artichokes were also often prescribed for their fortifying abilities, as it was generally accepted that male sexual dysfunction resulted from a cold, thin seed.¹²⁷ Cantharides, a popular aphrodisiac made from dried beetles, was also a popular treatment but one with dire side effects if taken too liberally. Sharp acknowledges that ‘indiscreet taking of Cantharides’ could cause a priapism or continual standing of the Yard’, and she admonishes, ‘I would wish men to take heed lest they pay for it at last, for the Proverb is commonly true, sweet meat must have sour sawce.’¹²⁸ Jennifer Evans has shown that aphrodisiacs were used in early modern England to rebalance infertile bodies and to encourage fertility, but such substances needed to be used in moderation.¹²⁹ Abuse of these remedies and overindulgence in sex could therefore result in more, and potentially worse, bodily problems, or a complete depletion of seed. Too much sex, either by fault of insatiable young wives, adultery, or by immoderate use of aphrodisiacs was therefore linked to infertility.

While many works attributed problems of male sexual dysfunction to wholly natural causes, impotence was also often linked to the supernatural. Indeed, sometimes both possibilities were presented side-by-side within the same text. Both Jane Sharp and Nicholas

¹²⁷ Satyrions, or orchids, were often prescribed as infertility remedies because of their likeness to male genitalia.

¹²⁸ Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book: Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford, 1999), p. 30.

¹²⁹ Evans, ‘Menstruation Provocation and Procreation in Early Modern England’, p. 13. I am also grateful to Dr. Evans for sharing an early draft of her unpublished article “‘They are called Imperfect Men’: Male Infertility and Sexual Health in Early Modern England” (*Social History of Medicine* article, forthcoming).

Culpeper, in addition to their herbal prescriptions, suggested that suffering husbands should urinate through their wedding rings in order to cure their disability. Culpeper devotes a separate section to ‘Barrenness against Nature’ in his *Directory for Midwives* (1656), and is preceded by Robert Burton in discussing the use of ‘diabolical means’ to cause and cure impotency.¹³⁰ The strong link between witchcraft and male sexual dysfunction dates back to antiquity and only declined, as Angus McLaren notes, in the eighteenth century.¹³¹ The infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) answered its own question as to ‘whether sorceresses can impede the faculty to procreate’ in confirming that ‘since the power of the demon is greater than that of a man and a man can impede the faculty to procreate, whether through very cold plants or through other impediments.... Therefore the demon, who possesses keener knowledge, can do this to a greater degree.’¹³² If virility was a natural condition that could be manipulated by mere mortals, it was certainly (and terrifyingly) corruptible by witches. The *Malleus Maleficarum* lists four ways in which witches made men impotent and even devoted a lengthy section to explaining the theory behind ‘penis-theft’, or witches’ abilities to ‘really and truly take away the limbs of a man.’¹³³ Scholars such as Catherine Rider have written at length about the longstanding link between witchcraft and impotence, and it remains an important example of the crisis of magic, medicine and religion in the early modern period.¹³⁴

By contrast, witchcraft trials in colonial New England do not include accusations involving impotency. Those facing trial in New England were more often accused of disrupting nature by hindering fertility in animals and women and/or causing child death. Witchcraft was a valid explanation for several types of misfortune in the early colonial New

¹³⁰ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621); Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, pp. 89-90.

¹³¹ McLaren, *Impotence*, pp. 52-3.

¹³² Christopher Mackay, *The Hammer of the Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 187-8.

¹³³ Mackay, *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 194.

¹³⁴ See Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2006).

England mindset, and, as John Demos and other historians have documented, evidence of infertility in people and in animals were often mentioned in the cases against those accused of this particular crime. Cotton Mather, writing about the death his firstborn son, noted that he ‘had great Reason to suspect a Witchcraft’ after learning through an autopsy that the newborn’s bowels were deformed. Mather linked the baby’s deformity to an incident outside their home where ‘ [his] Wife, a few weeks before her Deliverance, was affrighted with an horrible Spectre....which Fright caused her Bowels to turn within her’.¹³⁵ Witches were often thought to have an inordinate interest in children, infants or pregnant women, and child death and mysterious illness were often attributed to the accused. In addition, Demos states that ‘nearly one in six of the witches was childless – twice the rate that obtained in the population at large. Moreover, those who did bear children may have experienced lower than normal fecundity and/or success in raising children to adulthood.’¹³⁶

In constructing his ‘collective portrait’ of witches in early New England, Demos claims that infertility played a role in creating the profile of a suspected witch and the fate of those she tormented. One such case is Elizabeth Godman. Godman herself was childless and was involved in several years of litigation when she was accused of being a witch by her neighbours in Hartford, Connecticut, first in 1653 and again in 1655. In her trial in 1653, the court records state that ‘there is much suspition that she hath bine the cause of the loss of Mrs. Bishop’s children, for she could tell when Mrs. Bishop was to be brought to bedd, and hath given out that she kills her children with longing, because she longs for everything she see, which Mrs. Bishop denies.’¹³⁷ It is an unusual, slightly twisted case of a witch being blamed for the death of children, in that Godman actually accuses the mother herself, Mrs.

¹³⁵ Mather, *Diary*, p. 164. Mather connected the appearance of the spectre to a letter recently written to his father from a woman recently accused of witchcraft. Mather records that the letter warned that ‘Hee little knew, what might quickly befall some of his Posterity’.

¹³⁶ John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford, 1982), p. 72.

¹³⁷ The Examination of Elizabeth Godman, May 21st, 1653 in *Major Problems in American Women’s History, Documents and Essays*, ed. Mary Beth Norton and R. Alexander (Lexington, MA, 1996), p. 51.

Bishop, of 'killing with longing' and then in turn is accused of killing the children herself. The use of the word 'longing' in this case is particularly interesting in that it provides a glimpse into the strong emotions and interpersonal jealousies in cases of infertility or child death in the small communities of New England and echoes Rachel's longing for a child in the Old Testament stories, as discussed in the following chapter. It also highlights the potentially dangerous scenario of bad blood between neighbours, for if Elizabeth Godman could be accused of anything, it would be of further upsetting a grieving mother by accusing her of killing babies whom she recently lost. Elizabeth Godman's vulnerable social position – a single and childless woman -- did not allow her to make such comments without suffering dire consequences.

Carol Karlsen explores these connections and also argues for a strong link between female sexuality and witchcraft accusation in Puritan New England. Karlsen maintains that witches' carnal appetites were uncontrollable both internally and externally. The testimony implied that these women were dissatisfied with – indeed had no respect for – their society's rules governing sexual behaviour.¹³⁸ Puritan society in the wilderness of New England rested firmly on the foundations of a well-ordered family. Sexual roles were well-defined within this 'Little Commonwealth' and the appropriate relationship between husband and wife was openly communicated through prescriptive literature and the sermons from three generations of Mathers, as well as ministers such as Benjamin Wadsworth. Any transgressions were considered dangerous not only for the individuals involved but also for the society at large. In both England and colonial New England, a functional marriage was regarded as a healthy way to keep women's limitless sexual appetite in check. Thomas Foster argues that in early New England the onus of sexual satisfaction within marriage (and thus order within society) was on the man. He maintains that, 'One important feature of adult

¹³⁸ Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York, 1987), p. 137.

manhood was the capacity to moderate sexual wants – both one’s own and those of one’s wife – and direct them toward their proper ends. Those ends included procreation and the containment of potentially socially disruptive lust.¹³⁹ As already indicated, women could actually cause male impotence by demanding too much sex from their husbands. Angus McLaren connects this idea back to early modern England in his thorough discussion of popular ‘cuckold’ literature about lusty brides and their enfeebled husbands. He argues that ‘to be known as impotent was to be labeled as unmanly and lacking virility, power, morality and strength.’ Insults relating to sexual incapacity appear in slander suits, and titles such as ‘fumbler, malkin, pillock, bungler, bobtail, weak-doing man, and John Cannot’ support McLaren’s argument regarding the humorous role that impotent men filled in early modern songs, plays, and popular literature.¹⁴⁰

Impotence in the Courtroom

As the presence of anxieties about infertility in witchcraft cases indicates, the drama of infertility also played out in the courtroom. Impotence was one of the few charges that could end marriages in early modern England and colonial New England, and it was an arena in which it was particularly apparent that infertility is best understood as the embodiment of disordered relationships between men and women. A seventeenth-century broadside describes such disorder in a humorous way, with its description of

Fumblers-Hall, kept and holden in Feeble-Court, at the sign of the Labour-in-vain, in Dee-little Lane, wherein divers complaints & agrievances, out of the feminines in Cornucopia, are presented to the grave wisdoms of the masters of that company: concerning non-performance, want of due benevolence, deficiencie, and corporal disabilities in man-kind, whereby poor distressed

¹³⁹ Thomas Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston, 2006), p.6.

¹⁴⁰ McLaren, *Impotence*, p. 60.

females languish under a pressing weight of misery, not only to the great decay of their trade and occupations, but to the destruction of generation itself.¹⁴¹

This fictional court, described firmly tongue-in-cheek in a late seventeenth-century chapbook belonging to Samuel Pepys, is a colourful illustration of impotence as an acknowledged health problem in early modern society. In its pages, disappointed wives face off with their spouses to vividly describe their ‘deficient’ husbands’ short-comings to court officials. In the case of ‘Jone (sic) Wood-have-more’ vs. ‘Daniel Doe-little’, the master of the court asks, ‘Jone, What canst thou say against Daniel? Is he not a loving husband to thee?’ Joan responds that she, ‘Cannot say but that he is loving enough, but love is not all that Pleaseth a Woman, will love beget such beautiful Children as my neighbor K. or my neighbor B. hath, no, no, Love will not do it alone.’¹⁴²

Joan’s answer highlights the tension between two marital responsibilities acknowledged by early modern couples and, indeed, early modern courts: the procreative duties of marriage and the need for ‘due benevolence’ or sexual satisfaction and conjugal love. Both elements were necessary for a functional marriage, and the absence of either or both due to impotence, or male sexual dysfunction, proved to be a personal, social, and legal problem. While continuity in attitudes toward impotence existed between early modern England and colonial New England, there remain important differences due to the distinct religious and social structures of the regions.

The trials in ‘Fumblers-Hall’, while designed to titillate and entertain, in fact draw on the very real and deep-rooted history of impotence in marriage litigation in early modern European church courts. As noted by Martin Ingram and Lawrence Stone, in England generally ‘the traditional law of the church rigorously upheld the sanctity of the married state

¹⁴¹ Anon., *Fumblers-Hall, kept and hold in Feeble-Court* (London, 1675), p. 1.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

and the indissolubility of the conjugal bond, so that divorce in the modern sense – the termination of a valid marriage, enabling the partners to marry again – was not recognized.’¹⁴³ Impotence, however, was one of the few examples of ‘basic impediments to matrimony’ that could result in annulment – i.e., complete dissolution of marriage and the freedom to marry again. With sensational cases such as the Overbury scandal from the early seventeenth century, the inability to consummate marriage was well-established (if rarely occurring) business for the ecclesiastical courts to settle and the gravity with which it was regarded is apparent in legal records through the eighteenth century. Other impediments to matrimony included only such serious charges as bigamy, incest and one or both of the marriage partners being under age.

For the couples who fought these battles inside real courts and outside the pages of Pepys’ ‘Penny Merriments’, impotency was less amusing and carried serious social and financial consequences. In the trials, deponents recounted private conversations, surgeons and midwives reported results of physical examinations, and the defendants were sometimes forced to undergo humiliating tests of virility before the court. The well-known case of *Weld v. Weld* stands as an enduring example of the high drama and embarrassing afterlife that impotency trials often incurred in eighteenth-century English society. Catherine Elizabeth Weld sought annulment in the Court of Arches in 1730, claiming that her husband, Edward, was ‘naturally frigid, and for all carnal Copulation utterly unapt, and impotent.’ Edward’s own mother testified to her son’s odd nocturnal behaviour and avoidance of the marriage bed, and Catherine’s grandmother, Lady Mary Howard, relayed to the court that Edward himself ‘hath owned to her Ladyship the Truth of the Charge of Insufficiency, at least that he believed himself so.’ Edward was examined by five surgeons who testified that ‘though there had been some impediment in the husband, yet now by their skill that impediment was

¹⁴³ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 145.

removed.’ Edward had indeed undergone a surgical procedure in previous years to correct a deformity of his foreskin, having it ‘clipp[ed] with a pair of scissors’ by one Mr. John Williams, a surgeon in Covent Garden. Elizabeth was also physically examined, and three midwives found her to be ‘able, apt, fit for Generation, and the Procreation of Children’ but still *virgo intacta* in spite of her three-year marriage to Edward.¹⁴⁴ Despite this physical evidence, the judge ruled against annulment and ordered that the couple should resume their married life. Elizabeth died nine years after the trial, and Edward went on to sire three children by his next wife.

The *Weld v. Weld* saga enjoyed an afterlife that long outlasted the court-ordered reconciliation of Catherine and Edward. The ‘Genuine Proceedings’ of the trial were published by pornographer John Crawford under the provocative title *The Cases of Impotency and Virginitie Fully Discuss’d* (1732). It is one of only two nullity cases published for public consumption, and, while the social message behind its publication is much debated by historians, it stands as a thorough account of the proceedings, colourful language, and cast of characters involved in impotency trials in eighteenth-century England.¹⁴⁵

Across the Atlantic from the Weld scandal, husbands and wives were also squaring off in impotency trials in the civil courts of the New England colonies. Much has been written on early American divorce cases, as Puritan New England broke from England in mandating that marriage dissolution be handled by civil rather than ecclesiastical court

¹⁴⁴ Catherine Elizabeth Weld, *The Cases of Impotency and Virginitie Fully Discuss’d* (London, 1732), p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Barbara Chuback attributes its publication to anti-Catholic feeling in eighteenth-century England. The Welds were Catholic English gentry, and she maintains that, ‘in addition to being titillating, the published accounts of *Weld v. Weld* aided this process of [anti-papist] self-definition by labelling impotence and patriarchal disempowerment as specifically Catholic, un-English phenomena’: Barbara Chuback, ‘Impotence and Suing for Sex in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Urology*, 71 (2008), p. 483. Other historians have also discussed the Weld case at length, see Judith C. Mueller, ‘Fallen Men: Representations of Male Impotence in Britain’, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 28 (1999), pp. 85-102: pp. 94-95.

systems.¹⁴⁶ While marriage was gradually becoming more of a civil institution in post-Reformation England, George Haskins argues that ‘the government’s assumption of jurisdiction over marriage and divorce’ in the first years of the New England colonies ‘resulted in a fundamental departure from English ways.’ Haskins notes that the first English settlers in Plymouth Colony set the example for the other colonies by instituting marriage laws modelled after the Low Countries, in that they ‘had consistently advocated civil marriage upon the authority of the Bible, and their close connection with the Calvinist church of Holland’.¹⁴⁷ As marriage was established as a wholly civil affair in colonial New England, so too was divorce. Marriage dissolution in the civil courts of New England was much easier than in England, and the high numbers of divorce cases reflect this more permissive system. Cornelia Hughes Dayton explains the differences between the two systems, noting

Because they viewed marriage as a civil contract rather than a sacrament, marital disputes could properly fall under the jurisdiction of the secular courts... as with any contract, the gross misbehaviour of either spouse in breaking the terms.... should abrogate the contract and free the aggrieved party to re-marry. Finally, Puritan divines promoting law reform in seventeenth-century New England urged the sexes be treated equally with respect to grounds for divorce, just as they urged men and women to be held equally accountable for sexual transgressions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ For information on divorce in early modern England, see Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 171-188. Judith Mueller, ‘Fallen Men: Representations of Male Impotence in Britain’, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 28 (1999), pp. 85-102; Jeffrey Merrick, ‘Impotence in Court and at Court’, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 25 (1996), pp. 187-202. For divorce in colonial New England, see Nancy Cott, ‘Divorce and the Changing Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 33:4 (1976), pp. 586-614; Nancy Cott, ‘Eighteenth-century Family and Social Life Revealed in Massachusetts Divorce Records’, *Journal of Social History*, 10 (1976), pp. 20-43; Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-century New England* (New York, 1944), p. 34; Martin Duberman, ‘Male Impotence in Colonial Pennsylvania,’ *Signs*, 4 (1978), pp. 395-401; Thomas Foster, ‘Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-century New England’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 56:4 (1999), pp. 723-744; Thomas Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston, 2006); D. Kelly Weisberg, ‘“Under Greet Temptations Heer”: Women and Divorce in Puritan Massachusetts’, *Feminist Studies*, 2 (1975), pp. 183-193; Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁷ George Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts* (New York, 1960), p. 194.

¹⁴⁸ Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill, 1995), p. 109.

Impotency cases are included by historians in discussions of early American divorce as the divisions between the different categories of marriage dissolution were complicated.

Impotency was, as in England, considered to be a ‘natural incapacity’ that would prevent husbands from marrying again if they were found to be ‘insufficient’ in a court of law. But, as we see in the multiple court cases of John and Hannah Ufoote below, impotence cases were often more about disorder in marital relationships than malfunctioning of bodily parts.

The legal records recounting the disastrous, and dissolved, marriage between Hannah and John Ufoote of the New Haven colony illustrate how the charge of impotence could be used to effectively dissolve early modern marriage, whether or not the claim was actually true. The details from this case actually emerge from two colonial court cases in 1657, both of which are separate from the first, undocumented, divorce trial. The first documented case involved the defendant, John Ufoote, who was charged with fornication after impregnating his father’s servant, Martha Netleton, despite previously obtaining a divorce from his wife, Hannah, under the grounds of his ‘insufficiency’.¹⁴⁹ The details emerge in a second court case that Hannah, John’s ex-wife, was charged with ‘ill carriage toward her husband’, and a long list of family members, servants, and neighbours testified to the various abuses to which Hannah subjected John Ufoote during their marriage. Several witnesses testified that Hannah was unwilling to sleep with her husband, and that ‘it was reported that upon marriage day to John Ufoote, she would say that she was resolved to keepe herself a maide for one year’.¹⁵⁰ Edward Camp testified that ‘he lay one night at goodman Ufoots, in the chamber over the roome where John Ufoote and his wife lay, and where they were in bed he heard her say plainly, stand away, let me alone; some body laye with him whom he asked the reason of this disturbance, and he said alas that was nothing to what they sometime have’. John Ufoote

¹⁴⁹ At Court of Magistrats held at Newhaven for the Jurisdiction, the 25th 3 Month: 1657, in Charles Hoadley (ed.), *New Haven Records, 1653-Union*, pp. 201-2.

¹⁵⁰ Hoadley, *New Haven Records*, p. 210.

confessed in this second trial that he had been tricked into admitting his insufficiency, admitting ‘that [Hannah] told him if he would confesse himselfe insufficient, she would live with him halfe a yeare longer, and in that time he hoped it might appeare otherwise, whereby he was drawne to say as he did, but it was his great sinn, but he said Hannah denyed that ever she said so to him’.¹⁵¹ Lack of love between John and Hannah is also mentioned in the court records, as ‘another writing from Mistress Ferman was read, wherein it is testified that she heard goodwife [Hannah] Beard say, when she was John Ufootes wife, that it is a pittious cause that she must live with one that she did never love’.¹⁵² Hannah and John Ufoote’s marriage demonstrates the real-life applications of some of the lessons on sex, marriage, and infertility in the early modern period. Hannah, unhappy in her marriage, seemingly schemed her way out of it, bragging to neighbours that ‘when she was parted from John Ufoote, she would quickly be married againe’ and ‘that John Ufoote was a foole and she could make him say what she listed’.¹⁵³ Acting like a villainous character out of a broadside, Hannah was able to dissolve her marriage by denying her husband his conjugal rights but convincing him to attest to his own insufficiency. This battle, one of only nine divorce cases based on impotence in the New England colonies in the seventeenth century, was waged because of the disordered relationship between husband and wife, rather than physical problems or defective reproductive parts.¹⁵⁴

The outcome of the ‘ill carriages’ trial does seem to reflect this disharmony, however, and the court castigated Hannah for her wrongdoing, noting that ‘the Court heard these several passages....and doe conceive that the former devource, in respect of them which

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁵⁴ Roderick Philips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 70. There are varying statistics on the total number of divorce cases in New England in the seventeenth century due to definitional differences, but Roderick Philips supports Lyle Koehler’s count of 128 petitions of ‘termination of marriages’ that include annulment in cases of impotency. See Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The ‘Weaker Sex’ in Seventeenth-century New England* (Urbana, 1980), Appendix 1.

procured it, seems to be a horrible sinn, and goodwife Beard hath cause to lay it sadly to heart, for the scope of the prooffe seemes to runn that way if she did refuse her duty and befooled him and drawne him to say what she listed, to force herselfe out of his hand'.¹⁵⁵

Hannah was made to pay back the thirty pounds that John had been ordered to pay for 'wrong done by him to her' in the original divorce trial, as well as to pay an administrative court fee of ten pounds and 'make a full acknowledgement... of her miscarriages'. While her 'sinnes' were judged worthy of corporal punishment by the court, they were excused 'considering of Hannah Beard as a wife and subject to some weakness'.¹⁵⁶

The 'Feeble-Court' fumlbers, and the messy legal battles of Hannah and John Ufoote, illustrate the social ramifications surrounding the inability to meet the gendered responsibilities of marriage and represent disordered relationships between men and women. Social order perched precariously on husbands' abilities to control their dependants, and the sexual satisfaction of wives was an important familial and societal duty. As already noted, a basic responsibility of marriage was 'due benevolence', and it was for this reason that sterility (or inability to conceive) was differentiated from impotence (a 'catch-all' definition for male sexual dysfunction, including inability to have an erection, and premature ejaculation). Those unable to perform the sexual act were treated differently than those who went willingly to the marriage bed but were unable to produce viable offspring. It was for this reason that courts in both England and New England upheld that marriages could not be dissolved due to wives' barrenness (as they were still able to perform their marital duty of 'due benevolence' despite the inability to produce offspring). In England the anonymously-authored *Women's Petition Against Coffee* of 1674 captures this social message by making an outlandish, humorous appeal. The satire is staged as a 'Humble Petition and Address of

¹⁵⁵ Hoadley, *New Haven Records*, p. 212.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Several Thousands of Buxome Good-Women, Languishing in Extremity of Want.’¹⁵⁷

Lamenting ‘a very sensible Decay of that true Old English Vigour’, the ladies complain that ‘our Gallants [are] being every way Frenchified’ thanks to the ‘Newfangled, Abominable, Heathenish Liquor called coffee...drying up the Radical Moisture.’ In noting that ‘they are become as Impotent as Age, and as unfruitful as those Desarts whence that unhappy berry is said to be brought,’ ideas about virility take a nationalistic tone in this work in comparing England’s virility with that of other countries.¹⁵⁸

This rhetoric of reproductive competition grew in tandem with imperial concerns in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and *The Women’s Petition* voices the fears of degeneration, increasing immorality, and potential depopulation that plagued many Englishmen throughout the early modern period. John Marten both fuelled and capitalized on these fears by addressing infertility in *Gonosologium Novum* (1709), his work on venereal disease in the early eighteenth century. Marten warned that a man who was impotent was ‘Unfruitful, and not...able to Generate, and in that respect [was] a useless Member to the Common-wealth in which he live[d].’¹⁵⁹ The popular, anonymously-authored, *Onania* (1716), alerted readers to the connections between masturbation and infertility in both sexes and was published on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶⁰ Women who masturbated were more likely to suffer from the host of gynaecological ailments linked to barrenness that were discussed at the beginning of this chapter. *Onania*’s author provides a cautionary tale to young men, the group thought to be particularly susceptible to ‘self pollution’, by describing how

¹⁵⁷ Anon., *Women’s Petition Against Coffee* (London, 1674), title page.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ Marten, *Gonosologium Novum*, p. 59.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Stolberg addresses the problems of establishing authorship of *Onania* in his article ‘Self-Pollution, Moral Reform, and the Venereal Trade: Notes on the Sources and Historical Context of *Onania* (1716)’ *History of Sexuality*, 9 (2000), pp. 37-61. Stolberg convincingly argues that John Marten was possibly the author based on the similarities between *Gonosologium Novum* and *Onania* based on style and both texts’ heavy use of contemporary medical information about post-masturbatory disease (Stolberg, ‘Self-Pollution and Moral Reform’, p. 49-55). *Onania* was first published in Boston in 1724.

young persons of good Estates, in the Flower of their Age, find themselves bereft of Manhood, and conscious of their Impotence, are forc'd to decline the most advantageous Matches, and without the least Hopes of Posterity, remain the Contempt of other, and a Burden to themselves.... the Name and the Honour of an Ancient Family, extinct within themselves, must be buried in Oblivion.¹⁶¹

Cotton Mather also reprimanded his New England flock about masturbation in his sermon

The Pure Nazarite (1723) in which he tells young men that 'their Faults may be further chastised... in their not having any Offspring.'¹⁶² In his medical work *Angel of Bethesda*,

Mather also starkly refuses to prescribe remedies to those suffering from syphilis, or 'The Foul Disease', claiming that 'You are so Offensive to me, I'll do nothing for you.'¹⁶³

Infertility caused by masturbation or as a result of venereal disease was particularly loathsome as it stemmed from immoral behaviours. These works argued that such 'filthy' behaviour negatively affected the reproductive body, thereby linking the moral degeneration of society to depopulation.

Considered disordered and diseased, infertile male bodies were perhaps even more abhorrent than barren female bodies. Impotent men bore the reproductive responsibilities of not only their own families but those of the nation, and the consequences of sexual excess and inappropriate contacts were clearly communicated in these texts on venereal disease and masturbation. Thomas Foster argues that, in New England, 'by the end of the eighteenth century, the biblical edict to go forth and multiply had changed from a mission with implications for securing an outpost of the British Empire to one of generating a nation of virtuous American men.'¹⁶⁴ Thus the eighteenth century heaped new responsibilities on top of old anxieties about infertility on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹⁶¹ Anon., *Onania* (Boston, 1724), p. 24.

¹⁶² Cotton Mather, *The Pure Nazarite* (Boston, 1723), p. 8.

¹⁶³ Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, p. 120.

¹⁶⁴ Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-century Man*, p. xix.

Attitudes toward impotence in early modern England and colonial New England were expressed in conflicts between husbands and wives, debates about natural vs. supernatural causes and cures, and anxieties about familial responsibilities and societal duties. Puritan doctrine dictated many of the social messages about the importance of family and procreation in colonial New England, and the humour of English satire was replaced with solemn sermons about the responsibilities of marriage on the colonial frontier. Whether enfeebled by witchcraft, lusty wives, masturbation or coffee, 'pretending husbands' in the early modern period suffered the social and legal consequences of impotency in both societies.

Conclusion

While modern audiences assume that barrenness was primarily a woman's problem in the notoriously misogynist writing of the early modern period, close reading of midwifery and pseudo-medical texts highlights that infertility was attributed to both men and women. Most of the detailed information devoted to infertility does focus on women's reproductive disorders, but within these sections on 'barrenness', there are several open acknowledgements of male infertility as well. Both male and female reproductive organs could potentially be reproductively challenged, whether a womb was too slippery or a penis was too long. More importantly, fertility could be affected by the quality of sexual relations between men and women. Inappropriate couplings, determined by disparity of age, ill-matched humoral compositions, or lack of love, were all cited as reasons behind infertility in a couple. Women could be blamed for causing men's infertility and, occasionally, vice versa. Infertility in both sexes was the result of disordered bodies, disordered relationships, and disharmony between the natural and supernatural worlds. Whether described as rooted in physiological disorders, resulting from flawed social relationships, or as a spiritual and moral problem, the inclusion of all of these factors in early modern medical works illustrates the complicated ideology behind the causes of infertility in early modern England and colonial

New England as well as the close interplay of physical, social, and spiritual factors that were thought to influence patterns of reproduction.

Reproductive bodies were ones that interacted with, and were affected by, the natural world and other bodies in it. Female and male infertilities were deeply connected in the early modern period and, connected as they were to one another, they were also tied into the natural world. These connections are exhibited in medical texts, which, while containing bodily-based descriptions of ailments and their respective cures, also explain the ordering of worlds – natural, social, and spiritual. Early modern minds felt that the same natural forces – the four elements in the form of humours, influenced by emotions and behaviours – affected the mechanical workings of the body.

The reproductive body's interaction with the natural world and other bodies in it could have varying results. Deception could occur in a woman's own body by masking uterine problems with the symptoms of pregnancy, or it could manifest itself in the form of cuckolding women cheating on their 'pretending husbands'. Infertility was therefore deceptive within bodies and across relationships, and the disorder that characterized both scenarios was its hallmark. Women could be the authorities on reproductive bodies both inside the birthing room and the courtroom, in the pages of midwifery manuals or through the experience of being mothers themselves. Men and women had a considerable amount of control over each other's reproductive abilities – either through their sexual appetite and relations with each other or through the medical treatment of their reproductive bodies.

Disordered relationships between men and women could often result in infertility. While often described through the close analysis of flawed reproductive parts, or defective seeds, men and women had some ability to affect and correct the imbalances in each other. Men could be made impotent by being drained by overly lusty wives, and women could be

made infertile if their male partners' seeds were too cold or watery. Successful reproduction was ultimately the responsibility of a couple. While there is much more writing from the early modern period devoted to the 'diseases of women', often information about male infertility gets lost in those very same passages on barrenness. This information can be retrieved through close reading of these sections and bearing in mind the information that they include about the sexual relationship of the infertile couple. Each type of infertility seems to occupy a different space – women's infertility is usually kept within the bounds of midwifery manuals and books on women's health problems, whereas male infertility, usually in the form of impotence, appears more regularly in humorous literature and legal records. When these medical and legal authorities intersect they illustrate the close connection between bodily problems and social instability in both early modern England and colonial New England. Reading these sources together presents a much clearer picture of attitudes toward infertility, and the complex relationships between men and women, in the early modern period.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Upon the death of Mrs. Judith Hull in Boston in 1695, Samuel Sewall chose to honour his mother-in-law by publishing a broadside that characterized her as ‘Great Sarah’s faith, joind with Good Hannah’s Prayer; For Hearing of the Word, glad Maries Care; Aged Elizabeth’s Just Walk; to dwell Nigh Prophets, a true Shunamitish Zeal’.¹⁶⁵ In choosing these models to represent his mother-in-law, Sewall listed five women whose Biblical stories revolved around their struggles with infertility. Barrenness was a central theme used in the Bible to test and ultimately restore faith in God, and these stories were similarly used at the close of the seventeenth century in Boston to effectively communicate conduct lessons to an early modern audience. While Judith Hull, mother of five children, in no way resembled a ‘barren woman’, Sewall’s reference to these specific Biblical matriarchs highlights the resonance and relevance of the language of infertility in early modern society. As Amanda Porterfield notes, Judith’s only child to live to adulthood was named Hannah in reference to the Biblical Hannah whom she recognized as also being a woman of sorrow.¹⁶⁶ Religious language and Biblical parables largely influenced how early modern men and women conceptualised, explained, and managed their challenges with infertility. It shaped their relationships with their spouses, their children -- anticipated, realized, and lost – and their personal relationship with God. The barren wives of the Old Testament were familiar names to congregants

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Sewall, *Mrs. Judith Hull* (Boston, 1695), p. 1. ‘Shunamitish’ zeal refers to the unnamed, barren Shunamite woman who was told by Elisha that she would bear a son. (II Kings iv. 8-17) She represents the faithful woman. Elizabeth, cousin of the Virgin Mary and mother of John the Baptist, was childless until old age. (Luke i. 5-57). All Biblical references are King James Version.

¹⁶⁶ Porterfield argues that Judith Hull represents a paragon of female piety in early New England. It is through her experiences of the loss of four of her five children before adulthood and her devotion to the Church that ‘exemplified the interdependence of female suffering and social order essential to Puritan culture’: Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England* (New York, 1992), p. 123. Also see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, ‘The Vertuous Woman Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735’, *American Quarterly*, 28 (1976), pp. 20-40. Ulrich discusses how women became visible in ministerial literature in the New England colonies. She argues that the literary portrayal of feminine virtue, whether in the form of marriage sermons, advice on childbirth, or funeral sermons, was ‘remarkably consistent’ in early New England (p. 22).

through their frequent use in sermons and as their own namesakes, and the Biblical parables of overcoming fertility challenges provided women and men dealing with infertility and childlessness with examples of the right and wrong ways to bear their burden. This rhetoric also shaped New England colonists' relationship with their new landscape. The themes of promise and disappointment, faith overcoming doubt, and ultimately birth in the face of barrenness, provided early modern women and men with familiar characters, situations, and solutions through which to identify their problems and frame their own experiences of infertility.

These stories were used as lessons familiar to all English Protestants, but they took on particular urgency when coupled with the challenge of populating, organising, and regulating a far-flung colony. The particular Biblical trope of the barren woman, with its overt themes of assurance of grace, personal relationships with God, and tests of faith in the wilderness were especially powerful metaphors to the colonists embarking on setting up godly communities on 'these out-skirts of the earth'.¹⁶⁷ As such, there are some differences in the ways in which early modern English society and the New England colonies elected to repeat specifically chosen stories and to employ these Biblical archetypes in their messages about the ideal structure of society and the gendered responsibilities of men and women. While the religious sermons of English Anglican and Puritan ministers were tempered by contemporaneous, misogynistic satire about 'Good Wiving' and tracts declaring the difference between 'lewd and good women' in English popular texts, ballads, and broadsides, the well-ordered family and Old Testament examples only became more intrinsic and important in the structuring of society in New England. In the colonial landscape, the stakes were higher, the future of the entire colonial experiment more uncertain, and there was no room for humour regarding

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Thomas Shepard II to John Winthrop Junior in 1669, quoted in David D. Hall, 'Readers and Writers in Early New England', in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds.), *A History of the Book in America: Volume One, The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 142.

disobedience to the carefully-prescribed and all-important rules of family and societal structure. Mary Beth Norton contends that the centrality of God-ordered family life was as an organizing principle in colonial New England due to lack of institutional structures, and that families 'became even more important in North America than they had been in the mother country.'¹⁶⁸ As Edmund Morgan and John Demos have argued, the well-ordered, perfectly-formed family was the organizing principle around which the colonial experiment developed.¹⁶⁹

The religious role models and their lessons were repeated in the meeting-houses and recorded in the pious personal and published writing of the women and men of colonial New England, but there are no examples of their stories being likewise reproduced in light-hearted satire or ballads as occurred in England. As David D. Hall contends, the heavily religious literary culture of early New England was both a cause and a result of its particular social structure, and was based on 'the prevalence of godly books, the remarkable extent of book ownership and literacy, a book trade closely allied with the civil state, and the mobilization of authority speech and writing on behalf of a core set of values'.¹⁷⁰ The result, he maintains, was the production of a coherence of culture in New England that was unprecedented in England. The tight control by religious authorities and the physical distance of New England from the London booksellers meant that profane literature was not acquired or produced at high rates in New England, and the literature coming *out* of the colonies was similarly pious in nature. As Hall notes, 'Literary historians have proposed that the colonists broke new

¹⁶⁸ Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York, 1996), p. 39.

¹⁶⁹ Morgan's and Demos's books are seminal works in the history of the family in early New England. Both break down the different relationships within families, between husband and wife, parent and child, etc. and emphasize the centrality of the family as an organizing unit for the colony at large. Demos's work focuses exclusively on the family experience within Plymouth Colony, whereas Morgan's text covers the Massachusetts Bay Colony: Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-century New England* (New York, 1944); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford, 1970).

¹⁷⁰ Hall, 'Readers and Writers in Early New England', p. 131.

ground with forms like the “jeremiad” and the captivity narrative. But no one wrote plays or romances.’¹⁷¹

The evidential difference for historians lies most clearly in the limited and largely religious output of the colonial printing press. But the way that these Old Testament stories are used in personal accounts of reproductive challenges and child loss stories also portrays a colonial society in which, as Hall and other historians maintain, pious self-reflection strongly connected God’s influence to individual struggles with infertility.¹⁷² As Harrison Meserole maintains, ‘to a people constantly engaged in self-examination, all latent indications of God’s attitude toward an individual assumed high importance.’¹⁷³ To the people who characterized themselves as the new Israelites, faced with the challenge of populating a wilderness, stories of reproductive struggles and tests of faith in the Old Testament resonated even more strongly on the colonial frontier than in the developed society of England. This is not to say that providential reasoning linking infertility, and other personal tragedies, did not exist back in England, but the urgency of population concerns and the heavily religious tone of the New England colonial experiment present a particularly strong illustration of this kind of thinking.¹⁷⁴

The Biblical stories of barren women were used by early modern preachers and writers to convey different lessons and portrayed complex models of feminine behaviour falling in between the two extremes presented by the traditional Biblical binary of Eve and

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁷² The preeminence of religious literature as a product of the colonial printing press has been well-established by historians Hugh Amory and David D. Hall. See Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (eds.), *Bibliography and the Book Trade: Studies in the Print Culture of Early New England* (Philadelphia, 2005). Some historians, such as Jules Paul Seigel, disagree with this characterization. Seigel’s study on ‘Light Puritan Reading’ argues that ‘the tastes of the middle-class reader in New England, despite the Puritan theocracy, were relatively the same as those of the middle-class readers in England.’ See Seigel, ‘Puritan Light Reading’, *The New England Quarterly*, 37, (1964), p. 199; Seigel attributes the scarcity of invoices to differences in existing records. Attitudes toward infertility in popular literature are discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁷³ Harrison T. Meserole, *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1985), p. xxx.

¹⁷⁴ Alexandra Walsham has illustrated the prevalence of the belief of God’s direct intervention in everyday life in early modern England. See Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2001).

the Virgin Mary. These women were not presented as simply ‘good’ or ‘sinful’. The decisions that they struggled with in their respective sagas of infertility presented more multifaceted models for women reflecting on their own worldly dramas of being daughters, wives, and mothers. Like the early modern women listening to and reading their examples, these wives’ relationships with their husbands and reactions to their infertility varied. Early modern writers at once praised Sarah, wife of Abraham and ‘Mother of all Nations’ for her fidelity, and criticized her for her initial scepticism when God promised her a son in her old age. Michal, daughter of Saul, was lauded for her bravery in saving her husband King David from death but then castigated for the scornfulness she showed him upon his return to Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant, and she is the only woman who remains childless ‘until her dying day’.¹⁷⁵ Sarah’s story was used to convey the most fundamental lessons about faith and the importance of a strong marital relationship in the face of hopelessness, but it also raised questions about polygamy, a topic that early modern writers grappled with as they tried to make sense of Sarah’s decision to give her maid, Hagar, to Abraham in order for him to have a son. Hannah’s story of quiet and persistent prayer in the face of barrenness was often called upon to convey the lessons of patience and private devotion, and the resonance of her example is particularly represented in cases of early modern men and women longing for, meditating on, and praying for, long-awaited children. While Hannah was used as the prototype for the ‘correct way’ to bear the burden of infertility, the story of the reproductive rivalry between Leah and Rachel, wives of Jacob, was retold to exhibit the dangers of coveting children at all costs, but their joint roles as the ‘fruitful sisters of Israel’ presented other opportunities in the colonial context to represent the new landscape and its promising relationship to its settlers.

¹⁷⁵ 2 Samuel vi. 23.

The Well-Ordered Family

Religious language did not only provide examples through which to learn lessons of faith, sin, and salvation. It gave shape to the order of the most basic unit of organisation in early modern society: the family. As already discussed, the Biblically-informed ‘well-ordered family’ was integral to understanding how relationships were structured in early modern England and colonial New England, and its description was set down in a variety of prescriptive texts. William Gouge, a popular preacher in London by the time his most famous work, *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) was published, attracted large congregations for over thirty-five years, and his domestic manual served as an extension of his preaching. The work opens with a chapter that clearly states the source of Gouge’s information, i.e., ‘An Exposition of that Part of the Scripture out of which Domesticall Duties are Raised’ and relies heavily on Biblical passages, most prominently the Apostle Paul’s Epistles to the Ephesians. Its central message concerns the Biblical origins of the ordering of the household and ideas about domestic roles and responsibilities. This precise order dictates both the structure and the intent of the work, and there are eight chapters detailing the responsibilities of each member of the correctly-ordered family. Gouge addresses joint responsibilities within marriage in chapters such as ‘A Right Conjunction of Man and Wife’, and ‘Common-mutuall Duties betwixt Husband and Wife’ before he moves on to discuss ‘Particular Duties of Husbands,’ ‘Particular Duties of Wives’, as well as duties of children, parents, servants and masters. Gouge stresses the idea of joint responsibility, supported by the strict Pauline family hierarchy: man as the absolute head of household with women taking on subservient roles to their husbands. Gouge also emphasises the larger importance of the maintenance of this hierarchy of obedience in his own ‘Epistle Dedicatory’, stating ‘Necessary it is that good order be first set in families: for as they were before other polities, so they are somewhat the more necessary: and good members of a family are like to make good members of Church

and common-wealth.’¹⁷⁶ He therefore explicitly makes the connection between private household and public society, a key tenet propagated by Puritans in England and taken up by those establishing new colonies in North America.¹⁷⁷

New England minister Benjamin Wadsworth repeated these lessons in his series of sermons *The Well-Ordered Family*, published as a single text in Boston in 1712. Basing his structure on Gouge, he opens his work by stating, ‘Good Order in any society, renders it beautiful and lovely’ and the complementary sermons work together to emphasize the relative responsibilities of different members of the family unit, focusing on family prayer, duties of husbands and wives, duties of parents and children, and duties of masters and servants. Like Gouge, he emphasises the importance of the man as head of the household, and the duties of women as wives and mothers who must act along prescriptive lines. He advocates companionate marriage, noting the importance of well-matched spouses, and warning that ‘as the yoke fellow is suitable or unsuitable, so that Condition is like to be very comfortable or uncomfortable.’¹⁷⁸ Wadsworth’s family is well-ordered because it is carefully planned, and each stage of the development, from courting to childcare, is prescribed in his pages. Like Gouge, he supports his declarations with Biblical models for very practical advice across the lifecycle of a family unit, for example advocating breastfeeding for infants, proper child education, and exercising caution when choosing spouses for children. The well-ordered family, determined by a well-ordered marriage, was thus a familiar, and lasting, trope in the popular culture of early modern England and colonial New England. The works of ministers like Gouge and Wadsworth, despite being divided by the ocean and published almost a century apart, placed the family at the centre of society, and colourful Biblical examples were called on to reinforce norms and highlight transgressions of the constituent members.

¹⁷⁶ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ For more on order and its importance both inside and outside the domestic sphere, see Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988).

¹⁷⁸ Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family* (Boston, 1712), p. 25.

TREAT. III.		TREAT. IV.	
Particular duties of Wives.		Particular duties of Husbands.	
1	Wife, the general head of all wives duties, §. 1.	1	Husband and Love, the general heads of all husbands duties, §. 1, 4.
2	Acknowledgment of an husbands superiority, §. 3.	2	Acknowledgment of a wifes mere constitution, and fellowship with her husband, §. 4.
3	A due esteem of her own husband to be the best for her, and worthy of success on her part, §. 5.	3	A good esteem of his own wife to be the best for her, and worthy of love on his part, §. 9.
4	An inward wife-like love, §. 7.	4	An inward humane affection, §. 11.
5	An outward married carriage towards her husband, which consisteth in a wife-like sobriety, mildness, civility, and modesty in apparel, §. 9, 10, 11, 13.	5	An outward amiable carriage towards his wife, which consisteth in an husbands liberality, mildness, courteous acceptance of her civility, and allowing her to wear fit apparel, §. 4, 5, 22, 40, 43.
6	Reserved speech to and of her husband, §. 12, 14, 15, 16.	6	Mild and loving speech to and of his wife, §. 14, 25, 26, 30.
7	Obedience, §. 17.	7	A wife maintaining his authority, and forbearing to exact all that is in his power, §. 4, 18.
8	Forbearing to do without or against her husbands counsel. Each things as he hath power to order, as to dispose and order the common goods of the family, and the allowance for it, or children, servants, cattle, guests, company, &c. §. 18, 21, 28, 29, 40, 41.	8	A ready yielding to his wifes request, and giving a general civility and liberality unto her to order the affairs of the house, children, servants, &c. And a free allowing her something to belong as the best occasion, §. 18, 54.
9	A ready yielding to what her husband would have done. This is manifested by her willingness to dwell where he will, as come when he calls, and to do what he requires, §. 43, 44, 45, 46.	9	A forbearing to exact more than his wife is willing to do, or to force her to dwell where it is not meet, or to employ her to do things unmeet in themselves, or against her mind, §. 18, 26.
10	A patient bearing of any reproofs, and a ready redressing of that for which she is justly reprov'd, §. 47, 48.	10	A wife ordering of reproofs: not using it without just and weighty cause, and then privately, and meekly, §. 15, 38.
11	Contentment with her husbands present estate, §. 49.	11	A provident care for his wife, according to his ability, §. 46, 49, 50, 51.
12	Such a subjection as may stand with her subjection to Christ, §. 51.	12	A forbearing to exact any thing which stands not with a good conscience, §. 26.
13	Such a subjection as the Church prescribes to Christ, which is factors, pers, cheerful, conflict, for confidence sake, §. 54, 55, 56.	13	Such a love, as Christ beareth to the Church, and men to himself, which is full love, in deed, and truth, pers, chaste, conflict, §. 61, 62, and 74.

TREAT. III.		TREAT. IV.	
Aberrations of Wives from their particular duties.		Aberrations of Husbands from their particular duties.	
1	A bluntness, the general ground of the aberration of wives, §. 2.	1	W-ant of wisdom and love, the general ground of the aberrations of husbands, §. 1, 17.
2	A conceit that wises are their husbands equals, §. 4.	2	Too meagre account of wises, §. 8.
3	A conceit that she could better submit her self to any other man than to her own husband, §. 6.	3	A preposterous conceit of his own wifes to be the worst of all: and that he could lose any but her, §. 10.
4	An inward despising of her husband, §. 8.	4	Aetical disposition, without all heart of affection, §. 13.
5	Unseemly and unbecoming carriage towards her husband, manifested by lightness, dissimulation, coyness, and want in her state, §. 9, 10, 11, 12.	5	An unbecoming carriage towards his wife, manifested by his baseness, cynical vices of her, lascivious, lascivious, and niggedness, §. 5, 13, 17, 41, 44, 53.
6	Unseemly speech to and of her husband, §. 12, 14, 15, 16.	6	Hasty, proud, and bitter speeches, to and of his wife, §. 24, 25, 30, 32, 36, 39.
7	A stout standing on her own will, §. 17.	7	Losing of his authority, §. 5.
8	A peremptory violating to do things as she list without and against her husbands counsel. This is manifested by pious parking his goods, taking allowance, ordering children, servants, and cattle, shifting his fingers, making journeys, and votes, as he list listh, §. 41.	8	Too much strictness over his wife. This is manifested by refusing her from doing any thing without particular and specific consent, taking too strict account of her, and allowing her no more than is needful for her own private use, §. 19, 25.
9	An obstinate standing upon her own will, making her husband dwell where she will, and refusing to go when he calls, or to do any thing upon his command, §. 44, 45, 46, 67.	9	Too loosely a standing upon the highest step of her authority: being too frequent, insolent, and peremptory in commanding things frivolous, unseemly, and against his wises mind and conscience, §. 20, 22.
10	Difference at reproofs; giving word for word; and making warlike being reproved, §. 47, 48.	10	Rudeness and bitterness in reproving; and that too frequently, on slight occasions, and disgracefully before children, servants, and strangers, §. 25, 38, 39.
11	Discontent at her husbands estate, §. 50.	11	A careless neglect of his wife, and negligently dealing with her, and that in her weakness, §. 46, 51, 53.
12	Such a pleasing of her husband as offendeth Christ, §. 51.	12	A commanding of unseemly things, §. 26, 30, 32.
13	Such a subjection as is most unlike to the Churches, viz. fawning, servile, &c. §. 56, &c.	13	Such a disposition as is most unlike to Christ, and to that which a man beareth to himself, viz. completeness, impure, for by reproofs, unseemly, &c. §. 61, 62, and 74.

Figure 1. Page from William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) outlining the 'Particular duties' and 'Aberrations from their particular duties' of husbands and wives. The chart-like appearance of these pages emphasises the precise order of domestic relationships and their affiliated responsibilities in early modern England.

Gouge's work is useful to historians in presenting the ideal in an ideal way: the perfectly ordered work with well-balanced, clearly explained descriptions of roles and responsibilities of people whose lives were intimately (and financially, religiously, even physically) entwined. The crucial role that the family played in early modern society has been well-established by historians by using a variety of sources, and the wide variety of experiences represented through those studies gleaned from early modern diaries, letters, inventories, and portraits, both differs from and reinforces the ideal described in prescriptive works.¹⁷⁹ For every funeral broadsheet for a Judith Hull, the devoted wife, mother, and grandmother, there are court records or ballad lines detailing the breakdown of relationships due to a scolding wife or drunken husband. Comparing the real against the ideal most clearly illustrates the spectrum of possibilities of human behaviour, the variability that made up families in the early modern period and continues to make up families today.

The ideal of the well-ordered family, by its very definition, would seemingly have no place for discussions of infertility – the absence of children, the long-suffering barren couple, a wife experiencing multiple miscarriages, these characters do not fit into Gouge's neat charts, lest the interdependent network of responsibility would be broken. But prescriptive literature on the family *did* include information about what to do in the face of infertility, indicating infertility's relevance in early modern society, and writers such Gouge and Wadsworth provide information for those dealing with reproductive problems. The prescriptive literature about the well-ordered family, in both societies, always contained passages about children, but these writers did not condemn couples who failed to produce

¹⁷⁹ See Lawrence Stone's well-known, controversial, work *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1977) and Alan Macfarlane's counter-study, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* for a seminal debate over the role of love and emotional attachment in early modern families. For general studies of the early modern English family see Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London, 1982); Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1450-1800* (Harlow, 2001). On the particular patriarchal structure of society and families in early modern England, see Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995); Linda Pollock, 'Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of Family History*, 23 (1998), pp. 3-27.

children. They used the stories of the barren women of the Bible to instil values related to a wife's carriage toward her husband and to the individual's experiences with barrenness.

Inclusion rather than exclusion, explanation rather than condemnation, comfort rather than castigation, mark how these stories of barren women were represented within the conduct literature of early modern England and colonial New England. Both regions shared a common, religiously-based, language in their writing about the family and about the implications of infertility when it occurred. Barrenness presented the opportunity to learn specific lessons, and therefore the 'well-ordered' family was well-versed in the language of infertility in the Bible.

'But Sarai was barren; she had no child'¹⁸⁰: Infertility and Attitudes toward Marriage

The story from the Book of Genesis of Abraham and Sarah, barren until the divinely-appointed birth of their son Isaac, provided a channel through which to communicate ideas about tests of faith both within and outside the bonds of marriage.¹⁸¹ The couple's advanced age and Sarah's lifelong barrenness made God's promise that Sarah would give birth particularly outlandish. Sarah, thinking that she would have no children, gave her Egyptian servant Hagar to Abraham in order that '[she] may obtain children by her'. Abraham, 'hearkening to the voice of Sarah, went in unto Hagar, and she conceived'.¹⁸² Hagar gave birth to a son, Ishmael, and was sent into the desert by Sarah, whom she 'despised' due to her barrenness. Sarah, in accordance with God's covenant with Abraham, went on to have her own son, Isaac, whose birth fulfilled the promise that God 'will bless her, and she shall be a

¹⁸⁰ Genesis xi, 30.

¹⁸¹ Sarai's name was changed to 'Sarah' as part of the covenant God made with Abram, whose name was also changed to Abraham meaning 'father of multitudes', as described in Genesis xvii. Abram and Sarai will be referred to as Abraham and Sarah subsequently.

¹⁸² Genesis xvi, 2.

mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.’¹⁸³ Despite the earlier birth of Ishmael, God promised to ‘establish my covenant with [Isaac] for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.’¹⁸⁴

The story of Abraham and Sarah, with its emphasis on faith in God and the strength of the marital bond, was a particularly potent story in the religious culture of Protestant England, and it was utilized by Puritan ministers seeking to convey messages relevant to early modern society. Josias Shute, a mid-seventeenth century preacher in London, used the story of Sarah, Abraham and Hagar to communicate moral lessons about marriage to his congregation. Nineteen of his lengthy sermons on the sixteenth chapter of Genesis were published posthumously as *Sarah and Hagar* (1649) and therein contained line-by-line analysis and every day ‘application’ of the particular lessons of Abraham and his two wives.¹⁸⁵ Shute uses the story of Sarah and Hagar to convey worldly lessons about patience and love, and even to debate the question of polygamy. As he does so, the modern reader is exposed to an interpretation of Scripture that is infused with early modern concerns and problems described through Shute’s line-by-line analysis of the ancient text. Additionally, Josias Shute, in spite of being married to the same woman for 24 years, did not have any children himself, perhaps explaining his close attention to this particular chapter and his compassionate analysis of the drama of infertility in Genesis 16. His particularly close attention to the infertility struggles of Abraham and Sarah may therefore be a rare opportunity to glimpse a personal drama playing out in the published writing of the early modern preacher, a story with personal parallels that was projected in a very public way.

¹⁸³ Genesis xvii,16.

¹⁸⁴ Genesis xvii, 19.

¹⁸⁵ ODNB, s.v. ‘Josias Shute’, accessed 10 March 2014.

First, Shute addresses the fact that Abraham and Sarah were both concerned that they had physical impairments that prevented them from having children. Of Abraham, Shute argues that

He was troubled because he had no childe, and discovered some infirmity, which yet God took not advantage of, but satisfied his fears. And now his wife is troubled; she had taken knowledge of the promise, but yet seeing the time deferred, and that it was not said expressly, that though Abraham should have seed, yet he should not have it by her... Thus man and wife may have their turns in tentation, the one may be exercised as well as the other, and God in His wisdom will have it so, that they may be a mutual comfort to each other under their afflictions.¹⁸⁶

Shute also refers to other Biblical barren couples in this passage, and he thus presents barrenness as a problem that was shared by both partners. As discussed in the previous chapter, this idea is supported in medical literature of the early modern period as well, as chapters on reproductive challenges often explained infertility as a problem between or within a couple rather than the burden of one partner alone.

Central to his application of this case to contemporary societal problems is Shute's emphasis on the emotional responsibilities of wives and husbands within marriage. It is a 'miserable thing' that a man 'cannot comfort his wife in her trouble... but leaves her to pine away in her grief: and also when a wife seeing her husband in affliction, shall have no compassion of him, nor speak comfortably to him.' In Shute's analysis of the story, marital love and compassion are the only way to deal with the affliction of infertility.¹⁸⁷ He urges his congregants to follow the same example by explaining that Sarah 'did not lay any fault upon her husband, not did he upon her... He upbraided her not for her barrenness; but she honoured him, and he lovingly respected her.' Shute's references to love banishing the stigma of barrenness within marriage are supported by other domestic manuals of the period, such as

¹⁸⁶ Josias Shute, *Sarah and Hagar, Or, the Sixteenth Chapter of Genesis Opened* (London, 1649), p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Shute, *Sarah and Hagar*, p. 4.

those by William Gouge and William Whately, and by the work of historians who have emphasized the importance of affective, loving marriages in the early modern period.¹⁸⁸ As the poems of New England colonist Anne Bradstreet affirm, conjugal love and mutual affection were integral to her marital relationship, even in the face of the infertility she suffered in the early years of her marriage. In a poem entitled *Another* in the series *Letter to her Husband, Absent upon Publick Employment*, included in her book of poetry, *The Tenth Muse* (1650), Bradstreet expresses her longing for her husband clearly through verse, writing, ‘Mine being gone, I lead a joyless life/ I have a loving peer, yet seem no wife: But worst of all, to him can’t steer my course/ I here, he there, alas, both kept by force.’¹⁸⁹ Bradstreet’s writing is a personal account of the strength of a Puritan marriage, or at least the potential strength of a well-matched pair. While the Bradstreets’ fabled marriage has been lauded as an especially loving union, and therefore perhaps atypical in its overt expression of love, the deep emotion that characterised this particular marital relationship reinforces the prescriptive literature’s characterisation of the ideal early modern marriage. Love was essential on many levels in a well-ordered early modern Christian marriage, and even on a physical level when it came to prospective fertility. As medical authorities of the early modern period maintained, the ‘Want of love between man and Wife [was] another cause of Barrenness.’¹⁹⁰ Want of love could also extend to want of sexual relations, and Erik Seeman argues that attitudes toward celibacy were different in early modern English and colonial New English religious circles. New England religious authorities were less tolerant of the practice of celibacy, and Seeman argues that New England ministers, under different cultural and

¹⁸⁸ On the importance of love in early modern marriage, see Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, pp. 174-208.; Keri Boyd McBride, *Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh, 2002); John Gillis, *For Better for Worse: British Marriages, 1600-Present* (New York, 1985); Rosemary O’Day, *Women’s Agency in Early Modern Britain and the American Colonies : Patriarchy, Partnership and Patronage* (Harlow, 2007); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Religion, Ritual, and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997).

¹⁸⁹ Anne Bradstreet, *Another [Letter to her Husband, Absent upon Publick Employment]*, lines 21-24. Reprinted in Harrison T. Meserole (ed.), *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century*, (University Park, PA, 1985), p. 34.

¹⁹⁰ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 70.

demographic pressures, vehemently opposed celibacy due to its potential to destroy the fundamental social organization in New England: the godly-ordered family.¹⁹¹

Shute is particularly vocal about how the issue of Sarah's barrenness prompted her to seek a solution through the introduction of another woman into her husband's bed. Sarah, thinking herself irrevocably barren despite God's message to Abraham that he would have a son, took matters into her own hands and gave her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to Abraham, saying, 'Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her'.¹⁹² Shute describes Hagar as an instrument used by Sarah, and clearly discourages his parishioners from following this example of polygamy. He extends his denunciation of Sarah's decision by asking, 'Shall a man, because he lacketh a wife, go and steal one? Because his wife bears him no children, shall he beget them on others?' Comparing such actions to other recognized moral misbehaviours such as stealing money and lying, Shute declares that 'the want of things discontenteth people: and then, forsooth, because God restraineth his hand, they will furnish themselves.'¹⁹³ Polygamy was a contentious issue, and a criminal act, in early modern English society, and one that was frequently debated in relation to issues of populousness, sex ratios, and concern over heirs.¹⁹⁴ Shute is very clear in his condemnation of Sarah and Abraham's actions, and, citing other cases of polygamy in the Bible, declares that 'The Polygamy of the Fathers, then, was a fault. And let not men wonder, that it should never, in all that time, be reprov'd.'¹⁹⁵ Instead, he encourages his parishioners to consider the reasons behind Abraham and Sarah's decisions,

¹⁹¹ Erik Seeman, "'It is Better to Marry than to Burn': Anglo-American Attitudes toward Celibacy, 1600-1800", *Family History* 24 (1999), pp. 397-419.

¹⁹² Genesis xvi, 2.

¹⁹³ Shute, *Sarah and Hagar*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁴ See John Cairncross, *After Polygamy was Made a Sin: the Social History of Christian Polygamy* (London, 1974); Bernard Capp, 'Bigamous Marriage in early modern England', *Historical Journal*, 52 (2009), pp. 537-556; Margaret Pelling, 'Too Many Women: John Graunt, the Sex Ratio and Polygamous Misogyny in Seventeenth-Century England', chapter in forthcoming book, edited by Sarah Toulalan. I am grateful to Dr. Pelling for sharing the unpublished draft with me.

¹⁹⁵ Shute, *Sarah and Hagar*, p. 42.

namely, the want of children, and to remove any indication of lust from the difficult situation. He reasons that the decision was made 'for issue sake, the wife here giveth her handmaid, and for the same cause Abraham taketh her, by both of them, the fruit of the womb, and not the pleasure, is desired.'¹⁹⁶ It is a tenuous argument, and Shute walks a precarious line that requires several pages of close reading, explanation, and discussion about the problems associated with Sarah's encouragement to Abraham to take Hagar as a wife.¹⁹⁷ Far from striking a comfortable balance, Shute grudgingly accepts polygamy's existence in the past but also clearly discourages his listeners from entertaining any thought of following this path in early modern English society.

Shute also uses the opportunity to share information about the reception of infertility in the wider community. Looking outside of marriage, he urges men and women not to reproach their barren neighbours. This, he argues, is a question of faith and of personal egos superseding the pre-eminence of God's will. In using multiple examples from the Bible, ranging from Hannah to Elizabeth, he illustrates the social stigma of barrenness in society and counters that such judgement is in fact 'irreligious, for it doth imply a denial, at least a questioning, of that power and sovereignty that God hath over the conception and bearing of children.'¹⁹⁸ Shute believes that the question of fertility ultimately rests in God's hands, and that it is wrong to question, ridicule, or doubt His effectiveness in such matters. God has effectively 'shut up Sarah's womb', and Shute uses the contemporary, worldly example of locked and unlocked houses. He explains to his parishioners that 'God, that great Master of Nature, doth by the wombs of women, locks them or opens them, restrains them from bearing, or gives them the ability to bring forth children.' In granting such power to 'God,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹⁷ There is much debate amongst Biblical scholars about whether or not Hagar gained the status of wife of Abraham as a result of being 'given' to him by Sarah. For a discussion of the debate and overview of the Hammurabi Laws pertaining to this case, see Tammi Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (New York, 2004), pp. 47-53.

¹⁹⁸ Shute, *Sarah and Hagar*, p. 15.

that great Master of Nature,' he also admonishes his parishioners that 'if we have not the latitude of health that we would have, we must acknowledge it to be Gods doing.'¹⁹⁹ As Andrew Wear has noted in his analysis of seventeenth-century Puritan diaries, this position mirrors the Puritan 'partial spiritualisation of illness' as well.²⁰⁰ God gave medicine to humans to heal themselves, but ultimately the distinction between health and illness, and, in this case, fertility and infertility, rested in His hands.

Other writers in early modern England took a far less serious view of polygamy and infertility through the analogy of barren Biblical characters. In the humorous text, *A Marriage Sermon, called A Wife Mistaken* (1641), Thomas Grantham addresses Old Testament polygamy by satirizing the case of Jacob and his two wives Leah and Rachel. In Genesis 29, Jacob is tricked by Laban into marrying, and bedding, his daughter Leah instead of the woman whom Jacob loves and has agreed to marry, Laban's other, younger daughter, Rachel. The rivalry between the two women for Jacob's love, and for his offspring, is a story repeated often in early modern society for a variety of purposes, but in Grantham's text the familiar parable is playfully used to represent the duplicitous nature of women in general. As Grantham notes, 'there is many a man so blinded in his love & affection that he is as much or more mistaken in the qualities of his wife then Jacob was in the person of Leah.'²⁰¹ In marrying one woman, a man is potentially taking on the two (or more) personalities of that woman, and Grantham warns against the dangers of the intemperate, dangerous beauty of Rachel as opposed to the steadfast, although 'blear-eyed' Leah. Grantham himself seems undecided on which option is the better of the two, and his mock indecision highlights that there is no right answer when it comes to choosing a wife. While Rachel is loved by Jacob

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁰⁰ Wear, 'Puritan Perceptions of Illness in Seventeenth Century England', p. 57.

²⁰¹ Thomas Grantham, *A Marriage Sermon, called a Wife Mistaken* (London, 1641), pp. 3-4. According to Grantham, there were four editions of this work, and there are extant versions from 1641, 1643, and 1656. I am grateful to Clive Holmes for this bibliographic information.

and praised for her beauty, in spite of her reproductive problems, Grantham warns that the impatient Rachel is ‘but like a faire house haunted with sprites, or a bed of violets with a serpent’ and he reminds the reader that Rachel is famously, and unhappily, barren until she obtains mandrakes from Leah and conceives.²⁰² She is also the only woman in the Bible to die in childbirth. Both women are chosen to represent the multifarious personalities of early modern women, and it is noteworthy that, while Grantham refers to Eve and other traditionally-cited ‘treacherous’ Biblical women only briefly, he chooses these Biblical examples to warn his fellow men about the dangers of the opposite sex. In his conclusion, he concedes that ‘if it please God to give us Leah, instead of Rachel, to give us that which pleaseth us not so well, let us be content with it and serve him on still, he will at the last give us Rachel, we shall be married to him in whom are all joys.’²⁰³ Grantham’s satire is just one in a series of misogynistic satirical writing that uses the examples of barren Biblical women to communicate ideas about early modern women. In using the controversial question of polygamy as its ‘hook’, Grantham instead turns the parable into an opportunity to warn men about the two-faced nature of women and the institution of marriage in early modern England.

William Whately’s well-known work, *A Bride-Bush, or A Direction for Married Persons* (1619), lists several stories of barren women together as examples of how *not* to behave in marriage. The combination of verses and lessons about these barren women is not an unusual method, as their names are mentioned side-by-side in many religious texts as a familiar collection of the Biblical women challenged by barrenness. Whately’s use of three examples – Sarah, Rachel, and Michal -- to exemplify bad behaviour prominently displays one particular characteristic shared by those who were barren: disobedience to their husbands

²⁰² Ibid., p. 7.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 10.

-- a clear transgression of a Biblical code that had important social repercussions in early modern England. Whately writes that

Herein Sarah once faulted...“Thou dost me wrong (saith she), and God be judge between me and thee” (Gen. 16.5). Herein also Rachel offended, that came to her husband fuming, and in a pelting chafe must needs chide with him for children saying, “Give me children or else I die.” Though Jacob loved Rachel tenderly, yet (you know) he could not brook this rudeness without anger (for his wrath was kindled) and he said, “Am I in God’s place, that hath denied to thee the fruit of the womb” (Gen. 30.1-2). Herein also Michal, Saul’s daughter and David’s wife, though a Queen yet was much out of the way. For she came scoffing and flouting to the King her husband (a thing of the two less tolerable than wrath and rage, because it shows a more allowed contempt) and, “How glorious (saith she) was the King of Israel this day etc.” (2 Sam. 6.20), when her husband, in her conceit (though not indeed), had carried himself somewhat unfittingly for the place of a King.

Whately is unequivocal in his condemnation of disobedience, and the sum of these three women’s stories is more powerful than the individual lessons would be if they were repeated in separate passages. He notes that

these examples tend to show how subject women are to disreverent passages of speech, and withal how loathsome and unwomanly they be. Yet for all these examples and warnings, we want not women (if the name of the woman be not wronged in giving it to such shameless creatures) that chaste and scold their husbands, railing upon them and reviling them, and shaking them up with such terms as were nothing sufferable towards a neighbour or a servant. Stains of womankind, blemishes of their sex, monsters in nature, botches of the family, rude, shameless, graceless, next to harlots if not the same with them.²⁰⁴

These are harsh words, and Biblical, notably barren, stereotypes for women who did not conform to the strict patriarchal hierarchy that permeated early modern English society and insisted on committing the ‘aberrations of duties’ listed by William Gouge. Gouge also underlines his message about the responsibilities of the idealized wife by making frequent

²⁰⁴ William Whately, *A Bride-Bush* (London, 1619), reprinted in Lloyd Davies (ed.), *Sexuality and Gender in the English Renaissance: An Annotated Edition of Contemporary Documents* (London, 1998), p. 262. Other prominent marital sermons with similar messages include, Richard Meggot, *The Rib Restored* (London, 1656); two sermons by Thomas Gataker published as *A Good Wife, Gods Gift: and a Wife Indeed, Two Marriage Sermons* (London, 1623).

reference to her opposite, i.e., stereotypes of ‘bad women’, calling them, ‘unchaste strumpets, untrusty gossips, unquiet shrews, and proud dames’.²⁰⁵ Gouge and Whately’s texts describe both ends of the spectrum, and their stark condemnation of certain behaviours succinctly provides examples of negative female stereotypes that appear elsewhere in the literature of early modern English society.²⁰⁶ These prescriptive works effectively portray the ideal but also, relying on the use of barren women from the Bible, describe behaviours that were negatively received, thereby very clearly highlighting the close association between religious, social, and bodily transgressions.

A good marriage was the cornerstone to a strong family, heavily dependent on the choice of a good wife, and it was generally a subject that was open to serious religious contemplation as well as satirical illustration. As recommended by the author of one early seventeenth-century text, *A Discourse on Marriage and Wiving* (1620), men should seek wives who are ‘as beautiful as Sara, as vertuous as Anna, as obedient as the Virgin Mary’.²⁰⁷ The author of this text, Alexander Niccholes, admittedly a ‘Batchelour in the Art he never yet put in practice’ presents a humorous take, directed toward men, on questions central to choosing a partner. It is notable that, even given the satirical tone of his work, Niccholes relies on the same Biblical examples to most clearly convey his message about marital order and gender roles. The text is devoted to advising on such subjects as ‘how to tell a good woman from bad...‘what years are the most convenient for marriage’ and, broaching the subject of children, considers the question that ‘since the end of marriage is issue, whether it be lawful for old couples to marry, that are past hope of children.’ Niccholes clearly identifies the pre-eminence of children as being a goal of marriage, and he equally unsurprisingly

²⁰⁵ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ The scold was a particularly popular negative stereotype of women in early modern literature. See Lynda E. Boose, ‘Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), pp. 179-213.

²⁰⁷ Alexander Niccholes, *A Discourse on Marriage and Wiving* (London, 1620), p. 7.

favours marriage in youth over unions in later years. Niccholes advises men to ‘Rejoyce in the wife of thy youth’ and centres his argument for this on bodily representations of virility and health. ‘In thy youth whilst thou hast bloud in thy veines, and marrow in thy bones, health in thy loynes, and security in thy sufficiency, then thou maist beget offspring’. For begetting children, the youth of the wife is the most important element of the union, for, ‘if the wife be yong enough, though the husband be neare to decrepiti, shee shall not be out of all likely hood to see increase of her body.’²⁰⁸ It is possible, then, for men to beget children in later years, but it is not advisable. While the tone of Niccholes’ advice is humorous, his text touches on some of the most common themes of marital advice also included in the sermons of Shute, Gouge, and Whately: how to identify a good wife, the best time of life to get married, and how to maintain harmony within a marriage so that you will beget children.

The lessons of the Old Testament thus taught men and women how to behave in their relationships with each other in addition to teaching them how to deal with their reproductive problems. Whately and Gouge’s texts were serious about communicating ideas about gender hierarchy and describing the range of behaviours, both good and bad, that women could exhibit in marriage. Other attempts at communicating information about early modern gender relations clearly should be cast into the same, humorous, category as Grantham and Niccholes, who chose to use these stories for satire and to reinforce stereotypes of ‘lewd’ and ‘good’ women for entertainment.²⁰⁹ The messages, and the Biblical archetypes, are the same, but they are used in completely different ways and reference the problem of infertility directly.

Gouge also frankly addresses the issue of infertility, albeit more seriously, in his discussion of marriage and makes a clear distinction between impotency and barrenness,

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁰⁹ See, for example, Edward Midwinter, *Look E’re You Leap* (1720).

thereby agreeing with Shute's assertion in his analysis of Abraham that infertility in a relationship could be attributable to both partners.²¹⁰ Impotence, Gouge maintains, 'may by outward sensible signes be knowne and discerned' whereas 'barrenness cannot: it is not discerned by want of child-bearing.' Whereas 'impotent persons cannot yeeld due benevolence... such as are barren may.' As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, due benevolence was a keystone of Puritan marriage and one that frequently arises in early modern legal cases, medical literature, and even popular literature addressing the correct expression of love between husband and wife. Gouge's most important distinction between impotence and barrenness was the irreversibility of impotency, claiming that it was 'incurable: but barrenness is not simply so.' Gouge also calls on the now familiar Old Testament characters to support his claim that barrenness is not a lifelong state: after all, 'many after they have beene a long while barren have become fruitfull...whereof daily experience giveth good evidence: for many after 10, 15, 20, and more years barrennesse have brought forth children'.²¹¹ Citing the examples of several saints as well, Gouge puts 'procreation of children' into context, explaining that 'though it be one end of marriage, yet it is not the only end: so inviolable is the marriage bond, that though it be made for childrens sake, yet for want of children it may not be broken.'²¹² He underscores his point by declaring in Latin: *sterilem coniugem fas non est relinquere*, or 'it is not right to leave an unfruitful wife'. As discussed in the previous chapter, the legal authorities in both early modern England and colonial New England agreed with this edict.

As the analysis of these early modern English sermons and conduct literature, both earnest and satirical, has shown, the Bible and, specifically, lessons involving barrenness in

²¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Shute acknowledges the possibility of male infertility in his analysis of Genesis 16. Modern Biblical scholars assert that men were never infertile in the Hebrew Bible, but 'that the problem always resides with the woman, sometimes because yet another male figure, God, has "closed up her womb."' See Lilian R. Klein, *Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 2003), p. 4. Shute instructs husbands and wives not to blame each other and therefore implies that it could be either partner's fault.

²¹¹ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, p. 182.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

couples, from Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob, Leah and Rachel, were reproduced and disseminated in a variety of texts throughout early modern English culture. At the core of Gouge and Wadsworth's 'Well-Ordered Family' was a strong marital relationship and the parables cited were used to communicate very real concerns in early modern marriages in England which were then exported across the Atlantic. But the humorous publications, such as the works by Grantham and Niccholes, which circulated in England, were not reproduced on a grand scale in New England. In the colonies, the 'Well-Ordered Family', armed with the lessons of its Biblical forebears, faced the much more sober prospect of populating a wilderness.²¹³

Biblical scholar Hemchant Gossai argues that the story of Sarah and Abraham was in fact the most powerful way to establish the idea of faith in the Hebrew Bible, and notes that God intentionally starts from barrenness in order to emphasise the prospect of 'newness.'²¹⁴ Given this interpretation, the responsibility of the Abrahamic Covenant, and its designation of a 'chosen people', were internalized and interpreted by the colonists as a challenge that mirrored Abraham's own journey into Canaan, and their futures similarly depended on becoming 'mothers and fathers of nations' in their own right. These Old Testament stories of barrenness were appropriated for different purposes when considered against the backdrop of colonization and with new consideration of the success of the 'well-ordered family' and ultimately a society's survival.

²¹³ Peter Carroll stresses the centrality of the wilderness in shaping English Puritan experience and culture in the New World, arguing that 'this dialogue between the European mind and American environment can be analysed in the context of Puritan attitudes and responses to the wilderness'. Using Old Testament metaphors, the Puritan colonists were challenged by the wilderness that they encountered and its paradoxical ability to be both 'a paradise... and a wasteland': Peter Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: the Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier 1629-1700* (New York, 1969), pp. 1, 5.

²¹⁴ Hemchant Gossai, *Barrenness and Blessing: Abraham, Sarah, and the Journey of Faith* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 6.

‘I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit’²¹⁵ : Reproductive Challenges and Personal Piety

The Biblical stories of Sarah and Abraham, Jacob and his two wives, and Michal and King David, were frequently-used examples, but offer little consistency for how early modern couples actually should apply their lessons of infertility. There was one Biblical parable that early modern authors called on more often than any other to represent the ‘correct way’ of dealing with infertility: the story of Hannah, eventual mother of the prophet Samuel. Hannah’s personal suffering and private prayer set the example for many Puritans experiencing reproductive challenges to follow, and her story was also particularly referenced around the births and deaths of children. In sermons and prescriptive literature, Hannah’s quiet patience is often pitted against Rachel’s outcries, and she stands as the pious antithesis of Rachel’s petulant rejection of her barren state. The story of Hannah’s barrenness appears in sermons of both England and New England, and it is especially notable for its frequent presence in the personal writing of both men and women. Through the parable of Hannah, in particular, modern readers are therefore given access to the personal experience of reproductive problems and the emotional and spiritual value of children in early modern England and colonial New England.

Hannah, wife of Elkanah, was distraught after suffering years of abuse by her husband’s other, fertile, wife, Penninah, because ‘Penninah had children, but Hannah had no children.’²¹⁶ Long-suffering Hannah prayed fervently and made a private vow that if God would grant her a son, she would promise to dedicate this son to God. God ‘remembered’ Hannah, she conceived, and gave birth to a son whom she named Samuel.²¹⁷ This story

²¹⁵ Samuel 1:15.

²¹⁶ Samuel I.

²¹⁷ See Eve Levin, ‘The Barren Woman Giving Birth in the Bible: From the Matriarchs to the Monarchy’ (Unpublished B.A. thesis, Harvard College, 1986).

resonated in the minds of Puritan writers in that, as the result of a personal covenant with God, this barren woman gave birth to a son who went on to be His great servant as judge and prophet.

Promising a son to God was also a custom that was recorded by seventeenth-century English writer John Aubrey, who recorded its practice in his work, *Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, part of his *Three Prose Works*.²¹⁸ Aubrey recorded antiquarian customs present in English culture before the Civil War, and, alongside tales of folk traditions of love potions and divination, Aubrey noted that ‘Mr. George Dickson, now rector of Brampton, near Northampton, was by his breeding mother devoted to the office of the ministry, to which he was bred and ordained, though heir to a plentiful estate.’²¹⁹ The legacy of Hannah’s promise, then, could override worldly wealth and directly affect the lives of children born to grateful parents during the early modern period. As it did the case of New England wife and mother Experience Wight Richardson, who joyfully references the story of Hannah when her son is taken into the ministry in Wells, Maine in March 1756. Richardson notes that she has ‘Reeason to sing Hannah’s song’ for ‘that is what I have Longed for a great while I cant be thankful enough.’ In reflecting on her son’s chosen profession, she claims that ‘I prayed as Hannah did for Samuel before I was like to have him I had been married so long I was afraid I should have none but God Graciously answered my prayer and gave me a man child and I have given him to the Lord and now I lend him to the Lord again.’ Richardson’s jubilant diary entry traces the themes of longing, appreciation, and the comprehension of the ‘forward-paying’ covenant that characterises the story of Hannah and how it was

²¹⁸ While Aubrey’s writing has been of much interest to historians as a record of English traditions in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, most of his writing went relatively unnoticed until the late twentieth century. Aubrey included folklore and local customs among his interests, and he described himself as an antiquarian: ODNB, s.v. ‘John Aubrey’, accessed 11 March 2014.

²¹⁹ John Aubrey, *Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, reprinted in Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing (eds.), *Women’s Worlds in Seventeenth-century England: a Sourcebook* (London, 2000), p. 65.

appropriated by early modern women to reflect on their own relationships with God and their children.²²⁰

Biblical scholar Lilian Klein maintains that the marginalisation of Hannah by her rival, Penninah, and even by her husband is also a key message behind the story of Hannah. Not only does Hannah endure the pain of frustrated fertility patiently and silently, she also wrongly bears the social stigma attached to infertility. Klein's analysis uses the modern tools of psychology and anthropology to explore and discount issues of mimetic desire and projection, and ultimately she maintains that Hannah's torment came from her own personal disappointment in her infertility and that she was not envious of Penninah. Hannah therefore 'reinforces the patriarchal image of women' in Hebrew society.²²¹ Simply put, in the Hebrew Bible, all women wanted to be mothers. According to Klein, Hannah manages to avoid the typically female frailty of jealousy but ultimately conforms to patriarchal models by channelling all of her energy and prayer into her desire for a child.²²² In contrast, Michelle Osherow maintains that Hannah's story was used in early modern England to challenge that patriarchy by empowering the female voice through a personal covenant with God and through the 'linguistic authority' provided by motherhood. Gender, Osherow argues, is central to Hannah's story. Hannah presents a complex case to the Protestant patriarchal family and society by taking matters into her own hands and praying privately to God for a child, thus presenting a 'font of inconsistency' for a society that valued the silence and subjection of women.²²³ The early modern reality was somewhere in between these two scholarly characterizations of Hannah, and it must be noted that Hannah's story was used by men as much as by women for its lessons of private devotion and as an example of public

²²⁰ Experience Wight Richardson, *Diary from Sudbury, MA, 1728-1782*, eds. Ellen Richardson Glueck and Thelma Smith Ernst (Boston, 1978), pp. 38-9.

²²¹ Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, p. 54.

²²² See Chapter 3 of Klein's book, 'Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer' in *From Deborah to Esther*, pp. 41-54.

²²³ Michelle Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 60.

thanksgiving for a long-awaited child. Whether reinforcing or challenging the patriarchal model of the Old Testament and early modern society, Hannah's story was clearly being referenced by both genders, and in both personal and public writing, to communicate ideas about the intersection of personal and communal experience in times of reproductive challenges. This is particularly helpful in understanding the experience of individuals suffering reproductive challenges in colonial New England, as there is a regrettable lack of women's personal writing surviving for the colonial period.

The Boston minister Benjamin Colman uses Hannah's ill treatment, in conjunction with other lessons gleaned from the stories of barren women, as a warning to his parishioners about how they should and should not treat their barren neighbours.

If God blesses thee with Children and builds up thy Family, Do not despise the Neighbour who is not blessed in this instance as you are. Hagar had no sooner Conceived, but Sarah her Mistress was despised in her Eyes. Hannah's Enemy vexed her because she was barren. Leah glorified over poor fretful Rachel; having so many Sons to show and her Sister none.²²⁴

In doing so, Colman hearkens back to Shute's sermon regarding the removal of the stigma of barrenness within communities, and he also includes Hannah's suffering at the hands of 'her enemy' Penninah. Hannah, with her profound suffering and personal, private piety, was therefore an especially powerful Biblical figure for Puritan men and women to relate to. Her character aligns with the deeply introspective, personal, particularly feminine, piety that Amanda Porterfield argues characterized the culture of early New England.²²⁵ Preachers such as Colman used Hannah as the prototypical barren woman to emulate in terms of personal behaviour and the triumphant outcome of her struggle, but her example impacted on Puritan New England society outside the meeting-house and pages of sermons as well.

²²⁴ Colman, *Some of the Honours that Religion Does unto the Fruitful Mothers of Israel* (Boston, 1715), p. 19.

²²⁵ Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England*, pp. 3-13.

Cotton Mather was one such Puritan who used the story of Hannah to express his ideas about barrenness publicly but also to reflect on his own familial struggles with child illness and death. Publicly, he addressed those women who could not conceive in his treatise, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (1692), and encouraged them to accept their fate, saying ‘If a virtuous Wife be deny’d the Blessing of Children, her not Bearing is not a Trial that she cannot Bear. She humbly addresses the God of Heaven, like Hannah, for that gracious and powerful Word of his which makes fruitful, remembering, That Children are a Heritage of the Lord, and the fruitful Womb is his Reward.’²²⁶ Fervent prayer, strength and patience were the remedies to Hannah’s barrenness, and Cotton Mather urged his impatient congregants to follow her example. But as his personal diary shows, in times of anxiety over his own children, the Puritan minister took his own advice and called on Hannah’s lesson in his private devotion.

On 7 February 1697, Cotton Mather exuberantly recorded the birth of a new daughter, writing

This morning, a little after one o’clock, my Consort had an easy, and an happy Travail, and all the Circumstances of it, fell out most seasonably. Shee was delivered, of a Daughter; a very hearty and comely infant.... I gave her the name of Hannah, with my Desires, that shee may bee a gracious Child, and imitate those of her Name, which are commemorated in the Oracles of God.²²⁷

Hannah’s welcome arrival came on the heels of several family tragedies for the Mather family, and just after three of their four children died at birth or in their infancy within a few short years.²²⁸ The memorandum inserted into his diary about the death of his daughter

²²⁶ Mather, quoted from *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (Boston, 1691), and reprinted in May, *Barren in the Promised Land*, p. 26.

²²⁷ Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather*, Vol. 1, 1681-1709, ed. W.C. Ford (New York, 1957), p. 218.

²²⁸ Cotton Mather’s firstborn child, a son, was born deformed; the second child, Mary, died from illness just short of 2 years old, and the third child, Mehetabel, was ‘overlaid’ (possibly accidentally suffocated) by the nurse.

Mehetabel just one year before illustrates how deeply Mather connected his own actions and relationship to God to the fate of his children, as he laments ‘This morning, in my study praying for each of my Children by Name (as I use to do), I left the Name of my Mehetabel unmentioned. I wondred at this Omission, in myself and blam’d and chid myself, that I should be so sottish, as having but three children to forget one of them. Now, I had no sooner done my prayers, but the messenger gave mee to understand that the Child had been for above an Hour before, by its Death, gone beyond the reach or use of our Prayers.’²²⁹ Mather thus blames himself for failing to ‘remember’ Mehetabel, resulting in tragedy, and therefore it is even more fitting that his next born is named ‘Hannah’ to signify the woman whom God ‘remembered’ and made fruitful.

In the weeks leading up to Hannah’s birth, Mather anxiously recorded his feelings about his wife’s upcoming delivery and fretted about his own state of sinfulness. One week before Hannah’s arrival, he writes ‘Spreading the condition of my Family before the Lord, Hee said unto my tearful Faith, and then with such a Faith I also said it, unto the Lord, that hee will bless my Family; that my Consort shall have an easy and Happy Travail and the Circumstances of it, shall fall out seasonably.’²³⁰ Mather knew as well as anyone that childbirth was dangerous, and a ‘Happy Travail’ doubtful, and he eventually addressed childbirth’s dangers in published sermons on the topic several years later. In his sermon, *Elizabeth in Her Holy Retirement* (1710), published after years of watching his wife, sisters, and the women of his community give birth, he directly addresses his pregnant congregants, reminding them that ‘it was entertained, as a Gracious Promise of God Unto his People, that they should have an Offspring.... Barrenness was Threatened and Bewayled, as a Calamity.’²³¹ He refers to barrenness as ‘a punishment for Michal’, referencing the only

²²⁹ Mather, *Diary*, pp. 185-6.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²³¹ Mather, *Elizabeth in her Holy Retirement* (Boston, 1710), p. 4.

woman in the Bible to remain childless until death as a result of her scornfulness toward King David.²³² Mather stresses that, instead of fearing their pregnancy and the pain of childbirth, women should recognise their blessed state, but that they should also prepare themselves for death. The sermon emphasises the importance of motherhood while voicing some of the practical concerns that accompanied women at the time of childbirth (such as who would look after their children if they died in childbed, what it was like to be in labour, etc). It was also included in his medical work, *The Angel of Bethesda* (1724), as his contribution to information about childbirth.

But Hannah's arrival into the Mather family was mercifully easy, and she was followed quickly by two brothers whose births Cotton Mather also recorded with diligence, detail and pious self-reflection. While Mather named the first after his father, Increase, he named his second son Samuel.²³³ Of Samuel's birth in December of 1700, he writes 'My Consort fell into her Travail. It was in the day Time, and in a temperate and moderate Season. All the Circumstances of her Condition were ordered in every Faithfulness. The Lord gave her a good Time; and enriched us with the Birth of another Son...a lovely and lusty infant. On the Lord's Day following, I baptized him, and I call'd his Name Samuel, and I gave him unto the Lord, as long as hee lives.'²³⁴ The fact that Samuel's birth was 'ordered in every Faithfulness', easy, 'and in a temperate and moderate Season' was a great comfort to Mather, and he was pleased to name his son after the Biblical prophet whose birth was equally welcomed with great joy. Hannah and Samuel, then, became real-life characters in the Mather household, and their name choices were informed by the daily devotions and close reading of

²³² Ibid., p. 4. Biblical scholar Lilian Klein argues that Michal made herself metaphorically barren by filling her bed with household idols intended to deceive King Saul's messengers as they came to arrest David. According to Klein, the act symbolizes three things: 'a clever ruse to give David time to flee, a symbol of David's relationship to Michal, and an exposure of her failure to worship the one God of the Israelites.' Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, p. 92.

²³³ As Susan Hardman Moore notes, Cotton's father was named 'Increase' by *his* father, Richard Mather, minister of Dorchester, Massachusetts 'to mark the "great increase of every sort" with which "God favoured the country"' when he was born in 1639: Susan Hardman Moore, *Abandoning America* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 3.

²³⁴ Mather, *Diary*, p. 350.

the Scripture by their father. Samuel Mather, as Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger notes, fulfilled the promises of his father by becoming a minister, and Mather proudly records in his diary the day in 1723 that seventeen-year-old Samuel ‘appeared in the Pulpit where his Father and Grandfather before him, having served our glorious Lord.’²³⁵ Hannah and Samuel were the only two of Cotton Mather’s fifteen children to survive him when he died in 1728 at the age of sixty-five.²³⁶

As Gloria Main argues in her study on ‘Naming Children in Colonial New England’, the Biblical stories of miraculous birth in the face of barrenness, particularly associated with the story of Hannah and Samuel, left a very visible imprint in the naming patterns of the Puritan colonies.²³⁷ Main’s study shows a sharp divergence in naming patterns between early modern English society and colonial New England, with the main difference being New Englanders’ reliance on Old Testament models. Main argues that due to larger family size, New England parents had more freedom in choosing the names of their children and used the opportunity to give their children names inspired from the Old Testament. These names were chosen with a purpose, reflecting ‘right-minded’ individuals who provided examples to live by, which then in turn became family names in their own right.²³⁸ While mothers and fathers in New England were more likely to name children after themselves than their English counterparts, Hannah was the second most popular name for girls *not* named after their parents or grandparents in New England between 1650 and 1749. Hannah does not appear in the top eight names listed as most popular in a collective sample drawn from three English parishes over the same period of time.²³⁹ Samuel was the second most popular name for boys

²³⁵ Mather, *Diary*, quoted in Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, ‘Cotton Mather and His Children’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 10 (1953), pp. 188-89.

²³⁶ Schlesinger, ‘Cotton Mather and His Children’, p. 89.

²³⁷ Gloria Main, ‘Naming Children in Early New England’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27 (1996), pp. 1- 27.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Hannah does not make list but Main notes that it would have most likely been ‘thirteenth or fourteenth’ (p. 20). Main compares New England with three English parishes, 1621-1740.

born in New England in the last half of the seventeenth century, that is, within the first generations of New Englanders, but its popularity dropped off until resurgence around the time of the Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth century.²⁴⁰ As Main argues, distinguishing the naming patterns of children in colonial New England is a helpful exercise in determining ‘distinctive regional cultures’ and their change over time. Combining it with close reading of personal writing from the era also conveys the significance of the story of Hannah and Samuel in colonial New England and likewise contributes to the understanding how the lessons of Biblical barrenness were applied in Puritan daily life.

Table 4 The Ten Most Popular Names Given Children Not Named for Parents or Grandparents in New England (Percent in Birth Cohort)

BOYS										
RANK	1650-99		1700-24		1725-49		1750-74		1775-99	
1	Joseph	8%	Joseph	5%	John	3%	John	3%	John	4%
2	Samuel	7	Benjamin	5	David	3	William	3	James	3
3	John	7	David	5	Joseph	3	Samuel	2	Joseph	3
4	Benjamin	6	Jonathan	4	Samuel	3	Benjamin	2	William	3
5	Ebenezer	6	Ebenezer	4	Jonathan	3	Joseph	2	Charles	2
6	Jonathan	5	John	3	Benjamin	3	James	2	Thomas	2
7	Nathaniel	4	Samuel	3	William	3	Asa	2	Asa	2
8	Isaac	3	Daniel	3	Daniel	2	Daniel	2	Chester	2
9	Thomas	3	James	2	James	2	Levi	2	David	2
10	David	3	William	2	Isaac	2	David	2	Daniel	2
10							Thomas	2	Henry	2
Share, Top 10	51%		37%		27%		22%		24%	
Total Names/	.16		.15		.16		.21		.35	
Total Boys	953		1,276		1,857		1,697		697	
Total Names	148		191		305		364		243	
GIRLS										
RANK	1650-99		1700-24		1725-49		1750-74		1775-99	
1	Mary	10%	Mary	8%	Sarah	8%	Sarah	7%	Polly	5%
2	Hannah	9	Hannah	8	Hannah	7	Hannah	5	Nancy	4
3	Sarah	8	Sarah	6	Mary	7	Mary	5	Sarah	4
4	Eliz.	8	Abigail	6	Eunice	4	Eliz.	4	Hannah	4
5	Abigail	6	Eliz.	6	Abigail	4	Lucy	4	Lucy	4
6	Lydia	5	Lydia	5	Lydia	4	Ann	3	Betsy	3
7	Mercy	4	Ann	4	Ann	4	Esther	3	Sally	3
8	Rebecca	3	Thankful	4	Eliz.	3	Lydia	3	Susannah	3
9	Ann	3	Martha	3	Rebecca	3	Lois	3	Mary	3
10	Mehitbl.	3	Ruth	3	Thankful	3	Eunice	3	Ann	2
10	Ruth	3							Esther	2
10	Thankful	3								
Share, Top 10	58%		51%		46%		39%		35%	
Total Names/	.11		.09		.10		.14		.26	
Total Girls	644		1,107		1,689		1,619		629	
Total Names	74		105		164		222		161	

Table 1. Source: Gloria Main, ‘Naming Children in Early New England’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27 (1996), pp. 1- 27: p. 19.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., Table 4, p. 19. Main uses the same criteria for boys and girls and limits the ‘most popular’ lists to those who are *not* named after their parents and grandparents. Main’s tables are reprinted here for clarification.

Table 5 Comparing the Most Popular Names of Girls in New England, 1650–1749, with Those in Three English Parishes, 1621–1740

NEW ENGLAND ^a		THREE ENGLISH PARISHS ^b	
Mary	8%	Elizabeth	17%
Hannah	8	Mary	14
Sarah	8	Ann	14
Elizabeth	6	Margaret	8
Abigail	5	Jane	7
Lydia	4	Alice	3
Ann	4	Grace	3
Thankful	3	Sarah	2
Total	46%	Total	68%

^a Arithmetic mean of mean scores of three lists, 1650–99, 1700–24, and 1725–49, in Table 4.

^b Arithmetic mean of mean scores of two lists, each from three parishes, 1621–80, 1681–1740. SOURCES Table 4; Richard Woodruff Price, “Child-Naming Patterns in Three English Villages, 1558–1740: Whickham, Durham; Bottesford, Leicester; and Hartland, Devon,” unpub. M.A. thesis (Brigham Young Univ., 1987), 66, 78.

Table 2. Source: Main, ‘Naming Children in Early New England’, p. 21.

Cotton Mather’s and Experience Wight Richardson’s diaries illustrate the use of the Biblical story of Hannah in private contemplation and show the close connection that the respective parents felt between their relationship with God and their experiences of the births of their children. This theme is also evident in the writing of Samuel Sewall, the Massachusetts judge who reflected on the connections between God’s disfavour over personal actions and the spiritual and physical health of his family.

Judge Samuel Sewall’s recording of his wife’s experience with infertility introduces another dimension to this discussion of the connections between reproductive bodies, faith, and personal and collective spiritual health in colonial New England. His wife, Hannah Sewall, gave birth to fourteen children over the course of twenty-five years, and, among them counted at least one stillborn baby as well as periods of infertility and the death of six infants. Sewall’s journal thus provides information about how reproductive failure could be interpreted within an early modern marriage and specifically in the charged religious atmosphere of late seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Sewall’s diary has been lauded by appreciative historians for its unique portrayal of Puritan family life and the detail that it

provides on such intimate subjects as breast-feeding and methods of child-rearing. In addition to recording the births of his own children, Sewall also took careful notes about anomalous births in his community and, Judith Graham argues that ‘he seems to have recorded them as part of his incessant effort to order his world, and to find evidence of a divine plan in human events.’²⁴¹ His own family’s experience with reproductive failure can be included in several that caused him to deeply question God’s favour toward himself, his family and his troubled community in 1696.²⁴²

In May of that year, Sewall writes that, whilst on a trip with his father and brother to Ipswich,

Tho. Messenger comes in, and brings me the amazing news of my Wife’s hard Time and my Son’s being Still-born. We get up our Horses from the Ship, and set out by Starlight about 12, yet the Bells rung for five before we got over to find a sweet desirable Son dead, who had none of my help to succor him and Save his life. The Lord pardon all my Sin, and Wandering and Neglect, and sanctify to me this singular Affliction. These Tears I weep over my abortive Son.²⁴³

Sewall’s grieving over this ‘abortive Son’ lasted well into the beginning of the next year. Having lost several children in infancy already, Sewall worried that this stillborn was only the latest family tragedy that indicated God’s displeasure with him. On 11 January 1697 he expressed his direct desire for more children in the pages of his journal, writing that ‘God helped me to pray more than ordinarily, that He would make up our Loss in the burial of our little daughter and other children, and that would give us a Child to Serve Him, pleading with Him as the Institutor of Marriage, and the Author of every good work.’²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Judith Graham, *Puritan Family Life: The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (Boston, 2000), p. 42.

²⁴² The birth of Sewall’s stillborn son coincided with the late stages of the Salem Witch hysteria, an infamous episode in colonial American history during which 20 people were executed after being convicted of witchcraft. Sewall was a judge at the trials and was famously penitent for his role in the trials. See Richard Francis, *Judge Sewall’s Apology: the Salem Witchcraft Trials and the Forming of a Conscience* (London, 2005).

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Five long years passed before another child was born, an extended period of infertility for the normally 'teeming' Hannah. Sewall recorded the birth of this daughter, Judith, by inserting a memorandum into his diary. He took care to note some of the changes and unusual circumstances that were included in the arrival of this, his last child born to then forty-four year-old Hannah. He records

So this is a New Midwife, and a New Baptiser. What through my wives many Illnesses, more than ordinary, her fall upon the stairs about 5 weeks before; from which time she kept her chamber; her thoughtfulness between whiles whether she were with child or no; her Fears what the issue would be, and the misgiving of our Unbelieving hearts, GOD hath been wonderfully Merciful to us in her comfortable Delivery; which I desire to have Recorded.²⁴⁵

Like the entries recording Cotton Mather's anxiety leading up to the birth of his daughter Hannah, the uncertainty, tension and fear surrounding the birth of Sewall's last child is palpable, as is the relief and gratitude of the baby's weary father upon her surprisingly safe delivery. Sewall openly expresses his anxieties about the physical health of his wife, who experienced 'many illnesses' and a 'fall upon the stairs', as well as the family's faith, noting the 'misgiving of their Unbelieving hearts'. Moreover, he recalls the sad memory of his stillborn son, the last traumatic birth experienced by Hannah, in writing that, in this pregnancy, she had 'Fears what the issue would be.' The Sewalls' experience with infertility and child loss clearly affected this final pregnancy and illustrates how periods of infertility could leave a lasting impression on the women and men who had endured reproductive failure.

At this point in his journal, Sewall takes care to record that 'And it may be my dear wife may now leave off bearing', content, it seems, in his acceptance back into God's favour,

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

and confirmed by the gift of one last ‘Child to Serve Him.’²⁴⁶ The Sewalls’ experience with infertility, from its tragedies to its triumphs, was marked and measured by the perceived favour of God and the close connections between spiritual and physical health. Their story in many ways encapsulates the experience and the philosophy behind infertility in the minds of the Puritan colonists of colonial New England. Midwives, preachers and physicians all played a part in the drama, but ultimately God himself, influenced by individual behaviour and that of the community, controlled whether or not any ‘good fruit [was] to be expected’.²⁴⁷ Of all of the barren matriarchs in the Bible, Hannah, then, with her steadfast belief in God, and triumph in the face of adversity, provided a fitting role model, and for many, a namesake, for those suffering through the uncertainty and grief of reproductive challenges in colonial New England.

‘Fruitfull Sisters of Israel’: The Promise of New Beginnings

The initial settlement and resultant cultural climate of colonial New England was heavy with religious purpose and closely monitored for indications of God’s favour. The outcome of this ‘errand into the wilderness’ rested largely on successful reproduction, and colonial women were reminded constantly of their Old Testament forebears, women such as Sarah, Rachel and Hannah who also faced considerable challenges but ultimately were made ‘fruitful Vines’ through faith in God. Fertility was part of the promise, and also part of the responsibility, of the colonial American experience. These familiar stories of barren women were turned on their head and instead the focus on successful reproduction, or fruitfulness, became a hallmark of the early years of the New World experience. Biblical stories of barren women became heroic birth myths as New England colonists interpreted their successful reproduction in perilous conditions as indications of God’s approval of the colonial experiment.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

²⁴⁷ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, p. 67.

Thomas Weld, writing to his former parishioners in Terling, England, describes his passage to New England in 1632 in optimistic terms, claiming that

And not only I and all mine well and safe but all in the ship being near eighty passengers...some very young and hanging on the breast, some women big with child and one delivered of a lusty child within forty hours after she landed. She and the child well, and so continue to this day.²⁴⁸

Weld's picture of health and the happy appearance of new life aboard his ship stands in stark contrast to many other tales of sickness, inclement weather, and death experienced in the colonies and instead served as a first-hand account of English bodies overcoming widely publicised hardships of the colonial experience.

Weld's contemporary, Thomas Shepard, addresses his son in his *Autobiography*, and recounts his safe passage to the New World:

Now one cause of our going at this time of winter was because my wife was conceived of this second son Thomas and because we were persecuted in old England for the truth of Christ which we profess here we durst not stay to make ourselves known, which would have been at the baptizing of the child. Hence we hastened for New England, and therefore though thou, my dear son, wast not born then, yet thou wert in the dangers of the sea in thy mother's womb then, and see how God hath miraculously preserved thee, that thou art still alive and thy mother's womb and the terrible seas have not been thy grave. Wonder at and love this God forever.²⁴⁹

Shepard's passage serves to remind his son of the favour of God and of his own peril in the womb of his mother as they crossed the ocean. The unborn baby plays a pivotal role both in the reasons behind the emigration and the miraculous deliverance despite the ordeal. Shepard ties survival directly to God's grace and counts it as a divine endorsement of the venture that

²⁴⁸ Thomas Weld in David D. Hall (ed.), *Puritans in the New World, a Critical Anthology* (Princeton, 2004), p. 33. Peter Carroll argues that the sea voyages helped to shape Puritans' experiences of New England by creating a social bond that 'prepared them for their communal endeavours in the wilderness.': Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, pp. 27-44: p. 44.

²⁴⁹ Hall, *Puritans in the New World*, pp. 38-39.

the family has embarked upon. These types of stories served two purposes. Firstly, they supported claims regarding the natural strength of English human bodies, even the tiny bodies of the unborn, thus becoming a type of heroic birth myth. They also furthered the idea that the colony's survival, dependent on these very bodies, signified God's approval of the religious motives that drove many of the colonial projects. As Reiner Smolinski summarises, 'as the literal, spiritual and figural heirs of Israel's blessing, New England abrogated the Old and New Testament prophetic types and spiritual promises and could thus look forward to a future, progressive fulfilment of the prophecies within American secular history.'²⁵⁰ New England was a New Canaan, and for those closely monitoring the success of the colony, large families and strong babies confirmed this fact. As one colonist in the 1640s boasted, 'God hath so prospered the climate to us that our bodies are hailer, and Children there born stronger, wherby our number is exceedingly increased.'²⁵¹ It was equal parts responsibility and reward that led these bodies to 'increase and multiply' at a much higher rate than their English brethren left behind, and, as discussed in the subsequent chapter, their new competitors, the Native Americans.

Some enterprising colonists also took the initiative to attract settlers to the New World by blatantly using the well-known parables of the barren matriarchs of the Old Testament. The themes of barrenness turning into fulfilment were familiar to the ears of the early modern English audience, and the stories provided an enticing analogy to those attracted to the prospect of fertility and new beginnings. One such entrepreneur was John Hammond, whose tract, *Leah and Rachel, or the Two Fruitfull Sisters Virginia and Maryland* (1656), was part of a marketing campaign to lure prospective colonists to the southern British colonies. Using the well-known metaphor of Jacob's two wives – one fertile, and one barren, though

²⁵⁰ Reiner Smolinski, 'Jehovah's Peculium: the New Jerusalem and the Jews in Puritan Eschatology', in Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (ed.), *Early American Literature and Culture, Essays Honoring Harrison T. Meserole* (Newark, 1992), p.84.

²⁵¹ Unattributed quote in Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 155.

eventually made fertile – Hammond provides readers with a picture of bounty that was unparalleled in England. He refers to Virginia, the ‘elder’ sister, as Leah, and Maryland as the ‘younger sister’ Rachel. Hammond lived for nineteen years in Virginia before, as he writes, he ‘grew amoured on [Maryland’s] beauty, resolving like Jacob when he had first served for Leah, to begin a fresh service for Rachel.’²⁵² A large part of the tract is devoted to extolling the virtues and natural fertility of Virginia, and Hammond claims that ‘the Country is fruitfull, apt for all and more then England can or does produce’. In addition to the fertility of the land, the inhabitants of the colony, ‘very...sober and modest persons’, enjoyed healthiness and happiness which was reflected in their children who ‘increase and thrive so well there.’ Virginia, like Leah, is presented as the picture of health and fruitfulness, and Hammond’s strategic analogy is perfectly in line with the Biblical characterization of Jacob’s first wife.

Maryland, the younger sister, is a different story. While loved, like Rachel, Maryland needed encouragement in order to be fruitful. Hammond complains that ‘twice hath she been deflowered by her own Inhabitants, stript, shorne and made deformed’, blaming the native population for Maryland’s past stunted production, or infertility, that made it a less popular destination for colonization in previous years. Hammond also addresses the fact that the reputation of Maryland has not been positive, admitting that ‘the Country is reported to be an unhealthy place, a nest of Rogues, whores... a place of intolerable labour, bad usage, and hard Dyet’ but urges his readers to look to the future and consider ‘what it was? And next, what it is?’²⁵³ Disorderly inhabitants and ‘deflowering’ by the native populations have rendered a formerly fertile land barren, and Hammond thus repeats a popular trope in promotional literature of the New World. But Hammond also presents the attractive idea of change over

²⁵² John Hammond, *Leah and Rachel, or, the Two Fruitfull Sisters Virginia and Maryland* (London, 1656), p. 20.

²⁵³ Hammond’s political motives for publishing the tract are hinted at in these lines. Hammond was involved in a pamphlet war against one of his enemies who was responsible for his departure from Maryland. See Louis B. Wright, ‘Literature in the Colonial South’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 10 (1947), pp. 299.

time, a promise of renewed fertility that, with a new wave of settlement of the right calibre of people, is on the cusp of being fulfilled.

The appropriation of Leah and Rachel's story in promotional tracts for the North American colonies largely repeats the language of fertility, and its dire opposite, infertility, that characterized colonial popular literature. It differs, however, from its familiar employment in English religious texts and sermons, as in the works of Shute and others, and in New English texts, by Cotton Mather and others, where it was used primarily to condemn Rachel's petulance about being barren. Often compared with Hannah, Rachel represented the woman who railed against her infertility and ultimately died as a result of her childbearing. As Cotton Mather proposed to his parishioners, the virtuous barren woman in New England, 'will not impatiently long like Rachel, Give me Children, or I die, lest she die by having those children.'²⁵⁴ Rachel as embodied in the southern colonies was similarly flawed, but her fruitfulness was yet to be recognized. Barren but preferred, the Maryland that Hammond loved so dearly still had the potential for fertility to make her inhabitants 'in small time become a Nation of themselves sufficient to people the Country'.²⁵⁵ To Hammond, the truly barren, those without a future, were the ones who chose to continue to reside in England. Hammond explains his point explicitly in the last lines of his work, 'to let many that pine in England know, they are to their ruines deluded, that are frightened from going thither, if their ways of livelihood be not certain in England.'²⁵⁶ It is a direct call to action and one that is made effective through the use of lessons about barrenness and fertility, despair and fulfilment, in the Old Testament.

²⁵⁴ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, in May, *Barren in the Promised Land*, p. 27.

²⁵⁵ Hammond, *Leah and Rachel*, p. 15.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Conclusion

Barrenness was, indeed, in Cotton Mather's words, 'A Calamity Bewayled' in the Bible, but it also provided a useful parable for early modern audiences about how to structure their relationships with God, within their families, and in the greater community. It was a topic analysed in serious sermons and present in self-reflective, personal writing from the period, but it also occasionally received satirical treatment in the popular texts of early modern England. Its discussion fits within the strict outlines of the 'well-ordered family', providing examples of women who had not conformed to their prescribed roles. Its references heralded the long-awaited arrival of healthy babies and those of settlers on new shores. Overall, the barren women of the Bible provided a language through which early modern men and women could understand their own reproductive challenges and successes. Patience was indeed a virtue in the face of barrenness, and Rachel's cry to 'give me children or else I die' provided a chilling warning, and self-fulfilling prophecy, to those desiring to bear children at all costs.

The story of Sarah and Abraham was used to communicate the importance of faith within marriage, even in the face of infertility, and ministers such as Josias Shute effectively used their story to communicate lessons about marital love and sharing the burden of infertility within a fruitless marriage. English satirical writers such as Thomas Grantham and Alexander Niccholes also used stories of barren wives in their writing to communicate their ideas about marriage, preferring humour as a vehicle for their particular brand of conjugal advice. In the New England colonies, there was no room for such humour as the responsibility of populating a wilderness and developing a society centred on Puritan family values loomed large. Ministers such as Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman relied on the examples of women like Sarah and Hannah to provide role models for their own 'fruitful

mothers of Israel' who sat in their congregations.²⁵⁷ Their insights on the experience of pregnancy and opinions about motherhood, preached and published, illustrate the strictly religious framework and how information about barrenness was publicly communicated in colonial New England.

The story of Hannah appears in personal writing as well as in published sources from the early modern period. Hannah embodied the model of private devotion so central to Puritan faith and the 'fruitful womb [was her] reward'.²⁵⁸ Hannah's long-awaited son, Samuel, provided the example, and the namesake, for those who wished to thank God and offer their children into His service. This was an especially potent lesson for those men and women facing the uncertainty of childbirth in the early modern period, and it is the story that best captures the interchange of despair, hope, and introspection present in the experience and challenge of early modern pregnancy, or lack thereof.

The barren wives of the Bible were consistently powerful parables used to communicate lessons about faith and family in the early modern period. But the tone changed with the colonization of the New World. The disappointments and promises in their lessons provided vivid parallels to their own lives as the colonists 'long looke'd for land at length the eye, unknown, yet owne they will/To plant therein new Collonies, wide wildernesse to fill.'²⁵⁹ These particular stories became more relevant as the settlers applied them to their overall colonial purpose as well as their own reproductive experiences. Providing lessons on faith and social behaviour, the models of Sarah, Hannah, and Rachel, offered information about how to correctly and incorrectly bear the burden of infertility.

²⁵⁷ See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'The Vertuous Woman Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735', *American Quarterly*, 28 (1976), pp. 20-40.

²⁵⁸ Psalm 127:3.

²⁵⁹ Edward Johnson, 'Good News from Newe-England', reprinted in Harrison T. Meserole (ed.), *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century*, p. 161, lines 169-171.

CHAPTER 3 POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS

After establishing the extended parameters of early modern concepts of infertility and examining how they were represented by medical, legal, and religious authorities in previous chapters, it is evident that the same themes of disordered male and female relationships, dishonesty, competition, and the tensions between sex and reproduction surface in popular literature. This chapter discusses the cultural interpretation and dissemination of stereotypes of infertility which were communicated in the popular literature of England and which emerged from colonial New England. It also reveals how that literature reflects each region's anxieties over social disorder.

In order to understand how these early modern societies thought about infertility, it is necessary to explore how they thought about sex. These tensions between sex and reproduction, successful or unsuccessful, are demonstrated clearly in English pornographic literature from the early modern period. As evidenced in pornographic novels, whore biographies, and cuckold literature, the repercussions of intemperate and immoral sexual relations were often exhibited through infertile stereotypes. In New England, anxieties about infertility took new form when considered in relation to the fertility of the land and of the native people. Native bodies were competitors for land and resources, and their reproductive habits required monitoring and comparison with English standards to establish biological boundaries, secure social hierarchies, and ultimately, to confirm providential promises. While English pornographers fantasized about what these new encounters might be like, the reality was very different, especially when both societies were confronted with social crises in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

These attitudes are most apparent in the disillusioned years at the close of the seventeenth century -- a time of jeremiads and anxieties about local wars with natives and royal charters from the mother country. Captivity narratives, a new form of popular literature that emerged during the crisis years of King Philip's War, also pitted English stability and fertility against Indian domestic upheaval and disorder.²⁶⁰ The archetype of the Puritan woman, a pious mother ripped from her household, separated from her children, and made infertile by her captors, is paralleled by her native female adversary who is portrayed as exhibiting unfeminine characteristics. The polygamous Indian relationships, so much the focus of promotional literature and idealized in 'travelogue' pornography, were ultimately infertile-- but, in the Puritan mindset, they had to be. They were wholly outside the Puritan ideal of well-ordered families that were fertile by the Grace of God. Moreover, the less fecund marital arrangements of the natives supported the fact that the Indians were not the rightful inhabitants of the land. Incapable 'husbands' of both the land and of their wives, their reproductive failures were exacerbated by the fact that, according to promotional literature and reporting by colonial travellers, they had many sexual partners. As such, writers used English infertile stereotypes and tensions to disparage the natives' culture and sexuality as well as to assuage their own fears that their bodies would fail to thrive in their adopted landscape. Establishing how early modern minds, both in England and in the colonies,

²⁶⁰King Philip's War was an extended period of warfare from 1675-1676 between several associated tribes of the Algonquian nations and the English colonists. Reports from New England were sent back to England about the atrocities that were committed by the Native Americans and about the number of lives lost. See Henry Oldenburg, *A Farther Brief and True Narration of the Late Wars Rise in New-England* (London, 1676); Roger L'Estrange's work, *News from New-England being a True and last Account of the present Bloody Wars carried on betwixt the Infidels, Natives, and the English Christians, and Converted Indians of New-England* (London, 1676) communicated concerns about population by anxiously reporting on the 'true Number of Christians slain since the beginning of that War' in London; For more information on the devastating effects of the war in New England: James Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst, 1999); Richard Slotkin and James K. Folsom, *So Dreadfull a Judgment: Puritan Responses to King Philip's War, 1676-1677* (Middletown, CT, 1978).

thought about sex and reproduction is essential to uncovering the language of infertility and how it was used in popular works to exhibit these tensions of colonization.

Pornographic literature might seem to be an unusual place to find information about infertility, but various early modern popular works about sex offer examples of sexual dysfunction and reproductive challenges usually found within the pages of medical and pseudo-medical works. Sarah Toulalan, in her study of pornography and bodies in early modern England, *Imagining Sex*, convincingly argues that early modern pornography differs from modern pornography in its depiction of the close relationship between sexual pleasure and reproduction.²⁶¹ But while Toulalan persuasively describes the irrefutable links between reproduction and sexual pleasure in these popular works, there is also opportunity to identify and analyse the information these works offer regarding *infertility* and the information that these works contain pertaining to the ‘spectrum of infertility’. This chapter focuses on examples of works that depict stereotypical scenarios of when and where (and for whom) unsuccessful reproduction occurred. Neatly separating early modern notions about successful and unsuccessful reproduction is impossible, but these works provide the opportunity to examine the full range of reproductive outcomes as addressed in erotic literature. Information about infertility is rarely presented in a straightforward manner in these popular works. It is often necessary to read between the lines, build on inferences, and be aware of attitudes toward infertility that were more explicitly described in other types of literature, namely medical and pseudo-medical texts. Even distinguishing between these categories of literature is complicated for the early modern period, but close analysis of these truly ‘popular’ literary works alongside texts acting under the guise of medical manuals demonstrates the blurred lines between the two genres and illustrates the varied sources of information about infertility available in the early modern period. This chapter examines stereotypes of infertility as they

²⁶¹ Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 63-93.

appear in books that seemingly had nothing to do with medicine and analyses how medically-based ideas about infertility make an appearance in their pages.

By looking at popular, pornographic works that were read purely for entertainment, the modern reader can get a better sense of how attitudes about infertility were reflected on and circulated within contemporary society. This chapter employs close reading of what historian Roger Thompson refers to as ‘instructional literature’, using the examples of the erotic novel *The School of Venus* (1680) and the whore biography *The London Jilt, Or the Politick Whore* (1683) as well as poems focusing on cuckoldom. Each genre tells its own story with regard to infertility, both female and male, illustrating the popular concerns about reproduction and gender relations circulating at the end of the seventeenth century. These representative texts were also works read and published in colonial New England.²⁶² They all allude to distorted gender relations and inversion of the traditional sexual power structures. The central characters transgress sexually (and therefore socially) and the result is infertility or unsuccessful reproduction. While many historians have written about the origins and uses of pornographic literature during the late Stuart period, analysing specific representations of infertility illustrates how malfunctioning reproductive bodies were used to communicate ideas about disorder in early modern society.²⁶³

The School of Venus

The School of Venus, first published in French as *L'Ecole des Filles* in 1655, is one of the best known works of erotic literature of the early modern period. It is the work famously referred to in Samuel Pepys’ journal as ‘the most bawdy, lewd book that [he] ever saw’, and,

²⁶² See Roger Thompson, ‘The Puritans and Prurience’, in H. C. Allen and Roger Thompson (eds.), *Contrast and Connection: Bicentennial Essays in Anglo-American History* (London, 1976), pp. 37-65.

²⁶³ Several works have been written exploring the political motives and social impact of pornography in early modern England: David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1600-1745* (New Hyde Park, N.Y., 1965); James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London* (Cambridge, 2002); Melissa Mowry, *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660-1714* (Aldershot, 2004); Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (London, 1988).

while Pepys bought the original French version in 1668, several English editions were published throughout the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For scholars of pornographic literature, the popularity of *The School of Venus* provides valuable information regarding the early modern market for erotic literature. The version analysed in this chapter is the earliest English translation of 1680 due to its close adherence to the original French version by Michel Millot and Jean L'Ange.²⁶⁴ As Bradford Mudge notes, the characters' names were changed from the original French but little else was altered in its first English translation. Additional notes from the sellers, inserted between the two main 'dialogues', provide clues of justification for the English translation as well as hints to other rival (foreign) works.

Roger Thompson, in his extensive study of erotic literature, *Unfit for Modest Ears*, classifies *The School of Venus* as within the 'instructional' class of pornography, designed to inform readers about sexual positions and practices, whilst entertaining through 'a sense of realism and exciting immediacy... as well as highly explicit details of thrills and spills'.²⁶⁵ The work is structured as an educational piece that features an exchange between a maiden, or virgin, Katy, and her older cousin, Frances, called 'Frank', a married woman well-experienced in lovemaking. The exchange occurs in two dialogues and details Katy's first sexual experience with Roger, a suitor who frequently visits her and is first invited into her room by Frank. The first dialogue consists of Frank 'cunningly acquaint[ing] the young Girl with the pleasures of love' and encouraging her to take advantage of Roger's advances.²⁶⁶ While Katy is the wide-eyed, inexperienced pupil in the first dialogue, she is a fast study, and the second dialogue is dominated by her descriptions of sex with Roger that exceed even the

²⁶⁴ For more information on the uncertainty and controversy surrounding the book's authorship and distribution, see Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, p. 24. Toulalan cites the dual authorship of Michel Millot and Jean L'Ange, and I will adopt the same citation method.

²⁶⁵ Roger Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears*, p. 21.

²⁶⁶ Michel Millot and Jean L'Ange, *The School of Venus*, in Bradford Mudge (ed.), *When Flesh Becomes Word: an Anthology of Early Eighteenth-century Libertine Literature* (Oxford, 2004), p. 4. Cited as 'Millot and L'Ange' subsequently.

detail with which the elder cousin Frank introduces the subject. The first dialogue is largely structured around Frank's promotion of the hopeful suitor Roger as Katy's first sexual partner. Frank's support of Roger is largely based on his physical attributes, and she tells Katy 'I cannot pitch upon any whom I think fitter for your turn than Mr. Roger, he loves you very well, and is a handsome young Fellow...is neither too fat or too lean, hath a good skin, strong and well set Limbs; besides, I am informed by those that know it, he hath a swinging Tarse and Stones, and ha's a strong back to furnish a store of seed. In short, he is exactly cut out for a good Womans Man.'²⁶⁷

A man, according to Frank in this first dialogue, and as discussed by the cousins throughout the work, is seemingly the sum of all parts – but each part plays a role and is intrinsically linked to women's sexual pleasure. Frank's description of Roger aligns with other accounts of physical representations of healthy male fertility in early modern England. Moderate weight, fair complexion, and a generally well-proportioned body were all physical, observable traits that were used to judge fertility, or, in this case, sexual function. The most important part, 'a strong back to furnish a store of seed', was crucial in order for Katy to have a satisfying sexual experience.²⁶⁸ The promise of seed is described for its role in sexual satisfaction. It does not explicitly have to do with fertility in that the aim of Katy's experience is pleasure and not to conceive (as is later addressed in the second dialogue). Most importantly, this passage features women dissecting the male body through their discussion and judging its suitability for their purely sexual purposes. Everything from hair colour to the shape of calves is cited as evidence of a good sexual partner and frequent references are made to popular ideas about both male and female beauty.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Millot and L'Ange, *School of Venus*, p. 15.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁶⁹ Unlike another popular and widely-studied pornographic novel, *Venus in the Cloister* (1683), there is no lesbianism characterizing the sexual instruction between the main characters in this work. While Frank teaches

The two women continue this type of assessment in the second dialogue by discussing varying size, and functionality, of men's penises. Frank distinguishes three size categories 'great, small, and midling', the last being the one most able to 'tickle [women] sweetly'. This advice concurs with contemporary medical literature, such as the midwifery manuals of Culpeper and Sharp, as well as being included in the flood of mid-to-late-seventeenth-century pseudo-medical literature that blurred the line between health information and entertainment, such as *Rare Verities* (1658). The translator of this anonymously-published volume, based on the works of Sinibaldus, even admits to attracting a different readership with the English translation, specifically 'the longing Chamber-maide', rather than 'the Learned' who might previously have read the book in the original Latin.²⁷⁰ This 'longing Chamber-maide' would have also been instructed, like Katy, that 'a meen in all things is the best thing in the world' and 'to over-do or under-do in effect is one and the same fault.' Echoing the discussion of the cousins in *The School of Venus*, Sinibaldus contends that 'too long a yard is not good. For it is a long while before it doth stand, and doth not long remain so' making it 'so long before the seed comes through it' that 'the woman hath spent her self a long time before the mans issueth'. According to Sinibaldus, 'the short yard is the least of the two to be endured' in that the seed 'reaches not so far as sufficiently to provoke a womans lust and seed.' While Sinibaldus describes 'what is obnoxious to generation', he is actually writing about the same issue, penis size and its relation to female pleasure, as so graphically discussed by Frank and Katy. The aims, sexual pleasure for the women, and generation for Sinibaldus, are wholly dependent on each other, but the description of what does not work (namely, two types of penises out of three) also provides evidence of popular ideas about infertility, or what was believed to be 'obnoxious to generation' in the early modern period. While the medical works analysed in Chapter 1 of this thesis are mostly concerned with the reproductive capabilities of

Katy about different techniques and postures, she celebrates heterosexual, penetrative sex and focuses on the male form: Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 66-8.

²⁷⁰ Sinibaldus, *Rare Verities*, dedication.

the penis, Frank and Katy seem only to care about the sexual pleasure that a correctly-sized member promises.

Frank and Katy's discussion of the size of penises progresses quickly to the male sexual organ's functionality, and their conversation strikes a cynical note when reviewing penises' role in the relationships between men and women. Frank asks Katy, 'would you love Roger if he were gelt, and would you esteem him and think him a handsome Man... if he were Impotent?' When Katy bluntly answers, 'truthfully no', a satisfied Frank asserts that men and women's relationships are based squarely on sexual gratification (and thus dependent on the working sexual organs) of each partner. The ramifications of sexual dysfunction are therefore treated seriously in *The School of Venus* and result in a lack of love, attraction, and respect for the afflicted party. Frank argues that 'all ingenious persons confess, that copulation is the only means of generation, and consequently the chief procurement of love.'²⁷¹ She places functional sexuality at the heart of gender relations and reorders the relationship between these three concepts of love, copulation, and generation. Generation is acknowledged as an outcome and only briefly referenced as part of the argument for copulation. She revisits this relationship in a later discussion about the pleasure experienced during sex, stating that 'Copulation was ordered for the propagation and continuance of Mankind, to which Nature hath added so much delight, because the thing in it self is certainly so nasty, that were not for the pleasure, certainly none would commit so filthy an act.'²⁷² The pleasure of the sexual act, introduced by Nature, drives the action and inspires men and women to copulate. As before, generation and the 'propagation and continuance of Mankind' are mentioned, but overall this work, and Frank's advice, are not about reproduction, they are about sexual pleasure.²⁷³ Toulalan rightly asserts that these two concepts are intertwined in

²⁷¹ Millot and L'Ange, *School of Venus*, p. 43.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 49.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 49.

the early modern period, especially given the pre-eminence of female orgasm in the act of conception, and I would also argue that lessons in *The School of Venus* primarily focus on the lurid detail of the different acts, not on the overall message of fertility. Reproduction is an outcome that is on the fringe of the discussion and is trumped by the titillating description of physical pleasure experienced by the two women, providing entertaining reading for the mostly male audience. Pepys, for one, describes his own personal physical pleasure experienced as a result of reading the work, recording on 9 February 1668 that ‘it did hazer my prick para stand all the while, and una vez to decharger’.²⁷⁴

Reproduction is therefore acknowledged in *The School of Venus* as only a negative outcome of sex, and the cousins discuss a variety of ways to avoid accidental pregnancy. Frank acknowledges in the first dialogue that fear of pregnancy keeps rampant male sexuality in check, and, when questioned by Katy about why men restrict themselves sexually, she explains that ‘only for fear of giving too much liberty to the Women, who else would challenge the same liberty with them, but it is fine, we wink at one anothers faults, and do not thinking swiving is a heinous sin, and were it not for fear of great Bellys, it were possible swiving would be much more used then now it is.’²⁷⁵ Increased female liberty, or upsetting traditional power structures between men and women, is thus cited as the primary reason for keeping both male and female sexuality within acceptable bounds.

The women return to the question in more detail in the second dialogue in which they openly discuss methods of birth control, abortion, and pre-marital pregnancy. Frank makes a promise to Katy to ‘help thee out’ with her ‘infallible remedies’ if she falls pregnant as a result of her experiences with Roger. Moreover, she assures Katy that her anxieties are

²⁷⁴ Pepys, 9 February 1688, quoted in Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears*, p. 22. Also see James Grantham Turner’s discussion of Pepys’s interaction with pornography in ‘Pepys and the Private Parts of Monarchy’ in Gerald MacLean (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama and History* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 95-110.

²⁷⁵ Millot and L’Ange, *School of Venus*, p. 15.

misplaced as she acknowledges that ‘sometimes we may Fuck two or three years and that never happen, and if we would be so base ‘tis easie to have Medicines to make us miscarry.’ Frank’s dismissal of Katy’s fears is illustrative of early modern attitudes toward infertility for two reasons: first, she acknowledges the uncertainty of a timeline of conception. Most popular works exaggerate the speed with which conception takes place in cases of pre-nuptial fornication or extra-marital affairs, using resultant cases of unwanted pregnancy as warnings about immorality. But Frank’s dismissal, while perhaps overly blasé, addresses the potential extended delay in conception that some couples, married and unmarried, experienced. Second, Frank admits that ‘tis a pity such things be practiced in this time of Dearth, and want his Majesty has of able Subjects, in which there are none more likely to do him Service then those which are illegitimate, which are begot in the heat of Lechery’. Frank’s comments thus force the reader to think outside the confines of the principal characters’ conversation about sex by expressing some of the political (and political-arithmetical) concerns surrounding the turbulence of English society during the seventeenth century. While Thompson and others argue that *The School of Venus* is ‘unrelievedly claustrophobic’ in its discussion of sex, claiming that ‘hardly ever is the outside world referred to in a concrete way’, Frank’s reference to the dearth of population ties the two characters to the social and political environment in which they lived.²⁷⁶

But it is also within this exchange that Frank assuages Katy’s fears of accidental pregnancy by suggesting a variety of contraceptive practices, including masturbation and having sex with inanimate objects. All of these practices are described in provocative detail for the reader under the pretence of providing advice for a worried Katy, who fears that she is ‘with child’ after her frequent experiences with Roger. Frank assures her younger cousin that her involuntary practice of holding her buttocks together and shaking during sex ‘is alone

²⁷⁶ Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears*, p. 27.

enough to prevent [pregnancy], for stirring so much disperses Mans Seed, and hindreth it from taking place, that it cannot possibly joyn with the Womans.’ Other contraceptive measures suggested include *coitus interruptus* and intentional delay of female orgasm, in order to combat the fact that ‘all Physicians agree [men and women] must both spend together to get a Child’, though both strategies, in Frank’s mind, are unnecessary and prevent the full amount of pleasure during copulation. According to Frank, ‘most Women put to hazard, and rather venture a great Belly than receive the pleasures but by halves, and stop in their full carier, who certainly are in the Right, for of a hundred Women that Fuck, scarce Two of them prove with Child’.²⁷⁷ The physical pleasures of sex and anxieties about unwanted pregnancy are again compared, the dangers weighed, and Frank’s personal experience and anecdotes support her claims that accidental pregnancy does *not* occur nearly as often as everyone, including her young cousin, fears. Roger Thompson refers to this information as ‘basic dishonesty in the discussion of pregnancy’, criticises the work for ‘evasion when morality is raised’, and claims that the end result is ‘a general idealisation of sex’.²⁷⁸ Whether or not Frank’s claims are true, her nonchalance about accidental pregnancy and her lack of conception at least refers to the presence of women who did not conceive in spite of, or perhaps due to, their copious sexual activity.

The inversion of the traditional male and female power structures is a constant theme running throughout the work, and, when there are transgressions of traditional gender relations, infertility appears. The aptly named ‘Frank’ guides the conversation, and men’s bodies and private parts are described, measured, and rated over the course of the two dialogues. The women are presented as in complete control of their conjugal relationships, by both electing their ‘fucking friends’ with whom to carry on affairs and also in the act of sex itself. Katy recalls with satisfaction how her ‘powerful hand’ caused Roger’s penis ‘in the

²⁷⁷ Millot and L’Ange, *School of Venus*, p. 47.

²⁷⁸ Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears*, p. 27.

twinkling of an eye [to grow] as stiffe as a Stake, by vertue of my stroaking'.²⁷⁹ She grows bolder in both the sexual acts performed and in the descriptions of her escapades throughout the course of the second dialogue. The additional details and delight with which she tells her stories illustrate her growth into a powerful woman who develops complete control of her physical situation, but perhaps loses complete control due to her new lust for sexual activity. It is also fitting that it is the younger, more inexperienced Katy who expresses concern about being pregnant. Frank, married for years and 'swiving' for longer, represents an older, more sexually-voracious, woman who prioritises sexual pleasure above all else (and even strongly advocates extra-marital sex). There is no mention of her having a child herself, and she swiftly rebuffs Katy's anxiety about reproduction. Frank's sexual appetite is presented as virtually insatiable and therefore aligns with the common stereotypes reinforced by medical and other popular works of the early modern period that cited excess venery and overuse of the sexual organs as common reasons behind infertility.

The London Jilt

Similar depictions of inverted gender relationships and frustrated fertility can also be found in the instructional piece *The London Jilt, or the Politick Whore* (1683). Written anonymously, but attributed, perhaps falsely, to Alexander Oldys, it was a popular work on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁸⁰ The only existing copy resides in the library of Harvard University, and its reception in the New England colonies has been discussed in detail by Roger Thompson.²⁸¹ *The London Jilt* is one of many 'whore biographies' that comprised a genre in early modern pornography. It details the story of a young girl's descent into prostitution. In this genre, and particularly this work, women are in control, and they are deceitful. The subtitle promises to show the readers 'all the artifices and stratagems which

²⁷⁹ Millot and L'Ange, *School of Venus*, p. 32.

²⁸⁰ On the uncertainty about authorship, see Charles Hinnant's introduction to his edited version of the work: *The London Jilt*, ed. Charles Hinnant (Peterborough, Ont., 2008), p. 11.

²⁸¹ See Roger Thompson, 'The London Jilt', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 23 (1975), pp. 289-294.

the Ladies of Pleasure make use of for the Intreaguing and Decoying of Men’ as well as to illustrate ‘several Pleasant Stories of the Misses Ingenious Performances.’²⁸² Unlike *The School of Venus*, there is a progression of plot outside of the bedroom, and the story follows its female ‘protagonist’ (and narrator), Cornelia, as she goes from being an innocent, only daughter of a foolish man, to a clever prostitute who writes in the introduction that it is her duty to ‘warn Men of the danger they may run in the persuit of their Amours.’²⁸³ Exposing the ‘frailties of the Female Sex’ through such accounts is a frequently-repeated trope in early modern pornography, but *The London Jilt* also contains valuable information about infertility as several of its central characters, both female and male, deal with issues of sexual dysfunction and reproductive failure.

Cornelia’s own body experiences a range of reproductive challenges as she develops on her journey from innocent maid to popular prostitute. In doing so, she personifies the contemporary theory that prostitutes were barren, or at least had more difficulty with conception than virtuous women. Cornelia does become pregnant, though, and when she does, her description of the outcome clearly illustrates the spectrum of infertility as experienced by early modern women. Cornelia’s first experience of pregnancy is relatively late in the story and well into her tenure as a seasoned prostitute sleeping with multiple men. By this point in the story she is being ‘kept’ by a man named Valere who believes himself to be the father and is unaware of her other ‘gallants’. Cornelia admits ‘Tho that my Territory was so frequently cultivated by five Men; and that by this Reason it seem’d there could not arise any Fruit, by reason that I figured to my self, that the too great abundance of Humidity would be capable of stifling it in its Birth. Nevertheless, having led this Life six months, I

²⁸² Alexander Oldys, *The London Jilt, or the Politick Whore* (London, 1683), title page. Hereafter cited as Oldys,

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.1.

began to perceive that I was with Child.’²⁸⁴ Cornelia’s surprise at her pregnant state is explicitly tied to her lifestyle and the idea that the frequency of her sexual activity created an environment that ‘could not arise any Fruit’ by virtue of the ‘too great abundance of humidity.’ This humoral-based idea of the excess slipperiness of prostitutes’ wombs, and their resultant barrenness, is also, as we have seen, expressed in contemporary medical literature. Jane Sharp references this belief in her *Midwives Book* (1671) in which she claims women ‘must be sparing in the act of Copulation...for too frequent use makes the womb slippery, and therefore whores have but few children’.²⁸⁵ Cornelia confesses ‘it is certain that I was not over-joyed, for as I imagined, that this would not come out so commodiously, nor so easily as it went in.’²⁸⁶ Her indifference to the child, and her chief concern that ‘her Beauty... would receive great Injury’ as a result of the pregnancy, highlights stereotypes about the vanity and depravity of prostitutes who, living by an inferior moral code, think only of themselves and their ability to continue to whore and cheat men. Like Frank and Katy in *The School of Venus*, Cornelia regards pregnancy as an inconvenient consequence of sex. Furthermore, the slipperiness of a whore’s womb can also be interpreted as a comment on the prostitute’s inherent immorality as well as women’s physical bodies. Throughout Cornelia’s tale, she is presented as deceiving men, feigning love, and she uses the opportunity of this pregnancy to extract additional money from her lover, Valere. When she finally goes into labour, she describes it feeling as though ‘the Entrails [were] torn out of my Body which made me curse the Hours and Day that I suffer’d that unruly Member to rummage my Body’.²⁸⁷ In her hour of travail, the prostitute blames the man, although even Cornelia admits that she cannot be sure just whose ‘unruly Member’ got her into the state in the first place. Cornelia’s painful, protracted labour lasts four days, eventually resulting in a stillbirth,

²⁸⁴ Oldys, *London Jilt*, p. 76.

²⁸⁵ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 180.

²⁸⁶ Oldys, *London Jilt*, p. 76.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.79.

and her cold reaction to the tragic situation further illustrates her corrupt state. She notes that her dead child ‘by which reason of the Compressions and Contortions of my Body, seem’d so blew and deformed, that one could hardly perceive it had the Form of a humane figure.’²⁸⁸

Cornelia’s body is to blame for the disfigurement and deformity of her stillborn girl, her own body echoing the depravity of her sinful profession and of her polluted mind. While she is ‘over-joyed’ at the loss of this potential burden, the supposed father, Valere, mourns the loss of ‘his’ spurious daughter, and the traditional gender roles are reversed in this story yet again.

Cornelia dismisses the possibility that women in her circumstances could have children and notes that ‘it were to be wished that no Children could be gotten but in Marriage’ only so that she and other unmarried women might be able to fully enjoy the sexual act without being forced to ‘support the Agitation, but not the Shower.’²⁸⁹ Cornelia’s sentiments echo those of Frank in *The School of Venus* in that she resents the loss of pleasure owing to fear of conception and claims that most women would be more sexually active if pregnancy was not a concern. Both act as examples of lewd women and show how lasciviousness can warp priorities if the female sex drive gets out of hand. While Frank is not a prostitute, it is clear that her priorities revolve around enjoying the sex act itself, even outside of marriage, so much so that she openly discounts the spectre of accidental pregnancy. While she acknowledges that others may be afraid of becoming pregnant, she calls them silly and minimises the powers of fertility to prevent her, or her cousin, from ‘the possibility of swiving’. Likewise, Cornelia’s doomed pregnancy causes her to admit that ‘young and gentle Damosels’ are only put off sex for fear of conceiving. Her behaviour (and more importantly, the physical result of her stillborn baby) both draw attention to the fact that she still does not fear pregnancy and, moreover, that her body is apparently incapable of bringing a living child into this world. Cornelia’s mourning the loss of pleasure more than

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

loss of her child is an extreme example of her lack of maternal compassion, the depravity of prostitutes and the dangers of excessive venery. It is also reflected on her body in her adherence to the stereotype in midwifery texts of prostitutes being less fertile than other women.

Cornelia has one more brush with childbearing that highlights both the uncertainty of pregnancy in the early modern period and the lengths to which a prostitute would go to make money and take advantage of men: deception abounds in both cases. Cornelia fakes a pregnancy after the death of Valere in order to extract wealth from her next chief 'gallant', Philander. When Philander confesses one night that he would love to have a child by her, Cornelia decides to become 'only with Child for my Pleasure' and fools him for several months by manipulating her clothing in order to make her 'belly swell bravely' as though pregnant. He is overjoyed and showers her with wealth and attention. She also devises an escape from the situation, knowing full well that she must produce 'issue' before her gallant suspected foul play. Cornelia proudly informs her readers that 'when it was come to about the seventh Month' she would 'feign some inconvenience that might have made [her] Miscarry, and to make a lump of Callous Blood, in the figure of a Child newly Born' and 'expose it to Philander's sight.' Creating this fake miscarriage would not be difficult, as 'Philander was not well skilled in such like Affairs' due to the fact that 'he had never been with Child, nor had helpt to hold his Neighbour's Wifes legs when they were in labour.'²⁹⁰ In explaining the situation, Cornelia also describes the division of male and female knowledge in the early modern period, and frequently refers to matters of sex and reproduction as being the arena of other women, whether older bawds or midwives. In Cornelia's opinion, older women are the ones who are the authorities on women's bodies, and poor Philander could be easily duped by her treachery. In the end, Cornelia's plot is in fact, inexplicably, discovered by Philander who

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

disappears from the story, leaving her a letter in which he condemns the 'Jilting Cornelia' to a lifetime of misery. It is the last time that pregnancy is mentioned in the work, but Cornelia's experiences and exploits represent unsuccessful reproduction – stillbirth, exhibiting a counterfeit pregnant belly, and unfulfilled but detailed plans for a faked miscarriage. All of these episodes illustrate Cornelia's treachery and wantonness. They are represented in her malfunctioning reproductive body and depend on her inability, as a prostitute, to produce healthy offspring. Slipperiness of womb and slipperiness of character go hand-in-hand in Cornelia's story and her profession.

More dominant than even the description of her own body's infertility, however, are the descriptions of Cornelia's interactions with impotent men. Stereotypes of male as well as female infertility therefore appear in the work and likewise set the scene for warped gender relations and the inversion of male and female power. The theme of male insufficiency is set early on in the work, starting with her father, whose foolishness and ineptitude result in the family's destitution and Cornelia and her mother's initial turn to prostitution. This theme is evident in Cornelia's dealings with one Squire Limberham, a man who courts her when she is still a virgin, and one whose well-established struggles with impotence are dwelt upon by the author over nearly thirty pages (a quarter of the entire book). Squire Limberham, a 'gentleman from Surrey', visits Cornelia and her mother in their home one day and is quickly besotted with the young girl, so much so that he invites her to run away with him to be married. Cornelia is reluctant at first, but she is attracted to the squire and makes preparations to elope. Her plans are changed when she is informed of his reputation by four other men visiting their house. This new information sets a different plan in motion as Cornelia relays in detail the story of the squire's marriage to her readers and then describes a prank that she pulls on the pretty, though impotent, squire. Based on information learned from her new visitors, Cornelia explains that Squire Limberham's marriage to a local beauty

named Clara is called into question due to his rumoured 'insufficiency' and the fact that he is unable to consummate the marriage. He is confronted by a love rival, Aleippe, who vows to 'challenge the Impotent Spark', and Clara's parents even approach the Squire's parents in order to demand that he 'show better Signs and Testimonies of his Manhood' in order to avoid nullification of the marriage. The squire, in a desperate attempt to avoid such public humiliation, starts a rumour that he impregnated a chamber maid, and in the meantime he pays the actual father for his silence. While Squire Limberham was hauled into 'Spiritual court' for supposedly fathering a bastard child, he determined that it was better to pay the penalty of this charge of adultery and 'have been look'd upon as a Man very proper for the Multiplication of Humankind', rather than the alternative of being forever cast as an insufficient man. It is a very long and drawn out case, culminating in the chambermaid retracting her original claim by giving her 'contract', written by the squire and spelling out the terms of their arrangement, to Aleippe, the rival, and the entire affair ends in a courtroom drama in which the Squire, embarrassed, confesses his lie and is ordered to pay the chambermaid more money for her child. The final piece of business is the annulment of the marriage, as requested by the bride's parents, who ask that 'his handsome Son-in-Law might be searched by Two Doctors to know what might be the Cause of his Insufficiency'.²⁹¹ During the examination, the squire declares that 'he ha[s] nothing to show them and since it so pleased Justice he would desist from his Wife'. The matter over, the annulment is granted, and Cornelia takes delight in letting her readers know that, while it 'has only been two Months since this happened, Aleippe, who was the Principal Cause of this Affair, has already made Clara sensible of the difference there is between him and Squire Limberham.'²⁹²

Upon learning this story, Cornelia devises a plan to deal with the squire's advances so that she and her mother might have some 'Advantage' from his attention. The squire happily

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁹²Ibid., p. 48.

makes arrangements to spend the night with young Cornelia, who knows of his insufficiency but decides to play a trick at his expense. She does spend the night with the squire and even attempts to lose her virginity to him, but after ‘making a thousand amorous strains in postures the most petulant imaginable’ his inability to perform sexually, and his diminutive penis, ultimately frustrate the loss of her maiden-head.²⁹³ In a final humiliation for the poor squire, Cornelia writes him a note, tying it ‘around his Neck, after having for a long time done all that was possible to tie it to another Member, where there was not String nor hold enough’, and makes off into the night with his gold and his watch. She goes back to her mother who is delighted with her tale and they laugh together how she ‘shamefully reproached him with his Insufficiency.’²⁹⁴ It is Cornelia’s first real act in a long succession of ‘jilts’, and her robbery of the squire and the associated embarrassment put her in a position of power and further makes the impotent the object of ridicule.

The impotent man as an object of ridicule is also expressed in a variety of literary genres in early modern England, from cuckold literature to bawdy songs, as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.²⁹⁵ *The London Jilt*’s characterization of the impotent man falls well within the stereotypes and similar situations familiar to its early modern readership. The squire is the laughingstock of his town, and his shame follows him outside even his local area in the form of the men who arrive at the house and tell Cornelia about his past. No doubt Cornelia plays her own role in further ruining his reputation and adding to his shame by jilting him herself. He is a pathetic character, and, while celebrated for his beauty by Cornelia, it is clear that he lacks the power to satisfy women, causing Cornelia to reflect on how surely her ‘lower parts would have suffered to have endured Hunger after a miserable

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁹⁵ McLaren, *Impotence*, p. 60.

manner.²⁹⁶ In the end, he is remembered as young Cornelia's first victim, to be followed by a host of hapless suitors. While lovers such as Valere and Philander also eventually fall victim to Cornelia's tricks, Squire Limberham is her first (unsuccessful) encounter with male sexuality, and the disappointment that ultimately shapes her life-long exploitative relationships with men.

Cuckold Literature

The nature of virility and women's control over their husbands' sexual fate can also be found in the popular culture of cuckoldry, in which young lusty wives were continually held responsible for their often elderly husbands' sexual inadequacy. Impotence, and particularly cuckoldry, was a popular trope in early modern literature and, as examined in the first chapter of this thesis, these jokes carried many social and even political messages within their bawdy humour. Cuckold literature is explicitly tied to infertility in that the cuckolded men appearing in early modern English ballads, poems, and stories were often openly referred to as impotent. Whether this means suffering from complete sexual dysfunction or just the inability to keep up with their young, lusty wives is difficult to ascertain, but the genre is largely dependent on stereotypes of sexual incompetence. Cuckolds contributed to their fate as the rearers of other men's children by their inability to provide their wives with offspring or satisfy their wives' sexual needs. They were occasionally subjects of pity, but mostly of ridicule, as they were considered 'incomplete' men, responsible for their inadequate state, and often were portrayed as also physically weak or elderly and at the constant command of their cheating wives. Such is the male character presented in *The Fifteen Comforts of Cuckoldom* by 'a noted Cuckold in the New Exchange in the Strand', who tells his tale of woe to the reader by describing fifteen 'comforts', or episodes, in his experience with his

²⁹⁶ Oldys, *London Jilt*, p. 48.

cheating wife. In the very first ‘comfort’, he describes his inability to satisfy his wife sexually, and she cruelly alludes to his impotence:

Quoth she, you Fumbler you can do no good,
Give me the Man that never claps his Wings,
But always life and Courage with him brings
‘Tis such a one wou’d please; but as for you
If Night and Morning some small matter do;
You think you’ve done your due Benevolence,
When I with thrice your Labour can dispence.
This Reprimand my Courage soon did cool,
And fearing Combing with a Three-Legg’d-Stool;
I very fairly went to Sleep again,
and Left her of my Manhood to complain.²⁹⁷

Like Cornelia and the squire, the author’s wife cannot find pleasure with her husband and berates him for his deficiency. This type of exchange is repeated in the other fourteen ‘comforts’ in which his wife grows more bold in her adulterous behaviour as her husband ages. The woman is openly disgusted by her husband and calls attention to their disparate ages when she tells him ‘Old flesh she Loath’d, as having in it left/ No gravy, and of all it’s Juice bereft.’ The lusty wife claims that ‘But if the Flesh was Young and to her mind, She to one Dish would never be confin’d’ and expresses sentiments that echo Frank and Katy’s in *The School of Venus*. All three women celebrate the young, virile male form and argue that female lust cannot be satisfied by just one man.²⁹⁸ Female satisfaction, according to this poem and other examples in popular works, is not easily obtained, and rests almost solely on the virility of their partners.

The anonymous author of the *The Pleasures of a Single Life, Or the Miseries of Matrimony* also tells a tale of cuckoldry and the dangers of women’s lust. He starts his poem by bemoaning his married state, crying ‘Wedlock, oh! Curs’ed uncomfortable State’ and then

²⁹⁷ Anon., *The Fifteen Comforts of Cuckoldom*, reprinted in Mudge, *When Flesh Becomes Word*, p. 73.

²⁹⁸ Frank repeatedly refers to the fact that she is married but has an extra-marital lover: Millot and L’Ange, *School of Venus*, p. 16.

proceeds to describe the physical and emotional ordeal of his turbulent marriage. He makes bawdy references to sexual relations with his wife, noting that at first his 'Sails proportion'd, and my Vessel tite, Coasting in Pleasure's Bay I steered aright.'²⁹⁹ He goes on to describe the exploits of his 'Adult'rous Wife' whose indiscretions are the cause of his misery and made him into 'A Husband, Lover, Cuckold and a Slave', referencing the inverted power structure of the relationship that makes him so miserable. He openly mourns his single life, referring to the relative peace that he had when there was 'No Molted Off-spring to disturb my Thought, In Wedlock born but G-d knows where begot'.³⁰⁰ His wife's behaviour becomes more distressing as she 'grew still more head-strong, turbulent and Lewd, filling my Mansion with a spurious Brood.' The wife is described as a woman consumed with 'Brutal Lust' and the author repeatedly refers to all of the bad qualities of women that she exhibits, linking it back, in the end, to 'Thou Apple-Eating Traytor, who began/The Wrath of Heav'n and the miseries of Man'. The author claims his revenge on his cheating wife by suing for divorce in the end, in effect 'Cancel[ling] the marriage-bonds, & Bastardiz'[ing] her Brood' but his victory is a small one, as the poem exhibits the long lasting damage that his marital relationship has caused, a complete distrust of all women, and the aversion to marriage that the author still resentfully holds.³⁰¹ It also, as with *The London Jilt*, refers to legal procedures involving marriage breakdown and annulment.

This poem can be categorised as cuckold literature in that it focuses on the inversion of male/female relationships and the fact that man is portrayed as the victim. Situations of infertility often give rise to these concerns about gender relations and subversive scenarios, as wives were repeatedly shown as being in charge of the relationship and managing their poor husbands to the point of public embarrassment. The fact that 'men' took to the page to

²⁹⁹ Anonymous, *The Pleasures of a Single Life, Or the Miseries of Matrimony*, reprinted in Mudge, *When Flesh Becomes Word*, p. 61.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

express such issues is also noteworthy in this case, in that the personal shame of losing control of their household and their wives, is presented for the public's entertainment. Under the guise of the 'confession' of a hapless husband, these fictitious stories are presented for the public's enjoyment, and thereby reinforcing traditional household structures in highlighting the problems that occur when correctly-ordered, gender-based domestic hierarchies are not followed.³⁰²

Men's and women's sexual, and reproductive, fates are intertwined, as is supported by the exchange between Frank and Katy in *The School of Venus*, exploited by Cornelia, and dismally evidenced in cuckold literature about men humiliated in their inability to contend, sexually or otherwise, with their wives. Sexual activity was quite literally a slippery slope, and these three examples represent contemporary attitudes about how infertility appears on a spectrum, and, by natural connection, fertility and its many manifestations and complications. Included in this spectrum are numerous examples of infertility scenarios stemming from individual behaviours and resultant anatomies that seal the fate of these sexually active characters. All of the characters are sexually active but their outcomes are wholly different. When cases of failure present themselves, there is always someone, and some specific, socially unacceptable, behaviour, to blame. Throughout the pornographic literature discussed in this chapter, both men and women are blamed for fertility problems. In the case of *The London Jilt*, both sexes respectively contribute to their infertile states – the prostitute, wholly incapable, morally and physically, of being a mother, and the impotent squire, an early 'fumble' to the young Cornelia but ultimately an example of male impotence in all senses of the word. Separating the fates of these characters and assigning blame for infertility is hardly

³⁰² On cuckolds, see Elizabeth Foyster, 'A Laughing Matter? Marital Discord and Gender Control in Seventeenth-Century England', *Rural History*, 4 (1993), pp. 5-21; Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp. 177-181, 190-3. For information about the least respectable type of husband, the man content with his cuckolded state, see Jennifer Panek, '“A Wittall Cannot Be a Cookold”: Reading the Contented Cuckold in Early Modern English Drama and Culture,' *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 1 (2001), pp. 66-92.

straightforward as clearly their sexual functioning is dependent on the arousal of each other's reproductive organs. Infertility in both men and women depended on regulation, as the ideal -- and perhaps exaggerated, as proposed by Thompson -- expressed in the *The School of Venus*, could deteriorate to become the degenerate, as illustrated by the characters in *The London Jilt* and the various works of cuckold literature. While historians have rightly emphasized the strong connections between sexual pleasure and fertility that characterise these examples of early modern pornography, popular literature also provides the opportunity to examine infertile stereotypes and sexual scenarios that, if left unregulated, resulted in unsuccessful reproduction.

Fertile Lands and Bodies: Promoting New England

Through the language of discovery and colonization, writers seized the opportunity to examine old dramas surrounding gender relations and hierarchies whilst situating them within new landscapes and including new characters. The fertility of the land, animals, and native peoples were all subject to the scrutiny of writers reporting, and elaborating, on newly discovered or colonized lands, or, indeed, creating entirely fictional ones. The familiar messages regarding correctly-ordered families, and by extension, society, are reflected in these works, as are their converse, the stereotypes of disordered hierarchies and resultant infertility. The natural fertility of the colonies thus provided a new stage on which to consider ideas about order and disorder, and new bodies to observe and measure with regard to their own generative abilities.

This section examines those new, real and imagined, landscapes and characters as described in a variety of promotional texts and treatises about New England. As the literature of colonization permeated English society, it was also reflected in specific types of

pornography in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The themes of fertility and infertility prominent in the promotional reports of early seventeenth-century colonists, such as those by Thomas Higginson and William Wood, are used creatively, and controversially, in Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* (1634), and are also reflected in the subgenre of English pornographic 'travelogues' such as Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668) and John Cotton's *Erotopolis* (1684).³⁰³ All of these works posed questions about the fruitful possibilities of new lands, observations about the reproductive bodies of the native populations, and also stereotypes of infertility that arose when English values were challenged on the frontier. In New England, the late seventeenth century produced a new form of literature altogether, the captivity narrative, which starkly opposed the English pornographic visions of fecund, bigamous native communities and the possibility of interracial sexual relationships by removing the prospect of fertility altogether. The protagonists of these captivity narratives are not the valiant male colonists, reaping the full benefit of the land through a mix of superior technology and hard work. Instead, the pious female Puritan captives, mothers faced with death and infertility, are the heroines, and their attributes of strong Christian faith and family values are contrasted sharply with the brutality of their Native American captors, both male and female. Captivity narratives, first circulated in the immediate aftermath of King Philip's War in the early 1680s, betray the anxieties that plagued the second and third generation New Englanders about the degeneration of their fledgling colonial society due to war, political reorganization, and the religious apathy of younger generations. All of these works illustrate New English popular myths, ideas and

³⁰³ Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp.88-91. Neville's popular *Isle of Pines* presents a fictional scenario in which one shipwrecked colonist effectively creates his own island population through frequent procreation with the four women with whom he was stranded. Cotton's *Erotropolis* describes a fictional land by using the metaphor of a woman's fertile body. Toulalan's analysis convincingly shows that these works of pornography emphasize fertility in their overtly sexual characterizations of new lands and bodies. Also see Gaby Mahlberg, 'The Critical Reception of the *Isle of Pines*', *Utopian Studies*, 17 (2006), pp. 133-42; Felicity Nussbaum, 'The Other Woman: Polygamy, Pamela, and the Prerogative of Empire', in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds.), *Women, 'Race', & Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London, 1994), pp. 138-59.

concerns about reproduction in the colonial context. Familiar, English, stereotypes of infertility were attached to the new land and to anxieties surrounding the competing reproductive bodies of the Native Americans. The vulnerabilities of the colonists are expressed through these English tropes of infertility as they assert their religious and reproductive pre-eminence through the observation, measurement, dismissal and resentment of their competitors, both local and abroad.

Since the sixteenth century, reports of the unparalleled bounty of the American colonies were brought back to England via letters and treatises celebrating the lush landscapes, fertile fields, abundant wildlife and plentiful waters that awaited settlers across the Atlantic. Scholars such as Louis Montrose and Nathan Probasco have written about the familiar colonial trope of the land as a virgin woman requiring fertilization by masculine settlers.³⁰⁴ Anne McClintock and Carolyn Merchant have likewise examined these sexualised metaphors with a feminist historical lens to further explore the strong connections between colonization, gender and reproduction, and Anna Suranyi provides transnational context by studying similar language in early modern English colonial writing about Ireland and Turkey.³⁰⁵

Colonist Francis Higginson's account of the 'commodities and discommodities' of the settlement of Salem in his *New England's Plantation* (1630) is one such account. It was originally written as 'a letter to friends' and then published and circulated widely as 'the truth... without any frothy bombasted words' about the fertility evident in the natural landscape of the burgeoning Massachusetts Bay Colony.³⁰⁶ Higginson's brief description of

³⁰⁴ See Nathan Probasco, 'Virgin America for Barren England: English Colonial History and Literature, 1575-1635', *Literature Compass*, 9 (2012), pp. 406-419; Louis Montrose, 'The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery', *Representations*, 33 (1991), pp. 1-41.

³⁰⁵ See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (New York, 1995); Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Anna Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation: Travel Writing and National Identity in Early Modern England* (Newark, 2008).

³⁰⁶ Francis Higginson, *New England's Plantation* (London, 1630), p. 1.

the land mirrors earlier grand promotional tracts of late sixteenth-century North American explorers such as Hakluyt and Raleigh, as Higginson systematically lays out the benefits as well as the hardships experienced in the new colony. He details the new colony's potential literally from the ground up, stating that 'the fertilitie of the Soyle is to be admired at, as appeareth in the aboundance of Grasse that growth everie where both verie thicke, verie long, and verie high in divers places.'³⁰⁷ After several pages of rich descriptions of the topography, local flora and fauna, which he regularly compares with England, he concludes that 'we see both Land and Sea abound with store of blessings for the comfortable sustenance of Mans life in New England.'

Higginson's New England is a land of plenty, but it is not a land that is without need of cultivation. The natural resources are there and able to be enjoyed, but the labour required to appreciate the full bounty of the land is repeatedly referred to throughout his work. His vision for the new colony is one that is dependent on hard work and just rewards, and he distinguishes between naturally occurring fecundity and the potential of what English agricultural methods, industriousness, and societal order could bring to the land. Higginson remarks that 'it is scarce to be believed how our Kine [cows] and Goats, Horses and Hogges doe thrive and prosper here and like well this Countrey.'³⁰⁸ The new territory is presented as inviting and particularly amenable to English cultivation methods, and ideal for the transplantation of English bodies and their own improvement of health and fertility.

William Wood's *New England's Prospect* (1634) is filled with similar accounts of the land conditions, animals, air quality, and general geography of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and his work is noticeably longer and more descriptive than Higginson's short pamphlet. Wood takes Higginson's message of English suitability for the new colony one

³⁰⁷ Higginson, *New England's Plantation*, p. 4.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.4.

step further by suggesting that the colonists' bodies would contribute to New England's fecundity by producing strong, healthy children to an extent unknown in England. He writes that 'I have seen foure Children Baptized at a time, which wipes away that common aspersion, that women have no Children... there being as sweete lusty Children as in any other Nation, and reckoning so many for so many, more double births than in England; the women likewise having a more speedy recovery and gathering of strength after their delivery than in England.'³⁰⁹ Wood is unequivocal about the right kind of people who stand the best chance to thrive in New England and bases his decision on moral as well as physical strengths. He advises 'for the future those men who are of weak constitutions to keepe at home... for all of new England must be workers of some kindes.'³¹⁰ Like Higginson, Wood argues that New England's riches can only be enjoyed through the hard work of good, honest Christians. Virility and maturity, strength of body and of character, are essential attributes for Wood's settlers, and only the right type of man will prove successful in reaping the full potential of his new and fertile surroundings.

Works such as those by Higginson and Wood clearly set out the promise of fertility in the lush landscape of New England, but both authors also devote lengthy sections of their texts to describing relations between Native American men and women and, by extension, their reproductive bodies. Earlier accounts from the southern Chesapeake colonies criticized the native population as lacking the 'art or science' to take full advantage of their fertile surroundings.³¹¹ Higginson and Wood's accounts are more neutral in their informative tone, even laudatory of the Native Americans in parts, but negative stereotypes persist within their pages. Higginson claims that 'the Men for the most part live idely, they doe nothing but hunt and fish; their wives set their Corne and doe all the other worke' and Wood goes even further

³⁰⁹ William Wood, *New England's Prospect* (London, 1634), pp. 3-4.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³¹¹ Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London, 1609), p. 97.

to assert the 'preeminence' of the Indian women, noting that 'their qualifications more excellent, being more loving, pittifull, and modest, mild, provident, and laborious than their lazie husbands.'³¹² He lists an impressively long set of domestic and agricultural tasks with which they are charged and directs English women readers' attention to this particular passage. In doing so, he invites English women to compare their own, relatively easy, lives to those of the Native American women he describes. It is another opportunity to emasculate native men as he repeatedly compares marital relationships, the unbalanced share of labour, and other gendered responsibilities of the domestic sphere that readers, both male and female, may take for granted. In pointing out the differences and highlighting the imbalanced workload between the sexes, Wood urges his English audience to 'see their own happiness' by reading about the domestic arrangements of the Native Americans. Wood even claims that witnessing the easy lives of the Englishwomen had had a negative impact on the native women in Massachusetts, and 'since the English arrival comparison hath made them miserable, for seeing the kind of usage of the English to their wives, they doe as much condemne their husbands for unkindnesse, and commend the English for their love.'³¹³

Wood's text thus reinforces traditional English gender relations in the New World by contending that Native American women themselves question their own customs and marital relationships as a result of English models. New England's fruitfulness was to be cultivated, specifically by Englishmen, and the rewards for those accepting the challenge were increased health and fertility amongst their own ranks, but only within adherence of accepted, Church-approved, domestic structures. This was not a fertility fully enjoyed by the native population owing largely to the indolence of the men, despite their wives' exertions. In describing the Native American uneven division of labour, the colonists provide a very clear picture of what they view to be a disordered family unit and, by extension, an unproductive society. As Joyce

³¹² Wood, *New England's Prospect*, p. 94.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Chaplin notes, 'gender roles revealed the presence or absence of civility.'³¹⁴ The Native American domestic arrangement was not a household structure that followed the strict Pauline hierarchy as laid out in the Bible, and consequently nor was it one that maximised the benefit of the land. In the eyes of the English settlers, the native population's social order was innately disordered, evident both in their marriages and in their approach to work, and where disorder surfaced, so did infertility.

English curiosity about the unusual division of labour and inverted familial situation among Native Americans is also reflected in writing about the Native American women's reproductive bodies. There are many accounts of their painless childbirth and their ability to continue to work shortly after giving birth. Wood comments that 'a bigge bellie hinders no business, not a childbirth takes much time' and Wood's comparisons echo other travel writing attesting to the easy delivery of Irish women.³¹⁵ Wood's accounts are supported by traveller John Josselyn, who commented at length in his (subsequently published) journal, *Two Voyages to New England* (1674), about the childbearing habits of the native women that he observed on his travels throughout New England in 1638 and 1663. Josselyn writes that 'according to the ability of their bodies and the strength of their concupiscence' Native American women

have the easiest labours of any women in the world; they will go out when their time is come alone, carrying a board... when they are coming to a Bush or a Tree that they fancy they lay them down and are delivered in a trice, not so much as groaning for it, they wrap the child up in a young Beaver-skin...and lace him down to the board upon his back.... putting the strap of leather upon their fore-head with the infant hanging at their back home they trudge.'³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, p. 247.

³¹⁵ Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation*, p. 25; On general similarities made between the Irish and the Native Americans, see Robert Blair St. George, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill, 1998), pp. 328-344; James E. Doan, "'An Island in the Virginian Sea': Native Americans and the Irish in English Discourse, 1585-1640" *New Hibernia Review*, 1 (1997), pp. 79-99.

³¹⁶ John Josselyn, *Two Voyages to New-England* (1674) in Paul Lindholt (ed.), *John Josselyn, Colonial Traveler: a Critical Edition of Two Voyages to New-England* (Hanover, 1988), p. 92. Also see Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, pp. 262-4.

Josselyn describes a birth scene that is wholly foreign to English readers, starting with the act of easy, painless childbirth and emphasised by the description of the immediate dressing and carrying of the baby as 'home they trudge'. The description bears no resemblance to the extended period of fear, piety, and mortality expressed by Cotton Mather in *Elizabeth in her Holy Retirement*, but nor does it echo the painful, protracted and ultimately unsuccessful labour of the prostitute Cornelia in *The London Jilt*. Such accounts underscore the differences between the reproductive bodies and the practices of English and Indian women. These colonial reports described unfamiliar female bodies that seemed to reproduce differently. The Native Americans' birth scenes are devoid of the traditional domestic setting, ceremony, or participants in an Englishwoman's birthing chamber. Native American women's strength in recovery from quick and painless labour mimics the reproductive behaviour of animals and serves to further alienate their reproductive bodies from the Puritan colonists' experiences of birth. More importantly, pain-free labour was a strong indication of the New World and its native inhabitants being 'pre-lapsarian', i.e., Eden before the Fall.³¹⁷ New England's native women were not the recipients of the 'curse of Eve', the God-given labour pains that so dominated Christian writing about early modern childbirth. Cotton Mather advises his parishioners that the 'Curse in the Difficulties of both Subjection and of Childbearing, which the Female Sex is doom'd unto, has been turn'd into a Blessing by the free Grace of our most Gracious God' and 'sanctifies the Chains, the Pains, the Deaths which they meet withal.'³¹⁸ By Mather's standards, native women were not really

³¹⁷ See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'Captured Subjects/Savage Others: Violently Engendering the New American', *Gender & History*, 5 (1993), pp. 177-195: p. 178; Nussbaum, 'The Other Woman', pp. 141-147.

³¹⁸ Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, p. 48. Mather notes in his diary that he gave a copy of the sermon to each of the 'watchers' who looked after his family in a period of sickness immediately following his first wife's miscarriage and eventual death in 1702. (Mather, *Diary*, p.449) Mather also discusses the pain, distress, and fear associated with childbirth in detail in his sermon, *Elizabeth in Her Holy Retirement* (1710), a sermon which was included as a chapter in his medical manual *The Angel of Bethesda*. In the sermon, Mather's

women at all, as they lacked both the domestic subjection and the pain that signified God's blessing and which were among the most important features of women in general.³¹⁹

But the physical strength and pain-free childbirth of native women also served to further emasculate the Native American men who, as well as being lazy, were often reported by colonists as being drunk and, by correlation, morally weak.³²⁰ This moral weakness was also exhibited with the polygyny that was practised by the native men and women. The multiple sexual partners and communal living situations of natives piqued the interest of colonial writers and travellers. Wood makes passing reference to native polygyny in his *New England's Prospect*, and addressing, and correcting other, anonymous, reports 'that [native men] have eight or ten wives apiece', by instead asserting that 'men of ordinary rank have but one.'³²¹ Historian Anne Marie Plane supports Wood's claim of monogamy amongst the lower ranks of Native Americans, and she argues that many contemporary accounts overstated native polygyny. In reality, the majority of Native Americans practiced monogamy. Only sachems [tribal leaders] had multiple wives, mostly as a means to build political alliances between tribes.³²² Sarah Kemble Knight discusses both Native American marriage and divorce in her travel journal detailing her journey from Boston to New York in 1704-1705, and contends that 'they marry many wives and at pleasure put them away, and on the least dislike or fickle humour, on either side, saying stand away to one another is a sufficient

'Daughters of Eve' are instructed to approach their time of travail as an opportunity to exhibit their piety and prepare for death.

³¹⁹ Easy, pain-free childbirth was not limited to Native American women, as African women were also thought to give birth without pain, a belief that further separated them from Europeans and helped to justify the Atlantic slave trade. See Jennifer Morgan, "Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Race Ideology, 1500-1770', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 54 (1997), pp. 167-192: p. 189.

³²⁰ Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (London, 1632), p. 54. Morton devotes a paragraph to Native Americans' 'inclination to Drunkenness' but is otherwise positive in his description of the native population. This early modern English colonial characterization of men is not unique, as similar claims were made about the Irish.

³²¹ Wood, *New England's Prospect*, p. 81.

³²² See Anne Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca, 2000), p. 5. Plane argues that the early European colonists, such as Wood, were compelled to explain Native American marriages through their own rituals in order to contextualize their domestic arrangements and emphasize marriage as the 'fundamental structure of any society', one that 'secures the boundaries of nation, of civility' (Plane, p. 39).

Divorce. And indeed those uncomely Stand aways are too much in Vougue among the English in this (Indulgent Colony) as their Records plentifully prove'.³²³ Knight's comments reflect a less tolerant view toward native marriage practices and also betray the fear of cross-cultural contamination revolving around native divorce and its feared effect on the colonial culture.

By emphasising native polygyny, the colonial authors yet again demonstrated the sharp contrast between themselves and the Native Americans. Colonists' negative opinions toward native polygyny were linked with ideas about the disordered household, a result of crowded domestic relations, and the popular notion that natives frequently 'did away' with partners that were unsuitable. The contrast between these chaotic domestic arrangements and the Puritan godly-ordered household could not be clearer, and the lower birth rates of the native population confirmed their views. Historians have theorised that the lower birth rates had more to do with the natives' extended period of breastfeeding and culturally-specific periods of abstinence, but the colonists interpreted this phenomenon as yet more proof of their own providential right to the land.³²⁴ Dorothy McLaren has emphasised the contraceptive effect of breastfeeding in her study of the natural control of marital fertility of English women during the early modern period, particularly in the middling ranks of society like the families who immigrated to New England.³²⁵ Breastfeeding was promoted in prescriptive literature by Puritan writers such as Gouge and Colman and appears in the

³²³ Sarah Kemble Knight, *The Journal of Madam Knight*, ed. George Parker Winship (Boston, 1920), p. 39.

³²⁴ See Rebecca Tannenbaum, *Health and Wellness in Colonial America* (Santa Barbara, 2012), p. 56. C. Dallett Hemphill expands on this, stating 'through later weaning and abstinence during nursing, Native American women gave birth at three-or-four year intervals rather than the two year average among Europeans. European reporters from New England to Pennsylvania...remarked on the resulting smaller Indian family sizes of four to six children on average' in his chapter 'Sibling Relations in Early American Childhoods: a Cross-Cultural Analysis' in James Marten (ed.), *Children in Colonial America* (New York, 2006), pp.77-89 :p. 80.

³²⁵ Dorothy McLaren, 'Marital Fertility and Lactation, 1570-1720' in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), pp. 22-48. McLaren's study focuses on England. While higher birth rates in New England can be attributed to the fact that colonial women typically married younger, and gave birth earlier, than their English counterparts, the overall connection between lactation and fertility control that existed in both regions was significant.

personal writing of Samuel Sewall. While historians such as Marylynn Salmon have shown that breastfeeding was also culturally significant to New England's Puritan population, Native American women's extended period of breastfeeding, lasting up to three or four years, had a larger effect on family limitation.³²⁶

Conversion to Christianity and adoption of English family structures could alter this picture of native infertility, unusual childbirth practices, and domestic upheaval, however. Daniel Gookin describes a converted native woman's experience with a painful, protracted labour in his *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (1792) which, he admits, was a 'thing unusual with the Indian women, who are ordinarily quickly and easily delivered'.³²⁷ Close to death, the labouring woman and her husband are encouraged by their 'carnal and unconverted kindred' to pray to a native god, 'but both husband and wife utterly refused their temptation'. Instead, 'they cried earnestly to God in prayer' and invoked the help of the Christian community, including the minister, Thomas Mayhew junior, to 'implore the help of God for these poor, distressed, Christian Indians.' Shortly thereafter, the 'Lord graciously pleased to hear and... gave the woman safe deliverance of a daughter'.³²⁸ Similarly, Experience Mayhew includes the story of Hannah Nohnosoo, a native 'praying woman' in his *Indian Converts* (1727) in which he extols the virtues of the pious women of the converted Wampanoag tribe on Martha's Vineyard. Hannah helped 'several women, some English and some Indian' who were 'without the blessing of Children' through her combination of her 'considerable skill' with medicine and the example of her piety. After 'applying themselves' to Hannah, Mayhew notes that the barren women 'have soon after become joyful Mothers of Children; for which Comfort, under God, they have been oblig'd to

³²⁶ Marylynn Salmon, 'The Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding and Infant Care in Early Modern England and America', *Journal of Social History*, 28 (1994), pp. 247-269; also see Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, pp. 104-5.

³²⁷ Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England* (Boston, 1792), p. 15.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

her'.³²⁹ In both cases, Christian prayer (supported, in Hannah's case, by her knowledge of physic) prevailed in the face of prospective infertility. According to Gookin and Mayhew, native men and women who became 'praying Indians' reaped the benefits of Christianity and filled their own godly households as a result of English models.

Wood's 'New England's Prospect' would remain only that if it was left to continue to be sparsely populated and irregularly harvested by the idle male native population, this in spite of the recognition of their wives' hard work and unnaturally painless labour. Works such as those by Higginson and Wood portray a skewed native marital hierarchy and present native men as the very opposite of their ideal male settler who is most likely to reap the benefits of the land. The weakness of the native male population and the Native Americans' inverted power structures within their own marriages thus placed limits on the fertility of the land. Stereotypes of infertility were also reinforced by foreignness of Native bodies; the impact of which was directly linked to the frustrated potential of the ground that the Indians now shared with the English settlers.

Thomas Morton and Ma-re Mount

Thomas Morton takes these familiar themes to new lengths in his work, *New English Canaan* (1634), as he embellishes these metaphors of the potential fecundity of the colony, refers to the diminishing numbers and ultimate incapacity of the Indian population, and uses the work to openly insult the virility of his English rival settlers in the Plymouth Colony (and explicitly criticizes William Wood). Morton is known mostly for being a colourful antagonist to the Pilgrims in the late 1620s. He founded his own short-lived and controversial colony which he named Ma-re Mount, traded beaver pelts privately with the Native Americans, and indulged in many social activities forbidden by the neighbouring Separatists in Plymouth

³²⁹ Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts* (1727), quoted in Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander (eds.), *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington, MA, 1996), pp. 23-4.

Colony. Ma-re Mount was eventually disbanded and its founder sent back to England, but Morton remained a thorn in the side of the Puritan colonists for several years, not least by the publication of his side of the story, his work *New English Canaan*.³³⁰

Similarly to other colonial writers, Morton's work on New England is separated into three distinct parts: a description of 'the Natives, their Manners and Customs', a description of the 'naturall Indowments of the Countrie, and the Commodities it yeedelth, and finally a 'third booke setting forth what people are planted there', i.e., the experience of the English settlers.³³¹ His work, however, tells a story with a significantly different message from other colonial promotional material and employs liberal use of innuendo, nicknames, poetry, classical references, and riddles that have only recently been deciphered by historians. In an oft-quoted introduction, Morton famously refers to New England as 'a faire virgin, longing to be sped/ And meete her lover in a Nuptiall bed' and details her uneasy relationship with the Native Americans and the settlers of Plymouth by using metaphors and building characters around familiar stereotypes about fertility and infertility.³³²

Morton repeatedly employs the story of 'a barren doe of Virginia growne fruitfull in New Canaan' as a metaphor for the natural fertility of a land that 'is apt and fit for the increase of children.' Morton credits 'some sallet herbe proper to the Climate or the fountain at Weenaseemute that made her become teeming here, that had tried to camp royall in other partes, where shee had been, & yet never the neere, till she came in to New Canaan.'³³³

Morton later mentions the spring again, 'the virtue whereof, is to cure barrennesse', and relates that 'the place taketh his name of the Fountaine which signifieth quick spring, or

³³⁰ ODNB, s.v. 'Thomas Morton (1580x95–1646/7)', accessed 20 June 2013.

³³¹ Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (London, 1632), p. 1.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

quicken spring probatum.’³³⁴ By referring to the ‘doe’s’ fertility struggles in other North American settlements, such as Virginia, Morton asserts his own colony’s successes and also perpetuates contemporary ideas about the beleaguered southern colonies that did not enjoy such high levels of fertility as New England. His mention of the natural spring also recalls the English custom of visiting baths in order to treat infertility. Morton elaborates on the story of the barren doe to theorise that ‘this Country of New Canaan in seaven yeares time could show more Children living, that have been borne there, then in 27 yeares could be shewen in Virginia’.³³⁵ Morton thus weaves infertility into his work by addressing the struggles of settlers from other colonies and the relief that those individuals seeking children eventually found in his New Canaan. While his claims are wholly unsubstantiated, he echoes the earlier works of Wood in celebrating New England’s high fertility by comparing it to other North American colonies and their population problems. While there was no direct competition from the southern colonies, Morton’s language reinforces the idea that high fertility and population growth was a gauge used to measure the relative success of a colonial project.

Morton’s heavy use of conjugal metaphors has not been lost on scholars, and Edith Murphy argues that ‘Morton’s depictions of the land, the Indians, and the dissenters throughout New English Canaan’ are actually stock characters in a classic marital tableau.³³⁶ Michelle Burnham contends that Morton’s plans for exploiting the natural resources and prospering in New England differed greatly from the likes of his foes William Bradford in Plymouth and John Endicott in Salem and from the carefully prescribed hard work and English agricultural strategies laid out by Higginson and Wood. Morton is intent on living off of the natural abundance of the environment, and represents the colony’s ‘Puritan inhabitants as a kind of plague whose misguided labour brings morbidity and infertility to Canaan’s

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

³³⁶ Edith Murphy, “A Rich Widow, Now to Be Tane Up or Laid Downe”: Solving the Riddle of Thomas Morton’s “Rise Oedipus”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 55 (1996), p. 759.

paradise.’³³⁷ Morton even uses the language of infertility in referring to his rivals as ‘moles’ throughout the work, a term he used to denote their blindness to their failures in settlement efforts, but also a contemporary term used to describe the physical products, or lumps of flesh, that resulted from specific forms of miscarriages.³³⁸ Morton’s work praises the behaviour and practices of the Native Americans, and he lauds their ‘admirable perfection in the use of the senses’ and, contrary to other reports, insists that ‘they finde no want, but have, and may have [food and rayment (clothing)] in a most plentifull manner.’³³⁹ Morton uses the same language of infertility to criticize other colonists, rejecting Higginson’s claims entirely and instead siding with the Indians.

It is the other English settlers that Morton takes issue with, and his work is also populated with characters based on his real-life enemies at Plymouth and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He presents his fellow colonists as wholly impotent, incompetent men who are incapable of acting as proper husbands to land. Like the pathetic Squire Limberham in *The London Jilt*, Morton’s ‘Captain Littleworth’ (John Endicott) and ‘Mr. Bubble’ (a Plymouth minister) are presented as wholly incapable of taking the responsibilities required in this ‘marriage’ to the fertile virgin colony, and Morton comically relays stories about the men’s visits to Ma-re Mount in which they fail hopelessly at masculine tasks such as hunting and fishing. As Morton’s work progresses, so he develops the metaphor of his virgin bride and he eventually refers to the land as ‘a rich widow, Now to be tane up or laid downe’.³⁴⁰ Murphy asserts that ‘the widow represents the land, her deceased husband the Indians, and her new husband the Pilgrims. The [new] virile lover is Morton himself.’³⁴¹ Thus the early modern English reader is presented with characters identifiable from cuckold stories and similarly

³³⁷ Michelle Burnham, ‘Land, Labor, and Colonial Economics in Thomas Morton’s “New English Canaan”’, *Early American Literature*, 41 (2006), p. 418.

³³⁸ See Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 106.

³³⁹ Morton, *New English Canaan*, p. 55.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³⁴¹ Murphy, ‘Solving the Riddle’, p. 759.

familiar lessons about neglected responsibilities of marriage and straying, deceitful partners. Morton uses recognizable motifs to effectively tell his story about the new settlement of New England, and the characters that he chooses to include repeat, adapt, and perpetuate English ideas about infertility within a new landscape.

Morton's most dramatic use of traditional fertility symbols and metaphors is his most well-known: the maypole at Ma-re Mount has become the stuff of New England historical legend since its erection on May 1, 1627. Morton describes this particularly defiant act with much pride, and he takes care in his work to explain the meaning of his 'riddle', 'Oedipus Rise', that was attached to the pole. His reports of the 'Revells of New Canaan', complete with 'a barrel of excellent beare' and help from 'Salvages' to erect the 'goodly pine tree of 80 foote long', was for the benefit of 'the harmless mirth made by younger men (that lived in hope to have wives brought over to them that would save them laboure to make a voyage to fetch any over'.³⁴² Morton therefore defends his actions as being within the spirit of marriage, but he also admits that this act was still 'much distasted' by the 'precise Separatists'. The rest of *New English Canaan* is devoted to his ensuing struggles with the colonial governments. As noted by Murphy, the inclusion of 'a peare of buck horns [or cuckold horns] nayled' to the top of the maypole at Ma-re Mount also stood as a visible representation of Morton's implications as to the impotency of fellow English colonists, and his threat to take their contested bride.³⁴³ It was an audacious affront to Morton's enemies before he was sent back to England, and even in memory stands as an enduring, visible symbol of the insult of infertility with which he charged his colonial rivals.

³⁴² Morton, *New English Canaan*, p. 135.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Captivity Narratives

The captivity narratives that were published in New England and England in the immediate aftermath of King Philip's War in the early 1680s reinforced the familiar tropes of earlier treatises about native populations and infertility by emphasizing the wilful, often graphically described, destruction of Christian families. In these stories, pious women undergo extreme tests of faith after being kidnapped and enduring life in Native American communities before their eventual, providential, return to their own communities. Sustained by their devotion in the face of heathenism, death, and warfare, they survive their dramatic ordeals with renewed faith in God. The popular captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, published as *The Sovereignty and the Goodness of God* (1682) in New England, and as *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) in London, is the best known work of this genre, and it has long been regarded as a strategic political and religious tool.³⁴⁴ Scholars such as Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, Amanda Porterfield, and Theresa Toulouse have analysed captivity narratives' gendered messages through many different lenses, examining the genre's emergence with respect to religious crises and internal and external colonial political pressures, and explaining why the Puritan response to these stresses were best expressed in a new, notably feminine, form of expression.³⁴⁵ The latter half of the seventeenth century was a troubled time for the second-and-third generation New England colonists, a time of disease, local warfare, royal charter confusion, and perceived religious apathy of the younger generations. The anxieties of the period were captured most

³⁴⁴ See Kathryn Zabelle Derounian, 'The Publication, Promotion, and Distribution of Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative in the Seventeenth Century', *Early American Literature*, 23 (1988), pp. 239-61. Mary Rowlandson's was one of several captivity narratives to be produced during this period, but her story was the most popular, especially in England.

³⁴⁵ See Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* (New York, 1998); Smith-Rosenberg, 'Captured Subjects/Savage Others', pp.180-5 ; Theresa Toulouse, *Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia, 2007), pp. 10-29; Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England*, pp.137-143, pp. 137-142; Ann M. Little, *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia, 2007) pp. 91-126; Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark (eds.), *Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676-1724* (Cambridge, MA, 1981).

clearly in the jeremiads of the 1660s and 1670s by ministers such as Michael Wigglesworth, Samuel Danforth, Increase Mather, and Samuel Hooker, whose poems and sermons focused on such worldly representations of God's disfavour and imminent threat of destruction of the colony altogether.³⁴⁶ Captivity narratives were a way of communicating similarly important religious messages about the precarious state of the Puritans' bodies and souls by showing them both at risk during their time as captives in the heathen communities. The triumphs of Mary Rowlandson and other captives are therefore expressed through overtly religious language. These stories also contain important messages about infertility and the perception of differences between the reproductive physicalities and the maternal instincts of New English and Native American women. Mary Rowlandson's behaviour in captivity, and specifically, the representation of her mistress, the Native American queen Weetamoo, bring these differences to light.

Mary Rowlandson and her three children were kidnapped during a Native American attack on her town of Lancaster, Massachusetts in February of 1675 at the height of King Philip's War. Held for three months, Mary was eventually ransomed, and, upon her return, wrote a memoir of her time during captivity detailing native practices and customs. Throughout the twenty 'removes' chronicling her movement with her Native American captors around the region, Rowlandson describes her physical and spiritual trials and ultimately redemption through her faith in God. While a captive, Rowlandson was a slave to Weetamoo, an unconverted squaw-sachem of the Pocassetts, whose birthright and multiple

³⁴⁶ The best known examples of jeremiads are Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom* (Boston, 1662) ; Samuel Danforth, *A Brief Recognition of New Englands Errand into the Wilderness* (Boston, 1671); Increase Mather, *Day of Trouble is Near* (Boston, 1674); Samuel Hooker, *Righteousness Rained from Heaven* (Boston, 1677). For further historical and literary analysis of this genre, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, 1978); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 27-39. Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York, 1986); Robert Daly, *God's Altar: The World and the Flesh in Puritan Poetry*. (Berkeley, 1978).

marriages established her power as a leader across several tribes.³⁴⁷ As Tiffany Potter explains, Rowlandson's captivity account provides modern readers with unusually detailed information about the power of women in native societies, and colonists' judgments about indigenous femininity when compared to their own women.³⁴⁸ Potter contends that Rowlandson asserts her own femininity and challenges Weetamoo's on three levels: 'sexual purity, maternity, and gender-appropriate production and exchange' in the narrative.³⁴⁹ Rowlandson first mentions Weetamoo by name when she relates that 'my master had three squaws'. In spite of her proud manner and noble heritage, Weetamoo is immediately downgraded from a haughty queen to a concubine who must share her husband as part of a polygamous relationship. Rowlandson describes Weetamoo as 'a severe and proud dame' heavily decorated with makeup, jewelry and hair dressings 'as any of the Gentry of the land'. In contrast to her wretched, overworked and distraught self, Rowlandson portrays Weetamoo as vain, lazy (taking time to adorn herself with decorations), and utterly cold in manner. As Potter contends, this is the antithesis of ideal Puritan feminine behaviour, but it is not wholly unnatural, as Weetamoo's appearance and behaviour is explained through comparison to English gentlewomen. Mary also mentions that one of the other wives, 'the younger Squaw' has 'two papooses', but the only child ascribed to Weetamoo is the one Rowlandson mentions as dying during the thirteenth remove. An indifferent Rowlandson mentions that 'there was one benefit to [the child dying], that there was more room'.³⁵⁰ Weetamoo mourns

³⁴⁷ There is no official biography of Weetamoo and information about the details of her life vary. She was allegedly married five times to various sachems across the Algonquian tribes, including: Winnepurket, Wamsutta, chief of the Wampanoags (and brother to Metacom, or King Philip, who was also married to Weetamoo's sister and who gained the title of chief after Wamsutta's death in 1662), Quequequanachet, Petonowit, and Quinnapin, leader of the Narragansetts.: see Peirce Ebenezer Weaver, *Indian History, Biography and Genealogy: Pertaining to the Good Sachem Massasoit of the Wampanoag Tribe, and His Descendants* (North Abington, Mass., 1878), pp. 44-51.

³⁴⁸ Tiffany Potter, 'Writing Indigenous Femininity: Mary Rowlandson's Narrative of Captivity' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36 (2003), pp. 153-167.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁵⁰ Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (London, 1682), p. 18. I have chosen to use the London version of the narrative to reflect the trans-Atlantic context of the work.

the child in a primitive manner and after the burial, and Rowlandson notes that ‘there came a company to mourn and howl with her.’³⁵¹ Presented by Rowlandson as a failure as a mother and as a woman, Weetamoo is a picture of indigenous femininity divorced from successful maternity.³⁵² Indeed, by coupling this portrayal of failed maternity with polygamous relationships, Rowlandson contributes a dismal representation of Native American reproductive abilities in general. Despite all of her marriages, her power as a queen, and as one of several wives to the sachem, Rowlandson does not associate Weetamoo with any living children. In highlighting these differences between them, Rowlandson uses gender norms to emphasize the difference between herself and Weetamoo and assert her New English preeminence.³⁵³

Rowlandson also loses her status as a mother during the time of her captivity. While much of her religious authority depends on her status as a devout, loving mother of three children, Rowlandson’s maternal power is virtually extinguished during her time in captivity. Separated from her children who were held captive in another camp, it is clear that she misses them desperately, frequently referring to them in prayer and reflection. But she is powerless to protect them, as evidenced by the death of her young daughter, and she plunges into uncertainty and sadness when she thinks that she will lose them forever. Upon the negotiation of her release, she despairs ‘that ever I should go home again: and that I must go, leaving my Children behind me in the Wilderness’.³⁵⁴ If she remains a captive, she will also likely never be a mother again. As Mary herself publicly claimed in every edition of her narrative, she was not sexually assaulted by her Native American captors, nor was there any attempt to marry her to a Native man. Rape was not used as a tool of warfare by the Native Americans, and thus could be interpreted by the colonists as yet another indication of Native

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁵² Potter, ‘Writing Indigenous Femininity’, p. 159.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 155.

³⁵⁴ Rowlandson, *A True Story*, p. 29.

men's effeminacy.³⁵⁵ Thus, there was no chance of Mary Rowlandson becoming a mother in her new society either. In her role as a captive, Mary Rowlandson is rendered both childless *and* infertile. Her status as a mother 'removed' during her time in captivity, surrounded by examples of infertility in the Native community, her redemption and restoration to Christian society, and return of her children, would have resonated even more strongly amongst the Puritan readership who considered mothers and rightly-ordered families as pillars of faith in the face of war and an uncertain future.

Conclusion

In English early modern culture, the possibility of infertility was everywhere, and in the colonists' case, its threat was central to their experience of the New World. Examining how these popular stereotypes of infertility manifested themselves in English pornography, travel literature, and in the new genre of New England captivity narratives displays the tension that infertility caused between men and women, young and old, settlers and natives, and colonists and country. Writers in both societies expressed their population concerns through the language of infertility. In England, the language of infertility provided the script when social boundaries were crossed and gendered hierarchies were challenged. In pornographic novels, morally suspect women privileged sex over reproduction, and prostitutes were shown to be physically incapable of producing healthy babies. Cuckold literature exposed the dangers of inverted gender relationships. That same language was adopted and adapted by colonists in New England to deal with their new reproductive rivals, the Native Americans, both in terms of land and offspring, and to effectively describe and discredit Native American society. There was no greater mark of success than the high birth rates of the English colonists, and competition for land and resources with native populations provided a new sense of urgency for reproduction, and, by extension, colonial success.

³⁵⁵ See Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill, 2006), pp. 351-261; Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 261-263; Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Captivity Narratives*, p. xvi.

In the memorable case of Thomas Morton's Ma-re Mount, a physical symbol of fertility from Old England was erected in the virgin landscape of New Canaan, but other examples of the images, language and metaphors that shaped early modern discourse about reproduction and, by correlation, challenges to reproduction, also made the journey across the Atlantic. In the colonial world of small communities and dark wildernesses, the spiritual and culturally-informed interpretations of generation were crucial. Popular English tropes of infertility were retained and used to express the colonists' impressions of the new landscape, and, in times of crisis, to communicate anxieties about their own population and their reproductive rivals, the Native Americans. These stories were then sent back to England, illustrating how attitudes toward infertility were spread throughout and transmitted between the two societies. Likewise, it is important to remember that ideas about reproductive bodies were communicated through a variety of sources, and it was through these popular works that most people could reference, relate to, or question their own struggles with infertility.

Pornography perpetuated negative stereotypes of infertility by presenting it as a condition inherently linked to prostitutes and directly tied to excessive venery and social transgression. Unbridled sexuality was a key contributor to cases of infertility, and such rampant lasciviousness could only be held in check by the traditional Christian model of marriage that in turn correctly ordered gender relations in early modern society. In the case of the *London Jilt*, both sexes respectively contribute to their infertile states – the prostitute, wholly incapable, morally and physically, of being a mother, and the insufficient squire, an early fumble to the young Cornelia but ultimately an example of male impotence in all senses of the word. Separating the fates of these characters and assigning blame is hardly straightforward as clearly their sexual (and therefore reproductive) functioning is dependent on the appropriate arousal of each other. According to early modern minds, fertility in both

men and women depended on sexual regulation and functioned best when within the Christian model of marriage.

These themes are underscored, furthered, and complicated, by the colonial reports from New England as they provided cautionary prototypes of disordered relationships between men and women, colonists and the land, natives and settlers, and the prospective fertility of all. English colonists took their previously-conceived ideas about the situations that 'bred' infertility with them to New England, and there found new bodies and domestic arrangements to attach them to. The unfamiliar domestic relationships and labour arrangements between Native American men and women raised questions about traditional gender roles, and the familiar language and symbols that signified male impotence, and its associated social ridicule, were more powerful than ever. As evident in the writing of Higginson, Wood, and Morton, popular stereotypes of infertility were repeatedly used to discredit contradictory ideas about settlement patterns, and even the new 'virgin' land was given a role in familiar conjugal dramas.

Whether preached from the pulpits of Puritan meeting houses, published in the pages of pornographic novels, or nailed to the maypole at Mar-re Mount, stereotypes of infertility were everywhere in colonial New England, but they still shared the language, imagery, and values from the popular culture of Mother England. The anxieties surrounding the colonies' survival are also evident in the captivity narratives produced by second-and-third-generation New Englanders in times of crisis, as relationships with Native Americans disintegrated and attitudes toward Native American sexuality and reproduction became more derogatory. Fifty years after the promotional tracts celebrating the fertility of the New World, the stresses of the colonial experiment were expressed through the language of infertility as the competition from native populations underscored the urgency for reproduction for the success of the colony's future as a whole.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

Introduction

This chapter uses two cases of infertility in the early modern English world: the monstrous births of Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer in the Antinomian controversy in New England in the late 1630s, and the fertility struggles of Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena in the Stuart succession controversies of the late seventeenth century. These cases were chosen for their significance in the historical record and also for their representation of the social and political issues that infertility raised in the distinct cultural climates of colonial New England and late seventeenth-century England. In both cases, reproductive failure can be linked to the themes of disorder – disorder within a natural body, within a marriage, and within a society – that were associated with infertility in the early modern world. They exhibit the connections between infertility and disorder on two levels.

First, both cases exhibit the spectrum of infertility as experienced and interpreted by early modern men and women. Anne Hutchinson's and Mary Dyer's misbirths were analysed in great detail, and the different physical products of their reproductive failures were used strategically in the political and religious campaign of their adversaries. Likewise, Catherine of Braganza's range of reproductive failures, from her initial inability to conceive, to her multiple miscarriages, were observed and commented on by her contemporaries both in and outside court. Mary of Modena also experienced miscarriages and reproductive problems before finally giving birth to the long-awaited Prince of Wales in 1688. Secondly, these cases show how instances of personal, bodily misfortune could be analysed, interpreted, and manipulated by the public during the seventeenth century. The language of infertility was employed in times of crisis, and the anxieties expressed over these women's malfunctioning reproductive bodies reveal larger anxieties that plagued the societies of colonial New England and early modern England.

Case Study 1: ‘So She must bring forth deformed Monsters’: Reproductive Failure in the Antinomian Controversy

The ‘monsters’ born to colonists Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer in the late 1630s featured prominently in the Antinomian Controversy, a social and religious crisis during the earliest days of the New England colonial experience. The episode inspired contemporary writing in the form of letters between colonial leaders and published works on both sides of the Atlantic, and the misbirths were used strategically by orthodox colonial leaders as physical evidence of God’s disapproval of the Antinomian cause. By evaluating these monstrous births as cases of reproductive failure, the episode provides a dramatic example of how fertility challenges could be interpreted in the religiously charged environment of early New England. This analysis demonstrates that the Antinomian Controversy can be read as a story that starts and ends with scenarios of infertility, as key players were charged first with promoting fertility through unnatural means while eventually suffering experiences of stillbirth and miscarriage themselves. Popular ideas about, and representations of infertility, from seed imbalance to maternal imagination, shaped much of the contemporary discourse about the events and can be found throughout the various written records that make the Antinomian controversy one of the most studied events in early American history.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ The Antinomian controversy is one of the most analysed case studies from early New England social and religious history, and many works have been written to argue the finer points of the theological debate, as well as the role that gender and politics played in the dispute. For accounts of the theological dispute, see Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston, 1958); William K.B. Stoever, ‘Nature, Grace and John Cotton: The Theological Dimensions in the New England Antinomian Controversy’, *Church History*, 44 (1975), pp. 22-33; Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994). For discussion of Anne Hutchinson and the gender dynamics at play, see Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel: The Uncommon Life of Anne Hutchinson, The Woman Who Defied the Puritans* (San Francisco, 2004); Marilyn Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850 : the Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London, 1999), pp. 35-52; Lad Tobin, ‘A Radically Different Voice: Gender and Language in the Trials of Anne Hutchinson’, *Early American Literature*, 25 (1990), pp. 253-270; Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman : Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley, 1987); Lyle Koehler, ‘The Case of the American Jezebels: Anne Hutchinson and Female Agitation During the Years of the Antinomian Turmoil, 1636-1640’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 31 (1974), pp. 55-78. For analysis of the social, political, and economic elements of the crisis, see Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*

Connecting these cases of monstrous birth to contemporary medical and pseudo-medical knowledge sheds light on the complicated relationship between medical, social, and religious attitudes toward infertility during the early modern period. Additionally, a study of the trans-Atlantic communication over these events further elucidates the close relationship between colonial New England and early modern English society and the allegorical use of reproductive bodies in the frequent exchange of news and ideas between the two regions. Historians have argued that the extensive attention paid to the Antinomian monstrous births in New England played a key role in wider colonial developments and simultaneously fanned debates about religious and political dissension raging in England during the same period. Reports on the Antinomian controversy were some of the most widely-circulated news to return to England, as the crisis was used both as an internal gauge of the successes and weaknesses of the colonial experiment, as well as an opportunity to exhibit the strength of the colony's leaders in the face of adversity.³⁵⁷

The sheer amount of material written, published, and revised about the dispute makes it an unusually well-documented episode involving women's infertile bodies in early New England, but equally the number of disparate accounts necessitates a straightforward summary of the dramatic events as they were recorded. The critical timing of the discovery of Antinomian Mary Dyer's monstrous birth in the spring of 1638 featured in the correspondence between colonial leaders about the threat that Antinomianism presented in their communities, and, combined with Anne Hutchinson's miscarriage later that year, the reproductive failures appeared in subsequent literature that was produced in England about the wider social and political controversy. Analysis of the popular medical literature of the

(Chapel Hill, 1962); Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton, 2002). For collected documents on the crisis, including trial proceedings, testimonies, related correspondence, and excerpts of published accounts, see David D. Hall (ed.), *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, 2nd edn. (Durham, N.C, 1990).

³⁵⁷ Valerie Pearl and Morris Pearl, 'Governor John Winthrop and the Birth of the Antinomian's "Monster": The Earliest Reports to Reach England and the Making of a Myth', *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 102 (1990), pp. 21-37.

era provides the context for these specific cases and illustrates the worldview driving the explanations and descriptions of monstrous birth in the early modern period. Finally, the representations of Mary Dyer's and Anne Hutchinson's monstrous births in early modern correspondence and literature depict a distinctly colonial story built on the foundations of early modern English ideology about monstrous births; a story enhanced by the particularly providential worldview of the colonists, and bolstered by the need to prove the success of the new colony – a success that largely rested on the reproductive bodies of its mothers.

Correspondence between colonial leaders about the misbirths, the publication of several accounts documenting the events, and the historical legacy that it has left behind exhibit the anxiety that cases of reproductive failure caused in early New England and establish the episode's lasting impression on future generations – even generations of scholars hundreds of years later. Historians have argued that these particular monstrous births were products of the unique circumstances of the New England colonial experiment, and they should be understood with regard to New England's preoccupation with reproduction and particular reaction to its failure.³⁵⁸

The Antinomian Controversy

Anne Hutchinson was the central figure in the Antinomian controversy, a dramatic episode in the early years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony that called into question the interpretation of key religious doctrines and, by extension, the ordering principles of the colony. Hutchinson, a midwife and a devout follower of the Reverend John Cotton, arrived with her family in Boston in 1634. She attracted attention by hosting private gatherings in her home (across the street from soon-to-be re-elected Governor John Winthrop), by discussing

³⁵⁸ Anne Jacobson Schutte, ' "Such Monstrous Births": A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985), pp. 85-106: p. 86. Also see Jim Egan, *Authorizing Experience: Refigurations of the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England Writing* (Princeton, 1999), p. 81. Egan argues that Winthrop's account of the controversy 'invests Winthrop's faction of the church with the authority of an experience unique to colonial Protestants.'

the interpretation of religious doctrine and, more specifically, debating the issue of salvation through a covenant of works or a covenant of grace. Winthrop first refers to Anne in his journal in October 1636 and there sums up the ‘errors’ that resulted in her eventual expulsion from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

One Mrs. Hutchinson, a member of the church of Boston, a woman of a ready wit and bold spirit, brought over with her two dangerous errors: I. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2. That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification – From these grew many branches; as, I, Our union with the Holy Ghost, so as a Christian remains dead to every spiritual action, and hath no gifts nor graces, other than such as are in hypocrites, nor any other sanctification but with the Holy Ghost himself.³⁵⁹

The most flagrant Antinomians, including Anne Hutchinson, her brother-in-law John Wheelwright, and ‘other erroneous and seditious persons’ were brought to trial over their promotion of these dissident ideas in 1637.³⁶⁰ Anne, a married woman, was initially protected against the charge of sedition due to her legal inability to publicly preach or sign documents attesting to subversive doctrine, but she was charged with ‘maintain[ing] a meeting and an assembly in [her] house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for [her] sex.’³⁶¹ As several scholars have noted, the civil charges brought against her focused on the transgression of gender norms.³⁶² More specifically, it was the manner in which these Antinomian ideas were spread that proved so disconcerting to religious and government officials. A woman leading religious

³⁵⁹ John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, eds. Richard Dunn and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, MA, 1996), p. 193.

³⁶⁰ John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that Infected the Churches of New-England* (London, 1644), p. 21. Authorship of the embellished version of events in the *Short Story* is difficult to ascertain, as Valerie and Morris Pearl analyse in their article ‘Governor Winthrop on the Birth of the Antinomians’ “Monster”, p. 27. For citation purposes, Thomas Weld will be cited as the author of the preface of the *Short Story* and John Winthrop for the body of the work.

³⁶¹ ‘The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown’ reprinted in Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 312.

³⁶² Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that the Antinomian controversy marked the emergence of gender as a category of knowledge for the Puritan leaders and was significant in the subsequent social and political ordering of the colony: Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford, 2004), p. 52.

discussions in her own home, commanding the attention of both men and women – such actions transcended theological differences to demonstrate severe social impropriety.

The danger of the Antinomian argument as it manifested itself in New England was its challenge to everything on which the New England Puritan colonial experiment was based. On a theological level, Hutchinson's interpretation of a 'covenant of grace', in which salvation was guaranteed only by Divine election, and not by any observance of moral law, communicated to her directly by God, challenged the beliefs of several of the religious leaders of the Church of Boston, such as Thomas Shepard, whose interpretation she claimed to be more akin to a 'covenant of works'. As Susan Hardman Moore summarises, 'For Cotton and his admirers [including Anne Hutchinson], costly grace should be free; for Shepard and his allies, free grace was costly.'³⁶³ On a social and political level, Anne Hutchinson, as a woman leading religious meetings to debate scripture and promulgate this 'covenant of grace', personally exhibited the social disorder that could result from such an interpretation. The success of the colony depended on an intricately woven system of social, political, and spiritual order, and, in the eyes of the magistrates, Anne Hutchinson was guilty of transgressing several of those carefully-set boundaries. Jim Egan argues that the Antinomian controversy was conceived and communicated by Winthrop as a plague infecting the newly-formed body politic of the colony. Contemporaries described Antinomian teachings as a disease that 'tainted some who conveyed the infection to others', as minister Thomas Weld argued in his preface to Winthrop's *Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that Infected the Churches of New-England* (1644).³⁶⁴ As Egan contends, the 'plague' was often spread through women-only environments, including birthing chambers, which were inaccessible to males, and therefore especially

³⁶³ Susan Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims: New World Settlers and the Call of Home* (New Haven, 2007), p. 6.

³⁶⁴ Weld, *Short Story*, preface.

dangerous to the health of the colony as a whole.³⁶⁵ Weld contended that the Antinomians' 'boldness, pride, insolency' caused 'disturbances, divisions, contentions...both in Church and State, and in Families, setting Division betwixt Husband and Wife'.³⁶⁶ As Weld's rhetoric illustrates, these messages had the power to subvert gender hierarchies, destroy marital relationships, and subsequently tear apart the 'little commonwealth' family units upon which the colony was built. The transmission of these ideas through female channels proved most terrifying due to the lack of control Winthrop and other male officials had over these spaces. Most worryingly, the danger came from within the most intimate spaces of the colony itself, and therefore had the potential to destroy the entire religious and social experiment from the inside out.

Ill-chosen words at the very end of her trial in November 1637, that prophesied the downfall of the colony and claimed direct communication with God, proved to be a crucial mistake for Hutchinson, and her bold statements in the final day of her autumn civil trial before the General Court prompted her opponents to impose the extreme punishment of banishment from the colony. Hutchinson spent the winter under house arrest, awaiting a second, ecclesiastical, trial that resulted in her excommunication from the Boston Church in March 1638. It was only at the close of that ecclesiastical trial in March 1638 that colonial leader John Winthrop learned that one of Hutchinson's closest followers, Mary Dyer, had given birth to a 'monster' that had been immediately, and secretly, buried during the previous autumn. The 'manner of the discovery' of the birth was even regarded by Winthrop as being 'very strange' as the secret was exposed when the governor overheard gossip at the close of Hutchinson's second trial. Hearing a 'stranger' describe Mary Dyer (a close friend of Hutchinson who escorted her out of the church on the last day of her trial) as 'the woman

³⁶⁵ Egan, *Authorizing Experience*, pp. 74-5. Egan argues that Weld and Winthrop stress the importance of arranging the body politic through gender lines in the *Short Story*.

³⁶⁶ Weld, *Short Story*, preface.

who had the monster', Winthrop subsequently questioned the midwife, Jane Hawkins, and the full details of monstrous birth emerged.³⁶⁷ Winthrop learned that Anne Hutchinson and Jane Hawkins were present at the birth of the monster, and, after Hawkins confessed to the extremity of the baby's deformity, the elders exhumed the corpse in the spring of 1638. This exhumation and autopsy of the 'much corrupted' remains enabled Winthrop to describe the physical characteristics of 'the monster' in full detail in an extended journal entry as well as letters sent around the New England colonies and back to England. Winthrop described the disinterred corpse as

a woman child, stillborn, about two months before the just time, having life a few hours before; it came hiplings till she [midwife Jane Hawkins] turned it; it was of ordinary bigness; it had a face, but no head, and the ears stood upon the shoulders and were like an ape's; it had no forehead, but over the eyes four horns, hard and sharp; two of them were above one inch long, the other two shorter; the eyes standing out, and the mouth also, the nose hooked upward, all over the breast and back full of sharp pricks and scales, like a thornback; the navel and all the belly, with the distinction of the sex, were where the back should be, and the back and hips before, where the belly should have been; behind, between the shoulders, it had two mouths, and in each of them a piece of red flesh sticking out; it had arms and legs as other children; but, instead of toes, it had on each foot three claws, like a young fowl, with sharp talons.³⁶⁸

The detail with which Winthrop recorded the physical characteristics of the body was an important exercise in the documenting of the case.

Later in the year, Anne Hutchinson herself suffered a miscarriage that was interpreted, and promulgated, by New England Puritan leaders to be additional physical proof of God's judgment against the 'American Jezebel'. Hutchinson's miscarriage was only reported after she left the Massachusetts Bay Colony. John Winthrop, upon hearing of the delivery, wrote to a Dr. Clark in Rhode Island to get a full account. He then transcribed the doctor's descriptions into his own journal, stating

³⁶⁷ Winthrop includes the story of the 'discovery' in a summary of the list of unusual circumstances surrounding the birth in his *Short Story*. See Winthrop, *Short Story*, pp. 44-5.

³⁶⁸ Winthrop, *Journal*, pp. 253-4.

Mrs. Hutchinson, six weeks before her delivery, perceived her body to be greatly distempered and her spirits failing and in that regard doubtful of life, she sent to me etc., and not long after (in immoderate fluore uterino) it was brought to light... I beheld innumerable distinct bodies in the form of a globe, not much unlike the swims of some fish, so confusedly knit together by so many several strings (which I conceive were the beginnings of veins and nerves) so that it was impossible either to number the small round pieces in every lump, much less to discern from whence every string did fetch its original, they were so snarled one within another. The small globes I likewise opened, and perceived the matter of them (setting aside the membrane in which it was involved) to be partly wind and partly water...the lumps were twenty-six or twenty-seven, distinct and not joined together...The globes were round things, included in the lumps, about the bigness of a small Indian bean, and like the pearl from a man's eye.³⁶⁹

The details of the births were carefully recorded in Winthrop's journal, but the lessons and opportunity afforded by their exposure were yet to be realised through publication of popular works and correspondence. As historians have recognized, these monstrous births presented a public relations opportunity both within and across the colonies and, most importantly, back to England. Information about the monstrous births was used against the women to elevate the Antinomian crimes from doctrinal misinterpretation and civil disobedience to physical proof of God's condemnation. The reproductive misfortunes of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson thus played a pivotal role in popularizing the story of a faraway crisis for English audiences, and they also effectively communicated the danger of religious and social dissent in explicit, corporeal, and familiar terms. Moreover, the detail of the description of the births exposed the 'monstrous' results of women dabbling in areas beyond their specifically-ordered place within the colony. Graphically linking the crimes of these disobedient women to their cases of unsuccessful reproduction at once connected the physical products of their misbirths to severe judgment from God, and justified the harsh punishment inflicted by colonial leaders.³⁷⁰ But, as the graphic details emerged about the monstrous births of Mary Dyer and

³⁶⁹ Winthrop, *Journal*, pp. 255-6.

³⁷⁰ Anne Hutchinson's dramatic death further fuelled speculations about divine judgement as Hutchinson and all of her family, except for one girl, were murdered by Native Americans shortly after they moved to New

Anne Hutchinson, so did stories about other forms of their illicit knowledge and dangerous power within the realm of reproduction. As a closer analysis of midwife Jane Hawkins's role illustrates, the Antinomian controversy should also be read as a tale exhibiting the dire consequences of interfering with fertility.

Jane Hawkins: Tampering with Fertility

Anne Hutchinson preached in female-only circles first, and her own reputation as a midwife gave her access to groups of women. Rebecca Tannenbaum argues that Hutchinson's reputation as a healer contributed to her authority amongst the women of Boston and also intensified the threat that she posed to the male religious establishment. John Winthrop noted that she was 'very helpful in the times of child-birth' and complained that in that role she 'readily insinuated herself into the affections of many.'³⁷¹ The female spaces of the birthing chamber presented women with the opportunity to share all sorts of information not privy to men. As Tannenbaum maintains, the intimacy of the birthing chamber 'created an atmosphere that lent itself to spiritual discussions' and it was within this powerful space that Anne Hutchinson developed her religious and social authority.³⁷² Tannenbaum is correct in asserting that these female-only spaces played a critical role in both the development of Anne's authority and the fear that it instilled in male colonial leaders who would forever be on the outside looking in. The authority that midwives possessed over knowledge about women's reproductive bodies, and the distinctive social space of the birthing chamber, contributed to the male anxiety over the spread of Antinomianism through female channels.

Netherland in 1643. Anne's violent death was interpreted as yet another condemnation from an angry God by Weld, 'free[-ing] us from this great and Sore affliction'. Weld revels in the extraordinary nature of her death, marvelling, 'I never heard that the Indians in those parts did ever before this, commit the like Outrage upon any one family, or families, and therefore Gods hand is the more apparently seen herein, to pick out this woful woman, to make her, and those belonging to her, an unheard-of heavy example of their Cruelty above others.' (Weld, *Short Story*, Preface). Mary Dyer also faced a tragic end when she was hanged in 1660 for repeatedly returning to Boston after her conversion to Quakerism. Quakers were banned from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and she was one of four 'Boston Martyrs' who were executed due to their open dissension. See Anne G. Myles, 'From Monster to Martyr: Re-presenting Mary Dyer', *Early American Literature*, 36 (2001), pp. 1-30.

³⁷¹ Winthrop, *Short Story*, p. 31.

³⁷² Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, pp. 84-8: p. 86.

Anne Hutchinson was not the midwife to Mary Dyer, however, and her skills in midwifery are not explicitly mentioned in the discussion of the monstrous birth, although, critically, she was in attendance. Winthrop names only one midwife in his discussion of Mary Dyer's monster: Jane Hawkins. A detailed examination of the midwife Jane Hawkins's involvement with the misbirths, and her subsequent portrayal in the literature produced about the controversy, shows the potentially subversive power believed to be in the hands of women knowing and sharing information about reproduction. Jane Hawkins had the reputation of promoting fertility through the use of herbs and magic and was also rumoured to practise folk medicine in the community. Disparaging details about Goodwife Hawkins were reported in journals, letters, and published works from both sides of the debate regarding the Antinomian controversy, and there were conflicting opinions as to whether she was a dangerous or a socially pathetic character.

John Winthrop himself used Hawkins's testimony to investigate the stillborn foetus and recounts in his journal how, when Hawkins was first approached about the birth, she would only say that 'the head was defective and misplaced'.³⁷³ Upon hearing from Winthrop that the dead infant would be exhumed, Hawkins changed her story to provide the detailed description which reached the public.³⁷⁴ By all accounts, Hutchinson's and Dyer's already marred reputations were further stained by their association with Hawkins (and vice versa). Winthrop calls her 'a rank familist' and records in his journal that 'Hawkins's wife (who continued with [Mrs. Hutchinson] and was her bosom friend) had much familiarity with the

³⁷³ Winthrop, *Journal*, p. 253.

³⁷⁴ Valerie and Morris Pearl maintain that the number of texts circulated with the details of the monstrous births is difficult to ascertain. They trace the circulation and analyse the details of this story through four different accounts: private letters from Winthrop to English Puritan elites (written immediately after the exhumation of Dyer's monster), Winthrop's journal, early reports sent to London officials, and the *Short Story*, written by Winthrop and published by Thomas Weld in 1644. The Pearls argue that there is a great deal of revision and embellishment throughout these different versions, but Weld's publication contains the most graphic version of the births: Pearl, 'Governor Winthrop on the Birth of the Antinomians' "Monster", p. 33.

Devil in England, when she dwelt at St. Ives.’³⁷⁵ He also notes that ‘it was known that she used to give young women oil of mandrakes and other stuff to cause conception; and she grew in great suspicion to be a witch, for it was credibly reported that, when she gave any medicines, (for she practised physic) she would ask the party, if she did believe, she could help her, etc.’³⁷⁶ John Wheelwright, in his *Mercurius Americanus* (1644), a refutation of Winthrop’s *Short Story*, calls Jane Hawkins ‘a poor silly woman’ and pokes fun at Winthrop’s overly harsh criticism of her. He dismisses her supposed illicit powers and maintains that Hawkins followed Anne Hutchinson ‘not so much out of love to her positions as possets, being guilty I think of no other sorcerie, unless it were conjuring the spirit of Errour into a Cordiall.’³⁷⁷

Hawkins, whether as a powerful agent in her own right, or as a delusional follower of Hutchinson, was directly involved with the women in the Boston community who were looking to conceive. According to Winthrop, she exhibited all of the wrong ways to tend to the women of her community, and, like Hutchinson and Dyer, she was charged with taking advantage of the most vulnerable members of the society. Her use of fertility aids was regarded as the most visible, and potentially dangerous, sign of her dabbling in witchcraft. Mandrakes were a well-known aphrodisiac, well-documented in medical manuals and across cultures.³⁷⁸ They are referenced in the Old Testament when Rachel, struggling with infertility, begs for mandrakes from her fertile sister Leah (through Leah’s son, Rueben), in exchange for one night in their joint husband Jacob’s bed.³⁷⁹ As discussed earlier in this thesis, Rachel’s struggle with infertility was included in many sermons during the early

³⁷⁵ Winthrop, *Journal*, p. 330. ‘Familist’ refers to the fringe Protestant sect ‘The Family of Love’ to which Hutchinson and her followers were also charged with belonging. Antinomians and Familists were often condemned together by the Puritan authorities for their alternative views and practices. For more information, see Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630* (Cambridge, 1994).

³⁷⁶ Winthrop, *Journal*, pp. 142-3.

³⁷⁷ John Wheelwright, *Mercurius Americanus* (London, 1644), p. 198.

³⁷⁸ See Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals*, p. 38.

³⁷⁹ Genesis xxx, 14. Rachel does conceive and then dies in childbirth, a fact that was frequently referenced in Puritan sermons.

modern period, and her petulance and use of mandrakes were cited as examples of the ‘wrong’ way to deal with barrenness.

Cotton Mather, grandson to John Cotton, questions their use in his analysis of Rachel’s desperate attempts to conceive. He dismisses the plant in his epic *Biblia Americana* (an encyclopaedic critical analysis of the Bible) and condemns its illicit use in contemporary medicine. Supporting himself with other scholars’ and medical writers’ opinions, he argues that ‘it is not likely that these vertuous Women [Leah and Rachel], either knew that pretended Vertue in the Plant, or would have been fond of it... besides Filtres [or love potions] are Enemies to Fertility.’³⁸⁰ Hawkins’s supposed use of mandrakes cast further aspersions on the legitimacy of her skills as a midwife and was easily linked to the unfortunate outcomes of the births of her friends Dyer and Hutchinson.

Like Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer, Jane Hawkins was also banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the spring of 1638, and she also moved to Rhode Island. The court ordered that Hawkins had ‘liberty till the beginning of the third month, called May, and the magistrates (if she did not depart before) to dispose of her; and in the meantime she is not to meddle in surgery, or physic, drinks, plasters, or oils, nor to question matters of religion, except with the elders for satisfaction.’³⁸¹ The combination of Hawkins’s medical work with her dissident beliefs was thus considered to be her biggest threat to the stability of the colony. John Cotton wrote a letter in the weeks after all three of the women’s departures from Massachusetts Bay Colony to follow up on an inquiry specifically about Goodwife Hawkins. He tells the unknown recipient (a resident of Aquidneck, or Rhode Island)

Touching Goodwife Hawkins (of whom you lastly enquire) I have heard of some of those complaints against hir, which came to your Eares; but I have had noe occasion

³⁸⁰ Mather, *Biblia Americana: America’s First Bible Commentary, A Synoptic Commentary on the Old and New Testaments. Vol. 1: Genesis*, ed. Reiner Smolinski, (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2010), p. 981.

³⁸¹ Massachusetts Bay Records, reprinted in David D. Hall (ed.), *Witch-hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History* (Boston, 1991), p. 19.

to search the trueth or the [bottom of] them. I told hir self my feare, lest hir judgment should be unsound in some Fundamental poynts (but, that I onely fear I cannot prove:) but if it be so (as I have told hir) I feare she might doe much hurt in corrupting the judgments of yong women.³⁸²

Most telling is Cotton's concern over Hawkins's corruption of young girls. While Hutchinson and Dyer were considered harmful due to their preaching and ability to change minds, Hawkins was potentially even more dangerous with her ability to tamper with bodies, and specifically with the fertility of the 'yong girls' with whom she had contact. New England was therefore made vulnerable by the very hopeful mothers on whose wombs the colony's success depended, and Hawkins and her illicit fertility aids were particularly perilous given her reputation for dabbling in illicit magic. Hawkins is referenced as late as 1640 in Winthrop's journal as he recounts how Hutchinson continued to influence her fellow colonists in her new residence at Aquidneck. For Winthrop the memory of Hawkins's 'bosom friendship' with Hutchinson served as evidence of Hutchinson's persuasive power over those around her, and he also repeats speculation about Hawkins's 'familiarity with the Devil' in the years following both women's expulsion.³⁸³ Among all of Anne Hutchinson's friends and followers, the reproductive knowledge and practice of Jane Hawkins was particularly threatening, and Winthrop recorded its lasting effects years later and from a colony away.

Portraying the community surrounding childbirth in early modern society, and specifically the midwife Jane Hawkins's role in the Antinomian controversy, illustrates how these women's actions and experiences exhibit the fear, uncertainty, and suspicion regarding reproductive failure in early New England and the great lengths that some women went to ensure their fecundity. Hawkins, by first promoting unnatural means of fertility, and then

³⁸² Letter from John Cotton to [unknown] at Aquidneck, reprinted in Sargent Bush Jr. (ed.), *Correspondence of John Cotton* (Chapel Hill, 2001), p. 276.

³⁸³ Winthrop, *Journal*, p. 330.

colluding in concealing a monster born into the community, represented the feminine sphere that men like Winthrop could not enter. In portraying Hawkins as a witch, Winthrop suggests the religious and social transgressions that could occur in those female-only spaces, and grants Hawkins two kinds of illicit power: the physical power to alter reproductive outcomes, and the social power to influence other women (a fear also explicitly acknowledged in Cotton's letter to Aquidneck). God's punishment of both kinds of illicit power, graphically exhibited in the birth of Mary Dyer's monster, effectively communicated the danger that Hawkins and other dissident women, such as Anne Hutchinson, posed to the order of the colony.

Monstrous Birth in Medical Literature

A review of early modern medical literature elucidates how the colonists of New England interpreted the physical products of the misbirths of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson as 'monsters' and as tangible proof of their religious and social transgressions. The birth of 'imperfect children' was a phenomenon that attracted attention in both popular and medical works in the early modern period. Monstrous births were reported in a variety of texts, and, as numerous historical investigations have shown, their details were disseminated widely for a variety of reasons whether for education, entertainment, or political and religious propaganda.³⁸⁴ In early modern medical literature, monstrous birth is included as one of several scenarios of unsuccessful reproduction, i.e., infertility. Outside of the pages of the medical texts, monstrous births were popular marvels that elicited fear, wonder, and sometimes sympathy, from many different circles of society. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston contend that, while interpretations of monstrous birth changed during the early

³⁸⁴ For information on the popular uses of stories of monstrous birth in early modern England, see Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, pp. 29-51; Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, pp. 66-69; Julie Crawford, *Marvellous Protestantism* (Baltimore, 2005); Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London, 1993); Simon McKeown, *Monstrous Births: An Illustrative Introduction to Teratology in Early Modern England* (London, 1991); Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1995).

modern period, ‘they appeared in almost every forum of discussion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’.³⁸⁵ The interplay of popular and medical ideas about monstrous birth illustrates the hazy divide between science and religion during the early modern period, especially in cases of reproductive abnormalities, and explains, the reaction to Mary Dyer’s and Anne Hutchinson’s misbirths as physical proof of God’s displeasure.

French surgeon Ambroise Paré famously published a work on monstrosity in 1573, and his *On Monsters and Marvels* is regarded as one of the foundational works of teratology. Janice Pallister claims that Paré carefully uses the structure, illustrations, and narrative passages of his ‘four-square, four-part book’ to mirror the natural world.³⁸⁶ In doing so, Paré attempts to put structure around cases of reproductive abnormality that seem to defy natural order. First, he separates cases into monsters, marvels, and maimed persons, providing clear examples of each category of deformity. Paré lists both physical and spiritual explanations for the creation of monsters, and his thirteen categories range from too little quantity of seed to the interference of ‘Demons and Devils’. But the work, while medical in nature and celebrated for its order, is devoted more to descriptive narrative than to discussion of cause or medical treatment for the deformities within its pages. As Pallister notes, the careful organization of the work is its most distinctive quality, as is Paré’s late sixteenth-century world view that draws connections between the environment and human body. Paré describes natural phenomena occurring in the ‘big world’ – thunder, earthquakes, rain, dew, vapours, fertility, sterility, etc. – and describes how ‘the same thing happens in the small world, which is the human body.’³⁸⁷ The close relationship between the natural world and the human body, and how they interact, is therefore the main message behind Paré’s work

³⁸⁵ Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, ‘Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century France and England’, *Past & Present*, 92 (1981), p. 22. Also see Daston and Park’s book that analyses monstrous birth within the greater context of wonders and curiosities in the development of natural philosophy in early modern Europe: *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York, 1998), pp. 173-201.

³⁸⁶ Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, tr. Janis L. Pallister (Chicago, 1982), p. 2.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

and accurately captures the worldview of the early modern colonists. The body's relationship to its natural surroundings was paramount in describing and explaining circumstances of reproductive failure and, in the colonists' experience, monitoring that relationship was even more important due to the challenge of adapting their English bodies to their new environment.³⁸⁸

The attention that midwifery texts devote to the subject varies, but monstrous birth was consistently presented as an unfortunate outcome of the reproductive process and often included in chapters together with moles, false conceptions, and 'other deformed shapes, defective and unperfect' that formed in the womb.³⁸⁹ The entire fifth 'book' of sixteenth-century German physician Jacob Rueff's *Expert Midwife* (1637), published in English in the same year as the first trials of the Antinomian controversy, focuses on such aberrations and is followed by a final book 'of divers causes of sterility and barrenness'. Rueff places his chapter on 'imperfect children' squarely between his discussion of moles and miscarriage, or in early modern terms, 'abortives', thus situating monstrous births in a continuum of scenarios of unsuccessful reproduction.

Mary Dyer's 'Monster'

Monstrous births in medical literature were attributed to both divine judgment and natural causes, the chief physical cause being mostly the 'corruption and the fault of the seed'.³⁹⁰ Rueff's assessment of monstrous birth agrees with Daston and Park's assertion that such cases 'appeared more and more as natural wonders – signs of nature's fertility rather than God's wrath' as the early modern period progressed and as the tensions of the

³⁸⁸ Joyce Chaplin, 'Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 54 (1997), pp. 229-252. Also see Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, pp. 117-156; Egan, *Authorizing Experience*, pp. 23-31.

³⁸⁹ Jacob Rueff, *The Expert Midwife* (London, 1637), p. 140. Mary Fissell maintains that the English translation of Rueff's work coincides with the trend in English midwifery books toward a negative portrayal of the womb as diseased and potentially dangerous. Parts of Rueff's work reappear in other popular medical works over the course of the early modern period. See Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, pp. 61-2.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Reformation subsided.³⁹¹ Rueff's chapter on monstrous births is mostly a retelling of some of the most famous sixteenth-century English and European cases of monsters, thus aligning with the more popular literature of broadsides and pamphlets in its focus on lurid description of deformity. But Rueff also attempts to elucidate the natural reasons behind the deformities and thus deviates from the purely popular monster literature circulating around at the height of the religious crises and impending English civil war.³⁹² As with the creation of moles, Rueff cites the corruption of the seed as the reason behind many of the cases of monstrosity, particularly in cases of conjoined twins and hermaphrodites, or hare-lipped children whose deformities are attributed to maternal imagination, or specifically frights caused by hares whilst pregnant. The more extreme cases are attributed to God's wrath, and classical sources are cited alongside hearsay of monsters born in foreign lands such as Sicily and Cracovia. Rueff's chapter is a catch-all of deformity that lacks structure or organization by degree, and he concludes it with information regarding the offspring of cases of bestiality. Each case is considered separately, and has its own story regarding the role that divine judgment and corrupted nature respectively played. The extreme case of a monster born in Cracovia in 1547 Rueff 'ascribes to God alone', but he also mentions the 'destestable sinne of Sodomie in this Monster.'³⁹³ It seems that the more monstrous the creature, the more divine judgment was to blame for its appearance on earth. While more common cases of conjoined twins or hermaphrodites could be explained through descriptions of corrupted seed, more extreme deformity (so luridly described and often internationally known) could only be attributed to more direct workings of God. Mary Dyer's birth of 'a woman child, a fish, a beast, and a fowl, all together woven in one, and without a head' was fittingly spectacular in its deformity, and when combined with Anne Hutchinson's miscarriage proved a useful tool in communicating the severity of the Antinomians' sins.

³⁹¹ Daston and Park, 'Unnatural Conceptions', p. 23.

³⁹² Crawford, *Marvellous Protestantism*, p. 145.

³⁹³ Rueff, *The Expert Midwife*, p. 158.

Anne Hutchinson's Mole

Of the two cases in New England, Anne Hutchinson's misbirth is more explicitly described through the language of seed imbalance, a theory that corresponds neatly with information on moles in early modern midwifery literature. Rueff describes the 'false conception *Mola*' as 'which if at time it commeth to the birth, commeth forth in the likenesse and similitude of a piece or lump of misshapen flesh'. Rueff attributes the formation of the mola to 'the weakness or inability of both the seeds... or the else the corruption of good seedes' but also acknowledges another theory that 'it is ingendred of the abundance of the flowers or Terms, because through the great heat of the Matrix they are sometimes congealed and clotted together, and brought into a misshapen mass or lump of flesh'.³⁹⁴ He considers the appropriate balance of seeds to be crucial in determining successful or unsuccessful reproduction. Rueff's work includes prescriptions for those women wishing to cure themselves of moles, namely by aborting them through a regimen of diet, bathing, and physic. Rueff also connects social behaviour with physical abnormality of the seed in stating that women who 'are more lascivious than others are... conceiv[e] little seed from their husbands...[and] doe stirre up copious seed of their own', resulting in a 'misshapen mass or lump of flesh'. Rueff summarises that 'nothing can be ingendred without the seed of man; as neither any can be ingendred of the seed of women only'.³⁹⁵ Such seed imbalances were discussed in relation to Anne Hutchinson's molar pregnancy when John Cotton publicly declared that Anne was delivered of 'several lumps of man's seed, without any alteration, or mixture of any thing from the woman'.³⁹⁶ This is the only mention of Anne Hutchinson's husband in relation to the misbirth, but, in a journal entry in May 1639, after the Hutchinsons' expulsion to Aquidneck, Winthrop characterises William Hutchinson as being

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 138-9.

³⁹⁶ John Cotton, quoted in Winthrop, *Journal*, p. 264.

‘a man of a very mild temper and weak parts... wholly led by his wife’.³⁹⁷ In Winthrop’s eyes, this was a disordered marriage and an environment ripe for reproductive disorder as well. John Cotton’s statement similarly suggests Anne’s gender transgressions and insinuates that her foetus was a product simply *carried* by her body. Her female body contributed nothing to the creation of a viable baby, just as her ideas and actions had been unfeminine and bred only misconception and strife in the community. John Winthrop was not satisfied with this assessment of Anne Hutchinson’s miscarriage and instead pursued the medical opinion of Dr. Clark in Rhode Island who provided the official ‘report’ and dissection of the products of Anne Hutchinson’s monstrous birth.³⁹⁸ As with other manifestations of infertility such as cases of barrenness and miscarriage, humoral problems resulting in deficiency of seed and improper ordering of the womb were directly linked to the formation of moles. Imbalance of seed reflected the social imbalance present in Anne Hutchinson’s own marriage and the potential disaster that could result from allowing the gender hierarchy to be upended in colonial New England.

A considerable amount of space in early modern medical literature is devoted to ‘cures’ for expelling the moles rather than explaining their causes, and their presence is treated in early modern midwifery texts as an unfortunate, but natural, reproductive outcome. Equally important for writers of early modern midwifery manuals is the duty of imparting the knowledge of how to tell a false pregnancy from a true one; several ‘signs’ of false conception were easily observed or tested. In keeping with general early modern physionomical ideas, Rueff maintained that it is possible to distinguish a ‘true conception’ from a false one by watching for a series of signs. Earlier and greater swelling of the womb

³⁹⁷ Winthrop, *Journal*, p. 290.

³⁹⁸ Hutchinson’s reproductive failure has since been diagnosed as a ‘hydatidiform mole’, though that diagnosis has been challenged by historians who instead tie it to a gynecological phenomenon known to affect perimenopausal women. Anne Hutchinson was 46 at the time of this, her last, pregnancy. See Margaret Richardson and Arthur Hertig, ‘New England’s First Recorded Hydatidiform Mole’, *The New England Journal of Medicine* 207 (1959), pp. 544-5. See Emery Battis, ‘Mrs. Hutchinson’s Behavior in Terms of Menopausal Symptoms’, in Francis Bremer (ed.), *Anne Hutchinson: Troubler of the Puritan Zion* (Huntington, NY, 1981) pp. 16–17.

and ‘limbs and parts [that] doe wax feeble and soft’ indicate cases of molar pregnancy. Many of the warning signs in fact apply to both a healthy conception and its molar counterpart, but there were observable differences between moles and the swellings caused by tympanies, tumours, and hydropsy.³⁹⁹ In describing the differences in diagnosis and treatment, all of these disorders of the womb are linked, and the products of Anne Hutchinson’s miscarriage can be located amongst the several manifestations of unsuccessful reproduction identified by the authors of early modern midwifery texts. All of these natural signs of false conception were lost in the popular retelling of the miscarriages of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson, however, as the dominant messages of surprise, divine judgment, and disgust made for a more compelling, and therefore more useful, narrative in the story’s subsequent publication and circulation by their adversaries.

Rueff describes a variety of abnormalities in his chapter on moles before he even ventures into his discussion of ‘imperfect children’, thus distinguishing between the monsters found in the popular literature and specific cases of molar pregnancy. In contrast, no such distinctions between ‘mole’ and ‘monster’ are mentioned in the popular discussion of Anne Hutchinson’s and Mary Dyer’s births, despite the vivid detail of each delivery’s descriptions. Dr. Clark’s report on Anne Hutchinson’s delivery of the ‘globes’, recorded in Winthrop’s journal, more closely resembles Rueff’s descriptions of a molar pregnancy. There were no distinctive human features of the ‘lumps’, and they were determined by the doctor to be ‘partly wind and partly water’ upon closer examination. Hutchinson’s delivery was completely different from the monster born to Mary Dyer. Both misbirths were described using examples from the natural world, specifically local fish and wildlife metaphors, but the manifestation of Hutchinson’s reproductive failure was entirely different – a fact that was recognized and

³⁹⁹ Hydropsy, a synonym for dropsy, is ‘a morbid condition characterized by the accumulation of watery fluid in the serous cavities or the connective tissue of the body’: OED, s.v. ‘dropsy, n.’, accessed 2 December 2013.

described in detail by the doctor, yet still referred to as a ‘monstrous birth’ in the pages of Winthrop’s journal, letters, and the published *Short Story*. Both cases were referred to as monstrous birth due to the undesired result of the pregnancy. It was rhetorically more powerful for Winthrop to refer to Anne Hutchinson’s delivery as ‘monsters’ in the *Short Story* in order to effectively spread the message of her transgressions. As the medical works stated, divine intervention created monsters, and this interpretation of Anne Hutchinson’s misbirth was circulated by the colonial leaders amongst themselves and across the Atlantic. Moles and false conceptions could be explained through natural means and did not adequately capture the urgency of wholly unnatural consequences facing New England if Anne Hutchinson and others were not dealt with severely.

A Colonial Problem

The flurry of personal correspondence between the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth and Providence Plantation colonies at the time also illustrates the gravity of the situation and how the private, bodily misfortunes of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson were used to represent potential threats to public order. Winthrop sent out a series of letters to other colonial leaders immediately following the final trials and sentencing in March 1638 (and the time of the discovery of Mary Dyer’s monster). Letters, dated within days of each other, were quickly returned by Governors William Bradford of Plymouth Colony and Roger Williams of Providence Plantation in Rhode Island. Bradford thanks Winthrop for ‘[his] letter touching Mrs. Huchngson’ and asks for more information, stating

I heard since of a monsterous, & prodigious birth which she should discover amongst you; as also that she should retracte her confession of acknowledgement of those errors, before she went away; of which I have heard many various reports. If your leasure would permite, I should be much behoulden unto you, to certifie me in a word or two, of the trueth and forme of tht monster &c.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ William Bradford to John Winthrop, 11 April 1638, in *Winthrop Papers*. Vol. IV, 1639-1644 (Boston, 1944), p. 23.

The speed of Bradford's reply acknowledges the severity of the situation, and attempts to control the spread of rumours, just a few short weeks after the exposure of the monster in the adjacent colony. He is not satisfied by the 'many various reports' that he has heard and desires a more detailed verification and description of Mary Dyer's monster from Winthrop himself. Other news in the letter centres on important information about land grants, border disputes with the Native population, and the possible acquisition of an island – all 'state business' that would have a direct impact on those living within their colonies. The disruptions caused by the Antinomian controversy, but particularly Mary Dyer's monster, were included with this official business between governors, illustrating the gravity with which this case of infertility was taken. There is no interpretation, justification, or religious rhetoric in Bradford's letter, simply a desire for more information about what this potentially dangerous situation looked like, and consideration of how it might affect his own colony, either through the spread of rumours about the episode, similar sedition, or even the underlying fear that the banished women would seek refuge in his own colony.

Roger Williams, a supporter of religious freedom and himself exiled from the Massachusetts Colony in 1635 for sedition, was in fact responsible for many of the Antinomians moving to the recently-acquired Aquidneck Island near his own Providence Plantations. While Williams was more intimately involved in the aftermath of the Antinomian controversy than Bradford, he takes the opportunity to 'thanck [Winthrop] for that sad relation of the monster etc.' and adds that 'the Lord speaks once or twice: he be pleased to open all our Eares to his Discipline.' Williams's reaction highlights a slightly different providential tone in regard to Dyer's misbirth, recognizing it as a sign from God but without any zeal of condemnation. He assures Winthrop that 'Mrs. Hutchinson (with whome and other of them I have had much discourse) makes her Apologie for her concealment of the

monster that she did nothing in it without Mr. Cotton's advice, though I can not believe that he subscribes to her Applications of the parts of it. The Lord mercifully redeeme them, and all of us from our delusions and pitie the desolations of Zion and the stones thereof.'⁴⁰¹ In this short acknowledgement of the situation, Williams conveys a (still slightly defiant) apology from Anne Hutchinson herself and then implicates everyone in the role that they played in displeasing God by participating in this episode. It is noteworthy that Hutchinson apologizes for the concealment of the birth only, and that there is no other explanation or rationalization of the birth itself. The monster, in this case, is the secret, and Williams's delivery of the apologies, while acknowledging the 'prodigious' character of the matter, also downplays it to a question of women concealing a 'sad' case of private infertility. The deception that characterized the situation thus mirrors the deception that pervaded early modern attitudes toward infertility, both in that the women's bodies carried 'false fruit' and that their dishonesty about Mary Dyer's birth was ultimately revealed, despite their efforts to hide the evidence.

The respective governors' correspondence about this issue highlights the fact that these monstrous births were a domestic, political problem for colonies. These three men, split in terms of their interpretation of the Doctrine, rarely saw eye-to-eye. Communicating accurate details about the discovery of the monster was a prerogative for John Winthrop, and responding with appropriate messages was likewise the political and social responsibility of Bradford and Williams. Managing the situation between colonies was no small feat and tracking the movements of the women was important in order to keep women in their own colonies safe from subversive teaching and potential reproductive repercussions. The correspondence between the governors supports Egan's argument of Antinomianism being

⁴⁰¹ Letter from Roger Williams to John Winthrop (16 April 1638), reprinted in Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 149.

regarded as a contagious plague.⁴⁰² As Winthrop maintained in his journal, the spread of infection and more reproductive failure was imminent if such individuals were allowed to continue their subversive teaching, and as Anne Hutchinson herself had threatened during her trial, ‘God will ruin you and your posterity and this whole state’.⁴⁰³ In short, all would be lost. Sharing the details of the monstrous birth served as a valuable warning and also a valuable educational tool across the New England colonies. The fact that God’s rage manifested itself in reproductive failure is the most interesting part. The future and future births were at stake, and the Puritan colonial experiment as a whole would collapse if these situations were not analysed carefully and their lessons spread seriously. Irregular birth and infertility could not be confined to the birthing chambers of women: the graphic details of reproductive failure needed to be publicly communicated within the colony and back to England in order to regain control of the space and fix the errors so clearly exhibited by the monstrous births of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson.

The wrath of God is exactly how the Puritan magistrates regarded the monstrous births of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson, and, more important, how they incorporated the incidents into a public relations campaign to spread news of their ‘victory’ over the Antinomians in the years following the dispute. There were essentially three kinds of literature that publicized variations of the news of the monstrous births: published literature sent to and from England, correspondence between the colonial leaders, and written accounts in the developing histories of New England. The ‘official account’ of the Antinomian controversy, *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that Infected the Churches of New-England*, was written by John Winthrop and published in London in 1644 with an

⁴⁰² Also see Cristobal Silva, *Miraculous Plagues: An Epidemiology of Early New England Narrative* (New York, 2011), pp. 74-97, for an examination of the epidemiological rhetoric that the colonial leaders used to describe the Antinomian controversy.

⁴⁰³ Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 273.

introduction by Thomas Weld.⁴⁰⁴ Valerie and Morris Pearl have analysed the use of the monstrous births as a warning to other dissenters in England by plotting and comparing the different variations of the work and connecting the different versions to their reception in England. They contend that ‘Weld published his manuscript at a time when its impact would thus be most decisive in the struggle over church and state and the question of toleration for all Puritan religious opponents.’⁴⁰⁵ By punishing their opponents in such a visceral way, God had acknowledged the colonial religious leaders’ righteousness, and that much-needed approval had to reverberate across the Atlantic. There is scholarly debate about how successful Weld was in his goal to use the *Short Story* to advocate for the New England Way in England, and Michael Winship notes that Presbyterians ‘seized upon it as demonstrating the pitfalls of Congregationalism’.⁴⁰⁶ Julie Crawford’s analysis convincingly ties the Antinomian controversy monster scandal to the case of the Ranter’s Monster that occurred in England in the 1640s and argues that the New England cases fit into the particular ‘headless child’ trope of monstrosity occurring in the years preceding and during the Civil War.⁴⁰⁷ *The Short Story* was notably republished in 1692, during another period of political and social upheaval in both England and New England. England’s joint monarchs, William and Mary, were childless, as was James II’s other daughter, Princess Anne, and the kingdom was at war with France. The Salem Witch Trials consumed Massachusetts Bay Colony that same year,

⁴⁰⁴ Thomas Weld, an Independent minister and victim of religious persecution in England, immigrated to the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1632. He was elected an agent of New England and returned to England in 1641. Weld became embroiled in religious debates upon his return, and published *A Short Story* in order to argue that Congregationalism, as it was being practised in New England, could ‘defend religious orthodoxy’, but his story from New England was also manipulated and used by Presbyterians to illustrate that disorder could arise in the Congregationalist colonies: ODNB, s.v. ‘Thomas Weld (*hap.* 1595, *d.* 1661)’, accessed 6 Feb 2014. Also see Pearl, ‘Governor John Winthrop on the Birth of the Antinomians’ “Monster”’, p. 33.

⁴⁰⁵ Valerie Pearl and Morris Pearl, ‘Governor John Winthrop on the Birth of the Antinomians’ “Monster”: The Earliest Reports to Reach England and the Making of a Myth,’ pp. 21-37. Also see Karyn Valerius, ‘“So Manifest a Signe from Heaven”: Monstrosity and Heresy in the Antinomian Controversy’, *The New England Quarterly*, 83(2010), pp. 179-199, for a discussion of the efforts of New England’s leaders to use the episode as an opportunity to prove the colonies’ theological and political strength.

⁴⁰⁶ Winship, *Making Heretics*, p. 243.

⁴⁰⁷ See Crawford, *Marvellous Protestantism*, Chapters 4 & 5. Mary Fissell also discusses this case to illustrate the connection between individual sin and monstrous birth in early modern English pamphlets: Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, pp. 157-162.

and old lessons about enforcing order in the face of disorder, expressed in reproductive language, would have been particularly pertinent to both regions.

The published account of the trials by Winthrop is much more inflammatory than his original journal notes or any correspondence reporting the events of the Antinomian controversy. In ‘laying downe the Order and Sense of the Story’, the *Short Story* spread Winthrop’s account of the episode with marked emphasis on the most provocative details: the monstrous births and divine judgment upon Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer. In his lengthy preface to Winthrop’s work, Weld repeatedly uses reproductive language in his vilification of the women, calling Hutchinson ‘the breeder and nourisher of all these distempers’. The women are referred to as being pregnant *only* with their seditious ideas, ‘grown to their full ripeness and latitude, through the nimbleness and activity of their fomenters’.⁴⁰⁸ The women’s bodies are never discussed as actually being pregnant with babies, and Weld’s preface uses reproductive language to connect the growth of the women’s heretical ideas and eventual exposure of their sin. These women are ‘fomenting’, they are not reproducing, and, according to Weld, it was the exposure of their ideas through physical monstrosity that at last captured the attention of the public, alarmed their former supporters, and alerted them to ‘attend God’s meaning therein’. The appearance of the monsters communicated the danger and severity of the case explicitly through the recognizable medium of monstrous birth. In describing the monstrous births in detail, Weld and Winthrop’s published account captured the urgency of the situation and the physical consequences of religious dissidence for the offenders. As Winship notes, ‘Whether given supernatural or secular explanations, the monstrous births confirmed the association of the theological radicals with disorder.’⁴⁰⁹ In claiming that ‘they produced out of their Wombs, as they had out of their brains, such Monstrous births as no Chronicle (I think) hardly ever recorded the like’, Weld marketed

⁴⁰⁸ Weld, *Short Story*, preface.

⁴⁰⁹ Winship, *Making Heretics*, p. 217.

these misbirths as exceptional, they used a language and form familiar to early modern English audiences: monsters.⁴¹⁰

Lindal Buchanan maintains that such ‘maternal rhetoric’ can be used to analyse the controversy, and she argues that ‘Hutchinson’s maternal body and issue thus became figurative tools in the hands of her opponents... to underscore gender and thereby dismiss her, her theological views, and the faction associated with her.’⁴¹¹ While this gendered reading of the documents is valuable, it does not consider the power of the use of these glaring examples of infertility. Hutchinson’s and Dyer’s bodies were not publicly maternal enough to be acknowledged at the time of their trials, but, at their subsequent misbirths, their bodies were graphically infertile. Unable to produce life, they were charged with ‘the conceptions of [their] brain[s]’ having disastrous influence over ‘the conceptions of [their] womb[s].’⁴¹² Thus they were included in the ranks of women listed in early modern midwifery texts whose maternal imagination resulted in miscarriages, deformed foetuses, and other forms of reproductive failure. While Dyer may have been heavily pregnant, her birth scene was in secret (with only Hawkins and Anne Hutchinson attending), and she was able to conceal her monstrous birth for several months. The secretive nature of the events only condemned the women further.⁴¹³ While both were mothers of healthy offspring before their monstrous births, they were never spoken about as such. Mary had one child before her ‘monster’ was delivered, and Anne’s miscarriage in 1638 was her final pregnancy after

⁴¹⁰ Weld, *Short Story*, preface.

⁴¹¹ Lindal Buchanan, ‘A Study of Maternal Rhetoric: Anne Hutchinson, Monsters, and the Antinomian controversy,’ *Rhetoric Review*, 25 (2006), pp. 239-259.

⁴¹² John Wheelwright, *Mercurius Americanus, Mr. Welds His Antitype, Or, Massachusetts Great Apologie Examined* (London, 1645).

⁴¹³ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that the publication of *A Short Story* shifts ‘the monstrosity of collective deformation and misgovernance’ to ‘the specificity of individuated female bodies’: Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, p. 92). In Weld’s version of the story, exposing the secretive and monstrous births situates the blame fully on the individual bodies of these disorderly women. This, Philip Round argues, was ‘an argument to which almost every Englishman could subscribe, for both groups fundamentally agreed that female disorder was something that had to be controlled.’ Philip Round, *By Nature and by Custom Cursed: Transatlantic Civil Discourse and New England Cultural Production, 1620-1660* (Hanover, 1999), p. 148, quoted in Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, p. 93.

successfully giving birth to fourteen children. By removing the power of the reproduction and maternity from their bodies during the Antinomian controversy, and suggesting that they, with Jane Hawkins, were supposedly tampering with other women's fertility, Weld's version of the *Short Story* made these women as unnatural, and as fruitless, as the malformed products of their birth scenes.

The main body of the *Short Story*, composed by Winthrop, is also markedly different from the previously-recorded and circulated accounts. Winthrop's summary of the 'observable' things in the 'birth and discovery' of Mary Dyer's monster in the body of the work includes several sensationalist details, found only briefly in Winthrop's journal notes, numbered and summarised for full effect in their own section of the text. Eight points summarise the characters (including the role of Jane Hawkins), the dramatized birth scene, and chance discovery of the birth through gossip, a description of the monster, and even a short condemnation of the father, William Dyer, who 'coming home just at this time was... (by an unexpected occasion) called before the Church for some of his Monstrous Opinions.'⁴¹⁴ All of these points are presented side-by-side in order to succinctly communicate the number of strange incidents that surrounded the birth of Mary Dyer's monster. The abnormalities so clearly laid out cannot be ignored: in this version, the sequence of events as a whole presents a very convincing case of extraordinary circumstances not so coherently displayed in earlier accounts.

There were some critics of the *Short Story*. The most notable one was the rebuttal written by John Wheelwright who had returned to England after himself being convicted of sedition during the Antinomian trials. His *Mercurius Americanus* (1645) systematically rejects the argument made in the *Short Story* and attempts to repair the reputations of the accused and to correct some of the most virulent personal attacks printed in Weld's work. He openly

⁴¹⁴ Winthrop, *Short Story*, p. 47.

questions the authority of Weld's claim that she 'had at once thirty conceptions' (which corresponded to the blasphemous points that Hutchinson supposedly made during her trial) and bluntly asks, 'did the man obstetricate?' It is a bold request for medical authority and dismisses the rumours and more fantastical elements about the births that were reprinted in the *Short Story*. Wheelwright turns the tables on Weld by stating that it 'is a monstrous conception of his brain, a spurious issue of his intellect, acted upon by a sweatish and feverish zeal', thus using Weld's medical terminology and self-entitled authority to belittle him. Wheelwright accuses Weld himself of overstepping his social and professional bounds, and asserts that Weld's claim 'that this birth was an extraordinary defect' in fact 'avails nothing, unless he will either raise it to a miracle, or at the least prove a supernatural remission of the formative virtue in her.' Such a claim, he maintains, would 'require a most accurate physicall inspection which I think that his learning will not reach.'⁴¹⁵ Wheelwright's scathing questioning of Weld's medical authority equates to questioning his general authority on the facts of the Antinomian controversy as a whole. Both men argue their points by using language rich with the vocabulary and rhetorical devices found in early modern discussions of infertility and women's reproductive bodies, and they use this language to interpret the social and religious drama of the Antinomian controversy.

In addition to the religiously and politically-motivated publications, the *Short Story* and its rebuttal, *Mercurius Americanus*, the pamphlet *Newes from New-England of a Most Strange and Prodigious Birth* appeared in 1642 in London that captured the bare details of Mary Dyer's case just enough to entertain audiences with the details of 'this most strange and prodigious birth'.⁴¹⁶ Mary Dyer's monster was the first of several tales of monstrous births, including the most famous such as well-known details of the monster of Ravenna. While Dyer's story opens the work, it is the only such account from New England, and the

⁴¹⁵ Wheelwright, *Mercurius Americanus*, p. 197.

⁴¹⁶ Anon., *Newes from New-England*, title page.

description of the monster is very similar to the description first penned by Winthrop in his diary. This version, however, adds biographical detail about Mary and her husband, William, calling them ‘both young, very comely, and proper born’. This publication is meant to entertain more than educate, and no reference to the religious controversy appears. Valerie and Morris Pearl argue that this is due to the impending Civil War and that ‘it was not a suitable time for divisions among Puritans to be given prominence.’⁴¹⁷ Moreover, William Dyer is presented as ‘sometimes a citizen and Milliner in the New-Exchange’.⁴¹⁸ While this ‘newes’ is reportedly from New England, it is clear that William and Mary Dyer are not. The pamphlet instead presents them as a seemingly pedestrian, well-bred young couple originally from London. As a result, all elements of foreignness, social deviance, and open vilification of the parents of the monster are removed. Rather than ostracizing the couple and pointing out their religious dissent as being inherently tied to their reproductive misfortune, the pamphlet re-adopts the Dyers back into English society. This corresponds to Jim Egan’s argument that Anne Hutchinson was consistently portrayed by Winthrop and Weld as being thoroughly English. She brought her ideas with her to the colony, enabling the interpretation of the Antinomian controversy as a battle about English ideas waged in a colonial landscape.⁴¹⁹ The repatriation of Hutchinson and Dyer highlights the inability of their English reproductive bodies to adapt to New England.

The monstrous births lived on in popular histories of New England and in reports back across the Atlantic long after the initial exchange of correspondence and attempts by the Puritan leaders to ‘set the record straight’ in the *Short Story* in the 1640s. While the story of the Antinomian controversy transformed over time, the reproductive failures of the two women were considered to be a crucial part of that story. Colonial traveller John Josselyn

⁴¹⁷ Pearl, ‘John Winthrop and the Birth of the Antinomians’ “Monster”, p. 32.

⁴¹⁸ Anon., *Newes from New-England*, p. 1.

⁴¹⁹ Egan, *Authorizing Experience*, p. 71.

recorded in his *Two Voyages to New-England* (1674), that when he ‘went ashore upon Noddles-Island... a grave and sober person described the Monster to me, that was born at Boston of one Mrs. Dyer, a great Sectarie.’⁴²⁰ Entries such as Josselyn’s illustrate the oral transmission of the story and the private recording of its details that appeared in published works years after the actual dispute. The monsters became part of the popular early, celebratory ecclesiastical histories of New England and served to warn of the dangers of religious dissent and to boast of the Puritan triumph over those who had disobeyed in the past. Edward Johnson, in his *Wonder-working Providence*, also known as *A History of New England* (1653), includes the monsters in his retelling of the Antinomian controversy, and follows it with overtly reproductive language, reminding his readers, ‘you may see the manner how these Erronious and Hereticall persons batter the fruit from the goodly branches of Christs vines and make bare the flourishing trees planted in the house of the Lord.’⁴²¹ As a just punishment, Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer had been ‘made bare’ in the past, and their reproductive failures continued to be used for generations as cautionary tales of God’s wrath toward those who try to upend the correct ‘English planting’ in New England.

Cotton Mather’s treatment of the monstrous births, published in his epic, eight-part ecclesiastical history of New England, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), is noticeably different. His eight-page retelling of the Antinomian controversy self-consciously tries to repair the image of his grandfather, John Cotton, whose intimate involvement in the controversy was contentious among the Church leaders at the time. David D. Hall asserts that John Cotton’s disagreement with other ministers was at the centre of the discord and that Anne Hutchinson only played a supporting role. Cotton was one of the few people to be told immediately about Mary Dyer’s monster, and he encouraged the secret burial of the stillborn

⁴²⁰ John Josselyn, *Two Voyages to New-England* (1674), p. 23. Josselyn traveled to New England in 1638 and 1663, and his first trip would have aligned with the aftermath of the Antinomian controversy and the widely-publicized misbirths.

⁴²¹ Edward Johnson, *Wonder-working Providence of Sion’s Savior* (London, 1653), p. 95.

foetus. Cotton was eventually forced to explain his actions and apologize to the Boston Church community for his role in concealing Mary Dyer's monstrous birth. He explained his reasoning in several points, explaining that he had witnessed other misbirths and considered them to be 'for the private instruction of the parents', and he also admitted that, if such a tragedy happened in his own family, he would not want anyone to know.⁴²²

Unsurprisingly, John Cotton's grandson, Cotton Mather, places the blame squarely on the women involved in the dispute and takes the opportunity to attack women in general for their weakness and susceptibility to heresy. Women, he claims, are the gateway used by the Devil and other 'Seducers' who 'usually have a special Design upon the Weaker Sex, who are more easily gained themselves, and then are fit Instruments for the Gaining of their Husbands.' Like Winthrop before him, Mather describes the danger Antinomians posed to the colony's core, the family unit, and the colony's destruction from the inside out.⁴²³ Mather's treatment of Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer is no less critical than that of Weld and Winthrop, but its venom is more directed at their femininity and the threat posed by the strength and secrecy of their feminine circles.

Most importantly, and unlike other authors, Mather distinguishes between Dyer's monster and Anne Hutchinson's molar pregnancy. Like others, he describes Hutchinson's delivery as 'Thirty Monstrous Births', noting that 'none [were] of any Humane Shape.' He adds, however, that 'this was a thing generally then Asserted and Believed, ; whereas there were some Eyewitnesses, it is affirmed, that these were no more Monstrous Births, than what is frequent for Women, laboring with false Conceptions, to produce.' He directly contrasts Hutchinson's delivery with Dyer's, saying 'Moreover, one very nearly Related unto this Gentlewoman, and infected with her heresies, was on October 17, 1637 Delivered of as

⁴²² Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 4, 199.

⁴²³ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book VII (Boston, 1702), p. 18.

hideous a Monster as perhaps the Sun ever lookt upon.’⁴²⁴ Cotton Mather distinguishes the products of the misbirths at last, but he also includes them, as the midwifery texts do, in the spectrum of infertility. The distinction is there, but the element of overlap, even dispute between the ‘thing then Asserted and Believed’ versus the ‘eyewitness accounts’ still provides tension and confusion in an account of the controversy written over half a century later. The urgency of the situation is over, however, and the time elapsed allows for Mather to entertain the idea that Anne Hutchinson’s miscarriage was the result of a, more natural, molar pregnancy.

Conclusion

New England colonists had much to gain through the popularization of the monstrous births of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson, especially as they thought that they had come precariously close to losing everything. As previously argued in this thesis, the success of their colonial experiment depended on the fertility of land and the fertility of female and male bodies. Colonists lived in a self-proclaimed ‘World of Wonder’ and looked every day for examples of God’s approval of their endeavour. While David D. Hall has acknowledged that ‘what passed in general from England to New England was a language or mentality’, the Antinomian controversy proves how unusually galvanising a providential crisis could be on the colonial frontier.⁴²⁵ One that centred on the malfunction of the reproductive bodies of women and explicitly exhibited the wrath of God on those charged with producing future generations of New Englanders was an especially dramatic call to action. Historians have examined the political, theological and gendered elements of this dramatic episode in early American history, but the reproductive failures of Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson, and the opportunities that they presented, illustrate both the connection and the previously untested differences between the colonies and their mother country.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴²⁵ David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (New York, 1989), p. 81.

Anne Hutchinson's and Mary Dyer's respective monstrous births took completely different physical forms, but the contemporary religious and social interpretations of their misbirths were the same: they were misconceptions. Their reproductive bodies were not working the way that they should have, or even in the same way as they had in the past, and examining them within the spectrum of infertility elucidates the interplay of social, religious and medical theories behind their interpretation. The analysis of this particular element of the Antinomian controversy is supported by analysis of medical texts of the period along with the social reactions and interpretations of the monstrous births. The 'disorder' that Dr. Clarke described in Anne Hutchinson's delivery of the 'deformed monsters' is similar to the imperfect organization of material about anomalous births in the contemporary medical literature. The regular inclusion of information about monstrous birth and its relationship to other forms of unsuccessful reproduction in midwifery texts illustrates its potential as a product of the reproductive body and therefore should be considered as an example of infertility in the early modern experience. While some effort at description and explanation is made, the categories overlap and flow into each other with arbitrary subject headings and constant reliance on ancient stories, pictures, and anecdotes. Yet, there are distinctions between the formation, treatment, and delivery of 'monsters' and 'moles', and that distinction was not made in the popular literature about Dyer and Hutchinson's anomalous births until Cotton Mather's commentary sixty-five years later. Comparing the two cases illustrates the loose categories of analysis, and the appropriation of the terminology of infertility, in the highly-charged discussions and correspondence surrounding the Antinomian controversy.

In some ways, the Antinomian controversy can be viewed as a monstrous birth itself, relying heavily on the same theories, language, and imagery used in cases of unsuccessful reproduction. A colony that was threatened with corruption from the inside out, at risk of a

slow, insidious death imposed by women on whom its success was entirely dependent: mothers whose ideas had the power to deform the 'fruit of their wombs' and consequently the future success of the colony as a whole. The monstrous births of Dyer and Hutchinson would only be repeated if such heresy was allowed run rampant and further distort or destroy future generations. As such, swift action to manage the situation through the personal communication between the leaders of three of the New England colonies, and the publication of pamphlets, were absolutely necessary -- this was not a matter to be taken lightly. Winthrop and others were intensely aware of the social and political events in their own colonies, and they similarly monitored the turmoil facing their mother country. They also analysed the workings of the natural world through theological interpretation.⁴²⁶ In short, the colonial leaders were faced with the same agonizing dilemma present in all cases of reproductive failure in the early modern period. Exhibit your infertility publicly and attempt to rectify the situation with appropriate healing measures and spiritual analysis or contrition - or conceal your shame, conceding that your reproductive failure was due to forces beyond your control and potentially doomed to repeat itself. To the colonial leaders of New England, Mary Dyer's and Anne Hutchinson's monstrous births challenged the health, and the moral, religious, and political security of the entire colonial project, and therefore all measures were taken to prevent such a devastating 'miscarriage' from happening again.

⁴²⁶ Schutte, 'Such Monstrous Births', p. 105.

Case Study 2: ‘Fraught with England’s Store’: The Fertility Struggles of Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena, 1662-1688

In early modern England, no female body was held more responsible for successful reproduction than that of the queen. This case study examines the public struggles with infertility experienced by two late Stuart queens, Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena, and connects their respective fertility problems by examining how their experiences were described in contemporary society. Catherine never carried a pregnancy to full-term and was publicly ridiculed as a ‘barren Queene’.⁴²⁷ Mary suffered miscarriages and, while she gave birth to six living children, only two survived the first few years of life. Whispers in the court and letters abroad spread the anxiety that her husband, the Duke of York, feared that he would ‘never have children that live’.⁴²⁸ Mary sought treatment during an extended period of infertility between 1682 and 1688, when she famously gave birth to a son who would come to be known as the ‘Old Pretender’. While the outcomes of these two queens’ trials with reproductive challenges are wholly different, close examination of their experiences reveals relevant similarities that link their experiences with infertility as explored in medical and non-medical early modern texts and personal correspondence.

First burdened with expectation and then laden with collective disappointment, two female bodies were at the centre of this drama, and this case study examines how these bodies were publicly monitored by tracing the pattern of hope, disappointment, treatment, and outcome through both queens’ experiences with fertility problems. Contemporary writers were initially optimistic about the arrival of Charles II’s bride, Catherine of Braganza, but

⁴²⁷ Pepys, 14 June 1667. Pepys records the defacement of a neighbour’s gate by some ‘rude people’ on which was written “Three sights to be seen; Dunkirke, Tanger, and a baren Queene’ in reference to their displeasure with the state of public affairs.

⁴²⁸ The French Ambassador Barrillon to Louis XIV, quoted in Marie Hallé, *Mary of Modena, Her Life and Letters*, by Martin Haile (London, 1905), p. 67. This comment is particularly interesting in that James already had two healthy daughters (Anne, 8, and Mary, 11) by his first wife, Anne Hyde, when Mary of Modena became his wife. James’ anxiety would have been directed toward the issue of his new marriage.

eventually shared the anguish that accompanied Catherine's delayed conception and the multiple miscarriages as her bodily misfortune became the subject of gossip and even published poetry. Mary's body was also immediately subject to public discourse, and the attention paid to her fertility problems underscores the heightened responsibility carried by the queen's body during the late Stuart period. To this end, I argue that the Warming Pan Scandal in 1688 was a dramatic climax to over two decades of popular interest, uncertainty, and scepticism about these two royal consorts' reproductive capabilities. The sworn testimonies of the 42 witnesses present in the birthing chamber of Mary of Modena when she gave birth to the Prince of Wales serve as enduring examples of the close scrutiny and attention given to the queen's reproductive body, while contemporary political propaganda used historical precedent to analyse the dramatic event. The treatments sought by both queens reveal the close connections between humoral medicine, ideas about marital relationships, the bonds between the body and the mind, and the overlap of medical and political messages that characterised information about infertility circulating in early modern England.

Connecting the two queens' experiences and charting the progression of popular opinion and speculation also reveals the role that Catherine's childlessness played in the build-up to the dramatic Warming Pan Scandal of 1688 that centred on the body of her successor, Mary of Modena. Examining their prolonged reproductive challenges together provides a different perspective on this particularly tumultuous period of English history and the continuity of crisis that centred on the queen's reproductive body in the late Stuart period. Diverse sources, including epithalamic poems, diary entries and personal letters, illustrate the public's watching, waiting, and speculating on the reproductive bodies of both queens, and reveal the range of disappointing outcomes, including delayed conception and multiple miscarriages, which were familiar to early modern women experiencing fertility problems. Close examination of the medical treatments undertaken by both queens also illustrates late

seventeenth-century popular opinions about the physical reasons behind infertility, and the comparison of the prescriptions of early modern midwifery manuals with the treatments sought by the queens shows continuity between prescription and practice and provides context for the therapies used. Analysing court gossip, poetry, private letters, and legal documents alongside medical treatises illustrates the wide variety of sources in which bodily-based experiences were discussed, as well as demonstrating the close relationship between medical and popular ideas about infertility. It also reveals the tension between public and private knowledge in the late seventeenth century and raises the complex issue of the royal body's position in that debate.⁴²⁹ I do not argue that anxiety over a queen's reproductive body was an unusual phenomenon in the early modern period, and various reproductive dramas, from the Tudors to Queen Anne, have been studied by historians.⁴³⁰ Rather, I maintain that Catherine and Mary's successive experiences provide another, complex but cohesive, chapter to the on-going popular narrative about the queen's royal reproductive body in early modern England, as the rumours about Mary of Modena's spurious pregnancy in 1687-88 even dredged up memories of Mary Tudor's phantom pregnancy 134 years before. As such, connections drawn between the reproductive problems of these two Stuart queens illustrate the impact that historical queens' fertility dramas had in the creation of public anxiety surrounding royal births. Catherine and Mary's experiences should be examined together in the longer history of queen's reproductive pressures and disappointments. The stigma of

⁴²⁹ See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957) for foundational reading about the tension between the monarch's 'body natural' and the 'body politic'. For specific discussion of the queen's body in this debate, see Regina Schulte (ed.), *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World 1500-2000* (New York, 2006).

⁴³⁰ Queen Anne famously suffered through 17 recorded pregnancies and had numerous stillbirths and miscarriages. For a medical investigation into Anne's reproductive failures, see H.E. Emson, 'For Want of an Heir: the Obstetrical History of Queen Anne' *British Medical Journal*, 304 (1992), pp. 1365-6. Sophie Vasset is currently working on this subject. She takes an approach similar to mine in this case study by charting Anne's pregnancies chronologically, assessing the different treatments for infertility, and monitoring the public reaction to her reproductive failures through correspondence and published literature: Sophie Vasset, 'Queen Anne's Seventeen Pregnancies and Treatment for Barrenness', seminar paper, Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine seminar, University of Oxford, 25 November 2013. Also see Toni Bowers, 'Part 1: Queen Anne and the Politics of Maternal Representation' in her book *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 35-65.

Catholicism and foreign birth, and scrutiny over physical appearance and diet, were all factors which were debated and analysed as Catherine and Mary suffered through a host of reproductive problems under the watchful eye of an expectant public.⁴³¹

This case study does not dissect the complicated political history of the Stuart succession controversies; instead, the political context and potential impact of Catherine and Mary's successive fertility struggles are analysed through contemporary sources' descriptions of their experiences. Numerous works have been written on the intricate plots devised by courtiers and foreign diplomats jockeying for favourable positions by thrusting Charles II's illegitimate children onto the throne, or the complex series of political events that eventually led to the Revolution of 1688, but none focus on the bodily experiences shared between the two queens as they endured their respective reproductive challenges.⁴³² Existing biographies of Catherine and Mary likewise provide little insight into the connections between these two queens and the overlap of their lives and reproductive experiences.⁴³³ Both were prominent figures in each other's courts, linked by their strong Catholic faith and even more strongly by their struggles to conceive the heir to the throne. Reading these two queens' experiences with infertility together reveals the similarities of their experiences and provides previously overlooked context for the dramatic events surrounding the heavily-contested birth of the

⁴³¹ Catholicism did play a large role in the private lives and public reception of these two queens, but this case study examines religion's role only in respect to the queens' bodily experiences of infertility. For more information about women and the religious controversies during the Restoration, see Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-century Print Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999).

⁴³² There is a large body of literature that examines this tumultuous period in British political history. Catherine and Mary were at the centre of some of the most dramatic political and popular scandals that engulfed the Restoration court and led to the Revolution of 1688. In the so-called Popish Plot, Titus Oates directly implicated Catherine in 1678 in a fictitious Catholic conspiracy to assassinate Charles. This famous episode consumed the court and fuelled anti-Catholic sentiments, but ultimately Charles supported Catherine and the case against her collapsed. See John Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (London, 1972); Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987); Mark Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678-1681* (Cambridge, 2006); George Southcombe & Grant Tapsell, *Restoration Politics, Religion, and Culture: Britain and Ireland, 1660-1714* (Basingstoke, 2010).

⁴³³ Several biographies exist on the two queens, though references surrounding their interaction are scarce. For Catherine, see Janet Mackay, *Catherine of Braganza* (London, 1937); Laura Conway, *Catherine of Braganza: Charles II's Queen* (London, 1967); for Mary, see Carola Oman, *Mary of Modena* (London, 1962); Janet Southorn, *Mary of Modena, Queen Consort of James II and VII* (Huntingdon, 1992); Marie Hallé, *Mary of Modena, Her Life and Letters, by Martin Haile* (London, 1905).

Prince of Wales in 1688. While Mary Fissell uses the Warming Pan Scandal to support what she calls the ‘restoration crisis in paternity’, it can also be characterised as the climax to a twenty-six-year ‘crisis in maternity’ experienced by both queens.⁴³⁴

Expectation

All of England seemed to be waiting for the arrival of Charles II’s new young wife, the Portuguese Infanta, Catherine of Braganza, whose appearance in 1662 was delayed by several months due to inclement weather and various postponements. Seventeenth-century diarist and courtier John Evelyn noted that

the Queene arivd, with a traine of Portugueze Ladys in their mo<n>strous fardingals or Guard-Infantas: Their complexions olivaster, & sufficiently unagreable: Her Majestie in the same habit, her foretop long and turned aside very strangely: She was yet of the handsomest Countenance of all the rest, & tho low of stature pretily shaped, languishing and excellent Eyes, her teeth wronging her mouth by striking a little too far out: for the rest sweete & lovely enough.⁴³⁵

Evelyn’s initial description highlights several key aspects of Catherine’s physical appearance, separating her from her older Portuguese chaperones (also described as ‘frights’ elsewhere in the diary) and painting her in a positive, albeit not exactly glowing, light. Catherine’s foreign dress and complexion were initially subject to much scrutiny, though she eventually adopted English dress and hairstyle, and Evelyn’s emphasis on her Portuguese appearance reveals nationalistic undertones, foreshadowing discussions about her foreign body’s inability to thrive in England.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, pp. 196-243. Fissell analyses the propaganda, from pamphlets to playing cards, which fuelled the public’s interest in the questions surrounding Mary’s pregnancy and the birth of the Prince of Wales.

⁴³⁵ Guy de la Bédoyère (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Bangor, 1995), hereafter cited as Evelyn with diary date. Evelyn, 30 May 1662.

⁴³⁶ See Sonya Wynne, ‘The Brightest Glories of the British Sphere: Women at the Court of Charles II’, in Catherine MacLeod (ed.), *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II* (New Haven, 2007), pp. 36-7. This book of essays sheds light on the competition and culture of the Restoration court through the analysis of the portraits of several key players in the Restoration Court (including Catherine and Barbara

The description of this ‘sweete and lovely enough’ girl in Evelyn’s journal can be contrasted with the publication of numerous epithalamic poems welcoming Catherine to England.⁴³⁷ Many of these poems are heavily laden with descriptions of the Queen’s beauty and liberal use of fertile imagery. Written by a staunch royalist, *The Phaenix, Her Arrival and Welcome to England* (1662), alludes to the political promise of the marriage between Charles and Catherine. As an Infanta of Portugal, Catherine brought hopes of improved relationships with European powers, new colonial holdings such as Tangiers and Bombay, and the promise of a large (though ultimately under-delivered) dowry. This marriage signified the time of new birth in England, and it also carried an important message about the public’s opinions and expectations surrounding Catherine’s body.

The poem’s opening lines, ‘Wonders get Wonders, and their Glorious Birth/Increase new numbers both in Heav’n and Earth’ emphasizes the important physical function of the union and the expectations of the English people regarding the royal couple.⁴³⁸ Holland uses the familiar tropes of fertility, conjugal love, and passion, and the tone and language, while exaggerated, also clearly illustrate the pressure that the royal couple, and in particular the new queen, was under to fulfil the expectations of their adoring public by providing England with a healthy heir or a very full royal household. Holland also incorporates Catherine’s reception into the tragic history of the Stuart family by explicitly acknowledging the still-raw scars of the Civil War, even in his use of the phoenix imagery. The poem describes a family that

Palmer). Portraiture, while not discussed in this case study, was an important tool used to communicate ideas about fertility and early modern ideas of beauty.

⁴³⁷ Epithalamic poetry was a specific form used in the early modern period to celebrate marriage and to expound on the virtues of the new couple. Royal marriages were particularly represented by this genre and several were written for Catherine of Braganza and Charles II as well as for the marriage of James II and Mary of Modena. For similarly laudatory poems about Catherine, see Lancelot Reynolds, *A Panegyrick on Her Most Excellent Majestie, Katharine, Queen of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, or, Her Highness Cordiall Welcome into England* (London, 1662); William Cottrell, *Britannia Iterum Beata* (London, 1662); Anon., *To the Queens Majesty on her happy arrival* (London, 1662).

⁴³⁸ Samuel Holland, *The Phaenix Her Arrival & Welcome to England it being a Epithalamy on the Marriage of the Kings Most Excellent Majesty with the Most Royal and Most Illustrious Donna Katharina of Portugal* (London, 1662), p. 3.

would rise from the ashes, and Catherine's fertility struggles thus proved particularly disappointing to royalists on the heels of the Civil War, only to be repeated decades later by Mary of Modena. Emphasis on Catherine's purity serves as a stark contrast to Charles' particularly well-known mistress Barbara Palmer, the notorious court favourite repeatedly referred to by contemporary diarist Samuel Pepys as 'my Lady Castlemayne'. Charles famously stayed by the side of his pregnant mistress for several days before travelling down to the south coast to greet his newly-arrived bride, a controversial delay that did not escape public gossip.⁴³⁹

When he did travel to Portsmouth, Charles himself recorded a very different picture altogether of Catherine from the young woman painted by the poems heralding her arrival. The king was initially pleased with the appearance of Catherine and relayed his first impressions to the Earl of Clarendon, the broker of the marriage, writing, 'if I have any skill in physiognomy, which I think I have, she must be as good a woman as ever was born.... In a word, I think myself very happy; for I am confident our two humours will agree very well together'.⁴⁴⁰ The impressions of Charles should be regarded as more than superficial commentary on Catherine's appearance, as physiognomy was central to ideas about health and reproduction in the seventeenth century. To early modern minds, physiognomy, or the idea that a person's character could be observable through a set of physical characteristics was, as Martin Porter contends, a 'central, if not an all-pervasive phenomenon of their encounter with the universe.'⁴⁴¹ Charles's initial assessment of Catherine illustrates this mindset and is supported by contemporary medical texts. Writers of midwifery manuals stressed these ideas in their insistence on physical features betraying fertility prospects, and,

⁴³⁹ Pepys' obsession with Lady Castlemayne has been noted by scholars, and his diary is full of sexually-charged descriptions of the royal mistress. See James Grantham Turner, 'Pepys and the Private Parts of the Monarchy', in Gerald MacLean (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama and History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 100-4.

⁴⁴⁰ Sir Arthur Bryant (ed.), *The Letters, Speeches and Declarations of King Charles II* (London, 1968), pp. 126-7.

⁴⁴¹ Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture, 1470-1780* (Oxford, 2005), p. 27.

as we have seen, healthy fertility rested on a delicate combination of mutual attraction between the couple and appropriate humoral balances within each individual. Nicholas Culpeper devotes a lengthy section on these causes of 'natural barrenness' in his *Directory for Midwives*. Charles' attraction to and pleasure at the physical appearance of his wife were good indications for the marriage, according to Culpeper, as lack of love was perhaps the most common reason behind infertility.⁴⁴² The suitability of a marriage partner was largely visible. Charles' comments on Catherine's physical appearance, the meticulous recording of Pepys and Evelyn, and even the dramatic imagery of the epithalamic poetry represent different authorities, but their similar messages represent early modern ideas about the visibility of prospective fertility.

Despite Charles' initial pleasure and satisfaction with his new wife's appearance, there were still no signs of Catherine being pregnant within the first year of marriage, and rumours, jokes, and gossip ensured that Catherine's struggles with fertility remained a subject of discussion in the court. Even slight changes in personal appearance or habits pricked the public's ears over hopes of a pregnancy, and the teenage queen was constantly surrounded by reminders of her reproductive failure, as images and gossip about fertility surrounded her. A foetus miscarried at a ball was kept by the King 'in his closet a week after and [he] did dissect it; and making great sport of it', illustrating the popularity of such crude humour and how different representations of pregnancy and even miscarriage literally played out at Charles' court. Pepys records this incident, at the same time noting that 'our own Queen hath little or no company come to her', and that he is 'sorry to see it.'⁴⁴³ The combination of these stories in one diary entry -- the miscarriage and King's study of the aborted foetus, and

⁴⁴² Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 71.

⁴⁴³ Pepys, 17 February 1663. On the subject of the mirth of miscarriage during royal celebrations, the Count of Grammont tells of a court ball at Tunbridge Wells in at which a pregnant Lady Muskerry dropped a cushion from under her gown. The party merrily pretended to mistake it for a newborn baby, a story repeated in E.S. Turner, *Taking the Cure* (London, 1967), p. 43.

Catherine's isolation -- creates an image of a private suffering played out in a very public setting, Charles's notorious court, an environment described by historians as 'both classical and grotesque, both regal and foolish, high and low.'⁴⁴⁴ Catherine's experience with reproductive challenges thus played out in a highly scrutinized setting, in conjunction with the perpetual presence of Charles's fertile mistresses and with respect to the rampant sexuality that characterised the Restoration's court culture.⁴⁴⁵

Disappointment

By the early summer of 1663, Catherine sought treatment at Tunbridge Wells and Bath in the hope that taking the waters would aid her fertility. The reputation of Tunbridge Wells and Bath as country retreats and medicinal spas was well-established by this time, and the trips coincided with the court's summer progress and escape from London during the plague months. The waters of Tunbridge Wells, in particular, were purported to 'be endowed with an admirable and Powerful faculty in rendring those who Drink of them Fruitful and Prolifick.'⁴⁴⁶ The healing qualities attached to the waters of spas such as Tunbridge and Bath were based on correcting humoral imbalances, an idea that dates back to antiquity and was supported by popular and medical literature in the seventeenth century.

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the midwife Jane Sharp, borrowing liberally from Culpeper's work in her *Midwives Book*, divided physically-based fertility problems into two groups: humoral imbalance and deformity of the reproductive parts. In both cases maintaining a moderate complexion of the womb was very important in re-establishing

⁴⁴⁴ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* (Ithaca, 1986), pp. 101-2, quoted in MacLean (ed.), *Politics, Transgression, and Representation*, p. 105. Charles II was known to be very interested in science and granted the Royal Charter to the Royal Society in 1662. See Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge, 1981).

⁴⁴⁵ See James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge, 2002) for an analysis of the debauched nature of Charles II's court and the production of sexual literature during this period.

⁴⁴⁶ Patrick Madan, M.D., *A Phylosophical and Medicinal Essay of the Waters of Tunbridge* (London, 1687), p. 5.

fertility, and wombs deemed either too hot and dry or too wet and cold were doomed to be fruitless unless corrected by regimens of bathing, specific diet or sometimes vigorous exercise. Lorenzo Magalotti, an Italian diplomat visiting England in 1668, commented on Catherine's humoral composition, reporting that it was widely known in court circles that 'she has such a superabundance of blood, and so effervescent is it, that she is very often subjected to extraordinary purges, which may perhaps be harmful to her fecundity.' He attributed her menstrual problems first to her nationality, stating that 'it must be remembered that the Queen of England is from Portugal, and among the Portuguese she can be considered rather to have an extraordinarily hot and dry temperament'. Magalotti also argued that Catherine's behaviour was as much to blame for her fertility problems as her humoral constitution. Concerned that 'she fears that she may too soon bring herself to the point of despairing of having children,' he remarks that, 'in spite of all of that, she is not careful about eating food full of very hot condiments'.⁴⁴⁷ According to Magalotti, the combination of Catherine's humoral imbalance, careless diet, and 'indulgence to pleasures' all contributed to her infertile state. Magalotti insinuates that her marriage to Charles II was arranged in part because of her rumoured infertility, and suggests that Catherine's reproductive problems were used as political slander by a competitor for her hand, the jilted Duke of Aveiro, who 'gave the Chancellor [Earl of Clarendon] to understand that the Princess, because of her slender figure, the dry temper of her constitution, and the extraordinary frequency and abundance of her menses, was firmly judged incapable of bearing children.'⁴⁴⁸ Political intrigue and gossip were a particular focus of Magalotti's account from his time in Charles's court, but it remains significant that these concerns and observations about Catherine's reproductive body comprise a considerable portion of the Italian visitor's reflections on the queen. Such commentary highlights the use of infertility as a potential political tool, as in the case of Anne

⁴⁴⁷ W.E. Middleton (trans.), *Lorenzo Magalotti at the Court of Charles II, His Relazione d'Inghilterra of 1668* (Waterloo, 1980), pp. 30-1.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Hutchinson's and Mary Dyer's monstrous births, and anxieties about reproduction could be manipulated to serve political interests and agendas.

Magalotti's observations about Catherine's behavior at court, such as her avoidance of wine at meals, are squarely in line with the prescribed medical advice in contemporary medical literature. Catherine's rumoured 'excessive menses' and overly hot and dry humoral constitution are both linked to fertility problems in midwifery manuals. Culpeper writes that 'such Women as are subject to this disease [the Overflowing of the Menstruis] are subject to suffer Abortion upon every slight occasion.'⁴⁴⁹ Sharp acknowledges that 'the frequent cause for barrenness in young lusty women that are of a choleric complexion, is driness of the Matrix,' and prescribes 'cooling drinks', noting that 'drinking of wine or strong waters must be forborn.'⁴⁵⁰ A combination of these re-balancing treatments as well as a healthy dose of court entertainment characterized Catherine of Braganza's trips to Tunbridge Wells during the summer of 1663.

The water of Tunbridge Wells was renowned for its high levels of iron, the restorative properties of which were first advertised in 1606. Its fame grew as the spa received royal visitors, and its proximity to London made it a popular and fashionable retreat for the Restoration court.⁴⁵¹ Physicians such as Patrick Madan, author of *A Phylosophical and Medicinal Essay of the Waters of Tunbridge* (1687), claimed that patients were 'impregnated with a Chalcanteous or Vitrioliolate Juice' that invigorated the spirit and expelled the 'Feculency and Impurities' of the body.⁴⁵² Most of Madan's work centres on the mineral and

⁴⁴⁹ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, 79.

⁴⁵⁰ Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, pp. 176-7.

⁴⁵¹ Turner, *Taking the Cure*, 40. John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, wrote a poem specifically about Tunbridge Wells that satirized women visiting the town for treatment for their infertility. See Read, *Women's Bodies and Menstruation*, pp. 72-3.

⁴⁵² Madan, *Phylosophical and Medicinal Essay*, p. 1. Also see Lodwick Rowzee, *The Queens Wells, that is, a Treatise of the Nature and Vertues of Tunbridge Water* (London, 1671) for an earlier account of the benefits of Tunbridge waters to both fertility and general health. Queen Henrietta Maria first visited the wells in 1629 and her influence, and its proximity to London, established Tunbridge as fashionable spa town during the Stuart period. See Phyllis Hembry, *The English Spa, 1560-1815: a Social History* (London, 1990), p. 47.

chemical composition of the ‘chalybeate’ waters in relation to their ability to cure a host of diseases, but he also attributes their powers in correcting infertility to a very different source:

Venus comes from the Salt Sea through many Crannies, Interstices, Pores of the Earth, and dangerous Precipices foaming to meet her beloved Mars in the Bowels of the Earth: whom she no sooner embraces, but she is Impregnated and big with a Valiant Hero, in the Bed of Honour with no insipid delight: From thence soon after this Congression, she rises Tryumphing in our Hemisphere at Tunbridge, generously imparting and distributing this Impregnative Faculty to her Votaries, in order to preserve and perpetuate Mankind.⁴⁵³

It is a curious inclusion in a work supposedly devoted to the increasing knowledge of chemical analysis of water and its relation to bodily disease. Instead it plays on another contemporary attraction of Tunbridge Wells and its reputation as being a place of courtly scandal and sexual escapades. The Count of Grammont observed that ‘Those who repair thither for diversion ever exceed the number of those who go thither for health’ and the French ambassador lamented the debauchery that pervaded the court’s visits to Tunbridge.⁴⁵⁴ Madan draws upon these titillating scenes in his discussion of infertility and encourages his readers to visit with provocative references and literary devices. Contemporary midwifery manuals’ advice the role of bathing and treatments provides support for the benefits believed to be bubbling out of the springs at Tunbridge Wells, and, while Madan’s tract does little to provide insight to the practical science behind Catherine’s reproductive challenges, it does explain the contemporary reasoning behind her trips there as well as the social context for her visits.

The curative waters of Tunbridge Wells appear to have lived up to their reputation, for rumours that Catherine was pregnant swirled around court throughout the summer and early autumn of 1663 as the court progressed from Bath to Oxford. Catherine’s opinions of

⁴⁵³ Madan, *Phylosophical and Medicinal Essay*, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Count of Grammont, quoted in Turner, *Taking the Cure*, p. 43.

Bath were favourable as well, as Charles includes in a letter to his sister in September 1663 that '[his] wife is well pleased with the bath and finds herself in good temper after it, and I hope the effects will be as she desires'.⁴⁵⁵ Catherine's beauty and hopeful fertility were once more celebrated when the King and Queen and the Duke and Duchess of York were welcomed to Oxford with celebratory speeches directly after their time in Bath. A speech made in St. John's College library, concludes with the telling line, 'Perfection, Madam, from yourself must grow: Kings are Immortal, but Queens make them so.'⁴⁵⁶ Perhaps the most important line in all of the pages of poetry dedicated to the royal visitors, it clearly emphasises the centrality of Catherine's body in producing heirs for the English throne. While the speech was addressed to both the king and queen, these lines directly target Catherine and spell out the responsibility that rested within her womb. The legacy of the king of England, despite his many other children, depended on Catherine alone.

Catherine faced the most significant medical event of her life in the weeks immediately following the visit to Oxford. Suddenly taken with 'spotted fever', she became ill in the middle of October 1663 in a well-documented and dramatic episode that brought all of her reproductive anxieties to light.⁴⁵⁷ This period of illness is remarkable not only for its severity, but also for the brief glimpse it offers of Catherine's mental state with regard to her own reproductive body. Contemporary gossip provides most of the information about this episode, and the words of Pepys paint a dramatic picture of a woman consumed with grief over a perceived miscarriage as well as her fears over fictional babies she imagined that she bore. On 26 October 1663, Pepys relays the news as told by one Dr. Pierce

⁴⁵⁵ Bryant, *The Letters of Charles II*, p. 147.

⁴⁵⁶ Sir Thomas Ireland, *Speeches Spoken to the King and Queen, Duke and Duchesse of York, in Christ-Church Hall, Oxford, Sept. 29, 1663* (London, 1663), p. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ The 'spotted fever' diagnosis is somewhat disputed by historians as it was often used as a 'catch-all' to describe severe illness. Pepys supports this theory by saying that he heard that 'she was as full as spots as a Leopard' but admits that '[it] is very strange as it should be not more known.' Pepys, 19 October 1663.

That this morning [Queen Catherine] talked mightily that she was brought to bed, and that she wondered that she should be delivered without pain and without spueing or being sick, and that she was troubled that her boy was but an ugly boy. But the King being by, said, “No, it is a very pretty boy;” “Nay, says she, “if it be like you, it is a fine boy indeed, and would be very well pleased with it.”⁴⁵⁸

Charles also expressed his concern over his wife’s illness in a series of letters to his sister, noting that ‘it was a very strange fever, for she talked idly four of five days after the fever left her.’⁴⁵⁹ Catherine suffered for several weeks with the illness, during which she not only spoke of her own reproductive misfortune but commented on those of others as well.⁴⁶⁰ Culpeper asserts that ‘abortion [miscarriage] makes the woman that she oftentimes never can conceive again, for she can hardly ever retain the mans Seed anymore, there is such a weakness caused in the retentive faculty, or else she will hardly ever conceive again.’⁴⁶¹ Miscarriage could greatly diminish the chance of future pregnancy, and Catherine’s severe illness was therefore even more upsetting to the royal couple due to the possible repercussions on her reproductive health.

Pepys’ close watch over the prolonged illness of the queen is reasonable in consideration of the opportunities that Catherine’s death might afford the country (namely, a new wife for Charles, one with better prospects of begetting an heir), but there is also likely to have been a different reason for his heightened interest in the Queen’s reproductive health. Pepys suffered through reproductive challenges within his own marriage, documenting his own infertility drama in parallel with his account of the ailing queen. Just days after recording

⁴⁵⁸ Pepys, 26 October 1663.

⁴⁵⁹ Bryant, *The Letters of Charles II*, p. 148.

⁴⁶⁰ Pepys, 26 October 1663. Pepys includes that ‘she talked mightily of Sir H Woods lady’s great belly; and if she should miscarry, he would never get another’, perhaps echoing her own fears about her inability to bear children after such a bodily ordeal and supposed miscarriage. The editors of Pepys’ diary identify the man Pepys writes of as Sir Henry Wood, Clerk of the Board of Green Cloth and that he and his wife, a dresser to the queen, had no surviving children after 1653. Latham and Williams (eds.), *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, n. 1, vol. 3, 349.

⁴⁶¹ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, 170. This notion that Catherine’s reproductive organs were irreparably damaged during this severe illness is furthered by some historians and used as an explanation of her resultant infertility. See Charles MacLaurin, *Mere Mortals: Medico-Historical Essays* (London, 1925), pp. 150-1.

the Queen's sickbed delusions, he opens his journal entry by noting that 'This morning, waking, my wife was mighty earnest with me to persuade me that she should prove with child since last night – which if it be, let it come and welcome.'⁴⁶² The diary is filled with his meticulous notes of his wife's reproductive health, charting of menstrual cycles, and the couple's shared desire to have children.⁴⁶³ Reproductive disappointment then, was an event shared by men and women, and the intense desire for children was an emotion recorded but also experienced first-hand by the diarist. Pepys' commentary on Catherine's fertility struggles illustrates the fluid nature of public and private that characterised attitudes toward reproductive, and particularly royal, bodies. His entries regarding Catherine's reproductive health rely on a cast of informants, but there is a personal resonance that is reiterated by his commentary of the fertility drama playing out in his own household.

Popular midwifery manuals had their own opinion about the connection between the intense desire for children and its effect on the success of that ambition. Jane Sharp writes that 'We see often there is in women so great a longing to conceive with child, that oftentimes for want of it the womb falls into convulsions and distracts the whole body.'⁴⁶⁴ This notion of the connection between the body and the mind's ability to shape, distort and even destroy the fruit of a woman's womb is a familiar belief found within popular medical literature. Beyond simple inability to conceive, maternal imagination was also linked to miscarriage and monstrous birth. Culpeper and Sharp both describe this phenomenon, and popular literature,

⁴⁶² Pepys, 6 November 1663.

⁴⁶³ Pepys's own desire for children and frustration are themes running throughout the diary. See Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster 'Childless Men in early modern England', in their edited volume *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 158-183 for further discussion of Pepys's desire to be a father.

⁴⁶⁴ Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 94.

broadsides, and folklore also abound with stories of the monstrous and malformed which are largely attributed to maternal imagination.⁴⁶⁵

It was not until the very close of 1663 that Catherine recovered from her illness, and a poem, allegedly written by the physician, Edmund Cooper, was published in early January to celebrate her return to health. Cooper addresses Catherine's fertility directly and emphasizes the queen's body as being more important as a bearer of legitimate heirs rather than in its own right.⁴⁶⁶ The poem's messages about death, life and birth are particularly meaningful given the rumoured miscarriage that accompanied Catherine's severe illness and the mounting fears surrounding her infertility. The main body of the poem portrays Catherine pursued by the figure of Death and is full of dramatic imagery coupled with familiar, court-based scenery (such as the Queen's bedchamber). The queen's strength is celebrated, but most of the language concerning her health is translated into professed hopes for royal offspring, as Cooper's promise that 'He will ope thy Womb for Thee' concludes the poem on an optimistic note of recovery and rebirth.⁴⁶⁷ Cooper asserts that this royal couple must produce offspring stronger than those of other European monarchs:

Nations shall fear before Thy Seed
The Seignior not be Grand: That's kept for King Charles Breed
Which now we see neer at hand.
Against the Turk
Now there's a Work
Which France will not do; Bear thou a Son
Shall Over-run
France, and Grand Seignior too.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ For more on the power attributed to maternal imagination see Linda Pollock, 'Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England', *Social History*, 22(1997), pp. 286-306. Also see Chapter 3, 'The Womb Goes Bad', in Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, pp. 53-90.

⁴⁶⁶ Edmund Cooper, *On the Recovery of Our Most Gracious Queen Katharine from her Late Grievous and Most Deplorable Fit of Sicknesse* (London, 1664), dedication.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

Cooper's advice concerns her diet, and he claims that 'Your Body of Portugall is all wasted and consumed' thus attributing Catherine's illness to her identity as a foreigner, and raising the issue as to what extent the public may have linked her personal, Portuguese habits (such as her diet) to her reproductive failure and general poor health.⁴⁶⁹ The poem illustrates that the drama of Catherine's brush with death and struggles with fertility had wider consequences and reflects the popular, even published, commentary that her reproductive health inspired. While her physical, Portuguese, body is presented as vulnerable, the spirit of England's queen is stronger than death and hence there remains great potential for her offspring *if* she continues to adapt to English custom and diet.⁴⁷⁰

In encouraging her to eat an 'English Dyet', Cooper follows prescriptions laid out in midwifery manuals. Diet was a key contributor to humoral maintenance, and change in eating habits was the most commonly prescribed treatment for a variety of health disorders, including fertility problems.⁴⁷¹ Culpeper relies on the Latin adage 'Without good Meat and good Drink, Venus will be frozen to death' to prescribe an appropriate diet for those struggling with infertility, and Sharp concurs by encouraging women to 'eat meats and drink such things as nourish her well.'⁴⁷² Both midwifery manuals list foods such as game birds and 'windy meats' such as 'parsnips, alexanders, and skirrets' as remedies on account of their strengthening qualities.⁴⁷³ The diets for women hoping to become pregnant or intent on

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., dedication.

⁴⁷⁰ For more information about early modern English identity represented through food, see Anna Suranyi, *The Genius of the English Nation: Travel Writing and National Identity in Early Modern England* (Newark, 2008), p. 85-106. While Suranyi's work focuses on English travelers' impressions of Ireland and Turkey, she constructs four case studies based on early modern English ideas about food, hygiene, foreign women's bodies, and the gendering of states.

⁴⁷¹ See Margaret Pelling, 'Food, Status and Knowledge: Attitudes to Diet in Early Modern England', in her book *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London, 1998), pp. 38-62.

⁴⁷² Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, pp. 72-3, and Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 182.

⁴⁷³ Alexanders are similar to celery or parsley and were often were prescribed as a medicinal herb. Skirrets are root vegetables, similar to sweet potato.

maintaining a healthy pregnancy comprise a large part of the remedies listed within these works, and thus Cooper's advice is also in line with the popular medical advice of the period.

Prescriptions for local diets were rooted in these same concepts of humoral health, and Cooper's suggestion that Catherine's Portuguese body needed to become more 'English' in its humoral composition in order to thrive is a clear representation of early modern ideas about the interaction between the body and the natural world. As Alix Cooper explains in her book, *Inventing the Indigenous*, 'this material harmony of influences and ingredients spoke to a deeper sense of natural and divine order, in which living beings and indeed non-living objects as well "fit" their environments in a perfect match.'⁴⁷⁴ Both Magalotti and Cooper's characterisation and description of Catherine's ill and infertile body were tied to her being Portuguese. Their accounts of Catherine's health issues, strongly linked to her foreign heritage and transplantation to England, are examples of the pervasive presence of political messages in medical works and how socially-constructed ideas intertwined to form opinions about reproductive health. Lisa Forman Cody focuses on this strong relationship between nationality and reproduction by arguing that 'modern sensibilities about both the gendered individual and emergent corporate identities, such as religion and nationality [appear] during the long eighteenth-century'.⁴⁷⁵

But Cooper's, and Catherine's, hopes would not be realised as Catherine suffered a series of miscarriages in the years between her dramatic illness in 1663 and King Charles's death in 1685. In early 1664 Pepys notes that the King 'loves not the Queen at all, but is rather sullen to her; and she by all reports incapable of children.'⁴⁷⁶ It is a simple yet powerful statement, and one that is even more significant in terms of court relations. By this time the

⁴⁷⁴ Alix Cooper, *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 44.

⁴⁷⁵ Cody, *Birthing the Nation*, p. 4. While this book focuses on the eighteenth century, Cody begins her analysis with the succession controversies of the late Stuart queens.

⁴⁷⁶ Pepys, 22 February 1664.

competition for Charles' attention was tilted in the favour of his more fertile mistresses, and the diarist notes Charles as being 'mighty kind to [his] bastard children... and will go at midnight to my Lady Castlemaynes nurses and take the child and dance it in his arms', providing a sad contrast of Catherine's rumoured barrenness with the charming image of Charles bouncing a baby.⁴⁷⁷ Pepys records three further miscarriages, including one in February of 1666 in which 'the membranes and other vessels' that Catherine 'voided' 'perfect as ever woman's that bore a child.'⁴⁷⁸ More than two years later, Pepys writes again that 'Here I first hear that the Queene hath miscarried of a perfect child, being gone about ten weeks; which doth show that she can conceive, though it be unfortunate that she cannot bring forth.'⁴⁷⁹

The distinction between ability to conceive and ability to 'bring forth' was addressed clearly in early modern midwifery manuals. Often the reasons behind the failures to do either were discussed in similar terms, however, and remedies for both were fairly comparable. This distinction, and also the overlap of treatments (namely in terms of diet and rebalancing of constitutions), lends credibility to the idea of a spectrum of infertility as conceived by early modern minds. As Cathy McClive has demonstrated, uncertainty of outcome characterised the experience of pregnancy in early modern Europe. She argues that 'this uncertainty extended to the whole process of pregnancy – from the moment of conception to delivery, the detection and bearing of "true fruit" was doubtful.'⁴⁸⁰ As the midwifery texts of Culpeper and Sharp illustrate, conception was just one step in the process, and even successful conception could and often did end in a variety of disappointing results. The theme of maintenance of pregnant bodies, through diet and physical and even spiritual treatments, runs the length of the manuals, and there is a certain amount of disorder that characterises these works. The

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Pepys, 19 February 1666.

⁴⁷⁹ Pepys, 9 May 1668.

⁴⁸⁰ McClive, 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly', p. 209.

complicated organization of the texts, constantly going back and forth between procedures related to successful pregnancies and gynaecological pathologies and complications, also lends itself to McClive's thesis of 'uncertainty'. Likewise, the confusion and speculation surrounding Catherine's reproductive challenges illustrate this uncertainty while at the same time highlighting the blurry distinctions between public and private knowledge about royal bodies. Pepys records rumours of at least three miscarriages before he reports this 'perfect child' miscarriage that 'which doth show that she can conceive'.

This miscarriage is the first mentioned by Charles in his letters to his sister as well. On 7 May 1668 he writes that 'my wife miscarried this morning. And though I am troubled at it, yet I am glad that 'tis evident she was with child, which I will not deny to you til now I did fear she was not capable of.'⁴⁸¹ After years of monitoring and speculation, Catherine's ability to conceive is acknowledged as a minor victory several years into her marriage. But while the number of rumoured miscarriages and their relation to her bodily health remains difficult to chart accurately, they also reflect the spectrum of infertility recognized in contemporary medical sources and how they were exhibited, whether real or imagined, on Catherine's reproductive body. The range of reproductive failures and their descriptions also illustrate how the early modern experience of infertility could be interpreted and its language used strategically to support a number of opinions and agendas.

Catherine's reproductive abilities were a subject of intense scrutiny for not only her 'troubled' husband, curious public, and bewildered physicians, but also for the courtly rivals whose political futures rested on the possibility of her providing an heir to the kingdom. Rumours of divorce abounded, including reports that the unpopular Duke of Buckingham devised a plot to send Catherine off to a colonial plantation to clear room for a potentially

⁴⁸¹ Bryant, *Letters of Charles II*, p. 219.

fertile new queen to take her place.⁴⁸² The divorce proceedings of Lord Roos in 1669 also attracted the court's (and particularly Charles's) attention, as many thought the outcome of the Parliamentary trial could provide an important legal precedent for the dissolution of the royal marriage.⁴⁸³ Bishop Burnet writes in detail about these 'designs for putting away the Queen' in his *History of My Own Time*, and summarises the numerous proposals made to dispose of Catherine based on her barrenness. Burnet's personal reflections about questions of polygamy and divorce in cases of sterility, while briefly referenced in his *History*, were published separately and only sixty-two years after the crisis.⁴⁸⁴ The pamphlet contains two 'dissertations', a treatise on the 'Lawfulness of Divorce, on Account of the Sterility in Women', followed by a 'Defence of Polygamy' in which he argues that it is not expressly prohibited in the Bible. Burnet concludes that in questions of divorce, sterility in women in fact renders the question moot, arguing that 'a Woman being then found naturally Barren, nothing of Divorce or Polygamy is to be considered, but she is to be declared incapable of Marriage, as in the Cause of Frigidity on the Man's part: and so the Marriage is to be annulled'. On polygamy, he concludes that 'a simple and express Discharge of Polygamy is no where to be found' in the Bible, citing numerous cases of multiple wives in the Old Testament. Both of Burnet's arguments rely heavily on the belief that 'the Primary Intendment of Marriage...is Propagation' and his findings clearly support the abandonment of Catherine as well as highlighting the seriousness with which some of the more extreme proposed 'solutions' to the fruitless royal marriage were considered.⁴⁸⁵ Ten years before the Popish Plot, the dramatic episode that fuelled the Exclusion Crisis and ended with Catherine

⁴⁸² Burnet claims that Charles himself put an end to this particularly extreme plot, saying 'it was a wicked thing to make a poor lady miserable, only because she was his wife, and had no children by him, which was no fault of hers': Gilbert Burnet, *History of My Own Time* (London, 1734), pp. 262-3.

⁴⁸³ For more on the Roos case, see Philips, *Untying the Knot*, pp. 36-8.

⁴⁸⁴ Gilbert Burnet, *Two Dissertations written by the Late Bishop Burnet* (London, 1731), p. 1. The publisher of the pamphlet claims that the dissertations were 'denied a place in our Prelate's remarkable history' but assures their presence in the original manuscript: Gilbert Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, 2 vols (1724-1734), vol. 1, pp. 262-3.

⁴⁸⁵ Burnet, *Two Dissertations*, p. 8.

herself being informally accused of treason and involved in a plot to poison the king, her inability to produce children was the subject of intrigue and anxiety that divided the court. The Exclusion Crisis was a political controversy surrounding attempts to exclude James, Duke of York, from succeeding Charles II as King of England. The Exclusion Bill, introduced to Parliament by the Earl of Shaftesbury in 1679, centered on James's Catholicism, and built on anti-Catholic sentiments stirred by the Popish Plot and anxieties over Charles's lack of a legitimate heir to the throne.⁴⁸⁶ Burnet's treatises illustrate the types of spiritual and legal debate that Catherine's sustained reproductive challenges sparked and how her experience exemplified the problems that infertility raised concerning the most fundamental questions about the purpose of marriage (and exacerbated by the problems of royal succession).

Charles' final letter on the subject of his wife's pregnancies, dated 7 June 1669, is filled with resignation as he writes, 'after all our hopes, my wife has miscarried again, without any visible accident. The physicians are divided whether it were a false conception or a good one.'⁴⁸⁷ From challenges in conceiving, inability to 'hold' a pregnancy, or even the spectre of 'false conception', all of these perceived failures captured the attention and elicited commentary from her husband and a public that was watching and waiting for an heir. They also further illustrate the spectrum of infertility that was experienced by women and evaluated in a variety of sources from the early modern period.

Mary of Modena

This close reading of the fertility challenges of Catherine of Braganza sets the framework of expectation, disappointment and drama to be experienced by her successor, James II's wife, Mary of Modena, within the longer history of queens and their bodily responsibility to produce royal heirs. Contemporaries were well-practised in the close

⁴⁸⁶ For more information on the political aspects of these controversies, see J. R. Jones, *The First Whigs: the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis* (London, 1961).

⁴⁸⁷ Bryant, *Letters of Charles II*, p. 239. See Sharp, *Midwives Book*, pp. 106-15, and Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, pp. 148-9, for descriptions of false conceptions and moles.

supervision of the queen's reproductive body, and by 1685 the stakes, as well as anxieties, had been raised with respect to Mary's responsibility of producing an heir to the kingdom. Catherine's prolonged fertility drama magnified the role that public knowledge played in shaping ideas about the queen's reproductive body in the late Stuart period, and her ultimately disappointing outcome played an influential role in Mary's own reproductive challenges that culminated in the Warming Pan Scandal of 1688. It must be noted that Mary, unlike Catherine, did give birth to living babies. Mary's reproductive challenges happened within a very specific timeframe and had different results. She gave birth to six living children over the course of her childbearing years, and therefore the questions surrounding the abilities of Mary's body were markedly different to those concerning her predecessor. Nevertheless, Mary's inability to produce strong, healthy offspring, coupled with a long lag in pregnancies between the years 1682 and 1687, again raised anxieties over an heirless throne. While James had two living daughters by his first wife, Anne Hyde, the prospective fertility of Mary of Modena was undoubtedly a key factor in her selection as his bride. She was lauded by Lord Peterborough, the broker of the marriage and proxy for James in the first wedding ceremony, held in Italy, as having 'the appearance of a maid in the bloom of youth, and of a healthful constitution, [and was] likely to bring strong children'.⁴⁸⁸

The Italian princess, Mary Beatrice of Modena, arrived in England as the second wife of James, Duke of York, in 1673. As with Catherine, her youth and beauty were extolled in a number of poems welcoming her to England, and her virtues were described in physical terms. Peterborough reflected that 'in the whole turn of her Face, which was of the most graceful oval it could be framed, there was all the Features, all the Beauty, and all that could

⁴⁸⁸ Agnes [and Elizabeth] Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England* (London, 1867), vol. 9, p. 19. Strickland discusses the drawn-out selection process for James II's second wife in close detail whilst also providing insight into Mary's initial reluctance toward the marriage. On the value of Strickland's historical research, and her particular affinity for Mary of Modena, see 'Women historians and Documentary Research: Lucy Aikin, Agnes Strickland, Mary Anne Everett Green and Lucy Toulmin Smith', in Bellamy, J., Laurence, A., and Perry, G., (eds.), *Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge, c. 1790-1900* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 125-41.

be great and charming in any humane Creature.’⁴⁸⁹ The fifteen year old princess’ beauty was even more obvious when compared with the middle-aged, pockmarked figure of her husband.⁴⁹⁰ Dryden dedicated his opera the *State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* to Mary, and remarked in its dedication that her ‘conjugal virtues have deserved to be set as an example to a less-degenerate, less-tainted age. They approach so near to singularity in ours that I can scarce make a panegyrick on Your Royal Highness without a satire on many others.’⁴⁹¹ Mary of Modena, with her noble European lineage, wealth, and youth, recalled the promise that accompanied young Catherine of Braganza, and similarly obsequious verses celebrated her arrival to England. By 1675 she had given birth to her first child, a daughter, who died within a month from convulsions. Mary went on to give birth to three more babies within the next seven years, although none of the children survived past the age of four. After the death of a little boy named Charles, Duke of Cambridge (a name he ominously shared with a previously deceased son of James and Anne Hyde), it was widely publicised that Mary was plagued by the presence of a dead woman in her dreams. Nightmares and dreaming of the dead were linked to miscarriage and serve as examples of the power attributed to maternal imagination.⁴⁹²

Throughout these years, Mary’s appearance and health were a constant concern. Commentary on the royal couple’s coronation in 1685 included intense scrutiny of Mary’s appearance after a recent bout of illness, and Mary’s ascent to the throne was immediately

⁴⁸⁹ Lord Peterborough quoted in Marie Hallé, *Queen Mary of Modena: Her Life and Letters*, p. 19.

⁴⁹⁰ Strickland comments on the large age gap between James and Mary, claiming that ‘he appears to only have regarded her as a full-grown child’ given her proximity in age to his eldest daughter, Mary, who was only four years her junior. See Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, p. 64. Disparity of age between marriage partners was also often a reason cited in early modern sex manuals for problems with fertility, given the different libidos of an older husband and young wife. See Sinibaldus, *Rare Verities*, pp. 35-6.

⁴⁹¹ John Dryden, *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man* (London, 1678), epistle dedicatory.

⁴⁹² Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, p. 77. According to Strickland, the woman plaguing Mary’s dreams was Frances Villiers, the former governess of her stepdaughters, the Princesses Mary and Anne. Strickland attributes difference in religion to the supposed haunting. For more on contemporary connections between miscarriage, dreams and maternal imagination, see Sharp, *Midwives Book*, p. 224, and Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, pp. 93-4.

followed by a period of sustained infertility. The loss of all of her living children by 1685 and a prolonged illness started whispers at court regarding a suitable replacement. The Italian ambassador Francesco Terriesi wrote to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in the autumn of 1685 that ‘the Queen remains with a complication of disorders which the Doctors and the general public believe will not give her long to live; this is a conjecture which, while it pleases the Catholics and loyal subjects on account of her childlessness, equally displeases the fanatics and the disloyal, who see that there would be a prospect of His Majesty having male descendants’.⁴⁹³ This account coincides with numerous references to Mary being thin, pale, and melancholic due to her inability to become pregnant, and her jealousy at the frequent visits of James’ mistresses and their children to court. The ‘want of flesh’ on her tall, thin frame and her unhappy, jealous state made Mary the very picture of an infertile woman as described in the pages of Culpeper and Sharp. Both authors cite ‘discontent’ as a plausible reason behind infertility, and Culpeper writes that ‘it stirs up affections in the Body as are inimical both to body and mind, and therefore must needs either kill or spoil the child in the womb: such are anger, passion, hatred, fear of things to come, fear for things past, sorrow, sighing and grief of mind. All these corrupt the very nourishment wherewith the child is nourished within the womb, and oftentimes kills the fruit in the very bud.’⁴⁹⁴ Mary’s discontent at the presence of her rivals and her distress over losing her living children was reflected in her bodily state and cited as contributing to the very root of her unhappiness. Five years after her last pregnancy, Mary set out for Bath in the August of 1687 with the intent of seeking a cure for her prolonged fertility problems.⁴⁹⁵

Bath’s reputation had grown considerably throughout the late seventeenth century, and Mary’s royal visit was in keeping with that of her predecessor Catherine. The sulphuric

⁴⁹³ Francesco Terriesi to Grand Duke of Tuscany, quoted in Haile, *Queen Mary of Modena*, p. 149.

⁴⁹⁴ Culpeper, *Directory for Midwives*, p. 94.

⁴⁹⁵ Mary’s last pregnancy was with the Princess Charlotte Mary, born in August 1682, but the baby girl died just three weeks later.

nature of Bath's waters was believed to be helpful in aiding conception, a theory that was supported by the medical literature, and Mary reportedly used the Cross Bath, as it was more private than the Queen's Bath used by her predecessor, Catherine. Mary was known to prefer an older site, St. Winefride's well in Flintshire. St. Winefride's well was a shrine that had attracted pilgrims since the medieval period. Its patrons were cured by more spiritual means than those touted by other spa locations such as Bath and Tunbridge Wells, but the site remained popular with English Catholics after the Reformation. Mary's preference for St. Winefride's Well is one of the most obvious signs of her staunch Catholicism, and it was widely-known that her mother, the Duchess of Modena, had visited the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto in her home country of Italy to pray for her daughter's fertility shortly before her death in 1687.⁴⁹⁶ Mary's own visit to St. Winefride's was more of a pilgrimage as opposed to the therapeutic trips to places such as Tunbridge and Bath.

But Mary did conceive again, and Bath happily took all the accolades. James joined Mary at Bath on 6 September, and shortly after the confirmation that Mary was indeed pregnant, a cross was erected over the Cross Bath by the Earl of Melfort and, within a short period of time, 'Mary Beatrice's bath was much resorted to by married ladies desirous of children.'⁴⁹⁷ The news of Mary's pregnancy took the court by surprise and came at a time 'when utterly different expectations were prevalent concerning her.'⁴⁹⁸ Many believed and even hoped Mary to be irrecoverably infertile, and there was instant backlash from the Orangists who declared the claims to be false.⁴⁹⁹ John Evelyn records a public service being held in January of 1688 which he describes as 'a solemn and particular office used at our, & al the Churche[s] of London, & 10 miles about it, for thanksgiving to God for her Majesties

⁴⁹⁶ Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, vol. I, p. 749.

⁴⁹⁷ Hallé, *Mary of Modena: Her Life and Letters*, p. 167.

⁴⁹⁸ Terriesi to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, quoted in Hallé, *Queen Mary of Modena*, p. 174.

⁴⁹⁹ For a thorough discussion of the events leading up to the Revolution of 1688, including the impact of the birth of the Prince of Wales, see Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family, and Political Argument in England, 1680-1714* (Manchester, 1999).

being with child.⁵⁰⁰ Thus continued, stoked with new fervour, a period of public doubt, suspicion and gossip that centred on the queen's reproductive body.

The Warming Pan Scandal

The birth of the Prince of Wales in June 1688 was met with mixed emotions in a kingdom that faced imminent invasion from the Prince of Orange and religious and political factions threatening general upheaval. Ironically, the 'happy arrival' of the long-awaited male heir marks the beginning of the end of James II's time on the throne. Nonetheless, there were several poems published that heralded the birth of this new prince whose arrival seemed almost too good to be true. Dryden joyfully writes of the 'timely Fruit the longing Land to cheer' and thanks that 'Kind Heav'n, to make us English-Men again/No less can give us than a Patriarchs Reign.'⁵⁰¹ The poems celebrated Mary's body as well, and her beauty and successful fertility were again lauded after the successful delivery that once again indicated her ability to 'fill the Trine.'⁵⁰² England's male heir had arrived, and Mary's thirty-year-old body proved that it could conceive and carry a strong child to full term after years of frustrating attempts.

Mary's pregnancy and delivery of the Prince of Wales was fraught with mystery from the beginning to the end, but much of the suspicion it aroused was to be laid to rest by a special council called by the king in October 1688. The purpose of this council was to collect the testimonies of witnesses to the birth and to put an end, once and for all, to the widespread rumours that the Prince of Wales was a changeling, smuggled into the birth chamber in a warming pan. Much has been written about this remarkable episode and the tangled political

⁵⁰⁰ Evelyn, *Diary*, January 1688. See Church of England, *A form, or order of thanksgiving, and prayer, to be used...on behalf of the King, the Queen, and the royal family, upon occasion of the Queen's being with child* (London, 1688) for the special prayers regarding the royal family and Mary's health that were inserted into the regular church service.

⁵⁰¹ John Dryden, *Britannia Rediviva: A poem on the Birth of the Prince* (London, 1688), p. 2.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 13. The word 'trine' is a reference to the three kingdoms: England, Scotland, and Ireland, that were ruled by James II.

and religious motives behind its creation, and, as Daphna Oren-Magidor notes, the deposition document exhibits gendered knowledge and access to the queen's body.⁵⁰³ In her close examination of the scandal through published satire and pamphlets produced over the summer of 1688, Rachel Weil argues that the scandal illustrates the intersection of politics and the family and, therefore, public and private.⁵⁰⁴ Dynastic politics depended on the communication of traditionally 'women's knowledge' (i.e., accounts from the birthing chamber, specific stages of pregnancy) in order to establish legitimacy. Many of the female witnesses call on knowledge of Mary's other pregnancies as well as early physical signs of conception, referencing different stages of pregnancy and reinforcing that Mary could in fact 'conceive' and 'bring forth', similar to the questions posed about the body of her predecessor, Catherine, over twenty years earlier. Counting weeks, watching for bodily fluids such as milk, and Mary's fear of miscarriage are all significant references to uncertainty and close monitoring throughout the duration of the pregnancy. Precedent was important and the female witnesses drew upon Mary's past bodily and emotional experiences (inside and outside this single pregnancy) to provide evidence for the court. In contrast, the men's testimonies are usually vague and 'in the moment', describing Mary's screams during the birth and the appearance of the newborn as being 'in the Condition of a Newborn Child' at his moment of presentation to the peers.⁵⁰⁵ The men at the scene seemingly increased their authority through their association with women. The Earl of Middleton recalls in his testimony that James himself told him that 'You are a married Man, and so may know these Matters' as a response to the Earl's inquiry about the health of the queen.⁵⁰⁶ The evidence

⁵⁰³ I would like to thank Daphna Oren-Magidor for sharing her unpublished article on this topic with me. The article will be published in a forthcoming special issue of *Social History of Medicine*, edited by Daphna Oren-Magidor and Catherine Rider, expected in 2015.

⁵⁰⁴ Rachel Weil, *Political Passions*, p. 100.

⁵⁰⁵ Privy Council of England and Wales, *At the Council-chambers in Whitehall: Monday the 22 of October, 1688* (London, 1688), p. 3. Hereafter cited as Privy Council. A large body of literature argues for a shift in knowledge about women's bodies that occurred during the early modern period with the rise of male midwives. See Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-midwifery*, pp. 47-59.

⁵⁰⁶ Privy Council., p. 3.

bases for the men and women's testimonies are wholly different, as the women refer to personal experience of pregnancy and visible proof of the queen's pregnant body, whereas men are limited to sounds and speculations made from outside the bedchamber.

The Queen Dowager Catherine, resident at Somerset House since the death of her husband thirteen years before, was present at the birth and served as a key witness. Catherine's presence is noteworthy in that it illustrates the continuity that marked the reigns and the experiences of these two queens and also the official role that she still played at court. She was frequently visited by Mary and James at Somerset House.⁵⁰⁷ Her attendance at the birth scene of the Prince of Wales and the significance lent to her testimony communicates the high regard in which she was still held.⁵⁰⁸ Catherine's testimony is markedly different, however, from the detailed testimonies of the other women. Following the testimony of the King himself, the Queen Dowager's deposition simply states 'That when the King sent for her to the Queens Labour, she came as soon as she could, and never parted from her till she was Delivered of the Prince of Wales.'⁵⁰⁹ In contrast to the testimonies of the other women who described bodily fluids and gave detailed descriptions of the birth scene, Catherine's mere presence and word that the child was Mary's was enough. Catherine's high rank meant that her words carried weight, and her testimony, while terse, is an example of the strong connection between the two queens, the overlap of their respective reproductive and regnal responsibilities, and their personal lives. But Catherine's words also set her apart from the other women's testimonies in the deposition. They create a gulf between Catherine, a childless woman, and the other female voices recorded in the document. While the other

⁵⁰⁷ See Hallé, *Mary of Modena*, p. 126, p. 185, for the description of interaction between Catherine, James and Mary. Hallé describes the warmth that characterized the relationship between the Queen Dowager and her successors.

⁵⁰⁸ 'Her Majesty, the Queen Dowager' is listed before the 'Peers of the Kingdom, a detail that alludes to her high position in the aristocratic hierarchy and to the weight that her testimony carries in the deposition. For more on Catherine's time as Queen Dowager and her later influence on arts patronage, etc., see Edward Corp, 'Catherine of Braganza and Cultural Politics,' in Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Queenship in Britain 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics* (Manchester, p. 2002), pp. 53-74.

⁵⁰⁹ Privy Council, testimony of Queen Dowager, p. 1.

women's contributions communicate gendered knowledge about the processes of pregnancy and childbirth, Catherine's authority stands alone as a female whose mere acknowledgement of attendance at the birth scene confirmed the legitimacy of the Prince of Wales.

The questions raised by this royal birth dredged up recollections of another famous birth scene, or rather one that famously never happened. A pamphlet entitled *Idem Iteratum, or, the History of Queen Mary's Big Belly*, was published shortly after the contested birth of the Prince of Wales in 1688.⁵¹⁰ The pamphlet contained several historical documents relating to the phantom pregnancy of Mary Tudor, who famously failed to deliver a child after believing herself to be pregnant for almost a year.⁵¹¹ It also contained reprints of the official announcements of the pregnancy, prayers for the delivery and health of the child, and even a dubious story about a common woman being solicited by royal officials for her newly born baby boy when the Tudor queen failed to give birth. The implications were stark and the parallels between Mary Tudor's false pregnancy and Mary of Modena's birth scandal were obvious and were directly tied to their reproductive bodies. Like Mary Tudor's swollen body (yet unlike Catherine's body), Mary of Modena's body publicly exhibited the signs of pregnancy as testified to by several witnesses. The publication of this unusual pamphlet served as a timely reminder of another royal pregnancy shrouded in mystery, as it offered a host of alternative explanations behind the current queen's questionable delivery and tied it into a longer history of royal reproductive failure.⁵¹² On the eve of the Revolution of 1688 the public was reminded that similar questions had been raised before, about another notoriously

⁵¹⁰ Anon., *Idem Iterum: The History of Q. Mary's Big-belly* (London, 1688). The very title of the pamphlet 'Idem Iterum', translated to 'the same again' alludes to the similarities between the two questionable scenes of royal birth: Carole Levin, 'English Queens' Bodies in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Political Imagination' conference paper, Royal Body Conference, Royal Holloway, University of London, April 2-4, 2012.

⁵¹¹ For more on Mary Tudor's phantom pregnancy, see Anna Whitelock, *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* (London, 2009), pp. 253-57; Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman (eds.), *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 1998).

⁵¹² Several explanations for Mary Tudor's phantom pregnancy are detailed in the document, introducing the idea that the 'Queen's Conception was spread for a policy; some other affirmed that she was deceived by a Tympany or some other like Disease... some thought that she was with Child, and that it did by some chance miscarry, or else that she was bewitched': Anon., *The History of Q. Mary's Big-belly*, p. 7.

Catholic queen. Drawing comparisons between the two queens and their childbed experiences provided another opportunity for an attack on Mary of Modena and highlights the importance that previous queens' fertility dramas played in scenes of royal births and intrigue.

Conclusion

The Warming Pan Scandal serves as an opportunity for a close examination of the close interplay of court politics, religious anxieties and public access to the queen's reproductive body that characterized the fertility dramas of Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena. It was a culmination of two decades' worth of speculation and anxiety over the queen's fertility problems and a crisis which reached even farther back in history to recall fertility dramas of the Tudors. Mary's fertility struggles closely follow Catherine's in terms of the patterns of hope and disappointment that the queens, the court, and even the country experienced and expressed. Both their young bodies arrived in England heavy with expectation, their futures hinging on their reproductive capabilities. Judgments about those capabilities rested on each queen's physical appearance and were complicated by their foreign bodies' abilities (or otherwise) to adapt to their adopted natural and cultural environment. The pressure on those bodies to provide heirs mounted through each childless year and each reproductive challenge, and the prescriptions for strict diet, baths and medical treatments were similar for both queens. Throughout their ordeals, opinions about their reproductive bodies were openly offered by courtiers, poets, and physicians. Catherine and Mary's struggles with infertility were blamed on a mix of their physical health, their relationships with their husbands, and their behaviour in the face of their own reproductive challenges. Charting the sequence of the two queens' experiences with infertility illustrates the parallel personal disappointments of the queens as well as revealing the public's mounting concern and scrutiny over their reproductive failures.

Reading their two stories together illustrates the continuities between their struggles and provides a different angle from which to view the late Stuart succession crises, one that focuses on their bodily experiences with infertility. It also reflects late seventeenth-century attitudes toward the private and public bodies of queens and contextualises these attitudes through a close reading of contemporary therapies for infertility in popular medical literature. The cycle of hope, uncertainty, and disappointment was an experience shared by women (and, as Pepys' diary shows, also men) struggling with infertility in early modern England. Any pregnancy could have varying results, and these two queens' experiences represent the spectrum of outcomes possible in early modern interpretations of infertility.

The public scrutiny and growing concern that accompanied these two particular female bodies was atypical, but it was shared between them and significantly shaped the latter years of the Stuart monarchy. Their experiences clearly illustrate early modern ideas about frustrated conception, miscarriage, the uncertainty of pregnancy, and ultimately the tension between the personal experience of infertility and public role of the royal body. Connecting the fertility struggles of Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena shows how these two queens bore the responsibility with which their respective corporeal bodies, and collective royal, reproductive body, were burdened.

Case Studies Conclusion

The various manifestations of infertility in these two case studies presented serious problems for both the female bodies involved and the societies within which these reproductive failures occurred. Across the cases, infertility appeared as a host of physical disorders, ranging from the birth of a monster, in the case of Mary Dyer, to the delayed conception and multiple miscarriages of Catherine of Braganza. All of the reproductive bodies examined were not operating as they were supposed to. The popular descriptions of the women's various reproductive problems echo ideas found in early modern medical literature, were based in humoral theory, and were tied to themes of order and disorder in relationships between men and women and between the natural and spiritual worlds. The reproductive challenges experienced by Mary Dyer, Anne Hutchinson, Catherine of Braganza, and Mary of Modena were analysed by, mostly male, contemporaries with regard to the women's physical, mental, and spiritual health. Reading these cases together illustrates how infertility could be perceived to be a public problem as well as a personal disappointment in the early modern period. The stakes were high in all of these cases of infertility and there were calls to action when misconceptions were brought to light. These women's bodies and reproductive failures were the subject of speculation as personal and published commentary tied them to larger issues of religious dissent, national competition, and political and bodily deception. These high profile cases thus provide a rich set of sources to illustrate, on a grand scale, the anxiety that infertility could cause in both men and women in colonial New England and early modern England.

CONCLUSION

This thesis opened with a quote about the responsibilities that rested within the wombs and on the consciences of women and men who were about to become parents. According to John Oliver, mothers had a duty to order their bodies and minds to best support their unborn babies, fathers had a duty to provide for their wives and prospective children, current generations had a duty to procure offspring, and everyone had a duty to God. Oliver's text contained instructions for the ordering of a woman's body and soul before, during, and after, childbirth, but its information about infertility addresses the presence of potential disorder in the woman's body, mind, and marital relationship. As this thesis argues, the language of infertility similarly expressed fears about disorder in times of social, religious, and political crisis in early modern society. The tensions within early modern English and colonial New English societies were different, but ideas about infertility appear in both societies when order, within the body, within marriages, or within and between communities, was threatened.

Information about infertility therefore appears in the cracks of early modern society and illustrates important attitudes toward tensions in relationships between men and women, the natural and the supernatural worlds, the body and the environment, and sex and reproduction. It also, by extension, exhibits the tension between the two societies, colonial New England and its 'Mother' England, and how particular anxieties about population were expressed in each place. Medical, legal, and religious authorities overlapped and agreed in their descriptions and attitudes toward infertility and, as this thesis has shown, the sources informed each other. It is not possible to cleanly separate these authorities, and the study of each in isolation is detrimental to examining the complex problem of infertility in the early modern period as a whole. As a medical condition, infertility clearly exhibits why Ludmilla

Jordanova argues that social constructionism is a useful method for medical historians.⁵¹³ The way that people thought about infertility in early modern society was informed as much by religious parables and popular stereotypes as it was by the medical information available. The early modern 'medical' texts themselves were infused with moral opinions, popular lore, and religious messages. Proper functioning of the reproductive body depended as much on an individual's correct behaviour, the ordering of his or her mind, and a stable gender hierarchy as it did on diet, exercise, and moderate sexual activity. Representations of how infertility was confronted, understood, and interpreted in the early modern period must be examined across many types of literature and diverse sources in order to understand the personal and social impact of reproductive challenges. Attitudes toward infertility in both places informed and regulated, educated and advised, judged and condemned those bodies in which 'natural fecundity' was challenged, and simultaneously prompted questions about the natural order of the society that the problematic body was operating within.

One major aim of this thesis is to illustrate the merit of looking across a spectrum of reproductive challenges to redefine infertility in an early modern context. Midwifery manuals addressed infertility in several different sections, and information about infertility can be found outside chapters specifically devoted to 'barrenness'. Similarly, male infertility is addressed within sections on female barrenness, illustrating the complicated nature of these texts and the complexity of the subject of infertility as a whole. Disordered wombs produced a variety of results, from failing to conceive entirely, to creating monsters and moles. As the cases of Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer illustrate, imperfect products were all considered misconceptions. Pregnancy could go wrong at every step of the process. Miscarrying wombs failed in their task to hold fetuses until successful birth, 'true conceptions' needed to be distinguished from false ones, and a mother's imagination could disfigure or corrupt a

⁵¹³ Ludmilla Jordanova, 'The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge', *Social History of Medicine*, 8 (1995), pp. 361-381.

developing child. Jennifer Evans has identified the separation and distinction of female and male infertility as an eighteenth-century phenomenon.⁵¹⁴ Simple keyword searches then do nothing to unearth the diverse language used to describe the ‘spectrum of infertility’ that was experienced by early modern men and women and fail to capture the language used to express the anxieties that such challenges evoked. Words such as ‘barren’ and ‘fruitless’ were tied closely to well-known, socially-constructed images and religious parables, whereas ‘impotent’ could be used denote male sexual dysfunction as well as a general lack of authority or power. This thesis therefore looked beyond cases of lifelong childlessness, as multiple miscarriages or delay in conception could also raise the spectre, and the questions, of what these challenges meant in terms of spiritual tests or social judgments.

Of all of the early modern women mentioned in this thesis, only one, Catherine of Braganza, remained childless until death, and her reproductive history was filled with rumoured miscarriages and questions about menstrual problems. In New England, Abigail Mather gave birth to nine children, but her anxious husband Cotton linked her first birth of a deformed son to witchcraft in the community, and questioned his own relationship with God when she miscarried a baby nine years later.⁵¹⁵ Identifying and analysing periods of infertility within men’s and women’s reproductive lifecycles provides a more accurate analysis of attitudes toward infertility in early modern society. As Nicholas Culpeper distinguished natural barrenness from accidental barrenness, or permanent infertility from temporary infertility, so did John Oliver in his spiritual text for childbearing women. As Oliver maintained, ‘It be may be, [God] will grant thy petition, as he hath done of some that for

⁵¹⁴ Evans, ‘The Role of Gender in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Sexual Dysfunction in Early Modern England’, p. 44.

⁵¹⁵ Mather, *Diary*, p. 430. Abigail Mather never recovered her health after she suffered a miscarriage in 1702, and Cotton Mather recorded that she ‘unhappily miscarried of a Son, after being four or five Months with Child; and yet, it is possible, that not unhappily; for she had also a false Conception, whereof she was now delivered.’ The minister immediately followed this diary entry with an examination of his own relationship with God, expressed through reproductive language, as he questioned ‘whether I had ever troubled the Churches of the Lord, with any false Conception’.

above twenty years in a state of marriage went childless, yet at least he made the solitary to dwell in families'.⁵¹⁶ Infertility took many different forms, and understanding personal reproductive misfortune required similar breadth of knowledge. Treating infertility, whether through spiritual or physical means, depended on the particular reproductive challenge that the individual was facing, and the course of treatment was wholly dependent on their spiritual and physical health. Early modern men and women confronting these challenges were aware of these distinctions, and their understanding was also shaped by Biblical parables of barren women and by the many stereotypes of infertility in popular culture.

This thesis urges modern readers to look at infertility as a problem shared between men and women in the early modern period and as a challenge recognized across various types of literature in early modern England and colonial New England. Infertility, whether blamed on slippery wombs or unusually long penises, religious dissonance or moral decay, was a problem that was perceived as a fundamental failure occurring within relationships between men and women. As such, it is fitting to close with the stories of two well-known writers from the early modern period: one man and one woman, both living in the latter half of the seventeenth century, though separated by an ocean, as they documented their own struggles with reproductive failure. Both Samuel Pepys and Anne Bradstreet are usually cited for the colourful glimpses that they provide into life in early modern society, and rarely for how they absorbed and reflected medical, religious, and popular attitudes toward infertility. Both experienced personal reproductive challenges, however, and their writing illustrates how they responded when infertility occurred in their own lives and the lives of their contemporaries. While Pepys would remain childless until his death, Anne Bradstreet gave birth to eight children after a prolonged period of illness and infertility, eventually becoming a paragon of Puritan motherhood and celebrated for her domestic and spiritual virtues. Pepys

⁵¹⁶ Oliver, *A Present for Teeming Women*, p. 12.

and Bradstreet therefore exhibit the full spectrum of infertility and the experience of reproductive challenge in early modern society.

Samuel Pepys's experience as a childless man has attracted the attention of historians.⁵¹⁷ As Berry and Foyster assert, the very first entry of Pepys's famous diary reveals his hope for children as he notes that 'my wife, after the absence of her terms for seven weeks, gave me hopes of her being with child, but on the last day of the year she hath them again'.⁵¹⁸ The diary contains other references to his wife's menstrual cycle and his growing exasperation at her mistaken belief that she was pregnant. In September of 1664 he wearily notes that 'she tells me she thinks she is with child; but I neither believe nor desire it. But God's will be done.' The 'want of children' was clearly a point of tension in the Pepys marriage, and the resultant exasperation and irritation is expressed several times by the writer. The tensions expressed in the diary, just one indication of the unhappy marriage, echo the warnings about marital discord's negative effects on fertility in contemporary medical works. Culpeper cautions that unhappy marriages are often the cause, and, as perhaps in Pepys's case, the effect, of infertility. Pepys expresses his desire for children in other ways as well, in his admiration of the children of his friends and neighbours. He also expresses the practical concerns in 'considering the possibility... of my having no child' when writing about issues of inheritance and financial planning. He is particularly fond of the twin boys of Lord and Lady Sandwich, and measures their scholarly achievements like a proud father in October of 1667. As previously discussed in the case study of Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena, he is knowledgeable about the reproductive health of the queen and records the rumours and gossip about her supposed pregnancy, miscarriages and ill health over the course of several years. Pepys, then, is a man whose own private fertility struggle affects his social life and his interpretation of the more public reproductive dramas of those around him.

⁵¹⁷ See Berry and Foyster, 'Childless Men in Early Modern England', pp. 158-9.

⁵¹⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, 1 January 1660.

He therefore stands as a fitting example of how hazy such lines of demarcation between private and public were in the early modern world, particularly when it came to questions about infertility, as bodily concerns were expressed and measured against other reproductive bodies and within the social spaces that they shared.

One particularly telling entry from Pepys's diary details the advice that he received at a gossips' dinner during the summer of 1664 when he disclosed the problems that he and his wife were experiencing with 'not getting of children.' The 'matrons' at the party gave Pepys ten rules for begetting children, such as to 'eat no late suppers, drink juice of sage, wear cool Holland drawers, keep stomach warm and back cool', and, most importantly, to 'lie with [your] heads where [your] heels do, or at least to make the bed high at feet and low at head' during sexual intercourse.⁵¹⁹ Additionally, they advised that he 'must not hug [his] wife too hard or too much.' The matrons' suggestions align with much of the advice in early modern medical literature and adhere to prescriptions for ordering the humoral body. The temperature of different parts of the body was directly related to humoral theory, and elevating the pelvis and legs during intercourse is advice still followed by couples looking to conceive today. The advice of moderate sexual activity, not 'too hard or too much', echoes the relationship advice given in midwifery texts and pornography (of which Pepys was a famous consumer). Read together, the matrons' advice regarding fertility addresses the ordering of individual (both female and male) bodies and of a marriage in general. Moreover, the trusted source of the information, the matrons, demonstrates another theme of this thesis: issues of authority and gender. The women whom Pepys consulted were not midwives, and this was not an exchange between patient and practitioner. Rather, it was a social occasion, and the authority that Pepys grants these women by copying down their advice in his journal demonstrates the way that early modern people exchanged ideas about infertility. The plurality of authority on fertility

⁵¹⁹ Pepys, *Diary*, 26 July 1664.

concerns is mirrored in the diversity of sources in which it is addressed. Women were authorities on issues of fertility and childbirth, and Pepys's entry therefore exhibits the informality of certain channels within which information about infertility was passed along in early modern society. Samuel Pepys's diary brings to life the many roles that he assumed as a man dealing with reproductive challenges: a consumer of fertility advice provided in a social setting, a childless man longing for a son, a neighbour admiring the 'pretty children' of his friends, a frustrated husband who records his wife's uncertainties about her own reproductive body. Pepys's experience of infertility also reminds modern readers of what was similarly expressed in medical, religious, and popular literature of the period: that men were involved in the drama of infertility as well.

Across the Atlantic, Anne Bradstreet recorded her transplanted life in the New England colonies through poetry that she circulated amongst family and friends. Several of these poems were published, unbeknownst to Anne, in book form in England, by her brother-in-law John Woodbridge. *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650), containing poems on the 'Description of the Four Elements, Constitutions, Ages of Man, Seasons of the Year' proved very popular in England, and the information that its poems exhibit about Anne's knowledge of the natural world and interest in anatomy has been noted by historians.⁵²⁰ Many of her best-known poems were focused on the domestic sphere, such as her loving relationship with her husband, the death of family members, the love she felt for her children, and the anxiety she experienced before childbirth. As Jeffrey Hammond notes, 'Bradstreet... placed her own life at the very centre of her work, thereby transforming personal events into dramatic witnessing to a pilgrim's experience of the self and the world.'⁵²¹ Her poems reflect the significance of the Puritan family and exemplify what historians have identified as the

⁵²⁰ Jean Marie Lutes, 'Negotiating Theology and Gynaecology: Anne Bradstreet's Representations of the Female Body', *Signs*, 22 (1997), pp. 309-340.

⁵²¹ Jeffrey Hammond, *Sinful Self, Saintly Self: The Puritan Experience of Poetry* (Athens, GA, 1993) p. 86.

central organisational construct of the New England colonies: the intersection of faith and family.

Scholars have recognized that Bradstreet's poetry provides insight into the personal experience of motherhood, physical illness, and religious reflection. Her poetry also reflects a blend of popular early modern ideas about medicine and the family, and the relationship between the physical and spiritual components of reproductive health. As already cited in this thesis, Bradstreet's address to her 'Loving Husband' reflects the kind of well-ordered, harmonious marital relationship that medical authors and religious leaders trumpeted as being necessary for the generation of healthy children. As Jean Marie Lutes argues, her poems about the four humours, the four ages of man, and her writing about the female reproductive body exhibit her extensive knowledge of Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia* (1615).⁵²²

But Bradstreet, who famously went on to have 'eight birds hatcht in one nest', also struggled with illness and infertility. She failed to conceive for the first five years of her marriage, and, as she wrote to her children later in life, 'it pleased God to keep me a long time without a child which was a great greif to me, and cost me many prayers + tears before I obtained one, and after him gave me many more, of whom I now take ye care'.⁵²³ The physical hardships of these early years are captured in her first poem, *Upon a Fit of Sickness*, in which she asks

For what's this but care and strife
since first we came from womb?
Our strength doth waste, our time doth haste,
and then we go to th' tomb.⁵²⁴

⁵²² Lutes, 'Negotiating Theology and Gynaecology', pp. 314-323.

⁵²³ Joseph McElrath, Jr. and Allan Robb (eds.), *The Complete Works of Anne Bradstreet* (Boston, 1981), quoted in Rosamond Rosenmeier, *Anne Bradstreet Revisited* (Boston, 1991), p. 77.

⁵²⁴ Anne Bradstreet, *Upon a Fit of Sickness*, reprinted in Jeannine Hensley (ed.), *The Works of Anne Bradstreet* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), p. 222: lines 13-16.

This poem highlights the difficult circumstances and the sickness, cold, and starvation that characterised Anne's first years in the colonies. The first settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony at Cambridge did not reflect the promised fertility of the early promotional literature, and similarly Anne's body did not prove fertile under such trying conditions. Furthermore, Anne was a contemporary of Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer and her father, Thomas Dudley, was a judge in Hutchinson's trials in 1637. Historians have argued that her knowledge about the monstrous births of the Antinomian controversy influenced her poetry, most notably in her poem 'The Author to Her Book', featured in the second edition of the *Tenth Muse*, in which she describes her poetry as a misshapen, bastard child which has been prematurely exposed to the world.⁵²⁵ While Anne Bradstreet is celebrated for her eloquent verses on family life and strong Puritan faith, her experiences with infertility and hardship also bear witness to the early experiences of the small community of colonists arriving on New England's shores.

Moreover, Bradstreet's life experience and writing combine to give modern readers a glimpse of how these recently-arrived colonists viewed the relationship between Old and New England; a story of a parent/child relationship that is also full of metaphors of fertility and infertility, birth and death, hope and decay. Bradstreet expresses these themes in her poem *A Dialogue between Old England and New* (1645) in which she portrays her mother country as weary, broken by civil war, weak and seeking advice from its healthy daughter, New England. England asks her daughter, 'If I decease, dost think thou shalt survive? Or by my wasting state dost think to thrive?/ Then weigh our case, if 't be not justly sad. Let me lament alone, while thou art glad.'⁵²⁶ The close relationship between the two regions is portrayed through reproductive language, and Anne Bradstreet is wholly aware, and

⁵²⁵ Bethany Reid, "'Unfit for Light': Anne Bradstreet's Monstrous Birth", *New England Quarterly*, 71 (1998), pp. 517-542; Lutes, 'Negotiating Theology and Gynaecology', pp. 333-7.

⁵²⁶ Bradstreet, *A Dialogue between Old England and New*, in Hensley (ed.), *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, lines 19-22.

concerned, about the political upheaval and social strife occurring in her native England. She looks back to her mother country and imagines a conversation between the two regions, expressed in reproductive language, about the hope placed on New England and the anxieties of infertility and degeneration in Old England. The poem highlights that New England colonists thought of themselves as English, and that the mother country's struggles with war, death, and depopulation, were felt deeply by the colonists and weighed against their new physical and spiritual environment. Bradstreet's personal life, like her poetry, straddled both continents, as her husband travelled back and forth to England several times due to business and political interests.

Bradstreet's poetry and personal experience of the close connection between England and New England highlight another concern tied to anxieties about fertility, success, and survival of the colonies: some of the colonists went home. Susan Hardman Moore argues that a substantial number of colonists, as much as a quarter of the colonial population, returned to England during the years following the Great Migration, either temporarily or to stay.⁵²⁷ Her work therefore emphasises the importance of ideas about exchange and communication between the two regions; the exchange of ideas, language, books, and the sharing of stories of thriving and stories of hardship. As Moore contends, 'their life stories undermine the traditional understanding of the Great Migration as a one-way ticket across the Atlantic' and many colonists whose expectations were not met by the new environment took the opportunity to return to England.⁵²⁸ Within this context, the messages about infertility exchanged between New England and England were even more important. The New England colonist John Pratt was made aware of this in 1635 when he was called before the colonial court to answer for a letter that he had written back to England that called the land

⁵²⁷ Moore, *Pilgrims*, p. 1. Also see Susan Hardman Moore, *Abandoning America: Life-Stories from Early New England* (Woodbridge, 2013) for biographical studies of the individuals who returned to England.

⁵²⁸ Moore, *Pilgrims*, p. 1.

barren, and in which he complained about ‘the improbability or impossibility of subsistence for ourselves or our posterity without tempting God, or without extraordinary means’. The letter was confiscated by the court and Pratt was ordered to write another letter that renounced his initial opinions.⁵²⁹ As Pratt’s case illustrates, even the idea of infertility poisoned the promise of New England, and colonial leaders were constantly engaged in full-scale marketing campaigns in an effort to attract colonists and assure English observers that they were thriving. These messages became even more overt in times of crisis, and the language of infertility was used as a tool to describe ‘other’ bodies, the disordered bodies of the Native Americans, the dissenting bodies of Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer and indeed any bodies that disobeyed the strict social and religious structures in place.

John Elliott describes the process of incorporation of the New World into ‘Europe’s intellectual horizon’ as happening in four stages: observation, description, dissemination, and comprehension.⁵³⁰ As this thesis has demonstrated, the language of infertility was used throughout each stage of this process, as New English settlers came into contact with, recorded, and communicated their interactions with the new environment and Native bodies. The relative fertilities of both groups in this new landscape, and even the fertility of the landscape itself, were weighed, measured, and expressed through familiar English ideas, and through a blend of Biblical stories and ideas expressed in popular and medical literature. The specific combination of these messages and tropes is significant, as is the way that they were used in relation to the colonial experiment. Understanding the English origins of the colonists’ ideas toward infertility is fundamental to understanding both the connection between the two societies and to providing context for the colonists’ perceptions about their encounters with new lands, bodies, environments, and reasons for emigration.

⁵²⁹ Letter of John Pratt, cited in Cressy, *Coming Over*, pp. 18-19. Pratt’s case is more fully explained in Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, pp. 56-9.

⁵³⁰ Elliott, *The Old World and the New*, p. 18.

Fulfilling the promise of the New World, and specifically the Puritan's 'errand into the wilderness' required successful reproduction, and it was equally the responsibility of the New England colonists to order their bodies, minds, families, and communities to ensure that it would happen. Such attitudes explain the pride expressed in Benjamin Franklin's mid-eighteenth-century text about America's reproductive success, and highlight the endurance of these tropes in political discourse in the period leading up to the American Revolution. Starting with William Bradford recording births and survivors over the first thirty years of Plymouth Colony, people were counted in New England, and their 'increasings' likewise counted toward their success. The anxieties about population that New England colonists felt were not inherently different from anxieties about population back in England, but the particular stresses that moulded those anxieties are exhibited through their writing about infertility: namely, the competing tropes about the prospect of the fertility of their New Canaan and the 'barren deserts' of their metaphorical and actual wilderness, their attitudes toward Native American bodies, the immediacy of their connection with Old Testament models, and constant comparison with their Native American competitors and English counterparts. The success of the errand into the wilderness was wholly dependent on having reproducing bodies of visible saints to fill that wilderness, and infertility was therefore appropriated to communicate ideas when that errand was under threat of defeat. Fertility was indeed part of the promise and the responsibility of settling New England, and infertility was therefore an indication of when their English systems were in danger of breaking down.

Anne Bradstreet, Experience Wight Richardson, Abigail Mather, Mary Dyer, Sarah Savage, Hannah Sewall, Catherine of Braganza, Mary of Modena: all of these women experienced a range of reproductive challenges that left a historical imprint either in their own words or the words of men observing and interpreting their reproductive bodies. Cotton Mather, Samuel Pepys, Charles II, and John Winthrop were similarly all men concerned with

instances of infertility and whose experiences caused them to question the functioning of their own bodies, the strength of their faith, the state of their marriages, and the stability of their communities. As the medical, legal, and religious literature affirms, the drama of infertility in early modern society concerned women and men. Moreover, the difficult questions provoked by the presence of infertility illustrate the particular personal and public tensions that arose within these relationships and on political landscapes when the familiar Biblical edict to ‘increase and multiply’ was challenged.

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