The Function of the Rhetoric of Maternity in the Representation of Female Sexuality, Religion, Nationality, and Race in Early Modern English Literature and Culture

by

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Abstract

This dissertation tracks the use of maternal rhetoric in the literature and culture of early modern England and reveals how maternity intervenes in complex cultural and political conversations throughout the period. It shows how maternity impacts (and is impacted by) English attitudes and understandings of gender, sexuality, race, nationality, religion, and the natural world across the seventeenth century. The title of the introduction, *Defining Maternity*, plays with the notion that maternity is both a concept that is defined by a host of historically contingent factors as well as a politically potent, malleable rhetoric that gives definition to readers' values as they encounter a text. For example, in *Salve Deus ex Judaeorum,* Aemilia Lanyer invokes maternity – particularly the rhetoric of maternal pain and suffering – to buttress not only her authority as a female writer but also her unique intervention into the moment's Protestant poetics. In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* the ambivalence that surrounds maternity in the early modern period structures readers' ambivalent response to Egyptianness. Examining maternal rhetoric in Shakespeare's play reveals the multiple strategies the early modern English deployed to elevate English nationalism by selectively incorporating and rejecting Egyptian culture. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* uses maternal rhetoric to describe not only the human body of Imoinda but also the nonhuman plant and animal bodies of Surinam. Portraying Imoinda in parallel with these nonhuman reproducing bodies opens a critique of English exploitation of enslaved subjects and the foreign ecologies that they colonize. Finally, Maternity plays a key role in shaping readers' erotic experience of three canonical whore dialogues – *The School of Venus*, *Venus in the Cloister*, and *A Dialogues between a Married*

Woman and a Maid – highlighting the sexual knowledge and experience that is frequently erased from representations of maternity. When maternal rhetoric appears in these texts, it invokes and manipulates readers' expectations for women's sexual behavior, adding nuance to the paradoxical assumption that "good" mothers are asexual.

Throughout the seventeenth century, maternity returns to the foreground again and again as a site within which early moderns explored a host of contemporary concerns and debates that extend beyond women's reproductive function. Rather than attempting to ask what maternity *is* or what the early modern *discourses* of maternity are, this project examines what maternity *does* in the early modern cultural imagination. Because various references to maternity raise new and, at times, surprising questions about the historical and textual moments in which they appear, the dissertation follows maternity in a variety of early modern contexts, paying close attention to how it operates and allowing this operation to guide its assumptions about what maternity meant to the early modern English people. It examines how maternal rhetoric impacts our reading of certain texts and, in turn, how these texts use maternity to produce and shape the emerging cultural ideologies of the period – ideologies that continue to impact us today.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Defining Maternity

In Act 1, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora declares that she will be "[a] loving nurse, a mother to [Saturninus's] youth."[1] The promise's ambiguity begs the question of whether Tamora will be the true, biological mother of Saturninus's children or merely their nurse, a foreign maternal alternative. However, despite its ambiguity, this statement seems to satisfy Saturninus and the other Roman onlookers. Saturninus asks Tamora to immediately accompany him to the Pantheon, where the new emperor and empress of Rome will be wed.

> Ascend, fair queen, Pantheon. Lords, accompany
> Your noble emperor and his lovely bride,
> Sent by the heavens for Prince Saturnine,
> Whose wisdom hath her fortune conquered.
> There shall we consummate our spousal rites.[2]

In this speech, Saturninus declares Tamora's whiteness, or fairness, and indicates her acceptance as a vehicle of Rome's cultural inheritance. Here, Tamora's promise to nurse or mother Saturninus' Roman "youth" is secured by his public recognition of her whiteness.[3] Significantly,

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[1] 1.1.335. All citations of *Titus Andronicus* are from William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York & London: WW Norton & Company, 2016). Hereafter, hereafter I will cite just the line numbers.

[2] 1.1.336-40.

[3] As Francesca Royster argues, *Titus* constructs Gothic Tamora as "conspicuously white" and, even, "ultrawhite" in contrast to the Romans. In Royster's words, "One of the play's striking features is its othering of a woman who is conspicuously white." Francesca T. Royster, "White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol 51, no 4 (2000): 432-455, esp. 433. However, while Royster understands the Gothic Empress's "ultrawhite skin" as racially problematic for the Romans from the beginning of the play, I argue that Tamora's racialization develops over time in light of her problematic deployment of her reproductive knowledge. In arguing that Tamora's marriage to Saturninus becomes problematic only over time, I follow Ania Loomba, who points out the marriage at first seems to preserve patriarchal and racial hierarchies. According to Loomba, it is Tamora's manipulation of Saturninus and the imperial power that shows her to be an outsider. Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84.

when Saturninus selects Tamora over Lavinia as the vessel that will reproduce his Roman lineage, his reasoning is that Tamora is "of the hue/ That he would choose."[4] By inserting the epitaph "fair queen" before "Pantheon," Saturninus draws a grammatical connection between Tamora's white body and Rome's sacred edifice, emphasizing the reality that, as empress, Tamora is expected to both represent and reproduce Roman culture. Saturninus' call to "consummate our spousal rites" explicitly references sexual intercourse, further reminding the audience of Tamora's reproductive duties. Later, Tamora defies these duties by reproducing not with Saturninus but with Aaron. In contrast to Tamora, Aaron's ability to be a dedicated, loving father comes as a surprise in the play, even to Tamora herself. His blackness prohibits him and, later, the bastard child he fathers with Tamora, from carrying on Rome's royal line. In Tamora's character, race and maternity are dialectically linked; her maternity enables her Romanness at the same time that her whiteness enables her Roman maternity.

However, as the play goes on, Tamora's maternity — and, by consequence, her relationship to Roman identity — is revealed to be increasingly problematic. Indeed, what the play assumes to be true about Aaron – that his paternity is perverse or invalid – is a judgment eventually forced upon Tamora when she unknowingly consumes her own sons. In the beginning of the play, both Tamora and Titus claim Trojan history as a model for their parenthood. Gesturing to his twenty-five sons, Titus declares that he has "half the number that King Priam had" and requests that those who have been killed be buried with their Trojan ancestors. [5]

[4] 1.1.264-5. While Lavinia is "Rome's rich ornament," Tamora is figured as Diana, the Roman goddess of motherhood, by both Saturninus and Bassianus. 1.1.319-20 and 2.3.57-9, respectively.

[5] Romans, of five-and-twenty valiant sons,
Half of the number that King Priam had,
Behold the poor remains, alive and dead:
These that survive, let Rome reward with love;
These that I bring unto their latest home,
With burial amongst their ancestors (1.1.82-7).

Similarly, after Titus kills Tamora's son Alarbus, ignoring the "mother's tears in passion for her son," her son Demetrius compares his mother to Hecuba, the wife of the very King Priam that Titus claims as an ancestor. "The self-same god that armed the Queen of Troy/ With opportunity of sharp revenge/ May favor Tamora the Queen of Goths," he says.[6] Thus, Tamora's initial declaration and performance of her maternity alone are not enough to secure her social recognition as a loving Roman mother. Indeed, over time, the context of the play creates a sense of repulsion towards her maternity.

The role of Tamora's maternity in *Titus Andronicus* illustrates the rhetorical function of maternity in early modern English culture. As a rhetoric, maternity not only shapes the plot and tone of Shakespeare's play, but also provokes and structures wider attitudes about England's body politic, racial boundaries, and national belonging. In this dissertation, I consider maternity as a rhetorical force that orients early modern readers and audiences within affectively-charged political landscapes. The historical moment *Titus* stages, marked by a transition of imperial power and an attempt to incorporate ethnic outsiders, is, in many respects, representative of the political, religious, and geographical turmoil that occurred in England throughout the seventeenth century. When Henry VIII dissolved England's monasteries and, thereby, limited the possibilities for English women to find a space of cultural acceptance outside of heterosexual marriage, the stakes of maternity changed dramatically.[7] As I will show, throughout the century, maternity returns to the foreground again and again as a site within which early moderns explored a host of contemporary concerns and debates that extend beyond women's reproductive function. For example, Mary Fissell argues that the Protestant Reformation occurred through

[6] 1.1.139-42.
[7] Mary Beth Rose, *Plotting Motherhood in Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern Literature* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 9.

mothers' bodies, which became subject to new social regulations due to the pressure to conform to Protestant birthing practices. Fissell shows the ways in which the Protestant Reformation's changing attitudes towards the Virgin Mary and the Incarnation were both *produced by* and *productive of* shifts in attitudes about everyday childbirth practices.[8] Writing of an entirely different but equally-pressing social concern, Jennifer Morgan argues that "the place of motherhood in the complex of savagery and race became central to the figure of the black woman," as sexual difference justified Europeans' colonial atrocities.[9] Morgan claims that, beginning in the seventeenth century, colonial descriptions of women from west Africa repeated images of painless childbirth and elongated breasts in order create clear racial divisions between white and black embodied experiences of maternity. Thus, in these two seemingly unrelated cultural cruxes, moments in which the very fabric of English identity seemed to be at stake, maternity provides a set of terms and limits for working through social tensions.

In each of the examples above (which I discuss in greater detail in chapters II and IV, respectively), expectations about women's manner of childbirth step aside to reveal immaterial cultural values. To give birth a certain way is to demonstrate one's religious or racial belonging. Thus, the rhetoric of maternity leaves behind the context of women's embodied experiences and signifies shared values within larger discourses of religion and race. Similarly, in *Titus Andronicus,* Tamora's various maternal pronouncements reveal less about her experience of motherhood than about her place within Roman culture. Beginning the play as the loyal receptacle of Saturninus' line, Tamora is eventually revealed to be a foreignized villainess plotting to destroy Rome's families. The contingency of Tamora's ability to signify as a Roman

[8] Mary E Fissell, "The Politics of Reproduction in the English Reformation," *Representations* 87 (2004): 43-81.
[9] Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), esp. 23.

mother is made clear in the scene proceeding the rape and dismemberment of Lavinia. Here, Tamora orders her sons to revenge their brother's death "or be ye not henceforth called my children," a line that eerily echoes Titus's disowning of Mutius quoted above.[10] Significantly, Lavinia's pleas and Tamora's justification for her horrific actions pivot around maternal rhetoric. Appealing to Chiron and Demetrius, Lavinia cries,

> Oh, do not learn her wrath! She taught it thee.
> The milk thou suck'st from her did turn to marble;
> Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny.
> Yet every mother breeds not sons alike:
> [*To Chiron*] Do thou entreat her show a woman's pity.[11]

Here, Lavinia draws upon the understanding, widespread within early modern English medicine, that mothers pass their personality onto their children via their breast milk. Chiron's retort that he must not "prove [him]self a bastard" shows that he, too, understands this science.[12] Despite the parallels between Titus's and Tamora's parenting, Tamora's maternal elocution is deeply disturbing in this scene, as she uses a maternal rhetoric to justify a horrific act of sexual violence. "So should I rob my sweet sons of their fee," Tamora retorts when Lavinia begs to be spared from Chiron and Demetrius.[13]

By coding Lavinia's rape and dismemberment as an act of maternal care, the play raises alarm about Tamora's reproductive capacity. While her speech and behavior resemble that of a loving mother in *form*, the *matter* of her inheritance is, in Lavinia's words, "beastly."[14] The "marble" that Lavinia accuses Tamora of feeding her sons in place of breastmilk subverts the

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[10] 2.3. 115.
[11] 2.3.143-7.
[12] 2.3.148.
[13] Here, Tamora's maternity is directly opposed to her womanhood. Lavinia's plea to Tamora is based on the women's mutual experience of femininity. "No grace? No womanhood? Ah, beastly creature,/ The blot and enemy to our general name" (2.3.182-3). Therefore, when Tamora denies Lavinia's request for mercy by appealing to her maternity, she does so at the expense of acting in solidarity with women. The scene demonstrates the importance of treating "woman" and "mother" as separate categories of analysis.
[14] 2.3.182.

image of the loving mother feeding milk to her child. Tamora represents the threat that what may *appear* to be a loving mother is a vehicle for death and social disorder. Her character incites anxieties about the danger of women's powerful influence over their children. Because the empire depends on her ability to reproduce, the moment raises concern not only about Lavinia's safety but also about the safety of Rome's future. Indeed, the gap between Tamora's flowery maternal pronouncement and the vivid reality of Lavinia's violation produces a powerful affective response from audiences of Shakespeare's play. The overall rhetorical effect is less about Tamora's motherhood than about what Tamora's motherhood comes to represent: racial otherness, sexual deviance, and social chaos.

The Language of Maternity

The title of this introduction, *Defining Maternity*, plays with the notion that maternity is both a concept that is defined by a host of historically contingent factors as well as a potent, politically malleable rhetoric that defines various social values. To borrow from J. L. Austin, we can argue that Tamora's maternal pronouncement reflects a "perlocutionary" act, which exceeds her "locutionary" act (i.e., the act of speaking) and illocutionary act (i.e., the reproduction of a generic speech convention, often described in terms of the *intention* behind a speaker's locution).[15] According to Austin, to name a perlocutionary act is to name the "consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons."[16] When Tamora argues that she cannot deny her sons the opportunity to seek revenge on Lavinia's body, her locution can be understood as an attempt to justify her actions to the

[15] J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
[16] Ibid, 101.

audience. However, Tamora's conventional, illocutionary act of "justifying" does not ultimately achieve this intended effect. Instead, Tamora's locution creates the perlocutionary effect of disgusting and alarming the audience. Her appeal to maternity merely intensifies the emotional impact of her sons' violence on the audience, as the appeal undermines – indeed, explodes – the audiences' expectations for how a mother ought to behave. Tamora's prioritizing of her sons' rapacious desires over the general well-being of the Roman public is unacceptable to the consciousness of the audience, which has been led to believe that the role of maternity is not only personal but *social*. To be a mother, especially to be a royal mother, is to protect not only the well-being of one's child but also the health and prosperity of the wider culture of which the woman is a part.

The "infelicity," as Austin would say, of Tamora's speech act can be explained by the failure of her patriotism, as patriotism is always a relevant factor in determining the perlocutionary effects of maternal speech.[17] In other words, in the early modern period onward, maternity describes a relationship not only between a woman and her child but also between a woman and a country, culture, or public. For example, when Tamora first declares her intention to birth and care for Saturninus' offspring, she is behaving patriotically and encouraging patriotic feelings in Shakespeare's audience. As the audience accepts Tamora's new position as the mother of Rome, they implicitly accept Tamora's conformity to Roman culture. While in vulgar terms "patriotism" recalls a set of actions (state-sanctioned violence, saluting, pledging allegiance) or symbols (flags, national anthems) associated with *modern* nation-states, the term "patriot" was operating in English as early as the sixteenth century to mean "a person who loves

[17] Ibid, 105.

his or her country."[18] Significantly, the word comes from the Greek words *πατήρ* (father) and *πατριά* (clan).[19] Thus, it encapsulates the link between the personal and the political and, from a feminist perspective, highlights the ascendency of patriarchy in defining what/who does and does not count as a "lover of one's country." In other words, because the word combines the meanings of "father" and "clan," it emphasizes patriarchal influence over group processes of meaning-making. *Accordi*ng to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "patriot" acquired a negative, or ironic, connotation during the Interregnum. Thus, it was in response to the political turmoil of the seventeenth century that certain individuals' expressions of love for their country became legible as self-serving hypocrisy.[20] The word "patriotism," did not come into use until the early eighteenth century, and like "patriot," it could be used both sincerely or ironically.[21] In 1735, Benjamin Norton Defoe's *New English Dictionary,* describes "patriotism" as "the Acting like a Father to his Country; publick Spiritedness" – a definition that confuses paternalism and community pride.[22] I apply "patriotism" somewhat anachronistically to capture the insincerity of maternity's invocation. In other words, when maternity appears in literature, it never exists as a politically neutral or unaffected feature of the text. Like "patriotism," "maternity" is constitutively burdened by a fundamental disbelief in its pure existence. At an ontological level, both patriotism and maternity are always already layered with anxiety about their non-existence.

Arguing that maternity is yoked to patriotism is not to say that maternity always appears in reference to *national* shared cultured. After all, the public impact of maternity is flexible, often

[18] "patriot, n. and adj." *OED Online*. March 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/138899 (accessed May 15, 2019).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] "patriotism, n.". OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/138903 (accessed May 15, 2019).
[22] Benjamin Norton Defoe, "Patriotism," *A New English Dictionary, containing a Collection of Words in the English Language* (Westminster: printed by John Brindley, Olive Payne, John Jolliffe, Alexander Lyon, Charles Corbett, and Richard Wellington, 1735).

indistinct, and immaterial depending on the context of its invocation. The public or community that is defined by the rhetoric of maternity can vary in size and scope with each iteration. While the term "patriotism" tends to invoke a spirit of "nationalism," I use it in a broader sense to mean *any* community constructed around shared values, not just the community of the nation-state. In the instances I explore in this dissertation, the "culture" that is believed to be protected and reproduced through proper maternal behavior is variously that of England, Europe, whiteness, Protestantism, or other more or less abstract communities. Furthermore, I do not mean to imply that to be a mother is to outwardly or consciously express loyalty to a public. Rather, I explore how the values and activities associated with maternity are expected to be ideologically compatible with a public good. When a community recognizes and accepts a woman as a mother, it is acknowledging her contribution – both material and immaterial – to a larger culture.

In many ways, this dissertation is concerned with what Joel Altman has called "rhetorical anthropology" insofar as it "regards human thought, judgment, and action as functions of an intercommunicative circuit of mutual persuasion."[23] In other words, I am interested in how the category of maternity results from language's shaping of material reality and how socially-determined values stick and bend around maternity in this process. However, I believe Altman goes too far when he concludes that social identity is inherently "uncertain" or "improvisatory."[24] Tracing the impact of rhetorical education on Shakespeare's writing, Altman argues that *Othello* problematizes the idea of a stable self by drawing on discourses of rhetoric in early modern humanist education.

> For rhetoric fostered just such a double sense of the self as we have noticed in both Othello and Iago – the assumption of a stable human identity that possesses the capacity for self-reflection and self-projection, and also the intimation of

[23] Joel B. Altman, *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), esp. 20.
[24] Ibid, 22.

> human multiplicity and that of the world – of the immanence of the human in the world and the world in the human – that challenges the idea of such stability.[25]

Thus, according to Altman, embedded in the very education system of early modern English male writers is a destabilizing recognition that human categories are constructed in language. Altman's method of rhetorical anthropology offers important insight into the relationship between the rhetorical training of early modern boys and contemporary perspectives on identity and the self.[26] However, in claiming that identity and the self are constructed entirely in rhetoric, Altman ignores the unevenly distributed effects of phenotypical variation.[27] He treats the question of Othello's blackness as an *effect* of Iago's rhetorical manipulation rather than as an inalterable material fact (even as it is overdetermined by history) that *causes* Iago's ability to destabilize Othello's sense of self.[28] In contrast to Altman, I argue that the category of maternity is a flexible linguistic construct without suggesting that it is fully malleable or endlessly available for all individuals to claim. In this dissertation, I posit that maternity and the values that align with it emerge dialectically. While at times I focus on the rhetorical effect maternity has within a given text, I remain cognizant of the historical reality that shaped maternity in seventeenth-century England. Unlike Altman, I do not trace the contours of a specific discourse of humanist rhetoric to posit a universal process of identity construction. Rather, I zero in on a

[25] Ibid, 19.
[26] See also Altman's earlier work, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
[27] I also query Altman's tendency to treat "self" and "identity" as synonymous terms. While I believe there is significant overlap between a person's externally-ascribed identity – a social category – and their internal experience of self, there are also important moments in which these categories depart from one another. To put it in broad terms, how society sees a person could differ from how that person sees themselves. Furthermore, even when a person's audience seems to align with their self, that person may still experience feelings of ambivalence, shame, or pride about their identity that is not shared by their audience.
[28] Altman argues that Iago's greatest threat to Othello is not his racism but rather his ability to destabilize Othello's sense of self. While the latter may be true to the plot, I would argue that this ability depends on the former, making Othello vulnerable to Iago in a way that white individuals are not.

single rhetorically-constructed category – maternity – to examine how this category shapes, and is shaped by, public values.

Judith Butler's recognition that giving an account of oneself means encountering norms that pre-exist the subject can also apply to early modern invocations of maternity. Writers could not invoke maternity without, as Butler phrases it, "becom[ing] a social theorist": maternity is always negotiated within a complex social terrain that attaches certain values and expectations to mothers' bodies and behaviors.[29] The contributions to *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England,* edited by Kathryn Moncrief and Kathryn McPherson, apply Butler's notion of performativity to illuminate how "the maternal body…functions as a potent space for cultural conflict, a site of imagination and contest."[30] To Moncrief and McPherson, because maternity is a continuously self-making, iterative performance, it can expose and critique the mechanisms of patriarchy and misogyny that regulate women's bodies. In many ways, my examination of maternity picks up where Moncrief and McPherson leave off; recognizing that maternity is constructed over time through language and dramatic performance, my project examines the intended and unintended *consequences* – social, political, affective – of this performance. Because, as Judith Butler says, performative identities are made legible through their interaction with pre-existing norms and ideologies, each citation of maternity has emotional and social consequences for both mothers and their witnesses. In this dissertation, I explore the ideological consequences of a continuously emerging concept of maternity.

The inevitable act of negotiation that occurs between readers and texts that invoke maternity makes it a remarkably flexible rhetorical device. In early modern England, maternity

[29] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), esp. 8.
[30] Kathryn Moncrief and Kathryn McPherson, eds., *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England* (Aldershot & Burlington, Ashgate, 2007). See also, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

could be used to invoke a range of attitudes depending on the rhetorical context in which it appears. Exactly what a reference to maternity is doing in a text depends on a number of inter- and intra-textual factors, making it impossible to predict in advance the effect of maternal rhetoric in early modern literature. Rather than trying to comprehensively define early modern motherhood writ large – a task that, as I show below, has already been taken up by many literary scholars and social historians in the field – my analysis of maternity, as it is guided by close readings of individual texts, demonstrates how maternity intervenes in complex cultural and political conversations throughout the period.

The Lives of Early Modern English Mothers

In the early modern period, there was a set of phrases, behaviors, and actions that could have been recognizable as "maternal," even as the limits of maternity's legibility were contested, explored, and problematized.[31] Interest in the history of motherhood and maternity was proceeded in early modern scholarship by cultural historical work on the family. Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in Early Modern England* (1977), which set out to track the development of "the Modern Family" across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has been widely criticized by scholars who point out the lack of nuance in his metanarrative.[32] In particular, feminist cultural historians have called for a closer examination of women's lives and experiences of marriage and motherhood, as well as recognition of the historical specificity of

[31] Chris Laoutaris shows how, in the early modern period, knowledge about maternal bodies was created at the intersections and interstices of a variety of epistemologies – medical, literary, natural historical, etc. – rather than through a monolithic process of scientific discovery. This process was far from smooth and uncontested. Rather, Laoutaris argues, "…crises of conception provided the precondition through which the maternal body could be turned into bodies of knowledge." Chris Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises of Conception in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), esp. 11.

[32] For an overview of this critique see Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, eds. *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

these experiences.[33] For example, responding directly to Stone, Patricia Crawford focuses on the various cultural meanings of "blood" (e.g., bloodlines, menstruation, paternity, etc.) to shift analytic attention from "The Family" and toward individuals particularized by gender and the body.[34] Similarly, cultural historian Mary E. Fissell positions herself against "grand narratives of the history of the early modern body" by focusing on the ways in which women's bodies, particularly women's reproductive bodies, both shape and respond to the political crises of the seventeenth century.[35] Also of note is the work of Laura Gowing, who uncovers the formal and informal networks of power that regulated lower-class women's bodies, as well as that of Adrian Wilson, who details the social relations and rituals that surround childbirth.[36] Wilson emphasizes women's agency within networks of "counter-power," which exist *within*, rather than *against*, England's patriarchal culture.[37]

Meanwhile, early modern literary scholarship focusing on maternity became popular in the late 1980s when the heyday of psychoanalysis in literary studies resulted in a feminist interest in maternal figures, beginning with those of the Shakespearean canon. Noting the absence of a mother figure in *King Lear*, Coppélia Kahn argues that this erasure is symptomatic of a culture that depends on differentiating masculinity from femininity and containing femininity. At the same time, Kahn understands Lear's rage towards Cordelia as stemming from his psychic trauma over his lack of unity with his own mother and his subsequent failed attempts

[33] The contributors to Valerie Fildes, ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990) and Carol Smart, ed, *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) reflect a desire to study the particularities of the familial lives of women and mothers in the early modern period.
[34] Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies, and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Longman, 2004).
[35] Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Earl Modern England* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): esp. 12.
[36] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).
[37] Wilson, 212.

to fulfill this unity with Cordelia as daughter-mother.[38] Kahn was not alone in noting the absence of mothers in the Shakespearean canon. Mary Beth Rose's question "Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare?" was answered by Janet Adelman's landmark *Suffocating Mothers,* a sustained psychoanalytic reading of Shakespeare's mothers (and lack of mothers). In it, Adelman posits that Shakespeare's avoidance of mother figures later in his career was the result of men's subconscious efforts to forestall the psychic crises of confronting their mothers' contaminating sexualities.[39] In contrast to Adelman, Theresa M. Krier's *Birth Passages: Maternity and Nostalgia, Antiquity to Shakespeare* argues that canonical male poets such as Shakespeare, Lucretius, Chaucer, and Spenser view the subjects' distance from the mother not in terms of wholescale loss or nostalgia but, rather, as a volatile space that could also produce "fluencies of language, affect, thinking, and formal creation."[40] Krier's exploration of maternity's potential to produce language (particularly poetic language) supports my belief that maternity is a uniquely fruitful, flexible rhetorical device in the early modern period. Noting how references to creation or childbirth were commonly employed by poets in expressions of praise, she attributes maternity's strong poetic presence to a psychic process of *"parturition*," or "the long-term maintaining of space between mother and child."[41] During this continuous vacillating between desire and repulsion for the mother, subjects may find a verbal resource for confronting the deep political issues facing their society.

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[38] Coppélia Kahn, "The Absent Mother in King Lear," *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, et al. (Chicago University Press, 1986). 33-49.
[39] Mary Beth Rose, "Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 no. 3 (1991): 291-314. Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* Tempest (New York: Routledge, 1992).
[40] Theresa M. Krier, *Birth Passages: Maternity and Nostalgia, Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2001), esp. 11-2.
[41] Ibid, 7; 11.

Su Fu Ng also examines the relationship between the language of the domestic and the political sphere, though her unit of analysis is not maternity but what she calls the "family-state analogy."[42] Ng argues that, in the seventeenth-century, the family-state analogy proliferated as a language convention that drew on biblical scripture to posit a relationship between political structures and the structure of the family. In its simplest iteration, the idea that the monarch was the father of his people could be used to justify both royalist and patriarchalist thought. However, Ng pushes back against the assumption that the analogy propagated a single ideology or political regime. Rather, she "finds the analogy a supple vehicle for political debate, used to imagine a range of political communities from an absolutist monarchy to a republic."[43] Ng's attention to how the analogy both produced political meaning while also redefining gendered and state authority is similar to my methodology of tracking the political and personal effects of maternity.[44] Unlike Ng, I focus not on permutations of a single analogy but on maternity as it appears in literary and non-literary texts in various forms – as a trope, a metaphor, an apostrophe, an image, etc. However, as with the family-state analogy, the meaning produced by maternity's invocation varied by context; both are, as Ng puts it, "a conceptual vehicle by which writers debated political issues" rather than a vehicle for a fixed ideological agenda.[45]

Indeed, in the early modern period as well as today, maternity carried an inconsistent, and often contradictory, set of connotations. While various scholars have emphasized the positive and negative aspects of being a mother in the early modern period, perhaps the most accurate way to describe the early modern English attitude toward mothers and maternity is "ambivalent."

[42] Su Fang Ng, *Literature and the Politics of the Family in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[43] Ibid, 8.
[44] Ibid, 18.
[45] Ibid, 12.

Indeed, in her influential work, Mary Beth Rose has insisted on describing the early moderns' treatment of maternity in this way.[46] In chapter III, I examine the effect of this attitude of ambivalence in greater detail, showing how Shakespeare leverages the ambivalence toward maternity to portray an uncompromisingly multivalent view of Egyptianness, embodied by Cleopatra. For now, I stress that, like today, mothers in the early modern period were as likely to be idealized or glorified as they were to be demeaned, satirized, or victimized. In her seminal essay, Rose argues that in order to account for the dearth of mothers in Shakespeare's plays, we must "take account of the range of cultural possibilities for the construction of motherhood present in and distinctive to Elizabethan and Jacobean England."[47] Laying out the social anxieties surrounding the figure of the mother, Rose shows how mothers were regarded as both *inherently honorable* and *dangerously powerful*.[48] For this reason, says Rose, Shakespeare uses mothers in his tragedies to signify social tensions surrounding erotic love and marriage. Building on this argument in her later work, Rose diagnoses this ambivalence as a key feature of maternal plots in the western literary tradition from Oedipus to Walt Disney.[49]

> In a patriarchal culture, paternal authority, no matter how fragile, compromised, or defeated, presents the possibility of structural certainty: we know what plot positions the father's authority must entail: progenitor, lawmaker, preserver of order, seeker of knowledge. But this structural clarity does not exist for the representation of maternal authority.[50]

[46] Mary Beth Rose, "Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare?"
[47] Ibid, 295.
[48] Naomi Miller echoes Rose's conclusion about Shakespeare's ambivalence towards maternity in "Playing 'the mother's part,': Shakespeare's Sonnets and Early Modern Codes of Maternity," *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York & London: Garland Publishing): 347-367. Another notable analysis of this ambivalence is Mary Thomas Crane, "'Players in your huswifery, and huswives in your beds': Conflicting Identities of Early Modern English Women," *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Naomi Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000): 212-223.
[49] Mary Beth Rose, *Plotting Motherhood*.
[50] Ibid, 2

The lack of "structural clarity" surrounding mothers in patriarchal culture continues to manifest in critical disagreements about the limitations of early modern women's agency. Were early modern women passive victims of male knowledge and control, or did their culture enable sites of agency, authority, and power? The answer to this question informs how we understand the relationship between the ordinary lives of women and the representations of mothers in literature. To what extent do the stories of powerful mothers, such as Shakespeare's Cleopatra, shed light on early modern mothers' experiences of maternity, and to what extent are they extraordinary, out of touch with the reality that produced them? Laura Gowing shows how women's bodies, especially poor, single women's bodies, were meticulously subject to surveillance and state punishment. She argues that, because poor, single women were portrayed as sexually vulnerable, they were monitored by various networks of power, including knowledgeable matrons and midwives, who were called upon to touch and examine the bodies of women suspected of illicit sexual activity.[51] Pushing back against Gowing, Sara Luttfrig argues that these same networks of knowledge could secure for women an authoritative role within patriarchal power structures.[52] Luttfrig posits the term "bodily narratives" to describe how "women make reproduction legible through the stories they tell about their bodies and the ways they act these stories out, combining speech and physical performance."[53] Thus, they create a body of reproductive knowledge that exists as an alternative to the male-dominated medical

[51] Gowing, *Common Bodies*
[52] Caroline Bicks makes a similar claim about the role of female midwives in the birthing room. Bicks argues that, because midwives had privileged access to women's bodies, their testimonies were of great importance in shaping patriarchal lineages and historical narratives. In contrast, Eve Keller reads a similar set of midwifery texts and concludes that the texts reduce female selfhood to the womb, the ultimate sign of her opposition from man. See Caroline Bicks, *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare's England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003) and Eve Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).
[53] Sara Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2016), esp. 4.

science of the seventeenth century. Taking a middle approach, Adrian Wilson insists on differentiating between the social pressure women face and the private or personal rituals by which they elude patriarchal authority.[54] She warns scholars such as Gowing and Luttfrig not to read modern assumptions about what defines feminist progress onto the early modern women of the past.[55] Doing so, Wilson argues, risks either erasing women's agency or mischaracterizing it as "resistance," rather than as a regular, normative part of early modern society.[56]

While the perspectives of Gowing, Luttfrig, and Wilson appear to be opposed, I hold them in tension throughout this dissertation. Indeed, the literary works I examine vary greatly in their treatment of maternity and mothers; sometimes a single text elicits both positive and negative attitudes towards maternity, forcing readers and audiences to sit with this ambivalence. As I allow the literature to guide my analysis of the historical context that surrounds it, I remain vigilant to the various cultural resonances, dilemmas and contradictions that readers and audiences may be confronting through any given reference to maternity. My aim is to consider a wide range of potential responses early moderns may have had to a maternal reference in a text or play, recognizing that maternity resonates in distinct and evolving ways for different groups throughout history. At the same time, I seek to identify the rhetorical clues, present within these references to maternity, that offer a framework to guide readers' or audience's responses to the textual or theatrical moment.

While the scholars above approach motherhood, maternity, or reproduction as an embodied reality, a phenomenological experience, a legible pattern of performative behaviors, a plot device, a body of knowledge, or a formative figure of psychic experience, I focus instead on

[54] Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*.
[55] Ibid, 214.
[56] Ibid, 212.

the ways in which maternity functions as a visual, verbal, and conceptual language to shape English values, beliefs, and identities. Significantly, the end point of my study is not maternity *per se* but the wider social influence that maternity plays on early modern English ideas about religion, female sexuality, race, and nationality. Thus, I approach maternity as a sort of magnetic pole around which early moderns orient themselves. The direction of this orientation varies by genre, author, and perhaps even textual moment. Sometimes a literary reference to maternity attracts an audience or reader's sympathy; at other times, it repels them, turns them, aligns them, or divides them into opposing groups. For example, Shakespeare's Lucrece can recognize her suffering in an image of Trojan mothers, whose pride in their sons as they march to defend Troy is tarnished with fear for their sons' lives.

> And from the walls of strong-besiegèd Troy,
> When their brave hope, bold Hector, marched to field,
> Stood many Trojan mothers, sharing joy
> To see their youthful sons bring weapons wield;
> And to their hope they such odd action yield
> That through their light joy seemed to appear
> Like bright things stained, a kind of heavy fear.[57]

Here, Lucrece's remorse finds context and legitimacy through its association with the mothers of Troy. Like Lucrece's violated body, the joy of the mothers is "stained," corrupted by the foreign invasion of their city. The symbolic association between Troy and Lucrece foreshadows the later assumption of her corpse as a symbol that drives the banishment of the Tarquins and the founding of the Roman Republic. At the same time, Shakespeare's Venus, in a poem written just a year earlier, can use maternity to entreat Adonis to satisfy her sexual pleasures, saying "Oh, had thy mother borne so hard a mind,/ She had not brought thee forth, but died unkind."[58] Here,

[57] William Shakespeare, "The Rape of Lucrece," *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York & London: WW Norton & Company, 2016), esp. ln 1429-35.
[58] William Shakespeare, "Venus and Adonis," *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York & London: WW Norton & Company, 2016), esp. ln 203-4.

maternity is invoked to legitimate not death but erotic desire. The ideological flexibility of maternity to leverage various cultural fears and desires makes it an unruly, yet important, object for rhetorical analysis.

Rather than attempting to ask what maternity *is* or what the early modern *discourses* of maternity are, I examine what maternity *does* in the early modern cultural imagination. Because various references to maternity raise new and, at times, surprising questions about the historical and textual moments in which they appear, my dissertation follows maternity in a variety of early modern contexts, paying close attention to how it operates and allowing this operation to guide my assumptions about what maternity meant to the early modern English people. When maternity appears in a work of literature, what effect could this have on the way the text is read? How does maternity structure the affective economy of the text or the period? [59] And finally, to what ideological end(s) did maternity move?

At the same time, I also remain aware that the *rhetoric* of maternity is often inseparable from its effect on women's lives and experiences. Indeed, as Chris Laoutaris argues, the diverse paradigms that were applied to define and understand the maternal body were not discrete fields of knowledge but, rather, fluid, overlapping influences.[60] For example, maternal mythologies and early modern obstetrics interacted in the widespread belief in maternal impression, famously articulated by the anonymous writer of the popular *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, as well as by countless other premodern writers.[61] In much the same way, rhetorical appeals to maternity could have real, sometimes devasting implications on women. Thus, my discussion of the rhetoric of

[59] I borrow this term from Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117-139. Ahmed describes affective economies as spaces in which "emotions *do things*…they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments" (119).
[60] Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities,* esp. 17.
[61] Anonymous, *Aristoteles Master-Piece, Or The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Parts Thereof* (London: Printed for J. How, 1684). Cushing Collection, Yale University Medical School Library.

maternity differs from that of Carolyn Walker Bynum, who argues that the late medieval proclivity for referring to God, Jesus, or male religious leaders as the "mothers" of their followers indicates less about women's lives than it does about a general shift towards "affective spirituality."[62] Indeed, I find Bynum's theoretical insistence that "the female (or woman) and the feminine are not the same" difficult to sustain in practice.[63] The mental processes that enable a certain nexus of behaviors and emotions to be understood as maternal, despite the total absence of a mother, inevitably has implications for how actual women are understood in their reproductive roles. In short, I do not think it is possible to define maternity without reference to the lived experiences of female bodies.

However, this is not to say that my analysis of the rhetoric of maternity always leads me to make conclusions about early modern women's lives. At times, I show how maternal rhetoric attaches itself not only to female-sexed bodies but also to nonhuman bodies. For example, in chapter III, I discuss how the English obsession with the fertility of the Nile River can be understood in terms of an obsession with Cleopatra's sexuality and reproduction in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In chapter IV, I read the maternity of the landscape of Surinam and that of two tigresses in parallel with the maternity of Aphra Behn's African heroine, Imoinda. I use the word "maternity" throughout this dissertation to emphasize how the abstract value-concept of maternity has the potential to refer to the embodied reality of women and, simultaneously, to travel across seemingly unrelated contexts such as religious debates, immigration policies, and natural histories. In contrast, when I refer to the parental experiences

[62] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
[63] Ibid, 167.

of women – both real and imagined – I use the word "motherhood," all the while understanding that "maternity" and "motherhood" are often indistinguishable.

Maternity's History: Cycles of Salience

While this dissertation focuses on the literature and culture of seventeenth-century England, it is inspired by feminist and queer examinations of maternity in the context of the modern United States. Hortense Spillers' seminal essay "Mamma's Baby, Papa's Maybe" begins its examination in the late seventeenth century but quickly moves forward through history, tracing the impact of slavery on society's modern treatment of black women's reproductive lives.[64] Spillers argues that the dehumanization of enslaved subjects was predicated on their *ungendering*; in making black bodies commodities, slavery systematically elided gendered differences of enslaved experience. According to Spillers, this led to the double erasure of enslaved women. As the quintessential victim of slavery's violence became *male*, the physical and metaphorical violence perpetuated against black women was erased or ignored.[65] Recovering this forgotten narrative of the enslaved black female, Spillers argues that the hegemonic definition of Maternity occupies a privileged site of human recognition – a site from which enslaved black women were systematically denied access and representation. Legally speaking, enslaved mothers' kinship rights in relation to their children were overwritten by the property rights of their owners over the fruits of their bodies.[66] "To that extent, the captive female body was the locus of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime

[64] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203-29.
[65] Ibid, 215-6.
[66] Ibid, 217-8.

commodity of exchange."[67] Furthermore, as Spillers and feminist scholars have shown, this ideological erasure of black maternity continues to haunt media today.[68]

In her examination of late 20th and 21st-century America *pietàs*, Ruby Tapia argues that certain images of maternal death and mourning can consolidate national feelings of patriotism. Furthermore, because the lines between maternal images that elicit national feeling and those that fail to do so are inherently racial, these patriotic feelings shuffle in an investment in white supremacy.[69] For example, Tapia notes the lack of media response to Mamie Till, the mother of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy who was ruthlessly murdered by a gang of white men after he was falsely accused of sexually harassing a white woman.[70] Mamie Till's decision to open her son's casket failed to spur the national grief and outrage matched by the media's obsessive public display of "the widows of 9/11."[71] Tapia reveals the mechanism by which the identity of "mother" comes to be unevenly assigned to and occupied by different populations of women, depending on factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. At the same time, the privilege of national belonging granted by the social milieu of maternity is always contingent, incomplete. As Tapia notes, mothers widowed by 9/11 still faced accusations of being unpatriotic when they used their visibility to criticize and question US international policy.[72] Thus, the privilege of maternity, even for white mothers, becomes legible (and can be denied) only in certain contexts

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[67] Ibid, 220.
[68] For example, in *The Mommy Myth*, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels discuss the impact of media hype around "crack babies" and "welfare queens" on the exclusion of black women from the category of 'mom' in the first place. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004), esp. 199. See also Julie Marie Thompson, *Mommy Queerest: Contemporary Rhetorics of Lesbian Maternal Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).
[69] Ruby Tapia, *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death, and the Maternal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
[70] Tapia, 7-9. Richard Pérez-Peña, "Woman Linked to 1955 Emmett Till Murder Tells Historian Her Claims Were False," *New York Times*, January 27, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/emmett-till-lynching-carolyn-bryant-donham.html (accessed June 4, 2019).
[71] Tapia, 109-29.
[72] Ibid, 120-5.

and at certain moments. Flexible and opportunistic definitions of patriotism can be invoked to demean or discredit mothers as public attitudes shift and new cultural opinions emerge.

I draw on these discussions of modern maternity not to essentialize maternity by erasing its contingency throughout history, but rather to recognize the interpretative utility of embracing its ability to resonate across disparate historical moments. Discussing the historiography of lesbianism, Valerie Traub uses the term "cycles of salience" to describe the ostensible recurrence of certain metalogics in the history of lesbianism between the early modern period and today.[73] She proposes that thinking in terms of historical salience (as opposed to repetition, sameness, or difference) can raise new questions, allowing scholars to focus not on "the *contents* of typologies" but rather on "the cultural conditions that render such types culturally salient at particular moments."[74] However, identifying cycles of salience does not mean collapsing the historical specificity of different moments. Rather, Traub calls on scholars to "sharpen our analytic focus" by identifying more precisely the metalogics that seem to recur over time and the social forces that could explain this recurrence while, at the same time, keeping an eye on the historical differences that should impede transhistorical claims.[75] Traub's historiography is useful for my analysis in that it enables me to resist transhistorical or ahistorical definitions of maternity while allowing me to question why it is that maternity becomes so potent within very different political moments across time. While attempts to historicize maternity within the early modern period have been numerous, the social pressure to see maternity as a "natural" or ahistorical phenomenon has haunted individuals within drastically distinct social, religious, and political regimes. Therefore, it is important to continue to recognize the persistence with which

[73] Traub describes this concept in *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), most notably in chapter 4, 82-100.
[74] Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early* Moderns, 87.
[75] Ibid, 91.

maternity marks an affective investment in changing and emerging cultural values to bring to light both the material and ideological consequences of these investments.

Key Themes

MATERNITY, FEMALE SEXUALITY, QUEERNESS

Searching for moments in which maternity is invoked rhetorically in literature requires close attention to the terms by which the category may be activated. In this dissertation, I cast a wide net in my search for maternity's terms, considering maternity as a broad category that often overlaps with inequivalent but related categories such as fertility, biological reproduction, female sexuality, nursing, or physical and emotional childcare labor. I do so at the risk of raising objection from those scholars invested in drawing firm divisions between these categories. Such scholars have a point: there are historical and theoretical considerations that make distinguishing between these terms important, and I do not wish to imply that these considerations lack significance. However, I purposefully allow these categories to converge in order to explore the ways in which early modern values and expectations about each category impact one another. For example, the early modern belief that a nurse's personality could be transmitted to a child through breastmilk justified the intense surveillance of both mothers and hired wet nurses.[76] When early modern literature references breastfeeding or nursing without specifying the relationship between the woman and child, it is impossible to predict in advance whether readers or audience members will be reminded of motherhood or wet nursing or both.[77] Therefore, my

[76] It should be noted that in choosing to forgo a conversation about wet nursing in favor of a conversation about maternity, I am also putting aside a discussion of class and gendered labor. Attention to the ways in which wet nurses become social scapegoats in the early modern period is beyond the purvey of this project.

[77] For example, consider Shakespeare's rendering of Cleopatra's suicide. Cleopatra compares the bite of the poisonous act to an act of nursing: "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,/ That sucks the nurse asleep," and this line has been read as both a commentary on wet nursing (e.g., Gail Kern Paster) and a commentary on motherhood

project aims to be attuned to all potential cultural resonances that surround maternity and to pay attention to moments in which intersecting discourses interact in sometimes surprising, powerful ways.

The category of "maternity" and that of "female sexuality" emerges as a key theme throughout this dissertation. Often, I use the terms "maternity" and "female sexuality" in close proximity, not to elide the two, but to examine how the early moderns' attitudes towards female sexuality puts pressure on their view of maternity, and vice versa. In the context of sexual practices, I consider motherhood a subset of female sexuality; after all, remarkably few sex acts are intended to lead to motherhood. From a queer perspective, to conflate female sexuality with motherhood would be to erase the history of sexual acts between women as well an array of sexual practices that do not or cannot lead to sexual reproduction.[78] However, in this dissertation, I am less concerned with what women were doing, how they were doing it, or why they were doing it. Instead, my focus on how references to maternity functioned rhetorically and the effect of this rhetoric on early modern ideas, beliefs, values, and affects means that sexuality functions in my account as a marker of mothers' meaning and status within individual texts. It is important to note that scholars of queer theory and sexuality studies have expressed important objections to viewing female sexuality or reproduction through the lens of maternity. In early modern literary studies, Stephen Guy-Bray's *Against Reproduction* critiques scholarship on the "book as child" metaphor that perpetuates, rather than decentralizes, what he believes is the metaphor's inherent

(e.g., Janet Adelman). Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. 240-2). Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on* Antony and Cleopatra (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1973): esp. 64. William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York & London: WW Norton & Company, 2016), 5.2.303-4.

[78] The history of lesbianism and sexual acts has been examined extensively by such scholars as Valerie Traub, James Bromley, and Will Stockton. See Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and James Bromley and Will Stockton, eds. *Sex before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

heteronormativity. Alicia Page Andrzejewski studies pregnancy through the lens of queer and feminist theory, discovering how Shakespeare portrays the pregnant body in ways that challenge heteronormativity and reproductive futurism.[79] Working in a similar vein, Amanda Zoch shows how the character of Macduff's son in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* represents a queer disruption of normative temporality through his simultaneous knowingness and innocence. My project continues the work of these scholars insofar as it purposefully traces the way maternal rhetoric perpetuates or challenges various types of normativity in early modern England without erasing the existence of queer forms of motherhood or reproduction. By shifting the terms of my discussion away from embodied experiences of motherhood, I show how maternity as a rhetoric can both *perpetuate* and *upset* non-normative sexual and/or embodied expectations. Indeed, queer sexual and romantic coupling can occur around and through maternal rhetoric – and, in so doing, offers a reference point for the critique and subversion of hetero/normativity.

A potential objection to my contention that maternity is a useful starting point from which to build a critique of heteronormativity comes from Lee Edelman's antirelational queer theory.[80] However, in her analysis of the queerness of Macduff's son in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Zoch provides a model for demonstrating the surprising compatibility of a reproductive symbol – the Child –with Edelman's theory.[81] Edelman's controversial critique of what he calls "reproductive futurism" argues that society's fixation on the Child, a symbol of the biological imperative of reproduction, positions the queer individual as the death drive itself. According to Edelman, under this Symbolic Order, participation in politics reflects a desire for an imaginary

[79] Stephen Guy-Bray, *Against Reproduction: Where Renaissance Texts Come From* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Alicia Page Andrzejewski, "Queer Pregnancy in Shakespeare's Plays," Doctorial diss, City University of New York, 2019. Amanda Zoch, "Macduff's Son and the Queer Temporality of Macbeth," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol 57, no 2 (2017): 369-88.
[80] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004).
[81] Zoch, esp. 380.

identity that exists only in a future from which queer individuals, as negative, anti-social subjects, are denied.[82] He calls on queer folks to embrace their association with death and *jouissance*, for "if the queer's abjectified difference affirms normativity's identity, the queer's disavowal of that difference affirms normativity's singular truth."[83] For Zoch, young Macduff's disturbing precociousness (which presents as anachronistic) and his bold embrace of his own murder exemplifies Edelman's queer resistance to the future.[84] Thus, she extends Edelman's thesis and challenges scholars' tendency to sentimentalize childhood in *Macbeth.*[85]

Maternity, of course, also incites a tendency to sentimentalize, and, like childhood, it is often uncritically yoked to heteronormativity and reproductive futurism. Edelman's antisocial critique of reproduction may seem incompatible with my analysis of early modern maternity, which, I argue, was considered to be inherently *social*, or patriotic. At the same time, *No Future* presents a useful set of terms for discussing the role language plays in elevating the banal sex acts marked as "heteronormative" to the radicalized and sanctified status of the "natural."[86] According to Edelman, in moments in which heterosexual couples require "artificial" insemination, the couples' sex life suddenly "must assume at last the despiritualized burden of its status as *sexual function*."[87] Significantly, this transformation from sanctified to "useless" reveals the gap between bodily sex acts and the meaning that encases those acts.[88] Building on Edelman,

[82] Edelman's argument has been challenged by scholars invested in the redemptive force of queer identity and the potential of sites of queer political coalition. Such scholars rightly seek to recuperate queerness as an important and redemptive site in which marginalized individuals make their lives livable. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) and Ernesto Javier Martínez, *On Making Sense: Queer Race Narratives of Intelligibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
[83] Edelman, 26.
[84] Zoch, 380.
[85] Ibid, 370. In her argument against sentimentalizing childhood, Zoch draws heavily on Joseph Campana, "Shakespeare's Children," *Literature Compass*, vol 8, no 1 (2011): 1-14.
[86] Edelman, 63-4.
[87] Ibid, 64.
[88] Ibid.

I show that this meaning is created and perpetuated through *language*, particularly the language surrounding maternity. Like the Child that Edelman exposes, maternity is assumed to be patriotic, and therefore, it carries implications beyond individual women and speaks to English culture writ large. In this dissertation, I shift attention away from sex acts and reproduction to examine how the rhetoric of maternity travels beyond the realm of physical sexuality altogether.

RACE AND MATERNITY

Another major theme of this dissertation is the role maternal rhetoric plays in shaping, and being shaped by, racial identity. The field of early modern race studies has often faced charges of anachronism based on the assumption that "race" must refer to a system of discrimination, invented in the modern period, that depends on a bifurcated (black/colored vs. white) heuristic and is undergirded by the now-debunked science of comparative anatomy and biology. According to scholars who raise this concern, the prejudice expressed in the early modern period was surely less about skin color than it was about religion, class, lineage, or other concerns that could fall under the broad category of "culture." From this perspective, it was not until the Enlightenment that race developed as a proto-biological paradigm, largely in response to colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Therefore, many argue that speaking of "race" – that is, a category of social difference based on skin color alone – prior to the eighteenth century is inevitably fallacious.[89] In contrast, I argue that maternal rhetoric is one tool early moderns

[89] Several scholars have made cases for when and why focusing on skin color alone could reduce the historical complexity of racialism, and insofar as I add maternity to the list of factors relevant to race, I follow these scholars in expanding the criteria for what counts as race thinking. For example, Emily Bartels analyzes how the category of the "Moor" combines the markers of skin color, religion, and class and, therefore, must be treated with more nuance than a bifurcated view of blackness vs. whiteness affords. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From* Alcazar *to* Othello (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). On the other hand, Julia Lupton argues that Shakespeare's *Othello* transcends race entirely and suggests that scholars should understand the play in the context of a sort of Christian universalism. "Othello Circumcised: Shakespeare and the Pauline Discourse of Nations." *Representations*,

used to sort through ideas about racial difference in addition to that of skin color, religion, class, and many other value-laden categories.

In making this claim, I follow several scholars who have pushed back against this dismissal of early modern race studies – a dismissal that, in its most insidious form, reveals "a pathological averseness to thinking about race under the guise of protecting historical differences."[90] Notably, Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton's *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* explicitly sets out to address the charge of anachronism by delivering a capacious view of the discourses that surrounded race in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Loomba and Burton track the "protracted and erratic" history of ideas about the relative value of human differences across the early modern period, noting the varying degrees of continuity between these ideas and our modern understandings of race.[91] As Loomba and Burton argue, the complex patterns that emerged in early moderns' views of human differences "illuminate precisely the broad spectrum of discourses and practices of difference that are marshalled by [racial ideologies]."[92] For example, a term like "Gypsy," which I explore in depth in chapter III, could describe both a person with a nonwhite skin color (e.g., "black" or "tawny") as well as an idle person, a heathen, or a fraud – all of which become relevant to defining the Gypsy race in England. Furthermore, because Egyptian culture was characterized as gender deviant – the men subservient to dominant Egyptian women – considerations of Egyptian

vol 57, no 1 (1997): 73-89. Thus, while Bartels expands the signifiers that play a role in early modern English race thinking, Lupton reduces these signifiers.

[90] Kim Hall and Peter Erickson, "'A New Scholarly Song,': Rereading Early Modern Race," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol 67, no 1 (2016): 1-13, esp. 2. See also Kyle Grady, "Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms," *Shakespeare Quarterly,* vol 67, no 1 (2016): 68-83 and Francesca T. Royster, "The 'End of Race' and the Future of Early Modern Cultural Studies," *Shakespeare Studies,* vol 26 (1998): 59-69.

[91] Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton, eds. *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. 1.

[92] Ibid, 3.

racialism must go hand and hand with considerations of English gender norms.[93] Following Loomba and Burton, I speak of race not as a reified social category formed solely in reference to individuals' skin color but as an ongoing process that considers the way in which categories such as religion, gender, class, sexuality, and animality interact to create meaning around perceived human differences.

Furthermore, asserting that maternity is a marker of racial identity is not to argue, as does Lynda Boose, that an analysis of gender is a more viable strategy for discussing human differences in the premodern period than an analysis of the meanings of skin color.[94] In other words, I do not focus on maternity as a means of demoting the importance of colorism per se. Rather, I see maternity (and the related categories of gender and sexuality) and skin color as part of a nexus of signifiers capable of determining racial inclusion or exclusion in the early modern period. Within the nexus of race, maternity acts on – and is acted upon by – a range of other signifiers that together make human differences palpable. Thus, my work is indebted to that of scholars interested in the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, for I not only analyze moments in which these identity markers interact but also treat these categories as always already mutually constitutive.[95]

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[93] Ibid, 9.

[94] Lynda E. Boose, "'The Getting of a Lawful Race': Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman," *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 35-54, esp. 40. Boose's skepticism about the relationship between race and skin color in the early modern period seems to stem from her privileging of biology as the singular defining factor of modern race.

[95] Examples of scholarship interested in the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality include Morgan, *Laboring Women*; Kathleen M Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Carmen Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Joyce Macdonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). My work is also indebted to some of the foundational lessons of queer of color critique. For example, see Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Ann Stoler, *Race*

Chapter Summaries

I begin by exploring Aemilia Lanyer's use of maternal rhetoric in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611). While Lanyer's gynocentric interpretation of the Passion story demonstrates contradictory attitudes towards maternity, it is consistent in its association of maternal pain and suffering with spiritual redemption. As I show, her poem presents female –particularly maternal – bodies as uniquely suited to empathize with Christ's pain on the cross. Key to Lanyer's uplifting of women is her depiction of the Virgin Mary, whose suffering over the death of her son mediates readers' interaction with Christ's death. Significantly, Lanyer's portrayal of the Virgin Mary resembles aspects of Mariolatry dating to the medieval period and, therefore, could have raised concern from her Protestant contemporaries. In the chapter, I read *Salve Deus* in the context of devotional practices dating back to the medieval period as well as the devotional poetry of John Donne. As I show, by emphasizing Mary's status as a mother, one embedded within a community of mothers, Lanyer is able to draw on aspects of Mariolatry that her male Protestant contemporaries were actively trying to leave behind. While Lanyer allows readers to experience an embodied connection with Christ – one mediated by maternal pain – Donne's "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward" emphasizes the speakers' physical disconnect from the Cross. Thus, Lanyer's Passion poem uses maternity to encourage readers to connect with, rather than disavow or intellectualize, the past, and in so doing, she imagines a future for women that is free of gender and religious hierarchies.

The second chapter, "Mother Egypt: Rethinking English Nationalism and the Ambivalence of Shakespeare's Cleopatra," discusses how early moderns' ambivalence towards maternity could be deployed by writers to explore ambivalence about their relationship to

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and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

Egyptian culture. Early modern England legally excluded Egyptians, often conflated with Gypsies, from the country while simultaneously praising ancient Egypt and attempting to fold Egyptian culture into its national inheritance. In this chapter, I show how Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* holds multiple, contradictory attitudes towards Egyptianness in tension by drawing on the period's ready ambivalence towards maternity. In the play, references to Cleopatra's motherhood prompt mixed attitudes towards the Egyptian queen, making the character simultaneously alienating and familiar for early modern English audiences. Thus, my reading reconciles Cleopatra's apparent triumph with England's larger condemnation of Egyptian sexuality. By insisting on an intersectional approach to Cleopatra's character – one that accounts for her embeddedness within the complex discourses surrounding both Egyptianness and female sexuality and reproduction – I demonstrate how the play reveals a relationship between maternity and fictions of race in the period. Indeed, *Antony and Cleopatra* shows how ideas about female sexuality were central to England's developing national identity in the early days of colonial expansion.

From there, I move forward in time to the end of the seventeenth century to examine how maternal rhetoric continues to operate within the transatlantic slave trade and the colonialist work of natural historians. Chapter IV, "The Nature of Maternity: Understanding Gender and Racial Paradigms in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko,*" explores how Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* uses various non-white and even non-human mothers to explore the relationship between nature, gendered sexual and reproductive norms, and racial differences. While Imoinda is the primary exemplar of enslaved maternity in *Oroonoko,* the text uses maternal rhetoric to describe nonhuman bodies: the tigress who attacks Oroonoko and the colonists when they steal her cub, the lamb who is the victim of a second tigress, and the landscape of Surinam itself. As I read the

story of Imoinda in parallel with these nonhuman "mothers," I demonstrate how the text troubles the hierarchy between humans, animals, and plants even as it uses Oroonoko's victory over the natural world as evidence of his (whitened) masculinity.

Furthermore, I contextualize this reading within developing colonial responses to the natural world. Foreign landscapes were a particularly fruitful environment in which colonists made sense of both European and non-European reproduction. Indeed, these landscapes took an active role in shaping ideas about maternity and the alleged racialized differences among mothers. In colonialist natural histories, nature is presented in complex, contradictory ways. At times, plants and animals are sentimentalized by being imbued with European, Christian values, and at other times, they are presented as savage and dangerous entities, which Europeans must distance or conquer. This contradiction is often displaced onto the bodies of foreign mothers, who are doubly-burdened with Europeans' concerns about both gender norms and racial differences. Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* responds to the excess of meaning that attached itself to non-white female bodies by re-embedding Imoinda within the natural ecology that defines her. The text uses nonhuman maternal bodies to give shape to and explore the paradox at the heart of colonialist representations of the natural world.

The fifth chapter, "The Surprising Pleasure of Maternity," returns to a thread present throughout this dissertation: the relationship between maternity and female sexuality. Throughout my study of maternal rhetoric, a representational pattern emerges whereby positive (or even neutral) representations of mothers are presented as asexual while negative representations of mothers are sexualized. Paradoxically, to be a good mother in the early modern period is, often, to appear as devoid of the very sexual knowledge and experience

required to achieve that status.[96] However, in this chapter, I challenge the critical assumption that early modern mothers could only be understood within a firm binary that differentiated "virgins" from "whores" by examining the role of mother figures in the erotic genre known as "whore dialogues." Through close readings of the three most canonical whore dialogues from the period – *The School of Venus*, *Venus in the Cloister*, and *A Dialogues between a Married Woman and a Maid* – I illustrate the nuance with which maternity could be represented in relationship to sexuality. While mother figures are ubiquitous in these canonical texts, few have mentioned the role of maternity in shaping readers' experiences of the erotic scenes.[97] Indeed, while maternity tends to be neglected by scholarly discussions of the whore dialogues, the figure of the prostitute is over-represented. The very name of "whore dialogues" privileges the figure of the prostitute – a figure that is more easily recognizable as sexualized – despite the fact that the former is absent from the three most canonical iterations of the genre. Thus, as I explore the ways in which the whore dialogues sexualize their respective mother figures, my analysis has implications both for how we understand the history of maternal representation and for how we read and interpret early modern erotic literature.

[96] While adoptions did exist in the early modern period, they were rare and often stigmatized. See Erin Ellerbeck, "Adoption and the Language of Horticulture in *All's Well that Ends Well*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* vol. 51, no. 2 (2011): 305-26 and Maryanne Novy, "Adoption and Shakespearean Families: Nature, Nurture, and Resemblance," *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 56-86.

[97] An important exception here is Sarah Toulalan, though Toulalan's primary focus is reproduction rather than maternity *per se*. Sarah Toulalan, "'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*, vol 15, no 4 (2006), 521-32.

(Dis)locating the Essence of (Good) Motherhood

In the early modern period and today, maternity and maternal bodies came to symbolize anxieties about the vulnerability of culture itself. While the rhetoric of maternity could invoke a sense of hope, prosperity, and security, concern about the vulnerability of women's bodies, amplified by sexist assumptions about women's inherent dishonesty, created a persistent attitude of ambivalence. Indeed, at the end of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora's maternity cannot be reduced to a singular essence with only one function or purpose within the drama. Over the course of the play, Tamora's sexuality becomes tainted by her association with Aaron's blackness. When Lucius suggests that Chiron and Demetrius's "barbarity" mirrors that of Aaron, Aaron is rhetorically careful with his response:

> Indeed, I was their tutor to instruct them.
> That codding spirit had they from their mother,
> As sure a card as ever won the set.
> That bloody mind I think they learned of me,
> As true a dog as ever fought at head.[98]

Here, Aaron argues that he is able to create social disorder by taking advantage of Tamora's "codding spirit."[99] While Tamora provides the raw genetic material for Chiron and Demetrius's lustfulness, Aaron's tutoring is what makes them rapacious and "bloody."[100] In the context of a play that is heavily invested in the security of reproductive bloodlines, Aaron's interference in the genetic inheritance of Chiron and Demetrius taints both mother and sons. Aaron's response draws attention to the fragility of Roman posterity; in the play, Tamora's body is a vulnerable entry point that threatens the purity of the Roman line.

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[98] 5.1.98-102.
[99] The third edition of the Norton Shakespeare glosses "codding" as "lustful." See pg. 545.
[100] While Royster argues that Aaron denies of his role in the rape of Lavinia in this passage, I argue that Aaron here claims that his instruction was instrumental in Chiron and Demetrius's violence. See Royster, "White-Limed Walls," 445-6.

At the same time, the above speech recalls Titus's irrational, damaging fear that his sons have not adequately inherited his Roman sense of honor. When Mutius disagrees with his decision to marry Lavinia to Saturninus, Titus regards this difference of opinion as evidence of Mutius' genetic malfunction: "Nor thou, nor he, are any sons of mine. My sons would never so dishonor me."[101] In Titus's eyes, because Mutius betrays him by publicly disagreeing with him, he can no longer be regarded as his son. By this logic, Mutius must be killed to erase the sign of reproductive failure. Titus's assumption that loyalty to the father is guaranteed by genetic inheritance is revealed to be mistaken; his dependence on biological reproduction to ensure the continuity of his bloodline, as well as the non-natural system that places value on his family's blood, turns out to be his downfall. Thus, Tamora becomes a haunting reminder of the fragility of a social order based on biological inheritance. To restore Titus's sense of equilibrium, it is crucial that the Andronici achieve revenge not only by killing Tamora and her sons but by symbolically abjecting Tamora's maternity itself. By forcing Tamora to unknowingly consume her own sons, the Andronici aim to rid Rome of both present and future threats. This reversal of the process of childbirth literally and symbolically erases Tamora's motherhood.

Ironically, in killing Tamora, Titus destroys the thing he seems to value the most: a clean line of succession between parent and child. At the end of the play, Tamora's sole remaining offspring, the black biracial child fathered by Aaron the Moor, disappears from the diegetic frame. Alive but offstage, this infant remains a haunting testament to Tamora and Aaron's relationship. Onstage stands Lucius's son, who, though charged with retelling Titus's "pretty tales" for future generations, is unable to speak.[102] Thus, the posterity of Roman culture remains to be secured. More importantly though, the play does not reach a conclusion about what

[101] 1.1.297-8.
[102] 5.3.164.

maternity is or should be. Tamora's womb, which can be seen as functionally ideal in its ability to re-produce children who are just like their parents, is both an object of desire and a warning. Her maternity is simultaneously a powerful vessel for institutional stability and a point of weakness. The play's process of making meaning around Tamora's reproduction hinges on a wider social context that includes local conceptions of power, race, and female sexuality. For this reason, I take *Titus* as illustrative of maternity's essential lack of essence in the early modern period. The ideas, values, and affects that Tamora's maternity produces, always in motion, are in excess of the period's definition of "good mothering" *per se*. What becomes important, then, is not seeking to locate examples of good, or bad, mothers but, rather, to follow maternity's movements as it shapes and defines the early modern English cultural imagination.

CHAPTER II

Lanyer's Blessed Mother: Redeeming Maternal Pain in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

In *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, the rhetoric of maternity allows Aemilia Lanyer to highlight women's agency as witnesses and interpreters of the Passion story.[1] Indeed, many have noted how Lanyer carefully crafts her writing of the Passion in a way that is particularly feminine and, more specifically, maternal. For instance, Naomi Miller shows how Lanyer develops a "(m)other tongue," through which she writes her poetry.[2] The term "(m)other tongue" is inspired by feminist psychoanalysis, which Miller draws upon to define the connection between maternity and female subjectivity in Lanyer's poetry. According to Miller, while psychoanalysis tends to render women as "others" in the construction of male subjectivity (rendered as subjectivity *per se*), Lanyer escapes patriarchal limitations on her voice by defining her identity as a writer in terms of her identity as a mother writing to other mothers or daughters. In Miller's words, "[i]n urging self-definition in relation not to men, but rather to *the other as woman*, Lanyer signals the potential for women to affirm their own affinity for their mother tongue."[3] Thus, Lanyer seems to recognize the potential liberation to be found in maternity and capitalizes on it to give rise to her own subjectivity as a writer as well as the authority of her female patrons.

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[1] All references to Lanyer's work are from Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (Oxford University Press, 1993). Hereafter, I will cite the relevant poem and line number.
[2] Naomi J Miller, "(M)other Tongues: Maternity and Subjectivity." *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed Marshall Grossman (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 1998), 143-166, esp. 145.
[3] Ibid, 151, emphasis original.

However, focusing on the maternal rhetoric in *Salve Deus* reveals divergent and, often, contradictory attitudes underlying Lanyer's various references to motherhood. While Miller leans on psychoanalysis to create a remarkable consistency out of Lanyer's use of maternal rhetoric, I choose instead to confront the inconsistent attitudes surrounding Lanyer's various references to maternity by recognizing the complex, overlapping, and, at times, contradictory religious and literary conventions that inspire each moment. After all, maternity's rhetorical flexibility allows it to anchor a range of contemporary discourses, provoking diverse responses from readers. In *Salve Deus,* the recurrence of maternity does not provide a transparent lens onto Lanyer's personal attitude towards motherhood. Rather than delineating a uniform and consistent understanding of maternity in the Passion poem, I argue that Lanyer uses maternity to create a symbolic connection between the various actors (herself, her patrons, biblical women, Christ) that appear in her work. Indeed, Lanyer presents the physical and affective pain of motherhood in semantic proximity to the persecution suffered by all women at the hands of men, Christ's pain on the cross, and her own emotional burden of writing.

By taking advantage of the diversity of affects attached to maternity in seventeenth-century England, Lanyer intervenes in her moment's Protestant poetics. Of central concern in this chapter is the way in which Lanyer's gynocentric interpretation of the Passion reinvigorates the Virgin Mary at a time when Lanyer's male contemporaries – John Donne, George Herbert, and John Milton – were distancing themselves from what they understood to be Catholic Mariolatry. In contrast to these canonical male Protestant writers, Lanyer embraces a perspective of Christ's mother that early moderns may have understood as Catholic by positioning Mary both formally and thematically as part of a community of lay mothers. As I show, because Lanyer situates her Virgin Mary within both forms of Catholic Marian devotional practices dating back

to the medieval period and contemporary discourses of maternity, she is able to portray the Virgin Mary less as a *Catholic* icon than a *proto-feminist* icon.[4] Often, critics' attempts to place the Virgin Mary in the English cultural imagination after the Protestant Reformation fail to consider the role of Mary in *women's writing* in particular. Insofar as Lanyer uses Mary to garner her authority as a female writer, she complicates the assumption that Mary was viewed suspiciously by Protestants who always attempted to relegate her to a medieval past. Indeed, Lanyer's approach to Catholicism differs dramatically from that of her male contemporaries, enabling her to both reimagine the relationship between England's medieval/Catholic past and Protestant present and offer new possibilities for a future not saturated by oppressive gender and class hierarchies. Here, I explore Lanyer's use of the Virgin Mary by situating *Salve Deus* in relation to both medieval Mariolatry and the portrayal of the Virgin Mary in the Protestant devotional poetry of John Donne. By doing so, I demonstrate a gap in how female and male Protestant devotional poets responded to the Reformation. Drawing on various queer theorists who explore the relationship between history, affect, and politics, I show how Lanyer's performance of her desire for the past puts pressure on the gender, class, and religious hierarchies of seventeenth-century England.[5]

[4] In using the term "proto-feminist" to describe gynocentric work of the early modern period, I follow the seminal work of Constance Jordan. See Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990). Many scholars have noted the assumption that Lanyer's Passion narrative is particularly feminine or feminist. For a complete discussion of the ostensible gender of *Salve Deus*, see Janel Mueller, "The Feminist Poetics of 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,'" *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed Marshall Grossman (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 1998), 99-127. Elizabeth Hodgson argues that Lanyer's work reinvigorates a practice and representation of grief that would have been understood as feminine to early modern readers. Hodgson, "Prophecy and Gendered Mourning in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500—900* 43, no. 1 (2003): 101-116.

[5] While I turn to queer theory in this chapter, I am not interested here in the work of recovering Lanyer as a precursor to a modern queer identity. Thus, I depart here from the work of scholars like Jonathan Goldberg and Richard Rambuss, both of whom are invested in locating queerness in early modern devotional poetry. See for example, Goldberg, "Canonizing Aemelia Lanyer," *Desiring Women Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 16-41 and Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). Rather, I employ these theorists to illuminate the richness and complexity of Lanyer's historiography as well as to consider to social stakes

The Cultural Politics of Maternal Pain and Suffering

Because maternal pain and suffering was shrouded with political import in the early modern period, Lanyer is able to use this rhetoric to build her authority as a female writer.[6] At the same time, maternity ensures Lanyer's access to otherwise discredited forms of Marian devotion that were not available to her male counterparts. In premodern England, the meaning of maternal pain was overdetermined by narratives of the Fall, which taught women that their childbirth labor was divine retribution for Eve's transgression. These lessons altered the experience of childbirth for women even as that experience was described to women as "natural." Sara Ahmed illuminates how experiences of physical pain are ascribed meaning through historically-specific and culturally-determined processes.[7] According to Ahmed, while the intensity of painful experiences may create the illusion that sensation and emotion occur simultaneously, the relation between physical and affective injury is in fact mediated by what she calls "affective economies" – the circulation of memories, histories, and interpersonal interactions that give pain social meaning.[8] Furthermore, because pain is contingent, Ahmed argues that it plays a central role in determining individuals' relationships to objects, other individuals, and institutions.[9] Indeed, by attributing the pain of childbirth to divine retribution, early modern English culture alters the experience of that pain for women. As a result, labor became a means of controlling women's bodies and behavior; both men and women cite it as a justification for women's subordination in England's hierarchical religious system. Ahmed's

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of Lanyer's work. My aim here is to follow Lanyer's intervention within her historical moment as closely as possible.

[6] Naomi Miller also discusses the role of maternity in establishing Lanyer's authorly voice. See Miller, "(M)other Tongues."

[7] In Ahmed's words, "Feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation. The circulation of objects allows us to think about the 'sociality' of emotion." Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, second edition (New York & London: Routledge, 2015): esp. 8.

[8] See especially Ahmed's chapter, "The Contingency of Pain," *Cultural Politics*, 20-41.

[9] Ibid, 28-39.

work is useful for articulating the political and social stakes of bodily injury across the Reformation. According to Ahmed, how a society ascribes meaning to painful experiences impacts how it organizes individuals, resources, and power.

Ahmed's notion of affective economies also explains how and why Lanyer and Donne respond so differently to the image of Christ's death on the cross in *Salve Deus* and "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward" respectively. Ahmed tells a story in which a child reacts to encountering a bear. In the story, the child's fearful flight from the bear is intentional in the sense that the child recognizes the bear as dangerous and runs away. However, the child's fear does not stem from within the child alone, for it is only activated in the presence of an object (i.e., the bear) that the child understands to be dangerous. Ahmed concludes,

> So the fear is not in the child, let alone in the bear, but is a matter of how child and bear come into contact. This contact is shaped by *past histories of contact*, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome. The story does not, despite this, inevitably lead to the same ending. Another child, another bear, and we might even have another story.[10]

The idea that subjects are diversely oriented within affective economies – that the possibility of "another story" exists – is a foundational assumption in this chapter. How do we account for Lanyer's willingness to describe Christ's crucifixion in vivid detail beside Donne's deliberate fleeing from the image of the cross in "Good Friday"? While Donne retreats from Christ's mangled body as if he just saw a bear, Lanyer remains grounded, fixated on that which causes Donne fear. Because pain and suffering serve social and political functions, examining the way in which early modern devotional poets describe painful experiences, particularly the gendered pain of childbirth, provides evidence of the writers' larger worldviews. Moreover, because an individual's relationship to pain and suffering is governed by "past histories of contact,"

[10] Ibid, 7. Emphasis mine.

comparing Lanyer's and Donne's responses to the Passion involves a consideration of their differing relationships to the past, both to biblical history and to the Protestant Reformation, the latter of which dramatically impacted their understandings of the former. In Ahmed's words, "What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place."[11] In this chapter I ask: What moves Lanyer and holds her in place? How is this different from what moves/holds Donne and other male devotional writers in the seventeenth century? What can examining maternal affect in the devotional poetry tell us about the ways in which these poets oriented themselves in relation to (and were oriented by) their worlds? I argue that Lanyer uses the Virgin Mary's maternal pain and suffering to rewrite women's relationships, including her own, to history. She relates to her past in ways that are physical and sensual, using maternal bodies (the Virgin Mary's, her patrons', and her own) to imagine new possibilities for present and future affective pleasure.

Lanyer as Working Mother

From Lanyer's biography, we know that her experience of motherhood was inseparable from her experience of class and her need to make a living by writing. Born in 1569 and dying in 1645, Lanyer lived through the tense period after the Protestant Reformation leading up to the start of the English Civil War. The daughter of a court musician, Lanyer was a member of the minor gentry. A favorite of the court of Elizabeth, Lanyer began a love affair with Henry Cary, Lord Chamberlain to the Queen around the age of 18, and we have reason to believe that the Lord Chamberlain was the father of Lanyer's first born son, Henry.[12] However, upon becoming

[11] Ibid, 10.
[12] Woods, "Introduction," *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xv-xxx.

pregnant, Lanyer was quickly married off to Alphonso Lanyer, another court musician, who caused the couple's financial ruin. Thus, Lanyer's experience with motherhood was intertwined with her own "Fall" from the graces of court life, an event that haunts Lanyer's text both in her dedications and in "The Description of Cookham," in which Lanyer mourns her community with Lady Margaret, Countess of Cumberland, and Lady Anne Clifford. Lanyer's concern about her relationship to court life was great enough to warrant frequent consultations with the astrologist Simon Forman, from whose notes comes most of our biographical information on Lanyer. In these notes, Forman records that Lanyer suffered a series of miscarriages after the birth of Henry. In 1598, she gave birth to a daughter Odillya, who died just nine months later. [13]

The fact that Lanyer's Virgin Mary combines religious and secular discourses is symptomatic of the broader form of Lanyer's work, in which she oscillates between delivering the Passion narrative and tending to her own political and social investments. Indeed, Lanyer's tenuous relationship to court life explains the meticulousness with which she crafted her patronage network and writerly persona.[14] Lanyer's dedications are remarkable for many reasons, not least of which is their sheer length; the dedications total over 900 lines, sizable in comparison to the 1840 lines of *Salve Deus* itself. While it has been observed that Lanyer dedicates her work solely to women, this does not mean that she intends for only women to read

[13] As Susanne Woods points out, the child's name might also be of significance. A combination of "Ode" and "Aemilia," the name creates a connection between Lanyer's motherhood and her writing. Ibid, xxv.

[14] Kimberly Coles reads Lanyer in light of her position as a working writer. She insists on seeing Lanyer as having a marketing strategy that involves orienting herself within contemporary conversations about Protestant devotional lyric poetry. This explains, for example, Lanyer's long dedication to Mary Sidney, who was at the center of the development of Protestant lyricism, alongside Philip Sidney. Coles concludes, "What becomes clear is that Lanyer's terms are forged in opposition not to patriarchy *per se*, but to male poets of the middling sort who experience similar financial need" (177). I find Coles's reading of Lanyer against Protestant poets such as Breton, Fraunce, and Calvin illuminating. However, Coles's insistence that Lanyer's poetry should be read strictly in relationship to that of Protestants falls into the trap of creating too sharp a distinction between Protestantism and Catholicism. Furthermore, while Coles deemphasizes Lanyer's proto-feminism, I instead treat Lanyer's gender and status as intersecting. Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

it. In fact, one of the most elaborately-designed extant prints of *Salve Deus* was gifted to Prince Henry, eldest son of James I. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to create a firm boundary between Lanyer's dedications and the body of her Passion narrative itself, for *Salve Deus* contains frequent metadiegetic pauses, during which Lanyer directly addresses the Countess of Cumberland and other readers. The actual story of the Passion does not begin until line 329 of *Salve Deus,* as the first 328 lines consist largely of a continuation of Lanyer's dedication to the Countess of Cumberland. Therefore, the genre of Lanyer's devotional poem is already troubled by her personal concerns about her social standing. Indeed, Lanyer's rendering of Christ's death is imbricated with her intervention in the gender and class hierarchies of her day. Lanyer's painful experience as a mother may also account for her decision to center maternity in her work. While maternity is the catalyst that led to her estrangement from court life, it also anchors her attempt to reestablish herself in a powerful network of patrons.

Maternal Affects: Building the Case for Mary

In her interpretation of biblical women, Lanyer frequently codes these women's suffering as maternal. In a section she titles "Eves Apologie," Lanyer refers to Eve as "Our Mother Eve," establishing her as an authority, as the readers' kin, and as an object that carries affective weight.[15] Later, she codes Eve's act of sharing the fruit of the tree of knowledge with Adam as an act of motherly sacrifice or loss. In Lanyer's words, when Eve gave Adam the fruit, she was "giving to Adam what shee held most deare."[16] Given the absence of Eve's interiority in the corresponding biblical passage, this description of Eve's intense emotional attachment to the

[15] Lanyer, "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum," 763.
[16] Ibid, 764.

fruit of the tree of knowledge seems oddly hyperbolic. The striking imposition of this line can be attributed to Lanyer's desire to assuage Eve's culpability in the Fall. Lanyer's calculated word choice recalls the words of John 3:16: "For God so loveth the world, that he hath given his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life," creating a connection between God's sacrifice of his son and Eve's sacrifice of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.[17] While Lanyer does not completely absolve Eve of her guilt, she does employ motherly pain as a means of abating it. This description of Eve's sacrifice shifts attention from the divine punishments of childbirth labor or expulsion from Eden to Eve's self-imposed sacrifice of knowledge. Eve's maternal pain occurs in tandem with her loss of knowledge; the Fall – including the burden of childbirth – mark the end of intellectual pursuits for women.

Already, Lanyer's association of maternity with sacrifice, specifically the loss of women's intellectual pursuits, contradicts the way in which she treats maternity in her dedications, where she codes the knowledge, virtue, and poetic prowess of her patrons as either stemming from their motherhood or being passed down through matrilineal succession. Lanyer's first dedication, written to Queen Anne, begins "Renowned Emprese, and great Britaines Queene,/ Most gratious Mother of Suceeding Kings," immediately introducing motherhood as a key component of Anne's political authority. Furthermore, In Lanyer's dedication to Princess Elizabeth, she argues that the Princess has inherited not only Queen Elizabeth's name but also her virtues.[18] Meanwhile, Elizabeth I is described as "that deare Mother of our Common-weale,"[19] a common epitaph for the queen.[20] All of these moments can be seen as part of a

[17] *1599 Geneva Bible*. *BibleGateway.com*. Accessed 25 April 2015.
[18] Lanyer, "To the Lady Elizabeths Grace," 1-2.
[19] Ibid, 7.
[20] Lanyer, "To the Queenes Most Excellent Majestie," 1-2. The public persona of Queen Elizabeth provides an interesting backdrop to my argument here, for Elizabeth was sometimes associated with both maternity and the Virgin Mary. Helen Hackett addresses the argument, first proffered by E.C. Wilson and Roy Strong, that the early

conventional Renaissance humility topos, yet by attributing her patrons' authority to their motherhood or matrilineal succession, Lanyer also sets the groundwork for using maternity to build her own authority as a female poet. Because maternity cuts across class lines, Lanyer uses it to alter the terms of her relationship to the social hierarchy; she establishes a line of inheritance between her dedicatees and inserts herself into it. Furthermore, as she praises the maternal authority of her patrons, Lanyer's own maternity gains political potential as well. Motherhood is linked to a literal, embodied succession of political power, on which Lanyer capitalizes.

Adding yet another layer to her use of maternity, Lanyer adopts the common literary convention of using maternity *metaphorically*. Within this convention, exercised by both male and female poets, maternity is no longer linked to physical bodies but to the metaphorical body of writers, who imagine themselves "giving birth" to their poetry, regardless of their physical capacity to give birth to children.[21] For example, Lanyer accuses her muse of having a "poore barren Braine" before telling her that "thy poore Infant Verse must soare aloft" anyway.[22] In contrast to Lanyer's treatment of maternity elsewhere in the text, here the mother's authority is *belittled* in relation to that of the offspring, which possesses an agency of its own despite its

modern period witnessed a "cult of Elizabeth" that filled the popular longing left by the Protestant rejection of Mariolatry, arguing that scholars have largely overestimated the extent to which Elizabeth was accepted as a figure for the Virgin Mary. Hackett reexamines the rhetoric surrounding Elizabeth's rule, showing that the Queen was as likely to be associated with a range of other biblical figures, symbols, or motifs (including motherhood) than she was to be associated with the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, in moments where the two are explicitly related, Elizabeth is often presented as the typological counterpart to Mary, rather than a simple repetition of her (10). Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: MacMillan, 1995). See also, E.C. Wilson, *England's Eliza* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939) and Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethean Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

[21] Katherine Maus first describes male writers' use of this metaphor in "A Womb of His Own," *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*. Ed Douglas Brooks (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 89-108. Responding to the conversation opened by Maus, Stephen Guy-Bray argues that attempts to propound a difference in women's use of the maternal metaphor vs. men's use of it unnecessarily rarefies gendered bodily differences and perpetuates hetero- and cis-normativity. As he wittily reminds us, "women do not, as it happens, have the biological capacity to birth books." Guy-Bray, *Against Reproduction: Where Renaissance Texts Come From*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), esp. 6.

[22] Lanyer, "Salve Deus," 276; 279.

mother's weakness. In this metaphor, the woman's body becomes a passive vehicle for an agential child, whose success depends on its ability to leave its mother behind.[23] This rhetorical use of maternity was a common convention in early modern English literature, evincing Lanyer's knowledge and interest in English literary culture.[24] At the same time, this moment preempts our ability to ascertain a consistent and cohesive theory of maternity underlying Lanyer's work. Indeed, this rhetorical move might seem out of character for Lanyer given her otherwise celebratory representation of the maternal authority of her patrons and, as I show below, the Virgin Mary.

The confusion begins to abate, however, when we read these disparate references to maternity alongside Lanyer's investment in the redemptive power of maternal pain. To Lanyer, maternity is significant both as a material, embodied experience and an affectively laden abstraction. The flexibility that Lanyer affords maternal rhetoric enables her to use it in surprisingly diverse ways. While her definition of maternity is inconsistent, the rhetorical purpose to which she employs it cuts across these various references. Lanyer's use of the maternal metaphor, for example, beckons the reader to empathize with her suffering at the same time that it presents her suffering as a necessary part of her spiritual redemption. Because Lanyer uses maternity as an organizing rhetoric throughout her poem, she is able to form a symbolic

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[23] The image of a passive, vessel-like female body is consistent with Eve Keller's and Karen Newman's characterization of the way in which early modern medical tracts represented women's role in reproduction. See Keller, *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007) and Newman, *Fashion Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), especially Newman, "Body Politics," 1-12.

[24] For instance, compare this moment in Lanyer to the first sonnet of Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591):

> Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows;
> And others' feet still seem'd but strangers in my way.
> Thus great with child to speak and helpless in my throes,
> Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,
> "Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write."

Similar to Lanyer, Sidney describes his poetry as a child, which he "gives birth to" with great difficulty. Phillip Sidney, "From *Astrophil and Stella*: 1," *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse 1509-1659*, Ed H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p 199-200. Ln 10-14.

association between herself, her patrons, and the Virgin Mary. In this way, Lanyer's Virgin Mary can safely resonate with what her contemporaries may have understood to be a Catholic devotional practice by underscoring her role as a common, secular mother.

The Marian Affective Economy

Lanyer's *Salve Deus* presents a critical dilemma for scholars interested in the devotional poetry of the Protestant Reformation. While we have plenty of biographical, historical, and textual evidence to suggest that Lanyer was a Protestant, determining the religious influences of *Salve Deus* is a more complicated task. Despite her personal Protestantism, Lanyer's poetry builds on a long tradition of medieval female writers. Barbara Lewalski, an early authority on Lanyer, refers to Lanyer's attempt to construct a "community of good women," a phrase that puts Lanyer in line with a long tradition of medieval female hagiography and other "good women" dating back to Eve.[25] Frances Dolan argues that such gynocentric intellectual communities may have raised Protestants' anxieties about Catholicism and its apparent association with strong-willed, "disorderly women."[26] Of course, there are no official female Catholic communities in the kingdom of England when Lanyer writes, yet the community of women to which Lanyer addresses her poetry retains its medieval and, therefore, Catholic resonance. Through building this community, Lanyer expresses her desire for a now lost past, a subtle echo of the grief she explores in "A Description of Cookham."

Lanyer's ability to embrace the Virgin Mary, despite widespread concern about Mariolatry, is predicated on her use of maternal rhetoric. Because her Protestant contemporaries

[25] Barbara Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. 213.
[26] Francis Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

recognized the public significance of maternity, Lanyer capitalizes on the appeal of Mary's maternal authority. Significantly, this aligns Lanyer with certain Marian devotional practices tracing back to the High Middle Ages. Like *Salve Deus*, the medieval devotional practice of meditation was undergirded by faith in the redemptive power of physical and emotional agony. Thus, as Lanyer prompts her readers to respect and empathize with mothers' childbirth pain and emotional labor, she gains momentum by drawing on an established Catholic tradition that used texts and images to emphasize the pain and suffering of Mary and Christ and encouraged Christian devotees to empathize with powerful affective religious imagery.

During meditation, the devotee attempted to mentally recreate scenes from Christ's or the Virgin Mary's lives with as much vivid detail as possible with the goal of experiencing intense affect. Unlike reading scripture or studying biblical exegesis, practicing meditation was a lived, embodied act and, therefore, was considered more accessible to novice devotees or those lacking the education and literacy to interpret the Bible.[27] Meditation also permeated the visual culture of the High and Late Middle Ages, which emphasized the materiality and humanity of Christ and Mary in order to encourage devotees to witness their physical and emotional agony. The devotional practice of meditation began in the late eleventh century and continued to develop into a structured, programmatic act up until the eve of the Reformation.[28] By 1534, meditation meant more than simply devoting mental energy to biblical events; through circulation of meditation manuals, it became a systematic practice guided by particular objectives and theological insights. While there naturally existed a degree of variability in the details of meditation manuals due to the wide temporal and geographical reach of the practice, meditation

[27] See Michael Sargent, "Introduction," *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael Sargent (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2004), pg x.
[28] Sargent, ix-xi. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400- c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), 234-5.

ingrained in English culture a fundamental belief in the redemptive power of pain and suffering and made available a visual and textual tradition that encouraged individuals to empathize with the maternal pain of the Virgin Mary.

For example, in Nicholas Love's fifteenth-century translation of *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, the most important meditation manual on the eve of the Reformation, the Virgin Mary is presented as the ideal witness of the Passion due to her maternal grief for Christ.[29]

> And so stode Þe modere byside Þe crosse of hir sone, bytwix his crosse & Þe Þefes crosse; she turned neuer hir eyene fro him, she was full of anguish as he was also. And she preide to Þe fadere at Þhat tyme, with alle hir herte seying Þus…I beseke 3ow Þat 3he wille ese his peynes, gode fadere I recommende to 3ow in alle Þat I may my dere sone.
>
> And also he hir sone praiede for hir priuely in himself seying:
>
> Mi fadere 3he knawen how my modere is tormented for me. I shole onely be cruifiede & not shee…Wherfore I recommende hir to 3owe, Þat 3he make hir peynes lesse.[30]

In this passage, Mary's torture and Christ's torture are uniquely connected. Christ describes his mother's experience as a form of crucifixion parallel to his own. Meanwhile, Mary "turned neuer hir eyene fro him," choosing to witness – and experience – her son's death despite her intense grief. In this passage, we can observe the slippage that often occurs between physical pain and emotional suffering in the context of the medieval practice of meditation. As Christ compares his *physical* torment to his mother's *emotional* torment, he creates an opportunity for the reader to imaginatively replicate Mary's experience. Like Mary, the devotee does not actually feel Christ's pain but rather suffers affectively by recalling Christ's violent death; the devotee's body remains unharmed in the moment of meditation. Significantly, the pain inflicted on Christ's body is

[29] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ,* Ed. Michael G. Sargent (University of Exeter Press, 2004). Love's translation was printed nine times before 1535 and survives in 64 manuscripts, suggesting a wide reading audience. In number of surviving manuscripts, it is outnumbered only Wycliffe's Bible and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and *Prick of Conscious*. Sargent, ix. Eamon Duffy goes so far as to call it "the most popular vernacular book of the fifteenth century." Duffy, 235.
[30] Love, 176.

imaginable to the reader only by reference to their memories of their own physical pain. Thus, while the devotee's body does not experience physical pain *in the present,* they recall physical pain *from their past* to activate their affective union with Christ. As Ahmed reminds us, even though pain and suffering seem to occur simultaneously, the reader's witnessing of the Passion is mediated by painful memories – in this case, Mary's maternal memories. In this passage, readers are prompted to experience emotional distress by witnessing Christ's humanity through the lens of Mary's maternity. It is only through recalling a painful memory, and channeling that memory through Mary, that readers are able to empathize with Christ and grieve for him.

Lanyer's *Salve Deus* adapts and builds on this tradition of the Virgin Mary to both intervene in a Protestant poetic practice and assert women's – and particularly mothers' – unique agency as witnesses to the Passion. In the text, Lanyer positions the Virgin Mary as an intermediary between her readers and Christ, prompting them to experience the Passion through Mary's maternal pain. In so doing, Lanyer reveals her active interest in early seventeenth-century debates about Mariolatry. Gary Kuchar explores the political and religious implications of Mary's role in *Salve Deus* in light of the contemporary *lo spasimo* controversy – a debate between Catholics who believed that Mary suffered physically at the foot of the cross and Protestant reformers who rejected this notion.[31] The key question in this debate is the extent to which Mary participated in Christians' spiritual redemption via physical pain at the moment of Christ's crucifixion. According to the late medieval Christian tradition, the physical pain Mary suffers during Christ's death proves that she was a co-redemptrix, worthy of worship in her own right, rather than a passive vessel for Christ's birth. The Virgin Mary paid the cost of physical

[31] Gary Kuchar, "Aemilia Lanyer and the Virgin's Swoon: Theology and Iconography in 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,'" *English Literary Renaissance*, vol 37, no 1 (2007): 47-73.

pain, and that pain is itself evidence of her quasi-divinity.[32] Kuchar points to the fact that Lanyer's Mary swoons at the foot of the cross to argue that she did, in fact, participate in the suffering of her son:

> [W]oefull Mother wayting on her Sonne,
> All comfortlesse in depth of sorow drowned;
> Her griefes extreame, although but new begun,
> To see his bleeding body oft she swouned;
> How could shee choose but thinke her selfe undone,
> He dying, with whose glory shee was crowned?[33]

Certainly, these lines portray Mary in a position that would have been recognizable to the English people through countless visual representations of Mary at the foot of the cross – a tradition that stemmed from a pre-Reformation tradition.[34] Lanyer's description of Mary's "griefes extreame" is revealing. While today "grief" typically refers to emotional devastation, especially that which is related to loss, the word could denote both physical pain and emotional suffering in the medieval and early modern period. The Oxford English Dictionary provides the now obsolete definitions for grief: "a bodily injury or ailment; a morbid affection of any part of the body; a sore, wound; a blemish of the skins; a disease, sickness" (last dated 1727) and "physical pain or discomfort" (last dated 1630).[35] Thus, the word grief, along with the image of Mary "swouning," points to her experience of physical pain, activating her association with Mariolatry. The final line of the passage shows her crowned with glory – her rightful place according to Catholicism.

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[32] Recall that according to Catholics, the Virgin Mary did not suffer pain during childbirth. Because Christ was conceived immaculately, Mary was spared the divine punishment of a painful birth.
[33] Lanyer, 1009-14, qtd Kuchar, 50.
[34] Kuchar, 50-1.
[35] "grief, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/81389?rskey=Jv5dNq&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed November 15, 2017).

Kuchar concludes that Lanyer is drawn to Catholic beliefs due to their adoration of strong female figures such as the Virgin Mary. He goes so far as to argue that Lanyer leverages Catholicism's understanding of the Virgin Mary to empower women to serve in clerical roles. While I agree with Kuchar that these lines illustrate Lanyer's interest in intervening in contemporary Protestant/Catholic debates about Marian representation, unlike Kuchar, I do not claim that Lanyer, or her text, are implicitly Catholic. Instead, I argue that Lanyer undermines the distinction between Protestant and Catholic understandings of the Virgin Mary by embedding Mary within both the powerful representational mode that Catholicism provides as well as the secular authority offered by maternity. Indeed, Lanyer's Virgin Mary is anchored in not only medieval Christian theology but also post-Reformation maternal rhetoric. Furthermore, while Kuchar limits Lanyer's intervention to an attempt to create space for women in the Catholic clergy, I see Lanyer's intervention as a broader attack on the gender and religious hierarchies of her time. As the means by which Lanyer's readers empathize with Christ, the Virgin Mary empowers women beyond the limits of individual religious practice.

Longing for the Past: Lanyer's Historical Investment

Lanyer's Virgin Mary provides readers of *Salve Deus* with a particular mode of relating to the history of the Passion – one that, like medieval meditation, encourages an *embodied* experience of Mary's and Christ's pain. As they encounter Mary's maternal grief, readers are prompted to recall a memory of their own physical and emotional suffering and to apply this memory to their own devotional practice. Thus, through her portrayal of the Virgin Mary, Lanyer radically collapses the temporal boundary between past and present, opening future opportunities for herself and other women of diverse social statuses. This process of using the body to hold the

past in tension with the present is described by Elizabeth Freeman as "erotohistoriography," a sensational, affective, and pleasurable experience of history that is achievable only by accepting the past's influence on the present.[36] Freeman sees this act of relating to the past as holding potential for both lower class and queer subjects, who are marginalized by the temporal regulations of capitalism and (re)productive heterosexuality.[37] Throughout her exposition on erotohistoriography, Freeman returns to a reading of a queer media text directed by Nguyen Tan Hoang entitled *K.I.P.*, in which Hoang himself views a late 1970s or early 1980s pornographic film that has been damaged over time by frequent use. As Freeman explains, the skips and fissures of the film correspond to moments of increased eroticism, likely moments in which previous viewers paused and rewound repeatedly.[38] While the signs of damage on the tape draw attention to the temporal and filmic mediation between Hoang and his object of desire, Hoang seems to find pleasure in this very distance. Like Lanyer and medieval meditators, Hoang engages with multiple historical moments simultaneously: the present, the moment of the film, and the moment(s) of previous viewing by an unmarked other. Yet, Hoang's pleasure lies in the illusion that his access to the scene is unmediated – that the scene itself is marked by pauses, withholdings, and repetitions – rather than the result of a damaged film. In Freeman's words, "*K.I.P.* proffers a productive *disbelief* in the referential object, a disbelief strong enough to produce some kind of pseudo-encounter with it that is not worried about the pseudo."[39] Hoang's desirous rewriting of history uses the body to alter an experience of the present by holding it in tension with the past. As Freeman writes:

> Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object

[36] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[37] Ibid, 18-9.
[38] Ibid, 1-2.
[39] Ibid, 14.

> into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to erect, figure, or perform, that encounter.[40]

Hoang's erotohistoriography is like that of Lanyer and medieval devotees who overcome the limitations of history by encountering the past *as if it were in the present* before returning fully to a present that is now markedly more pleasurable.[41] For Lanyer's readers, the sense of immediacy in their encounter with Christ depends on their identification with Mary. Despite Ahmed's insistence that "sensations are mediated, however immediately they seem to impress upon us," *Salve Deus* encourages readers to relate their embodied memories to Mary's pain and, in so doing, to experience that pain as if it were their own. Lanyer's desire for the past is evident not only in her decision to represent the Virgin Mary in a way that her Protestant contemporaries consider to be "past" but also in the very *mode* in which she relates to the past – a mode that is bodily, sensational, and maternal. Put differently, Lanyer *desires to experience* history rather than *desires to know* history.

Significantly, because Lanyer's historiographic intervention involves creating a mode of relating to the past that is specifically maternal, Lanyer suggests that it is accessible primarily to women, only through an identification with a female body.[42] Lanyer further refines her Marian devotional model through her portrayal of biblical men as *bad* examples for how to behave in response to Christ's pain and suffering. Lanyer begins her narrative of the Passion story by

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[40] Ibid, 95.

[41] In describing the potential of this project for queer subjects, Freeman writes, "He or she would refuse to write the lost object into the present, but try to encounter it already in the present, by encountering the present itself as hybrid." Ibid, 14.

[42] The elision between "woman" and "mother" here comes from Lanyer's text, in which Lanyer presents these categories as interchangeable. I am wary of the way in which collapsing these categories reinforces oppressive gender norms that were present in Lanyer's context as well as our own. Furthermore, the implication that all women have the capacity to bear children depends on a definition of a female body that is irresponsible to trans theory, trans experiences, and modern trans activism. However, for the purposes of this argument, I am taking on this elision in my effort to follow Lanyer.

describing St Peter's false declaration that he would never betray Christ. She recounts how Jesus takes Peter, John, and James to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he tries to explain his torment to them, but, according to Lanyer, the men are unable to comprehend it.

> Beeing sorowfull, and overcharg'd with grief,
> He told it them, yet look'd for no reliefe.
> Sweet Lord, how couldst thou this to flesh and blood
> Communicate thy grief? Tell of thy woes?
> Thou knew'st they had no power to doe thee good,
> But were the cause thou must endure these blowes.[43]

Here, Lanyer implies that the men's failure to connect with Jesus's pain is a failure to achieve a proper meditational practice. As hard as the disciples try, they cannot empathize with Christ to the same degree as the Virgin Mary.[44] The budget remains unbalanced: the disciples are "the cause thou must endure these blowes," yet they do not give their empathy in exchange for this gift.[45] In Lanyer's version of this story, this failure of the three disciples to empathize with Christ's pain and suffering is directly related to their bodily capacity – specifically, their inability to stay awake to keep watch while Jesus prays. She writes:

> Although the Spirit was willing to obay,
> Yet what great weakenesse in the Flesh was found!
> They slept in Ease, whilst thou in Paine didst pray;
> Loe, they in Sleepe, and thou in Sorow drown'd:

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[43] Lanyer, 75-80.

[44] Donne, Hebert, and Milton each echo this idea that fully empathizing with Christ's grief is impossible. I demonstrate how this idea underlies Donne's "Good Friday" below. Michael Schoenfeldt shows how Herbert's "The Thanksgiving" and "The Reprisall" demonstrate how Herbert comes to terms with the fact that he can never fully experience the Passion. Schoenfeldt, "'That Spectacle of Too Much Weight': The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton," *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry 1603-1660* (New York: Norton, 2006), 890-906. Significantly, both Schoenfeldt and Ilona Bell attribute Herbert's failure to his Reformed Protestant ethics. Schoenfeldt writes, "[Herbert] slowly comes to realize…that the *imitatio Cristi* is from a Reformed perspective an impossible and ultimately misguided form of devotion that arrogates to the self the prerogatives of God alone" (902). See also Ilona Bell, "'Setting Foot into Divinity': George Herbert and the English Reformation," *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol 38, no 3 (1997): 219-41, esp. 222. I would add to Schoenfeldt's argument that the Protestants did not value the redemptive power of pain and suffering and, therefore, were unable to draw upon maternal pain as Lanyer does. Milton's "The Passion" remains unfinished, then, because, in Schoenfeldt's words, "it participates in a subgenre of works dedicated to the idea that the sacrifice inevitably defeats human response," a subgenre that also contains the works of Donne and Herbert (906). This is a subgenre that Lanyer's *Salve Deus* turns on its head.

[45] Lanyer, 380.

Yet Gods right Hand was unto thee a stay,
When horror griefe, and sorrow did abound:
His Angel did appeare from Heaven to thee,
To yield thee comfort in Extremitie.[46]

In an inversion of the story of Eve, the male disciples are prevented from experiencing "Paine" and "Sorrow" by the weakness of their own flesh. Because meditation was a mode of relating to Christ that occurred primarily through the body – that is, through memories of past sensations – the disciples' bodies are precisely what prevent them from connecting with Christ as Mary does. After all, Lanyer's description of Mary's suffering at the foot of the cross (quoted above) directly repeats this passage's description of Christ's "griefe" and "[drowning] Sorow."

It is important to note that Mary's ability to achieve this connection with Christ occurs not because she is a quasi-divine figure herself but, rather, because she is an ordinary mother. Indeed, in the above passage, the male disciples' experience contrasts not only with that of Mary but also with that of the Countess of Cumberland:

The meditation of this Monarchs love,
Drawes thee from caring what this world can yield;
Of joyes and griefs both equall thou dost prove,
They have no force, to force thee from the field:
Thy constant faith like to the Turtle Dove
Continues combat, and will never yield
To base affliction; or prowd pomps desire,
That sets the weakest minds so much on fire.[47]

Thus, Countess's "meditation" on Christ allows her to exchange worldly "joyes and griefs" for higher concerns. The Countess, like Mary, models religious piety for the reader. Unlike Christ's male disciples, she remains fixated on Christ despite the temptation of "base affliction." By presenting both Mary and her prominent female dedicatees as exemplars of proper devotional

[46] Ibid, 425-32.
[47] Lanyer, 153-60.

practice, Lanyer embeds Mary within a community of lay women and indicates that Mary's connection to Christ is achievable through any female body.

Childbirth Pain: from Divine Punishment to Spiritual Redemption

Lanyer's use of maternity provides women with an avenue for remembering the biblical past that is bodily, sensational, and affective, enabling mothers to use their maternal pain to empathize with Christ. *Salve Deus*'s description of labor bolsters Lanyer's writerly authority on the grounds of her maternal embodiment via her symbolic connection to Christ. Within the poem, the physical pain and emotional labor of childbirth is no longer seen as part of women's divine punishment but rather becomes something sacred: the means by which women can experience Christ's pain in a way that Peter, James, and John cannot. Because the success of this connection depends on the devotee's ability to recall personal memories of pain (even as the role of these personal memories are denied), only mothers have access to this devotional practice. Lanyer emphasizes the emotional and physical dimensions of both motherhood and Christ's crucifixion throughout her poem. For example, she writes,

> His joynt dis-joynted, and his legges hang downe,
> His alabaster breast, his bloody side,
> His members torne, and on his head a Crowne
> Of sharpest Thorns, to satisfie for pride:
> Anguish and Paine doe all his Sences drowne,
> While they his holy garments do divide:
> His bowels drie, his heart full fraught with griefe,
> Crying to him that yeelds him no reliefe.[48]

Descriptions of Christ's "anguish and pain" in this passage intermingle to suggest the inseparability of the destruction of Christ's body and pride. The "Crown of sharpest Thorns"

[48] Ibid, 1161-8. Coles cites this stanza as evidence of Lanyer's interest in Christ's affective humiliation. Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing,* 167.

placed on his head exemplifies the convergence of physical and emotional torment Christ experiences. Significantly, this is not unlike the combination of pain and suffering Lanyer argues women have experienced. Women connect with Christ both because they, like Christ, have suffered the cruelty of men and because they, like Christ, have experienced sacrificial pain: the pain of childbirth.

Nowhere does Lanyer's intervention become more palpable than in relation to the figure of Eve. The dominant historical understanding of Eve's transgression places her labor pain in a teleological relationship to that of later mothers. According to early modern exegesis, women suffer pain in childbirth because of Eve's transgression, and therefore, labor was understood to be a justified reminder of the inherent physical and moral weakness of women. However, this logic that links maternal pain to spiritual shame is at odds with Lanyer's use of maternity, which, contrarily, prompts readers to associate pain and suffering with spiritual *redemption*. While early modern men assumed a metonymic relationship between Eve and womankind (i.e., Eve was weak and, therefore, *all* women are weak), Lanyer insists on severing the link between Eve's guilt and that of future women. Rather than portraying Eve's sin as the cause of mothers' pain, Lanyer positions Eve as a fellow victim of her male contemporaries, correcting her readers' inherited account of Eve. Apologizing on behalf of "Our Mother Eve," Lanyer writes:

> Then let us have our Libertie againe,
> And challendge to your selves no Sov'raingntie;
> You came not in the world without our paine,
> Make that a barre against your crueltie;
> Your fault being greater, why should you disdaine
> Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?
> If one weake woman simply did offend,
> This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end.[49]

[49] Lanyer, 825-32.

Here, Lanyer emphasizes Eve's suffering at the hands of men, which she implies is arbitrarily and unjustly enforced upon both the history of Eve and the everyday lives of contemporary women. Once again, she deploys maternal rhetoric to convince men to give up their "crueltie"; men's failure to empathize with the "paine" women suffer during childbirth makes their sin greater than Eve's. Significantly, the passage also accuses men of misappropriating the past to secure their perpetual hegemony; their "sinne…hath no excuse, *nor end*." By contrasting men's infinite mistreatment of women with Eve's finite sin, Lanyer simultaneously consigns Eve to the past and commits her to an endless community of mothers who share in her physical and emotional grief. Lanyer's empathy with Eve, though qualified by Eve's "fault," collapses the temporal distinction between Eve's torment and her own. In doing so, she confronts this biblical past as part of the present. Lanyer's argument here reveals her faith that rewriting Eve's history within her present moment can alter women's conditions in the future.[50] To Lanyer, the "end" of women's suffering, as victims of men's injustice, will be achieved through the redemptive power of maternal pain.

[50] Victoria Brownlee has argued that Lanyer's *Salve Deus* sets up a typological relationship between Eve and Mary in order to propound an idea of "spiritual motherhood," or a form of motherhood that emphasizes women's role in the religious upbringing of their children. As Brownlee explains Lanyer's project, women's flesh is not only redeemed by Mary's birthing of Jesus but also replaced by mothers' capacity to provide spiritual guidance for their children. According to Brownlee, Lanyer sees *herself* as in a typological relationship to Mary, for Lanyer figures her writing as an act that provides spiritual sustenance to her readers – just as Mary provides spiritual sustenance to Christ and Christian followers. While I agree with Brownlee's conclusion that Lanyer is interested in drawing on the Virgin Mary to redeem Eve and other women, Brownlee does not acknowledge the larger historical context in which Lanyer was writing. For example, what Brownlee calls "spiritual motherhood" is a commonly prescribed function of maternity in early modern English conduct books. Also, the typological connection between Eve and Mary has a long history that is not unique to Lanyer. Finally, Brownlee does not account for the impact of the Protestant Reformation on Lanyer's writing. Brownlee, "Literal and Spiritual Births: Mary as Mother in Seventeenth-Century Women's Writing," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol 68, no 4 (2015): 1297-326.

Marian Historiography

After understanding the role maternity plays in Lanyer's work, we can begin to make sense of why Lanyer places her Virgin Mary at the intersection of pre-Reformation/Catholic theology and contemporary maternal discourses. While it is important to note that the practice of meditation maintained its purchase in the early seventeenth century – both through the continuation of the aesthetic and cultural practice by Protestants and through the specific effort of counter-Reformists, Lanyer's Protestant contemporaries such as Donne, Herbert, and Milton also made efforts to relegate Mariolatry to the past. In other words, the "pastness" of certain modes of representing the Virgin Mary was, in many ways, a deliberate erasure by Protestant writers. Thus, Lanyer's interest in Marian representation also reveals her investment in historiography; she intervenes in a conversation about how Protestant poetics should understand and relate to biblical history. Through her depiction of the Virgin Mary, Lanyer rewrites seventeenth-century women's relationships to both the medieval past and the biblical past, creating future possibilities for these women beyond those determined by their present gender and class hierarchies.

Lanyer's descriptions of the Virgin Mary are key to her understanding of the pain and suffering of childbirth as having political potential. In describing Mary, Lanyer argues that "[n]one ever lost so great a losse as shee, Beeing Sonne, and Father of Eternitie."[51] On the one hand, Mary's exceptional loss of her son is elevated above the public trauma of Christ's death. Yet, at the same time, the exceptionality of Lanyer's Mary is predicated on the rhetorical impact of maternity, which itself is rendered sacred through common literary and aesthetic conventions. For Lanyer, Mary is sacred not because of her place in theology but rather because she is a

[51] Lanyer, 1015-6.

mother, and maternity is sacred because of its status in the post-Reformation cultural imagination. Lanyer plays with the paradox of Mary's simultaneous exceptionality and commonality in order to posit her as a proto-feminist icon. For Lanyer, Mary is at once a sign of a particular Catholic theology and, at the same time, a sign of *all* mothers' everyday, embodied experiences. As a mother, she is at once unique and ubiquitous. In *Salve Deus,* these multiple symbolic functions of the Virgin Mary cannot be cleanly teased apart; they are interdependent and co-constitutive, lying at the intersection of sacred and secular discourses.

This intersection shapes the form of Lanyer's poem itself. In her rewriting of the Passion, Lanyer crafts a seamless transition between the sections titled "The Salutation of the Virgin Marie" and "Christs Death" by allowing the latter section to occur through Mary's eyes.

> How canst thou choose (faire Virgin) then but mourne,
> When this sweet of-spring of thy body dies,
> When thy faire eies beholds his bodie torne,
> The peoples fury, heares the womens cries;
> His holy name prophan'd, He made a scorne,
> Abusde with all their hatefull slaunderous lies:
> Bleeding and fainting in such wondrous sort,
> As scarce his feeble limbes can him support.[52]

The speaker of the poem is not describing Christ's death *per se* but rather Mary's witnessing of his death; in this way, Christ's pain and Mary's pain are intertwined. Given that Christ is the "sweet of-spring of [her] body," she has no choice in her suffering.[53] This compulsion occurs not because of Christ's divinity but rather because of Mary's maternity. The repetition of the word "when" emphasizes the simultaneity of the pain of mother and son: Mary feels pain *at the very moment* that her son feels pain. Mary's body, while exceptional, is the means through which *all* of Lanyer's readers visualize Christ's death. This description of Christ's body on the cross marks

[52] 1129-36.
[53] 1130.

the climax of Lanyer's narrative, and by delivering it through Mary, Lanyer positions her as the mediator between the secular reader and Christ's sacred body. The story of Christ's pain becomes the story of a mother's loss, and it is women, not men, who have a unique understanding of it. By delivering the Passion through Mary, Lanyer circumvents male biblical authorities. Her use of pain not only shows that women are *capable* of having a privileged bond with Christ but also *constructs* the avenue by which this access becomes possible. Mary's maternal suffering allows women to approach Christ's story in a way that defies traditional understandings of femininity and religion. Lanyer grants maternity – especially maternal pain – positive authority within a Christian framework despite the fact that this framework traditionally demeaned childbirth as a marker of women's sinfulness.

As Lanyer's interpretation of the Passion provides women with spiritual agency, it also preempts potential negative responses that Protestant readers may have felt when encountering a Catholic icon. As Dolan argues, Protestants' fear of the Virgin Mary was based, in part, on her privileged role in Catholic theology as an intermediary between man and God. According to Catholicism, Mary interceded to God on behalf of her followers, both male and female, and this dependence on female authority manifested gender anxiety in Protestant male religious leaders.[54] However, Lanyer is careful to attribute Mary's exceptional access to Christ to her embodiment as a mother, capitalizing on the political import assigned to maternal rhetoric. Lanyer's Mary does not derive her authority from her status as a glorified saint within Catholic theology but rather from her maternity – the same source Lanyer uses to derive the authority of Eve, her female patrons, and her own poetic voice.

[54] Dolan, *Whores of Babylon,* 119.

This is not to say that authoritative mothers in the seventeenth century were immune to male anxieties and subsequent patriarchal backlash. Scholars such as Mary Beth Rose and Naomi Miller have pointed to the complex ways in which motherhood in the early modern period could be simultaneously glorified and feared.[55] Furthermore, Lanyer cannot fully divorce her portrayal of the Virgin Mary from the history of medieval and, therefore, Catholic portrayals of her. After all, Mary's role as a mediator remains a central poetic device in her Passion, and medieval Catholicism, like Lanyer, was invested in the embodied motherhood of the Virgin Mary. As Lanyer's references to Mary's body draw attention to her both as a sign of Catholic theology as well as a sign of maternity writ large, it is important to note that, historically, the divide between these sacred and secular discourses was not always clear. Indeed, the issue is compounded by the fact that, traditionally, Catholic theology already privileged embodied responses to the Passion, while Protestant theology privileged the intellectualizing of Christ's death. Therefore, I am not suggesting that Lanyer's portrayal of the Virgin Mary sidesteps all potential misogyny, nor does it achieve what could be considered a purely "Protestant" representation. Instead, I argue that Lanyer's poem insists on a gap between a *theological* understanding of Mary's motherhood and a *secular* one. As a paradigmatic form of female embodiment, maternity transcends the religious debates surrounding the Passion, even as Lanyer uses it to define the ideal response to Christ's death as an embodied one – a move that aligns her with a Catholic tradition. It is through this gap between Mary's divinity and her firm association with a community of lay mothers that Lanyer intervenes in Catholic/Protestant debates about the Virgin Mary. Thus, while Lanyer may

[55] Mary Beth Rose, "Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 no. 3 (1991): 291-314. Naomi Miller, "Playing 'the mother's part': Shakespeare's Sonnets and Early Modern Codes of Maternity." *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, Ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland, 1999): 347-67.

not avoid *all* male anxieties, she does offer a Virgin Mary that is able to avoid those anxieties that are specifically anchored within Catholic prejudices.

Reformation Anxieties: Donne's Turn from the Virgin Mary

Insofar as I am invested in affect as the means by which to examine Lanyer's historiography, I align myself with much of the work on the social history of the Reformation. Indeed, scholarship on the Reformation tends to center on the categories of affect and feeling; conversations about how scholars should understand England's shift from Catholicism to Protestantism have occurred largely in terms of how to most accurately characterize the English people's emotional response to the reforms. Titles such as Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* or Stephen Mullaney's *The Reformation of Emotions* illustrate this scholarly investment.[56] Indeed, at the heart of many social histories of the Reformation are arguments about whether the English people were generally happy, scared, mad, sad, or traumatized about the break from Rome.[57] Like scholars before me, I am interested in how "affective economies" structure and are structured by social and political forces. By drawing on the available political cache ascribed to maternal rhetoric, Lanyer is able to challenge the way in which her contemporaries relate emotionally to both the Reformation and to biblical history. Thus, the affective economy Lanyer

[56] Stephen Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

[57] For example, see Aers and Smith's introduction to the special edition of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* entitled "Reformations." Following Norman Jones, Aers and Smith describe the "revisionist" historical model as charting a widespread shift in mood from contentment to anguish and the earlier Dickensian model as a shift from dissatisfaction to relief and joy. See David Aers and Nigel Smith, "English Reformations," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2010): 426-438, esp. 426. Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). The "revisionist" model is represented by Eamon Duffy as well as Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) and John Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). The "Dickensian" model is found in A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford, 1989).

presents cannot be seen simply as a reflection of the affect circulating in seventeenth-century England. Indeed, because Lanyer draws on both the old and the new, her work refuses scholarly pressure to be used as evidence of her contemporary moment. Rather, Lanyer's use of maternal pain and suffering structures her very relationship to the past, enabling her to challenge her society's affective script for how to relate to the Virgin Mary after the Reformation, as well as how to relate to mothers *per se*.

In looking back, Lanyer holds on to what Protestant England would have her leave behind. Reformed England rejected not only the Marian devotion on which Lanyer draws but also the notion that individuals could or should strive to relate empathetically to Christ's pain. After all, to Protestants, Catholic meditation was an egocentric, potentially blasphemous practice. Thus, Lanyer's desire for the past is consistent with the "queer historiography" Heather Love describes as "feeling backward," a mode of relating to the past that affords subjects the opportunity to recognize continuities between the past and the present, even when the present demands the past as a sacrifice. Love's historiography critiques "progressive" political movements predicated on forgetting the pain of the past in favor of an ostensibly more positive future for queer subjects. According to Love, this deliberate erasure of the past preempts acknowledgement of suffering in the present.[58] She argues that queer subjects who dare to embrace painful "pasts" enact a queer historiography – one that has the potential to create a new ("backward") future for queer individuals.[59] Love's notion of queer historiography usefully illuminates the political purchase of Lanyer's historiographical method. Insofar as Lanyer posits the suffering of Eve, Mary, and other biblical women in relation to her own suffering and that of

[58] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[59] Love, 146-7.

her female contemporaries, she critiques the reification of the past by her Protestant contemporaries. It is serendipitous that Love's prime exemplar for the queer subject who looks back is yet another biblical woman: Lot's wife. In Genesis 19, God, planning to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah as punishment for its citizens' homosexuality, sends an angel to warn Lot and his family to leave. However, as the family leaves, Lot's wife turns around, breaking God's commandment to leave the disgraced city behind and, as a result, is instantly transformed into a pillar of salt. Love argues that Lot's wife resists modernity's attachment to "progress." This resistance is repeated by Lanyer's presentation of the Virgin Mary, which expresses a desire for the not-really-completed "past" that Protestant reformers attempt to leave behind. For both Lanyer and Lot's wife, longing for the past retains its influence on the present; Lanyer's refusal to accept the terms of her present involves reviving, and reinterpreting, a history that Protestant male poets take for granted.[60]

For example, both Lanyer's Mary and Lot's wife present interesting counterpoints to Donne's narrator in "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward," who struggles to bring himself to look back to the pain and suffering behind him: that of Christ on the cross. While for Lanyer longing for the past enacts a resistance to her moments' gender and religious hierarchies, Donne's Passion poem expresses anxiety about the past and a subsequent desire to isolate the past from the present. In "Good Friday," the speaker's rejection of the past is literalized through his movement away from Jerusalem, the scene of the historical event of Christ's crucifixion. As the speaker rides from East to West, he contemplates his conflicting emotional attachments to the "pleasure or business" that calls him Westward and the "sun" (a pun on Son) rising in the East.[61]

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[60] Ibid, 5.

[61] John Donne, "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," *John Donne: Collected Poetry*, edited by Ilona Bell (London & New York: Penguin Books, 2012), esp. ln 7; 11. Hereafter, I will cite "Good Friday" followed by line numbers.

In the poem, the spatial divide between the West and the East maps onto the metaphorical separation between the location of the speaker's body and the affective investments that orient his soul. Thus, while Lanyer, as well as practitioners of meditation, relate to Christ through memories of embodied pain, Donne describes a disconnect between his body and that of Christ. In the poem, the speaker's body and soul move in opposite directions.

> Let man's soul be a sphere, and then, in this,
> The'intelligence that moves, devotion is,
> And as the other spheres, by being grown
> Subject to foreign motion, lose their own,
> And being by others hurried every day,
> Scarce in a year their natural form obey:
> Pleasure or business, so, our souls admit
> For their first mover, and are whirled by it.
> Hence is't, that I am carried towards the West
> This day, when my soul's form bends toward the East.[62]

While in Lanyer the reader is ultimately invited to empathize with Christ's pain, experiencing the Passion in the present, Donne's speaker remains physically and temporally distant from Christ. Not physical experience but "intelligence" is the phenological register that defines devotion. The "soul's form" that "bends toward the East" indicates a disconnect between the speaker's corporeal experience and his devotional practice.

However, this is not to say that Donne's poem does not describe a sensational experience. Indeed, in lines that have garnered ample critical attention, the speaker justifies his turn from Christ by interpreting it as a solicitation of physical pain. "O Saviour, as Thou hang'st upon the tree;/ I turn my back to Thee but to receive/ Corrections."[63] However, even in these lines, we can observe a distinct difference between Lanyer's use of pain and that of Donne. In "Good Friday," the speaker asserts not only a hierarchical boundary between himself and Christ but also a

[62] Donne, "Good Friday," 1-10.
[63] Ibid, 36-8.

temporal boundary between the past and the present. The speaker states that Christ is "present yet unto my memory," drawing attention to the temporal distance that Lanyer's poem denies and disrupts.[64] Therefore, the pain the speaker experiences is not Christ's pain but his own; pain here is not a means of empathizing with Christ but rather a way of exaggerating the distance – spatial, temporal, hierarchical, spiritual – between Christ and the devotee.[65]

Of course, Donne's "Good Friday" is not the only poem in which Donne explores the Protestant/Catholic divide, nor is Donne the only post-Reformation Protestant poet to denote the tension surrounding the Virgin Mary in seventeenth-century England. George Herbert expresses ambivalence towards the Virgin Mary in "To All Angels and Saints" and "Anagram to the Virgin Mary"; Milton's *Paradise Regained* also focuses intently on the Virgin Mary, exploring her role in the Passion.[66] My decision to turn to Donne's "Good Friday" as the main point of comparison to Lanyer's *Salve Deus* is twofold. First, Donne's conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism

[64] Ibid, 34.

[65] Donald Freidman argues that Donne's reference to corporal pain is ultimately Calvinist, insofar as it demonstrates "God as wrathful judge," who demands punishment for sin even as he promises forgiveness. See Friedman, "Christ's Image and Likeness in Donne," *John Donne Journal*, vol 15 (1996): 75-92, esp. 80-1. Ann Hurley also notes that Donne's speaker does not receive this pain in order to empathize with Christ but rather to suffer punishment, and therefore, she concludes that Donne's poem does not enact a meditational devotional practice. Instead, Hurley claims that Donne mimics counter-Reformation ideas insofar as he is invested in images and the mind's "image-making faculty." Ann Hurley, "Donne's 'Good Friday, Riding Westward, 1613' and the *Illustrated* Meditative Tradition," *John Donne Journal*, vol 12, no 1 (1993): 67-77.

[66] Mary Beth Rose also raises the question of why Milton would choose to feature the Virgin Mary so prominently in *Paradise Regained* despite his strong anti-Catholic views. Rose compares *Paradise Regained* with *Samson Agonistes*, which Milton published alongside *Paradise Regained* in 1671. She points that, while the biblical sources for both of these texts feature Christ and Samson's respective mothers, only *Samson Agonistes* erases the mother. Rose explains this discrepancy, as well as her initial question about Mary, not by looking toward Milton's theology but by putting these texts in conversation with prevailing understandings of maternal authority—an authority that she characterizes as an "authority of origin." While *Samson Agonistes*, which she calls a "dead mother plot," quickly sidesteps the question of origins, she argues that Milton's establishment of Christ's authority in *Paradise Regained* depends on the establishment of his origin. Thus, the short epic ends with Christ's return home to his mother rather than his establishment as a public hero (which is how Samson's story ends). See Rose, "Milton and Maternal Authority: Why is the Virgin Mary in *Paradise Regained?*" *Plotting Motherhood in Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern Literature.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. 105-122. Insofar as we both situate the Virgin Mary in light of early modern maternal discourses, my argument about Lanyer's treatment of the Virgin Mary is similar to that of Rose. However, while Rose leaves the Catholic theological framework behind in her pursuit of Milton's use of contemporary maternal discourses, I show how Lanyer holds these sources in tension.

means that we can assume his familiarity with Catholic theology and devotional practices. Furthermore, Donne's Catholic upbringing meant that he needed to be conscious of his presentation as a Protestant poet to avoid suspicion of papistry. Donne's conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism captures, at an individual level, what was occurring across English society, and therefore, he provides a useful case study for thinking about the effect of the Reformation on literature. Furthermore, I also turn to Donne's "Good Friday" because scholars tend to consider the poem as exemplary of Protestant devotional poetics and the poetic response to the Protestant/Catholic divide in the seventeenth century. Like Lanyer, Donne is sometimes accused by scholars of harboring Catholic loyalties – despite both poets' outspoken Protestantism. Furthermore, Donne's poem tends to center debates about Protestant lyricism; Louis Martz's *The Poetry of Meditation* and Barbara Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric,* two seminal texts in this debate, both rely heavily on readings of "Good Friday."[67] However, Donne's "Good Friday" approaches the tension of the Protestant/Catholic divide in a very different way than Lanyer's *Salve Deus*. Indeed, Lanyer's poem offers an important correction to both Martz and Lewalski, neither of whom turn to Lanyer in their respective studies.

The Virgin Mary also makes an appearance in Donne's poem, and like Lanyer, Donne seems to be drawing on an understanding of Mary that is, at times, surprisingly sympathetic to Catholic Mariolatry.

> If on these things I durst not looke, durst I
> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus
> Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?[68]

[67] Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princetown University Press, 1984).
[68] "Good Friday," 29-32.

Here, as in Lanyer's poem, the Virgin Mary is depicted as a co-redemptrix alongside Christ himself. The conditional that begins these lines furthers highlights Donne's suggestion Christ and Mary are on equal footing. *If I will not look on Christ, I also will not look on Mary,* the speaker says, for Christ and Mary contributed *equally* to Christians' redemption. Thus, Donne's poem, like Lanyer's, has the potential to raise Protestant readers' concerns about Catholicism and Mariolatry. However, if Lanyer uses maternity to contain the potential scandal of her Virgin Mary, Donne does so by making it clear elsewhere in his poem that he is rejecting what he sees as Catholic idolatry. Many have read Donne's description of Christ on the cross as a "spectacle of too much weight" as registering his disapproval of religious iconography.[69] While Donne's speaker later petitions God to "restore thine image," this image is now fully figural rather than material – present only within the memory of the speaker.[70] While Lanyer incorporates Catholic ideas into the form and argument of her poetry, Donne stages Catholic ideas in order to ultimately disavow them. Donne's use of rhetorical questions builds tension in the poem, deepening rather than reconciling the distinction between past/present, Catholic/Protestant. Donne's speaker is figuratively pulled in two directions. Thus, while he honors the Virgin Mary

[69] Michael Schoenfeldt sees this phrase in Donne's "Good Friday" as part of a larger trend by which post-Reformation poets shied away from vivid portrayals of Christ's crucifixion – a trend that he attributes to "a renewed emphasis in Reformed religion on the Davidic and Pauline notions that the only sacrifice God desires occurs neither in sanctified architectural space nor in explicit corporeal suffering but rather in the interior space of the believer." For Donne, Herbert, and Milton, that sacrifice is not so much a loss as a recognition that the self is incapable of fully imagining and understanding the event of the Passion. Therefore, the poets' sacrifice is merely intellectual or psychological rather than emotional or material. According to Schoenfeldt, Donne does not meditate on the Passion but merely contemplates his inability to do so. See Michael Schoenfeldt, "'That Spectacle of Too Much Weight': The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton" esp. 890; 892. Similarly, in her wide examination of Donne's poetry and sermons, Julia Smith notes that Donne "seems reluctant to dwell on the Lord's physical suffering," tending to focus instead on Christ's humiliation and subsequent glory. See Julia J. Smith, "Donne and the Crucifixion," *The Modern Language Review*, vol 79, no 3 (1984): 513-25, esp. 521-2.

[70] David Anderson also argues that this line should be understood as a call only for a *mental* image of Christ, an explicit rejection of witnessing Christ externally through religious iconography. Anderson, "Internal Images: John Donne and the English Iconoclast Controversy," *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol 26, no 2 (2002): 23-42, esp. 33.

as a saint, he ultimately must remain distant from her. The speaker preempts the potential fracturing of the self through a resolute rejection of Catholicism, which is relegated to the past.

The redemptive promise of connecting with Christ through a shared experience of pain and suffering – a promise that underlies both medieval meditation and Lanyer's work – is rendered problematic in Donne's poem. While Lanyer invokes her readers' memories of physical pain to urge them to connect with Christ through Mary's maternal torment, Donne ends his poem with the speaker failing to achieve empathy with Christ. While the speaker does solicit pain, the hope of spiritual redemption remains unfulfilled.

> O Savior, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
> I turn my back to thee but to receive
> Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
> O think me worth thine anger, punish me,
> Burn off my rusts and my deformity,
> Restore thine image so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know me, and I'll turn my face.[71]

The subjunctive mood and future tense of these lines places redemption on the horizon, just out of reach. While the painful corrections *may* occur and *may* lead to redemption, the reader does not witness this process. Furthermore, the pain the speaker solicits here is not that of Christ but the punitive pain of a whip; the passage draws attention to the "rusts" and "deformity" of the speaker's body, which is misaligned with Christ's already-restored "image."[72] While the speaker's lashing mimics the lashing experienced by Christ during his walk to Calvary, Donne here emphasizes the radical disconnect between the speaker's pain and Christ's. The lines create a negative visual space in place of Christ's body, which is whole and unharmed in comparison to

[71] "Good Friday," 36-42.
[72] "My rusts and my deformity" is an interesting pairing, given the physicality of the former and the abstractness of the latter. A tension between the material (i.e., the body) and the spiritual (i.e., the soul) runs throughout Donne's poem. By invoking this tension here, the speaker reiterates the musings of the opening lines of the poem, creating the sense that the tension remains unresolved.

the speaker. In this sense, Donne reverses the logic of Lanyer's Mary. While Lanyer's Mary offers readers a visual of Christ's injured body in pain and urges them to empathize with him, Donne's speaker focuses on his own body and its capacity to receive correction. Significantly, the speaker's emulation of Christ's pain occurs not in the present but in a hypothetical future, during which Christ has already been "restored." Thus, unlike Lanyer, Donne does not connect the present with the past but, rather, emphasizes, through the spatial metaphor of riding west, the temporal disconnect between the devotee and Christ. The injunction to "restore thine image" can be read in two ways: as a call to make the speaker look similar to Christ (i.e., clean, pure) or as a call to restore Christ's image to the speaker's memory. Thus, in the end, the poem stages the potential of meditational devotion rather than the enactment of it. However, given the pressure the poem elsewhere puts on the divergence of the speaker's body and soul, this desire for pain is an empty promise.

Insofar as I read of Donne's poem as an unfulfilled attempt at meditational devotion, I situate myself in contrast to Louis Martz, who locates what he calls a "meditation tradition" at the center of not only Donne's religious poetry but all post-Reformation devotional poetry.[73] Martz argues that this meditative impulse reflects the influence of counter-Reformation meditation manuals, beginning with the work of St. Ignatius, which gained popularity in England through the writings of English Jesuit Robert Pearsons.[74] Significantly, Martz argues that the Ignatian 3-part meditational form that runs throughout Protestant devotional poetry in the seventeenth century departs dramatically from the earlier medieval meditational practice that I described above. According to Martz, while counter-Reformation Catholicism emphasized theological or intellectual contemplation, the earlier devotional form stressed simplicity,

[73] Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*.
[74] Ibid, 5.

emotionality, and bodily intuition. In Martz's words, "When theology is present [in medieval texts], it is given in simple abstractions, never explored or elaborated: the understanding does not here intervene to make 'discourses' on the theological significance of the scene."[75] Put differently, Martz argues that while medieval meditation manuals focused on achieving embodied empathy with Christ's pain, early modern meditation manuals emphasized the importance of applying one's *reason* or *knowledge* to properly meditate on Christ.[76] Martz's distinction between pre-Reformation and early modern meditational practices may account for Donne's approach to the Passion; in Martz's reading of Donne's "Good Friday," the uncertainty of the speaker is a crucial component of counter-Reformation meditation – a sign of his intellectual wheels turning – rather than a failure of mediation *per se*. However, Martz's reading cannot account for how and why Lanyer's interpretation of the Passion differs so much from that of Donne. Furthermore, while I believe that Martz underestimates the intellectual complexity of the medieval texts he explores, of greater interest to me here is his insistence on bracketing early modern meditational manuals from the long tradition that came before them. Ironically, in drawing a firm line between the medieval and early modern texts, he recreates the same rejection of the past I locate in Donne. [77]

[75] Ibid, 73.

[76] Martz's barricading of pre- and post-Reformation devotion has been critiqued by social historians who now argue for a more fluid, multidirectional transition from Catholic to Protestant England. For example, Keith Wrightson explains the delayed progress of religious reform by pointing to the lack of education or training of local church leadership as well as outright refusal of certain local ecclesiastical courts to enforce new English laws. The task of disseminating reforms from the crown was burdened by geographical and logistical constraints. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 191-229. This has lead scholars such as David Aers and Nigel Smith to insist that we should speak only of "English Reformations" in the plural, for to insist on a singular narrative of the period necessarily misrepresents its complexity. "English Reformations" is also the title of the introduction to a 2010 special edition of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* that Aers and Smith co-edited. This special edition complicates even further the narrative set out by Eamon Duffy in his seminal work on the Reformation. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

[77] Martz, 54-6.

In contrast to Martz, Barbara Lewalski claims that the primary influence of the seventeenth-century canonical religious poets – namely Donne, Herbert, Vaughn, Traherne, and Taylor – was contemporary Protestant aesthetics and biblical exegesis. "Contemporary, English, and Protestant" are the three descriptors that Lewalski emphasizes throughout her work, firmly rejecting any readings that suggest that these poets draw on counter-Reformation or earlier Catholic traditions.[78] While Lewalski concedes Martz's claim that meditation appears to be active within certain Protestants' sermons and poems, she argues that the correct source for these moments is "an emerging Protestant meditative theory" rather than a medieval or counter-Reformation one.[79] However, the overlap between Lewalski's description of Protestant meditation and Martz's description of counter-Reformation meditation is striking. Both emphasize the importance of contemplating theology and biblical scripture and the application of one's intellect during devotional practice.[80] Thus, one wonders if these sources were as mutually exclusive as Lewalski suggests. Like Martz, Lewalski points to Donne's "Good Friday" as an exemplar of this practice:

> But the closest affinities [to Protestant meditation] are those between certain of Donne's occasional poems and hymns, and the genre of occasional meditation upon a providential experience. "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," though often approached as a classic Ignatian meditation upon the crucifixion, is in fact an occasional [Protestant] meditation on the specific experience of being kept by pleasure or business from conducting the expected meditation, and the conclusion of the poem finds in this unlikely circumstance a potential spiritual boon.[81]

While Lewalski asserts confidently that Donne's "Good Friday" is Protestant and not Catholic, her argument raises more questions than it does answers. If Donne was not interested in

[78] Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 5.
[79] Ibid, 147. Lewalski is careful to qualify the extent of the influence of the Protestant meditative practice. Unlike Martz, who sees the impulse of meditation as pervasive in seventeenth-century lyricism, Lewalski sees it as merely "ancillary" to other influences.
[80] For a full description of Lewalski's definition of Protestant meditation, see *Protestant Poetics*, pgs. 148-68.
[81] Ibid, 170.

Catholicism, why would he include so many Catholic elements in his poem?[82] By what evidence can we, as literary critics, determine if the meditation underlying Donne's text is Catholic or Protestant, medieval or early modern? For that matter, by what means may we make sense of the complex religious landscape of the early seventeenth century from within its literature?

For Lanyer, maternity offers a solution to this critical impasse, as it allows her to emulsify elements of past and present religious tradition. By considering Lanyer's use of the rhetoric of maternal pain and suffering, I have revealed Lanyer's investment in breaking down the boundary between Protestant/Catholic and past/present for her personal and political ends. Indeed, Lanyer's *Salve Deus* provides a response to the critical impasse represented by the debate between Martz and Lewalski, neither of whom discuss Lanyer's unique intervention. In their early efforts to make claims about canonical Protestant writers, Martz and Lewalski examine archives of exclusively male poets. Meanwhile Lanyer portrays a Passion narrative that is uniquely indebted to female bodies and experiences. Drawing on secular discourses of maternity as well as medieval Catholic theology, she offers a devotional lyric that is not bound to the categories of Protestantism/Catholicism, past/present. By allowing her readers to relate to the past through the maternal body of the Virgin Mary, she resists the gender and religious hierarchies of her moment and envisions a more equitable future.

[82] Richard Strier asks a similar question in "John Donne Awry and Squint: The "Holy Sonnets," 1608-1610," *Modern Philology*, vol 86, no 4 (1989): 357-384. Ultimately, Strier argues that Donne's treatment of Catholic elements reveals an underlying uncertainty of his religious loyalties. Strier attributes the contradictions in Donne's sonnets as "pain and confusion" and identifies Donne as "a person who would like to be a convinced Calvinist but who is both unable to be so and unable to admit that he is unable to be so" (361). Rather than psychologizing Donne, I am here making the less totalizing claim that Donne's poetry is simply invested in exploring the boundary between Protestantism and Catholicism. I do this without making recourse to label Donne as a confused Calvinist himself, nor do I see the necessity of equating the contradictions in Donne's poetry with "pain and confusion" in the poem or in the poet himself. After all, poetic contradictions are as likely to result in pleasure and clarity as they are to result in pain and confusion.

Conclusion: Cookham as Utopia

Lanyer begins to outline the future she desires in "The Description of Cookham," a secular country house poem appended to *Salve Deus*. Like the famous country house poems of Jonson and Marvell, Lanyer's "Cookham" is written, in part, to flatter her patrons by praising the splendor of their estates. The poem describes not only the topography of Cookham but also her nostalgic recollection of her (now lost) intellectual community with her patrons, the Countess of Cumberland and Anne Clifford. Lanyer portrays Cookham as a site in which she once dwelled in harmony with the Countess of Cumberland and her daughter without the interference of class or gender hierarchies. Furthermore, in the poem, Cookham is a space where women can meditate on Christ by embedding themselves in nature:

> While you the time in meditation spent,
> Of their Creators power, which there you saw,
> In all his Creatures held a perfit Law;
> And in their beauties did you plaine descrie,
> His beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majestie.
> In those sweet woods how often did you walke,
> With Christ and his Apostles there to talke;
> Placing his holy Writ in some faire tree,
> To meditate what you therein did see. [83]

In the absence of the stressors of city life, the women are able to "walke" and "talke" with Christ and his Apostles as if they were present in the woods themselves. Here, the women's connection to Christ is mediated not by the Virgin Mary but by nature. The women observe God's "holy Writ in some faire tree." In the passage above, God's "creatures" stand in for Christ's body itself; their "beauties" function as a sign of God's "beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majestie." Therefore, as the women immerse themselves in the space of Cookham, they likewise immerse themselves in Christ.

[83] Lanyer, "The Description of Cooke-ham," 76-84.

As in *Salve Deus,* "Cookham" is undergirded by a desirous view of the past. While Lanyer's elegiac tone in "The Description of Cookham" seems to foreclose the possibility of utopia, the poem illustrates the sort of society she longs for throughout *Salve Deus*. This imaginative longing for the past is reminiscent of José Muñoz's understanding of "queer utopianism." In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argues that marginalized individuals draw on utopian idealism to critique their present circumstances and envision a more palatable future.[84] Insofar as he concerns himself with the importance of imaginative world-making for queer subjects, Muñoz positions himself against the anti-relationality and anti-utopianism of queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman.[85] Significant to my purposes here, Muñoz argues that what he calls "queer utopianism" exists apart from the historiographic logic that separates the past, present, and future. As in Lanyer's *Salve Deus*, achieving this utopia involves a radical collapsing of historical boundaries. In Muñoz's words, "My approach to hope as a critical methodology can best be described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision."[86] Thus, for Muñoz, queer utopia exists within both the past and the future, even as it is imagined in the present.

By remembering the *past* as utopian, "Cookham" continues Lanyer's project of critiquing her present circumstances and offering a solution to her society's oppressive gender and class hierarchies. Furthermore, while Muñoz aligns himself with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reparative reading, he does not suggest that the act of envisioning and desiring a queer utopia always entails a positive affective experience. In fact, many of Muñoz's examples of queer utopianism are mournful expressions of an ostensibly lost past. According to Muñoz, in figuring the past as utopian, queer subjects critique their present and envision a better future. In creating a desirable

[84] José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press 2009).
[85] Muñoz, 11-3. See Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) and Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[86] Muñoz, 4.

view of the past, Muñoz, like Heather Love, refuses to accept the conditions of queer subjects in the present. In the same way, Lanyer offers a version of utopianism that is predicated not on loss but on remembrance, or narrativizing of the past. Indeed, remembrance is a constitutive element in Lanyer's poem; she describes her experiences at Cookham as "fleeting wordly Joyes that could not last." The pleasures she experiences at Cookham are subject to expulsion by the same sort of "business or pleasure" that occupies Donne's speaker in "Good Friday." However, while Donne accepts the loss of the past, Lanyer vividly recounts the past in an effort to connect with it. "Therefore sweet Memorie doe thou retaine/ Those pleasures past, which will not turne againe," she writes.[87] Eventually, the Countess and Anne Clifford must depart from the country house to return to London. Lanyer's grief over this inevitable loss colors her portrayal of the scene. "Every thing retaind a sad dismay," she writes.[88]

However, while "Cookham" continues Lanyer's project of creating an embodied connection to the past, it uses the rhetoric of maternity not to create community with her patrons but rather to emphasize her disconnect from them. Even in Cookham's utopic landscape, Lanyer never fully escapes the pressure of the Countess's social status. In the poem, she figures the Countess not as an ordinary mother, but as Diana, the goddess of motherhood, emphasizing her exemplarity and superiority over other mothers.[89] In doing so, Lanyer departs from her approach to the Virgin Mary's maternity. While in *Salve Deus* maternity is a means by which Lanyer created a coalition amongst herself and her patrons, in "Cookham" the figure of Diana exaggerates the power differential between mothers of varying statuses. Significantly, Lanyer

[87] "The Description of Cooke-ham," 117-8.
[88] Ibid, 130.
[89] Lanyer depicts the Countess of Cumberland as holding Bow, a known signifier of Diana, who was also the goddess of hunting. Ibid, 51.

explicitly blames the loss of Cookham on the disparity between her social status and that of her patrons. In this way, Lanyer's sorrow directly engenders her class critique.

> Unconstant Fortune, thou art most too blame,
> Who casts us downe into so lowe a frame:
> Where our great friends we cannot dayly see,
> So great a diffrence is there in degree.[90]

Lanyer describes Cookham as a sort of Eden, complete with a central Oak tree, where the women read "many a learned Booke."[91] However, if Cookham is like Eden, it is an Eden that is always already fallen. Even as birds and creatures approach the Countess to visit with her, they "flie away for feare they should offend [her]" or "runne away when [she] did make a stand."[92]

Despite this departure, by understanding "Cookham" as part of Lanyer's continued manipulation of temporal boundaries reveals, we can view the poem as a natural resolution to Lanyer's project in *Salve Deus*. While "Cookham" makes few references to maternity, it does perpetuate the *function* of maternity in Lanyer's Passion poem. Lanyer begins *Salve Deus* with a mention of Cookham, cementing the relationship between these poems despite their disparate thematic content. The Passion narrative begins by praising the Countess of Cumberland for her rejection of worldly enchantments, the very worldly enchantments that precipitate the loss of the female community at the end of "Cookham."

> Thou from the Court to the Countrie art retir'd
> Leaving the world, before the world leaves thee:
> That great Enchantresse of weake minde admir'd,
> Whose all bewitching charmed so pleasing be
> To wordly wantons; and too much desir'd
> Of those that care not for Eternitie:
> But yeeld themselves as preys to Lust and Sinne,
> Loosing their hopes of Heav'n Hell paines to winne.[93]

[90] Ibid, 103-6.
[91] Ibid, 161.
[92] Ibid, 45-52.
[93] 161-8.

Thus, the country house poem fulfills Lanyer's utopian vision in *Salve Deus*. Lanyer's experiences at Cookham are both the inspiration for her Passion narrative and its implied end – should her readers follow her call to value maternal pain and suffering. The final lines of "The Description of Cookham" turn toward the future, wherein Lanyer is metaphorically chained to the Countess by the memory of her virtues.

> This last farewell to *Cook-ham* here I give,
> When I am dead thy name in this may live,
> Wherein I have perform'd her noble hest,
> Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
> And ever shall, so long as life remains,
> Tying my heart to her by those rich chaines.[94]

Just as Lanyer uses maternity to encourage her readers to experience the Passion as an embodied encounter with Christ, she likewise recalls Cookham through bodily memory. While the passage does not mention maternity *per se*, the logic supplied by maternal rhetoric continues.

In writing a devotional poem that touches the past, Lanyer enables the reader to encounter the past in the present, and in so doing, she revives Cookham's utopian promise. According to Muñoz, Lanyer's utopian memory need not be an accurate portrayal of the past in order to offer a critique of the present and a vision of future possibilities.[95] In narrativizing the past as utopian, Lanyer helps her readers "see beyond 'what is' to worlds of political possibility, of 'what might be.'"[96] For Lanyer, unlocking this possibility depends on the political and social prestige of maternity. By emphasizing Mary's status as a mother and embedding her in a community of women that includes her patrons, Lanyer shapes her readers' interaction with the Passion story. Because maternity – particularly maternal pain – invokes readers' empathy, *Salve*

[94] 205-10.
[95] Muñoz, 35.
[96] Ibid, 38.

Deus avoids the stigma associated with Catholic Mariolatry and writes a new biblical history – one that is uniquely dependent on female embodiment.

CHAPTER III

Mother Egypt: Rethinking English Nationalism and the Ambivalence of Shakespeare's Cleopatra

As Shakespeare was bringing to life his powerful, sexually-expressive Egyptian queen, lawmakers in England were plotting to rid the nation of Egyptian, or so-called Gypsy, bodies. While these laws present a rather damning view of Egyptians, they represent but one layer of England's surprisingly-equivocal relationship to Egypt. Indeed, to define Egypt from the point of view of an early modern English citizen would seem to be an impossible task, as Egypt and Egyptian mythology were complex, often contradictory, signifiers in the cultural imagination of the period. While scholars have pointed out the ways in which Egypt became a site for negotiating anxieties about gender norms,[1] racial miscegenation,[2] religious corruption,[3] and vagrancy,[4] anxiety was one of many affects – both positive and negative – that Egypt could

[1] For example, see Lucy Hughes-Hallett's *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams, and Distortions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) and Mary Hamer's *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), both of which show the way in which Egypt was often portrayed as a site of gender inversion.

[2] Sujata Iyengar discusses concerns about miscegenation in Jonson's *Gypsies Metamorphosed*. Sujata Iyengar, "Artificial Negroes," *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 188-9. John Archer and Ania Loomba each approach the intersection of racial boundaries and sexuality in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Archer, "Antiquity and Degeneration: The Representation of Egypt and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Old Words: Egypt, Southwest Asia, India, and Russia in Early Modern English Writing* (Stanford University Press, 2002): 23-62; Loomba, "The Imperial Romance of *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 112-34.

[3] Frances Timbers shows how English fear of Gypsies could activate or be activated by their fear of witchcraft or Catholic influences. Timbers, *'The Damned Fraternitie': Constructing Gypsy Identity in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016): esp. 50-56; 130-5.

[4] Mark Netzloff shows how English concerns about Gypsies interacted with their concerns about the influx of vagrant groups from Scotland, especially during Jacobean unification efforts. According to Netzloff, as the Jacobean Union project sought to establish a British identity that accommodated the cultural differences between England and Scotland, Gypsies became a useful analogy for the protean nature of identity itself. Netzloff, "'Counterfeit Egyptians' and Imagined Borders: Jonson's *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*," *ELH*, vol 68, no 4 (2001): 763-93.

invoke for the English as it as it traveled between legal, historical, aesthetic, medical, and literary archives.[5] For example, the period witnessed a renewed enthusiasm for the Egypt of ancient times through the rediscovery of Horapollo's *Hierogyphica*. Meanwhile, Hermeticism, a philosophical and religious tradition based on the late-antique writings of the Egyptian priest Hermes Trismegistus, gained popularity in the sixteenth century through the work of Giordano Bruno, who traveled to England in 1583.[6] On the other hand, English admiration for the historical legacy of Egypt existed in tension with the contemporary reality of Ottoman rule of the country. Leo Africanus responds directly to this tension when he writes:

> The course of this river [the Nile] is in very deed most admirable, and the creatures therein contained are exceeding strange, as namely sea-horses, sea-oxen, crocodiles, and other such monstrous and cruel beasts, (as we will afterward declare) which were not so hurtfull either in the ancient times of the Egyptians or of the Romaines, as they are at this present: but they became more dangerous ever since the Mahumetans were lords of Egypt.[7]

By imposing a historical narrative on Egypt's natural world, Africanus pacifies the confusion caused by his clear ambivalence towards the Nile. If the Ottoman empire changes the very nature of Egypt's corporal world, it remains reasonable for Africanus to admire ancient Egypt while continuing to naturalize the monstrosity of contemporary Egypt. However, even if one were to focus exclusively on the early modern period, competing narratives about the origin of the

[5] Ania Loomba provides a useful overview of these associations, showing how Egyptian mythology, legislation against "Gypsies," Classical histories, and contemporary travel narratives colored English understandings of Shakespeare's play. Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, 112-134.
[6] According to Douglas Brooks-Davies, the Hermetic tradition was particularly useful to Protestant England, as it portrays Egypt as undergoing an internal struggle to restore itself to its divinely-sanctioned glory by reforming its "wicked" habits. Thus, certain followers of Hermeticism found Egyptian culture to be fully compatible with mainstream English religion. Douglas Brooks-Davies, "Egypt," *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, eds. AC Hamilton, et al (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 233-4.
[7] Leo Africanus, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans John Pory (London: George Bishop, 1600): 335.

Egyptians in England made these illusive foreigners difficult to pin down. The period often conflated Egyptians with Gypsies, a group now generally believed to be the Romani tribe from northern India.[8] While some texts, such as Thomas Dekker's *Lathorne and Candlelight*, argued that the Gypsies were not from Egypt, few could make positive claims about their true origin.[9] Despite Dekker's firm assertion, he continues to elide Egyptians and Gypsies, and he uses references to Egyptian biblical history to garner his readers' disdain: "These are those *Egiptian Grashoppers* that eate up the fruites of the Earth, and destroy the corner fieldes."[10]

Rather than resolving the period's general ambivalence towards Egypt, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* draws liberally on these diverse discourses of Egyptianness, holding even contradictory attitudes towards the culture in tension. In the play, Cleopatra's maternity moves in and out of line with English values for "proper" femininity, making her character analogous to the wider treatment of Egyptians in the period. As I will show, Shakespeare organizes his nuanced portrayal of the Egyptian queen by drawing on the period's ready ambivalence towards maternity. It is through maternal discourses that the play guides audience reactions to Egypt, holding various and protean attitudes in tension while maintaining narrative clarity. From the point of view of the early moderns, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is at once old and new, Egyptian and Gypsy, foreign and domestic. As I read the relationship between maternity and Egyptianness in the play, I am conscious of the difficulties of accurately defining "Egyptianness" in the first place. After all, Shakespeare refers to Cleopatra as both an "Egyptian" and a "Gypsy" and colors her both "tawny" and "black," enabling diverse inquiries into Cleopatra's background. I confront

[8] See, for example, Iyengar, "Artificial Negroes," 181 and Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism,* 128.
[9] Dekker emphatically declares, "Sure I am they never discended from the tribes of any of those people that came out of the Land of *Egypt: Ptolomy* (King of the Egiptians) I warrant never called them his Subjects: no nor *Pharao* before him." Many have pointed to this moment in Dekker's text to clarify the relationship between Egyptians and Gypsies in the early modern English cultural imagination. (Cf, previous footnote.) Thomas Dekker, *Lathorne and Candle-Light* (London: John Busby, 1609): H2.
[10] Ibid, H3.

this impasse not by narrowing my archive of relevant discourses but by defining "Egyptian" in as broad of terms as possible, showing how Cleopatra's maternity allows multiple, contradictory views of Egypt to exist in the play.

Because Cleopatra is constructed by intersecting maternal and Egyptian identities, any attempt to understand early modern audiences' response to her must account for her interaction with the period's discourses of both maternity and Egyptianness. At the same time, Shakespeare was not alone in drawing on the rhetoric of maternity to structure readers' attitudes towards Egypt. As I will show, this strategy was but one iteration of a larger pattern whereby English writers made sense of their relationship to Egypt and other cultural outsiders by placing racialized women's bodies in relation to England's reproductive norms. Thus, *Antony and Cleopatra* offers insight into the relationship between maternity and race in the period, as well as England's developing national identity in the early days of colonial expansion. The literary treatment of Cleopatra posits her within what Zrinka Stahuljak would call a "bloodless genealogy," which adopts her as a sort of English stepdame – a source of legitimizing authority that establishes historical continuity for the reproduction of English cultural values.[11] In my examination of the maternity of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, I aim to reinvigorate scholarly conversations about the play's relationship to England's wider imperialist project. I interrogate how the maternal figure of Cleopatra interacts with England's norms and expectations for mothers in order to reinforce those norms within England's cultural consciousness.

[11] See Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages:* Translatio, *Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

The (Dis)placement of Egypt

Surveying the English-authored discourses surrounding Egypt and Egyptianness reveals the pressure and tension the nation faced as they attempted to define their relationship to the culture. Geographically, writers such as George Abbot and Samuel Purchas set Egypt apart from other parts of Africa.[12] However, this spatial exemplarity did not afford early modern Egyptian, or "Gypsy," residents in England similar exemplary status. After centuries of tolerating Gypsy presence on the island, both Elizabeth I and James I issued legislation criminalizing Gypsies on English soil. By 1609, in the eyes of the law, being a Gypsy was synonymous with being a "rouge" or "vagrant," and the punishments for belonging to this group included public beatings, enslavement, branding, or even death.[13] However, though the stakes for identifying Egyptians were high, individual accounts of Egyptians remained imprecise as authors developed various strategies for placing Egypt in relation to English culture. In 1607, John Cowell writes in his book of definitions of legal terms that individuals known as "Egyptian" are not from Egypt at all, nor, he argues, are they Muslim as his contemporaries seem inclined to believe. Instead, Cowell argues that Egyptians are nothing but English or Welsh people in disguise. He compares English Gypsies to similar groups of Italian Christians, activating anxieties about the foreign influence of Catholicism.[14] Eight years later, George Sandys responds to the confusion surrounding

[12] The racial and geographical complexity of Egypt is illustrated by its inconsistent and overlapping mapping in early modern travel literature. Leo Africanus dedicates the entirety of Book 8 of his *A Geographical Historie of Africa* to Egypt, but he also describes it as part of Asia (Book 8) and "The Land of the Negroes" (Book 7). In contrast, George Abbot's section title "De Africa, & Egypto" marks Egypt as part of Africa while maintaining it exceptional position as a gateway to "the Holy Land," as well as to Rome. Abbot refers to Egypt adoringly as "Horreum populi Romani," – the storehouse of Rome – due to the fertility of the Nile River valley. George Abbot, *A Brief Description of the Whole World* (London: T Judson, 1599): E2-E3. Similarly, Samuel Purchas includes Egypt in his chapter on Africa, but he separates it from "Barbarie, Numi, Dia, Libya, and the Land of the Negros" (463). Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (London: William Stansby, 1613).

[13] Mark Netzloff shows how, under James, legislation about Gypsies sought to create distinct divisions between Gypsies, equated with Egyptians, and vagrant English citizens. These laws criminalized being Egyptian (i.e., from the country of Egypt) and associating with Egyptians or pretending to be Egyptian. However, this legislation was in competition with the idea that *all* Gypsies were "counterfeit." Netzloff, 773; 780.

[14] John Cowell, *The Interpreter* (Cambridge: John Legate, 1607): EA-EL.

Egyptians' origins by differentiating between "Egyptian Moors" and "Coptics…the true Egyptians" – the latter of which, he says, were cruelly forced to be circumcised by the Turks.[15] Thus, to Sandys, "true Egyptians" are those that resemble the English in terms of religious belief. His framework enables cross-cultural identification with Egypt while maintaining prejudice towards those "threatening" Egyptians who were trying to make a home on English soil.

While Cowell and Sandys each in their own way narrow the ontological divide between the English and Egyptians, this distinction did little to script England's wider imaginative treatment of Egyptianness as the century developed. By the middle of the seventeenth century, medical writers such as Jane Sharp and John Bulwer responded to the problem of Egyptians by defining Egyptian bodies in terms of their gender and sexual deviance from those of the English. Midwife Jane Sharp writes of Egyptian women with abnormally large clitorises that "some lewd women have endeavoured to use…as men to theirs." Such a thing, she makes clear, is unheard of in England, where "if there be any [such women] they will do what they can for shame to keep it close."[16] Physician and natural philosopher John Bulwer describes Egyptian men as abnormally obese so that they "have greater Breasts than the biggest of our women" and are able to breastfeed their children.[17] While Bulwer finds this practice "strange" and "against kind," he also disapproves of the less ample breast size of English women, blaming it on England's practice of swaddling infants.[18] Thus, while Sharp and Bulwer both use embodied gender and sexual perversion to erect a divide between the Egyptians and the English, they also appeal to Egypt (among other foreign cultures) to illustrate and sort through their feelings about sexual and reproductive practices in England. By mid-century, Egypt's imagined difference from England

[15] George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun An: Dom: 1610* (London: W Barren, 1615): 109-10.
[16] Jane Shape, *The Midwives Book* (London: Simon Miller, Star West End of St. Pauls, 1671): 44-5.
[17] John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis* (London: William Hunt, 1653): 317.
[18] Ibid, 330.

creates a space for Sharp and Bulwer to recommend their vision of ideal bodies, sexual attitudes, and infant medical practices.

That the English often referred to Egyptians to reflect on their feelings and concerns about their own national boundaries is demonstrated clearly in Thomas Dekker's *Lathorne and Candle-Light*. Dekker's complaint about the presence of Egyptians or Gypsies in England does not register any particular foreign threat but rather seeks to define bodies that do not belong on English soil. By Dekker's definition, the Gypsies are generalized outsiders to English culture, abstracted threats that need to be removed. He compares Gypsies to Moors, Jews, "Irish Kerns," and even "English rogues," drawing on his readers' attitudes about these groups to garner antipathy for Egyptians. Meanwhile, Dekker's tract remains haunted by the notion that Egyptians' origin could very well be England itself. Dekker's attempts to differentiate Egyptians from the English fall flat, as his language threatens to merely collapse the boundaries he is trying to erect. Observe, for example, how Dekker employs theatrical language to highlight Egyptians' deceitfulness, a common accusation lodged at the group:

> The bloudy tragedies of all these, are only acted by the Women, who carrying long kniues or Skeanes under their mantles, do thus play their parts: The Stage is some large Heath: or a Firre bush Common, far from any houses: Upon which casting themselves into a Ring, they inclose the Murdered, till the Massacre be finished. If any passenger come by, and wondring to see such a conjuring circle kept by Helhoundes, demaund what spirits they raise there? one of the Murderers steps to him, poysons him sweete wordes and shifts him off, with this lye, the one of the women is falne in labour.[19]

Here, Dekker describes what he claims is the Egyptian ritual of slaughtering animals as if the Egyptian women were actresses "play[ing] their parts" in a "bloudy tragedie." However, recall that this passage was written at a time when animal slaughters would have been a familiar sight in the markets of London and bear-baiting was at the peak of its popularity. Dekker's insistence

[19] Dekker, H2.

that the Egyptians slaughter their animals "more churlishly" than do English butchers does little to clarify the source of his ostensible disdain. If the difference in the Egyptian killing of animals is merely a difference in degree, why does this activity raise so much alarm in the text to the point that it becomes the sign of Gypsies' inherit otherness?

Dekker's attempt to distance the English from the Gypsies inadvertently reveals an uncomfortable similarity between Egyptian and English culture. The behaviors that he describes as most representative of Egyptianness seem to be projections of *English* behaviors that he wishes to disavow. Scholars have noted the ease with which anxieties about the theater stick to Egyptians, who are infamous for their alleged deceitfulness.[20] However, for Dekker, the affective weight of the scene derives less from dramatic performance *per se* than from a specifically maternal deceit. In his description of the Egyptians' activities, ethnic otherness is made legible through everyday anxieties English men experienced about their tenuous control over women's bodies and reproductive practices. The Gypsy women hide their actions by telling concerned witnesses that "one of the women is falne in labour." The "performance" mimics the birthing room insofar as it is closed to the male gaze, an opacity that produced widespread fear in the early modern period.[21] After all, men's exclusion from the birthing room left open the possibility for all sorts of female deceit. If women could cite reproductive norms as an excuse to cover their

[20] For example, see Iyengar, "Artificial Negroes." Jyotsna Singh discusses the way in which Shakespeare's Cleopatra registers both antifeminist and antitheatrical concerns. Singh, "Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra.'" *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 99-121.

[21] Several scholars have discussed the anxieties caused by men's exclusion from birthing rooms, looking to a range legal, historical, literary, medical, and other texts that respond to this practice in various ways. See for example, see David Cressy, "Childbed Attendants," *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 55-79, Caroline Bicks, *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare's England* (Burlington,VT: Ashgate, 2003), Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth," *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013): 153-210, and Sara D. Luttfring, "Birthing Room Gossip and the Construction of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern Satire and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England* (New York & London: Routledge, 2016): 125-64.

killing of animals, what else might they be hiding when they are ostensibly giving birth? Dekker's word choice portrays the inside performance as a scene of all-female erotic pleasure. The Egyptian women's "Skeans under their mantles" mimic phallic objects, suggesting that what they are hiding is their gender and sexual perversion.[22] Furthermore, the "Ring" that the women "cast themselves into" activates the common pun on vagina, intimating the potential of female homoeroticism. Thus, what the outside "actresses" are hiding is another theater – one whose participants, like the participants in the birthing room, are agnostic towards the gaze of English patriarchal authority, unconcerned with anything but the pleasure of their all-female company. By displacing the burden of deceitfulness onto Egyptian women, Dekker obscures the existence of deceitful *English* mothers. Indeed, the latter must be temporarily ignored or suppressed for his complaint about Gypsies' foreignness to register as valid. In choosing to define Egyptians in relationship to practices that are also English, Dekker reveals his deep-seated ambivalence about English culture – particularly, English women's sexuality.

Virginal Mothers

While the legal and ethnographic texts discussed above reveal England's impulse to expunge Egyptians from both the physical and imaginative boundaries of England, other texts selectively incorporated Egypt into the fabric of what it meant to be English. Representations of Egypt in early modern English literature reflect responses that vary from disgust and fear to admiration and seamless appropriation.[23] On the one hand, Aemilia Lanyer points to Cleopatra as

[22] Iyengar, 175.
[23] For an overview of representations of Cleopatra in England see Lucy Hughes-Hallet, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams, and Distortions* and Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra*. For an overview of the responses to Egypt see Timbers, '*The Damned Fraternitie*.'

an example of lust and irreligiosity, contrasting her emperor-ensnaring "Beautie and defects" to the inner virtue and piety of her patron, the Countess of Cumberland.[24] On the other hand, traditions of upholding Cleopatra as a model of femininity are present as early as Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* and Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrons* (1582). Chaucer and Bentley each name Cleopatra as a positive female role model for English women. Thus, privileging understandings of Cleopatra that degrade Egyptian femininity risks painting over the more nuanced understanding of these figures that existed through the early part of the seventeenth century.

Often, the difference between a text that expunges Egyptian femininity and one that embraces it pivots on its attitude towards female sexuality. Dekker's portrayal of Egyptian women's deviant sexuality and trickery adds to the racialized fear he wishes to instill in his readers. In this way, racial fear fed on the English patriarchal need to categorize mothers as "good" or "bad," "pure" or "impure."[25] In English treatments of Egyptian femininity, the paradoxical desire for an asexual, or virginal, maternity helped deepen the gap between acceptable and unacceptable Egyptians. For example, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* a text well known for its representation of feminine types, presents both sides of the imagined binary between the sexually deviant Egyptian mother and the idealized, asexual Egyptian mother.[26] The former is presented in Book I, Canto I in the figure of Error, whose monstrous birthing ritual Spenser likens to the spontaneous generation of hermaphrodites along Egypt's Nile River:

> As when old father *Nilus* gins to swell
> With timely pride above the *Aegyptian* vale,
> His fattie waves do fertile slime outwell,

[24] Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (Oxford University Press, 1993), lines 209-224.
[25] I discuss, and problematize, this phenomenon in further depth in chapter V.
[26] *The Spenser Encyclopedia* describes "two Egypts: the evil Egypt of biblical tradition and the venerated ancient Egypt of Horapollo's recently discovered *Hieroglyphica* and of the Hermetic renaissance." Brooks-Davies, 233.

> And overflow each plaine and lowly dale:
> But when his later spring gins to avale,
> Huge heapes of mudd he leaves, wherein there breed
> Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male
> And partly female of his fruitfull seed;
> Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.[27]

By describing the Nile as a scene of gender and sexual chaos, Spenser can leverage Egypt to incriminate Error. Error's cross-gendered identification with "old Father Nilus" makes her reproduction both foreign and grotesque. In turn, Egypt's identification with Error further embeds English prejudices towards Egypt into England's national literary project. Spenser repeats the process of racialization in Dekker's text, allowing English fears of deviant maternity to position Egypt as the antagonist in his heroic narrative. However, Error's grotesque, Nile-like maternity does not prevent Spenser from later re-turning to Egypt in Book V, where he ultimately presents Isis, the Egyptian goddess of maternity, as a model of chaste femininity. Just before rescuing Artegall from the Amazons, Britomart spends a night amongst the chaste, sober, and vegetarian priests of the Temple of Isis. There, she has a dream vision in which Isis gives birth to a lion after a crocodile "so neare her drew,/ That of his game she soone enwombed grew."[28] At first, Britomart is tempted to shun the image of Egyptian maternity she encounters; she initially finds her dream vision "uncouth" and "fraught with melancholy." It is only when one of Isis' priests interprets it, informing her that she, too, is destined to become a mother and claim "the just heritage/ Of [her] sires Crowne" that Britomart accepts the vision's consistency with her British legacy.[29] The contrast between the Egyptian maternities of Error and Isis is

[27] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, eds Thomas P Roche and C. Patrick O'Donnell (London: Penguin Books, 1987): I.i.21.
[28] Ibid, V.vii.16.
[29] Ibid, V. vii. 16-24.

striking. While Error's reproduction is portrayed as wild, excessive, Isis' reproduction is contained and asexual, making her an adequate model for Spenser's chaste heroine.

By presenting Egypt in proximity to maternity, Spenser allows Egyptianness to define his various models of female sexuality and vice versa. In a text whose nationalist impulse is made explicit, Spenser asks readers to both reject and incorporate Egypt into their English virtues, using female sexuality as a litmus test for determining which Egyptian mothers conform to English standards. Spenser's declaration of his intent "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" is sutured by a set of gendered and racialized values that are historically and nationally specific.[30] While the English could admire ancient Egypt and, at times, fold it into their origin story, the racialization of early modern Egyptians limited their attachment and produced ambivalence towards Egyptianness. In Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and elsewhere, this ambivalence was often expressed and explored through the ambivalence the English felt toward maternity.

The Multiple Meanings of Egyptian Maternity

While it is tempting to point to Spenser's admiration of Egypt as evidence of England's relative tolerance towards cultural others in the period, I posit here that the ambivalent, or even ostensibly conflicting feelings attached to Egyptian femininity were part of a highly productive strategy for England's national and imperialist identity. In doing so, I follow scholars such as Kyle Grady and Geraldine Heng, who seek to expand rather than limit the types of evidence that constitute premodern racial thinking. Heng explicitly rejects definitions of "race" that privilege cultural or biological alterity and insists instead on defining race in terms of "its *function*, or

[30] Ibid, "A Letter of the Authors," pg 15.

instrumentality in a historical period."[31] By shifting her attention from race's *content* to its *function*, Heng accounts for the illogical, inconsistent, or incommensurate manifestations of English national boundaries in medieval romance. According to Heng, it is through engaging in "cultural fantasy" that romances make intelligible medieval England's tacit national and imperial agendas.[32] Similarly, Grady critiques what he calls the "pre-racial orientation" he identifies in certain scholarship. To Grady, those who point to Othello's high social standing or religion as evidence of the period's undeveloped racial consciousness demonstrate "a pervasive misconception that racialism is unambiguous."[33] Demonstrating that modern discourses of "post-racialism" stick to prominent black male figures such as Colin Powell, Grady illustrates how equivocal attitudes towards black individuals are "actually characteristic of regimes of racial intolerance."[34] The ability of Spenser to see Isis as part of England's lineage — to see the goddess as an *English* mother — occurs only under the condition that she appear as the "right kind" of Egyptian – the kind that resembles Spenser's preconceived understanding of virtuous femininity. Thus, Spenser's Isis resembles Othello and Colin Powell, who Grady warns "encourages doubts about the operation of comprehensive racism."[35]

My above analysis of Egyptianness in Dekker's and Spenser's texts also confirms Marjorie Rubright's argument that the similarities between ethnic groups are often as useful as the differences between them in the production of ethnic imaginaries.[36] In *Doppelgänger Dilemmas,* Rubright deploys what she calls a "double-vision analytic" to capture both the

[31] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 13.
[32] Ibid, 14.
[33] Kyle Grady, "Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol 67, no 1 (2016): 68-83; esp. 69.
[34] Ibid, 69.
[35] Ibid, 70.
[36] Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

proximity and distance of the Dutch in the early modern English cultural imagination. Rubright insists on seeing the creation of English identity as an ongoing *process,* an understanding that allows her to challenge the centrality of "difference" as the *sine qua non* of ethnic formation. In Rubright's words:

> Understood in this way, ethnicity pressures the self-evidence of our widely held conviction that social identity "lies in difference" by calling attention to a correlative logic that reveals that identity formation requires identifications *with* —a process that is as likely to slide toward identification *as* as it is to backtrack in the form of a disavowal of the "Other."[37]

Spenser's description of the Error, like the descriptions of the Dutch that Rubright reads, is unreconcilably slippery, threatening to slide into the category of "Englishness" despite Spenser's attempt to create distance. Indeed, the availability of "Egyptians" to serve as the receptacle for English writers' intolerance stems precisely from the uncomfortable *similarity* between England and Egypt. Spenser could leverage this similarity to simultaneously define Egyptians as deviant and cleanse Englishness by projecting its native cultural "defects" onto foreign bodies. Similarly, Egypt stands for the parts of English culture that Dekker would rather renounce, so he isolates them from the English behind the insurmountable walls of the birthing room. As he does so, the fear caused by the opacity of childbirth is displaced from England along with those supposed "Egyptians," which are themselves a mere construct of the English writer. Put figuratively, Dekker's "Egyptians" are bred of English mothers.

Accounting for the work of similarity, however, does not mean discounting the real historical conditions of oppression to which early modern Egyptians were subjected by the English.[38] While I aim to emphasize the flexibility of *Englishness* in their real and imaginary

[37] Rubright, 29.

[38] Frances Timbers argues that early modern English discourses about Gypsies and Egyptians were based *entirely* on anxieties about English identity and nationality rather than on real, non-English bodies. To Timbers, the English invented the term "Gypsy" to foreignize groups of English vagrants rather than to describe a *real* ethnic group.

encounters with Egyptianness, I also acknowledge that applying Rubright's Dutch-inspired "double-vision analytic" to the Egyptians reveals the uneven barriers to England's identification with outsiders — barriers that are shaped by nationality, skin color, and religion. While the Dutch could sometimes be granted "denizenship" — the ability to own English land while remaining a non-citizen — Egyptians were legally barred from English soil.[39] While the Dutch physically resembled the English to the point that outsiders were prone to confuse the two groups, Egyptians were imagined to be physiologically distinct. English people could disguise themselves as Egyptian only by painting their faces to appear darker.[40] Finally, while the Dutch who migrated to England shared England's Protestant faith, Egyptians were considered variously Muslim, pagan, or Jewish.[41]

Indeed, Egypt offers unique insight into England's imaginative interactions with outsiders, forcing us to account for the role of ambivalence in England's colonialist project. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the celebration and appropriation of ancient Egyptian culture by Shakespeare depended on the erasure of the legalized oppression of contemporary Egyptian or Gypsy people. Heng's attention to the *desires* of romances attunes her to the function of *pleasure* in cultural identity formation. According to Heng, the pleasures of fantasy when encountered in fictive literature establish patterns of public feeling that structure interactions with cultural or

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While I admire Timbers's astute analysis of the way in which English anxieties about their own culture colored their portrayal of Egyptians, I would not erase the impact these anxieties had on real foreign bodies. Timbers, '*The Damned Fraternitie*.'

[39] Rubright, 11. For a useful overview of the laws affecting Egyptians in England, see Iyengar, "Artificial Negroes," 175-80 and Netzloff, "'Counterfeit Egyptians' and Imagined Borders."

[40] Rubright, "Doppelgänger Dilemmas: The Crisis of Anglo-Dutch Interchangeability in the East Indies and the Imperfect Redress of Performance," 189-234; Dekker writes that the Egyptians seem to have "all the yellow Jawndis" and that they resemble "Tawny Mooores bastardes" because they make their faces dirty by painting them. Dekker, H2. John Cowell summarizes England's legal definition of Egyptians as "as counterfeit kind of Rogue, that being English or Welsh people, accompany themselves together, disguising themselves in strange robes, blacking their faces and bodies, and framing to themselves an unknown language." John Cowell, *The Interpreter*, Bb1.

[41] Rubright, 8.

racial others.[42] Therefore, I show how the pleasurable feelings elicited by Shakespeare's Egyptian mother – along with the anxiety, rage, or disgust – are productive for England's construction of racial and ethnic boundaries. In *Antony and Cleopatra,* the desire to enlist Cleopatra's maternity was part of, rather than antithetical to, England's consolidation of its national identity. Shakespeare's play uses Egypt to distinguish good Egyptian mothers from bad ones, selectively incorporating certain forms of Egyptian maternity while rejecting those forms deemed undesirable.

Experiencing Ambivalence in *Antony and Cleopatra*

If in Spenser's text conflicting views of Egyptian maternity are spread out across cantos and plots, in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* Cleopatra and her associates bear the weight of Egypt's ambiguity so that ambivalence becomes a constitutive part of experiencing the play. Shakespeare's Cleopatra serves as a microcosm for the complex meanings attached to Egyptian maternity in English culture. As Janet Adelman has argued, the play resists critics' ability to derive any singular meaning from its plot. Instead, it produces "a series of reports and judgments" through contradictory character descriptions and competing points of view, drawing the audience into this web of judgments.[43] Building off Adelman, I argue that the play's strategic movement – between geographies, value systems, character perspectives, and meanings – is driven by its awareness of English ambivalence towards maternity and Egypt. In other words, if Spenser's text is uninterested in the contradictions it employs, Shakespeare's text interrogates them. In what follows, I make sense of this morally ambiguous play by demonstrating how it

[42] Heng, 5
[43] Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on* Antony and Cleopatra (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1973): 39.

leverages the maternity of Cleopatra to explore England's complicated attachment to Egyptianness.

Understanding *Antony and Cleopatra* as a play about exploring ambivalent feelings could explain scholars' contradictory conclusions about Shakespeare's treatment of Cleopatra.[44] Indeed, affect has played a large part in scholarship on the play, which has consistently been divided on the question of how the play *feels*; its "mingling of pain and pleasure" has confounded attempts to label it generically or to speculate on its early reception, about which we know very little.[45] Recently, those that see the play as contributing to the development of early modern England's racialism and colonialist imagination tend to emphasize the combination of racism, sexism, and xenophobia that contribute to Cleopatra's characterization.[46] Joyce MacDonald, Arthur Little, and Ania Loomba insist – correctly, I believe – on reading Cleopatra through early modern discourses of racialized blackness and the alienating gaze of English colonialism.[47] John Archer provides a nuanced history of England's view of Egypt, including England's long-standing recognition of Egyptian preeminence to Greco-Roman mythology, before ultimately arguing that Shakespeare's play colors over this history as it "consolidates the fantasy of race, rendering it monumental, making it history."[48] However, despite the clear

[44] My argument here bears some resemblance to that of Constance Brown Kuriyama, who, however, turns to psychoanalysis to understand the play's paradoxical treatment of Cleopatra's eroticism, arguing that "the source of the ambivalence lies in the nature of Oedipal attachment." Kuriyama, "The Mother of the World: A Psychoanalytic interpretation of Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra,'" *English Literary Renaissance*, vol 7, no 3 (1977): 324-51, esp. 331.
[45] Kuriyama, 324. For a nuanced overview of the ambivalences in early twentieth-century scholarship on the play, see Kuriyama, 324-8.
[46] I borrow the term "racialism" from Kim Hall, who employs it to describe the white-black color hierarchy that she locates across literary, non-literary, and aesthetic objects in the period. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
[47] See Joyce MacDonald, "Sex, Race, and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 45-67, Arthur Little, "(Re)Posing with Cleopatra," *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000): 143-76, and Loomba, "The Imperial Romance of *Antony and Cleopatra*."
[48] John Archer, *Old Worlds*, 62.

implications of racialist and colonialist thought in Shakespeare's play, many scholars insist on seeing its ending as a triumph for Cleopatra and Egypt. While some feminist scholars have argued that the play fuels early modern concerns about the danger of women's sexuality, others have argued that the play celebrates Cleopatra's sexual agency.[49] Linda Charnes attributes Cleopatra's victory to her ability to manipulate the voyeuristic gaze of the Romans by taking control of her performance of her Egyptian self.[50] Jyotsna Singh argues that the play leverages Cleopatra, with all her lasciviousness and sexual authority, to celebrate the "social and ontological instability" the theater makes possible.[51] Indeed, the play's racialization and sexualization of Cleopatra does not preempt her honorable burial beside Antony at the play's end. Caesar's victory does not occur at the expense of cultural outsiders, as it does in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* or *The Tempest*. Cleopatra's fear of seeing "[s]ome squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness/ I' the posture of a whore" is circumvented by her successful staging of her suicide – a feat that even Antony blunders. Both she and Antony are celebrated with "high order" and "great solemnity."[52] Even Ania Loomba, who elsewhere claims that "[f]or the Romans, an identification between Cleopatra and Egypt was strategically necessary in order to highlight an absolute division between Egypt and Rome" later admits that "in the end [Cleopatra]

[49] Jonathan Gil Harris offers a productive example of the former category of feminist scholarship when he argues that the play stages the danger and attraction of Cleopatra's orientalized sexuality only to problematize the narcissism of men. Harris, "'Narcissus in thy Face': Roman Desire and the Difference It Fakes," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol 45, no 4 (1994): 408-25. For a useful overview of feminist scholarship on the play, see Singh, 99-102.
[50] Charnes argues that, unlike Cleopatra, Antony fails in this endeavor to control his self-performance, whose identity becomes "unconstituted" as he "sojourns emotionally, imaginatively, and literally between Rome and Egypt (and the two subject positions they offer and mutually critique)." Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 103-47, qtd 113.
[51] Singh, 102.
[52] All references to the play are from William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, Stephen Greenblatt et al, eds. (New York & London: WW Norton & Company, 2016), 5.2.220-1; 5.2.361. Hereafter, I will cite line numbers only. On the other hand, Charnes points out that this honorable ceremony serves Octavius's purposes as much as it serves Cleopatra. According to Charnes, Octavius erases the memory of their threat to his order by re-writing their story as a love story. Charnes, 145.

becomes *both* the goddess Isis, with an asp at her breast, as well as Antony's Roman wife."[53] The effort to reconcile the play's multiple and conflicting attitudes towards Cleopatra, then, continues to lead to a scholarly impasse.

Meanwhile, few scholars have questioned the impact maternity may have had on early moderns' experiences of Cleopatra. Previous scholarship on Cleopatra's maternity has been almost exclusively anchored in feminist psychoanalysis, which tends to see Cleopatra as the manifestation of the psychic crises of men – albeit in very different ways.[54] For example, Janet Adelman argues that Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* dramatizes Antony's struggle to incorporate Cleopatra-as-mother into his subjectivity. To Adelman, the play stands out from other Shakespearean tragedies insofar as it concludes with Antony's subjective closure, as he ultimately achieves unity with Cleopatra through death. According to Adelman, Shakespeare portrays Cleopatra as an endlessly bountiful mother – "the potential site of an idealized male selfhood."[55] The positive potential Adelman ascribes to Cleopatra differs dramatically from Cynthia Marshall's understanding of the character as divorced from the maternal role. Marshall traces Antony's melancholia to his failure to mourn and incorporate a *father* figure, arguing that the play tasks Antony not with *incorporating* Cleopatra but with *abjecting* her. [56] Thus, to

[53] Loomba, 114; 133.

[54] A notable exception to this is Chris Laoutaris's work on the play in the context of maternal memorials and the gendered histrionic of death. I will discuss Laoutaris work in further detail below. Laoutaris, "Speaking Stones: Memory and Maternity in the Theatre of Death," *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises of Conception in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008): 212-267. Another major psychoanalytic work on the play is Coppélia Khan's "Antony's Wound," *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997): 76-93. Khan's chapter focuses less on Antony's relationship to Cleopatra than on his homosocial rivalry with Caesar.

[55] Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays from Hamlet to the Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 175.

[56] Cynthia Marshall, "Man of Steel Done Got the Blues: Melancholic Subversion of Presence in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 44, no 4 (1993): 385-408, esp. 396.

Marshall, Cleopatra troubles Antony's subjective unity not because she represents his lost mother figure, but because he cannot fully abject her.[57]

The disagreement between Adelman and Marshall points to the heart of the critical impasse that prompts my reading of the play. I pause on this debate not to resolve it in favor of one critic or the other, but to illustrate the tension that pervades not only Shakespeare's play but also English culture at large. That is, English attempts to define themselves in relationship to Egypt bear a striking resemblance to Antony's dual impulses to both incorporate and abject Cleopatra. According to Julia Kristeva, while the (m)other is outside of the subject, the abject is *part* of the subject – the part that the subject denies.[58] However, teasing apart the signs of the abject from those of the lost mother presents a critical challenge. Indeed, Kristeva sees the process of abjection as the stemming from the same "primal repression" that begins the subject's "earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her."[59] In other words, the process of abjection and the incorporation of the mother begin with the same instinct, designed to protect the subject from threats to its "identity, system, order."[60] Thus, the question of whether to see Cleopatra as abject or (m)other depends on one's willingness to see Antony as related to or inherently separated from her. In other words, one must decide: is Cleopatra Antony's gendered (as well as cultural, national, and ethnic) other, or is she a projection of him?

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[57] Here, Marshall cites Julia Kristeva, who warns critics not to elide the maternal and the feminine. Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987): 234-64. Marshall, 396.
[58] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Press, 1982).
[59] Ibid, 12-3, emphasis original.
[60] Ibid, 4. Kristeva describes the "primal repression" as "the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat" even in the absence of an object. According to Kristeva, this is a protective strategy to fight "maternal anguish, unable to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic." Ibid, 12.

Such a question, I would argue, can only be answered through recourse to the historical context of the play. The irreconcilability between Adelman and Marshall's opposed psychoanalytic narratives occurs because neither account for the complex way in which Cleopatra's identity is constructed by her Egyptian otherness and her maternity simultaneously. The question of Antony's psychic relationship to Cleopatra is also a question of the early moderns' conceptualization of England's relationship to Egypt, both ancient and contemporary. The psychic processes of abjection and incorporation both blur the lines between self and other. Both the abject and the (m)other are psychologically destabilizing prior to the subject's final resolution of its relationships to them. As Antony (and, I would say, the play as a whole) oscillates between resistance and attraction to Cleopatra, it remains unclear from the outside if this struggle will end in abjection or incorporation. Furthermore, it remains unclear which role – abjected other or nurturing mother – would best service Antony's (and the play's) internal unity. Psychoanalysis's rigid assignment of social roles to its various objects of analysis, including its propensity to define these social roles only in terms of gender identity, obscures the fluidity and illogic of early moderns' relationships to both maternity and Egyptianness.[61] Cleopatra's intersectional identity places her always in a liminal state, resembling the pre-abjected self or pre-incorporated (m)other, but with no clear end in sight. Only by examining her not as a psychoanalytic object, but as a character immersed in a nexus of overlapping, historically contingent discourses can we account for her complexity and internal contradictions. What follows thus responds to scholars' conflicting interpretations of Shakespeare's treatment of

[61] It should be noted that not all psychoanalytic readings of Cleopatra's maternity fall into this trap of rigidity. Kuriyama, for example, uses psychoanalysis to explore the play's ambivalence. Kuriyama, "The Mother of the World."

Cleopatra's race and sexuality by reading the play *vis-a-vis* the period's ambivalence towards (Egyptian) maternity.

Reproducing Nilus

In the early modern period, English ambivalence towards Egypt and maternity often coalesced around depictions of the Nile River. As I mentioned above, Spenser describes the Nile as a location of sexual excess and chaos, and he borrows from his Nile's vileness to construct the monstrosity of Error's maternity. However, while in *The Faerie Queene* the Nile appears as unambiguously contrary to Spenser's definition of virtuous femininity, the Nile of Shakespeare's play is used to invoke both positive and negative responses to Egypt by leveraging the rhetoric of maternity. Furthermore, the multiplicity of Shakespeare's Nile makes legible the play's equivocal attitudes towards Egypt and female sexuality.[62]

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the rhetoric of humoral theory draws together Cleopatra's intersecting identities as both mother and Egyptian, particularly through comparisons between Cleopatra's humors and the conditions of the Nile River. According to humoral theory, all bodies were porous and individuals' humoral balance was continuously subject to environmental stimuli. Under this paradigm, maternal bodies, understood as inadequate defense mechanisms for fetuses and the patriarchal lineages that depended on them, often became subject to intense regulation, scorn, or satiric ridicule.[63] Women's bodies, like the overflowing Nile, were

[62] Kuriyama also examines the role of the Nile in shaping the play's attitude towards erotic desire. However, while she argues that the Nile represents erotic *excess*, I demonstrate how Shakespeare also uses the river to evoke more positive attitudes towards Cleopatra's sexuality and maternity. Kuriyama, "The Mother of the World," 336.
[63] See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

portrayed as grotesquely open and porous within scientific and imaginative discourses alike.[64] Gail Kern Paster, for example, argues that references to female incontinence in city comedies denote cultural fears of women's inability to control their bodily boundaries. As she shows, the early moderns forged a logical association between women's corporal "leakiness" and a range of other female sins: gossiping, drinking, adultery, etc. Paster identifies "a semiology of excretion in which an ostensibly natural behavior becomes thoroughly implicated in a complex structure of class and gender differences."[65] "Leakiness," then, is a sign of women's inability to control not only their bladders but also a range of their physiological impulses: sexual, emotional, and spiritual.

Antony and Cleopatra creates a semiotic association between the "leakiness" of women's bodies and the overabundant fluidity of the Nile River. The play explicitly associates the Nile's overflow with fertility, female sexuality, and reproduction, using the river to guide audience expectations about Egyptian femininity. The first of such moments occurs in Act 1, Scene 2 as the Soothsayer reads the palm of Iras.

> Iras: There's a palm presages chastity, if nothing else.
>
> Charmian: E'en as the o'erflowing Nilus presageth famine.
>
> Iras: (*to Charmian*): Go, you wild bedfellow, you cannot soothsay.
>
> Charmian: Nay, if an oily palm be not fruitful prognostication, I cannot scratch mine ear.[66]

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[64] While Paster uses the word "grotesque" in reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal work, I resist her application of Bakhtin's theory of the "carnivalesque" to describe such portrayals of "leaky" women, which seem to serve, first and foremost, as mechanisms for the discipline and control of women's bodies. In contrast, Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque calls into question norms for proper – in this case, properly gendered – behavior. Thus, I employ "grotesque" in a more colloquial sense: to refer to the potential for Cleopatra's speech to inspire horror or disgust in early modern audiences. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Paster, 2.

[65] Paster, 34.

[66] 1.2.44-9.

The humor of Charmian's retort depends on the audience's recognition that the Nile's overflow leads to a bountiful harvest, rather than famine. The scene suggests that at least a portion of the audience would have been familiar with the Nile and its role in Egyptian agriculture. Furthermore, in referring to the Nile in a sarcastic rebuttal to Iras's claim to chastity, Charmian sets up a connection between the river and female sexuality. The wetness of the Nile mimics the wetness of Iras's palm, a signifier of her sexual vivacity according to early modern humoral theory. The Nile's overflow here presages the overflow of female sexual desire.

Cleopatra herself frequently describes the Nile as "leaky" or excessive. For instance, she attacks the messenger who informs her that Antony has married Octavia, "Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt./ Melt Egypt into Nile! And kindly creatures/ Turn all to serpents."[67] In this speech, Cleopatra states her callous intent to punish the messenger despite his innocence. Here, the Nile is by implication associated with fertility; the close connection between her sentences suggests that it represents a breeding ground for serpents as well as an agent of moral decadence. Cleopatra, whose jealous rage is signified by the flood of the Nile, embodies unregulated female desire. Like the porous female body and Cleopatra's amoral emotions, the Nile is terrifyingly beyond the control of men. Facing the Nile, reason holds no sway; innocents are just as likely as guilty persons to be punished.

This association between the Nile and Cleopatra's insuppressible will appears again in Act 3, Scene 13 when Cleopatra attempts to pacify the jealousy of Antony after he overhears her vowing loyalty to Caesar's messenger Thidias. However, unlike the previous reference to the

[67] 2.5.76-8.

Nile, here the River elicits an ambivalent response to Cleopatra's maternity.[68] Following Antony's accusation that she is behaving coldly towards him, Cleopatra replies:

> …Ah, dear, if I be so,
> From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
> And poison it in the source, and the first stone
> Drop in my neck. As it determine, so
> Dissolve my life! The next Caesarion smite!
> Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
> Together with my brave Egyptians all,
> By the discandying of this pelleted storm
> Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
> Have buried them for prey![69]

Here, Cleopatra swears by her own death and that of Caesarion, her first born son by Julius Caesar, that she still loves Antony. Cleopatra's wish is for her body to give birth not to children but to poisonous hail, which would then drop through her mouth and into her womb, killing both mother and child. Once again, the Nile appears in this context as destructive and grotesque. The short passage continuously inverts the process of normative reproduction; Cleopatra's consumption of the poisonous fruit of her womb parallels the Nile's consumption of her children. The insects of the Nile erase the "memory" of Cleopatra's royal Egyptian lineage from historical record, leaving the bodies of her children buried without graves.

The callousness with which Cleopatra refers to the death of her children may cause Cleopatra's maternity to seem equally grotesque. Cleopatra's body is terrifyingly "open" in this image, exposed to poison and insects that threaten both her and her child.[70] On the other hand,

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[68] By reading Cleopatra's associations with the Nile River as expressing the play's ambivalence about her, I depart from Mary Nyquist's totalizing view of Cleopatra as a typical barbaric tyrant. Nyquist sees Cleopatra as "excessive, *overdetermined*" – a characterization that Nyquist says allows her to challenge Roman republicanism, as well as "accepted bourgeoise domestic and marital codes." In contrast, I reconcile English discourses of ideal maternity with the ambivalence of the Nile River in the play. Mary Nyquist, "'Profuse, proud Cleopatra': 'Barbarism' and Female rule in Early Modern English Republicansim," *Women's Studies*, vol 24 (1994): 85-130, esp. 97.

[69] 3.13.158-67.

[70] Mary Crane argues that when Cleopatra imagines herself as open to the world, she is reflecting a broader Egyptian belief system that is rooted in Aristotelian thought. Crane shows how Egyptians' belief in their connectedness with the world contrasts with the Romans' Cartesian-like belief in the separation between the mind and the body. Crane,

Cleopatra intends for the extremity of this image to express the extent of her love rather than a real fantasy that she wants fulfilled. In this sense, the loss she describes points to that which she values most: her life, her throne, and her posterity – all emblematized by her children. By forging a semiotic connection between the Nile and her maternity, Cleopatra takes control of the presentation of both the famous Egyptian river and her maternal values. The word "discandying," one of Shakespeare's lexical inventions, appears twice in *Antony and Cleopatra* and does not exist beyond this play. Beside its reference above, the word's only other appearance occurs in Antony's lament that the Roman peoples' "wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets/ On blossoming Caesar."[71] Thus, in both moments, the term is associated with the decadence of royal authority. In her remarkable philological examination of "discandying," Jennifer Park shows how "candying," a process of preserving food using sugar, was a rising trend in early modern households; in the period, "discandying," meaning to melt or dissolve, would have triggered, more precisely, a sense of loss for something intended to be preserved.[72] In the play, while the preservation of Antony's authority depends on Roman loyalty, Cleopatra's authority is bound to her maternity. In this speech, the fate of her offspring precipitates that of her "brave Egyptians all"; one cannot wish for the demise of one without the other. Both the Nile and Cleopatra serve as symbols of Egypt, yet here, Cleopatra posits the river as her royal enemy. The Nile's unbounded destruction is complicated by Cleopatra's implicit assertion of the value of "the memory of her womb."

"Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Comparative Drama*, vol 43, no 1 (2009): 1-17.

[71] 4.12.22-3.

[72] Jennifer Park places "discandying" within the play's many references to *food* and *corporal* preservation, arguing that Shakespeare presents Cleopatra as an expert on both subjects. Park, "Discandying Cleopatra: Preserving Cleopatra's Infinite Variety in Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra,'" *Studies in Philology*, vol 113, no 3 (2016): 595-633.

Cleopatra's relationship to the Nile is further complicated by Antony's positive esteem for the river. Indeed, Antony's relationship with the Nile is predominately one of desire – erotic and economic – and admiration. He affectionately refers to Cleopatra as his "serpent of the old Nile," positing the Egyptian asp as erotic object. However, to Antony, the Nile is not a source of chaos or death, but a scene of intense ecological regulation. In Rome, Antony raves about the Nile to his fellow triumvirs:

> *Antony* : (*to Caesar*) Thus do they sir. They take the flow o' the Nile
> By certain scales i' th' pyramid. They know,
> By th' height, the lowness, or the mean, if dearth
> Or foison follow. The higher Nilus swells,
> The more it promises. As it ebbs, the seedsman
> Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
> And shortly comes to harvest.
>
> *Lepidus*: Y' have strange serpents there?
>
> *Antony*: Ay Lepidus.
>
> *Lepidus*: Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun. So is your crocodile.
>
> *Antony*: They are so.[73]

In this exchange, Antony associates the Nile with a positive understanding of female fertility, as its waters are "seeded" by a "seedsman." The Nile's timeliness, productivity, and manageability could make it an emblem for the ideal English mother. However, Antony's description of the regulated Nile also points to its inverse: the image of the Nile out of control. Antony's condoning of the regulation of the Nile cannot erase the "slime and ooze" that threatens sexual chaos or death rather than harvest. Antony's use of "seedsman" suggests a bawdy pun on "seed" or "semen," while Lepidus's comment that Antony's "sun" breeds serpents and crocodiles is a reference to Antony's excessive sexual heat. Lepidus' obsessive repetition of the possessive

[73] 2.7.17-28.

"your" is both praise and accusation; assigning this possession does little to answer the question, posed between Adelman and Marshall above, of whether Egypt, Cleopatra, and the Nile are Antony's destiny or his biggest character flaw. I posit that the play insists on seeing them as both.

The Nile, as a symbol of both Egyptianness and maternity, is contaminated by the ambivalence with which early moderns treated both these categories in the period. The river's ambivalence leads Susan Shapiro to center it in her explanation of the "brightness" of the tragedy. Shapiro sees the Nile as an emblem for the paradoxical precept, underlying the entire play, that excess and destruction precipitate life and redemption.[74] While I applaud Shapiro's nuanced treatment of the Nile's symbolic excess, I want to put pressure on the cleanness of her narrative, which creates a causal relationship between suffering and redemption, the Nile's flooding and its fertility. Cleopatra, the Nile, and Egypt circulate as signifiers that weave in and out of line with English values as they undergo judgment by the various characters of the play. The reception of Antony's speech above is revealing. While the stage direction instructs Antony to address Caesar, it is Lepidus, not Caesar, who responds. Caesar's silence in this moment can be interpreted dramatically as disinterest, annoyance or disapproval. Lepidus's drunkenness in this scene would seem to make this interpretation even more plausible. Whether the audience is meant to identify with Caesar's silence or to hang on Antony's words is dependent on several dramatic and cultural factors, the results of which are impossible to predict. Indeed, the audience's inability to reconcile the conflicting nexus of fear and desire that the play attaches to the Nile is precisely the point. Cleopatra's maternity, like the Nile and Egypt in general, is

[74] See Susan Shapiro, "'To "O'erflow the Measure': The Paradox of the Nile in "Antony and Cleopatra," *Studies in the Humanities*, vol 4, no 2 (1975): 36-42.

sometimes licensed and sometimes condemned in the play, and the audience is asked to reside within this confusion.

Connected Histories

Knowledge of the Nile and the mythos surrounding it circulated in seventeenth-century England through a plethora of widely-read travel literature such as that by Purchas or Leo Africanus.[75] Purchas describes the Nile as "famous," suggesting not only a wide familiarity with the river but also a wide captivation with it.[76] Indeed, he devotes so many pages to the river that he feels the need to apologize for his verbosity:

> Let it not then be imputed to me as a tedious officiousnesse, if I longer detaine the Reader (otherwise delighted with the view of those rills which hence have flowed among the Greeke and Latine Poets and Philosophers) in surveying these Aegyptian Fountaines and well-springs, whence have issued especially a deluge of Superstition, that in elder times drowned all the neighbouring parts of the world.[77]

While Purchas critiques the "Superstition" that Egyptians bring to bear on the river, his sense of fascination with it remains. Significantly, Purchas legitimates his interest in the Nile by positioning himself beside a long line of Greek and Latin scholars who studied "these Aegyptian Fountaines and well-springs." By doing so, Purchas can claim his interest in the Nile as part of England's licensed historical inheritance. By aligning himself with Rome, Purchas joins the company of England's royalty and cultural elite; recall that James I famously described himself as "The New Aeneas." The history of how classical ideas and aesthetics invaded Renaissance

[75] See Africanus, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, especially 335-6.
[76] Purchas, 469.
[77] Purchas, 469.

England's art, literature, science, and culture has, of course, been well documented.[78] However, what is important to reiterate here is the fact that Egypt also entered the English imagination both alongside and through this investment in appropriating Hellenistic culture.[79]

Shakespeare's knowledge of the Nile River offers but one example of how Egyptian culture influenced England's literary project. The play works to fold elements of Egyptianness into its value system even as it engages with questions of English nationalism and empire. In this sense, the play offers an example of what Sanjay Subrahmanyam calls "connected history," a way of writing world history that accounts for the historical permeability of cultures and ideas. Subrahmanyam opposes this historiographic approach to "comparative histories," which, unlike "connected histories," creates a dialogue between two entities that are already distinctly defined in opposition to one another.[80] Instead, Subrahmanyam insists on considering the ways in which non-European cultures prior to the eighteenth century influenced European thought as well as vice versa.[81] Jonathan Burton echoes the sentiment of "connected history," adding a critique of scholars who apply Said's notion of *Orientalism* backward onto early modern England's relationship with the Ottoman empire. Burton calls for a reconsideration of English writing on the Ottoman empire that accounts for England's real historical encounters with Ottoman bodies – encounters that enabled a *bi*lateral exchange of power and ideas. According to Burton, reading the relationship between the Ottomans and the English in terms of Said's *Orientalism* obfuscates

[78] See for example, Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
[79] For an overview of Egypt's influence in Western Europe, see James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).
[80] Thus, Sanjay Subrahmanyam's historiographic method is also opposed to the notion of area studies. He gives an overview of "connected history" in "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol 31, no 3 (1997): 735-62.
[81] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2011): 175.

the way in which these bilateral exchanges inevitably shaped English writers' portrayals of the Ottomans.[82]

To read *Antony and Cleopatra* through the method of "connected history" is to acknowledge the longstanding legacy of European and Egyptian encounters. For example, the Egyptian understanding of the idea that the Nile's flooding was a source of rebirth reflects Medieval and Renaissance Christianity's belief in the redemptive power of pain and suffering – an idea that I explored in my previous chapter. In the words of historian James Curl, "The Christian religion, it might be proposed, owes as much to the Nile as it does to the Jordon."[83] Furthermore, Herodotus' *Histories* (ca. 450 BC), which was among the classical texts translated into English in the early modern period, reinforces the idea of Egyptian precedence over Greco-Roman culture. This idea was made widely available in the early seventeenth century through Purchas's writings. As Purchas writes:

> And not in Religion alone, but in Policie, Philosophie, and Artes, the Grecians which would seeme the first Fathers of these things, have beene Disciples to the Egyptians, as *Am. Marcellinus,* and *D. Siculus*, *Plutarch*, and many others affirme. Hence *Orpheus*, *Musaus*, & *Homer* fetched their Theologie; *Lycurgus* and *Solon* their lawes; *Pythagoras*, *Plato*, *Anaxagoras*, *Eudoxus*, *Democritus*, *Daedalus*, here borrowed that knowledge for which the world hath euer since admired them.[84]

Antony's knowledge about the Nile's role in Egyptian agriculture and herpetology, then, could be understood as a reenactment of the pedagogical hierarchy that positions Egypt above Rome. Antony recognizes the complexity of Egyptian knowledge and culture and desires to claim it as his own through his erotic relationship with Cleopatra. Antony is, like Pythagoras and others before him, a student of Egypt. For all these reasons, the Nile River is a useful test case for

[82] Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).
[83] See Curl, *The Egyptian Revival,* 66.
[84] Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage,* 469.

examining the way in which Shakespeare leverages – or obscures – the connected history between England and Egypt to create the play's ambivalence towards Cleopatra's Egyptian femininity. *Antony and Cleopatra* both reenacts and obscures this history of exchange.

The connected history between Egypt and England also manifests itself in the early modern period through portrayals of Cleopatra and Isis, the latter of which I already analyzed in the context of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. It has long been taken as fact that the Greco-Roman gods were originally modeled after the Egyptian gods, Isis being the equivalent of the Greek Goddess Demeter, or Ceres, as she was known in Rome.[85] Cleopatra and Isis were frequently imagined in relation to figures of quintessential white femininity such as Lucrece, the Virgin Mary, and Elizabeth I.[86] Indeed, Arthur Little shows how contemporary artistic representations of Egyptian and English female figures drew heavily on one another.[87] Figures 1a and 1b and figures 2a and 2b illustrate the way in which artists could easily conceptualize Cleopatra as belonging amongst the ranks of other emblems of white femininity such as the Virgin Mary and Lucrece. In Andrea Solario's two paintings, Cleopatra mimics with the asp the Virgin's suckling of the Christ child.[88] In Guido Reni's paintings, the same model performs as both Lucrece and Cleopatra – literalizing Egypt's connection to Rome's origins.[89] If Lucrece's rape instigates the institutional founding of Rome, Cleopatra instigates its cultural genesis, as Egyptian thought traveled to Rome in the hands of the same philosophers early modern England embraced. [90]

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[85] Archer, *Old Worlds*, 27.
[86] Peter Erickson argues that "the cult of Elizabeth is a cult of whiteness." Erickson, "Representations of Blacks and Blackness in the Renaissance" *Criticism*, vol 35 (1993): 499-527, esp. 517. Also quoted in Little, "(Re)Posing with Cleopatra," 161.
[87] See Little, 157-76.
[88] Andrea Solario, *Cleopatra*, first half of the 16th century. Oil on canvas. Location unknown, private collection and *Madonna with the Green Cushion*, 1507. Oil on poplar. Paris, The Louvre.
[89] Guido Reni, *Cleopatra*, 1640-2. Oil on Canvas. Rome, Capitoline Gallery and *Lucrezia*, 1640-2. Oil on Canvas. Rome, Capitoline Gallery.
[90] Little also cites a similar pair of Guido Reni pieces. See page 170.

Meanwhile, counter-Reformation efforts in England and throughout Europe led to a reinvigoration of Marian iconography, much of which drew on Isian motifs such as crescent moons, roses, and fountains.[91]


Figure 1a (left): Cleopatra. *1b (right):* Madonna with the Green Cushion. *Both paintings are by Andrea Solario (1460-1524).*


Figure 2a (left): Cleopatra. *Figure 2b (right):* Lucrezia. *Both paintings are by Guido Reni (1575-1642).*

However, historians suggest that the connection between the Virgin Mary and Isis runs

[91] Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, 62-73.

even deeper, as elements of early Mariolatry began to mimic associations with Isis in the fourth century after the widespread destruction of pagan temples by Roman emperor Theodosius (d 395 AD).[92] For example, according to art historians, depictions of Isis suckling Horus such as the one in Figure 3 were ready models for the *Maria lactens* or "Nursing Mary," common in Egyptian Coptic art.[93] Mediterranean artists' ability to absorb Isian iconography into Christianity's Virgin Mary was not only convenient given the similarities between the two "Virgin Queens" but also necessary for the propagation of Christianity, which depended on the conversion of pagans.[94] In other words, Christianity depended on Egyptian paganism for its genesis as well as its survival.

[92] Ibid, 65
[93] Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Treasures of Coptic Art in the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006): 41-2; 109. Figure 3 features *Isis Suckling Horus*, Ptolemaic period. Granite. Museo Gregoriano Egizio, Vatican Museums, Vatican City. Also cited in Miri Rubin, *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea* (New York: Scala Arts Publishers, 2014): 28.
[94] Ibid, 69-71.

Figure 3 Isis Suckling Horus, *Ptolemaic period.*

Desiring Egyptian Knowledge in Shakespeare

As a performance and a text, *Antony and Cleopatra* provides a medium through which the English view Egypt — not in the reductive form of an exoticized other but as a thriving culture with a history of its own. Indeed, at times, Cleopatra uses rhetoric that gains meaning only through reference to Egyptian culture. For example, while Cleopatra expresses strong opinions about how she wants the Romans to treat her body after her death, she also thinks consciously about how her Egyptian subjects will read her corpse.[95] Worrying that her body will be touted before crowds of triumphant Romans as a sign of Caesar's victory, Cleopatra cries:

[95] My argument here continues that of Arthur Little, who also disrupts the relative positionality of Egypt as performer and Rome as spectator. Drawing on Judith Butler, Little argues that Cleopatra *mimics* Rome's whiteness, revealing it to be necessarily performative (162). According to Little, Cleopatra becomes "white" through her active stylization of herself in relation to Roman and English cultural signifiers (170). Insofar as Little invites us to

…Rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark naked, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! Rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains![96]

Significantly, Cleopatra's references here can be understood only by individuals who are familiar with Egyptian mythology and culture. Both examples of Egyptian corpse disposal contain connotations of indignity that may or may not be legible to the Romans in the play—or theater goers in London. In Egypt, bodies of executed criminals were hung from the pyramids as a sign of their shame. Likewise, the notion of burial on the banks of the Nile recalls the myth of the murder and mutilation of Osiris, husband of Isis, by his brother Typhon. According to the myth as told by Plutarch, Typhon scattered Osiris' body parts along the banks of the Nile, where they were later found and reassembled (excepting Osiris' genitals) by Isis herself. Thus, burial along the banks of the Nile, like hanging in front of the pyramids, carried strong mythic connotations for Egyptians. That Cleopatra expresses these two examples of death shows the play's meticulous engagement with the meaning of death rituals in Egyptian culture. Cleopatra's words here perform a sincere articulation of her disdain for Caesar's plan for her corpse. Of course, the play's references to Egyptian culture could very well have been lost to most members of Shakespeare's audience. However, in subtly folding in such references, the play creates the opportunity for (mis)understanding, (mis)interpretation, and (mis)appropriation of Egyptian mythology. The play uses opacity to spark a sense of curiosity and desire for Egyptian knowledge.

consider *Cleopatra's* gaze (and to turn our own critical eye toward the mechanisms of the Roman's whiteness) he pushes back against critics who focus solely on the Romans' voyeurism at the expense of ignoring their own theatrical manipulation. I build on Little's analysis by arguing that the play is equally invested in the gaze of Egyptian subjects. Little, "(Re)Posing with Cleopatra."

[96] 5.2.56-61.

The role of the desirous scholar of Egypt is modeled for the English audience by Antony himself. Recall, for example, Antony's inability to liken the crocodile to anything other than itself:

> It is shaped, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.[97]

Here, Antony's tautologous definition of crocodiles reveals less his firm grasp on knowledge of reptiles than the illusiveness of Egypt's signifiers to him. The crocodile remains a mysterious object that Antony lacks the language to describe. Alongside Antony, the audience is led to experience Egypt's resistance to Rome's attempts to define and control it, as well as the resulting desire to do just that. Antony's reference to transmigration above recalls the writings of Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher who, like Antony, was a student of Egyptian culture. That Antony draws on his knowledge of Pythagoras in this context begs the question of whether he learned of Pythagoras through Egypt or Rome. As the English struggle to delimit Egyptianness ontologically in the broader historical context, Antony also struggles to delineate between Egypt and himself. As he fails to grasp hold of Egyptian knowledge, Antony, like the English writ large, struggles to define himself in relationship to both Egypt and Rome. He later admits to Eros that he "cannot hold [his] physical shape."[98] In fact, the more Antony tries to differentiate between Egypt and Rome, the more the boundary between these ethnic groups breaks down. Antony, like Cleopatra, is described as "tawny"; he is a "tawny-finned fish" that Cleopatra hopes

[97] 2.7.43-6. Charnes argues that these lines demonstrate Cleopatra's "theatrical indeterminacy that renders [her] representation mode so subversive to Octavius' imperialist project" (131). I would add that Cleopatra's multiplicity works in favor of English imperialism.
[98] 4.14.14.

to ensnare.[99] At the same time, in creating an avenue through which early moderns could connect with Cleopatra, Antony dramatizes England's struggle to make sense of itself in relation to cultural others.

Maternal Inheritance and the Politics of Grief

Antony and Cleopatra both highlights and occludes England's cultural exchange with Egypt.[100] At times, Cleopatra's maternity, modeled on Isis's mothering of Horus, appears to be reconcilable with English stereotypes of ideal mothers.[101] However, Cleopatra's decision to draw upon Isis is not without controversy in the play. In Act 3, Scene 6, Caesar stirs up animosity for Antony by announcing the news that Antony has publicly named Cleopatra queen of Egypt, Syria, Cyprus, and Lydia and has distributed kingships to "all the unlawful issue that their lust/ Since then hath made between them."[102] As Caesar snidely reports, Cleopatra appeared beside Antony on a golden throne in the middle of the market, dressed as the goddess Isis and surrounded by her children.[103] Because the audience hears about this off-stage ceremony from Caesar, Cleopatra's self-presentation as Isis is subject to his biased interpretation. However, Caesar's imperial agenda (much like that of England) prompts him to cultivate animosity towards Cleopatra by drawing attention to the competition between her Egyptian progeny and

[99] 2.5.12 and 1.1.6, respectively.
[100] This represents a key departure from Archer's argument, cited above, that Shakespeare unilaterally erases this connected history. Archer, *Old Worlds,* 62.
[101] Plutarch describes Isis as "wisdome herselfe," devoted mother to Horus and wife to Osiris (1288). According to Plutarch, Isis is both the Earth, impregnated by the Nile (i.e., Osiris) and the female half of the Moon – the "Mother of the World" – which combines the fertile powers of Osiris and Isis (1300; 1304). Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called, the Morals Written by the Learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea*, trans by Philemon Holland (London, 1603).
[102] 3.6. 6-7.
[103] 3.6. 1-19.

that of Rome.[104] Therefore, Caesar presents Isis as a mark of Cleopatra's difference, erasing their empires' shared mythological origins. Contrary to Spenser's Britomart, who encounters Isis as a link between English and Egyptian history, Caesar uses Isis to sever Rome's past and present political ties to Egypt.

On the other hand, to argue that the play asks audiences to wholeheartedly side with Caesar here would be to ignore the ambivalence with which Shakespeare imbues Cleopatra's maternity. After all, Caesar uses this opportunity to justify his sudden murder of Lepidus and his waging of war against Antony. Indeed, at other moments in the play, Shakespeare allows Cleopatra's devotion to her children to dominate her characterization. When Cleopatra first meets Proculeius, Ceasar's diplomat, after being defeated at Actium, she immediately asks him to secure Egypt on behalf of her son.

> …If he please
> To give me conquered Egypt for my son,
> He gives me so much of mine own, as I
> Will kneel to him with thanks.[105]

Here, what Cleopatra claims belongs to her is not only the land that she has ruled but also her maternal legacy. By making her request on behalf of her son, Cleopatra asserts her position as both mother and queen. To return to the Egyptian throne is also to claim authority over her familial inheritance. This assertion is particularly cogent in light of Cleopatra's opening speech to this scene. Anticipating the arrival of Caesar's diplomats after her defeat, Cleopatra reflects on her fate relative to that of Caesar:

> My desolation does begin to make
> A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Caesar.

[104] Here, Shakespeare again agrees with his Plutarchan source, which describes this ceremony with disdain, saying, "And to confesse a troth, it was too arrogant and insolent a part, and done (as a man would say) in derision and contempt of the Romanes." Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans by Thomas North (London: Thomas Vautroullier and John Wight, 1579): 996.
[105] 5.2.18-21.

> Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
> A minister of her will. And it is great
> To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
> Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
> Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
> The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.[106]

While Caesar appears to have the upper hand, Cleopatra reminds her attendants that his position is only temporary, as Caesar is still "Fortune's knave."[107] Importantly, Caesar's subjectivity infantilizes him. If we read "dung" as a homonym for "dug," the lines imply that both Caesar and beggar alike are nursed by Fortuna, the Roman goddess of luck, who is figured here as an omnipotent mother. By emphasizing the maternity of Fortuna, Cleopatra, who is consistently figured through maternal imagery, positions herself triumphantly as the antithesis to Caesar's infantilization. While Caesar remains attached to the bosom of Fortuna, Cleopatra steps powerfully into her own maternal authority and demands the agency to nourish her own children. While Caesar's speech may temporarily silence Cleopatra's legitimate concern for her children, Shakespeare later gives her voice to express it—even at Caesar's expense.

Furthermore, to insist on reading Shakespeare's play as wholeheartedly bracketing Cleopatra from England's value system is to overlook moments in which the play enables audience sympathy with her. Much can be revealed by comparing Shakespeare's play with Plutarch's *Lives*. On the one hand, unlike Shakespeare, Plutarch does not refer to Cleopatra's skin color. By referring to Cleopatra as "tawny" and "black," the play insists that the audience see her as racially other to the Romans.[108] On the other hand, Cleopatra's assertion of her maternal authority also represents a departure from Plutarch's *Lives,* which emphasizes

[106] 5.2.1-8.
[107] Fortuna was often depicted manipulating her Wheel of Fortune. Because the wheel is always turning, it symbolizes the inevitability of change. Those at the top will fall to the bottom and vice versus as the wheel rotates.
[108] See 1.1.6 and 1.5.29.

Octavia's maternal devotion (and Antony's desertion of her) rather than *Cleopatra's* maternity.[109] These departures from the Plutarchan source suggest that Shakespeare manipulates the affective impact of Cleopatra's maternal rhetoric, along with references to her skin color, to create a vision of Cleopatra that would be simultaneously relatable and alienable to early modern English audiences.

The emotional appeal of Cleopatra's maternity to the audience culminates in her death, as she commits suicide by suckling an Egyptian asp. When Charmian cries out upon seeing the poisonous asp at her breast, Cleopatra rebukes him:

> …Peace, Peace.
>
> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
>
> That sucks the nurse asleep?[110]

Plutarch's detailed account of Cleopatra's death locates the bitemarks on her arm rather than her breast.[111] The shift from the relatively-neutral arm to the affectively-charged breast distracts the audience from the foreignness of the asp by thrusting into focus Cleopatra's *maternal* body. The maternal framing of Cleopatra's death allows her body to transcend its material reality as her memory gets incorporated into Roman history. Now seen positively in relation to English reproductive values, Cleopatra's body appears literally and metaphorically cleansed; Caesar declares that "she looks like sleep,/ As she would catch another Antony/ In her strong toil of grace."[112] This is again a departure from Plutarch, who reports that Cleopatra severely mangled

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[109] Plutarch, 986.
[110] 5.2.302-4.
[111] Plutarch, *The Lives*, 1010.
[112] 5.2.341-3. According to Valerie Traub, the psychological threat women's erotic power poses to men is often contained within Shakespearean drama by their figurative or dramatic transformation into static objects such as jewels, statues, and corpses. Following this pattern, Cleopatra's body is cleansed – literarily and metaphorically – by and *because of* her death. Her eroticism is no longer an active threat here but an ironic, because impossible, scenario: she appears "*as [if]* she would catch another Antony." Valerie Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses:

her body in her fit of despair.[113] The seamless maternal body of Shakespeare's Cleopatra is able to be grieved in a way that the mangled body of Plutarch's Cleopatra cannot. By suckling an asp, she dies not only as an Egyptian queen but as a loving mother, sacrificing her life to feed her child.

The potential for this moment to elicit audience sympathy is evidenced by the other characters' responses to Cleopatra's death. Here, it is Cleopatra's Egyptian maids, rather than the Romans, who initially interpret her death for the audience. Iras dies immediately after Cleopatra kisses her farewell, presumably out of grief. Charmian, however, survives long enough to finish Cleopatra's last sentence, ensuring the preservation of her final lament.

> Cleopatra: What should I stay –
>
> Charmian: In this vile world? So fare thee well.
> Now boast thee death, in they possession lies
> A lass unparalleled.[114]

By giving Cleopatra's final words to Charmian, the play directs Cleopatra's embeddedness within her all-female Egyptian community.[115] Cleopatra's death is literally defined by Charmian, who justifies her suicide by acknowledging the "vileness" of the world. Then, before taking her own life, Charmian straightens Cleopatra's diadem, emphasizing Cleopatra's royal authority for the audience. Significantly, when the Romans finally arrive, they perpetuate the doleful attitude

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Containments of Female Erotic Power," *Desire and Anxiety*: *Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 25-49. I discuss this phenomenon in further depth in chapter V.

[113] According to Plutarch, Caesar finds Cleopatra naked and "marvelously disfigured: both for she has plucked her heare from her head, as also for that she had matired all her face with her nailes, and besides, her voice was small and trembling, her eyes sonke into her heade with continuall blubbering and moreover, they might see the most parte of her stomake torne in sunder." Plutarch, *The Lives*, 1008.

[114] 5.2.308-11.

[115] Elizabeth Brown discusses Cleopatra's relationship to her maids in the context of Elizabeth I's extensive all-female Privy Chamber, showing how Cleopatra's maids "humanize" her even as the relative isolation of her women ultimately makes her vulnerable. Brown, "'Companion Me with My Mistress': Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and Their Waiting Women," *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, eds Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 131-45, esp. 138.

established by the Egyptian women. Caesar refers to Cleopatra's death as "brave" and "to be lamented," and Dollabella announces that Caesar wished to prevent this very deed.

Cleopatra's absorption of the political valence of maternal death enables her grievability by early modern English audiences. In the seventeenth century, the widespread cultural purchase of maternal death was evidenced by the popularity of the genre of mothers' legacies.[116] By the 1620s, mothers were able to leverage the affective impact of their death as part of a common, generically produced rhetorical strategy.[117] Some mothers' legacies, such as that by Dorothy Leigh, attracted remarkably wide readerships, indicating the marketability of maternal death at the time.[118] Christopher Laoutaris points out how Cleopatra's death scene participates in a larger contemporary exploration of the proper way to grieve mothers in the first part of the seventeenth century, reading *Antony and Cleopatra* in the context of the period's norms for memorializing women.[119] As he shows, the College of Arms prescribed women strict roles both for mourning their relatives and for being mourned themselves. These regulations emphasized women's place within patriarchal kinship structures rather than their affective impact on the intimate lives of

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[116] According to Jennifer Heller, the genre of mothers' legacies is defined by four key features: 1) a maternal author, 2) an explicit child reader, 3) reference to the maternal deathbed as the scene of writing, and 4) a discussion of religion. Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early Modern England* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2011), 2.

[117] For example, the anonymous author of *A Mothers Teares over Hir Seduced Sonne* clearly recognizes her work as participating in a wider genre. She writes:

> There are two books that goe under a mothers name; *A Mothers Blessing; A Mothers Legacie*: now thou see'st a *Mothers Teares*. And this last containes all. In this a sorrowfull Mother *weeps for her Child, laments for her Child, and cannot bee comforted, because he is not*: Call it a *Mothers Teares* (A2).

This writers' assertion that her book is even more anchored in maternal grief than that of Dorothy Leigh and Elizabeth Russell indicates the wider currency of maternal death within England's print culture. Anonymous, *A Mothers Teares over Hir Seduced Sonne* (London, 1627).

[118] Sylvia Brown calls Dorothy Leigh's criticism of her society's preaching "scathing." However, despite its political charge, Leigh's attitude was not viewed as being entirely impertinent, for her work was prized as the number one selling book with a woman's name on the title page. See Brown, ed, *Women's Writing in Stuart England: The Mother's Legacies of Dorothy Leigh, Elizabeth Joscelin, and Elizabeth Richardson* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 3.

[119] Christopher Laoutaris, "Speaking Stones: Memory and Maternity in the Theatre of Death," *Shakespearean Maternities: Crisis of Conception in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008): 212-67.

their families.[120] However, the early modern period also witnessed mothers putting pressure on these norms through their insistence on using their deaths to emphasize their maternal authority and affection.[121] Laoutaris argues convincingly that the monument of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, like the monuments of real early modern mothers, pushes the boundaries of acceptability for maternal memorials, as Cleopatra regains control of the narrative of her death from Caesar and the Romans. Thus, Cleopatra's death may very well have resonated alongside those of these well-known and respected English mothers, who were actively shaping the meanings of their deaths by appealing rhetorically to their maternity. In Laoutaris' words "[b]ecause she is as changeable as Fortune, as endlessly creative and fertile as Isis, Cleopatra evades the restrictive delineations of memorializing heraldry which seeks to contain and control the *memory* of the female body."[122]

What is at stake in Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra as a dying mother is early moderns' ability to align themselves with her legend – to see Cleopatra as part of their own history. Significantly, Cleopatra's death scene also shows her distancing herself from potential identifications with lower-class Egyptians, allowing her to emerge as exemplary from the negative associations the Romans (and English) maintain to her country. While the asp is native to Egypt, Cleopatra is ostensibly ignorant of the effects of its venom before questioning her physician. In this way, Cleopatra's knowledge of Egyptian herpetology more closely resembles that of her Roman counterparts, who fail to read the signs of asp poison on Cleopatra's body:

> Caesar: The manner of their deaths?
> I do not see them bleed.

[120] Ibid, 222-3.
[121] As Laoutaris shows, it became common in the early seventeenth century for monuments to feature women breastfeeding or surrounded by their children. Such monuments challenged the heraldic emphasis of the College of Arms. Ibid, 212-16; 225
[122] Ibid, 259.

Dolabella: Who was last with them?

Guard 1: A simple countryman, that brought her figs.
This was his basket.

Caesar: Poisoned, then.[123]

The cleanliness of Cleopatra's body confuses Caesar and Dollabella, who are not familiar with the signs of asp poisoning. Given his lack of information, Caesar quickly blames Cleopatra's poisoning on the rustic, whose lack of institutional credibility makes him an easy scapegoat. However, unsatisfied with this conclusion, the guard, another low-status Egyptian, steps in to interpret the women's bodies:

Guard 1: This is an aspic's trail, and these fig leaves

Have slime upon them, such as the aspic leaves

Upon the caves of the Nile.[124]

Here, the guard's knowledge of the asp seems to come from his intimate experience with the Nile River – an intimacy that Cleopatra lacks. While Cleopatra references the Nile as an abstract signifier of her emotional state, it becomes clear in this moment that her regal body has remained distant from its "slime and ooze."[125] Even when the rustic gives the asp to her, she has to ask him: "Will it eat me?"[126] Thus, the moment in which Cleopatra is incorporated into Roman culture is anticipated by her distancing herself from "common" Egyptians. The cleanliness of Cleopatra's body is also a symbolic reflection of her purification and racial whitening. Cleopatra achieves her victorious, maternal death only by emerging as exceptional to other Egyptians, even as these commoners are the only characters able to correctly interpret the means of her death.

[123] 5.2. 332-5.
[124] 5.2.346-8.
[125] 2.7.22.
[126] 5.2.267.

Here, Cleopatra resembles the English, who, like her, appropriate the symbolic value of Egyptian mythology without knowing the realities of Egypt's ecology.

On the other hand, while Cleopatra's death may have resonated with positive images of English maternity, it could also be interpreted as a perversion of traditional maternal behavior. Paster describes Cleopatra's suicide as a carnivalesque inversion of early modern scripts for wet nursing. According to Paster, Cleopatra's death frees her body from its inscription within a patriarchal economy, as she reclaims her breast for her own desires rather than that of an infant.[127] Indeed, the rustic's misogynistic response to Cleopatra's inquiry ("I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not") could raise doubts about the status of her femininity. Is Cleopatra one of the five out of ten women that the rustic claims the devil corrupted?[128] Or are we to dismiss the rustic's comedic musings in the midst of the high solemnity of the moment? Cleopatra also breaks from the role of the sacrificial mother by eroticizing her death: "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,/ Which hurts, and is desired." Even at her death, she reminds the audience of her uncontained jealousy:

> If she first meet the curled Antony,
> He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
> Which is my heaven to have.[129]

Significantly, the play does not separate Cleopatra's desire to help her children from her sexual desire for Antony. Association with Antony and Rome offers her both sexual gratification and economic stability for her children. Thus, the play insists on a firmly ambivalent image of Cleopatra's maternity – one that does not erase sexual desire from motherhood. In doing so, the

[127] Paster, 240-2.
[128] 5.2.268-72.
[129] 5.2.296-8.

play forces the audience to confront an anxiety that always shadows maternity in the period: the possibility that women's desires may not be in men's control. Paster comments on the equivocal nature of the monument scene, which she likens to a "theatrical birthing chamber":

> Here, as in birth, the redefinition is presided over by a culturally empowered woman acting apart from men, but in this anomalous imitation Cleopatra takes on both roles in the birthing drama. She is both the passive subject of the physical drama and the midwife, both the surrogate mother offering her breast and the woman who will die and leave her 'real' children behind, both the central actor in a drama of physical mutability and the renouncer of womanly mutability.[130]

The widespread ambivalence regarding the birthing room in the period leaves the question of Cleopatra's death resolutely open. After all, as many have argued, the opacity of Cleopatra itself could have been a deterrent to early moderns' identification with her.[131] While Laoutaris understands Shakespeare's Cleopatra as unique in her ability to craft her own memory, I argue that the slipperiness of Cleopatra is symptomatic of England's ambivalence towards *all* Egyptians as well as *all* mothers.

Conclusion: Desiring Mother Egypt

Analyzing the relationship between maternal death, race, and United States national ideology in the 21st century, Ruby Tapia shows how certain images of maternal death have the potential to consolidate white supremacy and white nationhood. Her primary object of analysis is the *Pietà* motif, which she argues structures the emotional responses of its viewers in a way that can elicit feelings of national pride and belonging. However, as Tapia shows, only certain maternal deaths arise to the level of national significance, as the reception of *pietàs* depends on contemporary structures that police national inclusion along racial lines. I turn to Tapia's insights

[130] Paster, 239.
[131] See Iyengar, "Artificial Negroes."

not to elide the historical and geographical distance between seventeenth-century England and 21st-century America, but rather to highlight the differences between the meaning of maternal death in these distinct locales. Because Tapia's claims depend on the 21st century's long-standing treatment of race as a quasi-biological trait that governs the institutional distribution of social and material resources, the boundary between mothers whose deaths seem to matter and those whose deaths do not is made tragically clear by the presence or lack of media and government support for survivors. In Shakespeare's play, however, Cleopatra's death is profoundly ambivalent. How the early modern audience responded to Cleopatra's suicide is unknown, and any conjectures about audience reception must remain tentative and incomplete. At the same time, Tapia's analysis of *pietàs* can push early modern scholars to consider the broad cultural stakes of maternal death in the period – if only to modestly question the extent to which popular contemporary discourses of maternal death would have resonated in the theater during the final act of this play.

Tapia's work also illuminates the stakes of Cleopatra's maternal death for English nationalism. If the early moderns were able to see Cleopatra as an *English* mother, then mourning the loss of Cleopatra's maternity does not disrupt English nationalism but perpetuates it. The ability of Cleopatra's death to register alongside that of well-known and respected English women is contingent on whether the audience sees her as conforming to their culturally-specific expectations for mothers. For the English, this also necessitates reconciling Cleopatra with common negative stereotypes of Egyptians, and specifically Egyptian femininity. As I have shown, this was part of a larger ongoing process of England navigating their relationship to Egypt in the seventeenth century. As they entered into colonial ventures, the English needed to develop a strategy for appropriating the authority of ancient Egypt while maintaining their sense

of cultural superiority over contemporary Egyptians, whose alterity represented a problem for their national boundaries. *Antony and Cleopatra's* concern about the eroticized boundaries between Egypt and Rome reflect a larger English concern about their own cultural boundaries with Egypt, as well as their geopolitical boundaries with Africa and Asia. The manifestation of the connected history between Egypt and England in the early days of English colonial expansion presents both a continuation and a turn away from this long-standing tradition, as Shakespeare both appropriates and brackets Cleopatra's maternity from English cultural inheritance.

Appealing to ancient Egypt as a source for England's national values was a useful strategy that manifested in early modern vernacular translations of Hellenist or Classical texts. Since the early medieval period, *translatio imperii* or *translatio studii* described a strategy by which European vernacular writers laid claim to Classical ancestry – both literary and literal – through the translation and production of Classical texts. As several scholars have explored, this practice was in large part anchored in a desire of medieval and early modern writers to gain prestige through the imagined authority of their chosen forbears.[132] Importantly, this was part of a *national* project, as individual writers' claims to authority often referred to their part in

[132] In her seminal study of medieval theories of translations, Rita Copeland posits that "translation is a vehicle for vernacular appropriation of academic discourse" (3). See Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, eds., *Rethinking Medieval Translation: Ethics, Politics, Theory* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2012). Zrinka Stahuljak considers *translatio*'s role in constructing medieval genealogies through language and narrative. See especially Stahuljak, "Translations of Genealogy (*Translatio Imperii et Studii*)," 142-89 in *Bloodless Genealogies*. For an examination of translation in Shakespeare see Liz Oakley-Brown, ed. *Shakespeare and the Translation of Identity in Early Modern England* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011). In her contribution to this collection, Barbara Correll notes the period's logical connection between schoolboys' learning to translate Latin and their learning to embody Latin masculinity. She argues that Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* presents Antony as a failing student of Latin grammar, as he rejects Roman *virtus* in favor of Egyptian pleasure and femininity. Correll, "Schooling *Coriolanus*: Shakespeare, Translation, and Latinity," 22-45. Special thanks to my colleague Megan Behrend for drawing my attention to the resonance between medieval translation theory and the claims I am making in regard to Cleopatra's treatment in the early modern period.

building the literary legacy of Britain. As I have shown, a similar phenomenon motivates Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, which uses the ambivalence of maternity to grapple with England's conflicting views of Egyptianness. As Emma Campbell and Robert Mills remind us, "*translatio* more often than not entailed contestation and suppression."[133] In other words, the repetition of Classical influences did not occur as a seamless transference across time but rather as a *rupture*, as later vernacular thinkers interpreted and obscured earlier ideas to repurpose them in response to the pressures of their current political moment. As a result, certain early modern English writers could claim Cleopatra or Isis as English mothers even while others worked to demonize Egyptian femininity. Cleopatra can be seen as at once an ideal, loving mother and a dangerous, willful "whore."[134] Indeed, *both* practices enabled the consolidation of national boundaries and a sense of cultural superiority. The possibility for a triumphal ending for Cleopatra represents less a transformation in Rome's relationship with Egypt than a recalibration of it in English terms.

Cleopatra's death represents only a temporary resolution to the play's ambivalence about Egyptian femininity. As Cleopatra's incorporation into Rome is licensed by Caesar (and Shakespeare) himself, the play seems to evaporate previous concerns about Cleopatra's sexuality and cultural difference. And yet, if we see Cleopatra's monument as a birthing chamber, closed to the gaze of men and ruled by the will of women, then the entrance of Caesar and his men coincides with the dissolution of Cleopatra's authority.[135] The power of Cleopatra's will is subsumed by the service her legacy provides to Caesar's rule. While she avoids the fate of being "hoist[ed] up/ And show[n] to the shouting varletry/ Of censuring Rome," she is still, of course,

[133] Campbell and Mills, 2.
[134] Both Caesar and Antony refer to Cleopatra by this term. See 3.6.67 and 4.12.13.
[135] Paster, 243-4.

impersonated by "some squeaking Cleopatra boy" on the early modern English stage.[136] Thus, it is the play that manages to contain her. While *Antony and Cleopatra* offers the English an imaginative outlet to seek resolution for the culture's mixed feelings toward both maternity and Egypt, history shows that the English project of making sense of their relationship to Egypt would continue beyond the space of the theatre well into the seventeenth century. Indeed, Shakespeare's play represents but one iteration of a process that manifested in law, history, poetry, romance, prose, and many other cultural arenas in the period. In aggregate, the English struggled to define the position of the Egyptians relative to Englishness. Indeed, writing ancient Egypt into English history served an important ideological function for the nation, yet it did little to resolve the question of how to deal with real Egyptian bodies in their country in the seventeenth century. Unlike other iterations of this discourse, however, Shakespeare's play treats Egypt with remarkable ambivalence, recognizing and manipulating its connected history with England to contain Cleopatra's threat while simultaneously appropriating her for English nationalism. In Shakespeare's play, we observe that what appears to be two warring views of Egypt are actually two sides of the same imperialist coin.

[136] 5.2.54-6; 5.2.218.

CHAPTER IV

The Nature of Maternity: Understanding Gender and Racial Paradigms in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko

In the previous chapter, I show how the Nile River, a naturally-occurring geographical feature, was rhetorically linked to a nexus of historically constructed ideas about race, gender, female sexuality, and reproduction. In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Nile is sometimes represented as savage or destructive and sometimes represented as bountiful or productive. These contradictory depictions of the river shape audiences' responses to Cleopatra's maternity, making her sexuality seem simultaneously excessive and well-regulated. Thus, how Shakespeare referred to the Nile in any given moment led audience members to make moralistic judgments about Egyptian sexuality. In the present chapter, I examine the relationship between ideas about the natural world and maternity in greater depth by analyzing how these categories operate in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* (1688). In *Oroonoko*, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, there is no consistent epistemology of nature. At times, the narrator presents the natural world as savage, dangerous, and foreign, and at other times, she endows it with Christian values. As I will show, the inconsistency that underlies English constructed views of the Nile is present throughout colonialists' developing understanding of the natural world, and *Oroonoko* uses the rhetoric of maternity to explore and draw attention to these contradictions.

For example, for the character of Oroonoko, masculinity is tied to his ability to prove his mastery over the natural world by hunting and traversing dangerous landscapes. When Oroonoko learns of "Numb Eels" capable of paralyzing people who touch them, he "[believes] it

impossible a Man cou'd lose his Force at the touch of a Fish" and makes a point to test the rumors.[1] However, Oroonoko's refusal to believe that he can be conquered by a fish is almost his downfall, as the eel paralyzes him, causing him to fall into a river and float downstream until he is eventually found and rescued. Significantly, both the fish and the water threaten Oroonoko in the episode. "If *Caesar* were almost Dead, with the effect of this Fish, he was more so with that of the Water, where he had remain'd the space of going a League."[2] Eventually, Oroonoko reasserts his masculinity only by eating the eel that shocks him: "We had the *Eel* at Supper…as most delicate Meat; and was of the Value, since it cost so Dear as almost the Life of so gallant a Man."[3] The eel episode reveals Oroonoko's attachment to his imperviousness to the natural world. His masculinity is threatened and, then, reasserted through his interactions with plants and animals. While Oroonoko is eventually tricked into slavery, he continues to be portrayed as a hero, in part through his separation from, and sovereignty over, the natural world.

At the same time, the narrator also glorifies and sentimentalizes nature in the text.[4] The story opens with a vivid description of the wonders of Surinam, which is described as a rich, beautiful landscape, full of exotic charms and resources. In addition, the natives of Surinam are celebrated for their proximity to nature; in the text, the natives' connection to "simple Nature" is coded as sexual purity and innocence.[5] Here, the natives' imagined proximity to nature is not emasculating but rather idealizing. The texts' attitude towards nature is sentimental insofar as it – like Shakespeare's Cleopatra – confirms the cultural values of English readers; nature is

[1]All references are to Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko,* ed by Joanna Lipking (New York & London: WW Norton & Company, 1997), esp. 46-7.
[2] Ibid, 47.
[3] Ibid.
[4] For a discussion of *Oroonoko*'s influence on the later genre of sentimental abolitionist fiction, see Scott J Juengel, "Unbearable Theater: *Oroonoko's* Sentimental Afterlife," *Approaches to Teaching Behn's* Oroonoko, Cynthia Richards and Mary Ann O'Donnell, eds. (New York: The Modern Language Association, 2014): 156-61.
[5] Behn, 10.

endowed with traits – that is, sexual purity – that Europeans admire.[6] This moralization of the natural world runs throughout not only *Oroonoko* but also colonial representations of the sexual and reproductive habits of non-European humans, especially mothers. Thus, as *Oroonoko* represents the natural world as both savage and sacred, dangerous and innocent, I argue that such opposing views of nature reveal the texts' interest in exploring the very processes whereby colonial writers made sense of foreign human bodies and ecologies. For this reason, a primary contention in this chapter is that colonists' real encounters with foreign ecologies produced a particularly ripe setting in which they considered – and, at times, questioned – the "naturalness" of Europeans' maternal values.

In *Oroonoko*, Imoinda's maternity highlights the implicit contradictions within Europeans' constructed ideas about nature not only in the text but in the seventeenth-century scientific movement known as "natural history."[7] In contrast to Oroonoko, Imoinda's relationship to nature is much more intimate and empathetic. Her body is adorned with flowers and birds, and she "[takes] great Delight in" a small dog, which she keeps as a companion in Surinam.[8] More importantly though, Imoinda's pregnancy places her in parallel with the plant and animal reproductive bodies described in the text. Like the tigress whose cubs are stolen by the colonists and the landscape whose miraculous fruitfulness is exploited, Imoinda's offspring is claimed as property of the English. Indeed, while the narrator establishes Oroonoko's heroism through his dominance over plants and animals – usually represented as savage or debased –

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[6] Both Joyce MacDonald and Laura Brown describe *Oroonoko*'s sentimentality in terms of its narrative erasure of the couple's Africaness. See Joyce MacDonald, "Race, Women, and the Sentimental in Thomas Southerne's 'Oroonoko,'" *Criticism*, vol 40, no 4 (1998): 555-70 and Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves," *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993): 23-63.

[7] For a more in-depth description of the development of the discipline of natural history, see Brian Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[8] Behn, 40; 39.

Imoinda's maternity complicates the clean hierarchy between humans and plants and animals by existing in empathy with them. As an enslaved African mother, Imoinda could evoke both the sacred and the savage; she is loyal and obedient to her husband but also skilled in wielding a bow and poisoned arrows. In this sense, Imoinda embodies and extends the contradiction at the heart of colonialist representations of the natural world. By reading Imoinda's maternity through an ecocritical lens, we see how the terms of nature that the narrator attempts to establish in relationship to Oroonoko fail to account for Imoinda's sentimentalized attachment to plants and animals. Indeed, Imoinda's character deconstructs the binary that undergirds Oroonoko's masculinity and heroism. In doing so, she reveals the inconsistency not only in the text's epistemology of nature but also in the larger colonial history that, as I will show, made nature, race, and maternity interrelated objects of scientific observation and English "discovery" in the late seventeenth century.

Colonial Anxieties about Enslaving Maternity

The dehumanizing effect of the transatlantic slave trade reduced the maternity of enslaved African women to a legal or logistical problem. While some Europeans invoked maternity to argue against the institution of slavery, colonial leaders, whose primary concern was financial gain and the survival of plantations, viewed the reproduction of enslaved women as both an inconvenience (insofar as it interrupted enslaved women's workflow) and a potential source of profit (insofar as it produced a new generation of coerced laborers). From the perspective of slaveowners, many questions had to be answered: How would colonists classify the offspring of children born to enslaved mothers but fathered by free men? How would colonies classify and tax the reproductive labor of slaves? Of white indentured servants? Should

enslaved mothers be allowed time to wet nurse or recover from labor? Should slaveowners keep mothers and children together? Europeans' answers to these questions affected not only how they legally instituted the theft and debasement of African mothers and children but also how they came to understand the very nature of enslaved peoples' sexual and reproductive lives. Because of our historical vantage point, we know that colonial leaders eventually created policies and legislation to answer these questions. In 1662, the colony of Virginia decreed that the condition of children born to mixed-status parents would be determined by that of the mother.[9] The Virginian act, known as *partus sequitur ventrem*, pointed to a truth that disturbed English slaveowners: the clean division between black and white bodies was being compromised by miscegenation. The decision to use the womb to determine the fate of children was a legal attempt to institute closure to an urgent question for colonists confronted with the presence of biracial children. Other questions proved to be equally pressing. Because plantation owners were taxed per laboring servant on their land, lawmakers struggled to classify the labor of reproduction, as it impeded the regular productivity of pregnant mothers. While masters could ban white indentured servants from marrying and having children during the term of their service, the sex and reproductive lives of black women, enslaved their entire lives, could not be simply postponed.[10] Kathleen Brown show how, legally, this issue was addressed through a tithe system that taxed enslaved Africans' reproductive labor as equivalent to their field labor. According to Brown, "[t]he distinction between English and African women created a legal fiction about their different capacities for performing agricultural labor."[11] Masters owned not

[9] Kathleen M. Brown. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996): esp. 132.
[10] While masters could seek compensation and tax relief if their white female servants became pregnant, no such exemptions were made for pregnant black women. Ibid, 134.
[11] In the seventeenth century, this solution was far from straightforward or universal. As Brown shows, even wealthy white women were frequently found working on their husband's plantations, so the binary between laboring black women/low-class white women and idle wealthy white women was not entirely sound. Indeed, colonists continued

only the bodies of enslaved women but also their reproductive capacities and the bodies of their potential offspring.

However, examining colonial laws governing the maternity of enslaved women tells but one side of the story of Europeans' imaginative response to encounters with these mothers. Even as the logistical problem of enslaved maternity was being addressed legally, such laws did little to pacify the less tangible anxieties enslaved mothers incited in European colonists. Indeed, the exploitation of women's reproductive capacities under chattel slavery put pressure on Europeans' knowledge and beliefs about maternity *per se*, and colonial writers responded to this pressure with varying degrees of violence, antipathy, and racist fantasy. Europeans, accustomed to defining the values and behaviors of white mothers as "natural" and, therefore, universal, developed imaginative strategies to justify alienating enslaved women from their own reproductive labor and maternal experiences. The desire to naturalize maternity – to posit a divinely-ordained set of meanings and affects that could explain and prescribe women's behaviors – was threatened by the realization that slavery depended on divorcing black women's reproductive labor from motherhood.

One response to this threat was colonial travel literature's tendency to portray enslaved women's bodies as naturally equipped to minimize the burden of reproductive labor. Jennifer Morgan argues that, beginning in the seventeenth century, colonial descriptions of women from west Africa repeated images of painless childbirth and elongated breasts in order to create clear racial divisions between white and black experiences of motherhood. According to Morgan, such "monstrous" images of black women created the sense that they were less affected by the

to revise and refine policy and legislation around slave women's reproductive labor throughout the seventeenth century. Brown, 119; Esp. "Engendering Racial Difference, 1640-1670," 107-136.

physical and emotional demands of childbirth and post-natal care than their white counterparts.[12] For example, Pieter de Marees's *A Description and Historicall Declaration of the Golden Kingedome of Guinea*, published in *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* (1624), describes how, unlike the gender-segregated birthing rooms in England, where women gave birth surrounded by female aids and companions, Guinean mothers gave birth in public, in front of both women and men, "without any sense of shame."[13] In England, the lying-in period was seen as crucial for the health of both mother and society, as women were seen as "unclean" immediately after birth.[14] However, according to writers like De Marees, west African women returned to work directly after giving birth. "[T]he very day after giving birth to the Child, they go and walk again in the streets and do their things just like the other Women, as if nothing had happened," De Marees writes. [15] Furthermore, because enslaved women were often depicted with hyperbolic elongated breasts, it was believed that they could throw their long breasts over their shoulder and nurse their child while they continued to work. This mark of racial difference was found throughout the seventeenth century across a wide range of travel texts on not only Africa but diverse locales around the globe.[16] According to Morgan, the pervasiveness of this image in various tracts

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[12] Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 14.

[13] Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, trans. and ed. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 23. While De Marees's text was originally published in Dutch in 1602, it was later translated into English by Samuel Purchas 1624. For a content and textual history of De Marees's work, see the introduction to Van Dantzig and Jones's modern edited edition, xiii-xix.

[14] For a useful overview of the cultural significance of the lying-in period and the churching ritual see David Cressy, "Churching," *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 195-229.

[15] Ibid, 23.

[16] The pervasiveness of this image can be observed by scanning the texts available in Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton, eds, *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). See, for example, the excerpts by Sir Thomas Herbert, "A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile Begunne Anno 1626. Into Afrique and the Greater Asia,…and Some Part of the Orientall Indies (London: William Stansby and Jacob Bloom, 1634)," 228; John Bulwer, "Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd, or, The Artificial Changeling Historically Presented…(London: J. Hardesty, 1650)," 241; Richard Ligon, "A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados (London: Peter Parker, 1657)," 256.

throughout the seventeenth century made it "an image that could symbolize the continent."[17] Like the descriptions of Africans' birthing process as ostensibly painless, this image, when applied to enslaved women, demonstrated to early modern English readers that African mothers labored for their children in a fundamentally different way than white women. Significantly, Morgan claims, such portrayals suggested that black women, as well as black men, were "immutably differ[ent] than white colonists.[18]

In her attempt to establish a pattern in how Europeans represented enslaved mothers, Morgan posits a binary between the maternity of white women and the purported "monstrous," animalistic maternity of black women. This fantasy of enslaved maternity's monstrosity was highly useful for European colonists. By describing African women as relatively unfazed by childbirth, Europeans could justify slavery by claiming African mothers were naturally equipped for the emotional and physical demands of servitude.[19] Slavery could continue without interrupting motherhood, for enslaved women were supposed to be undisturbed by physical labor – both the labor of childbirth and the labor of fieldwork.[20] According to many Europeans, African women's childbirth was animalistic and "natural" insofar as it was unthinking and, unlike European childbirth, devoid of ritual. For colonialist scientists, enslaved women's imagined proximity to nature shapes the very meaning of their reproduction.

However, while Morgan's argument it useful for outlining the racist effects of Europeans' developing scientific imagination, she fails to recognize that these images represented a limited subset of west African mothers' appearances in colonial literature. Casting a wider net reveals a diverse array of strategies by which colonial writers responded to enslaved

[17] Morgan, 31.
[18] Morgan, 11.
[19] Morgan, 30-1.
[20] Morgan, 36.

mothers. As I will show, representations of African mothers varied in their scope and purpose, indicating a general lack of consensus about the relationship between white and black maternity. There was no monolithic imaginative paradigm that could account for all representations of black maternity – a fact that remains as true today. In Behn's *Oroonoko,* for example, Imoinda, though west African, conforms to English expectations that Europeans mothers be chaste, loving, and obedient, yet she also undermines the colonialist logic that positions Europeaness as separate from, but still dominant over, the natural world. As I will show, by being re-embedded in the ecology that sometimes gives meaning to enslaved mothers in colonists' racist fantasies, Imoinda highlights the fragility of English understandings of whiteness and, more specifically, white maternity. In shifting attention from England's emerging racial paradigm in the abstract to the localized consequences of colonists' imaginative encounter with Imoinda, I show how this encounter raised questions about the "naturalness" of European maternity, understood as (capital-"M") Maternity writ large.

Maternity, Racialism, and Ecophobia

While enslaved mothers with elongated breasts could be seen as "unnatural" to colonists who were invested in understanding European reproductive habits as "natural," they could also be seen as *closer* to the natural and animal world than European mothers. In my examination of representations of enslaved maternity, I focus on the way in which the natural world of plants and animals in colonial ecologies came to play a part in writers' responses to enslaved mothers. While it may seem odd to discuss the maternity of plants and animals in relationship to human reproduction, many scholars have argued that the imaginative boundary between humans and animals that characterizes our modern, post-Linnaeus thought was not yet fully formed in the

seventeenth century.[21] Indeed, I follow scholars who have paved the way for such an intersectional analysis of race, nature, and reproduction. For example, in his seminal cultural history of English perceptions of the natural world, Keith Thomas argues that both enslaved subjects and women were associated with animals as part of an imaginative strategy to justify their oppression.[22] According to Thomas, the assumption of mankind's dominance over nature and animals was conscripted to explain hierarchies amongst humans.[23] Our tendency to refer to our enemies as "dogs" or "snakes" is part of a long history of what Simon Estok refers to as "ecophobia," or "an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism."[24] Iago's warnings to Brabanzo that "an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe" and "you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse" illustrate the potential for ecophobia, particularly speciesism, to promote concerns about miscegenation and the victimization of white women's sexuality.[25] Over a century and a half later, Edward Long's comparison of African women's childbirth to that of a "wild animall" draws on a similar nexus of race, gender, and animality to naturalize Africans' difference from Europeans:

> Their women are delivered with little or no labours; they have therefore no more

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[21] See Jean Feerick, "Botanical Shakespeares: The Racial Logic of Plant Life in 'Titus Andronicus,'" *South Central Review* vol 26, no 1-2 (2009): 82-102; Allen J Grieco, "The Social Politics of Pre-Linnaean Botanical Classification," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* vol 4 (1991): 131-49; Laurie Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Jean E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi, eds, *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[22] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983): esp 41-50.
[23] Ibid, 41.
[24] Simon Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): esp 4.
[25] William Shakespeare, "Othello," *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd Edition, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York & London: Norton, 2016): 1.1. 86-7; 1.1.108-9. For a full, nuanced examination of these lines with attention to the intersection of race, sexuality, gender, and species see Jeffrey Masten, "Glossing and T*pping: Editing Sexuality, Race and Gender in *Othello*." *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 569-85.

occasion for midwifes than the female oran-outang, or any other wild animall…Thus they seem exempted from the course inflicted upon Eve *and her daughters*."[26]

While the contexts of these references diverge dramatically, the temporal and textual differences between them also emphasize the persistence with the English looked to the natural world to make sense of racial differences between humans, as well as the prevalence of ideas about maternity and female sexuality in this imaginative process.

I reference this persistence not to create a unilateral historical arch between these moments but, on the contrary, to trouble any sense of a clear, direct path between them. Indeed, as colonial texts reflected various attitudes about gender, race, and nature, writers came to diverse conclusions about the implication of gender and racial differences for colonial policy.[27] For example, according to De Marees, women's ability to return to work shortly after giving birth "shows that the women here [in Guinea] are of a cruder nature and stronger posture than the Females in our Lands in Europe."[28] However, apparently this "crudeness" was not always to be avoided, for in the same text, De Marees explains that white women made poor wives for the Portuguese living in Guinea, as they were unsuited for the weather.[29] De Marees naturalizes the

[26] Edward Long, "History of Jamaica, 2, with notes and corrections by the Author" (1774), Add. Ms., 12405, p364/f295, British Library London, 47.
[27] I follow Estok's call (2011) to consider the way in which ecophobia intersects with racism and misogyny, amongst other forms of systemic oppression. Estok echoes Gabriel Egan's insistence that an ecocritical perspective ought to be unabashedly "political." Activism drives both Estock and Egan's work. See Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[28] De Marees, 23. The word here translated as "cruder," reads "grover" (the comparative form of "grof") in the original Dutch. Pietre de Marees, "Beschrijvinghe ende Historische verhael vant Gout koninckrijck van Guinea… Amsterdam, 1617," *Oost-Indische ende West-Indische Voyagien,* Marten Heubeldinck, compiler (Amsterdam, 1619): 10. Clements Library, University of Michigan. The Dutch word "grof," which also connotes rudeness or coarseness, is probably related to the English word "grove," or "a small wood," which was spelled "grof" in Middle English. Hence, the word itself connects the childbearing bodes of Guinean women to nature. See "grove, n.," *OED Online*, December 2018, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81891?redirectedFrom=grove (accessed February 11, 2019) and "gruff, adj. and n.," *OED Online*, December 2018, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81981?rskey=jn1a2O&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed February 11, 2019).
[29] De Marees, 36.

relationship between west African women's bodies and the ecology that surrounds them, but he concludes that *European* women are unsuitable sexual partners for white colonists in west Africa. Thus, while perceptions of the differences between women's bodies could be used to deepen racial divides, these differences could also be used to authorize miscegenation.

While Morgan is correct that the existence of racist images of African women with elongated breasts could justify the enslavement of black women and men, considering the role of colonists' multiple and contradictory understandings of nature in England's developing racial paradigm presents a much more complicated picture. Indeed, "Nature" could either be aligned positively with European values or be judged as debased or foreign. Colonial writers sometimes labeled the maternity of enslaved women as unnatural (i.e., monstrous, savage), sometimes as hypernatural (i.e., unthinking, animalistic, or sexually pure and innocent), or, paradoxically, both at once. Furthermore, the centrality of mothers and maternity to early modern race thinking could also produce and perpetuate new racial anxieties, for insofar as foreign mothers presented an *alternative* model for reproduction – sometimes a *preferable* one – they could call into question the value of European maternity. As travel writers attempted to inscribe maternal differences on enslaved women's bodies, these texts were haunted by the concern that the superiority of white women's maternity was socially constructed, or contextually dependent. Often, they inadvertently pointed out the contingency and fragility of their expectations for their own wives and mothers.

In this chapter, I turn to perhaps one of the most famous depictions of enslaved mothers in early modern English literature: the character of Imoinda in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*. I show how *Oroonoko* interrogates the tensions, contradictions, and ambivalences that emerged as colonists attempted to inscribe racial differences through maternal bodies throughout the

seventeenth century. Due to its ambiguous status as literature and history, fiction and truth, novel and memoir, *Oroonoko* is uniquely situated to examine early modern anxieties about the authenticity of labeling something as "natural," as well as the ethical stakes of doing so. Behn's novel is meticulous in its presentation of both Oroonoko and Imoinda as conforming to European romantic ideals. Imoinda is seen as an ideal European mother, distant from the hyperbolic images of foreign mothers described in the travel literature above. The couple's Europeanness is literalized and naturalized through their bodies. From his "rising and *Roman*" nose to his "perfect Ebony, or polish'd Jett" skin, Oroonoko appears as physically distinct from his fellow Africans.[30] Likewise, Imoinda is presented as a worthy Europeanized counterpart to the (whitened) hero. Indeed, the narrator explicitly states that Imoinda is the object of white men's affection: "I have seen an hundred *White* Men sighing after her, and making a thousand Vows at her Feet, all vain, and unsuccessful."[31] She is "the beautiful *Black Venus,* to our young *Mars*."[32] Thus, for both Oroonoko and Imoinda, the narrative's praise depends on the erasure of their Africaness and the imposition of European beauty standards. Such an imposition makes Imoinda particularly vulnerable to English men, who threaten to lay violent claim to her whitened body.

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[30] Behn, 13. What is at stake in such descriptions is Oroonoko's acceptance as a suitable object for the erotic desire of *European* women. Indeed, the text was so effective at encouraging this response from English audiences that rumors began to circulate that Behn had an affair with her hero. Thus, the notion that English women may be sexually attracted to Oroonoko was not beyond imagining. An anonymous "Gentlewoman of [Behn's] Acquaintance" publicly dispels this rumor in a posthumous edition of her works. See Anonymous, "Memoirs on the Life of Mrs. Behn," *The Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs Behn in One Volume* (London: S Briscoe, 1696), n pag.

[31] Behn, 14.

[32] Ibid. After Imoinda and Oroonoko are reunited in Surinam, the narrator amends her description of Imoinda, indicating that her body is heavily tattooed according to the custom of Coramantee nobility. The late addition of this detail may be a strategic attempt to avoid recognizing Imoinda's foreignness until after she is reunited with Oroonoko. Jaqueline Pearson and Pumla Gqola point to this detail as evidence that Imoinda, unlike the Anglicized Oroonoko, is still seen as connected to Africa. However, I believe such a reading of Imoinda's characterization ignores a great deal of evidence that shows Behn's investment in portraying Imoinda as racially whitened. Jacqueline Pearson, "Slave Princes and Lady Monsters: Gender and Ethnic Difference in the Work of Aphra Behn." *Aphra Behn Studies*, Ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 219-34, esp. 230-1. Pumla Dineo Gqola, "'Where there is no novelty, there can be no curiosity': Reading Imoinda's Body in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko or, the Royal Slave*," *English in Africa,* vol 28, no 1 (2001): 105-17, esp. 108.

At the same time, *Oroonoko* presents not just one but several examples of non-European reproduction, all of which inform the reception of Imoinda's maternity. Throughout, the text draws on ideas about the natural world to establish attitudes about the sexual and romantic behavior of its various racial groups. On the one hand, the narrator's romanticizing and fetishizing of nature is central to her presentation of Imoinda as an ideal European mother. On the other hand, as the text associates Imoinda's maternity with the plant and animal life of Surinam, it complicates readers' ability to see Imoinda's maternity *as European*. The narrator's response to the non-human reproductive bodies of the Surinamese ecology undermines her unequivocal admiration for Imoinda and Oroonoko. Ultimately, *Oroonoko* highlights and explores the anxieties created by colonists' various strategies to situate enslaved mothers in relationship to their expectations for (European) Maternity. Behn's novel points to the concern, often tacit amongst European colonial writers, that the value of maternity itself might be subject to imaginative interpretation.

Foreign Ecologies and the Colonial Imagination

While exotic plant and animal bodies served a metaphorical function for colonialists, who made imaginative comparisons between women's bodies and the natural world, these "exotic" landscapes were more than metaphors: they were also real settings in which travelers created new "truths" about racialized mothers. Recently, scholars of ecocriticism have insisted on the importance of considering plants and animals not only as metaphors but also as embodied agents, which acted on the early moderns who encountered them. For example, Vin Nardizzi takes seriously the phenomenological effect of the Globe Theater's woodenness on playgoers' experiences of Shakespearean drama. Because the Globe was made of wood, built in the woods,

and located near the woods on the outskirts of London, Nardizzi argues that the very space must have called attention to early moderns' feelings and beliefs about forests and forestry.[33] Similarly, Maureen Quilligan draws a productive comparison between the spectacles of the bear, the statue, and the pregnant woman in the *Winter's Tale*. Positing that the "exit pursued by a bear" stage direction likely indicated the presence of an actual bear on the Elizabethan stage, Quilligan goes on to conclude that the bear would have drawn attention to the "natural animality" of Hermione's temporal and physical existence, as her body undergoes the visible transformations of pregnancy, birth, and ageing.[34] For both Nardizzi and Quilligan, the space of the theater is a privileged site for exploring the interaction between imaginary and real encounters with nature.

Seventeenth-century travel writing resembles the theater insofar as it combines empirical observation with imaginative tradition.[35] Indeed, the seventeenth-century witnessed the increased professionalization and institutionalization of empirical scientists who identified as "natural historians."[36] In the introduction to his early eighteenth-century natural history of Jamaica, Hans Sloane meticulously positions himself within a line of predecessors, including John de Lery,

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[33] Vin Nardizzi, *Wooden Os: Shakespeare's Theatres and England's Trees* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

[34] Maureen Quilligan, "Exit Pursued by a Bear: Staging Animal Bodies in *The Winter's Tale*," *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 506-22.

[35] Indeed, Behn's use of visual imagery is one of the avenues by which scholars have connected *Oroonoko* to both theater and colonialist travel writing. Marta Figlerowicz shows how Behn's novel, like later novels, uses theater as a model for its narrative structure, in which events are displayed for spectating masses. Figlerowicz, "'Frightful Spectacles of a Mangled King': Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Narration through Theater," *New Literary History*, vol 39, no 2 (2008): 321-334. Similarly, Ramesh Mallipeddi reads *Oroonoko*'s use of spectacle in the context of the emerging theatrical conventions and technologies of civic pageants and the new Restoration playhouse. Mallipeddi argues that *Oroonoko* engages with mercantilist and aristocratic colonialist ideologies that were also being propounded and explored in these new theatrical spaces. Ramesh Mallipeddi, "Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Sympathy in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol 45, no 4 (2012): 475-96.

[36] Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe*.

Andre Thevet, Jaques Bouton, Jean Baptiste du Tertre, Samuel Purchas, and John de Laet.[37] Brian Ogilvie argues that one of the primary features of natural history as it developed in the sixteenth century was an investment in description as a method.[38] While these early natural historians often "understood the world as a forest of symbols," they also differentiated "between the empirical study of nature and the symbolic interpretation of it."[39] The truth claim that begins *Oroonoko* echoes these writers' insistence on the primacy of firsthand observation.[40] While Behn's early English readers never set foot in Surinam, Behn frames her report of Surinam as an accurate portrayal of her time there, and her early readers understood *Oroonoko* as a secondhand account of her experience.[41] Indeed, Behn's description of the reproducing plant and animal bodies of the Surinamese ecology should be seen not only as an extended metaphor for Imoinda's pregnancy but also as the creation of an empirical truth about racialized maternity.

On the other hand, early naturalists' preference for empiricism did not lead them to neglect their interest in how nature expresses the divine order.[42] In fact, some believed that because natural history was rooted in "Observation of Matters of Fact," they were establishing proof of God's glory.[43] Titles such as John Ray's *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Work of*

[37] Hans Sloane, "Preface," *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica,* vol II (London, 1725), n pag.
[38] Ogilvie, esp 6-7.
[39] Ibid, 16.
[40] Robert Chibka argues that the text interrogates the primacy of empirical, "objective" truth claims and "does not imply…an equation between morality and historicity." While I find Chibka's argument convincing, I am concerned here less with the way in which Behn rejects the moral imperative of empiricism and more with the way in which she self-consciously frames her text as historical truth, even as she later manipulates and subverts this claim. Chibka, "Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* vol 30, no 4 (1988): 510-37, esp. 530.
[41] The anonymous author of "Memoirs on the Life of Behn" seems to take seriously the truth of Behn's story when she writes, "The Misfortunes of that Prince had been unknown to us, if the Divine *Astrea* had not been there…" Anonymous, "Memoirs on the Life of Mrs. Behn," n pag. Furthermore, Chibka shows how even modern critics prior to the 1980s were often overly obsessed with establishing the "truth" of Behn's story through historicism and biographical analysis. Chibka attributes this tendency to Behn's gender. Chibka, 511.
[42] Ogilvie, 16.
[43] Sloane, "Preface," n pag.

the Creation (1691) indicate that, by the late seventeenth century, the new natural historical method was invested in describing not only the usefulness of plants and animals but also their role in the higher cosmographical order.[44] Sloane spends several pages justifying the importance of his work, describing his text as both a practical guide for individuals on the medicinal use of plants and an opportunity for philosophical meditation on the world.[45] He argues that, if knowledge of natural history is established with empirical methods, its resulting persistence over time should point to "the Power, Wisdom, and Providence of Almighty God, in Creating, and Preserving the things he has created."[46] For Sloane, to write "natural history" was both to describe the physical features of plants and animals as well as to describe how individual organisms fit into a divinely-ordained order. As Ogilvie argues, "in the late Renaissance, becoming a naturalist meant mastering not only a set of concepts but also a specific set of techniques that granted meaning to interactions with the world."[47] Thus, foreign ecologies were not just the backdrop on which colonialists wrote their ideas about race and human differences but also active agents, whose interactions with colonists generated new knowledge. *Oroonoko* demonstrates how colonial encounters with foreign ecologies primed colonists to question their learned assumptions about maternity and the reproductive lives of non-Europeans mothers through a phenomenological encounter with the text. Because Imoinda's maternity is colored by

[44] John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (London, *Princes Arms* in S. *Pauls* Church-Yard: for Samuel Smith, 1691). British Library. Other scholars have identified the desire to illuminate God through detailing his creation as an important feature of the new science. See Sylvia Bowerbank, *Speaking for Nature: Women and Ecologies of Early Modern England* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): 19 and Peter Harrison, "Reading Vital Signs: Animals and the Experimental Philosophy," *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures*, ed. Erica Fudge (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 186-207. However, I would not go as far to claim, as both Bowerbank and Harrison do, that this "sanctified" creatures and indicated humans' scientific humility (Harrison 200). Indeed, presenting the natural world as evidence of European religious beliefs is merely a form of epistemological exploitation – one that buttresses European values at the expense of the natural world.
[45] Sloane, "Preface," n pag.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ogilvie, 5.

its parallels to the plant and animal life of Surinam, readers are confronted with the racial discomfort of her enslavement.

Colonists' tendency to apply spiritual meaning to the interaction between organisms and environments is supported by the early modern science of humoralism. Michael Schoenfeldt argues that because humoral theory taught that bodies were porous, the English regarded the regulation of their bodily boundaries – through behaviors such as diet and excretion – as acts of empirical self-fashioning.[48] According to Schoenfeldt, "as temperance became a central ethical virtue for the Renaissance, health assumed the role of a moral imperative, just as it still is in many ways for us."[49] Karen Kupperman shows how this imperative became particularly urgent during colonial exploration, as the English faced uncertainty about the effects new climates would have on their bodies. Indeed, early moderns' understanding that bodies and environments were inseparable from one another created the anxiety that travel would lead to racial degeneration. As Kupperman shows, while some English travelers expressed concern that living in warmer climates may make them ill, others believed that the sun offered healing powers for bodies and made land rich and fertile.[50] These latter writers pointed to the fertility of colonial land as evidence of the medicinal benefits of these ecologies for European bodies. They quite

[48] Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[49] Ibid, 7.
[50] Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol 41, no 2 (1984): 213-40. Kupperman's assumption that the English viewed their climate as more temperate than the "hot climates" of the global south has been complicated by the more recent work of Mary Floyd-Wilson. Floyd-Wilson shows how the English viewed Mediterranean climates producing the ideal humoral balance, in comparison with the geographic extremities of both England and Africa. She argues that the English's strategy to understand their climate as ideal or temperate emerged in congruence with colonialist thought, which depended on establishing European superiority to colonized people. Still, Kupperman's argument usefully lays out the English's concern about how travel would affect their humoral balance. Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

literally hoped to mimic the prosperity they observed in the reproducing plant bodies throughout "new" world.

Furthermore, because humoral theory posited a porous boundary between bodies and environments, early moderns' perceptions and experiences of foreign ecologies were also inseparable from their accounts of non-Europeans.[51] The frontispiece of a travel account by a French Dominican missionary named Jean Baptiste du Tertre (see Figure 4 below) demonstrates the close imaginative connection between the indigenous peoples of Antilles and the exoticized natural world in which he encounters them.[52] In the image, a central female figure mediates an idealized transaction between French colonists and natives; the French offer books and tools in exchange for the natives' animals, plants, and food.

[51] Building on Allen Grieco, Jean Feerick argues, "Not yet devoted to supporting the pretense that these two realms are distinct, the cultural logic expressed in the world of Renaissance botany understands the 'natural world' as a site always already infused with cultural categories" (85). For this reason, Feerick shows how the natural world came to serve as a ready model for Shakespeare and other early modern writers to sort through racial differences between humans. For example, Feerick shows how *Titus Andronicus* constructs Aaron's racial difference from the Romans over time through the language of grafting in reference to his "unnatural" coupling with the Gothic queen. A similar phenomenon occurs in Behn's novel, though the dominant site of analysis is not miscegenation but, rather, female fertility. See Feerick, "Botanical Shakespeares" and Grieco, "The Social Politics of Pre-Linnaean Botanical Classification," esp. 135-6.

[52] Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale des Antilles Habitées par led François*, vol II (Paris: Chez Thomas Jolly, 1667). Clements Library, University of Michigan. N pag.

Figure 4 Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, Histoire Generale des Antilles Habitées par led François.

Images such as this reveal Du Tertre's investment in portraying the Antilles as vibrant, fruitful, and harmonious. Throughout his text, Du Tertre scatters images of vases and baskets brimming with food, recalling the natives' offerings in the image below. Thus, while these images are metonymic, representative of the ecology of the Antilles as a whole, they are also symbolic of the prosperity the Antilles offer the colonists. In the images, the natives themselves become a natural resource that the colonists may exploit. Each groups' offerings are both commodity and

metaphor; the food and animals the colonists receive reflect and define the identity of the natives themselves. The contrast in the commodities point to the essential differences between the French and the natives while creating an illusion of peace, or even, equity. However, if the exchange in the foreground can be read as a meeting of different, but equal, cultures, a secondary image, framed in the background, undermines this reading. In the secondary image, which is noticeably parallel to the dominant one, the natives, humble and empty-handed, embrace the authority of Catholic missionaries. Once again, the natives' connection to the natural world is implied, this time by a tortoise that stands at the foot of the natives. Here, the natives are marked not by their bounty but rather by their lack – by the complete absence of religion. From the French perspective, the tortoise does not indicate their command or possession of the Antilles' resources but their spiritual innocence and natural acceptance of Catholic enlightenment.

Sexual Exceptionalism and the Nature of "Innocence"

As in colonial travel literature, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* uses the category of "nature" to mark and characterize racial boundaries. In a characteristic move, the narrator reports that Oroonoko "had nothing of Barbarity in his Nature, but in all Points address'd himself, as if his Education had been in some *European* Court."[53] The convoluted logic here manages to assert that Oroonoko's European-styled behavior is innate while also insisting that Europeans' comportment comes not from nature but from culture, particularly courtly education. This paradox is repeated throughout the description of Oroonoko. His "real Greatness of Soul," which emerges miraculously despite the fact that his "Objects were almost continually fighting Men," is

[53] Behn, 13.

attributed to his French tutor and his conversations with Spanish and English traders.[54] In this way, the narrator glorifies the "natural" exceptionalism of her hero while maintaining the English colonists' distance from the natural world.

A similar logic is deployed to establish Oroonoko and Imoinda's sexual exceptionalism. Significantly, Oroonoko and Imoinda are monogamous despite coming from a culture that practices polygamy – a fact that the narrator emphasizes. "He made her such Propositions as were not only and barely such; but, contrary to the Custom of his Country, he made her Vows she shou'd be the only woman he wou'd possess while he liv'd."[55] Thus, the sexual and romantic habits of Oroonoko and Imoinda affirm the values and expectations of Europeans and mark the couple as morally exceptional in comparison to their fellow enslaved people. As Laura Brown argues, the narrator characterizes Oroonoko as physically and culturally reminiscent of a European romantic hero. According to Brown, monogamy is a key feature of this heroism.[56] Indeed, the couple's monogamy enables early modern audiences to comprehend their relationship in the familiar terms of heterosexual, communal marriage despite their racial, cultural, and status difference.

Furthermore, the couple's positive valuation in relationship to European romantic ideals is requisite to Imoinda's characterization as an ideal maternal figure. A counterpart to the fantasy of African mothers unaffected by childbirth that Morgan describes, Imoinda greatly anticipates the birth of her son. In addition to being physically attractive by European standards, Imoinda is loyal, obedient, and virginal – even after she is married to the Coramantee king. As an enslaved

[54] Ibid, 12.
[55] Ibid, 15.
[56] In Brown's words, Oroonoko is "a man of wit and address, governed absolutely by his allegiance to the conventional aristocratic code of love and honor." Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves," esp. 37.

woman in Surinam, Imoinda is sexually vulnerable to her white possessors, yet she somewhat miraculously manages to evade even the persistent advances of Mr. Trefry. Before Oroonoko learns that the beautiful Clemene is actually his lost Imoinda, Mr. Trefry describes Clemene to Oroonoko as having all the qualities of an ideal English wife: "She is adorn'd with the most Graceful Modesty that ever beautifyed Youth; the softest Sigher — that, if she were capable of Love, one would swear she languish'd for some absent happy Man."[57] Mr. Trefry's description of Imoinda emphasizes her asexuality. By Mr. Trefry's interpretation, her sighs indicate either her love for an imagined, absent man or her inability to desire any man at all. In erasing Imoinda's sexuality, Mr. Trefry ironically makes her a viable reproductive partner, and therefore, prevents himself from raping her. He never acts on his impulse to force himself on her because of her sexual virtue. "*But oh! She disarms me, with that Modesty and Weeping so tender and so moving, that I retire, and thanks my Stars she overcame me*."[58] Indeed, Imoinda's sexual fidelity to Oroonoko is so consistent that when he asks her to sacrifice her life to avoid rape, "he [finds] the Heroick Wife faster pleading for Death than he was to propose it."[59] Jacqueline Pearson characterizes Imoinda's intense wifely submission as "an attack by exaggeration on the status quo," for it emphasizes, even to the point of hyperbole, Imoinda's conformity to European gender roles.[60] Thus, in many ways, Imoinda reflects English readers' expectations for ideal maternity. Because she does so despite being from a polygamous culture, her European reproductive values are not learned but natural. Therefore, she seems to provide evidence of a natural source for European values.

[57] Behn, 38.
[58] Ibid. Emphasis original.
[59] Ibid, 60.
[60] Jacqueline Pearson, "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn," *The Review of English Studies*, vol 42, no 166 (1991): 179-90, esp. 189.

However, while Behn's narrator uses the couple to morally validate European sexual norms, she also remains critical of the sexual and romantic habits of European men. Indeed, the narrator aligns the couple with European romantic ideals even as she suggests that European men themselves fail to exemplify this ideal.

> [A]s he knew no Vice, his Flame aim'd at nothing but Honour, if such a distinction may be made in Love; and especially in that Country, where Men take to themselves as many as they can maintain; and where the only Crime and Sin with Woman is, to turn her off, to abandon her to Want, Shame and Misery: Such ill Morals are only practis'd in *Christian*-Countries…but, contrary to the Custom of his Country, he made her Vows she shou'd be the only woman he wou'd possess while he liv'd.[61]

Here, narrative tension occurs as the speaker attempts to sort through two conflicting systems of marriage – polygamy and monogamy – which are emblematicized by the apparently mutually-exclusive categories of "Coramantee" and "Christian."[62] The logic of this passage, full of conditional and restrictive clauses, is slippery. Oroonoko is "especially" honorable because, unlike other Coramantees, he is monogamous, yet he is also similar to Coramantees, who, unlike "monogamous" Christians, are faithful to their wives. The narrator draws on both Cormantee and Christian culture to idealize Oroonoko and Imoinda's relationship, undermining the expectation of the cultures' inherent opposition. As she struggles to craft Oroonoko as exceptional, she must qualify English monogamy with West African fidelity. Significantly, the narrator attempts to resolve this tension by coding Oroonoko's desire to have a monogamous relationship as innate, or "against Custom." By describing Oroonoko and Imoinda as naturally conforming to English customs of licet sexuality, the text expresses approbation of these customs even while acknowledging that many Europeans fail to live up to this ideal. Indeed, the couple's very

[61] Behn, 15.
[62] Tensions such as this one support Margaret Ferguson's conclusion that accounting for the categories of gender, race, and class in *Oroonoko* requires critics to embrace the act of "juggling." Ferguson, "Juggling the Categories of Race, Class and Gender: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko,*" *Women's Studies*, vol 19 (1991): 159-81.

unaffectedness by European and African culture alike, uniquely positions them to embody sexual purity. At the same time, "purity" is defined by the text as a set of behaviors and virtues that are recognizable and palatable to English ideals for monogamous, communal marriage.

Though the narrator attempts to posit European monogamy as the ideal, "natural" form of heterosexual coupling, a competing logic emerges in the text, whereby polygamy is redeemed by force of being "natural." While the narrator informs readers that the natives "have a Plurality of Wives," she is quick to add that this does not produce sexual jealousy: "[W]hen they [the wives] grow old, they serve those that succeeded 'em…with a Servitude easie and respected." Significantly, the narrator explicitly cites "nature" as the source of the natives' chastity. They exist not according to laws or religion but according to "simple Nature...the most harmless, inoffensive, and virtuous Mistress."[63] The novel opens with a description of the sexual habits of the Surinamese, with whom the colonists "live…in perfect Amity, without daring to command 'em."[64] After recounting the natives' value as guides and trade partners, the narrator meditates on the beauty and mannerisms of the native women:

> Some of the Beauties which indeed as finely shap'd, as almost all are, and who have pretty Features, are very charming and novel; for they have all that is called Beauty, except the Colour, which is a reddish Yellow…They are extream modest and bashful, very shy, and nice of being touch'd. And though they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among 'em, there is not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance: and being continually us'd to see one another so unadorn'd, so like our first Parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had not Wishes…[W]here there is no Novelty, there can be no Curiosity.[65]

Here, nature is explicitly imbued with Christian, European values. The natives are presented as

[63] Behn, 10. Jacqueline Pearson argues that Behn genders Nature (and, by association, the natives) female to "cast important reflections on the ambiguous world of civilization in the novel," as well as the male authority that governs civilization. According to Pearson, this implicit critique of male authority remains ambivalent in the text, which both challenges and upholds the status quo surrounding race and gender. Jacqueline Pearson, "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn," esp. 185.
[64] Behn, 8.
[65] Behn, 9.

prelapsarian, saved from the Fall of Christian history, and therefore, unaffected by the taint of sexual sin. In this passage, the character of the native population is constructed through the bodies of native women. Significantly, the native women's nudity is coded as lack of adornment, placing them closer to nature than their English counterparts. By association, the native men are also sexually innocent due to their lack of concern with the women's beauty and nudity. The narrator's surprise that the native men do not objectify the women problematizes the act of empirical observation itself. The narrative gaze implicates both the storyteller and the reader in the sexual impropriety that is absent in the natives' culture. The narrator finds the native women "very charming and novel" even as she notes the lack of "Novelty" and "Curiosity" in the natives' culture. Thus, *Oroonoko* reverses the moral hierarchy between empirical scientist and subject of observation. The narrator and her readers experience the erotic desire that the natives themselves lack when they view one another's nakedness. Meanwhile, the narrator's reference to the women's disdain of being touched conjures images of English hands attempting to violate these innocent bodies. By equating the empirical methods of looking and touching with sexual impropriety, *Oroonoko* highlights the disconnect between the naturalized innocence of the natives and the English colonists. Significantly, the narrator's empirical gaze undermines her credibility; her stated admiration for nature – coded as sexual purity – is contradicted by the impropriety of her observation of the natives' nudity. As Ramesh Mallipeddi puts it, in *Oroonoko*, "the visual pleasures of seeing and contemplating are closely allied to the desire to possess and master."[66]

[66] Mallipeddi, 479.

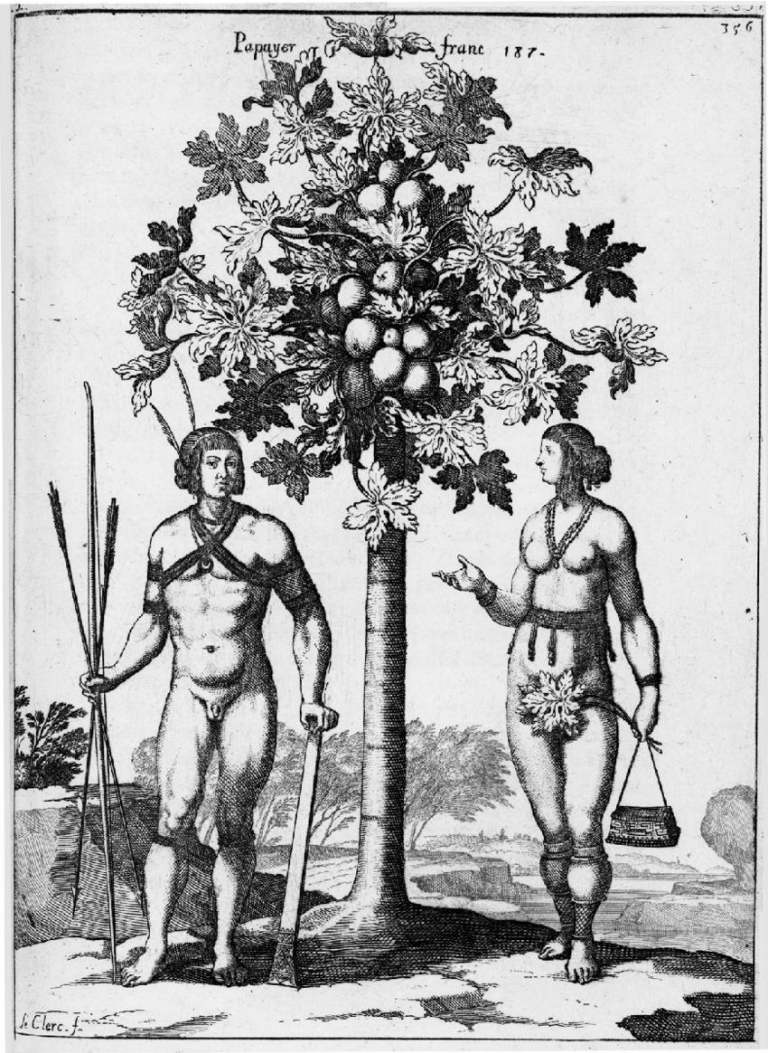

Figure 5 In this image from Du Tertre's Histoire Generale *(1667), the natives of the Antilles are reminiscent of Adam and Eve (356). The natives' bodies blend visually with the landscape. The round fruit on the tree mimics the native woman's breasts, and her genitals are modestly covered by a leaf from the same tree.*

Because Oroonoko and Imoinda's sexual behavior cannot be fully explained through reference to either English, Coramantee, or Surinamese culture, the characters put pressure on the very categories of culture and nature, sexual purity and deviance, and European and native. If the narrator condemns the practice of polygamy, she must also condemn the "natural" virtues of the native peoples. However, doing so would undermine her desire to saturate the natural world with Christian values. At the same time, the narrator desires to portray Oroonoko as conforming to English expectations for monogamous, communal marriage. In Behn's novel, the tension

between nature and Christianity, polygamy and monogamy, as the ideal guiding forces for sexual practices threatens to undermine the very categories of licit and illicit sexual and romantic behavior. While the narrator attempts to define racial boundaries by referencing the various cultures' sexual habits, she merely highlights the fragility of these boundaries.

"Eternal Spring": Imoinda's Body and the Surinamese Ecology

Meanwhile, Imoinda's sentimental maternity also puts pressure on the categories of "nature" and "culture," "slave" and "European." The reader's ability to see Imoinda as an *English* mother is complicated in the text by two other maternal figures: that of the natural landscape of Surinam and that of the tigress that Oroonoko kills after stealing her cub.[67] Even as the narrator seeks to portray Imoinda as sympathetic to white European maternal ideals, she is presented as similar to the plant and animal maternal bodies of Surinam. The narrator's detailed empirical description of the Surinamese ecology emphasizes the incredible fertility of Surinam's plants. Furthermore, the Europeans' hobby of "surprising" tigresses and stealing their cubs parallels the conflict over Imoinda's ownership of her unborn child. In what follows, I lay out the role of the two non-human mothers in Behn's text. As I do so, I suggest how and why Europeans' understanding of the natural world impacted discourses of racialized maternity. Thus, my analysis of plants and animals has implications not only for reading this text but also for understanding the larger history of the development of racial discourses across the seventeenth century.

[67] Margaret Ferguson also points out the parallel between the tigers and Imoinda, albeit to a very different end. Ferguson argues that the deaths of the tigers illustrate an implicit competition between Behn and Imoinda, who vie for the authority to re-present Oroonoko – Behn through narrative and Imoinda through embodied reproduction. In contrast, I argue that the tigresses do not merely illustrate the violence done to Imoinda but also problematize it. See Ferguson, "Juggling," esp. 173.

In *Oroonoko,* the landscape of Surinam seems to endlessly reproduce itself. The narrator describes the continent of South America as containing a vast, unknown stretch of land and resources. Stretching to China and Peru, Surinam "may contain more Noble Earth than all the Universe besides."[68] This endless geography enjoys an eternal spring: "the Shades are perpetual, the Trees, bearing at once all degrees of Leaves and Fruit, from blooming Buds to ripe Autumn; Groves of Oranges, Limons, Citrons, Figs, Nutmegs, and noble Aromaticks, continually bearing their Fragrances."[69] Because the plants can produce fruit and buds at the same time, they are continuously ready for harvest. Surinam can be seen as a maternal figure that is always already pregnant. Unlike Imoinda, this ecology is not subject to the temporal framework of human pregnancy. Tracing the limitless space of the landscape, the plant and animal carcasses propagate their "noble Aromaticks" endlessly, even beyond death: "The very Meat we eat, when set on the Table, if it be Native, I mean of the Country, perfumes the whole Room."[70] Thus, the model of maternity presented by the Surinamese ecology is endlessly bountiful and eternal. The pressing issues of life, death, and freedom raised by Imoinda's pregnancy are remarkably absent from this scene.

At the same time, the narrator's admiration for Surinam is colored by her eulogistic attitude toward the scene. Here, the narrator elides her grief for human life with her sorrow about her disconnect from Surinam's miraculously fruitful ecology. The narrator first describes the loss of Surinam in terms of her grief for her father – a prominent male figure who anchors her colonialist authority over the land. In her lament for his death, the narrator speaks not in terms of familial intimacy but rather in terms of the loss of wealth and power the land never afforded him.

[68] Behn, 43.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

> My stay was to be short in that Country, because my Father dy'd at Sea, and never arriv'd to possess the Honour was design'd him, (which was Lieutenant-General of Six and thirty Islands, besides the Continent of *Surinam*) nor the advantages he hop'd to reap by them.[71]

The narrator's gesture to "the advantages he hop'd to reap" resonates within the description of the land's endless fertility. However, the father's death by sea also reminds the reader of the fragility of human bodies in the face of nature, undermining the English's possession of the Surinamese ecology. Indeed, by the time *Oroonoko* is written, the English had already released Surinam to the Dutch. Once again, the narrator describes this loss as a form of social death – now embodied by the passing of Charles II. "I must say thus much of it, That certainly had his late Majesty, of sacred Memory, but seen and known what a vast and charming World he had been Master of in that Continent, he would never have parted so Easily with it to the *Dutch.*"[72] Richard Grove argues that conservationist attitudes, such as the one expressed here by the narrator, are rooted in concern about "the possibility of the disappearance of man himself."[73] While the Surinamese ecology is brimming with the quality of life and affectivity that Mel Chen refers to as "animacy," the English are dead or vulnerable to death.[74] Indeed, the narrator's doleful respect for the Surinamese ecology points to the loss of institutional authority that she gains through her association with her father and the crown of England. What the narrator mourns here is not the landscape *per se* but rather what the land "bears": wealth, honor, and

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Richard H Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 14.
[74] Mel Chen's study of "animacy" draws on an idea in linguistics that explains how and why words with greater degrees of animacy cannot be the objects of less animate words. Chen applies this "hierarchy of animacy" to a broader analysis of how racialized, gendered, queer, disabled, and classed bodies are negatively positioned on a continuum between life and death. Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke University Press, 2012).

power. By making Surinamese land miraculously fertile, the text erases the coerced labor of enslaved people. The narrator attempts to assert ownership over the landscape by describing it not as an autonomous entity with a life of its own but rather as a typology of resources that have use and monetary value for the English. The trees "have an instrinsick Value…and bear a Price considerable."[75] Unfortunately for the narrator, this landscape is already lost to the English. Surinam is "oftentimes Fatal and at least Dangerous" to the colonists, indicating not only that it was never really theirs to possess but also that the *landscape* may have possession of *them*.

Thus, as the English struggle to capitalize on Imoinda's reproductive capacity, they also struggle to control another maternal figure: the landscape of Surinam itself. The English's failure to lay claim to Imoinda –both her body and her written legacy – parallels their failure to fully know and possess the territory, which always proves to be inhospitable to them. Significantly, this failure is both material and narratological. The narrators' description of the English colonists' unmediated access to the fertile Surinamese landscape is undermined by the death of Behn's father; the text fails to maintain English dominance in its representation of the natural world. Now, I do not wish to argue that Behn secretly embedded a critique of colonialism into her description of the Surinamese landscape. After all, as Simon Estok reminds us, "The romanticization of nature as a space of simplicity, innocence, and peace…no more slowed the progress of ecophobia than did the notion of 'the Noble Savage' slow the genocide of colonized peoples in the New World."[76] Indeed, the tension between Behn's romanticization of nature and natives and her literary and historical exploitation of them is the precondition of the text's

[75] Behn, 43.
[76] Estok, 7.

anxieties about racialized maternity.[77] The striking parallel between the story of Imoinda and the description of the Surinamese ecology points to Behn's attempt to sort through the tension between the English desire to naturalize and idealize Imoinda's maternity and their desire to exploit it by enslaving her offspring. The unobtainable Surinamese landscape is a symbolic manifestation of the discomfort caused by the narrator's attempt to use Imoinda to buttress English maternal values. If Imoinda is "natural" and "pure," then she must resemble the English understanding of ideal maternal behavior. However, this "whitening" of Imoinda also places her, like the Surinamese landscape, beyond the limits of English exploitation. Imoinda cannot parrot English maternal values without simultaneously condemning the colonists who would exploit her fertility under the economic paradigm of chattel slavery. Thus, the English are vulnerable not only to the threats of physical violence and starvation posed by the Surinamese landscape but also to challenges to the very ethical qualities that make them Enlightened humans. The narrator recognizes this vulnerability even as she struggles to deny it. As the Surinamese ecology reflects alternative attitudes towards Imoinda's maternity, it reveals fissures in the narrator's smooth portrayal of her (whitened) maternity, creating racial tension where we expect to find closure.

The tension continues to mount as the narrator recounts the colonists' adventures in Surinam – adventures that require the surveillance and protection of Oroonoko and native Surinamese translators. It is here that the narrator discusses the act of "surprising," an activity whereby the human participants steal tiger cubs from their nests while their mothers are out hunting. On one such venture, a group of colonists – including the narrator, Oroonoko, three nameless women, and "an English Gentleman, Brother to Harry Martin, the great Oliverian" –

[77] While Behn's novel is, at times, highly critical of the English, I do not believe we can dismiss her complicity in the structures that allowed the English to prosper through the economic and environmental exploitation of "the New World."

steals a tiger cub only to encounter the cub's mother while making their escape. Just as all hope seems lost, Oroonoko takes the sword of the Martin brother and uses it to slay the tiger, saving the group.

While the narrator focuses on the action of Oroonoko and the colonists, the tiger's maternity presents an important parallel to that of Imoinda. Like Imoinda, the tiger defends its offspring from the exploitative claims of the colonists, and she, too, dies at the hands of Oroonoko. Significantly, while the violence of Imoinda comes as a surprise to the colonists, the tiger's ferocity is itself part of the narrator's enjoyment of their adventure. The narrator expects the tigress to become dangerous at the loss of her cub, and she steals it specifically for the entertainment produced by the tiger's anticipated maternal reaction. On the other hand, exploiting the tiger also produces discomfort in the text. While she introduces the tiger as a female "Dam," she later oscillates between using male and female pronouns to describe the animal. In a gloss of the text, Joanna Lipking suggests that this gender anomaly, which was repeated in all four seventeenth-century editions, may indicate "reluctance to use a feminine pronoun in moments of extreme violence."[78] Jacqueline Pearson argues that the oscillation of pronouns in this scene expresses ambivalence about female authority. Positioning the tiger as a parallel to Behn rather than to Imoinda, Pearson argues, "The narrator's Freudian slips with pronouns reveal her culturally-constructed anxiety about female power…but also a compensating fantasy of female power challenging the male world."[79] Departing from both Lipking and Pearson, I argue that the narrator's odd use of pronouns points to the uncomfortable relationship between the tiger's maternity and that of Imoinda.[80] While the narrator praises Oroonoko for

[78] Lipking, ed, *Oroonoko*, 44.
[79] Jacqueline Pearson, "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn," 185.
[80] This argument is further supported by fact that the pronouns of the second tiger are changed to masculine in the fourth edition of the text while those of the first tiger continue to oscillate. Because the second tiger is an aggressor

killing this tiger/mother, the scene, like the description of the Surinamese landscape, reflects the disconnect between the English and the non-human animal world. Oroonoko's success, upheld by the narrator as heroic, also marks his implication in the very system that exploits him and the mother of his unborn child.[81]

The narrator's announcement of the danger of "surprising" aids the suspense of her story and highlights Oroonoko's heroic masculinity. In the scene, Oroonoko proves his heroism at the expense of that of the Martin brother as well as the maternity of the tigress. Martin's sword is a phallic symbol of his masculinity. As Oroonoko takes it, he "desir[es] him [Mr. Martin] to stand aside, or follow the ladies" — a command that Martin quickly obeys.[82] This symbolic castration positions Oroonoko as hierarchically superior to Martin, lending further weight to his accomplishment. The narrator's description of the tiger's attack on Oroonoko also raises the threat of castration. As Oroonoko stabs the tiger through the heart:

> …the dying Beast stretch'd forth her Paw, and going to grasp his Thigh, supriz'd with Death in that very moment, did him no other harm than fixing her long Nails in his Flesh very deep, feebly wounded him, but cou'd not grasp the Flesh to tear off any.[83]

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of a mother (i.e., the lamb), making it masculine is easily conscionable. See footnote 2 of Lipking, ed, *Oroonoko*, 44.

[81] In his thorough reading of the tigers in *Oroonoko*, Eric Miller argues that "[Oroonoko's] conquest of tigers in Surinam implies self-defeat. The cats' destruction only prefigures his own" (53). To explain the shifting gender pronouns in the tiger scenes, Miller reads the tiger scenes through the lens of classical literary tropes, arguing that Oroonoko combines both male and female classical roles. However, his focus on classical texts leads Miller to ignore the context of colonial slavery, as well as contemporary gender roles. Furthermore, in focusing on how the tigers signify aspects of Oroonoko, Miller fails to note parallels between the tiger and Imoinda. Eric Miller, "Aphra Behn's Tigers," *The Dalhousie Review*, vol 81, no 1 (2001): 47-65.

[82] Behn, 45.

[83] Ibid.

The thigh's suggestive proximity to the genitals, along with the narrator's reference to the removal of "flesh" draws attention to Oroonoko's penis. That the tiger fails to take a piece of Oroonoko's flesh indicates that his body, while wounded, maintains its masculinity.

On the other hand, while the narrator celebrates the heroism Oroonoko displays in killing the tiger, his own reaction to the event is less enthusiastic. Unlike the narrator, Oroonoko does not display pleasure in the death of the tiger mother but merely lays the cub at the narrator's feet "with an unconcern, that had nothing of the Joy or Gladness of a Victory."[84] Oroonoko's ostensible stoicism in this moment is demonstrably out of character for the Prince, who routinely struggles to hide his emotional state, even when his life depends on it. For example, when he sees a bed being prepared for Imoinda and the King, Oroonoko is "forc'd to retire, to vent his Groans; where he [falls] down on a Carpet, and [lies] struggling a long time, and only breathing now and then – *O Imoinda!*"[85] Thus, Oroonoko's failure to display joy in this moment should be understood as a face-value expression of his emotional state; he displays no joy because he feels no joy about killing the tigress. Indeed, Oroonoko's reaction to the death of the tiger mother directly contrasts with his reaction to defeating a second tiger — the latter of which is known to be preying on domesticated animals. After learning about the trouble this "Devil" or "Monster" has caused colonists, Oroonoko immediately vows to kill it.[86] According to the narrator's report, he goads the English women into challenging him to hunt the second tiger: "*What Trophies and Garlands, Ladies, will you make me, if I bring you home the Heart of this Ravenous Beast, that eats up all you Lambs and Pigs?"*[87] Comparing these two tiger encounters, we can see that what is at stake for Oroonoko is less the deaths of the tigers *per se* but the context and circumstances

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid, 20.
[86] Ibid, 45.
[87] Ibid. Italics original.

by which he kills them. Eric Miller argues that the wounds of both the tiger mother and Oroonoko suggest invagination. According to Miller, Oroonoko, like the pronoun-switching tiger, experiences gender confusion during the scene, as his forced participation in the game of surprising effeminizes him.[88] Later, Oroonoko recalls this episode of surprising when he laments his fate of being "*Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the Sport of Women, Fools, and Cowards*."[89] By this logic, the difference in Oroonoko's reactions to the two tiger encounters can be explained by Oroonoko's agency in setting the terms by which he displays his hunting prowess. Because Oroonoko's masculinity is elsewhere tied to his dominance over animals, the comparison to animals here is particularly degrading.

In addition, I argue that Imoinda's symbolic association with the tiger mother in the text puts critical pressure on Oroonoko's killing of the animal. Unlike the tiger mother, the second tiger is "Ravenous"; they catch it eating "the Belly of a new ravish'd Sheep," protecting her stolen prey rather than her offspring.[90] Here, the *sheep* is feminized through the etymological link between "ravish" and "rape." The reference to the sheep's "belly" draws attention to the animal's womb and potential maternity, linking her to Imoinda, as well. Through Oroonoko's juxtaposed reactions to hunting the two tigers, the novel highlights the affects surrounding both nature and maternity in the text. The narrator's celebration of Oroonoko's masculine heroism can occur only under the condition that she ignore the rhetorical impact of the tiger's maternity. If we see the tiger mother as a proxy for Imoinda – which, I argue, the text encourages us to do – Oroonoko's exceptionality in this scene is put in direct tension with that of his wife. Ironically, Oroonoko is forced to kill an animal for acting on the same parental instincts that lead him and

[88] Miller, "Aphra Behn's Tigers."
[89] Behn, 52. Italics orginal.
[90] Ibid, 46.

his wife to violent insurrection. Thus, if Oroonoko emerges from this moment as a European-styled hero – different and more impressive than his enslaved fellows – it is only by devaluing the maternity of the tiger and, consequently, that of Imoinda.

Behn's decision to insert tigers in her story is itself worthy of critical pause, as tigers, unlike the other animals mentioned in *Oroonoko* – marmosets, eels, snakes – are not native to Surinam.[91] It is possible that Behn mistook the tiger for a similar large feline such as the ocelot, jaguar, or cougar, the latter of which are native to Surinam. Indeed, there is evidence that other English colonists mistakenly believed tigers were present in the Surinamese ecology.[92] Regardless of why Behn chose to represent tigers in her story, the episodes would have carried particular connotations for early modern English readers. In the premodern period, the tiger, unlike other large felines, was often associated with not only maternity but also questions of biological savagery and ethnological difference. Widespread folklore tracing back to Pliny tells of a tigress whose cubs are stolen by a hunter. According to Pliny's tale, the cunning hunter deposits one of the cubs in the path of the tigress, knowing that the tiger mother would eagerly collect the cub and take it home, allowing the hunter to escape safely with all her other offspring.[93] The activity of "surprising" Behn describes may very well be a direct reference to Pliny's legend, or countless accounts of it throughout the bestiaries of the Middle Ages and into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[94] Furthermore, the common accusation that a particularly cruel individual was nursed by a Hyrcanian tiger was familiar to readers of Virgil,

[91] Miller, 55.
[92] Governor William Byam requests that one of the conditions of surrendering Surinam to the Dutch be that the English be allowed guns to defend their stock in Surinam from "Indians, our Slaves, and Tygers and other vermines." William Byam, *Narrative of the State of Guiana and Surinam: 1665-1667*, British Library, Sloane MS 3662: 1665-7.
[93] For a more complete etymology of "tiger," see David Thorley, "Naming the Tiger in the Early Modern World," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol 70, no 3 (2017): 997-1006.
[94] Significant mentions of tigers can be found in British Library, Add MS 11283; British Library, Harley MS 4751; British Library, Royal MS 2 B. VII; British Library Royal MS 12 C.

Marlowe, and Shakespeare, among others.[95] The logic behind this insult naturalizes an individual's cruelty through the breastmilk of their mother. Indeed, embedded within the folklore surrounding tigers are questions about the naturalness of maternal behavior and women's role in the heritability of savagery. Presenting the tigress as a model of maternity would have activated a long history in which tigresses served as allegorical representations of human, and specifically maternal, behavior.

Colonialist Interpretations of Non-European Maternity

When Behn constructs the tigress as a parallel to Imoinda, she is implicitly confronting the uncomfortably-tangled nexus of race, maternity, and nature in the period. On the one hand, Imoinda's maternity seems to provide evidence of a natural source for European values. Her sentimental maternal performance reinforces Europeans' expectations for women and mothers, temporarily assuaging the racial tension caused by her enslavement and death. On the other hand, Imoinda's connection to nature complicates this sentimentality of her character. The narrator's portrayal of plants and animals in parallel with Imoinda's maternity draws attention to the *un*natural creation of maternal norms and values and undermines maternity's status as "nature" or "truth." In *Oroonoko*, these non-human forces draw attention to the narrator's short-sightedness, as she attempts to appropriate the natural world to undergird English morality. In concert with Imoinda's pregnancy, the Surinamese ecology asserts its own narrative agency, upsetting the hierarchy between colonist and landscape, as well as the assumption that English expectations of maternity, or Maternity, are natural.

[95] Thorley, esp. 989-91.

Insofar as *Oroonoko* lays bare the processes by which the natural world gets conscripted into colonists' "empirical truths," it intervenes in larger conversations about emerging scientific practices and epistemologies. Indeed, Behn wrote *Oroonoko* at a time when colonial writers were actively making sense of their new encounters with foreign mothers. The story can be understood as a sort of parodic interpretation of a natural historical text; as Behn claims to write "the Truth…without the Addition of Invention," she echoes the truth claims of the emerging scientific genre and opens the opportunity for comparison between her work and such texts.[96] While maternal bodies were seemingly ubiquitous in early discourses of race and ethnicity, the meaning they produced was contingent on the context in which they appeared. Often, this meaning varied from writer to writer, as individuals developed strategies to conform their descriptions of racialized mothers to their text's purpose. While images and descriptions of enslaved women giving birth painlessly and suckling their children with elongated breasts signaled racist expectations about Africans' sexualities, these images existed alongside a range of other representations of black maternity. Even within colonial travel texts, the message that enslaved mothers were physically and culturally different from European mothers was inconsistent. Through this inconsistency, colonialist writers revealed their discomfort in their interactions – both imagined and real – with black and/or Native American mothers. Faced with the pressure to justify their exploitation of enslaved mothers and other maternal colonists subjects while simultaneously naturalizing their expectations for European maternity, travelers developed unique rhetorical and representational strategies. Meanwhile, certain abolitionists decided the tension between slavery and maternity was untenable and began to assert the immorality of the institution through sentimental portrayals of enslaved mothers. The diversity of early modern

[96] Behn, 8.

representations of enslaved mothers makes it impossible to fully align Behn's treatment of Imoinda with any individual or tradition. Instead, I argue that the variation itself points to the problem at the heart of Behn's text – namely, the concern that Maternity is not a natural, self-evident construct but is, instead, subject to narrative interpretation.

For example, figure 6, from Pietre de Marees's 1602 account of his voyage to Guinea, depicts four types of West African women, each labeled with a letter corresponding to a description.[97]

Figure 6 *Pietre de Marees*, Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602).

The visual logic of this image leaves the viewer with the impression that it outlines a complete visual representation of "the condition and appearance of the women-folk."[98] However, the image also emphasizes the dynamic hybridity of the Guinean people. The caption of the image reveals that the types are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Image C, a young girl "with short breasts, being in the prime of her life," may very well soon resemble the women of image B or D, or she may already be a mother herself. The woman of image D with elongated breasts

[97] De Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, 36.
[98] Ibid.

suckling a child over her shoulder could be understood as just one temporal phase of Guinean women's lives. She is but part of a whole, rather than, as Morgan argues, a symbol for the entire continent of Africa.[99] Furthermore, while the child in image D connects the woman to the hyperbolic racist fantasy that Morgan describes, it is unclear whether the breasts of the woman in image B fulfill the same trope. Certainly, the woman's breasts are larger than those of the young girl, yet it is unclear what – if any – racial meaning such breasts would have registered in the European imagination. Finally, the image on the far left depicts a "Melato," a half black, half Portuguese woman. According to De Marees, miscegenation is not only common but even desired by Portuguese men, who prefer to take Melato women as wives "because white women do not thrive much there."[100] The presence of the Melato woman indicates that the image's typology is already influenced by European culture. While the image seems to mimetically represent Guinean bodies, the Melato woman draws attention to the Portuguese gaze that mediates this portrayal.

Meanwhile, other colonial texts offered alternative means of understanding the relationship between European mothers and enslaved African mothers. Even after the Virginian *partuus* law of 1662 naturalized the relationship between maternity and slave status, depictions of enslaved mothers failed to produce a unilateral binary between black and white maternity.[101]

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[99] Morgan, 31.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Indeed, the illusion of completeness in De Marees's text is challenged by the context in which it travels in the early seventeenth century. The image in figure 6 reappears first in a Dutch collection printed by Michiel Colijn in 1619 that binds together several well-known travel texts such as those by Walter Raleigh, Gerrit de Veer, and Francis Pretty. See Pieter De Marees, "Beschrijvinghe ende Historische verhael vant Gout koninckrijck van Guinea." Later, De Marees is quoted in *Purchas, His Pilgrims* (though Purchas greatly abridges his text, leaving out key moments that produce sympathy for the native Guinean women). The existence of these collections indicates that readers were interested in consuming the narratives of individual travelers within a larger conversation that offered varying perspectives on Africa by Europeans of diverse nationalities. The popularity of large collections of travel writings such as the famous *Purchas, His Pilgrims* suggests that part of the pleasure of reading traveler's accounts was in viewing an excess of perspectives produced by diverse European travelers. See Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrims*, vol 2 (London: W Stansby for H Fetherstone, 1624): book 7, chapter 2. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

For example, while John Ogilby's *America* (1671) reiterates the familiar fantasy of the "savage" woman breastfeeding her child over her shoulder, he also reports indigenous women who "destroy'd the Infants in their Wombs, that they might not bear slaves for the Spaniards."[102] This account of slave women sacrificing their children may indicate, as Behn would have it, "a sort of Courage too brutal to be applauded."[103] However, it also complicates the assumption that the reproduction of enslaved black women was passive and exploitable. This example of an enslaved woman resisting the exploitation of her reproductive labor puts pressure on Morgan's claim that colonists always saw enslaved mothers' reproduction as fundamentally distinct from that of white mothers. Similarly, Du Tertre (1667) describes an enslaved woman who would become known as "*La Pucelle des Isles*," made famous for refusing to marry a fellow slave offered to her by her master. Aware that the purpose of such a marriage would be to perform sexual and reproductive labor for the owner, the woman announces, "I am satisfied to be miserable in myself, without bringing children into the world who would perhaps be more unhappy than I, and whose afflictions would be much more painful to me than my own."[104]

Du Tertre's account of the enslaved peoples in the French-owned Antilles features images of enslaved females with naked breasts, bent over their work as white French masters stand poised overseeing their labors (e.g., figure 7).[105] Here, while the women's breasts are nude, they are not hyperbolically elongated. On the one hand, the image's caption of "menagerie," a word typically used to describe an exhibition of exotic animals, is dehumanizing. Because the

[102] Jennifer Morgan also quotes Ogilby's text, yet she does not unpack the significance of this maternal act of devotion but, rather, cites it as further evidence of racialized differences between slave mothers and white mothers. See Morgan, 36.
[103] The narrator of *Oroonoko* uses this phrase to describe Oroonoko's reaction to the self-wounding ceremony of the Surinamese natives. Behn, 50.
[104] Joanna Lipking, trans and ed, "Jean Baptiste du Tertre," *Oroonoko* (New York and London: Norton, 1997): 108-12, esp. 110.
[105] Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, 419.

labels describe the plants, animals, and people in the scene, they reduce black bodies to commodities that the image proudly displays. At the same time, Du Tertre's image is deceptively idyllic. The labeled commodities, including the human bodies, are surrounded by decorative trees and animals, and the sky is riddled with beautiful fluffy clouds. The image's idealism is intended to mask the horrible reality of the enslaved subjects' dehumanization. In the background, a child reaches towards its doting mother – a representation of maternity that is loving and commodious. Thus, while Du Tertre represents racist images of enslaved people, he offers an alternative interpretation of the meaning and moral consequences of these bodies in order to obfuscate the scene's cruelty. In the image, maternity is conscripted to justify the institution of slavery, not by denying that enslaved mothers love their children but by implying that their condition does not preempt them from experiencing the joys of their children. Meanwhile, Du Tertre dedicates an entire chapter to describing the culture, clothing, work, and harsh punishments of the enslaved subjects, deploying sympathetic language throughout.[106] "I don't know what the nation has done; but it is enough to be black to be taken, sold, and bound into a grievous servitude that lasts for all of life," he writes, going as far as to argue that "they [the enslaved] live in a more Christian way in their condition than many of the French."[107] In such moments, Du Tertre's text reveals what the harsh injustice that his image obscures.

[106] Du Tertre, "Traite VIII. Des Esclaves Des Antilles de l' Amerique," 483-539.
[107] Lipking, 108-9.

Figure 7 Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, "Menagerie," Histoire Generale.

Another important topic that was frequently explored in colonialist writing on slavery was the issue of parents – most often, mothers – being separated from their children. The idea of family separation produced mixed responses from European writers. While some attempted to justify family separation by telling stories of African fathers selling their children for profit, others vehemently objected to the practice.[108] For example, in his explicitly abolitionist text entitled *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies* (1684), Thomas Tryon claims to be deeply disturbed by the effect of slavery on black children and families.[109]

[108] De Marees writes, "Each woman maintains her children and each child knows it Mother, staying close to her till the Father carries the child away from the Mother and sells it; for it happens quite often that the Husband takes the children from his Wives and sells them to other people as Slaves." De Marees, 25-6. In contrast, Hans Sloane argues that the rumor that African fathers sell their children is false. Hans Sloane, *A Voyage*, lvi.

[109] Thomas Tryon, *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies* (London: printed by Andre Sowle, 1684). Harvard University Library. Ruthe Sheffey, makes the case that Behn's *Oroonoko* was influenced by her relationship with Thomas Tryon and her knowledge of his work. Ruthe Sheffey, "Some Evidence for a New Source of Aphra Behn *Oroonoko*," *Studies in Philology*, vol 59 (1962): 52-63.

The tract quotes enslaved mothers expressing their pain over their separation from their children or their inability to adequately care for their infants. One mother complains:

> For then we are hurried from our nearest and dearest Relations, the kind Husband from his loving Wife, the tender Mother from her helpless Babe, and Youth (the comfort and joy of Age) snatcht from their mourning Parents, and that without any hopes of ever seeing one another again.[110]

The form and sentimental language of this complaint deserve some unpacking. Beginning with the patriarch and descending to the children, the complaint mimics the structure of European familial hierarchies. Furthermore, the adage that children are "the comfort and joy of age" is a common English saying that would have been recognizable to English readers. The presence of these distinctly English features in a speech reportedly delivered by a non-English mother may certainly produce skepticism about the speech's authenticity. Regardless, these Anglicanisms corroborate Tryon's assumption that white and black women experience maternity in much the same way. As in later sentimental abolitionist fiction, Tryon's condemnation of slavery is predicated on the problematic assumption that maternity is universal and ahistorical. Meanwhile, the same assumption also motivates natural historian Hans Sloane's recognition that enslaved subjects "have so great a love for [their children], that no Master dare sell or give away one of their little ones, unless they care not whether their Parents hang themselves or no."[111] In contrast to Tryon, Sloane demonstrates little remorse for the harsh treatment of slaves, referring to them as "a very perverse Generation of People."[112] All of these colonialist texts confront the existence of enslaved mothers through preconceived assumptions about what maternity should look like

[110] Ibid, 81-2.
[111] Sloane, *A Voyage,* lvii
[112] Ibid.

and feel like – assumptions that are based on their expectations for European women. These expectations are so powerful that some pro-slavery colonists argued against family separation simply out of fear of parents' retaliation. Thus, the recognition of enslaved parents' affective attachments to their children does not necessarily lead to political justice for the families of enslaved individuals. In aggregate, these texts demonstrate the ongoing colonial project of writing and rewriting the meaning of enslaved mothers' bodies, as well the cognitive dissonance colonists experienced as they confronted, and exploited, non-European mothers.

In *Oroonoko,* we witness the manifestation of Hans Sloane's fear: an enslaved father and mother reference their love for their child to justify their violent rebellion against English colonists. Significantly, the animal rhetoric surrounding the rebellion in *Oroonoko* temporarily secures Oroonoko and Imoinda's exceptionality from the other enslaved subjects by positing their violence as a signifier of their conformity to English familial norms. When Oroonoko and Imoinda first reunite, they seem content to remain enslaved, if they can be together. "Even Fetters and Slavery were Soft and Easy; and wou'd be supported with Joy and Pleasure, while they cou'd be so happy to possess each other, and to be able to make good their Vows."[113] However, when Imoinda becomes pregnant, the couple suddenly develops a sense of urgency to be freed, as they want to save their child from being born into slavery. As Oroonoko begins to unite his fellow enslaved peoples in a rebellion, he appeals to gender expectations that are compatible with those of England, using animal metaphors to emphasize his concept of "the Divine Quality of Men." Speaking only to the enslaved men, he argues that their situation is "fitter for Beasts than Men; Senseless Brutes, than Humane Souls." According to the narrator, Oroonoko accuses his fellow enslaved men of acting "like Dogs that lov'd the Whip and Bell,

[113] Behn, 39.

and fawn'd the more they were beaten." When the men respond that revolting might endanger their wives and children, Oroonoko lectures them on the proper behavior of honorable women:

> That Honour was the First Principle in Nature, that was to be Obey'd…he found it not inconsistent with that, to take an equal Care of their Wives and Children, as they wou'd themselves…But if there were a Woman among them so degenerate from Love and Vertue to chuse Slavery before the pursuit of her Husband, and with the hazard of her Life, to share with him in his Fortunes; that such an one ought to be Abandon'd, and left as a Prey to the common Enemy.[114]

Here, the hypothetical sin of the enslaved women is not only that they will have accepted slavery, an animal-like condition, but also that they will have refused to follow their husbands. Here, women's obedience to their husbands is coded as natural, and in turn, nature teaches men "to take equal Care of their Wives and Children, as they wou'd themselves." Those who fail to behave according to these gendered expectations, then, are *unnatural*. The word "degenerate" contains the Latin root "genus," meaning "race" or "kind." Thus, to be "degenerate from Love and Vertue" is to act against nature, or against the precedent set by one's ancestors. Should the women disobey their husbands, Oroonoko says, they would be are like animals, worthy of being "left as Prey to the common Enemy." Thus, by the time the nameless enslaved subjects retreat from conflict with the English, readers have already been conditioned to see this as a sign of their race and gender deviance. Significantly, it is the nameless enslaved women who are blamed for the rebellion's failure; it is they who convince the men to retreat, begging their husbands to abandon Oroonoko and save themselves. Thus, the women's failure is presented as evidence of the enslaved people's patriarchal order. By attributing this failure to women, *Oroonoko* perpetuates the period's tendency to center women – particularly maternity – in politicized discourses.

[114] Ibid, 53.

In contrast, the pregnant Imoinda, "grown big as she was," fights alongside Oroonoko. This reference to Imoinda's womb posits her strength and bravery as a natural, maternal act. Unfortunately, Imoinda's violence, while justified by the narrator, also leads to her death and subsequent immortalization. Once she rebels against the English colonists, the contradiction between her sacredness and her savagery can no longer be sustained within the narrative. The various values she has been forced to represent – sexual innocence and maternal authority, blackness and whiteness – can no longer exist in equilibrium, and the only narrative solution is her death. By labeling her death as "Heroick," Behn contains the threat she poses to both European bodies and values without condemning her violent maternal act.[115] The legacy Imoinda leaves behind affirms English expectations for white women's maternal behavior only by sacrificing Imoinda's black maternal body. [116] In the end, Imoinda's memory, like her body, is enslaved by the very colonialist system from which she sought freedom.

Conclusion: The Nature of Empirical Science

Even in dying, Imoinda's connection to nature is made clear. Oroonoko kills Imoinda by "first, cutting her Throat, and then severing her yet Smiling Face from that Delicate Body, pregnant as it was with Fruits of tend'rest Love." The use of "fruit" as a euphemism for Imoinda's child recalls and subverts the narrator's description of the "fruitfulness" of the Surinamese landscape. Imoinda's death is a disruption in the natural temporal order of reproduction. This disruption is reinforced by the intrusive smell of Imoinda's decaying body,

[115] Behn, 60.
[116] Charlotte Sussman points out that the only way Imoinda can "survive" as literary legend is through her death. She argues that Imoinda's death is more a sign of Oroonoko's proprietorship rather than her own honor or freedom. Sussman, "The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, Heidi Hutner, ed (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 212-33, esp. 218-9.

which propagates across miraculous distances, "for Stinks must be very noisom that can be distinguish'd among such a quantity of Natural Sweets, as every inch of that Land produces."[117] The unpleasantness of Imoinda's corpse highlights the gap between the narrator's fantasy of the Surinamese ecology and the grotesqueness of the violence and exploitation necessary to sustain this fantasy. Her smell is an invisible, though palpable, reminder of the human cost of the wealth and abundance the Surinamese landscape affords – an abundance that is not natural but produced by coerced human labor. At the same time, Imoinda's body maintains its symbolic connection to the Surinamese ecology. After killing her, Oroonoko lays Imoinda's body "decently on Leaves and Flowers; of which he made a Bed, and conceal'd it under the same cover-lid of Nature."[118] As Imoinda's body is physically incorporated into the Surinamese landscape, the very ecology seems to mourn her loss. To find the couple, the English must wade through "Leaves that lye thick on the Ground, by continual Falling"; now that Imoinda is dead, the forest no longer exists in a state of eternal spring but in a state of eternal autumn.[119] In contrast to the landscape's expression of empathy and understanding, when the English finally find Oroonoko, they initially fail to comprehend the scene they encounter. Despite the intense smell, the English do not locate Imoinda's body beneath the foliage until Oroonoko points her out. Thus, once again, the text displays the colonists' disconnect from the natural world; they are not able to navigate the landscape to find Imoinda's corpse without Oroonoko's help. Meanwhile, *Oroonoko* continues to emphasize the symbolic connection between Imoinda and the Surinamese ecology.

Imoinda's maternity is one of many iterations of colonial writers' attempts to process the jarring effects of slave women's reproduction. Confronting the reality that the system of slavery

[117] Behn, 62.
[118] Ibid, 61.
[119] Ibid, 62.

depended on exploiting and devaluing black mothers' reproductive labor forced colonialists to reconsider their naturalized, universalized understanding of maternity. In many ways, Behn's text parodies these efforts to define racial differences through the bodies of enslaved mothers, drawing attention to process by which categories such as nature, maternity, whiteness, and blackness are written and rewritten in narratives of slavery. While these narratives claimed to be factual accounts of empirical observations, these "facts" were laden with colonists' desires and assumptions about the divine order of the cosmos. Thus, it is only by considering the role of ideas about nature in colonial writing that we can begin to observe the fault lines that divided colonists' responses to enslaved mothers. On the one hand, colonists could point to the apparent ease of enslaved women's reproductive labor as evidence of their animality, positioning them closer to nature than European mothers. On the other hand, Europeans' desire to understand their expectations for mothers as "natural" meant that enslaved women's reproduction was either part of this universal experience or was entirely unnatural. Consequently, enslaved peoples were judged as either fully human or not.

Examining *Oroonoko* alongside the period's complex and contradictory views of the natural world allows us to account for the process by which Behn interpreted her encounter with enslaved people by locating her narrative in a living, agentic physical space. Given a context in which colonists frequently made connections between nature and non-Europeans, it is surprising that few have considered the remarkable parallels between Imoinda, the Surinamese landscape, and the tiger dam. Indeed, early modern science encouraged colonists to view non-European natives as embedded within foreign ecologies. As colonists created new truths about racial differences, these truths were inevitably permeated by their ideas about these exotic locales. Examining the role of nature in Behn's depiction of racialized maternity allows readers to reflect

on the epistemology of empirical science itself. Like colonial travel writing and natural histories, Behn's *Oroonoko* forges a connection between the plants and animals of the Surinamese ecology and the bodies of the non-Europeans who reside there.

In the context of New World slavery, large-scale plantation farming, and the European hunt for natural resources from the hands of Native Americans, this sort of imaginative thinking proved ominous. Insofar as Behn's narrator asserts Oroonoko's heroism by insisting on a hierarchy between Man and Nature, she recreates a logic that attracts and perpetuates exploitative colonial systems. For example, Johann Theodor de Bry attempts to attract settlers to Virginia by describing the landscape as remarkably fertile:

> I thought also good to note this unto you, if you which shall inhabite and plant there, maie know how specially that countrey corne is there to be preferred before ours: Besides the manifold waies in applying it to victual, the increase is so much that small labour and paines is needful in respect that must be used for ours. For this I can assure you that according to the rate we have made proofe of, one man may prepare and husbane so much grounde (having once borne corne before) with lesse then foure and twentie houres labour, as shall yeelde him victuall in a large proportion for a twelve moneth, if hee have nothing else, but that which the same ground will yeelde, and of that kinde onelie which I have before spoken of: the saide ground will yeelde, and of that kinde onelie which I have before spoken of: the saide ground being also but of five and twentie yards square.[120]

De Bry's description of the lack of "labour and paines" his readers will need to reap the benefits of the land recalls the fantasy of the painless childbirth of enslaved women. Significantly, De Bry fails to mention the labor and pains of the enslaved subjects who till the Virginian land. Thus, he repeats the same act of erasure at the heart of racist fantasies about the unthinking, painless reproduction of enslaved mothers. His repetition of the word "yeeld" suggests that Virginia is completely passive and open for the English to "husband"— a term that itself connotes the close imaginative relationship between land grabbing and rape. Within an

[120] Johann Theodor de Bry, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (Frankfurt: Wecheli, 1590): 15.

imaginative paradigm in which hierarchies could be justified through natural discourses, Europeans' encounters with vast new landscapes, such as the one described by Behn as endlessly fertile, presented a ready opportunity for exploitation. Indeed, De Bry's advertisement shows how early modern Europeans were already primed to make imaginative connections between embodied racial divisions and the natural world. As a result, the ostensible fertility of the landscape could easily translate into the fertility of human bodies, as it sometimes did in representations of enslaved mothers. As Mary Pratt puts it, by the 1750s, "the systematizing of nature…models the extractive, transformative character of industrial capitalism, and the ordering mechanisms that were beginning to shape urban mass society in Europe under bourgeois hegemony."[121]

However, while De Bry and Behn's narrator at times use nature as a symbol to promote the ascendency of whiteness and maleness, *Oroonoko's* multiple, contradictory views of nature problematizes the English relationship to the Surinamese ecology, as well as their relationship to Imoinda's reproductive capacity. In the text, the landscape and the tigress, like Imoinda, resist the English colonists' physical and epistemological exploitation. By reading Imoinda's pregnancy alongside these non-human models for maternity, we can better illuminate *Oroonoko*'s ambivalence towards non-European maternity and the tension produced by Europeans' attempts to naturalize racial divisions through maternal bodies. Though Surinam is figured as an endlessly-bountiful mother, the English are always disconnected from the potential it offers. European bodies are particularly vulnerable to the natural world of Surinam, requiring translators and Oroonoko's special protection to travel through it. By drawing attention to this disconnect between the land's fertility and the English colonists' bodies, *Oroonoko* raises doubts

[121] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992): 36.

about English reproductive norms. The text reflects on assumptions about the “naturalness” of English maternity itself.

CHAPTER V

The Surprising Pleasure of Maternity: The Function of the Mother Figure in English Whore Dialogues

In this final chapter, I build on a thread that is present throughout this dissertation – namely, the relationship between maternity and sexuality. As I have demonstrated, the categories of maternity and female sexuality functioned in a productive tension in the early modern period. Often, positive representations of mothers depended on a purposeful erasure of their sexual experience. While this project of expunging sex from the experience of reproduction was inherently incoherent, the fantasy it produced was highly useful for differentiating between "good" and "bad" mothers. For example, in *Salve Deus,* Aemilia Lanyer establishes the religiosity of her patron, The Countess of Cumberland, by differentiating her from the sexually-explicit Cleopatra, whose "Beautie and defects/ Did worke *Octaviaes* wrongs, and [Antony's] neglects."[1] Here, Octavia is victimized by Cleopatra's sexuality, which is condemned as "blood, dishonor, infamie, and shame."[2] Because admirable exemplars of motherhood were precisely those that managed to shed sexuality from their representational lens, sexualized mothers were portrayed as immoral, dangerous, or foreign. A number of feminist critics have examined the way in which discourses of "proper" femininity and maternal behavior in the period lend themselves to the construction of racial and national identities.[3] Kathleen Brown describes how

[1] Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,* ed. Susanne Woods (Oxford University Press, 1993), lines 209-224, esp. 215-6.
[2] Ibid, 218.
[3] Kathleen M Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Carmen

the imagined typography between "good wives" and "nasty wenches" that dominated early colonial gender norms was easily deployed to create the racial distinctions necessary for slavery by projecting gender and sexual deviance onto African women's bodies.[4] Jennifer Morgan makes a similar claim, arguing that "the place of motherhood in the complex of savagery and race became central to the figure of the black woman," as sexual difference justified Europeans' colonial atrocities.[5] As I show in chapters two and three, the patriarchal need to categorize and, thereby, control women meant cleansing idealized European women of the sex acts necessary for procreation while exaggerating the sexual difference of racialized others, such as Egyptian or Gypsy women.[6] This paradoxical strategy works by defining Englishness as distinct from certain customs for childbirth and gendered labor. The desire to cleanse England through the projection of "problematic" sexual and reproductive practices onto ethnic others correlates with England's internal desire to "cleanse" English mothers through the rigid regulation of female bodies.

As Valerie Traub argues, this bifurcated pattern throughout early modern English representations of women is undergirded by the period's anxieties about fully-realized female sexuality.[7] Mothers – indeed, women in general – are often represented as either virgins or whores, and their relationship to sexuality shapes readers' and audiences' experiences of

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Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995). Joyce Macdonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Many of the contributions to Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker's seminal edited collection *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994). See especially Ania Loomba, "The Color of Patriarchy: Critical Difference, Cultural Difference, and Renaissance Drama," 17-34, Jean Howard "And English Lass Amid the Moors: Gender Race, Sexuality, and the National Identity in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West,*" 101-117, and Margo Hendricks, "Civility, Barbarism, and Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter,"* 225-39.

[4] Brown, *Good Wives.*

[5] Morgan, 23.

[6] See especially Nocentelli, "Perverse Implantations," *Empires of Love,* 17-43.

[7] Valerie Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containments of Female Erotic Power," *Desire and Anxiety*: *Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 25-49. esp. 30.

literature. Traub argues that anxiety about female sexuality necessitated that Shakespeare develop a "strategy of containment" to limit the adverse effects of staging women with sexual agency.[8] In *Hamlet, Othello,* and *The Winter's Tale,* female erotic power is contained by converting women into jewels, statues, or corpses, thereby neutralizing their threat to men's psychic stability. In this way, women's sexual purity is maintained only by their conversion into objects – their literal objectification. Significantly, Traub speculates that men's fear of female sexuality is rooted in the fact that their "first and most intense dependency is upon their mothers, whom patriarchy demands they must renounce in favor of paternal identification."[9] Following Traub, I argue that the erasure of mothers' sexual experience is a defensive strategy designed to protect readers from confronting the fact that mothers and whores share a common sexual pedagogy.[10] By insisting on the insurmountable gap between good mothers and bad ones, virgins and whores, the early modern patriarchal system could justify and maintain control over mothers' sexual capacities – a project with intense social, political, and economic stakes.

Rather than essentializing men's objectification of women, Traub emphasizes the contingency of this process – a process that Shakespeare's plays "legitimized and reproduced."[11] Building on Traub's work, I posit that erasing sexuality from positive representations of mothers was an extension of this historically-contingent project of women's sexual containment. Indeed, I have aimed throughout this dissertation to de-essentialize the virgin-whore binary within representations of mothers by explicating the rhetorical processes that perpetuate its existence. However, in this chapter, I depart from this strategy by focusing less on the cultural production

[8] Ibid, 26.
[9] Ibid, 48.
[10] Traub describes the "dualistic ideology" that divides women into angels or whores as a "psychological dense against the uncomfortable suspicion that underneath the angel *is* a whore." Ibid, 30.
[11] Ibid, 48.

and impact of the virgin-whore binary itself and look instead to a body of early modern texts that manipulates and problematizes this binary: the erotic genre known as the "whore dialogue." As I show, whore dialogues purposefully interrogate the relationship between maternity and sexuality and, in so doing, highlight the inherent incoherence of the periods' tendency to represent mothers as either asexual or problematically eroticized.

Perhaps no other erotic genre of the early modern period explores the virgin-whore binary more explicitly than the "whore dialogue." The whore dialogues are an erotic prose genre featuring a didactic conversation between a sexually-experienced woman (the whore figure) and a sexually-ignorant maid (the virgin figure). The satirical and comedic effect of whore dialogues depends, in part, on the exaggerated knowledge differential between the two interlocutors. The texts begin by creating clear categorical distinctions between the virgin and the whore and generate erotic and comedic pleasure by blurring this binary over time. Through comprehensive and sexually-graphic lectures, as well as occasional homoerotic demonstrations, the virgin begins to experience sex herself and, in some cases, to offer erotic lessons of her own.[12] Thus, on the surface the whore dialogues articulate, if only to undermine, a distinction between widely accepted female sexual types, hyperbolizing and caricaturizing normative expectations for women's sexual behavior. Indeed, in addition to detailing the women's sexual exploits, the texts are also usually political in nature, critiquing the hypocrisy of their society's sexual standards and calling out prominent political and religious figures.[13]

[12] See Sarah Toulalan's discussion of lesbian visibility in the whore dialogues in "'An extraordinary Satisfaction': Imagining Homosexuality," *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 132-60.
[13] Ian Moulton and Lynn Hunt describe the political nature of these texts. See, Ian Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2000). Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1993).

However, it is important to note that while the whore dialogues represent female voices, the canonical exemplars of the genre that I explore below are authored exclusively by men and are written primarily for male audiences. Recognizing the whore dialogues as men's attempts to ventriloquize the sexual awakening of young women limits our ability to locate female pleasure in or around these texts. Though the texts are not invested in creating a platform for female pleasure, they do insist on recovering the relationship between sexual pleasure and maternity. Indeed, the texts routinely feature mother figures who play a central role in the erotic experience of the reader. As the whore dialogues playfully manipulate the virgin-whore binary, the mother figure often shapes the sexual action described by the primary interlocutors.

Despite the near ubiquity of mother figures in whore dialogues, scholars have yet to address how and why maternity features so prominently in this erotic genre. Indeed, the passing references to maternity that we do find in the scholarship of whore dialogues reveal a lack of consensus and clarity about its rhetorical function. For example, Ian Moulton briefly mentions Nanna's maternity in Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* (1534), offering it as evidence of the text's ambivalence towards sexualized women.[14] In the text, a mother, Nanna, consults her interlocutor about the options available to her daughter, Pippa. According to Moulton, Nanna's concern for her daughter allows readers to sympathize with her despite her presentation as a crass, manipulative prostitute.[15] In contrast, James Grantham Turner reduces the presence of mothers to a sign of exaggerated female authority:

> Narrative authority is gendered female, libertine mothers take command, men appear more as objects than subjects, and the phallus, at first a 'scepter,' 'sword,'

[14] Pietro Aretino, *Dialogues of Pietro Aretino*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (Toronto & New York: University of Toronto Press, 2005).
[15] Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 133.

> or 'battering ram,' becomes sometimes a 'female slave,' sometimes a 'queen,' 'heroine,' or 'empress'…[16]

Thus, while Moulton argues that Nana's maternity tempers – or, as Traub might say, "contains" – the effect of her sexuality, Turner argues that maternity merely heightens the anxiety surrounding powerful, erotic women.[17] Their readings are undergirded by opposite understandings of the relationship between maternity and sexuality; only by assuming that maternity signifies as asexual can Moulton argue that it acts against, rather than in concert with, Nana's prostitution. The tension between Moulton's and Turner's readings of the mother figure highlights the period's ambivalence towards maternity, which I have been exploring throughout this dissertation (most explicitly in chapter III). Is Nanna's maternal authority reassuring or anxiety producing? Does she allow readers to sympathize with the plight of women, or does she teach readers to fear women's agency? Here, rather than asserting clear answers to these questions, I argue that Moulton's and Turner's contradictory readings of maternity are equally valid. Because English readers held ambivalent attitudes towards maternity, maternal rhetoric could produce both positive and negative responses from readers of these erotic texts.

Answering the questions above has implications both for how we interpret early modern erotic literature and for how we understand the history of maternity and maternal representations. Sarah Toulalan argues that contemporary erotic literature is anchored by historically specific ideas about conception and the female body.[18] While Toulalan's key term is reproduction rather than maternity, her argument usefully illuminates the intimate relationship between early

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[16] James Grantham Turner, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England 1534-1685* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.
[17] Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses."
[18] Sarah Toulalan, "'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*, vol 15, no 4 (2006), 521-32.

moderns' understanding of pregnancy and sexual pleasure. According to Toulalan, while it is tempting to assume that erotic literature divorces sexual pleasure from reproduction, the texts present acts that could lead to reproduction as essential to the achievement of mutual orgasm.[19] Ultimately, she concludes that the texts subtly "reinforce contemporary moral strictures…that the primary purpose of marriage, and hence sexual intercourse, is procreation."[20] While I believe this conclusion greatly reduces the texts' complex and diverse engagement with their moments' culture and politics,[21] like Toulalan, I am interested in how early modern erotic literature invoked and manipulated readers' pre-conceived expectations about women's bodies and behavior. Discourses of maternity, like scientific discourses surrounding conception, play a role in how women's reproductive bodies were understood and represented in erotic contexts. As I have illustrated throughout this dissertation, maternity has a tractable representational history that carried real politic stakes, and the mother figures in erotic literature necessarily drew on and intervened in this history.

While maternity tends to be neglected by scholarly discussions of whore dialogues, the figure of the prostitute is over-represented.[22] Indeed, the very name of the genre privileges the

[19] Ibid, 522; 524.
[20] Ibid, 522-3.
[21] I believe Toulalan's argument oversimplifies attitudes towards sex and reproduction in the early modern period. After all, the "moral strictures" she describes would not be necessary if the English people monolithically subscribed to the notion that sex is primarily for reproduction. Furthermore, her claim does not adequately account for non-heterosexual sex, adultery, or extramarital childbirth in the period. As I show below, the whore dialogues demonstrate a deep ambivalence towards the cultural expectations of sex that the mother figures invoke and manipulate.
[22] Limiting our discussion of early modern pornography to texts that feature prostitutes narrows our understanding of the role of this body of work in English literary and cultural history. For example, Melissa Mowry argues that late Stuart representations of prostitutes were "examples of the degradation to which royalists believed democracy would drive England."[22] Mowry analyzes the figure of prostitutes in English texts in relation to England's history of making real female sex workers scapegoats for moral corruption. In doing so, she demonstrates convincingly that prostitutes were often marketed as "common" bodies, whose unchecked willpower and pursuit of personal pleasure was guaranteed to create social disarray. However, because Mowry does not account for the major erotic texts that do not feature prostitutes, she severely restricts "what argument the pornographic body is being used to settle."[22] Indeed, her reading of prostitution often becomes an argument about the meaning of early modern pornography *per se*, and therefore, she leaves out important nuances of these texts' political investments. Melissa Mowry, *The Bawdy*

category of prostitution despite the fact that the three most canonical examples of the genre (all of which I discuss below) do not feature sex workers at all.[23] Of these three canonical erotic texts, two (*School of Venus* and *A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid*) are about women from ostensibly mundane, respected families, while the third (*Venus in the Cloister*) is about the sex lives of nuns.[24] While scholars consider Aretino's *Ragionamenti* to be the first "whore dialogue," this texts discusses prostitution as one of three life circumstances available to women, in addition to that of nun or wife. In the text, Nanna describes her life as a prostitute only after recounting her time spent as a nun and a wife. Together, the stories suggest that the lifestyles of nuns, wives, and prostitutes have more in common than may be supposed; each phase is riddled with gluttony, adultery, and slapstick comedy.[25] Furthermore, as Stephen Spiess has shown, the conflation of the term "whore" with "prostitute" itself reduces the complex, expansive "terms of whoredom" that were in use in early modern England.[26] Indeed, in the period, "whoredom" could reference a range of sexual behavior and social relations beyond those directly related sex work. Thus, while there are clear formal and thematic affinities between the texts that scholars label as "whore dialogues," focusing too intently on the figure of the prostitute – even to the point of naming the genre after sex work – produces both linguistic and

Politic in Stuart England, 1660-1714: Political Pornography and Prostitution (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), esp. 1; 3.

[23] Sarah Toulalan also points out that the three most prominent examples of whore dialogues from the seventeenth century are not about whores. She presents this as evidence that "these texts have a basis in reality," as they tell stories about the mundane experiences of married women. I agree with Toulalan's argument that the genre reflects its moment's normative sexual and reproductive standards. However, I question Toulalan's (and others') privileging of the prostitute as the presumed *sine quo non* of whore dialogues. Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, 27.

[24] All references to the three primary texts are from Bradford Mudge, ed, *When Flesh Becomes Word: An Anthology of Early Eighteenth-Century Libertine Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The print and translation history of these texts are complicated. I briefly describe this history for each text below.

[25] Aretino, *Dialogues of Pietro Aretino*.

[26] See Stephen Spiess, "Shakespeare's Whore: Language, Prostitution, and Knowledge in Early Modern England," Doctoral diss, University of Michigan, 2013, esp. "Chapter 1: The Terms of Whoredom in Early Modern England," 43-77.

taxonomical errors. This leads scholars to sometimes mischaracterize the content of these texts by narrowing the scope of their diverse and dynamic thematic investments.

It is telling that the privileging of the prostitute occurs in tandem with the erasing of maternity from the scholarship on whore dialogues. After all, Nanna, the whore character in Aretino's seminal dialogue, is both a prostitute and a mother. Her maternal status is not incidental: she speaks as a mother about the future of her daughter.[27] The assumption that the prostitute is an inherently sexual figure – and, therefore, the appropriate emblem for the erotic genre – leads critics to ignore the genre's interest in the inherent sexuality of *mothers*. Early modern erotic literature – unlike the dominant perspective across other literary genres – acknowledges that sexual knowledge and experience are necessary to maternity. In doing so, it invokes and disrupts readers' expectations that mother figures will be averse to their daughters' sexual exploits, revealing those expectations to be illogical, or incoherent. As I show, the genre frequently refers to the sexual experience that maternity offers, using this experience to guide the sexual awakening of the virgin figure, as well as the readers' voyeuristic pleasure. Despite certain the genres' investment in maternity, scholarship perpetuates the erasure of sexuality from positive, or even morally-neutral, representations of mothers.

Thus, my aim in this chapter is, in part, to simply recover maternity's centrality to the erotic literature of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. As I do so, I also begin to broaden scholars' perceptions about how maternity operated in the cultural imagination of early modern England. Below, I survey the impact of maternal rhetoric in *The School of Venus, Venus in the Cloister,* and *Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid* in order to reconsider the relationship between maternity, normativity, and erotic pleasure in English culture.

[27] Aretino, *Dialogues*.

Defining Early Modern Erotic Writing

Before we can understand the role of maternity in the whore dialogues, it is necessary to situate the genre within the history of erotic representation. Scholarly commentary on early modern erotic literature was predated by the intense "feminist sex wars" over the social impact of pornography, particularly in relation to women's agency and safety.[28] It was in response to this debate's tendency to treat the category of pornography as transhistorical that early modern scholars began to write the history of the genre.[29] Early work by David Foxon, Peter Wagner, Lynn Hunt, Walter Kendrick, Robert Darnton, and James Grantham Turner was instrumental in establishing a body of early modern texts that resemble what we now consider to be pornography.[30] As a result of this historical recovery, most scholars now agree that the roots of modern English pornography began in the mid-seventeenth century and gained momentum with the rise of print culture.[31] The whore dialogues I discuss below are all considered central to this history.[32]

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[28] For a useful overview of this history, see Bradford Mudge, *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel, 1684-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. 17-24.

[29] A key turning point in this discussion is Joan Huff's "Why is There No History of Pornography?" in *For Adult Users Only: The Dilemma of Violent Pornography*, ed. by Susan Gubar (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 1989), 17-46. Manuela Mourão shows how the early modern texts' interest in female desire speaks back to "sex negative" feminists' assertions that erotic literature is inherently harmful to women. Mourão, "The Representation of Female Desire in Early Modern Pornographic Texts, 1660-1745," *Signs*, vol 24, no 3 (1999): 573-602.

[30] David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1660-1745* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1965). Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (Secker & Warburg: London, 1988). Lynn Hunt, ed, *The Invention of Pornography*. Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987). Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1995). Turner, *Schooling Sex*.

[31] Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, 2-3. Mowry, 4. Bridget Orr argues that the introduction of actresses to the public stage was, alongside pornography, part of a rising interest in voyeuristic appropriations of the female body. Bridget Orr, "Whore's Rhetoric and the Maps of Love: Constructing the Feminine in Restoration Erotica," *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, edited by Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 195-216, esp. 200. Some have argued for an earlier genesis by pointing to works such as Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and Thomas Nashe's *Choice of Valentines* (1592/3) – both of which were considered to be erotically-charged though less illicit than later "pornographic" texts. See Chantelle Thauvette, "Defining Early Modern Pornography: The Case of *Venus and Adonis*," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol 12, no 1 (2012): 26-48.

[32] For a useful overview of this history, see Harry G Cocks, "Reading Obscene Texts and their Histories," *Media History*, vol 18, no 3-4 (2012): 275-288.

Furthermore, in addition to recovering precursors to today's pornography, many scholars have discussed the influence of these early erotic texts on the development of modernity *per se*. For example, Hunt argues that "[e]arly modern pornography reveals some of the most important nascent characteristics of modern culture."[33] Turner discusses the role of libertine literature in relation to the developing philosophical, educational, and scientific movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[34] Moulton argues that the texts explore and manipulate developing ideas about gender and English national identity.[35] My discussion of whore dialogues contributes to this ongoing conversation by drawing attention to the ways in which maternal rhetoric shaped early modern readers' experiences of these texts. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the rhetoric of maternity repeatedly comes to the fore in politically-charged discourses, influencing the values of texts that are otherwise uninterested in motherhood *per se*. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the mother figures of the whore dialogues are implicated in shaping their moments' gender and sexual discourses.

While scholars recognize the historical and political importance of erotic texts, they continue to disagree about how to define the "pornography" of the early modern period. As many have noted, the term "pornography" itself did not come into use until the mid-nineteenth century.[36] Furthermore, because the period lacked clear generic boundaries, accounting for the full range of erotic literature in the early modern period presents a practical and theoretical quandary. For example, Lynn Hunt defines pornography as "the depictions of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings."[37] However, this definition has been

[33] Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 11.
[34] Turner, *Schooling Sex*.
[35] Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 7.
[36] Kendrick, *Secret Museum*, 2-3.
[37] Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 10.

heavily critiqued by scholars, who correctly point out the potential disconnect between authors' and readers' intentions. Texts that aim to arouse readers may not achieve this goal, and readers may find masturbatory pleasure in certain texts despite their chaste intentions. In response to this difficulty, Walter Kendrick defines pornographic texts not by their *content* but by their *reception*.[38] Discussing the etymology of the term "pornography," Kendrick concludes that "[f]rom the start, 'pornography' named a battlefield, a place where no assertion could be made without at once summoning up its denial, where no one could distinguish value from danger because they were the same."[39] Thus, to Kendrick, "pornography" has meaning precisely because its boundaries remain elusive and, therefore, controversial. Kendrick's insight is productive for my consideration of the mother figure, as it focuses attention on the wider public discourses that organize around these texts.

However, insofar as he focuses on the conflicts that readers bring to bear on these texts, Kendrick does not fully account for the authors' political or satiric messages. According to Ian Moulton, unlike "pornography," early modern "erotic literature" is not limited in scope to graphic sexual content but often critiques its moments' culture, religion, or politics.[40] For this reason, Moulton is careful to distinguish the premodern genre from the distinctly modern category of "pornography."[41] In this chapter, I follow Ian Moulton's use of the term "erotic literature" to describe the broad range of early modern texts that represent and discuss human sexuality, and I treat whore dialogues as one of many subgenres that fall under this umbrella.[42]

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[38] Kendrick, *Secret Museum, 31*. Similarly, Moulton suggests that "it might make more sense to see pornography as a way of reading rather than as a mode of representation." Moulton, *Before Pornography,* 11.
[39] Kendrick, 31.
[40] Moulton's point here is not that modern pornography is apolitical but rather that "the notion that sexuality is itself private and set apart from – even irrelevant to – broader social concerns, is one of the enabling fictions of pornography as a discourse." Moulton, 14.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Moulton, *Before Pornography*.

The whore dialogues, aim at both sexual arousal and social critique. Thus, I concede Moulton's contention that labeling an early modern text "pornographic" obscures these texts' central investment in contemporary power struggles.[43] Unlike pornography, the three canonical whore dialogues manipulate readers' expectations about maternity – especially its relationship to sexuality – in order to create erotic pleasure while also satirizing their culture's hypocrisy regarding its condemnation of female sexuality. Maternity's centrality to these highly politicized texts shows, once again, that the rhetoric of female reproduction and parenting could be mobilized to intervene in diverse cultural debates.

Satirizing the Mother in *The School of Venus*

While all three of the whore dialogues I examine were widely read in England, English authorities made attempts to limit their circulation – especially to uneducated populations. For example, the French *E'colle des filles* by Michel Millot went unprosecuted in England until it was translated into English as *The School of Venus* in 1680, suggesting that the wider accessibility of the English version catalyzed officials' concern. In 1688, a reprint of the English text prompted a major legal case against erotic literature that eventually convicted an English printer and publisher, Robert Streater and Joseph Crayle.[44] Meanwhile, *E'colle des filles* escaped

[43] Indeed, several scholars have examined the how erotic literature intervenes in major social and political movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, for a discussion of the role of erotic literature in the British Civil War, see Mowry, *The Bawdy Politic*, and for a discussion of it in the events surrounding the French Revolution, see Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France.*

[44] I pull this textual history from Mudge, *When Flesh Becomes Word*, xvi. The sentences of Streater and Crayle were harsh. Streater, the printer, was banished for three years, while Crayle was hanged and then burned alongside the erotic texts he published.

officials' attention, despite its availability in England. The version of Millot's text I examine here is the earliest English translation, printed in 1680.[45]

The School of Venus features two dialogues between Katherine, a sixteen-year-old virgin and daughter of "a Substantial Citizen," and her sexually-experienced kinswoman, Francis.[46] Francis has recently been approached by Mr. Robert, Katherine's frustrated suitor. Because Katherine has "been brought up under the rigid Government of her Mother," she is too innocent to understand Mr. Robert's sexual advances, and therefore, he petitions Francis to speak to Katherine on his behalf.[47] A vocal proponent of sexual pleasure and renouncer of all social norms and institutions that limit said pleasure (e.g., monogamous marriage), Francis agrees to aid Mr. Robert. Waiting until Katherine's mother is out of the house, she visits her cousin and broaches the subject of love and sex. Katherine's ignorance on these matters is exaggerated for comedic and erotic effect. In response to Francis' initial inquiry about men, Katherine announces, "I believe none of them ever think of me," though, ironically, she admits that men often "commend my beauty, kissing me and feeling my Breasts."[48] According to the logic of the text, Katherine's ignorance produces a complete lack of sexual desire; because she does not know about sex, any physiological response she may have to men's attention – positive or negative – is strangely absent. Significantly, this hyperbolic erasure of Katherine's sexual desire is directly attributed to her mother's strict parenting. Katherine's mother is not only the explanation for her daughter's virginity but also the means by which that virginity is exaggerated

[45] According to Mudge, *The School of Venus* (1680) closely resembles the original French text. Both the English and French versions consist of two dialogues between women from respected families (though the names of the women are Anglicized in the English translation) and are accompanied by fourteen sexually-explicit illustrations. Mudge, xvi. "The School of Venus," in *When Flesh Becomes Word,* edited by Mudge, 1-57. Hereafter, I will cite quotations from this text as *SOV* followed by a page number.
[46] *SOV*, 4.
[47] Ibid, 3.
[48] Ibid, 6; 7.

to comedic effect. Thus, the presumption of maternity's asexuality – despite its irrationality – lends itself to the text's project of caricaturing the state of virginity; the text's invocation of the "rigid" mother is enough to justify Katherine's otherwise inexplicable asexuality. It is only after Francis spends the remainder of the first dialogue describing sexual anatomy and mechanics in graphic detail that Katherine gains an erotic appetite. Fortunately, her eagerness to experience sexual intercourse mounts just in time for Mr. Robert's unexpected arrival to the house. In the second dialogue, which takes place a short time later, Katherine describes her several sexual encounters with Mr. Robert. Now "an apt Schollar" in not only having sex but also talking about it, Katherine titillates her instructor with erotic stories of her own. Throughout, the women discuss and critique their society's hypocrisy, as well as men's poor treatment of women who indulge in sexual pleasure.

In *The School of Venus*, maternity plays a central role in structuring the dialogue's satiric content. On the surface, Katherine's mother serves primarily as a sexual authoritarian, responsible for preventing her daughter's erotic pleasure. The women describe Katherine's mother only in negative terms; remaining on the margins of the narrative, her absence is a necessary pre-condition for sexual pleasure. However, the mother also signifies a process of sexual discipline that the women can actively reject. In the first dialogue, Francis sets herself apart from the mother figure by vehemently critiquing Katherine's upbringing.

> [T]hou art finely fitted with a Mother, who ought now to take care to please thee, as formerly she did herself, what's become of Parents love and affection now adays, but this is not my business; art thou such a Fool to believe you can't enjoy a man company without being Married?[49]

[49] Ibid, 6.

Here, Francis directly draws attention to the erasure of the mother's sexual experience by referring to her past investment in sexual pleasure. However, she attributes the erasure of her sexuality not to the societal pressure placed on women but to the mother's personal hypocrisy. In this way, Katherine's mother bears the burden of an entire representational field that demands that respectful mothers be asexual. In the passage above, Francis begins to critique Katherine's mother for lacking "parental affection" but quickly disavows this line of thought; "[T]his is not my business," she says. In refusing to speculate about *why* Katherine's mother behaves the way she does, Francis highlights the opacity, or absurdity, of the association between maternity and sexual ignorance. Then, when Francis offers to compensate for what she argues is a deficit in parental affection, she presents her lesson as an alternative approach to mothering – one that inherently critiques normative expectations for mother's behavior. Significantly, this critique leaves the mother's role as sexual disciplinarian intact. Later, the text reaffirms the mother's hypocrisy when she unwittingly admits that Katherine's sexual adventures have made her a more active, interesting conversationalist.

> Heretofore what was I good for, but to hold down my head and sow, now nothing comes amiss to me, I can hold an argument on any subject, and that which makes me laugh is this, if my Mother chide, I answer her smartly; so that she says, I am very much mended, and she begins to have great hopes in me.[50]

By describing the mother's joy at her daughter's newfound social potential, the text mocks the sexual norms that the mother represents. The mother's recognition that her daughter is "very much mended" after becoming sexually active points to the speciousness of the virgin-whore binary. Because Katherine's mother considers sociality a positive trait in her daughter, Millot

[50] Ibid, 27.

devalues the hyperbolic manifestation of her virginity. The irony that this sociality is the result of Katherine's loss of virginity anchors the text's critique of normative expectations for women. As an exemplar of ostensibly "virtuous" female behavior, Katherine's mother receives the force of the interlocutors' rebellion. Because maternity is already associated with the illogical erasure of female sexual desire, the character is positioned to represent the sexual hypocrisy of a larger culture.

Indeed, from the beginning, Millot's whore dialogue satirizes the notion of asexual maternity by using Katherine's mother to explore the boundary between licit and illicit sexual fantasies. Most strikingly, the text raises suggestions of mother-daughter incest, producing a sense of comedic discomfort and inviting readers to indulge in sexual taboo. When Francis enquires about Katherine's interactions with men, she is shocked to learn that Katherine is unable to distinguish her kinsmen from the men who visit her with romantic intent. "Phish, they are your kindred! I mean others," Francis declares. Katherine's response elides her feelings for her mother and aunt with her feelings for her suitors.

> Why, what make you of Mr. *Clarke*, Mr. *Wilson*, Mr. *Reynolds*, and young Mr. *Roger*, whom I ought to have named first, for he comes often and pretends he loves me, telling me a Hundred things which I understand not, and all to little purpose; for I have no more pleasure in their Company, then I have in my Mothers, or my Aunts. Indeed, their cringes, congees and ceremonies, make me laugh sometimes, when I speak to them, they stare upon me, as though they would eat me; and at last go away like Fools as they came; what satisfaction can one receive by such persons Company?[51]

Here, Katherine mistakes men's sexual desire with their desire to consume her. By expressing concern that the men may "eat" her, Katherine subverts the normative progression of reproductive futurity; to Katherine, men's sexual desire leads not to new life but to death.[52] In the

[51] Ibid, 6.
[52] On reproductive futurity, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

passage, the possibility of incest follows a similar subversive logic. Because Katherine does not understand the sexual aim of men's performative "cringes, congees and ceremonies," these courting rituals are merely tedious to her. As a result, she considers spending time with her mother and aunt to be a viable, perhaps preferable, alternative to spending time with potential lovers. On the surface, Katherine's initial preference for spending time with her mother and aunt over spending time with potential lovers is a sign of her sexual ignorance. More interesting, however, is the way in which Katherine's exaggerated innocence leads her dangerously close to incest – a sexual taboo that, like consumption, represents a reversal of normative reproduction. Because she cannot discriminate between erotic and familial pleasure, mother and suitor become equivalent subject positions.

> Francis: …what pleasure can'st thou injoy being always confined to a Chamber with thy Mother?
>
> Katy: Do you ask me what pleasure, truly Cousin, I take a great deal, I eat when I am hungry, I drink when I am dry, I sleep, sing and dance, and sometime go into the Country and take the Air with my Mother.[53]

Here, Katherine naïvely equates the pleasure of walking outside with her mother with the pleasure of sex. Francis' suggestive invocation of the "chamber" may also raise the possibility of incest. As the text implies, but does not name, the possibility of mother-daughter incest, it invites readers to participate in this unspeakable fantasy. Thus, while Katharine's mother is presented as asexual, she also enables readers to explore this sexual taboo. As both a normative disciplinarian and a possible object of incestuous desire, the mother moves readers to the limit of social acceptability while maintaining the safety offered by her maternal authority. The mother at once *protects* the readers' stabilizing sexual norms and pushes the limits of those norms.

[53] *SOV*, 8.

Indeed, throughout *The School of Venus,* the erotic boundaries posited by Katherine's mother seem to merely enhance the couple's, as well as the reader's, pleasure. As the story continues, Katherine and Mr. Robert find increasingly creative and risky ways to avoid being caught by Katherine's mother. "If my Mother was from home, we took our Bellies full of Fuck, if my Mother of any Company was in the House we watched all opportunities that he might encunt me."[54] In a practical sense, because the mother's presence delays the couple's sexual enjoyment, their encounters gain intensity.

> Last Sunday in the Afternoon, my Mother being gone to Church, he having not seen me in Three days before, gave me a visit. So soon as he came in, being impatient of delay, he flung me on a Trunk and Fucked me.[55]

The couples' impatience enhances the enjoyment of the action for both parties. Moreover, this cycle of delay and satisfaction conforms to Francis' advice for maximizing sexual pleasure. At multiple points in Millot's dialogue, Francis insists that sex is best enjoyed in moderation. "[A]s in other pleasures, so in this, too much of it is for naught."[56] She repeatedly encourages Katherine to control her impulses and extend the period of sexual anticipation.[57]

> Katy: I must need believe what you say, since the very Relations you have given me makes me mad for Horseing, in plain English my cunt Itcheth like Wild-Fire, but what needs all these preparations, I am for downright Fucking without any more ado.
>
> Frank. That's your Ignorance, you know not the delight there is in Husbanding this pleasure, which otherwise would be short and soon over.[58]

[54] Ibid, 40.
[55] Ibid, 36.
[56] Ibid, 20.
[57] Ibid 22, 34, 38, 39-40, 43, 55.
[58] Ibid, 22.

Thus, in slowing the pace for Katherine and Mr. Roger, the mother fosters a sexual temporality that the logic of the text considers to be ideal. As the sexual disciplinarian, the mother structures the couple's adventures, making everyday activities such as ironing and dancing erotically-charged opportunities for gratification.[59] Furthermore, as the couple engages in sexual acts with an increasing threat of exposure, the potential of the mother's interference adds a sense of suspense and, therefore, enhances readers' pleasure.

However, it is important to note that though Katherine's mother attempts to enforce her daughters' chastity, *The School of Venus* does not lay out specific content that constitutes normative sexual behavior. Because the mother's authority is entirely negative, the reader is left to fill in the gaps about how Katherine's mother defines licit sexual activity. While Katherine seems to believe that male affection leads to marriage, it is unclear what, if any, forms of sex the mother precludes her from having before or after marriage. Indeed, Katherine's ignorance occludes the details of the directives she receives from her mother. When Francis asks if she "suffers" men's compliments, kisses, and caresses, Katherine declares, "Truly no, for my Mother hath forbidden me."[60] Based on this moment, the reader may expect that all three of these forms of male affection have been deemed illicit by Katherine's mother. Katherine's comment places these acts on a single, unilaterally prohibited level. However, in dialogue two, the mother does not object to Katherine being alone in a room with Mr. Robert, nor does she bat an eye when Katherine sits on Mr. Robert's lap during a party. These later moments add uncertainty to the readers' early impression of the mother's severity, as well as the reliability of Katherine as a narrator. The disconnect between Katherine's statements about her mother and her mother's actual behavior reveals the presumptions readers make when primed to consider maternity's

[59] In the final scene, the couple has covert sex during a dance party while surrounded by company. Ibid, 41-2.
[60] Ibid, 7.

relationship to sexuality. Readers' willingness to accept that the maternal figure is antithetical to sexual pleasure is strong enough to erase their knowledge that her sexual experience is necessary to her biological reproduction. Katherine's mother comes to signify a unilateral condemnation of sex, despite the text's evidence to the contradictory.

As it turns out, maternity in *The School of Venus* does not represent a distinct set of sexual norms but, rather, invokes *the line* between licit and illicit sexual acts itself. As the defender of her daughter's chastity, Katherine's mother recalls readers' sexual discipline even as she invites them to challenge this discipline. At the same time, by appearing to maintain the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior (despite the unreliability of Katherine's narration), maternity contains the threat of the text's erotic transgression. As the embodiment of erotic discipline in *The School of Venus*, Katherine's mother reduces the couple's offense from social crisis to household rule-breaking. In this sense, the threat of interference from Katherine's mother operates in tandem with the threat of pregnancy, which Francis casually dismisses as unlikely and, ultimately, inconsequential. "Those that will follow my advice should neither trouble themselves with the care either before or after Fucking," Francis says, "[F]or such fears must certainly diminish the pleasure, which we ought rather to add onto."[61] On the one hand, by saying "no" and prompting readers to fill in the content of that "no," Katherine's mother creates suspense and eroticizes social risk. However, because the stakes of being caught are minimized – perhaps, even nonexistent – the mother maintains the appearance of upholding sexual boundaries without negating the pleasure of transgressing those boundaries. Katherine's and Francis's impression of the mother's severity overshadows the texts' evidence of her surprisingly relaxed rule enforcement. While she invokes readers' feelings of sexual shame, she simultaneously

[61] Ibid, 47.

authorizes and enhances their erotic feeling – using the former as the condition of the latter. Significantly, the mother's ability to embody this contradiction depends on the period's tendency to erase maternal sexuality, as well as the reality of mothers' sexual knowledge and experience.

Maternity and Surprise in *Venus in the Cloister*

If *The School of Venus* creates pleasure by appearing to defy the authority of the mother figure, *Venus in the Cloister* does so by repeatedly subverting that authority. *Venus and the Cloister: Or, the Nun in her Smock*, a translation by Robert Samber of Jean Barrin's *Venus dans le Cloître, ou la religieuse en chemise* (1683), was first printed in English in 1724.[62] In this whore dialogue, the mother figure is not a biological mother but an Abbess, the highest-ranking woman of the convent where the two nuns, Agnes and Angelica, reside.[63] After spying Agnes masturbating, Angelica surprises her in her cell, determined to seduce her. Agnes, a devout, virginal nun, denies being tempted by "amorous Inclination."[64] "There is nothing that touches me less than that Passion; and since the three Years that I have been in Religion it has not given me the least Inquietude," she insists.[65] Like Katherine, Agnes describes her virginity as an absence of sexual desire rather than the containment of it; her performance as a devout nun necessitates that she appear to lack sexual temptation altogether. However, while *School of Venus* never questions the sincerity of Katherine's exaggerated sexual ignorance, *Venus in the Cloister* makes

[62] The text I read here is a reprint of 1724 version, dated 1725. Mudge, xvii.
[63] The generic convention of the whore dialogues encourages this analogical connection between biological motherhood, Abbesses (or other religious female leaders), and bawds. All these figures were referred to colloquially as "mothers," and many texts, such as Aretino's *Ragionamenti* encouraged readers to sexualize *all* female authority figures. While more work is needed to fully illuminate the rhetorical implications of this connection, Melissa Mowry does discuss how the figure of the bawd provokes anxiety about women's authority and familial instability. See Mowry, "Monstrous Mothers: Property and the Common Law," *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660-1714: Political Pornography and Prostitution* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 79-103.
[64] "Venus in the Cloister, or The Nun in her Smock," in *When Flesh Becomes Word*, edited by Mudge, 143-232, esp. 149. Hereafter, I will cite quotations from this text as *VIC* followed by a page number.
[65] *VIC*, 149.

clear that Agnes's denial of her interest in sex is dishonest. Despite her initial resistance, Angelica eventually woos Agnes by convincing her that sex is a common and expected part of the cloister's culture. Throughout, Angelica cites the Abbess's sexual adventures as proof that sex is authorized by a higher authority.

> Dost thou note know, my little Fool, what it was I could see? Why I saw thee in an Action, in which I will serve thee my self, if thou wilt, and in which my Hand shall now perform that Office which thine did just now so charitably to another part of thy Body. This is that grand Crime which I discovered, and which my Lady Abbess of **** practices, as she says, in her most innocent Diversions.[66]

Like Aretino's *Ragionamenti, Venus in the Cloister* uses sexual scandal to critique the hypocrisy of the clergy. As the head of the order, the Abbess is expected to behave, like Katherine's mother, as a sexual disciplinarian. However, Angelica quickly neutralizes the threat of the Abbess's punishment, leaving Agnes, as well as the reader, to reevaluate the cloister's expectations. According to Angelica, the sexual behavior of the mother/Abbess metonymically reflects the nuns' shared sexual norms. While Katherine's mother is an ambiguous symbol for the sexual pedagogy imposed on young women, the Abbess leads not by negative censure but by example.

When the text exposes the erotic activities of the Abbess/mother, maternity is disassociated from sexual discipline, and the threat of social censure is displaced from the Abbess to the proscriptions of Catholicism itself. The disembodied threat of Catholic authority maintains suspense in the dialogues, as it establishes the expectation that Catholicism's ethos is antithetical to sexual pleasure. Significantly, this expectation allows readers to be continuously surprised by the norms of sexual experimentation within the convent. With each new sexual coupling, the women continue to assume that clergy members are celibate until they are proven

[66] Ibid, 150.

otherwise. Indeed, as the dialogues unfold and the interlocutors implicate an increasing number of church authorities in their erotic adventures, both the Abbess and other clergy members move in and out of line with Catholicism's ethos. To circumvent the moral supremacy of celibacy, Agnes and Angelica must repeatedly appeal to the Abbess/mother to sanction their actions. For example, one evening, Agnes is called to appear before the Abbé of the convent. Eager to present herself as "proper," Agnes changes into a clean veil and guimpe, a conservative garment that covers the neck and shoulders, and modifies her behavior to appear "somewhat shy and ignorant, giving very serious Answers to the Civilities he shewed [her]."[67] However, the Abbé soon makes clear his intentions to seduce Agnes. Reflecting on the affair, Agnes tells Angelica that the Abbess was a deciding factor in her participation.

> At the second Visit he made me, I could not help bestowing on him some small Favours. He combated all my Reasons with such strong Morality, and so artful withal, that he rendered all my Efforts entirely useless. He shewed me *three Letters* from our *Abbess*, which convinced me that whatever I did was no more than treading in her Steps.[68]

Agnes's initial hesitation to engage in a sexual affair with the Abbé is dispelled by her recognition that the Abbess is also having an affair with him. While Agnes's "Reasons" are not stated, by contrasting them to morality, the text implies that they lack ethical grounding. Meanwhile, "Morality" references the wider expectations of Catholicism and, in so doing, aligns Catholicism with erotic behavior. The logic of this "Morality" that the Abbé presents to Agnes is authorized by a *maternal* exemplar. Agnes is in fact seduced less by the Abbé than by the desire to follow in the Abbess's footsteps. Significantly, the male authors of *Venus in the Cloister* find the evidence of the Abbess's sexual adventure necessary despite that fact that, as a woman, she lacks the spiritual authority of the Abbé, who has already made his own desire clear. The Abbé's

[67] Ibid, 172.
[68] Ibid, 173.

appeal to the Abbess points to the larger political significance attached to mother's – and not father's – sexualities. Because maternity, not paternity, is irrationality dissociated from sexuality, the assertion of the Abbess's investment in sexual pleasure reorients Agnes's moral compass in a way that the Abbé's sexual desire cannot. The letters, presumably erotic in content, give Agnes permission to break her vow of chastity. Furthermore, the Abbess's maternity soothes Agnes's and the reader's surprise at learning of the sexual experience of the Abbé, for as a maternal figure, the Abbess guides the morality of the text.

However, the text's recognition of the Abbess's sexualization does not last long. The period's expectation that positive maternity be dissociated from sexuality causes readers to fear the Abbess, even after her threat as sexual disciplinarian has been dispelled. Because so many early modern discourses illogically represent maternity as asexual or anti-sexual, the Abbess, like Katherine's mother, primes readers to anticipate a congruence between sex and feelings of shame. In this way, *Venus in the Cloister* creates comedic effect by manipulating readers' expectations of maternity, encouraging them to repeatedly forget and then remember the Abbess's sexuality. This pattern is reflected most clearly in the final dialogue of the text, which begins with Agnes expressing fear that the Abbess will punish her and Angelica for spending too much time together. Angelica assures Agnes that they are safe, "for [the Abbess] has gone to visit her Prisoner."[69] She recounts how, the previous night, the Abbess caught a man who had been entering the convent disguised as a woman named Marina to engage in an affair with a nun named Pasythea. When Marina begins to have sex with not just Pasythea but several other nuns, the women's jealousy alerts the Abbess to the presence of a man in the convent, and she begins to fervently search for "that Angel of *Satan* that comes to disturb the Repose of Nuns at Night-

[69] Ibid, 222.

time."[70] Angelica creates suspense by recounting the Abbess's actions in grave terms: "This Discourse made us all tremble, and *Pasythea* especially, who had the greatest Reason."[71] As the text legitimates Pasythea's fear, the reader likewise is led to view the Abbess as a threat to sexual pleasure. The rhetoric of the passage constructs the Abbess as an officer of the nuns' chastity – one who earnestly seeks to find the "wolf" in the "Sheepfold."[72]

Tension continues to mount as the Abbess moves through the convent. Finally, the punchline of the dialogue occurs only at the very end, when Angelica reveals that the Abbess has imprisoned Marina not to punish him but to use him for her own sexual pleasure. After failing to find the man, the Abbess realizes that he must be disguised as a woman. Hatching a comically unchaste plan, she demands that each nun raise her smock to expose her genitals and, in this way, discovers Marina's penis. While the Abbess tells the nuns that she is punishing Marina for being in Pasythea's cell "without any Necessity," Agnes and Angelica immediately intuit her true intentions:

> Agnes: She found that Bird so agreeable to her Humour, that she would put him into a Cage to make use of him in her quaintest Pleasure.
>
> Angel: She believed, that Nuns, as we are, did not deserve so sweet a Morsel which was worthy the Mouth of an Abbess.[73]

Thus, the dialogue ends by, once again, subverting readers' expectations of the Abbess's/mother's motivations. Like Katherine's mother in *The School of Venus*, the Abbess builds suspense by acting in the role of sexual disciplinarian. However, unlike Katherine's

[70] Ibid, 229.
[71] Ibid, 227.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid, 232.

mother, the Abbess's authority is dismissed as a bawdy joke. The interlocutors have learned, finally, that the Abbess is not a sexual authoritarian but rather a sexual connoisseur.

As the reader follows this cycle by which the Abbess's sexuality is erased and then reasserted, their surprise implicates them in the text's critique of the clergy. The dialogue does not dispose of the Catholic ethos entirely but, rather, invokes the maternity of the Abbess to repeatedly call readers' attention to that ethos. As the Abbess weaves in and out of line with Catholic values, the readers' surprise or shock is predicated on their initial acceptance of the mother figure's (and Catholicism's) authority to discipline the sexualities of her followers. By first establishing then undermining the Abbess's sexual authority, *Venus in the Cloister* guides readers through the discovery of the clergy's hypocrisy. In this way, Catholicism, like maternity, becomes a means by which the text creates suspense, as well as the pleasure of challenging the limits of licit sexuality. Significantly, the basis of the text's critique of the clergy is not that the clergy is full of sexually active individuals but rather than it attempts to erase this fact. Indeed, in text's fictionalized epistle dedication to "Madam D.L.R. The most worthy Lady abbess of Beaulieu," L'Abbé Du Prat embraces and celebrates sex as a Catholic principle:

> For in Reality, to begin with *Poverty*, Can any One shew herself more detached from *Worldly Good*s, than to strip herself voluntarily into her *Smock*? Could she in her Words and Actions display the Beauty of *Chastity* in a greater Lustre than by taking for her Rule *Pure Nature*? In short, if we would make Proof of her implicit *Obedience* in all Things, without Exception, we shall find that she has shewn herself as docile as any One of our *Novices*.[74]

Here, L'Abbé Du Prat reminds readers of the nuns' vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, even as he uses bawdy suggestion to mock these values. According to Du Prat, obedience requires Agnes to conform to the Abbess's leadership, despite her licentiousness. The Abbess's maternity licenses Agnes and readers to indulge in the sexual culture of the cloister. Just as Du

[74] Ibid, 148.

Prat recalls and quickly subverts readers' expectations of nuns' behaviors, so too does the mother figure invite the reader's feelings of shame, only to neutralize those feelings. Because early moderns associate both the clergy and mothers with asexuality, the Abbess is uniquely positioned to serve as the basis of the text's critique of attempts to divorce maternity and Catholicism from sexuality. The recognizability of the mother's role as sexual authority allows the Abbess to set the moral tone of the dialogues, granting social approbation to the interlocutors' actions and, in doing so, satirizing Catholic leadership itself.

A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid: Balancing Maternal Expectations

The final mother figure I will discuss, that of Nicholas Chorier's *A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid*, is, perhaps, the most complex of those featured in the canonical whore dialogues. Chorier originally wrote the text that would become *A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid* as the Latin *Satyra Sotadica* around 1660.[75] The text appeared in French as *L'Academie des dames* in 1680 before it was finally translated into English around 1684.[76] Like *The School of Venus*, *A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid* was included in the 1688 prosecution of Robert Streater and Joseph Crayle, suggesting that the English text caused an almost immediate public stir, despite the previous availability of the Latin and French versions in England.[77] The text that I analyze here is from the earliest extant English edition of the work, published in 1740. This 1740 version is slightly abridged from the earlier Latin and French versions and, as a result, focuses more narrowly on the normative domesticity

[75] The original work was published with the byline Luisa Siega, a female Spanish scholar, likely as an attempt to shield Chorier from legal prosecution. James Grantham Turner discusses the misattribution of Chorier's text to a woman in *Schooling Sex,* 165-220.
[76] Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography,* 27.
[77] Mudge, *When Flesh Becomes Word*, xvii.

of Octavia's wedding night.[78] As the title suggests, Chorier's text is composed of a conversation between a fifteen-year-old maid, Octavia, and a seventeen-year-old married woman, Tullia. Octavia has just been informed by her mother that she will marry Philander the following night, and Tullia, prompted by her own mother, offers to prepare Octavia for what is to come. In the dialogue, Octavia's sexual awakening is framed in terms of her burgeoning womanhood and wifehood. For Octavia, sex is a necessary wifely duty – sometimes excruciating, pleasurable, or tedious – aimed primarily at her husband's desire.[79]

Like the mother figures in *School of Venus* and *Venus in the Cloister*, Octavia's mother plays a dynamic role in shaping the eroticism of *A Dialogue*. Throughout, the mother oscillates between the role of sexual disciplinarian, preventing and controlling Octavia's sexual activity, and sexual connoisseur, advocating for Octavia's pleasure and, even, serving as an erotic object herself. On the one hand, the mother prevents her daughter from seeking any form of sexual pleasure, including sexual knowledge, before she is married. As in *School of Venus*, Octavia's mother has a reputation for being strict, though, once again, the details of this reputation are unclear. The initial ambiguity surrounding the mother conjures readers' expectations of normative, licit sexual behavior. On the other hand, Octavia's mother repeatedly expresses the expectation that her daughter's wedding night will be physically and emotionally traumatic and works to not only mitigate this effect but also advocate for female sexual pleasure *per se*. Thus, Chorier's mother figure articulates contemporary gender and sexual norms – including the norm of sexual violence – and maintains the patriarchal status quo, all while being fully eroticized. Because texts in the period rarely depict sexually-realized maternity in a positive way, *A*

[78] Mudge, xviii.
[79] "A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid," in *When Flesh Becomes Word*, edited by Mudge, 233-256. Hereafter, I will cite quotations from this text as *A Dialogue* followed by a page number.

Dialogue challenges readers' expectations about what eroticized mothers can and should signify. It is precisely by toeing this line between modeling and undermining readers' expectations for maternal behavior that Octavia's mother explores, and sometimes challenges, early modern boundaries between licit and illicit sexual activity.

In terms of sexual knowledge, Octavia is more similar to *School of Venus*'s Katherine, whose ignorance is exaggerated, than she is to *Venus in the Cloister's* Agnes, whose ignorance is merely a farce. However, while Katherine's mother seems to withhold sexual knowledge from her daughter as a way of maintaining control over her, Octavia's mother attempts to reason with her daughter about sex. Thus, Octavia's ignorance is not imposed by her mother's sexual authority but, rather, is presented as a quality inherent in the state of virginity itself. While Katherine's mother in *School of Venus* remains on the periphery of the narrative, Octavia gives voice to her mother's clear, reasoned argument for why women should remain virginal until marriage:

> …for, said she [the mother], most Men are for that base Principal, that they either never marry those they have enjoyed, or scorn them afterwards when they do; Few are so generous, as to be thankful to their Mistresses for yielding to Love, but had rather owe their Joys to the Formality of a Person, than to the free Concessions of Beauty enflam'd by just Desires; and tho' they have made the same Vows in Private, that they made in Publick, at their Wedding, yet contemn Women for believing them without a Witness. For ever after, she watch'd so narrowly that *Philander* never found me alone.[80]

Here, Octavia's mother argues that she must not let Philander "enter" her on the grounds that men cannot be trusted to marry women they have already "enjoyed" sexually. From the context of this conversation, the reader can determine – even as Octavia cannot – that the mother defines "entering" as the insertion of a penis into a vagina (coitus) and distinguishes this sexual act from other acts like fingering or cunnilingus. Though the mother accepts that Philander has never

[80]*A Dialogue*, 238.

"entered" Octavia, Octavia confesses to her that he has used his finger and face to manipulate her genitals. Thus, the mother provides a distinct boundary between licit and illicit sexual acts, referring not to the mandates of Christianity but to the contemporary exigencies of women's financial survival. However, despite the mother's nuanced understanding of heterosexual relationships, she remains unable to explain these rules to Octavia, whose virginal ignorance prevents her from understanding the fine distinctions between various sex acts. The mother must enforce her sexual mores bluntly and disproportionately by banning Octavia from being alone with Philander entirely. In containing her daughter's access to Philander, Octavia's mother prevents not only the "wrong kind" of sex (premarital coitus) but also *all other* premarital sexual acts. However, she does so not because she believes the latter are immoral (i.e., against a prescribed social or religious code) but because she cannot rely on her daughter to understand the difference between acts.

By positing sexual ignorance as a quality of virginity, the text can then contrast the mother's knowledge to her daughter's lack. In this way, Chorier highlights – indeed, depends on – the sexual experience of maternity that other contemporary texts either erase or demean. Unlike early modern texts that use sexuality to discredit maternal authority, the savviness of Octavia's mother does not diminish her authority but, rather, enhances it. Chorier's decision to articulate sexual standards through Octavia's mother assigns the role of sexual disciplinarian to maternity while also highlighting the sexual knowledge necessary to fulfill this role.

At the same time, while Chorier's can be understood as a liberating view of maternity insofar as he allows the mother to express her erotic interest, it is important to note that the mother's description of men's dubious behavior towards women in the passage above also normalizes it. Indeed, as the mother describes the physical and emotional dangers of premarital

sex for women, she implies that the onus of protecting women from these dangers belongs not to men but to other women. Chorier's *A Dialogue* frequently uses the mother figure, a sign of sexual experience, to assert the normalcy of violence in heterosexual relationships. As I discuss in greater depth below, Octavia's mother repeatedly warns Octavia and Philander that the breaking of the hymen is an excruciating experience for women. Though she tries to mitigate this pain for Octavia, she inadvertently accepts pain as an inevitability. Maternity's role in approbating violence within heterosexual marriage is made explicit through a second mother figure in the text: Tullia's mother. As Tullia describes her own wedding night, she recalls how her mother and friend merely laugh at the pain she experiences.

> His going in so quick hurt me so, my Wounds being yet fresh, that I cried out, Ah! My dear *Pomponia,* come and deliver me from the murdering Man. My Mother and she only answered me with Laughing as loud as they could, and so went out, and *Horatio* [Tullia's husband] kept jogging in.[81]

Here, the passage shifts attention from Horatio to Tullia's mother and friend, shielding Horatio from being held accountable for the pain he causes. Tullia appeals to the women – not Horatio – to end her agony. Because the mother plays the role of sexual disciplinarian, she licenses Horatio's violent rape of her daughter. While Tullia does not consent to the pain she experiences, the mother's laugh assures the reader that no crime has occurred. Chorier describes the laugh not as reactionary but as deliberate; the women laugh "as loud as they could" as if the volume of the laugh signals their intentional, sadistic disregard for Tullia's suffering. While Octavia's mother does not demonstrate this callousness, she does express her resignation that the breaking of the

[81] Ibid, 246.

hymen is an aggressive act. Thus, in the text, the sexual experience of the mother becomes a means by which Chorier decriminalizes sexual violence within marriage.

As in *Venus in the Cloister*, the mother figure in *A Dialogue* surprises the reader by correcting their (paradoxical) assumption that maternity is not only asexual but also inherently opposed to sexual pleasure. In the first dialogue, Octavia corrects Tullia's expectation about how her mother reacted to finding her alone with Philander during their courtship:

> OCT. I had scarce put down my Coats, and he put in his Shirt, which hung out of his Breeches, when my Mother came in.
>
> TUL. Woe be to thee, I know her Severity.
>
> OCT. Yet she said nothing harsh, only smiling ask'd, how we both came by such a Colour; then sitting down by *Philander*, told him, within a Day or two, she hoped to make him the happiest Man in the World.[82]

Just as *Venus in the Cloister* manipulates readers' expectations about maternity as they learn and re-learn of the sexual exploits of the Abbess, *A Dialogue* uses the mother to challenge readers' assumptions about the boundary between licit and illicit sexual acts. The mother (especially the "severe" mother) serves as a shortcut that primes readers to reflect on the disciplinary processes that have shaped their own sexualities. Alongside Tullia, the reader anticipates the mother's harsh reaction to finding the couple in this compromised position. Readers expect the sexually-savvy mother to interpret Philander's loose shirt tail as evidence of sexual activity; indeed, the imprecision of this sign enhances the reader's nervous anticipation of the mother's reaction. In response, the text purposefully disorients the reader by drawing attention to the eroticism of the *mother's* body. In a teasingly ambiguous line, the mother promises to sexually fulfill Philander "within a day or two."[83] As it turns out, the mother does so by quickly arranging his marriage to

[82] Ibid, 238.
[83] Ibid.

Octavia. However, for a fleeting moment, the scene titillates the reader with the possibility that the mother's sexual pleasure will displace Octavia's; the mother's body is briefly offered in place of her daughter's to "make [Philander] the happiest Man in the World."[84] Thus, while the Abbess produces surprise through her total lack of sexual boundaries and flagrant mocking of Catholic authority, Octavia's mother is surprising for her ability to promote licit sexual norms without disregarding her daughter's, or her own, eroticism.

While the fantasy of the mother having sex with Philander remains unfulfilled, the mother's sexual pleasure does become increasingly intertwined with that of her daughter. However, as this occurs, Chorier is careful to maintain the mother's role as a sexual authority, using maternity to establish and enforce the line between licit and illicit sexual behavior. After the wedding ceremony, Philander, overcome with desire to consummate his marriage, begs Octavia's mother to distract their wedding guests so that he can briefly sneak away with his new wife. Apologetic in tone, Philander's request emphasizes the chastity of the mother:

> Madam, said he, I beg your Pardon for this unmannerly Cheat of making you do,
> in an usual Time of the Day, that which you would not scruple by Candle-light,
> with a much less troublesome Ceremony.[85]

Philander's careful calculation as he makes his case to his mother-in-law reflects early moderns' illogical tendency to represent positive maternity as asexual. Philander flatters Octavia's mother through the hyperbolic erasure of her sexuality; he implies that the mother should object to *all* sexual activity, regardless of the time of day. In contrast, the mother's initial response to Philander does not condemn his sexual desire but merely the untimeliness of it. "Your Desires, *Philander*…are very unreasonable, and I should think, that the very Expectation of it should

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid, 247.

increase the Joys at Night."[86] Concerned that their guests will be suspicious of the couple's absence, the mother plays the part of sexual disciplinarian. Significantly, when she finally agrees to Philander's request, she does so *reluctantly*, citing men's right to the sexual obedience of their wives. "Daughter, said she, you are now your Husband's. Do what he will have once, but no more."[87] The mother's ambiguous reference to a will beyond that of Philander could acknowledge Octavia's sexual desire but forbids her from acting on it. Similar to how *Venus in the Cloister* mocks the nun's vows of obedience to the clergy by using them to justify their sexual behavior, here, Octavia's mother satirizes women's obedience to their husbands. While the mother creates the semblance of controlling her daughter's sexuality, she also, ironically, uses Philander's will as an excuse to allow her to break the rules of sexual and social decorum. The "more" that the couple is not permitted to do is precisely that which would implicate Octavia in illicit sexual action. However, as the following scene suggests, the line between Philander's and Octavia's desire is anything but clear; wifely obedience is revealed to be an arbitrary licensure of women's behavior, as it is granted not by Philander but by the mother. Furthermore, by citing the value of wifely submission, the mother manages to comply with Philander's suspect request to prioritize his erotic desire over social decorum while safeguarding the (albeit, limited) authority granted to her by her conformity to patriarchal mores.

Maintaining this authority excuses Octavia's mother to play a central role in the consummation scene that follows. As Philander enjoys his new wife, the mother returns to the room multiple times to aid and direct the sexual action, all under the guise of wishing to prevent the wedding guests from suspecting the couple's indiscretion. For example, she helps Octavia remove her upper petticoat "lest by its being rumpled, the Guests of the Wedding should

[86] Ibid, 247.
[87] Ibid.

perceive that you have been at it already" and warns Philander to "be merciful…to poor Octavia, for my Sake," hoping to both spare Octavia from pain and prevent her from making too much noise.[88] At the same time, the mother's presence and commentary enhances the erotic experience of the reader. Because she must maintain her passivity and innocence, Octavia is unable to express judgement on the erotic scene herself, and thus, her mother adds detail and context that Octavia cannot provide. Catching sight of Philander's "Weapon," the mother exclaims at the large size of it. In so doing, she sets the visual scene for the reader and prompts fantasies of Octavia's future sexual fulfilment. "[I]t will be so much the more pleasant to you in time," she informs her daughter.[89] Karen Harvey argues that detailed descriptions of body parts such as this are what distinguishes "pornography" from "erotica." Such moments, Harvey argues, are obscene precisely because they give the reader direct access to the sexual encounter rather than the mere suggestion of sex.[90] While figurative or coded language distances the readers of erotica from its subjects' bodies, the explicit description of body parts draws them into the pornographic scene. Thus, as the mother fills a key gap in Octavia's sexual knowledge, she also contributes to *A Dialogue's* indecency and, therefore, its masturbatory capacity.

While *A Dialogue* prioritizes male pleasure over female pleasure, the mother advocates for her daughter's sexual safety and enjoyment – despite the many barriers against it. As the text

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[88] Ibid, 248.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20. Similarly, Peter Stewart argues that the explicit depiction of body parts in erotic engravings is what distinguishes "indecent" images from "decent" ones. Peter Stewart, "Decency and Indecency," *Engraven Desire: Eros, Image & Text in the French Eighteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 291-334. On the other hand, Sarah Toulalan troubles the association of metaphor with implicitness or decency. "A differentiation between the erotic and the pornographic that is based upon degrees of explicitness neglects to pay attention to historical and cultural contexts, as explicitness…may also be culturally determined." In fact, Toulalan refuses to differentiate between pornography and erotica at all, arguing that such a differentiation did not occur in the early modern period. Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*¸ 11-5, esp. 13; 23. I concede Toulalan's point about the difficulty of creating such distinctions. While I am not interested in distinguishing between "erotica" and "pornography" here, as do Harvey and Stewart, I am interested in how *A Dialogue* is self-consciously invested in the detailed sexual knowledge of the mother.

fetishizes virginity, it portrays the task of penetrating virgin bodies and breaking of the hymen an intense effort – one that causes women a great deal of pain. At times, Philander's callous response to Octavia's pain border on sadism and threatens the believability of the female voice. For example, in the initial consummation scene, Octavia's pain is so extreme that she cries out "as if [she] had been killed," and in response, Philander tells Octavia to be still so as to "not disappoint his first Joys."[91] Thus, Chorier's effort to ventriloquize Octavia while maintaining an emphasis on *male* pleasure – predicated on conquering the woman's virginity with his "Weapon" – threatens to undermine the sense that Octavia values her interaction with Philander. In this regard, as the mother advocates for her daughter's safety, she also marks the text's recognition of the sadism embedded in men's sexual pleasure. She gives voice to the potential threat to women's bodies in heterosexual unions and raises the possibility that women may not enjoy pleasing their husbands if that pleasure comes at their physical and emotion expense. "If you will," she tells her daughter, "I will desire *Philander* to use you kindly, and not to put you to such pain as he did in the Morning."[92]

Chorier deploys the mother to temper the potential disconnect between the readers' erotic fulfillment and the witnessing of Octavia's distress. In this way, he implicates the mother in both her daughter's pleasure, as well as her pain. The mother's role as intermediary between Philander and Octavia is literalized in the consummation scene, which ends not with the alignment of Philander's and Octavia's climaxes but with the synchronicity of Octavia and her mother – a deliberate subversion of the simultaneous orgasm.

> Just as he had finished, my Mother, who had heard me shrick, came into the Room. Oh! Said she, *Philander,* you forgot your Promise. I, at that Instant felt something extraordinary come from me, and closing my Eyes, and taking fast

[91] *A Dialogue,* 248.
[92] Ibid, 249-50.

> hold of *Philander*, I laid my languishing Head in his Arms, and upon his neck, and cried, Oh! I feel some thing so sweet that it kills me![93]

In the passage, the mother's final entrance into the room, rather than Philander's ejaculation, aligns with Octavia's orgasm. Because prior to the mother's entrance the sexual encounter is painful, not pleasurable, for Octavia, the timing of her orgasm is jarring. Her sudden shift from extreme pain to extreme pleasure is illogical and threatens the reliability of Octavia's narrative voice. However, as the mother intervenes, Octavia's, somewhat miraculous, achievement of orgasm in this moment assuages Philander's callous and sadistic response to Octavia's pain. In scolding Philander, the mother shifts attention from the violence he does to Octavia's body to his petty transgression of forgetting a promise. She normalizes Octavia's pain, assuring the reader that Octavia is not only safe but also in extasy herself. While the temporal alignment of the mother's entrance and the daughter's orgasm can easily be overlooked or dismissed as coincidental by modern readers, the centrality of the simultaneous orgasm to early modern erotic texts is well known.[94] While the mother does not orgasm in this scene, her actions emphasize the gap between Philander's climax and her daughter's. Because whore dialogues privilege simultaneous orgasms as a sign of successful, mutually-pleasurable sex, contemporary readers were likely to be highly attuned to the context of Octavia's first climax. Indeed, using phrases like "just as" and "at that instant," the passage carefully demarcates time – not in relation to Philander's pleasure, but in relation to the actions of the mother. In doing so, *A Dialogue* highlights the mother's role in the sexual pleasure of her daughter, as well as that of the reader.

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[93] Ibid, 248.

[94] Toulalan, "'The Act of Copulation Being Ordain'd by Nature as the Ground of all Generation,'" 523-6. This is also a theme in Thomas Nashe's *Choice of Valentines.* See Moulton, "Transmuted into a Woman or Worse: Masculine Gender Identity and Thomas Nashe's 'Choice of Valentines,'" *English Literary Renaissance*, vol 27, no 1 (2008): 57-88, esp. 74-5.

Both Octavia and the reader depend on the mother to achieve orgasm; she licenses, enables, and enhances the erotic scene.

Of course, the mother's centrality to this scene can also be understood as intrusive. Indeed, *A Dialogue* implicitly defines Octavia's burgeoning womanhood as the transfer of control of her body from her mother to her husband. While Octavia implies that she expects her mother to be near her when she loses her virginity, Tullia repeatedly emphasizes the value of solitude in a couple's achievement of sexual pleasure.

> This Silence and Quiet in the Family, To-morrow Night, would be to thee and thy *Philander* much more welcome; but instead of that, there will be nothing but Noise about you, till you are both a Bed, and People placed in every Corner, to hear what you do and say; and if the Bed shakes…thou wilt hear them without Laugh and Giggle, to the no small Disappointment of thy Pleasure at first.[95]

Here, Tullia laments her culture's tendency to make consummation a semi-public affair. The passage is an exaggerated description of the bedding ritual, a custom whereby boisterous wedding guests escort the bride and groom to bed, where they rally around the couple until they are forced to leave. The jocularity of this event involves the explicit expectation of sex, as well as the community's teasing delay of the couple's sexual enjoyment.[96] Thus, *A Dialogue* enacts a fantasy in which the wedding guests do not leave the room at all at but remain as voyeurs to the sexual act.[97] Octavia's mother extends the joke of the bedding ceremony by not only failing to leave but also flaunting her authority to be present. Significantly, it is only when the couple finally appears alone that they achieve the simultaneous orgasm that alludes them during the wedding reception.[98] In so doing, they complete the symbolic transfer of Octavia's sexual

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[95] 239.
[96] David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 374-6.
[97] Robert Darnton argues that this voyeurism is a key a feature of the pornography of pre-Revolutionary France. Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 72-3.
[98] *A Dialogue*, 255.

dependence from her mother to her husband. In the final dialogue, Philander locks the door to their bedroom and carefully searches the room for potential intruders. Here, Philander alone directs Octavia's movements, teaching her how to stand, move her body, and express her pleasure. Indeed, compared to the male sex objects in *School of Venus* and *Venus in the Cloister*, Philander plays a much more commanding role in Octavia's sexual activity, perhaps as a means of compensating for the involvement of the mother.[99] As Octavia submits to the sexual desire of her husband, the mother serves as a marker of Octavia's girlhood – something she must outgrow in order to become Philander's wife.

However, ultimately, *A Dialogue* fails to fully relegate maternal authority to girlhood. Indeed, Both Tullia's and Octavia's mothers remain actively invested in the sex lives of their daughters after their respective weddings. As Tullia reveals, the precipitating event of this dialogue is her own mother's desire to hear about Octavia's sex life. Tullia confesses that her mother has "sent me on to pump thee, about what past between you [and Philander], and to instruct you against the Wedding-night, to prepare thee, for a better Bedfellow, which thou wilt have To-morrow."[100] Thus, Tullia's mother maintains her surveillance over the actions of her daughter, despite the fact that Tullia is now a mother herself. Meanwhile, Octavia's mother also questions her daughter about her sexual affairs with Philander. After pulling Octavia from Philander to prepare her to return to the wedding reception,

> There immediately, having kissed me tenderly, she began to question me, how it was with me? Bidding me tell her all the Particulars without Shame, for now she was more my Companion than any Thing else. I obey'd; and as I made the Description her Eyes sparkled, her Veins swelled, and embracing me she almost fell away in my Arms with the Sense of my Pleasure; and no Wonder, for she is not yet above nine and twenty Years old.[101]

[99] Dialogue three even contains a long passage in which Philander recites a prose blazon of his ideal woman, which Octavia eagerly absorbs.
[100] *A Dialogue*, 238-9.
[101] Ibid, 249.

While Octavia's mother claims that she is "more [Octavia's] Companion that any Thing else," this does not mean that she is no longer invested in her daughter's sexuality. Now that Philander has taken up the role of Octavia's sexual disciplinarian, the mother is able to share in her daughter's pleasure. In each of these moments, the text posits an intimate, mirroring relationship between the mothers and the reader. Both mothers, like ideal consumers of the text, receive erotic pleasure from hearing about their daughters' sexual affairs. When Octavia obeys her mother's request for sexual content, she produces corporeal satisfaction that is highly suggestive of orgasm.

The incestuous overtone of this moment is noteworthy, yet what is most striking here is the way in which the mother-turned-sexual-confidante complicates the narrative's logic about the "proper" ownership and recipient of Octavia's sexuality. While *A Dialogue* ends with Philander's assertion of his authority over his wife, the erotic situation of the text invokes maternal authority to broaden the audience and purpose of the consummation scene beyond its role in securing and legitimizing the heterosexual union. The role of the mother, itself authorized by the patriarchal status quo, reinforces Philander's ownership over Octavia by guarding her virginity until the proper moment. In this way, maternal discipline lends credence to the consummation scene, making it a complete expression of patriarchal control over Octavia's body. At the same time, the control of Octavia's mother over her daughter also licenses her involvement in the affairs of her wedding night. Her maternity enables her to both reinforce and satirize the period's obsession with wifely obedience, as her concession to Philander's will leads Octavia to break the rules of sexual and social decorum. Readers' pleasure arises from not only the surprise of witnessing the disciplinarian become a sexual confidante/erotic object, but also the suspense of skirting the line between licit and illicit erotic expression.

Conclusion: The Pleasure of Maternity

In the words of Angela Carter, "Sexual relations between men and women always render explicit the nature of social relations in the society in which they take place and, if described explicitly, will form a critique of those relations, even if that is not and never has been the intention of the pornographer."[102] If we follow Carter's conclusion that descriptions of sexual relations necessarily offer a critique of a society's social relations, some questions remain: what constitutes the *content* of this critique? Do whore dialogues offer a liberating view of the sex lives of early modern mothers? If the dialogues critique early modern English social relations, which social relations do they critique and on what terms? As I argue above, examining the mother figure's role in the whore dialogues challenges assumptions about how maternity operated in the early modern English imagination. The period's tendency to bracket or erase mothers' sexual knowledge and experience makes maternity's centrality to this erotic genre surprising. As I discuss in my introduction, early modern scholars such as Stephen Guy-Bray, Alicia Page Andrzejewski, and Amanda Zoch have pointed out the ways in which scholarship perpetuates the period's uncritical sentimentalization of the mother figure, yoking her to heteronormativity and reproductive futurity.[103] Each has worked to disturb the assumption that maternity, childhood, and reproduction are always already aligned with heteronormativity. My examination of the mother figure in these whore dialogues builds on this conversation insofar as it offers an example of how maternity can upset normative sexual and social expectations. Indeed, the dialogues highlight the irony inherent in de-sexualized representations of mothers. To

[102] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), esp. 20. Also qtd Hunt, 40.
[103] Stephen Guy-Bray, *Against Reproduction: Where Renaissance Texts Come From* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Alicia Page Andrzejewski, "Queer Pregnancy in Shakespeare's Plays," Doctorial diss, City University of New York, 2019. Amanda Zoch, "Macduff's Son and the Queer Temporality of Macbeth," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol 57, no 2 (2017): 369-88.

borrow Angela Carter's words, the dialogues "render explicit the nature of social relations" by drawing attention to the purposeful erasure of mothers' sexualities. In so doing, the texts rescue these sex lives from socially-enforced invisibility, revealing the mechanism by which early moderns divorced eroticism from positive representations of maternity.

However, it would be an overstatement to argue that these whore dialogues represent a wholly liberating view of early modern mothers. In the dialogues, the virgin-whore binary is not deconstructed so much as mobilized for the purpose of interrogating and satirizing early modern culture. Indeed, the comedic effect of the texts is predicated on the readers' surprise at witnessing the sexualization of the mother figures. In *A Dialogue*, for example, Octavia's mother continues to assert Philander's authority over his wife, maintaining normative expectations for heterosexual marriages – including the expectation of sexual violence. Thus, while she, alongside the readers, shares in Octavia's sexual pleasure, she is able to do so only because she reaffirms patriarchal mores. Meanwhile, in *The School of Venus*, the mother's sexualization occurs at her own expense. Unlike Octavia's mother and the Abbess, Katherine's mother does not share in the erotic pleasure of the text, but serves as a symbol of sexual hypocrisy, which the text relentlessly mocks. Ultimately, these whore dialogues invoke maternity to create erotic pleasure *because* rather than *despite* the fact that erotic pleasure was assumed to be antithetical to maternity. The texts' successful critique of their culture necessitates that they implicate the mothers in the normative sexual and social expectations that they expose. The whore dialogues do not liberate mother figures from the purposeful erasure of their sexuality but, rather, use this erasure to create a politically-potent experience of shock or surprise.

This is not to say that whore dialogues unilaterally associate maternity with normativity. The ubiquity of the maternal figures in these texts indicates the genre's interest in tracing the line

between licit and illicit sex. However, rather than representing licit sex, the mother figure presents the opportunity for the readers of whore dialogues to approach and challenge the boundary between sexual acceptability and sexual deviance. In addition to structuring the interlocutors' sexual adventures, maternity also shapes the readers' experience of the texts' eroticism and political critique. In *The School of Venus,* the emptiness of the Katherine's mother's sexual expectations for her daughter primes readers to fill this void with their own assumptions about normative behavior, which may or may not arise to the level of verbal articulation. Similarly, in *Venus in the Cloister,* the Abbess creates the threat of Catholicism's condemnation of sexual desire even as the text routinely implicates the reader in her hypocrisy. The mother does not represent sexual norms *per se* but rather the belief – or, perhaps, fear – that a collectively-defined source of sexual shame exists and *could* interfere with the interlocutors', and the readers', pleasure. However, the presence of the mother also frees the reader from the mental and emotional labor of confronting this shame directly. The belief that certain forms of sex can be classified as licit is enough to make possible the sense of surprise when the mothers take part in the erotic situation.

When maternity appears in the whore dialogues, it disrupts the period's ability to use female sexuality to categorize mothers as good or bad, virtuous or dangerous, domestic or foreign. In the period, creating such binaries aided the control of women's bodies and tempered the threat of mothers' authority. However, in the whore dialogues, the binary between virgin and whore fails to contain the range of responses that the rhetoric of maternity could invoke. The erotic texts self-consciously manipulate maternity's relationship to sexuality in order to guide readers' reactions to the protagonists. Despite this, scholars continue to take for granted the role of the mother figure in the whore dialogues. Even in the very name of the genre, the figure of *the*

prostitute is upheld as the central symbol for fully sexualized femininity, yet in the three canonical whore dialogues I examine above, it is the mother's, not the prostitute's, sexual knowledge and experience that structures the erotic scenes. While many whore dialogues discuss prostitution, *The School of Venus*, *Venus in the Cloister,* and *A Dialogue between a Married Woman and a Maid* acknowledge the pleasure, desire, and sexiness of maternity. In so doing, they not only reveal the erasure of sexuality from positive representations of mothers in the early modern period but also offer scholars the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which our own assumptions implicate us in this erasure, as well.

CHAPTER VI

CODA: Defining Maternity Today

My initial investigation of the rhetoric of maternity was inspired in part by feminist analyses of maternity in relation to modern race relations.[1] As several feminist scholars have shown, the rhetoric of maternity differentially empowers and oppresses women.[2] Since the 1970s, the feminist mantra "the personal is political" has led many scholars to look to the nuclear family, especially mothers, as a site where oppressive gender ideologies manifest. Many have examined maternity as a key social formation that governs women's behaviors and affects as well as the ways in which the public makes sense of and responds to women's reproductive lives.[3] Today, some mothers – such as nonwhite mothers, mothers on welfare, mothers who are teenagers, and mothers who are imprisoned – are excluded from social and institutional support unless they achieve particular norms of maternal behavior.[4] Given maternity's relationship to

[1] For example, see Ruby Tapia, *American Pietas: Visions of Race, Death, and the Maternal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). Here, Tapia seeks to expose the ways in which US nationalism claimed images of death and the maternal to consolidate white supremacy and white nationhood around the turn of the 21st century. In *The Mommy Myth*, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels discuss the impact of media hype around "crack babies" and "welfare queens" on the exclusion of black women from the category of 'mom' in the first place. *The Mommy Myth: Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004), esp. 199. Analyzing the intersection of class, gender, and race, Dorothy Roberts points out that welfare benefits are denied to women deemed "unproductive" by competitive capitalism's standards. "The Value of Black Mothers' Work," *Connecticut Law Review*, vol 26, no 3 (1994): 871-8; esp. 872-3.

[2] Ann Snitow discusses this paradox in "Feminism and Motherhood: An American Reading," *Feminist Review* vol 40, no 1 (1992): 32-51.

[3] The excess of prescriptive advice for mothers is the subject of Douglas and Michaels' *The Mommy Myth* (2004). Here, Douglas and Michaels propound the idea of "the new momism," the pressure put on women by the media to perform motherhood in a way that is physically and psychologically taxing. They see this "momism" as resulting, in large part, from a backlash to the women's movement, which created a new social impulse to control and contain women's effect on children. Many have suggested this as a central aim of their work.

[4] See Dorothy Roberts, "The Value of Black Mothers' Work." Also, contributors to the volume *The Politics of Pregnancy* examine the ways in which the moral panic around teenage pregnancy relates to gender, class, and race.

various forms of power, feminism must maintain a critical approach to it. Recognizing the effects of the rhetoric of maternity in the history of western culture is one strategy for correcting the problematic and damaging assumptions that we continue to make about and through women's reproductive bodies. In this coda, I turn to an example of one mother's intervention in public debates surrounding the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in order to demonstrate the ongoing necessity for feminist and anti-racist examinations of the rhetorical impact of maternity.

In April of 2015, protestors took to the streets to air their grievances in response to the violent arrest of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man. Gray died in police custody on April 18th of that year after suffering injuries to his head and neck by police during the arrest. Amid these protests, a viral video of a mother caught the attention of millions of viewers, prompting a swarm of debate about the nature of the mother's actions and shifting the conversation on police brutality against young black men in important ways. The video featured Baltimore resident Toya Graham accosting and hitting her son, Michael Graham, who appeared to be participating in the protests. In subsequent interviews, Toya Graham would tell reporters that she confronted her son after spotting him in a crowd of other protesters who were allegedly throwing rocks and bricks at police officers.[5] However, the video that went viral does not capture protesters throwing objects at police, nor does it focus on officers at all. The video, as well as the public conversation that followed it, centers on a single interaction between a mother and her son.

For the weeks following the protest, the image and words of Toya and Michael Graham would echo in millions of homes from multiple major media outlets such as CNN, Fox, and MSNBC, and the hashtag "*#momoftheyear*" would trend on Twitter as people commented on the

The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy, edited by Annette Lawson and Deborah L Rhode (London: Yale University Press, 1993).

[5] CBS NEWS, "Baltimore mom: "I just lost it" seeing son at riots with rock in hand," *CBSNews.com*, 29 April 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/baltimore-mom-toya-graham-on-smacking-son-at-riots-freddie-gray/.

video.[6] Toya Graham prompted powerful, disparate responses from viewers on various sides of the political spectrum, pointing to the ability of maternity to perform ideological work. The video shifted and aligned audience responses in ways that sometimes traveled along partisan lines and sometimes cut across them. For example, many on the right praised the mother as a "hero" for preventing her son from participating in what they characterized as a violent, fruitless "riot."[7] By referring to Toya Graham as "the mother of the year," conservatives could assuage the burden of their racial antipathy towards the protesters by imagining themselves in solidarity with a black mother. This fantasy of allegiance to not only Toya Graham's but *all* black mothers' cause depended on the erasure of the social and geographical circumstances that pressured Toya Graham to fear for her son's life. Indeed, the insincerity of conservative media's expressed sympathy with Toya Graham is reflected in their appropriation of her image as a justification for the violence committed by authorities tasked with suppressing the protest. The conservative media outlet *New York Post* ran a headline that read "Forget the National Guard…Send in the Moms," imaginatively substituting Graham's actions for that of institutionalized violent regimes.[8] This substitution became literal when the Baltimore Police Department tweeted, "ASKING ALL PARENTS TO LOCATE THEIR CHILDREN AND BRING THEM HOME."[9] Thus, Toya Graham inspired the Baltimore police to deputize local parents to help them put an end to the protests. The tweet infantilized BLM, reducing the issue of police brutality to a childish misunderstanding that could be corrected by the "proper" domestic management of

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ruben Navarrette, "Hero of Baltimore riots: A mom," *Fox News Opinion*, 28 April 2015, http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2015/04/28/hero-baltimore-riots-mom.html.
[8] Pamela Engel, "New York Post: 'Forget the National Guard, send in the moms,'" *Business Insider*, 29 April 2015, https://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-post-forget-the-national-guard-send-in-the-moms-2015-4.
[9] @BaltimorePolice. "Several juveniles are part of these aggressive groups. WE ARE ASKING ALL PARENTS TO LOCATE THEIR CHILDREN AND BRING THEM HOME. — Baltimore Police." *Twitter*, 27 April 2015, 2:25 p.m., https://twitter.com/BaltimorePolice. Original emphasis.

black parents.

While the right's reaction to the video seemed consistently positive, the supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement were surprisingly divided in their opinions of Ms. Graham's actions. Many supporters of BLM praised Toya Graham, echoing the voice of the conservative media. Notably, Oprah Winfrey, who elsewhere has claimed support for the Black Lives Matter movement, called Toya Graham personally to praise her for what she did for her son.[10] However, unlike those on the right, liberal voices drew attention to the historical context that they believe necessitated Ms. Graham's actions. Online, many recognized that the viral video depicted a sad state of reality for black mothers, who must fear for the lives of their black sons in the face of continuing police brutality. Such individuals emphasized the fact that Graham's own justification for her behavior was undergirded by a combination of love and fear: "That's my only son," said Graham. "And, at the end of the day, I don't want him to be a Freddie Gray."[11] Recognizing the real danger Michael was confronting, one *reddit.com* user wrote, "It's better to get a smack in the head from your Mom than a bullet from a cop," starting a long discussion about the importance of taking black mothers' fear and outrage seriously.[12] Meanwhile, many progressive voices critiqued the hypocrisy of the conservative media, arguing that Graham's violence toward her son implicated her in the same police violence that BLM combats.[13] In the left-leaning *HuffPost*,

[10] Brennan Williams, "This is How Oprah Winfrey and Ava DuVernay Define Black Lives Matter," *Huffpost*, 17 August 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/oprah-winfrey-ava-duvernay-queen-sugar-black-lives-matter_us_57b49e0be4b04ff88399f61d. Inside Edition, "Oprah Telephones Baltimore Riots' 'Mom of the Year,'" *Youtube*, 30 April 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhB7DyjxQNo.
[11] CBS. "Toya Graham CBS INTERVIEW Baltimore Mom Hits Son During Riots: 'I Was Shock' | VIDEO." *Youtube*, uploaded by Interrante Oludhe, 9 September 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2uSNm5KHCA.
[12] LonglivetheFunk [anonymous]. "Baltimore rioter slapped by mom on CNN," *Redditt,* 2015, https://www.reddit.com/r/news/comments/343pfa/baltimore_rioter_slapped_by_mom_on_cnn/#bottom-comments.
[13] For example, see Joan Walsh, "The hideous white hypocrisy behind the Baltimore "Hero Mom" hype: How clueless media applause excuses police brutality," *Salon*, 30 April 2015, https://www.salon.com/2015/04/29/the_hideous_white_hypocrisy_behind_the_baltimore_%E2%80%9Chero_mom%E2%80%9D_hype_how_clueless_media_applause_excuses_police_brutality/.

Julia Craven argues – correctly, I believe – that Graham's actions would have been condemned by white people had they not been aligned with the agenda of the police.[14] Craven notes the irony of the fact that the media has long criticized black mothers for using corporal punishment on their sons.

The conversation surrounding the video of Toya Graham reveals the ongoing salience of maternity in twenty-first century US politics. After the video went viral, lines differentiating supporters and antagonists of the Black Lives Matter movement consolidated around the various reactions to Graham's maternity. The video presented an opportunity for supporters of BLM to explore and clarify their stance on the place of violence in the movement. How and why should BLM avoid condemning the actions of Toya Graham while criticizing police violence against black men? *If* Michael was using violence against the police, would this have justified Ms. Graham's actions? Should progressives be condemning certain protesters' tactics at all? In such conversations, maternity came to the fore as a central analytic by which both conservatives and progressives made sense of the Baltimore protest and the Black Lives Matter movement in general. Analyzing the effect of Toya Graham's maternity is thus necessary for making sense of the publics that formed around the video.

Indeed, the debate surrounding Toya Graham highlights the importance of tracking not only when and how maternal rhetoric gets deployed but also what assumptions are being made in its deployment. While conservatives and progressives analyzed the same video of Toya Graham, they made disparate assumptions about how maternity should be defined. The conservative perspective treated maternity as a universal experience, disregarding the particularity of the

[14] Julia Craven, "Dear White America: Toya Graham is not Your Hero," *Huffpost*, 1 May 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/toya-graham-hero-mom_n_7175754.

experience of black mothers.[15] For US conservatives, Graham's universalism was established, in part, through appeals to her Christianity. After Graham joked in an interview that she was worried that her pastor may have heard her cursing at her son on television, conservative media became fixated on Graham's pastor, often making him the punchline of their newscasts.

> **VAN SUSTEREN:** We saw the video. You have a salty vocabulary.
> **GRAHAM:** Yeah. I apologize for that.
> **VAN SUSTEREN:** Does your pastor know about that yet?
> **GRAHAM:** He does at this point. Yes. He does at this point.
> **VAN SUSTEREN:** And I guess have you been given be a solution on this one, right?
> **GRAHAM:** Yes. I have. I have.
> **VAN SUSTEREN:** You got a pass on this?
> **GRAHAM:** I got a pass.[16]

Through this jocular repetition, Graham's personal religion became a means by which conservative individuals related to her maternity, as well as a reassurance of her "acceptable" moral standing. Though Christianity excludes large portions of the US population, the right's attachment to Christian universalism trumped their aversion to Graham's race. Conservative media outlets refused to acknowledge the history of black mothers' exclusion from the maternal ideal even as they, at times, echoed racist stereotypes about black maternity. ("Are you a tough mother?" Fox News anchor Greta Van Susteren asked her.)[17] Thus, conservatives used religion to construct Graham's maternity as universal – a move that shielded them from confronting their racism. In fact, Graham's maternity was granted sacred authority only insofar as it upheld the status quo of US race relations. In declaring Graham a "hero," individuals granted her violence a similar moral exceptionalism as that which is granted to the US police and military, whose

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[15] Jane Ribbens proposes that resisting the urge to see motherhood as "natural," singular, or self-identical should be one of the foundational principles of a feminist sociology of motherhood. Ribbens, *Mothers and their Children: A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), esp. 34-5.
[16] Ibid.
[17] "Baltimore 'Mom of the Year': 'Two wrongs don't make a right,'" *Fox News*, 1 May 2015, https://www.foxnews.com/transcript/baltimore-mom-of-the-year-two-wrongs-dont-make-a-right.

attacks on racialized bodies are protected by the state.

Indeed, Graham's video reveals the efforts of a patriarchal culture to use mothers and maternal bodies to shore up the power of dominant groups. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, patriarchal societies take an active interest in controlling the sexual and reproductive habits of women. The expectation that maternity be "patriotic" — that it conform to the good of the public — is, by consequence, an expectation that it uphold the patriarchal standards on which the dominant groups' hegemony depends (in this case, that of white, Christian, US conservatives). In the debate surrounding the maternity of Graham, what is at stake is the question of black men's access to the power afforded to white men in the United States. In conversations surrounding BLM, those on the right deny the historical trauma of both black men and black mothers at the hands of the police. To them, Michael deserved his mother's discipline, for they do not believe his alleged aggression was adequately defensive. After all, US culture's criminalization of black individuals leads white individuals to dismiss the overwhelming evidence of police brutality in this country.[18] As Michael Graham's mother was praised for upholding the right's notion of political justice — one that eerily echoes the brutality of police – she was made complicit in the perpetuation of US culture's racist status quo.

Finally, Graham's video and the conversations that surrounded it remind us that the rhetoric of maternity cannot be considered in isolation from the lived experiences of actual mothers. Indeed, many feminist scholars have pointed out the historical barriers that limit black mothers' access to idealized representations of maternity – barriers that include limited access to

[18] For example, see Jerome Skolnick and James Fyfe, *Above the Law: Police and the Excessive Use of Force* (New York: Free Press, 1993). The authors of *Suspect Citizens* describe the racial disparities that occur during routine traffic stops. Frank Baumgartner, Derek Epp, and Kelsey Shoub, *Suspect Citizens: What 20 Million Traffic Stops Tell Us about Policing and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). A wide interdisciplinary view of law enforcement and race in the United States is available in Tamara Rice Lave and Eric J Miller, eds, *The Cambridge Handbook of Policing in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

material wealth, as well as the long-standing stigmatization of black mothers, who are often blamed for the systemic injustices facing black families.[19] Contextualizing Graham's maternity in the history of the material and representational oppression of black mothers reveals US culture's larger investment in the licensing of police violence. Many supporters of BLM discussed the media's differential treatment of black mothers' corporal punishment versus that of the police. As these voices showed, the media's tendency to criticize black women for using corporal punishment fundamentally contradicts their refusal to critique the militarization of the police. Meanwhile, deploying an abstract and universalizing maternal rhetoric – one disconnected from black mothers' lived experience – allowed conservative news outlets to erase this history, enabling ideological appropriations of Toya Graham's video while silencing BLM's anti-racist critique. By studying the history of maternal rhetoric, including the relationship between language and bodies, we can begin to not only trace the development of our moment's most insidious fallacies but also reassert the erased narratives of diverse women. Just as maternity impacted the cultural ideologies of early modern England, it continues to play a role in elevating white supremacy and police militarization in the United States, producing real, material consequences for black mothers. Thus, for feminist and anti-racist scholars, analyzing the rhetoric of maternity remains an urgent, necessary project.

[19] Many have rightfully attacked the racist and misogynistic claims of E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939) and the United States Department of Labor's *The Case for National Action: The Negro Family* (Washington, 1965) also known as the Moynihan report. See for example, Tiffany King, "Black 'Feminisms' and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan's Negro Family," *Theory & Event*, vol 21, no 1 (2018): 68-87; Treva B. Lindsey and Jessica Marie Johnson, "Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, vol 12, no 2 (2014): 169-95, esp. 176-8.; Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-68; and Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Dial Press, 1979).

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