

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER IN ENGLISH
NEWS PAMPHLETS 1660-1700

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ABSTRACT

Sensational murders were a popular topic for news pamphlets in England from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth. Early pamphlets are characterized by religious and dramatic imagery, but beginning in the late seventeenth century these documents began to focus more on legalistic details of the crimes depicted, with less emphasis on religious morality. Moreover, the pamphlets also show significant changes in the portrayal of gender over time.

Using a qualitative rather than a quantitative research methodology, I analyze a sample of fifty-five English pamphlets printed between 1660 and 1700 describing murder cases. The thesis argues that they reveal a social anxiety toward unchecked patriarchy in conjunction with an enhanced depiction of female vulnerability. I place this evidence within the context of fears regarding increasing crime among some elements in society and the late seventeenth-century intellectual debate over the duties of a good father and a good ruler. A close reading of murder pamphlets demonstrates their authors constructed

the narratives to play upon the early modern audience's fear of public disorder, not just in the area of crime, but also with respect to the unraveling of traditional gender roles. By comparing the depictions of murders in which men and women were both perpetrators and victims, it was possible to conclude that a compelling issue for late seventeenth-century English society was disorder created, on the one hand, by men crossing the boundaries of conventional patriarchal roles and, on the other, by women whose activities were not monitored by an appropriate male figure. In particular, analysis of these murder narratives sheds light on the ensuing struggle and negotiation of gender boundaries that took place in the wake of profound changes in society following the Civil War and the Interregnum.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Perceptions of Gender in English News Pamphlets 1660-1700,” presented by Kimberly Ann Fogarty, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A 1684 pamphlet printed in London imparted the following advice to its readers:

Draw but the Curtain, view the Tragick Sceen,
Read, but so Read, to keep thy Conscience Clean.
See with Abhorrance, what the Vile have done,
Fly the fowl Act, that thou its Fate may Shun.¹

Since their introduction in the late sixteenth century, pamphlet literature had been a popular medium of print. While they covered an array of subjects, a large number of pamphlets described criminal activity occurring not only in London, but all of England. As with many pamphlets, they were often characterized by dramatic language, as the quote above alludes to, which helped to increase their popularity. The large-scale availability of these sources was possible due to the introduction of the printing press in the fifteenth century, which resulted in a more efficient means of copying material and relaying information to the public.

Large numbers of pamphlets were printed and many have survived. For the forty year period between 1660 and 1700 the Early English Books database has over six hundred pamphlets that deal in some way with the topic of murder. Using a keyword search in the site, I selected a random sample of fifty-five pamphlets dating from 1660 to 1700 that describe murders committed by both men and women. For the cases printed in the 1660s and 70s, the sample is very thorough, due to a lower number of available pamphlets. The last twenty years of the period, however, witnessed an increase in the

¹ Anonymous, *Murther Upon Murther* (London, 1684).

printing of murder cases, especially those referring to duels between members of the aristocracy, and therefore it was necessary to exclude some cases from the study. The lower number of cases involving female perpetrators, on the other hand, necessitated the use of a larger proportion of pamphlets on female crime. While this would skew any statistical results, it was necessary in order to have a large enough sample to compare to male perpetrated crimes. To avoid an elitist study of crime, cases that involved treason against the state (i.e. attempts to assassinate government figures etc.) were excluded from the sample, as were cases solely between members of the aristocracy. While a sample of dueling cases was included, the goal was to avoid a study focused on the upper classes, instead focusing on a variety of people, in an attempt to investigate the gendered nature of crime and the way crime was represented to the public. I argue that beyond offering the basic information of the crime to the public, albeit in a dramatic fashion, these sources represent social tension between gender relations. I have focused attention on the details of the crimes as printed in the pamphlets in order to determine how the crimes and the way they were presented to the public characterize contemporary ideas about gender.

The instability of the government, coupled with changes in political thought, led to changes in the way gender was portrayed in these sources.² While these pamphlets contained moralizing language, using the crimes as a means for lecturing the public on the dangers of disorder, as sources they offer more than just the gory details of crime. They are also a means to examine the early modern psyche: the focus of these pamphlets illustrates what contemporaries feared. The murders also offer valuable insight into the

² Most notably works by John Milton and John Locke, justifying rebellion against unjust kings. These same arguments were later used to fight against notions of patriarchal authority.

methods by which men and women committed crimes and how these crimes were seen as a threat to order. This can be observed through the language chosen to describe particular types of behavior, as well as the details the author chose to include pertaining to the crime itself.

Historical Context

Located primarily in London, printers could distribute their product throughout the city as well as to provincial booksellers through agents or fairs.³ Even with differences in English dialect across the country, books had a wide market. They might have been printed in London, but they could and were distributed throughout England. The pamphlet, a term used fairly loosely by contemporaries, was generally a short unbound book covering an array of material including: religious tracts, ballads, and current events.⁴ While the sheer number of pamphlets made some of them ephemeral, their influence should not be entirely discounted; the sensational style of writing alone ensured the genre an enduring legacy. The popularity of such material made them an influential medium. William Caxton, considered England's first printer, was an astute observer of public tastes and preferences and used this information in order to optimize the sale of his goods.⁵ This became the model for many printers, who, like most

³ H.S. Bennet, *English Books and Readers 1475-1557: Being a Study of the Book Trade from Caxton to the Incorporation of the Stationers' Company* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 23-24.

⁴ Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1991), 264.

⁵ H.S. Bennet, *English Books and Readers*, 17.

craftsmen, worked in order to make a profit. Pamphlets were a potentially profitable enterprise, often being sold at public executions, and therefore most printers included pamphlets among their products.⁶ Therefore it can be inferred that successful printers printed materials that they were reasonably sure would sell. Aside from works commissioned by patrons, it can be argued that the majority of what was printed had at least a measure of popular appeal.⁷

The pamphlets evolved significantly from the earliest examples, moving from graphic and often crude depictions of crime into documents that used legal and medical terminology. Possibly because of the growing popularity of sessions of goal delivery at the Old Bailey, these sources informed the public not only about murders that were committed, but also about the legal proceedings that followed.⁸ However, they served another purpose as well. In many cases, whether explicitly or implicitly, these works relayed to the public a moral agenda. As the quotation above alludes to, the process of the printing of murder cases served as a warning to the public. Their moralizing agenda made them a haven for social concerns, especially in the troubled times after the Civil War.

⁶ Peter Linebaugh, "The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons" in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, eds. Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 65-117.

⁷ For more information on popular consumption and literacy see: David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) in conjunction with Margaret Spufford, "First Steps in Literacy: The Reading in Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Autobiographers" *Social History* 4 (1979): 407-35.

⁸ J.M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750: Urban Crime and the Limits of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

The structure of the pamphlet helped to set a moralizing agenda. Most of the murder pamphlets began with biblical references. This was predominantly the case in the early part of the seventeenth century, which helped to solidify the metaphorical connection between religion and morality. When man acted against the moral order, he brought disorder and condemnation. “Murder in it self is a scarlet and most crying sin, a defacing of God’s Image, and offering violence to Nature.”⁹

In the early half of the seventeenth century justice was closely tied to God’s providence, as stated in the following excerpt:

Let no presuming Mortal comply with the Temptations and Delusions of Satan, to commite this Unnatural and Abhorred Sin of Murther, under the vain hopes of escaping undiscovered...the All-seeing God will not long permit such Guild to go Unpunished, but with his Threatned Vengeance will certainly overtake such workers of Iniquity.¹⁰

As the period progressed, however, the idea of loyalty to the state began to encroach on the underlying biblical morality of the pamphlets. Disorder was still the underlying principle, but the disorderly household was no longer depicted as a threat just to religious moral order but also to the justice and integrity of the state. This change was accompanied by a shift from binary opposites of good and bad behavior to a more complex understanding of criminal action. This can be seen most clearly in the depiction of women, as the evidence indicates that their criminal actions became increasingly excused in conjunction with male villainy.

⁹ Anonymous, *Bloody News for Clerkenwel* (London, 1670), 3.

¹⁰ Anonymous, *Murther Upon Murther* (London, 1684), 8.

Religion was not eliminated from the pamphlets altogether. In fact, the shift was quite gradual, but even as the pamphlets became less religiously minded, the role of the devil and temptation is still often apparent, as one pamphlet stated: “How great the sway and Dominion the Black Prince of the Air hath over the minds of too many men.”¹¹ This temptation does not seem to indicate a loss of human agency. The role of the divine was evident in the implication that through God’s will justice would be served, but the religious imagery does not go so far as to imply the complete loss of human agency.¹²

While religion was becoming formulaic by the final decades of the seventeenth century, the moralizing example of these works cannot be denied. As one of the later pamphlets explicitly stated: “*Draw but the Curtain, view the Tragick Sceen, Read, but so Read, to keep thy Conscious Clean. See with Abhorrence, what the Vile have done, Fly the fowl Act, that thou its Fate may Shun.*”¹³ While a number of the pamphlets express similar sentiments there are also indications that fear was a motivation behind some of these works. None stated it quite so explicitly as the following example but it was apparent nonetheless, “the publishing...is not so much designed to divert the Reader with the variety of surprising Circumstances, as to affright him, by the sad Example from the Commission of that horrid Sin of Murther...”¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹² Peter Lake, a religious scholar of England argues that religious imagery indicates a lack of human agency in criminal pamphlet literature. For more on this argument see his work: *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 39.

¹³ Anonymous, *Murther Upon Murther* (London, 1684).

¹⁴ Anonymous, *Bloody and Barbarous News From the Parish of St. Giles’s* (London, 1690), 2.

Murder was not a new phenomenon, but in periods of political and social upheaval the focus on issues of disorder became more acute. The year 1660, the beginning of the period under investigation, marked the restoration of the monarch in England. In the preceding two decades, the country had witnessed a Civil War, the temporary disestablishment of the Church of England, the execution of the monarch, and the temporary dissolution of the House of Lords. Even after King Charles II was restored to the throne, instability remained, especially in the 1660s. The early years of his reign were filled with unrest. Trading disagreements led to war with the Netherlands in 1665. In 1666 there was an outbreak of plague in London that took the lives of over 68,000 people. In September of the same year, the Great Fire of London left another 100,000 homeless.¹⁵ Along with these problems there was also disruption in the area of religion.

Despite Charles II's position of religious toleration, the British parliament passed legislation in order to diminish religious opposition in the wake of the revival of the Church of England. Religion would continue to be a point of contention during the reign of Charles II (his wife being Roman Catholic), but these problems would come to fruition during the reign of Charles' brother James II. James' open support of Roman Catholicism ran quite contrary to the dominant anti-Catholic culture of England. The years preceding his accession to the throne were tense as it became increasingly clear that Charles would not provide a legitimate heir.

During Charles' twenty-five year reign, his debauched behavior was viewed with disfavor by his more Puritanical subjects. He encountered little resistance however, most

¹⁵ Lacy Baldwin Smith, *This Realm of England 1399 to 1688* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 2001), 318.

likely the result of a desire for stability after years of upheaval. The reign of James II, conversely, was intolerable, and the British subjects were aware of the inevitability of instability. As John Evelyn stated a month after William of Orange landed in England, “it looks like a revolution.”¹⁶ James was overthrown in a revolution only three years after taking the throne. Often referred to as bloodless, current scholarship indicates that the revolution was far more damaging than previously believed.¹⁷ It is now argued that the Glorious Revolution was characterized by personal violence and large-scale property damage.¹⁸ It seems as if John Evelyn’s fears were well founded.

Throughout this period, pamphlets were used as a means to express concerns, loyalties, and opposition. Even when William of Orange marched into London, tracts and pamphlets were printed in droves, offering an array of opinions on the state of the government.¹⁹ The reign of William was also characterized by conflict. William’s accession to the throne ended England’s position of neutrality in foreign policy. In 1689 he brought England into the Grand Alliance with Sweden, Spain, Savoy, the Holy Roman Empire, Bavaria, Saxony, the Palatinate, and the Dutch Republic, thus placing England in

¹⁶ John Evelyn, *Diary*, II, 7 as quoted in Steven Pincus, “John Evelyn: Revolutionary” in *John Evelyn and his Milieu*, ed. Frances Harris and Michael Hunter (London: The British Library, 2003), 185-219.

¹⁷ For a current work on the subject see Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ William B. Willcox and Walter L. Arnstein, eds. *The Age of Aristocracy 1688-1830*, 8th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 7.

opposition to France. This led to the Second Hundred Years' War the first part of which, also known as King William's War, was fought from 1689 to 1697.²⁰

The tumultuous monarchy and volatile religious situation were only part of the problems society faced in this period. The Civil War had brought about numerous issues of disorder.²¹ The years following the war did not bring peace at home or with other European countries. In the push for stability, social disorder became a focal point. For example, courts were increasingly used to prosecute what were seen as the "disorderly poor."²² The tensions were not new, however: they represented a heightened social anxiety.

While the period was characterized by political instability, some historians argue that the early modern period was also often characterized by periods of gender crisis, especially in regards to issues of power and patriarchy. As protestant reformers attempted to restructure the medieval family, the patriarchal nuclear family became dominant. In this structure, the wife was subjected to the rule of the husband and the children to their parents.²³ Family order, therefore, depended on the rule of the husband, however in most instances advice literature spoke against male tyrannical behavior.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., 14.

²¹ For more information see: David Cressy, *England on Edge: Crisis and Revolution 1640-1642* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1972).

²² Jenny Wormald, *The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175.

²³ Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 2.

The influx of advice manuals on family behavior has led some historians to argue that this indicates a reaction to an instability between gender relations, i.e. that men and women were not adhering to social conventions regarding proper behavior based on their sex. Two prominent historians in this debate are D. E. Underdown and Martin Ingram. In 1985, Underdown argued that Jacobean anti-feminist literature and forms of chivari, coupled with an influx of scolding, cases suggest that contemporaries were aware that patriarchy could not be taken for granted and therefore needed to be reinforced. Consequently, Elizabethan and Jacobean writers were increasingly preoccupied by topic of independent female behavior.²⁵ This was accomplished by punishing unruly female behavior. He concluded that these court cases offered evidence of a gender crisis or at least “strained gender relations,” which were the result of a crisis of order.

Martin Ingram, however, refuted these claims arguing that regional variation and an increase in all types of criminal punishments negate the evidence of an actual crisis of gender relations. The dispute between these two historians is central to representations of gender in the pamphlet literature.

Although Ingram’s work provides a valid argument, it does not, however, completely resolve the issue. The problem is not with the sources but with what constitutes a gender crisis. By designating fluctuations in social relationships as crisis, much like the use of “revolution,” historians run the risk of overusing the term, thus

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

²⁵ D. E. Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 117.

robbing it of any valid meaning. The evidence from the pamphlet literature in question does not justify the designation of a “gender crisis,” but it does indicate at the very least an element of gender tension, and thus fits within discussions of crime and threats of disorder.

Historiography: Crime and Disorder

Even though gender was not initially included in discussions of criminal history, as studies of gender became a focus of historians that quickly began to change. In 1974 Barbara Hanawalt published “The Female Felon;” her work began a more focused study on crime and gender than seen in previous periods.²⁶ Addressing a deficiency in the field, as prominent criminal historians had largely ignored female-focused criminal studies, it was only when social historians began to turn their attention to criminal history that a more thorough analysis (at least where gender is concerned) could be undertaken. As legal histories, such as those by F. W. Maitland and G. R. Elton, left women on the periphery, the work of social historians on female crime has resulted in their inclusion in current legal surveys.

Using the same method as more generalized studies by legal historians, early works on the subject relied heavily on quantitative analysis in order to determine how women fit into the historical picture. As the field has progressed, however, the methodology, both in terms of criminal research and gender, has changed dramatically. Following this trend of opening up the source focus, gender historians have shifted their

²⁶ Barbara Hanawalt, “The Female Felon” *Viator* 5 (1974): 253-268. For another early female focused crime study see: J. M. Beattie, “The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England” *Journal of Social History* 8, no. 4 (1975): 80-116.

focus away from the incorporation of women into history to a much more analytical approach to ideas about femininity and masculinity.

The importance of the incorporation of gender theory into criminal history cannot be overlooked. As the method changed, issues on the periphery that had previously been viewed as negligible, since they represented only a small sample of overall criminal activity became included in the discussion. Historians began to focus on crimes attributed largely to females such as verbal crimes. Not only studies centered on actual criminal action, but also studies that examined women's deviant behavior permeated the field.

The field of gender and crime has come a long way since its beginning in the 1970s. Although the earlier works were focused on complex studies, the source list was very limited. These early historians concentrated more on compiling quantitative data from court cases in an effort to reveal the way women actually fit within the historical narrative. As some of the earlier historians attest, the incorporation of non-official sources was not encouraged.²⁷

Beginning in the 1980s works regarding the connection between disorder in the domestic setting and its subsequent bearing on the state began to filter into criminal studies. This subgenre of legal history has not only influenced the way historians deal with criminal history, it has also become an inseparable component.

One of the leading historians in this area is Susan Dwyer Amussen. While her work is centered mostly on issues of order and disorder within specific gender and class models, some of her earlier work utilized legal history. In her article, "Gender, Family

²⁷ For an example of this see Carol Z. Wiener, "Sex Roles and Crime in Late Elizabethan Hertfordshire," *Journal of Social History* 8, no. 4 (Summer, 1975): 38-60.

and the Social Order 1560-1725,” Amussen argues that the early modern congruence of social theory and social practice made family order essential to the proper order of the state.²⁸ The analogy commonly used during the period compared the father, or head of household, to the king. The family unit represented a little kingdom; if the family was in disorder, so too was the state.

Using political theory, household manuals, and legal cases, Amussen utilized a comparative approach in order to determine the connection between the order of the family and the order of the state. She concludes that the breakdown of family order directly threatened the order of the state.²⁹ Prosecutions for disorderly behavior therefore represent an attempt to address the breakdown of order.³⁰ The period for which there was an influx such of cases brought forward—1560-1640—was a tumultuous period for English history.

The connection between public disorder and the domestic sphere would continue to be prominent in gender studies of crime; this is especially prevalent in the pamphlet literature. Frances Dolan looks at this connection as it is represented in literature. Looking at conceptual issues imbedded in the sources, she attempts to illustrate the reasoning behind female criminal action. Examining domestic murder in both fact and

²⁸ Susan Dwyer Amussen, “Gender, Family and Social Order 1560-1725,” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 196-217.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

fiction, Dolan analyzes the relationship between gender and order.³¹ Using trial transcripts, confessions, and gallows speeches, she compares the historical experience to “literary” depictions of crime found in pamphlets, ballads, and popular plays. Utilizing literary narratives in conjunction with legal evidence, the author attempts to delineate evidence of the process of cultural transformation and change. While she uses many of the same sources as her predecessors, she is able to examine the changes in culture by relying on literary sources as well as quantitative data.

Referring to her own method as cultural/feminist materialist within the tradition of new historicism, Dolan uses gender as a central category of analysis, especially in its intersection with class, race, and sexuality. Focusing on collectives in a cross-genre approach, she examines domestic crime representations from the inside out, concluding that legal and literary narratives attempted to restore the instability of class and gender relations; domestic crime representations were manifestations of a threat to order. I rely on many of her methods within my own research, but I argue that, while literature did aim to restore stability, it did not necessarily aim at a return to the status quo. Pamphlet literature was a venue for negotiating social tension and therefore revealed flaws within the system. Gender roles were constructed based on culturally defined ideals. They come into question when the performative aspects of those gender roles represented elements of disorder.³² When the domestic relationship degenerated into lethal violence, not only

³¹ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

³² For more information on the performative nature of gender see: Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” *Theatre Journal* 40. 4 (Dec 1988): 519-531.

were the performative roles called into question, but the family itself was undermined. Some historians, however, argue that elements of disorder enabled women a degree of agency.

Following Dolan's work on crime within the domestic setting, Laura Gowing, in her work *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex*, examines defamation cases in London. Specifically looking at the difference in meaning attached to sexual misconduct, she attempts to determine in what way these cases differed according to gender.³³ Gowing uses ecclesiastical court records, primarily the Consistory Court Records for the years 1572 to 1670, in order to examine cases of slander, marriage contracts, and marriage separation. Using social history in combination with linguistic analysis, she argues that moral discipline, through language and litigation, made people's sexual lives a public concern. The court was employed by men and women as a chance to resolve personal conflicts and gave them agency over official records: essentially they could tell their side of the story.

Through the years in question, Gowing argues, church courts in London increasingly became a place for women's disputes in accusations of slander. In a cultural environment that viewed women's sexual sins as a domestic danger, these cases highlight the sexual double standard apparent in early modern gender relations. Even though there were different moral standards depending on gender, women were able to exercise agency by bringing defamation suits and therefore had the opportunity to negotiate status, power, dependence, and identity.

³³ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996).

While some historians looked at the reasoning behind crime, others used criminal history as a means of studying culture. Malcolm Gaskill examines the cultural context of law breaking and criminal prosecution by looking at the way religious reform, state formation, secularization, and social and cultural change altered the outlook of the people, in his work *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*.³⁴ Influenced by the Annales school, social anthropology, and cultural history, Gaskill utilizes crime as a microhistory in order to investigate social context and mentalities.

Building on Dolan's examination of continuity and change within crime, Gaskill uses the sources as a means of finding the cultural meaning of crime itself. He moved away from quantitative to a multi-source qualitative analysis, using pre-trial procedure records in order to investigate mentalities. These sources include normative sources (statutes, proclamations, orders, and sermons), impressionistic sources (literary accounts, broadsides, ballads, newsheets, diaries, and letters), and administrative sources. He attempts to demonstrate continuity and change in crime while also using social contexts of communication to determine what crime meant to the early modern audience. He looks at questions regarding the use of religious ideology, legal judgments, and protection through fear in order to establish the social context. Offering a more in depth reading of the sources, Gaskill's use of normative and impressionistic sources in combination with more traditional criminal sources allows historians to understand the cultural atmosphere surrounding criminal history. It is in this area that the pamphlet literature on crime can offer the most valuable information. These cases reveal details of crime, but also offer a

³⁴ Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

means of understanding early modern mentality, by representing prominent fears of disorder.

The most recent shift in the history of gender and crime has flipped the argument from the way we can understand culture through the study of crime, to a means of understanding the ways in which culture affected criminal proceedings. Finding historians' work in the field to be problematic on both conceptual and methodological bases, Garthine Walker attempts to synthesize gender and crime history in order to modify current trends in scholarship.³⁵ With particular attention to the tendency of historians to project modern gender stereotypes onto the early modern world and to overuse quantification in the absence of historical context, Walker attempts to remedy the issue by broadening the criminal context. Thus, quantitative data is contextualized by narrative sources within their own context, i.e. without projecting modern gender perceptions into a historical period.

While Walker acknowledges the problematic nature of social history in the wake of postmodernism and post-structuralism, she does not, however agree that the theory of post-structuralism is useful when dealing with narrative sources. Instead, Walker utilizes the linguistic theory of M. M. Bakhtin, regarding the multivocality of discourse, to analyze quantitative and narrative evidence. Using these methods to analyze sources, Walker is able to conclude that, when placed within context, the gender discrepancy in sentencing, for example, is less pronounced; analyzing crime based on gender stereotypes does not provide a culturally accurate depiction of criminal activity and punishment.

³⁵ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

As Walker's work made great inroads in the field, her treatment of gender was not as innovative. In the area of gender studies, historians have begun to realize the benefits of studying masculinity as well as femininity in order to have a more complete picture of the society. Karen Jones employs new methods in gender studies and combines them with traditional criminal research. Cultural context continues to be an important component of analysis as Jones uses the historical and social context of Kent in order to analyze contemporary attitudes to the misconduct of men and women in her work, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England*.³⁶ Drawing on qualified quantification to examine the types of offences committed, she looks at local court records in conjunction with archdeaconry office books and frankpledge records.

Using gender analysis, Jones argues that any discussion of gender must include a discussion of femininity and masculinity as well as class, age, and marital status. As a result, she reveals that both class and gender were significant factors in punishments and reflected contemporary attitudes. Utilizing these methods, she reveals the gendered construction of misconduct seen through the connection of women with sexual and verbal offenses and men with physical violence, thus reflecting contemporary conceptions of femininity and masculinity. While the pamphlet literature under investigation does not focus on female verbal offences, there is ample evidence of a preoccupation with male violence.

As the field of gender and crime progressed, the variety of sources expanded beyond traditional quantitative data to include literary sources. The research parameters

³⁶ Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: The Local Courts in Kent, 1460-1560* (New York: Boydell Press, 2006).

widened as well: no longer content to gain a numerical relationship between the population and crime, recent scholarship has focused on the way in which masculinity, femininity, class, age, and marital status has affected or was affected by crime and punishment. Scholars pushed to receive a more in-depth cultural reading of the sources. The research in this study fits with this notion of culture, representation, and crime. The pamphlet literature, beyond offering details on criminal activity represented contemporary feelings on issues of gender, revealing a deep-seated tension in their social rhetoric.

Organization

The following analysis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses gendered elements inherent in the pamphlet literature focusing on the types of weapons used, the physical space of the crime, and the threat of premeditation. This chapter argues that characteristics of the crimes themselves represented social fears about gender disorder thus validating early modern stereotypes.

The next two chapters discuss the ways in which the pamphlets adopted specific imagery to discuss fears of patriarchy and disorder. While crime was an ever-present topic, the pamphlet literature was instrumental in highlighting fear. It was often accompanied by denunciations of wandering soldiers, prostitutes, independent females, and unruly nobles. Along with the perceived social evils prominent in society, changes in political thought also threatened the hope of social stability and became an underlying factor representing a common social rhetoric.

The historical period in which these were printed had special significance within these debates. The lack of distinction between the private life of the family and the more public social sphere caused disorderly behavior to be brought before the courts, leaving government officials to dictate order upon society.³⁷ The ideal patriarchal family had often been used symbolically to represent the power of the state. Inversely, when the structure of the state was in disorder, the ideal patriarchal family was also threatened. While banned by the Licensing Act enacted in 1662, the philosophical works of John Milton, which justified revolt against the government, and later John Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, represented changing attitudes pertaining to the nature of monarchy. These challenges caused more than the structure of government to be questioned.

The patriarchal family structure was equaled with the relationship between the ruler and the state. As political theorists questioned the validity of absolute governmental authority, the analogous structure of the family came to be questioned as well. John Locke's direct challenges to patriarchy caused later writers to question the idea of absolute male dominance. As Mary Astell stated in 1706, "If absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? Or if in a family why not in a state...? If the authority of the husband so far as it extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the prince?"³⁸ These arguments represent a change in attitude from an unquestioning acceptance of a patriarchal structure that had been used to justify the state,

³⁷ Susan Dwyer Amussen, "Gender Family and Social Order," 216.

³⁸ Mary Astell, *Reflections on Marriage*, 3rd ed. (London, 1706) as quoted in Newton Key and Robert Bucholz eds. *Sources and Debates in English History 1485-1714* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 277.

to a need for evidential proofs to the validity of such a system. With changes in attitudes toward government, the structure of the family also came under question and therefore needed re-justification.

Chapter two outlines the evidence in the pamphlet literature of a questioning of unrestrained patriarchy and the dangers of unruly men. These cases highlight the dangers of men who abused their authority or who lived outside of their proscribed gender roles, thus voicing some apprehension over the existing patriarchal structure.

Chapter three describes the dominant characterization of the female as the victim. Contrary to earlier pamphlets, which relied on a clear good versus evil dichotomy, the pamphlets in the latter half of the seventeenth century increasingly depict women as victims, often even when they were perpetrating the crimes. This served as a means of voicing fears of unlicensed patriarchy while also re-establishing the necessity of male dominance.

The conclusion will pull together these arguments in an effort to determine the ways in which these sources reflected social tension and gender conflict. As the seventeenth century drew to a close patriarchy still had a firm hold on the social structure, but it would continue to be questioned. As outspoken female writers such as Mary Astell pointed out, the unjust rule of a king could be questioned. Why not the rule of the husband?

CHAPTER 2

MURDER PAMPHLETS: REINFORCING GENDER STEREOTYPES?

Early modern news pamphlets offered readers and listeners the chance to be informed of the latest events occurring in Britain. While the pamphlets often included topics on military activity and religious material, they also focused attention on crime. Using a sample of fifty-five pamphlets dating from 1660 to 1700, I have centered on the specific details of the crimes in order to determine how both the crimes and the way they were relayed to the public represented contemporary ideas about gender. While the pamphlets were describing actual crimes, the construction of the narrative reveals a gendered perception, especially in regards to premeditated crime. What is important is the way early modern audiences would have perceived the roles men and women played within these crimes. I investigate how well these cases conformed or challenged traditional gender roles. There are clear differences between the depiction of murders committed by men and those committed by women. Even the sex of the victim indicates changes in the way the crime was carried out. By deconstructing these crimes, I argue that structural elements of these crimes served to reinforce stereotypical views of gender roles and deviant behavior. The specific gender variations within the pamphlets will be discussed more fully in the proceeding chapters.

Historians have argued that female criminals were recognized differently by the justice system. Often this took the form of underreporting, especially in less serious

crimes.¹ In other instances women were seen to have committed crimes that were specific to their gender, such as scolding or even infanticide. More modern historians of crime have moved away from this notion, citing evidence that women committed more “male” crimes than “female” ones.² I argue that even though women committed many of the same types of crimes, the pamphlet literature of the early modern period shows very real differences in the details of the criminal act, revealing and in some cases exacerbating popular fears. While I agree with Garthine Walker’s conclusion that analyzing crime based on gender stereotypes does not provide a culturally accurate depiction of criminal activity and punishment, evidence of stereotypical gender behavior found in literary depictions of crime offers a window into the early modern psyche.³ The extent to which these depictions were grounded in fact helps to explain some of the sources of these fears.

There was a contemporary fear of the female criminal, not because she was responsible for murdering large numbers of people, but because, unlike her male counterpart, the murders she committed were often private, committed within her own home and many times her crime escaped immediate detection. Domestic violence, especially when that violence led to death, undermined the notion of an orderly family.⁴

¹ Shani D’Cruz and Louise A Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice in England Since 1660* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 17.

² Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ Susan Dwyer Amussen, “Gender, Family and the Social Order 1560-1725” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 209.

When women committed these crimes, they not only undermined family order, but proper gender order as well. Men were seen as more openly assertive and aggressive--most of the crimes in this sample follow this pattern--whereas female crimes often required premeditation. This fact alone condemned them to their contemporaries. "But of all Murders, none so plainly discovers the inherent Cruelty and Enmity which Sin has lodged in Humane Nature, as those committed by private Persons, upon Premeditation..."⁵

I do not argue that the authors of these pamphlets altered the facts of the crime in order to fit men and women into separate categories of gender (although some exaggeration and theatricality is to be expected). These sources represent real crimes, evidence of criminal actions that do show differences according to sex. The specific gendered elements that were constructed by the pamphlet authors is the focus of the next two chapters, but it should be noted that the possibility exists that specific cases were printed in order to further highlight certain types of deviant behavior.

The female criminal has been a popular subject for historians of crime since Barbara Hanawalt popularized the field in her work "The Female Felon" published in 1974.⁶ While many works by historians on female crime focus on less serious crimes than murder, these highlight the primary areas in which women were prosecuted. For example, in terms of overall crimes committed in England by both sexes, theft by far outnumbers

⁵ Anonymous, *A True Relation of Four Most Barbarous and Cruel Murders* (London, 1684), 2.

⁶ Barbara Hanawalt, "The Female Felon in Fourteenth-Century England," *Viator* 5 (1974): 253-268.

all other types of criminal activity in the early modern period.⁷ Although pamphlet literature can be found on theft, by far the largest category of crime topics for pamphlets is murder.

Cases of female perpetrated murder are firmly connected to the domestic household. Garthine Walker makes the argument that the early modern household was often the contextualizing feature of female crime.⁸ The evidence from the pamphlet literature confirms the association of females and the home, and this is true when they are committing crimes as well as when they are victims.

The chapter has been divided topically focusing on both male and female perpetrated crime. The first section discusses the type of weapons used in these crimes. The second section looks at the physical location of the murders and the way pamphlets offered representations of gendered space. The final section examines the disposal of the body after the murder was committed. In the early modern period such action indicated to the reader that the crime could not be categorized as an accident and therefore there was a possibility that it was premeditated. Within each section, a comparison will be made between male and female perpetrated crimes in addition to a discussion on the differences that appear between the sex of the victims as well.

It should be noted that the sample contains more crimes committed by men. It appears that, unless fewer pamphlets describing women as the perpetrators survived, more pamphlets focused on crimes enacted by men. Statistically, women committed far

⁷ J. M. Beattie, "The Pattern of Crime in England" *Past & Present* 62 (February 1974): 73-78.

⁸ Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

fewer crimes as men. Some of this statistical disparity could also be the result of a higher proportion of dismissed cases among female perpetrators, although that could not account for the entire disparity.⁹ While women were predominantly the victims, they also committed a number of crimes as well, and not just by means of poison.

Weapons

Murder itself is a deviation from an orderly existence, but even within this disorder there are certain gendered perceptions. Contemporary belief stereotyped certain types of crimes by gender, but as with any other social paradigm the mold does not always conform to reality. While there is a perception that women used poison as a murder weapon, the evidence found in these cases does not support its exclusivity. In the cases described in the pamphlets, the most commonly used weapons among both men and women include swords, knives, and poison. There are some differences between the types of weapons used, but in many cases they are quite similar. The weapons men used to commit murder were numerous. Table 2.1 illustrates the type of weapon used by men on both male and female victims.

⁹ Shani D’Cruz and Louise A. Jackson, *Women, Crime and Justice in England Since 1660*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 56.

Table 2.1: Weapons Used by Men		
Weapon Used	Against Women	Against Men
Adze	1	
Bayonet	1	
Gun		3
Hands	2	
Hammer	1	
Hatchet	1	
Hedging Bill	2	1
Iron Bar	1	
Knife	5	3
Pattins	1	
Poison	2	
Scimitar	1	
Sword		8

When categorizing the types of weapons used by men to murder their victims, patterns do emerge. When murder was the result of issues of honor, retaliation due to personal insult, the weapon was almost always a sword.¹⁰ Many men, especially among the upper classes, wore swords, making them a readily available weapon of choice. Only two cases were the result of a shooting; these two technically fall into the category of

¹⁰ For more information on issues of honor see: Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

assassinations.¹¹ The cases in question both describe men who were insulted but, instead of immediately remedying the insult, they later assassinated their victims. The cases with honor-driven motives fall within the later half of the period under investigation, when the duel was becoming a popular means of conflict resolution for the upper classes, as well as a means of displaying masculinity.¹² The weapons were uniform and the motive, while varying in specific detail, was always due to some affront to the person's, or in some cases a woman's, honor. This uniformity is not the case in other male murders, although some of the same patterns do emerge.

In cases where crimes were financially motivated and the victim was a man, a knife was the most common weapon. In one instance a hedge bill was used, although the manner in which the wounds were inflicted was not described. There are a few pamphlets that do not outline the specific way the murder was carried out. In the cases *A True Relation* and *The Bloody Innkeeper* for instance, we know that the murders took place, but there is little specific detail about the means used.¹³ In the former, the son murdered his father, but oddly the murder itself was not described, only his disposal of the body. It should be noted that since these pamphlets were not legal sources they did not have a set format. The lack of information could have been the result of negligence or ignorance on

¹¹ Anonymous, *An Account of the Proceedings at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bayly on February the 28th 1682* (London, 1682) and Anonymous, *True Valour Cowardly Slain* (London, 1698).

¹² J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (New York: Longman, 1999), 138.

¹³ Anonymous, *The Bloody Innkeeper or Sad and Barbarous News from Goucester-Shire* (London, 1675) and Anonymous, *A True Relation of a Barbarous and Bloody Murther Committed by Philip Standsfield Upon the Person of Sir James Standsfield his Father* (London, 1688).

the part of the author. There is the chance, however, that details were omitted purposely either due to their lack of tantalizing appeal or in order to deliberately construct an image.

Another pamphlet that does not describe the murders describes the discovery of corpses in the yard of an inn. The murders described in *The Bloody Innkeeper* were discovered well after the violence took place, when the new tenant working in the garden found human remains. A knife happened to still be lodged in one of the corpses, conveniently with the innkeeper's initials engraved in the handle, which is the only indication as to the way the victim was killed.

The innkeeper seemingly chose victims at random, but only one other pamphlet related information about murder enacted upon strangers. The rest of the pamphlets motivated by monetary gain describe murders enacted by acquaintances of the victim. Francis Dolan has outlined how this was the case especially in crimes enacted by women, but it seems that even with male perpetrators, the majority of murders took place within familiar social networks.¹⁴ The victims were not always family members (although they did make up a large number) but they were in most cases known by their attackers. This was also the case with the honor driven murders. At least half of these involved men who were already acquainted with one another. According to these sources, it seems that violence was anything but random. This may be the case when the victims are male, but can the same be said for victims who were female?

Beginning with the weapons that were used to enact violence, they are much more varied than those used on male victims. When the victims of male perpetrated crimes

¹⁴ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

were female, the weapons included tools, knives, and in one instance bare hands. Death was inflicted either by beating, splitting the skull, or slitting the throat. The violence in these cases is often characterized by brute force, highlighting the men's physical power over their female victims.

While slitting the throat seems to be a common mode of murder for both male and female victims, only when women were the victims do you find split skulls and beatings also common. When women were the victims, regardless of motive, the weapons became more varied, often including workman's tools. This could indicate a degree of expedience, but could it also infer a lack of premeditation? Not necessarily, although when the victim was the wife or love interest of her attacker there are some indications of rash action. In the case of Jacob Turner, his action had all of the appearance of a lack of premeditation.¹⁵ He came home from drinking and in the midst of beating his wife, he stabbed her in the ribs with a kitchen knife. Even the legal record stated that he killed his wife in a sudden, violent passion, but there is not enough evidence to make this claim for the rest of the sample.¹⁶ By its description of his time in the tavern, it would appear that Turner was still intoxicated when he arrived home. Drink often excused the crime for contemporaries, as it was believed it would bring out the violence inherent in men.¹⁷ As quoted in *A True Relation*, drink created madness, therefore the crime was not necessarily committed out of bad character.

¹⁵ Anonymous, *News from Bishops-Gate Street* (London, 1689).

¹⁶ Old Bailey Record, OA16890531.

¹⁷ A. Lynn Martin, *Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 112.

...the Desperadoes...whose often Excesses in Drinking, Debaucheries amongst Women, and Heats of Blood produced therefrom, a little palliates for their Crimes, as more the Effect of Rashness and Madness, than the Bloodiness of their Natures.¹⁸

Another interesting anomaly is the use of poison. This occurs in two cases in which men were the perpetrators of the crime. In both instances, the husband was attempting to rid himself of his wife using the stereotypically feminine mode of murder. These cases were domestically centered. Even though men did use poison, the social perception behind the crime was acutely feminine. This issue was dealt with by the pamphlet writers in a way that attempted to explain the cause behind this perceived anomaly: they were influenced by female prostitutes.¹⁹

In female perpetrated crimes, the pamphlets rarely discussed the motive behind the crime. The way the victim was killed, however, was often described in great detail. Table 2.2 describes the method women used to murder their victims. The most commonly used weapon, conforming to the stereotype, was poison, but unlike poisonings committed by men, these all involved multiple victims.

¹⁸ Anonymous, *A True Relation of Four Most Barbarous and Cruel Murder Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway* (London, 1684), 2.

¹⁹ The specific gender implications behind the involvement of prostitutes will be discussed in chapter 2.

Table 2.2: Weapons Used by Women	
Weapon Used	Victims
Hatchet	1
Knife	2
Pack Thread	1
Poison	4
Razor	1
Scissors	1
Sharp Object	2
Water	1

One such case is described in *The Cruel French Lady*.²⁰ As mentioned earlier, in comparison to murders committed by men, the sample includes only a fraction of crimes committed by women. Interestingly this case is one of the most dramatic poisoning cases in the sample, and it did not occur in England. This pamphlet describes the method a wealthy French woman adopted in order to inherit her father's fortune. The importation of fantastic stories of female villainy indicates not only selectivity but also a degree of gender construction.

Although *The Cruel French Lady* does not enumerate the exact number of people who received poison-covered presents from the accused, there were definitely multiple victims. For the other poison cases that do specify the exact number of victims, no fewer

²⁰ Anonymous, *The Cruel French Lady* (London, 1673).

than two victims died, although in most cases more than two were administered the poison. The largest number of victims, four, were killed by Elizabeth Ridgeway.²¹

Over a period of time, Elizabeth was responsible for killing her mother, a fellow servant, one of her sweethearts, and finally her own husband. The motive for most of these crimes was that she had a falling-out with the victim and decided to poison him or her. In one instance, however, that was not the case. John King was courting Elizabeth at the same time as her future husband William Ridgway. She ultimately decided that she would marry Ridgway, but according to the pamphlet, she had been “too free” with King and was afraid that he might cause trouble. So, she gave “him some Draught which sent him into the other world.”²²

This case is another illustrative example of a dramatic poisoning case perpetrated by a woman. Unlike *The Cruel French Lady*, the case of Elizabeth Ridgeway occurred in England, but it is similar in the number of deaths. The extended period of time in which these women continued to kill would have further added to the wickedness of their crime. While the horrors described in these cases would have been memorable, poison was not the only murder weapon used by women.

Another type of weapon that multiple women utilized were knives and other unspecified sharp objects; this does not greatly vary from the types of weapons used by men. Aside from these, the rest of the weapons within these women’s arsenals are a

²¹ Anonymous, *A True Relation of Four Most Barbarous and Cruel Murders Committed in Leicester-Shire by Elizabeth Ridgway* (London, 1684).

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

hodge-podge of objects that would have been available to them. A specific look at the way these women used these objects will greater illustrate the point.

As Table 2.2 shows, these sources indicate that women used poisoning and stabbing equally as a means of murder. The graph is not divided according to the sex of the victim because the evidence does not indicate, as was the case in the previous section, that the method of murder changed depending on the sex of the victim. The only category that shows any signs of consistency is that of child victims. Two out of the three cases involving child murder were the result of slit throats. The third case was a drowning performed by the child's wet-nurse. In the former two cases, the murder was carried out by the victim's own mother.

The stabbing cases include three women who murdered their husbands and one female thief who stabbed her victim. Only three women used throat-slitting as a method of murder. As discussed, two of the women who used this method were murdering their own children, and in one case her husband too. The third case describes a woman who murdered an old acquaintance in order to rob her house.²³ The cases of strangling, however, all included husbands among the victims. This would have been particularly discomfiting to an early modern audience. Women who murdered their husbands inverted the power structure within the domestic relationship. Furthermore, for a woman to strangle her husband involved a degree of stealth and premeditation. In one such case, a wife was assisted in the crime by her lover.

²³ Anonymous, *A True Relation of the Life and Conversation of Margaret Martel* (London, 1697).

William Ives kept a victualling house with his wife Esther.²⁴ According to the pamphlet, *A Full and True Account*, she had become familiar with a cooper named John Noyse. One fateful evening when John was visiting the establishment, he and Esther strangled her husband. Unfortunately for the murderers, Esther's children were so distressed to find their father dead, that their cries drew the attention of the town bellman.

From a comparison of murder weapons it can be seen that similar weapons were used by both male and female murderers, but as has been discussed, the perception of gendered crime revealed a different story. The evidence from these pamphlets did in some way support common perceptions: women were involved in cases of poisoning, men committed crime under the influence of drink, and masculine pride led to duels. While many cases conformed to traditional gender roles, the similarities of murder weapons between the sexes challenge established norms. Had the sample been as large for female crimes as the one for male crimes, I have no doubt that the variety of weapons would continue to expand. Women might have used poison predominantly as a murder weapon but it was not the only weapon women chose.

Location of the Murder

The female sphere was perceived as largely inside the home. The man was the head of the household, but that role often entailed work in a more public setting. The

²⁴ Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of a Most Barbarous and Bloody Murther* (London, 1686).

gendered nature of space is made further evident when looking at murder. The location of the crime reveals a sense of conformity to these prescribed gender norms.

Table 2.3 illustrates the location of murders based on the sex of the victim. In murders of honor, the location was always out of doors and most of these crimes were enacted dramatically in a public setting. Many occurred in crowded parts of London known for their entertainments, including Covent-Garden, White Friars and Fleet Street. The male victims killed for monetary gain follow a similar pattern, although two of these were enacted in an indoor or private location. This pattern shifts dramatically, however, when the victims were female.

Location of Crime	Men Murdering Women	Men Murdering Men	Women Murdering Women	Women Murdering Men
Private: General House	11		5	9
Private: Bedchamber	1	1		1
Public: Pub/Tavern	1			1
Public: General Outdoors	3	10		
Unknown/Unspecified	1	2		

The female victims were killed predominantly in homes. However, that does not mean that they were private murders. When women were killed as part of financially motivated crimes, the crimes were rarely witnessed, but when the victim was the perpetrator's wife that was not the case. Evidence from the pamphlets indicate that the murder of wives was enacted in view of witnesses, often neighbors and servants, almost

fifty percent of the time. This contrasts to the financially motivated crimes, where no witnesses were listed for male victims and only one for the female victims. It should be noted that the one female exception became a victim herself to prevent her from revealing the culprits.²⁵

When women were committing the crimes, the murder locations were predominantly in private, indoor locations. Since a large number of the victims of female murderesses were members of their own families, it comes as no surprise that the most common murder site was the home. In two cases the location was a house that was not the residence of the murderer. The case of Elizabeth Lillyman was the only one that took place in a public setting.²⁶ In a rage of jealousy while eating in a pub, Elizabeth stabbed her husband in the heart. As Shakespeare wrote seventy-six years earlier,

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.²⁷

This is also one of the few cases in which a female murderer committed her crime amidst witnesses. Unlike the murders committed by men, those committed by women were not often witnessed. According to the pamphlets, women were discovered for their crimes because of confessions made by these women to friends or neighbors.

²⁵ Anonymous, *The Bloody Quaker* (London, 1668).

²⁶ Anonymous, *A Compleat Narrative of the Tryal of Elizabeth Lillyman* (London, 1675).

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.195-197.

The largely private character of these murders does indicate, or in some cases reinforces, the perceived domestic nature of female murder. Cases of this nature also would have served to intensify the fear of female instigated disorder. Women murdering in their homes, especially when these crimes were directed against their husbands, further demonstrated the dangers of domestic disorder.²⁸

Male perpetrated crimes, however, were predominantly more public and more often witnessed. The lack of concealment would have made these crimes less heinous. While murder was not justified, when it was perceived to be premeditated it took on a more serious character in the public psyche. As one pamphlet clearly states: “But of all Murders, none so plainly discovers the inherent Cruelty and Enmity which Sin has lodged in Human Nature, as those committed by private Persons, upon Premeditation.”²⁹ Women were perceived as more likely to commit premeditated crimes, this coincides with the belief that women predominantly used poison as a murder weapon. Poison was seen as malicious and deliberate; as one historian so aptly put it, murder by poison was “perceived as striking not in hot anger but in a cold and malicious act of deliberation.”³⁰ It was believed that women were more apt to commit devious and planned crimes rather than acting out in anger.

²⁸ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 58.

²⁹ Anonymous, *A True Relation of Four Most Barbarous and Cruel Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway* (London, 1684), 2.

³⁰ Vanessa McMahon, *Murder in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 108.

Disposal of the Body

The disposal of the corpse after the murder had taken place further reveals the possible intent behind the murder. The pamphlets often describe where the criminal left his or her victim. By relating this basic detail about the crime, we gain access into the mentality of the murderer. This can also offer some indication as to whether the murder was planned. Table 2.4 charts the action taken by men after the murder had been committed, specifically examining whether or not the body of the corpse was moved from the location where the murder was committed.

Table 2.4: Location of Corpse in Murders/Homicides Committed by Men

Corpse	Female Victim	Male Victim
Burned	1	
Buried		2
Hidden		1
Left at Site	12	11
Thrown in Water		1
Unknown	4	

When murder resulted from issues of honor, primarily the result of a two-sided fight enacted in public, attempts to hide the body were therefore senseless. These murders took place in the company of witnesses; and as a result, the identity of the culprit was not in question. The same cannot be said when the victims were killed over money.

In all of the financial cases when men were the victims, there is no indication that the crime was witnessed. There are only two cases in which the murderer fled, leaving the body at the site of the murder. In all other cases, the murderer attempted to dispose of the body, presumably in order to weaken his chances of being caught. This indicates at least some degree of calculation if not premeditation.

The opposite was true when the victim was female. Two of the cases fail to give any indication pertaining to the corpse's whereabouts, but in all other instances, the body was left at the site of the murder. This is not the result for heavily witnessed crimes, as was the case in deaths due to issues of honor. Instead, this presumably stems from the fact that almost all of these crimes were committed in a private, indoor area. Therefore, the criminal would have ample time to escape before the body was discovered. In one such instance, described in *Gods Justice Against Murther*, a maid was murdered by her master's apprentice.³¹ After beating her to death, he left her body, but covered her wounds with a dishcloth. He locked the doors of the house when he fled, but he did not attempt to dispose of the body.

One would expect to see a similar pattern when the victim was the wife or love interest of the accused, since the majority of these crimes were enacted inside the home, but these actually amount to the second most often witnessed set of murders in these pamphlets. Five of the murders were actually enacted in the presence of witnesses and therefore the perpetrator never had the chance to hide the body or to escape. In only one

³¹ Anonymous, *Gods Justice Against Murther, or The Bloudy Apprentice Executed* (London, 1668).

case, did the husband attempt to cover up the crime by disposing of the corpse.³² In this case, he set the house on fire and then stumbled in front of the burning house, practically naked, declaring that bandits had robbed and burned his house. He claimed that he escaped only by jumping through a window leaving his family inside--so much for chivalry. Unfortunately for him, one of the “murdered” witnesses revived from her blow to the head and crawled to a neighbor’s house.

It is clear from the evidence that the men who were committing these crimes were not preoccupied with the need to cover up their crimes. It is possible that since they were married to the deceased women, they would be the prime suspects when their wives turned up missing, and therefore saw no hope in attempting to escape. More likely, however, is that these crimes were enacted in a fit of passion and that therefore they were not meticulously planned out. The choice of weapon also supports this theory. When husbands murdered their wives, the choice of weapon became much more varied when compared to other categories, and most of them were objects that might easily have come to hand inside the house, not necessarily chosen specifically as murder weapons.

Women who committed these crimes seem to have attempted to conceal the results more often than men. The fact that most of these murders happened in a private setting meant that, unlike their male counterparts, women often had the opportunity to cover up their crimes. According to the sources, many women took advantage of this. Table 2.5 describes the action that women took after the murders had taken place.

³² Richard Ward, *An Account of a Most Inhumane and Barbarous Murder* (London, 1700).

Table 2.5: Placement of Corpse in Murders/Homicides
Committed by Women

Corpse	Number of Cases
Buried/Covered Up Death	6
Caught Removing	2
Dismembered	1
Left at Site	2
No Removal Specified	3
Placed in Closet	1
Thown in Fire	1

The largest category for female crimes includes murders that were not immediately discovered. Cases of poisoning, where the body was buried and foul play was not considered until a later date, fall into this category. As the results indicate, in only a small number of cases did the woman just leave the body at the site. Cases of poisoning are included under the category of buried/covered up death, in those cases, the body was left where death occurred, but the method of murder offered a means of concealment. In cases where poison was not used, and the victim was left at the site, there is no indication from these sources that actions were taken to conceal the crime. Even including cases where no removal was specified, in only five cases did women not conceal their crime. This is a considerably higher percentage than crimes in which men attempted to conceal their action.

In two cases, women were actually caught in the act of removal. Margaret Osilly went to a neighbor, Mr. Fowler, to get his assistance in secretly burying the body of her husband.³³ Mr. Fowler relayed the information to another neighbor, who went to the Osilly home and discovered the body. The second was the case of Esther Ives discussed earlier who, with the assistance of her lover, strangled her husband.³⁴ When the constable arrived at the site of the crime, Esther and John were caught trying to dress the corpse. Esther later confessed that they were planning to claim that William had fallen down the stairs, therefore passing off their crime as an unfortunate accident.

The majority of cases include women who attempted to cover up their crimes using a variety of different methods. Mary Aubrey dismembered her husband and scattered his body among various streets.³⁵ Margaret Martel hid her victim in a closet, then locked up the house, telling the maid that her mistress was out.³⁶ However, every act of corpse disposal is not necessarily indicative of concealment. Mary Cook, who threw the body of her child into the fire after she had slit its throat, may not have been trying to hide her crime.³⁷ Her husband was in the house at the time of the murder and

³³ Anonymous, *Great and Bloody News form Farthing Ally in St. Thomas's Southwark* (London, 1680).

³⁴ Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of a Most Barbarous and Bloody Murther* (London, 1686).

³⁵ Anonymous, *A Cabinet of Grief* (London, 1688) and Anonymous, *An Account of the Manner, Behavior and Execution of Mary Aubry* (London, 1687).

³⁶ Anonymous, *A True Relation of the Life and Conversation of Margaret Martel, that Murder'd Mistress Pullyn* (London, 1697).

³⁷ Anonymous, *The Cruel Mother*, (London, 1670).

immediately discovered his child. The pamphlet stated that, Mary had intended to kill herself as well, so it can be speculated that she was not too terribly concerned about being caught for the murder of her child. All of the other cases, however, indicate a logical attempt to conceal the crime.

The fact that the men in domestic cases rarely attempted to conceal the body indicated to the early modern audience a certain amount of rash action. The murders were often the result of an angry passion and therefore were not seen as planned occurrences. When women committed crimes, especially in a domestic setting that was not often the case. It is this act of concealment that was feared by early modern audiences, because it was perceived as deliberate. Just as the act of poisoning carried with it a clear murderous intent, and would not be tried as manslaughter, disposing of the corpse indicated concealment and guilt.³⁸ While male perpetrated crime indicate degrees of premeditation and calculation, the cases printed about female crimes focus more prominently on acts of concealment. Does that necessarily indicate that women were more likely to commit premeditated crimes and dispose of the body? This did take place, but the choice to print cases highlighting the dangers of female deviancy could have been a deliberate choice. If that is the case, these cases reveal a manufactured gendered image of crime in which pamphlet authors and printers chose to print cases that highlighted specific aspects of female behavior. Regardless of the motive, these cases would have solidified fears of women who usurped a role of power, especially over men.

³⁸ Vanessa McMahon, *Murder in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 108.

Conclusion

As the evidence suggests, while there were many similarities between murders committed by men and women, the gendered elements inherent in these crimes were highlighted in the pamphlet literature. The use of poison by women was dramatized and when cases arose where men used this same method of murder their culpability was partially neutralized. Women were found to commit more multiple murders than men, and their victims were often members of their own family, which further made their crimes feared by early modern audiences. The use of space within these crimes further gendered the action as women killed and were killed in private spaces, as opposed to the public and heavily witnessed crimes enacted by men. While the details described within these cases did not always conform to stereotypical gender roles, the similarities would have recognizable to the contemporary audience. These images, which were presented to the public, demonstrated and further exacerbated early modern fears of disorder.

CHAPTER 3

AGGRESSIVE MEN: A THREAT TO SOCIAL ORDER

We have Savages amongst us far worse than those in Africk; Men-eaters, that devour Orphans and Widows, and cannot live without having every day a large Mornings-draught of intermingled Blood and Tears.¹

While individual behavior might deviate from the normative structure, the standard was still upheld especially in moralizing literature. When actions predominantly fell outside of the prescribed mode of behavior, concerns would often be voiced. Pamphlets had been an established medium for relaying social concerns for nearly a century. In cases of murder, pamphlets served as a means of conveying information to the public but could also be instrumental in voicing social concerns.

The pamphlets under consideration in this study reveal a pronounced social apprehension concerning the failure of men to live up to the proper male gender construction. The majority of cases in this chapter took place in the 1600's a particular period of unrest in England. In 1685 James II came to the throne. His reign, characterized by political and religious tension, ended three years later in The Glorious Revolution. This political instability led to a heightened focus on social disorder and in these cases it was increasingly directed at the disorderly man. As the head of the household, the father was responsible for the care of his family. When such men instead murdered their wives, they revealed a breakdown in the social order. This was especially pronounced when husbands were categorized as debauched by prostitutes.

¹ Anonymous, *Lamentable News from Southwark* (London, 1675), 1.

The breakdown of family order was an acute concern, but it was not the only indicator of masculine disorder. Cases of murder that accompanied theft also reveal prevalent social apprehensions. The preoccupation with male barbarity and aggression that can be found in these sources is further evidence of these fears. By focusing on the failure of men to live up to the patriarchal ideal and also by drawing attention to male barbarity, these pamphlets not only represented social fears but also served as a means of instruction and warning to the public: disorder would lead to savagery. As a result, the violent behavior of men was described in vivid detail, focusing on the barbarity and detached manner in which they dispatched their victims, especially in cases of theft. This served as a means to express fears regarding male disorder as well as a way to illustrate the dangers females might face.²

The pamphlets of this period highlight male aggression and male failures to live up to the patriarchal ideal, often casting the female as the doting innocent abused by her husband. The only cases with a diminished focus on male aggression are those involving murders instigated by prostitutes. Here the relationship between the man and his prostitute lover represents a type of gender inversion, highlighting the dangers of debauchery and an over indulgence in sexual and alcoholic appetites. While some of these cases hearken back to the good versus bad formula, the evidence indicates that this could have been used to draw attention to female dependence.

² The dangers which women faced at the hands of men are discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Husbands Who Kill

Thus you see a Man, who by the Laws of God and Common Natural Duty, was Bound by all lawful means to take Care for the Welfare and Preservation both of the Souls and Bodies of his Wife and Children, Contriving and Resolving the Ruin of both...³

As discussed in the introduction, the husband was the head of the household. It was his duty to rule over the family and set a moral example. When this ideal was not upheld, it was perceived, disorder would be the result. As the above quote indicates, religion was often used as an illustrative example of man's place within the social structure. Earlier pamphlets often used religious elements to define gender relationships, but in later pamphlets, while religious imagery continued to be used, it was no longer the foremost feature.

Even though religion was given a much smaller role in the later part of the seventeenth century, its utility for the authors cannot be dismissed entirely. *The Bloody Papist*, for example, was rife with religious imagery.⁴ It should be noted that 1683, the year in which this pamphlet was printed, was the beginning of the reign of James II, an open Roman Catholic. This would have served to increase religious tension. The husband in this case was specifically described as a follower of that "Mock-Religion," which, according to the author, justified his cold-hearted nature. "It being nothing strange that those whom God hath so far forsaken as to give them up to believe a Lie...should

³ Anonymous, *A True Relation of the Most Horrible Murther Committed by Thomas White* (London, 1682), 3.

⁴ Anonymous, *The Bloody Papist* (London, 1683).

likewise be left without Natural Affections, and abandon themselves to Work all kind of Wickedness with Greediness.”⁵ This case is the only one in the sample that, in the absence of a motive for the crime, attempts to supply one. Out of the possibilities offered, the wife desiring to become Protestant was the first suggestion posited by the pamphlet.

While religion does continue to appear in the literature, it becomes less pronounced, often appearing as part of the formulaic structure rather than intended as purposeful statements. This most often takes the form of references to specific bible stories, most commonly that of Cain and Abel or Adam and Eve. As the period progresses, however, these references become shorter and were often eliminated altogether. That is not to say that religious references cannot be found in pamphlets printed near the end of the seventeenth century, but the number of pamphlets with a religious focus drops dramatically. The focus becomes largely the danger of disorder to the state rather than personal salvation; in these instances, that danger takes the form of the dysfunctional husband.

The wife was usually the victim of male violence, but at least to some degree this was accepted as a component of the marital relationship. The legal code allowed men to “correct” their wives behavior.⁶ The most apt example of the popular perception of domestic abuse can be found in a proverb published in 1670,

A spaniel, a woman and a walnut tree

⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁶ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 192.

The more they're beaten the better they be.⁷

That did not, however, justify severe violence or murder, although such actions did take place. The language and character descriptions found within these pamphlets indicate a shift in attitude regarding the abuse of wives.⁸ Out of the sample of fifty-five pamphlets, nine describe the death of a woman at the hands of her husband. These cases highlight the violence and aggression that characterized male behavior.

In the case of Thomas Watson (printed in 1686) he caught his wife Mary secretly pawning his goods and as a result, “he abused her in the street, at an unseemly rate.”⁹ While acknowledging that to beat one’s wife, even in the street, might not have been uncommon, the severity, however, fell outside what was deemed acceptable. When his wife returned home to make amends, Watson flew into a rage and stabbed her with a bayonet. The specific references to his character relayed to the reader the flawed nature of his authority. His wife had taken it upon herself to sell his goods, and his attempts to reassert his authority led to her death. The information provided about Watson did not attempt to justify his behavior. For example, the discussion of his military career, specifically whether or not he was cashiered or dismissed, helped to further establish his dubious position. The wound he gave his wife proved fatal; her final words, “O! Thomas,

⁷ J. Ray, *A Collection of English Proverbs* (London 1670), 50, as quoted in Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 192.

⁸ The characterization of women in the pamphlet literature will be discussed in detail in the proceeding chapter.

⁹ Anonymous, *A Sad and True Relation of a Most Barbarous and Bloody Murder* (London, 1686), 4.

you have now done my business,” summed up the pamphlet’s message.¹⁰ Thomas Watson was guilty of his wife’s murder. It is interesting that despite the fact that his wife was selling his goods without his consent, for which no explanation was given, she was seen as the victim. No assessment was made of her character.

Another example of male aggression against a wife is found in *News from Bishops-Gate Street* (1689). Jacob Turner murdered his wife Mary when she was unable to supply him with enough money to “discharge his Reckoning,” at the Sign of the Lamb.¹¹ Most likely induced by alcohol—which was commonly associated with disorder—and while beating his wife Turner grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed her in the ribs. After stabbing her, “he feignedly caught her up in his Arms; telling her, he having done her business, would now do his own; but (poor Woman) she Innocently begged of him not to do any violence to himself.”¹²

His wife, described as “a Vertuous and Chaste Maid,” was an innocent (and from the use of the term maid, mostly likely young) victim to her husband’s violent passion. Even his remorse was seen to be feigned. His nefarious character was elaborated on by witnesses, who claimed that he was not in the least remorseful; he “avowed several times, that if it were to do again, he would do it, and further. That he had more Persons Business to do, besides her, his said Wife.”¹³ His villainy was established and her loving

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Anonymous, *News from Bishops-Gate Street* (London, 1689), 2.

¹² Ibid., 3.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

submissiveness was upheld as the ideal for female behavior. The flaw in complete patriarchal license was tempered by her obvious dependence. In this manner a flaw in the system could be acknowledged, without threatening the hierarchical gender structure by ensuring that female dependence was not questioned.

While most of the cases highlight male barbarity, a number of cases specifically describe husbands who were being unfaithful to their wives, often with prostitutes. While aggression is still evident, in these cases the husband fails to live up to the ideal by living a debauched and disorderly life. *Bloody News from Clerkenwel* is the least explicit in this manner; while not stated outright, the implications of the husband's ill behavior can be found in the last few lines, "O! Let his Example warn all others from following lewd Courses, absenting themselves from their dwellings, and never providing for their families."¹⁴ His lewd courses resulted in him being an unfit provider for his family. No other motive was given as to why he murdered his wife, but as was often the case, the author inferred the motive. Rarely is there an explicit confession regarding anything other than basic guilt for the crime itself. While not as common in theft cases, character description was the common component in descriptions of domestic murder; it was a means to justify, or at least explain, atrocious behavior.

The husband in this case was unnamed, described only as a Cooper who had never risen higher than the position of Journeyman. While many men presumably would not have obtained a Master's position, the inclusion of this fact was most definitely meant as a blot against the accused, since moral character was a qualifying characteristic of a

¹⁴ Anonymous, *Bloody News From Clerkenwel* (London, 1670), 8.

Master's status. His behavior toward his wife was also less than admirable, "he was generally a very bad Husband, and froward and unkind to his Wife..."¹⁵ His spouse, on the other hand, fit the model for the dutiful wife who loved her husband despite his cruelty.

He left his wife without word for four days "on a Ramble," and she was left with the responsibility to care for their children. When he finally returned home, his wife related to him her fears regarding the health of one of their children, asking if he could give her money to go to the apothecary. He responded by beating her to death with an adze, a large woodworking tool. His actions were described in a way that diminished any doubt regarding his villainy. After his wife was murdered, "he takes up one of his children into his arms, and was walking with it up and down the room, as in Triumph for that Hellish victory."¹⁶ His villainous characterization was completed with his confession. Upon being asked by the Justice what had prompted him to murder his wife, he replied, "That he knew well enough he should be Hang'd and was sorry for nothing but that he had not dispatcht some more of them."¹⁷ He could have been referring to the woman who had been visiting his wife at the time of the murder and ran for help, his own children, or more women in general. However, even after being pressed by the justice to elaborate on his statement, he refused.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 7.

The husband in this pamphlet was villainized not only because of the murder, but also because of his failure to live up to the patriarchal ideal. This was illustrated by his inability to rise to a position of authority in his trade and his failure to properly care for his family. The implication that he was involved in lewd practices was further proof of his dissipation.

A relationship with another woman was the most common factor in these cases of wife murder and was often a topic of reproof in the pamphlet literature. Prostitution had been viewed as a necessary evil as the need to prove one's manhood often took the form of sexual encounters. The Protestant rejection of the double standard, however, led to renewed attacks on prostitution.¹⁸ The specific focus on some of these issues in the literature indicates that they were responding to social changes. While prostitution was an established institution, social shifts resulted in a preoccupation with the debauchery of the bawdy houses.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, sexual libertinism gained acceptance in elite circles.¹⁹ To what extent this movement was practiced is debatable, but it did become the format for many literary figures.²⁰ Often defined by rakish behavior and sexual license, it was frequently accompanied by religious skepticism. As Lord Rochester, a notable early instigator of libertinism, believed, morality was not based on a

¹⁸ Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 55.

¹⁹ Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (New York: Longman, 1999), 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

system of right and wrong but of pleasure and pain.²¹ While followers of libertinism tended to be upper class, libertine notions of sexual license were also held by unsupervised apprentices and some of the poor. They did not follow the philosophical leanings but, influenced by the sexual activities of the libertine gentleman, adhered to the belief that sexual desire was a natural state of being.²² These ideas justified the search for sexual pleasure.

The need to prove one's masculinity through coitus was not always satisfied by relations within marriage. In most cases this resulted in visits to bawdy houses. The remaining four pamphlets in the sample that describe husbands murdering their wives have a common theme. The husband was "debauched by ill company." Not merely relationships outside of marriage, these cases describe men who had taken up with prostitutes. Proving male heterosexuality obviously necessitated a need for sexual opportunities; due to social conventions, prostitutes became the most viable outlet.

Prostitution spread from the riverbanks of Southwark into the heart of the city during this period. With the introduction of oil-burning streetlamps, women began walking the streets to find clients for their services.²³ This, of course, did not happen without opposition. The Societies for the Reformation of Manners, originally formed in the 1690s, focused attention on immorality, primarily drunkenness and prostitution. These groups were supported by both Anglicans and Dissenters and therefore

²¹ Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 74.

²² *Ibid.*, 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

concentrated on the effects of immorality on the family.²⁴ Many of the topics brought up in the murder pamphlets comprise the same complaints offered by this group: that the husband did not support his family, wasted money on bawds, and risked infecting his wife with venereal diseases.²⁵

Efforts to reduce corruption were not always applauded by contemporaries. Years after these efforts had begun, Bernard Mandeville wrote his *A Modest Defence of Publick Stews* in which he states “Your Endeavors to suppress Lewdness, have only serv’d to promote it; and that this Branch of Immorality has grown under Your Hands, as if it was prun’d instead of being lapp’d.”²⁶ Mandeville proposed that the bawdy houses should be left alone. Even patrons of such establishments, however, were conscious of a moral dilemma inherent in their actions. Samuel Pepys, for example, could not resist the temptation to walk through “Fleete ally...to see a couple of pretty whores,” but acknowledged the moral degradation that accompanied such behavior.²⁷ This may not have prevented him from visiting the area, but it did prompt him to include “God forgive me” in his diary entries involving prostitutes.

²⁴ Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 385.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁶ Irwin Primer, ed. *Bernard Mandeville’s A Modest Defence of Publick Stews: Prostitution and its Discontents in Early Georgian England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 44.

²⁷ Robert Lathan and William Matthews eds. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Vol. XI (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 164.

The changes that were taking place in the latter part of the century help to explain the explicit renouncing of overt sexuality, prostitution, and infidelity that can be found in the murder pamphlets. These pamphlets were responding to real problems faced by society. The repercussions of husbands visiting bawdy houses had devastating effects on their family, especially when placing their wives at risk of infection from venereal disease.²⁸

One such case was printed in 1682. *A True Relation of the Most Horrible Murther* describes the fall of Thomas White, who was corrupted from his honest upbringing by his less than savory associations, "...having at last by the Abuse of Himself with lewd Women, gotten that Disease which commonly is the Consequence of Uncleaness..."²⁹ He subsequently passed the disease on to his wife. His attempts to keep his condition confidential eventually led him to murder his wife, in the fear that she would betray their secret. As a result of this concealment, it was implied that his wife was unable to receive medical attention. Although the author of the pamphlet attributes the murder to concealment of their medical condition, the murder took place after the wife had returned home to her natal family. At this point, she had already been advised about her medical condition, and it seems extreme that her husband would risk hanging to murder someone who had already revealed their secret. From the evidence relayed, he did not kill her in a

²⁸ Venereal disease was increasingly problematic in the late seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries especially for the London poor. For more information on the disease and its connection to prostitution, see: Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 196-225.

²⁹ Anonymous, *A True Relation of the Most Horrible Murther Committed by Thomas White* (London, 1682), 2.

sudden passion; he made numerous attempts to visit his wife. When she finally agreed to see him,

...this wicked and most unnatural Wretch, having a Scimiter by his Side, so secretly and by degrees got it out of the Scabberd, and the Point of it through the Pocket-Hole of his Coat, and as he sate close by Her, he forc'd it in at her right Breast, and through her Body, upon which she died immediately, only speaking these Words, *Thomas, Thou hast killed Me*; At which words, the Company that was in the Room were Amazed, not discerning any thing before she fell down...³⁰

The crime was clearly premeditated and therefore particularly heinous. Often associated with female crime, the use of poison, for example, was seen as an especially malicious means of murder precisely because it was not the result of a violent passion, but a deliberate and obviously premeditated crime.³¹ As Sir John Croke made clear to a jury in 1614: “of all murders poisoning is ye worst and most horrible 1 Because it is secret 2 Because it is not to bee prevented 3 Because it is most against nature and therefore most heinous 4 It is alsoe a Cowardly thing.”³² Due to the accessibility of poison and the ease of administering it, poisoners were a threat to social order; they could effortlessly cross gender or social boundaries. Early modern social perceptions saw poison as a distinctly feminine crime, especially by housewives.³³ In reality, it was used

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

³¹ Vanessa McMahon, *Murder in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 108.

³² Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 208.

³³ J.S. Cockburn, “The Nature and Incidence of Crime in England 1559-1625” in *Crime in England 1550-1800*, edited by J.S. Cockburn (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 57.

as much by men as by women.³⁴ As the following cases suggest, however, there is still a gendering element evident within these descriptions.

In *Three Inhumane Murthers*, (1675) the husband had the benefit of an “honest and credible” father, but his father’s premature death left him undereducated.³⁵ The inclusion of this type of information further demonstrates the importance of character and family in relation to personal behavior. He married the daughter of an honest old man and moved in with the family. Although his character was marred before his marriage, his real downfall came when he became acquainted with a woman of bad reputation. Upon one of his visits to this woman, “it was contrived presently, and put into his mind to Poyson...his Wife, his Father-in-law, and his Mother-in-law, and then all that they had would be his own.” The implication of this statement was that this woman convinced him to murder his family.

He placed the poison (believed to be ratsbane or arsenic) in his wife’s milk; she died later that night. He then killed his father-in-law and his mother-in-law in the same manner. After he was apprehended, he confessed to the crime, blaming that “naughty woman” for bewitching him. However, he refused to confess at the assizes, claiming that “hee would be try’d by God.”³⁶

³⁴ Vanessa McMahon, *Murder in Shakespeare’s England*, 109.

³⁵ Anonymous, *Three Inhumane Murthers Committed by One Bloudy Person* (London, 1675).

³⁶ The pamphlet stated that his thumbs were tied together with whipcord when he refused to confess to the crime.

Edmund Allen committed a similar crime against his wife.³⁷ He came from a good family, but was corrupted when he “fell into bad company.” These women made him turn against his wife. He began beating his wife, making her miscarry on one occasion. He ultimately poisoned her, placing sublimated mercury in her raspberry jelly. He was found guilty, but the pamphlet makes clear the belief that the death of his wife was the result of plotting with these lewd women.

The connection with prostitution, especially in cases of poison, caused the gender roles between the husband and the female prostitute to be inverted. The prostitute took on the dominant position in the relationship; the man was subsequently influenced by her and put her ideas into action. In the cases where death occurred by the use of poison, the man is clearly associated with the female gender role. Women were believed to have been more likely to use poison as a means of murder. The fact that poison was administered through food, the preparation of food again being a stereotypically a female occupation, made the inverted nature of these relationships clear.

In these cases, the wives were described as tender and loving companions. *Three Inhumane Murthers* stated that in the midst of her sickness from poison the wife “demonstrated a great deal of Love and Affection to her husband.”³⁸ Unfortunately, the love these women showed their husbands led to their deaths, but wives were not the only women who needed to fear male violence. Women who lived without male protection could also be targets for male aggression, but unlike the women described in this section,

³⁷ Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of the Penitent Behavior, Last Dying Words, and Execution of Mr. Edmund Allen, Gent.* (London, 1695).

³⁸ Anonymous, *Three Inhumane Murthers* (London, 1675), 4.

this was not the result of frustration or the desire to be with another woman. Instead these women were killed in order to obtain money.

Barbarous Thieves

Theft was a popular topic for pamphleteers. Robert Greene captured the essence of Elizabethan fears of theft in his work *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage*.³⁹ His work takes pains to highlight the dangers and depravities of pickpockets and cutpurses as well as drawing attention to a criminal underworld filled with gangs and thieves, much like those created by Charles Dickens two centuries later.⁴⁰ Although the extent to which this underworld existed is debatable, the reality of theft was all too apparent. While it was an issue taken seriously by the public, it was all the more grave when accompanied by violence.

From the sample of pamphlets under investigation, twenty-one describe murder as a result of a financially motivated crime. Of these crimes, men were predominantly the perpetrators, often housebreaking or burglarizing the homes of unprotected women.⁴¹ While criminal statistics do show that men made up the majority of property offenders, the manner in which these cases are revealed in the pamphlet literature portrays an

³⁹ Robert Greene, *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage* (London, 1591).

⁴⁰ The most popular Dickens character which fits this description can be found in *Oliver Twist*. Fagan was the leader of a gang of young pickpockets who plagued the streets of London.

⁴¹ Out of twenty-one pamphlets, fifteen outline thefts where men committed the crime, one pamphlet involved a mixed group, and one the sex of the perpetrator is unknown. That leaves only four where women were accused of theft and murder.

anxiety not only relating to the crime but also to the social disorder that such crimes reveal.⁴² This is especially true with gender relationships.

While women were often portrayed as the victims of male violence, the barbarity that characterized the action of men was also emphasized. Most of the murders were described in vivid detail, highlighting their cruelty. This is not only the case when the victim was female; the same instances of cruelty are stressed in cases in which men murdered other men.

As discussed in the previous section, society and the legal system accepted the notion of men having authority to “correct” female behavior. However, when the line between “correction” and “abuse” was crossed there was cause for public censure. One such case occurred in 1675.⁴³ This case describes the abuse a poor woman suffered at the hands of her landlord after her husband left to avoid arrest for debt. In the absence of her male protector this woman was left defenseless. There are definitely elements of the victimized female in this pamphlet, but more prominent are the censures of male barbarity. The pamphlet begins lamenting the deplorable situation that was currently experienced, comparing England with Africa:

We have Savages amongst us far worse than those in Africk; Men-eaters, that devour Orphans and Widows, and cannot live without having every day a large Mornings-draught of intermingled Blood and Tears.⁴⁴

⁴² J. M. Beattie, “The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England” *Journal of Social History* 8, 4 (Summer 1975), 80.

⁴³ Anonymous, *Lamentable News for Southwark* (London, 1675).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

The landlord in this case seized a poor woman's goods and turned her out of her lodgings along with her three young children. However, he was not content and,

...as if he had thought to get that satisfaction out of her poor Carcass, which he could not find in her Goods, and Chattels, upon some hasty words, or small provocation, he fell upon her, and most manfully beat her, giving her several lamentable blows, kicks and spurns, especially about the breast and belly, so that she cried out most miserably at the very instant that he had spoil'd her.⁴⁵

She lived three more days, but being thrown ejected from her home, she was forced to live in a dog kennel with her children. The attention brought to these deplorable circumstances highlights the landlord's cruelty. This particular case actually includes an explicit statement about the injustice that the woman suffered from her barbarous landlord, even though she legitimately owed the debt, "...he is still much to blame for his severity...and so unmanly and inhumane as to assault and beat a silly weak woman (and one supposed to be with child too) in that miserable and barbarous manner."⁴⁶

While this case involved debt, the following cases all pertain to theft. The barbarity of these crimes is further exacerbated by the perceived greed that motivated them, but there are other factors of social tension as well. The apprehension of wanderers, especially soldiers and seamen, was an acute fear in this period. Men without work or a stable residence were seen as masterless and therefore represented a threat to the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

established order.⁴⁷ Even though legal records do not show any cause for a heightened anxiety to vagrancy, nevertheless such fears were voiced in popular literary sources.⁴⁸

In *Sad News from Ratcliff* (1691) a widow and a young girl were murdered by three seamen.⁴⁹ Fears of wandering soldiers and seamen would have been especially acute in 1691 as the Treaty of Limerick was signed in that year ending revolutionary activity in Ireland. The presence of idle military men, trained to be violent and unemployed, never failed to cause a certain amount of apprehension. The women in this pamphlet were alone in the house at the time of the assault. The pamphlet focused on the barbarity of the murders describing in detail the death of the woman, child, and maid.

...they set upon the old Gentlewoman, knock'd her down with a Smith's Iron Hand-Maw, and gave her an extraordinary large cut with a Hand-Cleaver over the Forehead cross-ways, that she immediately died; and the Child crying, Rogers swore, *Damn it, does it make a Noise? Kill it.* Which inhumanly, they did, and the Maid returning with the Tabacco, they knock'd down, as before, and gave her a Cut cros the Forehead with the Cleaver, so deep that her Brains came out upon the floor.⁵⁰

In the absence of living witnesses it is improbable that the author of the pamphlet would have known what was said at the time of the murders, unless this was revealed in the confession after the murderers were apprehended. The inclusion of the actual words

⁴⁷ A. L. Beir, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (New York: Methuen, 1985), xxi.

⁴⁸ J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (New York: Longman, 1999), 143.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, *Sad News from Ratcliff: Being a Full and True Relations of a Horrid and Bloody Murther* (London, 1691).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

spoken by one of the murderers, whether a fictional elaboration or an actual occurrence, further demonstrated to the audience the depravity of these men.

The case of a woman, described in *A Full and True Account* (1699), who was killed by her man-servant is similar in its gruesome depiction of death, made particularly serious because the woman was killed by one of inferior social standing.⁵¹

...being void of all natural pity and human compassion, took a Bar of Iron, and beat his poor innocent Ladies Brains out, with the repetition of several othre dreadful and unmerciful Blows on several parts of the Body, as plainly is made manifest by the plurality of Bruises, as well on the Head and Arms, as on other parts, the which was done (as some thiuk) in order to force her to discover some more than ordinary valuable Treasure.⁵²

It is not only the detail that sets these cases apart, but also the malicious nature attributed to their attackers. Instead of simply murdering their victims in order to steal their goods, they are characterized as almost finding delight in their cruelty. While women, especially widows, were vulnerable targets for theft, they were not the only victims of male violence. A few of the cases describe a vicious murder enacted on another man. In one such case, the victim was a relative of the perpetrator, although he was not the only one to suffer at the hand of this man.⁵³ William Blisse murdered a “near kinsman” by the name of William Johnson in order to rob him of six pounds, throwing his body into a pond. Apparently not content with the six pounds, Blisse also robbed and killed a young man whom he had been hired to conduct through Enfield-Chase. After

⁵¹ Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of a Most Barbarous Murther and Robbery Committed by John Davis* (London, 1699).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ Anonymous, *A True and Perfect Relation of Three Inhumane Murders* (London, 1672).

apprehending Blisse, evidence was found that he had also murdered a boy who had come to the home of Blisse's father to buy a pie.

While the murder of three individuals was deplored, the behavior of the perpetrator further testified to his malice. When accused of having a hand in one of these deaths, "the Villain then made answer, *have a care that I have not a hand in yours.*"⁵⁴ This not only hinted at his guilt, but also indicated his complete lack of remorse. The need to exhibit remorse was a fundamental component to the punishment of the guilty. As examples to their contemporaries, their confession and contrite behavior served as a deterrent to would-be criminals.

The premeditations and a lack of remorse made murder particularly heinous. One of the most explicit and barbaric descriptions of murder in the pamphlet literature can be found in the case of John Loe, described in *A True and Sad Account of a Barbarous Bloody Murther* (1685).⁵⁵ This case outlines the murder of John Mullen by his lodger John Loe. The victim was described as a sober and honest man who was married to a "Lunatic Woman." Since she could not attend to business in her husband's absence, Loe was taken on as a lodger. After discovering that Mullen had taken in a large sum from his customers, Loe devised a plan to get Mullen out of the house. The description of the subsequent murder is extremely detailed, thus giving evidence to the barbarity of this lodger. After wounding Mullen with a knife,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Anonymous, *A True and Sad Account of a Barbarous Bloody Murther* (London, 1685).

Without any regard that might tend to Humanity, he extended his Vengeance so far as to cut and mangle him, as if his Life was no sufficient satisfaction to his Malice; As first, he gashed his Face in divers places, cut his Throat in sunder, and by that means having bereaved him of Life, whether out of some former grudge, or what other provocation, is uncertain; he proceeded to cut off his Arms, and to Ripping him up, though many imagine he did it to disfigure him, that he might not be known...as for his Bowels, he took them out, and putting them into the Shirt of the Party murdered, he cast them into a pit that was near at hand. After this and divers other Cruelties, as if he had studied a further Barbarity, he cut him in tow in the Waste.⁵⁶

While many pamphlets included detailed descriptions of the crime, the explicit references to barbarity, as well as the extent to which this crime was graphically explained, indicates a particular purpose. Murder was seen as an act of villainy, but by offering such gruesome details, the crimes committed by men served to characterize them as barbaric and disorderly.

Conclusion

Husbands who murdered their wives were a direct threat to the properly functioning family. While the need for male sexual fulfillment made prostitution a necessary evil, moral reformers began to target such behavior, especially when it resulted in a disorderly household. Cases of male theft and murder were never portrayed as a positive action, but the works in this period are characterized by a heightened focus on male barbarity. Male behavior was not excused; instead, the disorderly male was villainized in the pamphlet literature. As the introductory quote alluded to, danger was not in the primitive cultures but instead could be found in England, as men attacked the helpless women they should have been protecting. In every period, murder is seen as a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2.

social evil. The pamphlets printed on the subject drew on the public interest in such crimes, but also used the medium to express fears prevalent within the social structure.

From 1660 to 1700 England was plagued by periods of instability and unrest. The early reign of Charles II witnessed a number of problems: war with the Netherlands, an outbreak of plague in 1666, and the Great Fire of London in September of the same year. The death of Charles II led to another revolution and religious conflicts inundated the government throughout the period. After a period characterized by such volatility, the re-establishment of order was a preoccupation many. This was especially true in gender relations.

As can be seen from the pamphlet literature, beyond apprehensions regarding murders, there was also a heightened tension in the gender structure. These sources became an outlet for concerns about male behavior, specifically their inability to properly function as husbands. The focus on male aggression and barbarism reveals an anxiety in an era of instability. This feeling of instability led to an increased focus on elements of social disorder. By describing the failures of men to live up to the proper male gender construction of the patriarchal head of household, these pamphlets illustrated what such failures inevitably led to.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN AND MURDER: VULNERABILITY VS. CULPABILITY

*With care and grief I was opprest,
e're since I did become his Wife,
And never could have peace or rest,
but led a discontented life.*

*No Tongue is able to express
What I with him did undergo,
He Cruel was and pittiless,
Which now has prov'd our overthrow.¹*

A number of murder pamphlets describe the death of a woman at the hands of a man. The desperate situation of a wife suffering abuse from her husband is a common topic, as seen in the previous chapter, but other women were depicted as vulnerable as well. The fact that women were victims of abuse was not a novel idea, but from the sample under investigation, the prominence of the desperate plight of females is more pronounced. This was the result of historical changes that would strain the existing social structure.

As discussed in the introduction, the social instability during and after the civil war resulted in a sense of heightened anxiety. In the 1640s and 50s, women took on a more active public role, petitioning in the streets, preaching, and commanding public attention.² The freedoms women received as a result of a less stable social structure would be phased out as traditional gender roles would be re-established. The pamphlet literature exhibits reactions to gender disorder by attempting to re-establish

¹ Anonymous, *A Cabinet of Grief* (London, 1688), 9.

² Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 384.

women's subordinate position. This was not done by overtly censoring bold women, although occasionally this does occur; in most cases stress was placed on the necessity of women's dependence on men. As Richard Allestree wrote in his advice manual, *The Ladies Calling*, in 1673, there was a "natural feebleness" in women.³ This necessitated their protection by men.

The cases outlined in the pamphlet literature highlight female vulnerability especially when unprotected by a man. While there are cases of wives suffering at the hands of their husbands, the emphasis in these cases is on the male's inadequacy to fulfill his proper gender role. The pamphlets are instrumental in establishing female vulnerability, but they are not focused on censoring female behavior. These women were fulfilling their wifely role; women who were not married, however posed a more severe threat to the patriarchal social structure. By elucidating the dangers of independent females, widows living without male protection, and prostitutes instigating violence, the pamphlets were able to re-define proper gender order. This was done by offering representations of popular belief with the hope of influencing those who might choose to live outside the proper gender boundaries.

The pamphlets accomplished this desire to redefine proper gender balance by focusing on two types of gender disorder: disorderly men and disorderly women. By printing cases that highlighted women as victims of male violence, the pamphlets inferred the threat that unprotected women were under when men became disorderly. However, it should be noted that men were not the only perpetrators of violence. Women committed a number of violent crimes as well. These cases draw attention to

³ Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling* (London, 1673).

the disorderly female, but interestingly enough in many cases their behavior could have been blamed on men. The properly functioning head of household was responsible for controlling unruly female behavior. The use of *chirivari* to censure deviations from proscribed gender roles indicates that the man was being shamed as well. These types of rituals, however, were directed at less severe deviant behavior.

In terms of actual crimes, based on the available statistical evidence, women committed fewer crimes than men. While there is debate as to how accurate these records are, even considering underreporting of female crimes, their frequency would still be less than their male counterparts, which seems to coincide with the pamphlet literature. That does not mean, however, that women did not commit serious crimes. Legal records include cases of theft, murder, and infanticide among the more female crimes of scolding. In the few cases where women were engaged in violent acts for money, they were seen as taking on characteristics of the male gender role and the pamphlet often included a specific censure.

Female Victims

As was shown in the previous chapter, women were often victims of male violence within the home, yet their victimization extended to financially motivated crimes as well. By highlighting the exploitation of unprotected females, pamphlet writers demonstrated sympathy toward these women while also reasserting the need for male protection and subsequent female subordination. This was especially pronounced when females were seen as living alone by choice, such as widows who did not remarry.

Widows were not the only female victims, however. In some cases women were victimized when living under the protection of a man, most notably their husbands. It is generally believed that the low number of domestic abuse cases found in the legal records is due to underreporting. Informal complaints to the justice of the peace may have been the preferred method of redress.⁴ When death resulted from such abuse, domestic or otherwise, we receive a much more detailed picture.

As in *Bloody News from Clerkenwel* discussed in the previous chapter, the woman in the following case was unable to cope when her husband failed to fulfill his role as head of the household.⁵ She relied on her husband for financial and emotional support, but instead was left to care for the children.

On Thursday the 14 of May he went abroad, and what Company he was with, we cannot say, but know this, that he came no more home till the Munday following, during all which time the poor woman and her two children were forced to make what shift she could for a Livelyhood.⁶

When men did not provide, the family suffered. In *Lamentable News from Southwark* it was shown that when the husband left his family to avoid arrest, being unable to pay the rent, his wife was beaten by their landlord.⁷ His family was forced to live in a dog kennel and his wife died from her injuries. This woman was unprotected by her husband, and consequently her weakness was taken advantage of

⁴ J. A. Sharpe, "Domestic Homicide in Early Modern England," *The Historical Journal* 24, no. 1 (March, 1981): 31.

⁵ Anonymous, *Bloody News from Clerkenwel* (London, 1670).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ Anonymous, *Lamentable News from Southwark* (London, 1675).

by her landlord. While the pamphlets directed their focus on male failure and disorder, it placed women in a subordinate role, unable to cope without the protection and guidance of a man. This was especially pronounced when women were unmarried or widowed.

The attention given to female victims of crime was not always accompanied by language dramatizing the plight of the female victim, although occasionally this can be found. Much more prevalent, however, are cases where women are murdered while alone in the house. Widows or female servants were frequently victims of housebreaking or burglary. The language of the pamphlets presumes that the absence of a male in the home made this a possible or even a probable occurrence.

Women were therefore considered vulnerable when left alone in the house. A pamphlet written in 1668 illustrates such an occurrence. *God's Justice Against Murther* describes the death of a maid who was left alone in the house while the rest of the family attended church.⁸ While the pamphlet decries covetousness, financial gain being the motivation of the crime, the underlying message is clear. This young maid was left at the mercy of her master's apprentice, Thomas Savage, who had returned to rob the house in the family's absence. After stealing the money, he beat the maid to death with a hammer.

A similar circumstance occurred in 1674, when John Randal murdered Widow Burtin, as recounted in *The Full Discovery*.⁹ Left alone to mind the house when

⁸ Anonymous, *Gods Justice Against Murther or The Bloody Apprentice Executed* (London, 1668).

⁹ Anonymous, *The Full Discovery of the Late Horrid Murther and Robbery, in Holbourn* (London, 1674).

Esquire Bluck took his family to his country house, Widow Burton admitted John Randal to the house, being acquainted with him when he had previously served as the family's butler.

The widow was found by the milk woman the next day, "lying in the Parlor with her feet over the threshold, with a Coverlid thrown over her...strangled black in the face."¹⁰ The widow had been a cautious woman and keenly aware of the dangers strangers might pose. "Tis further observable, the she never used to let in any into the house, but such, whose voice she well knew."¹¹ Even with her awareness and precautions, she did not escape violence. This indicated that knowledge of dangers would not always protect against assault.

The dominant elements of fear in these pamphlets were often directed at women, specifically widows, who in the absence of a male protector were often the victims of financial crimes. Widowhood often resulted in women becoming the heads of their households. The fact that these women were often economically independent, as well as sexually experienced, disrupted the patriarchal structure. Families often pressured widows to remarry, but remarriage could cause new problems as well, especially if there were children from the previous marriage.¹² In any given period, widows made up a substantial percent of the population; however, they were still seen as outside the ideal social structure and often associated with subversive acts. While

¹⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹² Mary E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 89-93.

there were pamphlets that accused widows of witchcraft and other acts of deviancy, many focus on the dangers that a widow might suffer due to the lack of a male protector.¹³

One such case is described in *A Strange and Wonderful Account of a Most Barbarous and Bloody Murther* (1680).¹⁴ In this account, “five fellows in Seamens habit” broke into the house of a widow. The men had been observed earlier in the day “eyeing” the residence, whose household, “according to Report consisted of only the Mistress of the house, her Daughter about sixteen or seventeen years of Age, and the Servant-Maid.”¹⁵ Breaking through the wall using iron implements, they seized the maid and ran upstairs to secure the other residents. Upon hearing her daughter scream, the widow escaped from the house in order to get the assistance of the town. Unfortunately in her absence the men,

Not willing to depart before they left a lasting stain on their Diabolick Cruelties they went as it is supposed where they had left the two females bound, and with impious hands bereaved them of their Lives by giving them several mortal wounds, whether they acted this Barbarity to secure themselves from a discovery by Reason the Maids might know them or whether their guilty Consciences suggested any such thing is not certain, because they left none alive that could resolve the Cause.¹⁶

The men escaped without being captured.

¹³ For an example of a widow accused of witchcraft see: Anonymous, *Truth Brought to Light* (London, 1662).

¹⁴ Anonymous, *A Strange and Wonderful Account of a Most Barbarous and Bloody Murther* (1680).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

A similar incidence occurred in 1691 as recounted in *Sad News from Ratcliff*.¹⁷ A widow, a young girl, and the maid were left alone in the house, when three seamen came to rob the residence. As stated in the previous chapter, this case occurred at a time when there would have been a heightened fear of unruly soldiers as men were returning from fighting in Ireland. In this instance, those fears were justified; the women were barbarously killed.

While these cases included other members of the household, they were all female and therefore vulnerable. Madam Bennet, who was completely alone when her house was robbed, suffered a similar fate.¹⁸ *The Unfortunate Lady* (1694) describes the murder of this widow. Having saved out of the portion her husband had left upon his death, she had not only improved her estate but also obtained a reputation for having large sums of money. Her motivation for frugality, “whether through a desire of improving her Childrens Fortunes at her death or whether to gratify some covetousness herself,” was undetermined.¹⁹ The implication here is that altruistic notions may not have motivated her thrift. This is further elaborated upon in the description of her security measures.

It is said she went up a Ladder to her Bed-Chamber, which she used to draw up after her, letting down a heavy Trap door, fortified with all the Engines of safty to secure her Pecuniary Paradise from the a temps of Robbers Her Age

¹⁷ Anonymous, *Sad News from Ratcliff: Being a Full and True Relations of a Horrid and Bloody Murther* (London, 1691).

¹⁸ Anonymous, *The Unfortunate Lady* (London, 1694).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

hath led her at last, into such Jealousies and Fears that she kep no Servant at all in her House for fear of being cheated or deceived by them.²⁰

This statement, in some ways, indicates that Mrs. Bennet was partially to blame for what befell her. The isolation in which she placed herself was taken advantage of by a butcher. He climbed over her garden wall and robbed her house. Mrs Bennet was found later by a neighbor, her neck broken.

From the evidence it appears that widows were seen as especially vulnerable to burglars and housebreakers. In the cases outlined thus far, these women were all without the protection of a man and consequently suffered dire fates. The case of Madam Martha Bowles offers yet another example of an isolated female who was murdered as part of a robbery.²¹ *A Full and True Account of a Most Barbarous Murther and Robbery* (1699) describes the death of Madam Martha Bowles at the hands of her manservant. Unlike the previous cases, however, she was not a widow but chose to live separately from her husband, Charles Bowles Esq. who, “ by reason of her Age, and continual Indisposition appointed her a Farm-house in Cleaver.”²² Although this would have been contrary to traditional marriage arrangements, the author of the pamphlet does not openly condemn this arrangement. Instead, great pains are taken to ensure that the personal arrangements made were above suspicion. Even the sleeping arrangements made for her manservant were included in this short

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ Anonymous, *A Full and True Account of a Most Barbarous Murther and Robbery Committed by John Davis* (London, 1699).

²² Ibid., 1.

pamphlet, “according to her desire, he went every Night to the Windsor lodge, and return’d each Morning to the said Farm about his Business.”²³ These meticulous precautions did not prevent the murder of this woman. Lady Madam Martha Bowles, described as a “poor innocent lady” was robbed and barbarously beaten to death by her servant. This would have effectively placed fear in the hearts of women in similar situations.

Women who lived alone were certainly seen as potential victims of violent crime. Their deaths were lamented, but the printing of such cases would serve to warn others of the dangers one faced while living alone.

The lonely widow in her home was not the only obvious target for theft. Widows who ran businesses were often highlighted in the pamphlet literature as possible victims of thieves. Such was the case printed in 1690 entitled, *Barbarous and Bloody*.²⁴ This case concerns Mrs. Sarah Wilkins and her niece, who kept a coffee house. On December 13th some persons came into the establishment and slit the throats of both the widow and her niece. The perpetrators removed four rings from the widow’s fingers and then ransacked the house.

A similar incident was described in the case of Mrs. Jewers.²⁵ Upon the death of her husband, Mrs. Jewers was left with a small house in Angel-Ally. She would often take in lodgers in order to supplement her income, which resulted in her murder.

²³ Ibid., 1.

²⁴ Anonymous, *Barbarous and Bloody News from the Parish of St. Giles’s* (London, 1690).

²⁵ Anonymous, “Bloody and Barbarous News from Bishopsgate-street” (London, 1678).

As the pamphlet presumes, “Tis supposed she had been so indiscreet as to show or declare to these ill people, what Plate or Money she had.”²⁶ However her tenants learned about her wealth, the result was quite apparent. Upon the subterfuge of being invited to dinner, the landlady entered their room only to be strangled.

While the previous two cases described widows who were involved in business, married women were also vulnerable when performing the duties of their husbands. *The Bloody Quaker* (1668) describes one such instance. Mr. Hamond, being in Ireland, sent his wife to collect a debt.²⁷

Over into England comes this innocent woman, little dreaming the date of her life was so near expiring, the poor woman was glad she had escaped the dangers of the Sea, little mistrusting a far greater danger attended her on land.²⁸

The woman was overtaken on the road by Farmer Restal, the debtor. In an effort to retrieve the bond from her, using a bill, he “cleft her head, so that the poor soul presently dyed.”²⁹ While entrusted with the redemption of the bond by her husband, she was left vulnerable to the desperation of Farmer Restal. As was the case with so many of these incidents, women were in danger in the absence of male protection.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Anonymous, “The Bloody Quaker” (London, 1668).

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

Wives Who Kill

When considering cases of husband murder, the later pamphlets differ from those printed in the earlier part of the century. The women discussed in the previous section were clearly victims of crimes, but even when they were committing crimes, women were often viewed with sympathy. No longer relying on the good versus bad dichotomy, the pamphlets often sympathize with the female, who is seen as driven to murder by an abusive husband.³⁰ This does not mean that suddenly women were being mistreated by their husbands; it appears that the recognition of female misfortune had begun to permeate popular culture. Women were still considered culpable for these crimes and were consequently punished, but there is a sympathy in these pamphlets that was not prevalent in the early half of the century. They may not be innocent victims such as those described in the previous section, but they were also not evil females preying on their poor husbands.

The consciousness of the fallibility of the patriarchal structure caused the female condition to be observed in a more sympathetic manner. This recognition, however, did not lead to innovative changes for women. While the pamphlets regarded the mistreatment of women as deplorable, they did not call for an overhaul in the philosophical or legal structure.³¹ Instead, the dreadful state of the female reinforced the need for her to be protected, thus giving a renewed purpose to

³⁰ For examples of earlier pamphlets see: Anonymous, *The Araignment and Burning of Margaret Ferne-Seede* (London, 1608), Anonymous, *Murther, Murther* (London, 1641).

³¹ The 1670 Act for the Better Settling of Intestates' Estates further limited female entitlement to personal property. For more information on this subject see: Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

patriarchy. While placing blame on the failure of the system on the man, women were not empowered, only pitied.

Not all of the pamphlets explicitly sympathized with the murderous wife, but the absence of scandalous character description is a stark contrast to pamphlets in the earlier half of the century. One earlier pamphlet compares the disorderly wife to a prostitute, indicating that a show of individual will represented a decline in moral character. A wife was advised, “not to selfe-willed, but diligent, not to be like a strange woman, which wandereth abroad in the twi-light to get a prey, but to be constant and loving...”³²

This pamphlet further described the wife who was guilty of murdering her husband as an unkind woman who delighted in her husband’s misfortune. Dramatic language was used to illustrate her evil character, “Oh then thou savage woman, why unto blood wert thou addicted, as to destroy thy loving and kind husband?”³³ The earlier representations of female crime were steeped in melodrama. The woman was never justified in her actions and the man whom she killed was often described as completely innocent. That is not the case for pamphlets in the latter half of the century.

An example of this change can be seen in *Great and Bloody News from Farthing Ally* (1680), describing the murder of Mr. Osilly by his wife.³⁴ Margaret Osilly could not be described as a model wife, but while her actions were deplorable,

³² Anonymous, *Murther, Murther* (London, 1641), 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ Anonymous, *Great and Bloody News from Farthing Ally* (London, 1680).

her husband's flawed character was included in the description as well. Returning from the Beargarden, Walter took his wife drinking with their neighbors. Upon returning home, they had a quarrel resulting in Margaret receiving some blows from the hand of her husband. He was so consumed with drink that he presently fell asleep, or more likely passed out, leaving Margaret to enact her revenge by attacking him with an axe. Even with the barbarous nature of her crime, the pamphlet does not offer elaborating character descriptions. Style could have played a part in this change, although depictions of men perpetrating crimes are openly critical.

This is also the case in *Bloody News from Southwark*.³⁵ Even though the wife was presumed to be involved in the crime, interestingly, the pamphlet does not attempt to blacken her character. Both husband and wife are described as civil and from appearances living "very lovingly together."³⁶ He had been keeper of the Ship Inne and a strongwater-shop before his demise.

On the day of his murder he was drinking at his establishment with his wife and another woman, believed to be her kinswoman. Upon the prompting of his wife, he was sent home in the care of this other woman to sleep off his drink. The woman was with him in his chamber about an hour, according to the maid, tapster, and hostler at the Ship Inne. When the other woman emerged from the room, bolting the door, she told the maid that he was resting and should not be disturbed.

³⁵ Anonymous, *Bloody News from Southwark* (London, 1676).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

The woman returned a few hours later and upon entering the room, called for the maid, claiming that the master appeared to be dead. The description of his body and the nature of his wounds were very detailed. They,

...found him lying dead upon the bed, the greatest part of his body covered over with bed clothes, and two Pillows on his feet, as she had said she left him, but very strangely wounded about the Neck and Head; one very large wound or slash behind his Ear down towards his Throat, another before his Ear upon the Cheek, and a third behind upon his Neck. A great quantity of blood lay in the floor of the Room at some distance fro, the bed, an not very much upon the bed-clothes. The blood had run a great deal upon his right Arm, which lay hanging down over the bed, and his left hand placed upon his breast was very much bruised, so that is lookt black.³⁷

This description offers a representative sample of the technical changes in the pamphlet style. While the description is gory in some respects, it is more preoccupied with being precise than with titillating the reader with gruesome details.

Knowing that his goods would be seized when word got out of his death, his wife and her kinswoman took as much away as they could before the constable found out about the matter. The witnesses to this scene found a pistol near the bed; they concluded that self-murder must be the solution. The constable, however, did not believe self-murder explained the state of the corpse. Even with the wife's attestation that her husband had been lately melancholy, she and her kinswoman were held on suspicion of murder.

While it obviously inferred the probability that the wife and her kinswoman were involved in crime, the case was relayed in an objective manner without trying to discredit the wife beyond what the evidence itself revealed. Not necessarily revealed

³⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

to be vulnerable, the wife was not demonized. This was also true in the case of Mary Aubry who murdered her husband and scattered pieces of his body about town.³⁸ Even with the barbarity inherent in such an action, the pamphlet does not dramatize the case.

The woman in the next case was not described in the positive terms found in the previous two, but considering that Mr. Lillyman was her sixth husband, the description of her character was mild.³⁹ She was described as living “a life somewhat extravagant and expensive for one of her condition...”⁴⁰ Her husband was described as “a lusty comely man,” a few years her junior. This difference in age caused certain jealousies to arise, but instead of using this fact to denounce her character, the pamphlet admits the prolific disturbance that jealousy caused to marriages by stating, “...the poison of jealousie, which often is the disturber of the discreetest marriages...”⁴¹

This weakness, which plagued many marriages, was exploited by the devil, who tempted Mrs. Lillyman into evil acts, “Satan takeing the advantage of her being in one of these Jealous moods...prevailed on her barbarously to imbrue her hands in his blood...”⁴² The influence of Satan was a common construction used to describe

³⁸ Anonymous, *An Account of the Manner, Behavior and Execution of Mary Aubry* (London, 1687).

³⁹ Anonymous, *A Compleat Narrative of the Tryal of Elizabeth Lillyman* (London, 1675).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

the reason people committed crimes. Although such imagery is often connected to witchcraft, the use of such examples was prevalent with male perpetrated crime as well and therefore does not necessarily take on a gendered meaning.

While the pamphlets just discussed were characterized by mild rebukes, the case of Sarah Elston, printed in 1678, actually sympathized, to a degree, with the wife. In this case, it states that their marital discord could not be blamed on Sarah, “some now would partly excuse the woman, and alleage the man as the principal Cause of their Differences by his ill husbandry, cross carriage, ill company, and other provocations.”⁴³ The husband, while the victim, was not a blameless party. Instead of the evil woman murdering the exemplary man, a woman was driven to murder by ill use.

The crime itself was relayed in the first page of the pamphlet; the rest was dedicated to her confession and conversion. In Sarah’s case, her crime actually became her salvation. “I know not whether we should more admire the wisdom or the mercy of God in his proceeding with this poor Creature: had she not been guilty of Blood, ‘tis probable she had never known the worth of the pretious blood of Christ.”⁴⁴

On the day of her execution, Sarah offered her confession and advice to the crowd. Even in her deplorable situation, she was able to appear as the model wife, wishing she could offer her life for her husband. She confessed, “how well she had loved him, and that even then, notwithstanding all his Abuses, she could have given

⁴³ Anonymous, *A Warning for Bad Wives* (London, 1678), 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

her own life to have saved his.”⁴⁵ She was portrayed as a murderer who could be admired. Her suffering was not denied, neither was her guilt, but she was not described as an evil villain. Instead, she was depicted as a woman who was driven to rashness through abuse and subsequently found her redemption. Sarah was representative of the abused woman, who, despite her suffering realized the error in her ways.

Female Villainy

The women discussed in the previous sections were not living outside the accepted social structure. Even widows whose very existence put stress on the strict gender boundaries were not necessarily rebelling against the system. Wives who murdered their husbands were culpable for their crimes but were often represented as victims driven to rashness. Female thieves and prostitutes, on the other hand, represented social evils, and as a result, there is a distinct lack of pity for these women.

In the sample of pamphlet literature, there are very few cases that describe murders committed by women in order to obtain money. Once such case, *A True Relation of the Life and Conversation of Margaret Martel* (1697), described the murder of Mistress Pullyn committed by Margaret Martel.⁴⁶ This crime was committed by a Frenchwoman living in England. The crime was described as

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, *A True Relation of the Life and Conversation of Margaret Martel, that Murder'd Mistress Pullyn* (London, 1697).

particularly odious because Margaret had known Mistress Pullyn, having lived with her when she first came to England, and because it was a premeditated act. While awaiting trial, “she Confessed, that she had committed this Bloody Murder; and that she had Premeditated it above three Months.”⁴⁷

The introduction to this pamphlet described the questionable background and parentage of Margaret Martel. Her personal indiscretions were also included, specifically her adherence to Catholicism and giving birth to a son without any mention of her being married. The meticulous planning of her crime was also included in the discussion, which emphasized the deviousness of her crime.

The cruelty behind female theft is most pronounced in the case of the yeoman who was murdered in his own home. Printed in 1684, *Murther upon Murther* described six different cases of murder that had recently been committed. The final case involved the burglary of a house in Yorkshire by a gang of thieves. Believing that the owner had a large sum of money, the thieves entered the house, binding and gagging the family. After torturing the husband and wife by burning their fingers, the thieves discovered that only six pounds were left in the house after the farmer had paid his yearly rent. After ransacking the house of what valuables they could find, they prepared to leave,

but the Woman Thief being most cruel, would have perswaded her Comrades to Kill the whole Family, but the men were of a little better Nature, though otherwise Cruel enough, and refused to do so Wicked a deed, but she being Instigated by the Devil, took a Knife which she had in her Bosom and thrust it into the body of the Man, and then departed with the rest of her Company.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, *Murther Upon Murther* (London, 1684), 8.

While the actions of the male thieves were not exonerated, it was the woman who was described as most cruel. This woman, who presumably spent her time in the company of men, represented the dangers of female disorder. Her crime was unnecessary and vengeful. The fact that she kept her knife “near her bosom,” sexualized her action.

Another case that drew attention to a female murdering for financial gain was discussed in the pamphlet printed in 1661, *An Exact Relation of the Barbarous Murder Committed on Lawrence Corddel*.⁴⁹ This pamphlet describes a Landlady, referred to as Jezebel, who buried her tenant alive in order to sell his goods. She was characterized as “his fat Landlady; who to raise her one stock by the sins of the people was always willing to keep her tap going to any such noble Customers as he, who was easily perswaded to spend all in her service.”⁵⁰ The implication behind this characterization involved her explicitly in her tenant’s drunkenness. When the man was unable to be roused the next morning she sent for a coffin to have him buried despite the protests of her husband. Her command within the home represented an inverted gender relationship between herself and her husband, stated quite explicitly, “Thus having the better of him b[y] wearing the Britches, she like a Mr. of Mis-rule” invited guests to the burial which she held that same afternoon.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Anonymous, *An Exact Relation of the Barbarous Murder Committed on Lawrence Corddel* (London, 1661).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Corddel, her tenant, had for many years suffered from “Falling-Sickness” and unfortunately was not dead when he was buried. When the body was exhumed after neighbors complained of hearing cries from the area in which he was buried, bruises were found all over his body as he had fought to release himself from his tomb. Upon being questioned the landlady’s husband stated, “That he would not have had his wife bury him till Saturday, but she would be Master whether he would or no.”⁵² The pamphlet ended with a warning to husbands about the dangers of their wives being masters over them.

The gendered message in this case was more explicit than most, but it demonstrates a contemporary belief about the dangers of domineering wives. While wives could, theoretically be controlled, however, the same was not the case with prostitutes. Prostitutes were often independent of male authority. The cases that include prostitutes have similar features. They are always accused of instigating the crime and the subsequent murder that is committed is often the wife of their “client.” Most of the crimes instigated by a prostitute were perpetrated on other females. Such was the case in *Gods Justice Against Murther* discussed in the first section. The maid was the vulnerable victim of male violence, but the crime was blamed on the female prostitute.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the involvement of prostitutes in murder inverted the gender relationship between the man and his whore. Thus the man was relegated to a subordinate position by being dominated by a woman, often further illustrated by his use of poison as a murder weapon.

⁵² Ibid., 1.

Even though it was considered a common murder weapon used by women, very few pamphlets describe poisonings. Aside from the cases discussed where husbands used poison against their wives, only a small number of cases of poisoning could be found. One case, printed in 1673, actually occurred in France, but was printed in London to show the “Impieties in all Kingdoms.”⁵³ The woman in this case came from an illustrious family, but having squandered her wealth, she formed an intimate relationship with an apothecary and planned to dispatch her relatives. By sending poison-filled packages to their homes, in one year’s time she was sole heir to her father’s estate. The pamphlet decried her villainy stating, “Oh horred Cruelty! Oh Damnable Woman! Worse than a Cannibal, who though he destroy his kind, preserves his kindred.”⁵⁴

The woman in this case was married, but her husband was said to frequent “Ladies of pleasure,” and as a result his wife began a relationship with her footman. This was a complete breakdown of the family, which accounted for her debauched behavior.

These cases represented all the fears about the stereotypes of the female criminal. The crimes are premeditated, some using poison, and the gender roles between men and women were often inverted. The women described here represented the dangers posed to society when women lived outside the proscribed gender roles.

⁵³ Anonymous, *The Cruel French Lady* (London, 1673).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Conclusion

The women described in this chapter have one similarity: either as agents or victims, they were all disorderly in some way. The female victim and the female criminal represented the disorder that resulted in the absence of a strong, properly functioning patriarchal structure. These cases highlighted social anxieties, but they also reinforced the need for stability.

While there were cases that focused on female crimes, many cases highlighted the “natural feebleness” of women in an attempt to justify a male dominated social structure. In the descriptions of murderous wives, the pamphlets may describe their crimes, but ultimately the fault lies with the husband who was unable to control his wife. These works offer a means to see into the fears and tensions of the social structure of this period. In a time of social upheaval, the crimes of women received different treatment in the pamphlet literature.

Crimes involving independent women were still censured, but women were increasingly being seen sympathetically. Women were characterized as the victims of abusive husbands, landlords, and servants. While this obviously relayed fears about disorder and unchecked patriarchy, the vulnerability of women served as a means to reinforce the need for proper male dominance. The roles might be questioned, but essentially they did not change, because the overarching hegemonic structure remained the same.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519-531.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts...¹

Is there evidence of a gender crisis in the period from 1660 to 1700? Since the historians who have argued for and against this have been remiss in defining what actually constitutes a crisis, it is difficult to evaluate. Generally speaking, a crisis marks a turning point, and while I have argued that this period witnessed changes in the theory behind patriarchy, the status quo remained the same. As the pamphlets have shown, there were clear indications of gender tension and social apprehension, but there was not a decisive beginning to this nor was there an end. The negotiation of gender roles continued and many would argue still remains.

The late seventeenth century was characterized by an almost unrelenting onslaught of political and social upheaval. The very foundation of government shifted from one based on divine right to a parliamentary monarchy. The country was plagued by war throughout the period and in the short intervals of peace demobbed soldiers and seamen created an atmosphere of unrest. Religious tension continued to be an ongoing problem as the country fluctuated from Protestantism to Catholicism based on who was in power. Therefore, it is not surprising that disorderly behavior became a focal point for public dialogue. As Susan Dwyer Amussen argued, due to the inseparable philosophical relationship between the family and the state, if the family was in disorder so, too, was

¹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.8.141-144.

the state. These pamphlets reveal that the reverse was also true. The disorder within the state could also cause the order, or disorder, in the family to come under public scrutiny. This took many different forms: conduct books, shaming rituals, and in more severe instances prosecution.

The pamphlets offered a medium to negotiate the prescribed, and often idealized, gender roles, especially when disorderly behavior became violent. Although they were not technical legal documents with a standard form, the authors used these sources to voice concerns about social disorder. What cases printers chose to print and the manner in which they presented the material indicate elements of character construction. While the basic facts of the case might follow court records, the narrative aspects of these pamphlets have a performative component that cannot be overlooked. As to the validity of the content, exaggeration is always possible and in many cases might have been utilized to make the work more appealing, but even such exaggerations can be revealing. In this manner, pamphlets reflected popular anxiety as well as revealing attitudes towards certain types of behavior. By questioning unruly behavior, these sources attempted to restore stability and convince the populace of the importance of performing their gender role properly. As the quote above alludes to “All the world’s a stage...and one man in his time plays many parts,” one of which is gender.

Since proper gender roles are based on constructed ideals, there is never absolute conformity to a prescribed system. Therefore, the pamphlets were instrumental in revealing flawed behavior. In most cases this took the form of extreme deviations from proper forms of behavior, but there is evidence that even types of behavior that were accepted, such as patriarchal authority, when unchecked could be ridiculed. However, the

objective of these censures was not to overturn the existing social system, but to reaffirm the need for order.

The second chapter indicates the relative truth behind some gendered perceptions of crime. As reported in these sources, most crimes involving women, either as perpetrators or victims, were enacted in the area around the home. Even though men did commit crimes in the home, especially when the victim was their spouse, they were far more likely than women to commit crimes in a public setting. The spatial connection between these crimes reaffirmed the public/private sphere of men and women.

However, the types of weapons that were used were not gender exclusive. The only weapons that were utilized only by men were the gun and the sword. All other weapons, save for a few minor variations, were used by both men and women. The characterization of female poisoners was supported by these sources, but men were also found to use poison as a means of murder, thus invalidating the exclusive connection of this weapon with women. Nevertheless, the pamphlet authors did attempt to blame the use of poison by men on female instigators. This, coupled with the inclusion of cases involving female poisoners that were imported from another country, indicates that there was an effort to construct an image of the female criminal.

The male criminal, on the other hand, was not free from construction either. As disorder became increasingly under the scrutiny of the public, male behavior that deviated from the culturally prescribed model came under attack. Pamphlets that described male perpetrated crimes increasingly characterized the men by their barbarous behavior. The order of society—and the family—was based on the ability of men to maintain control. In this manner, men were censured for not conforming to the proper

patriarchal structure, but this also enabled contemporaries to voice concerns about unchecked male authority and the dangers that could result. This is most clear in cases that censured excessive abuse, but concerns were not only focused on violent behavior. There are also more subtle indications of apprehension in regards to the social status of the men in question and their morality. The pamphlets might have become more secularized, but that did not mean that they lost their moralizing agenda. This was generally directed at sexual behavior, but could also encompass issues of greed.

These concerns, however, did not lead to a change in the social structure. While the pamphlets characterized women in a more positive manner than found in previous periods, they also emphasized female weakness. In the same manner that pamphlets attacked male deviancy, they also proved the necessity of strong patriarchal authority. This was especially targeted at widows, who for centuries had been a strain on the existing social paradigm. A woman living alone and financially independent posed a serious threat to the patriarchal rhetoric. Therefore, cases that described the tragedies that befell such women helped to validate male authority, while also creating an atmosphere of fear. Likewise, the female prostitute, another type of independent woman, was denounced in various cases as instigators of violence and disorder.

Aside from cases condemning prostitutes, women were generally described in more sympathetic terms, in some cases even driven to their acts of violence. During the period under investigation there is evidence of an increased recognition of the female condition. However, it is this characterization of the female as a victim that proved the necessity of male control. The image of women as portrayed through these sources indicated that, without proper male protection, women were at the mercy of deviant men

or ran the risk of falling into aberrant behavior. Even female deviancy could be avoided if men maintained proper control.

As this research has shown the pamphlets reveal part of a dialogue of social negotiation. Beyond depicting crimes, they represented fears and tensions that were prevalent in the period. While the focus of this study has been primarily on elements of gender, the pamphlets reveal other social tensions as well. One area that deserves further research is the changing attitudes toward social groups. For example, in pamphlets written in the last twenty years of the seventeenth century there is evidence of a focus on aristocratic disorder coupled with an increased sympathy for the poor. The pamphlets could also be useful in providing invaluable information on perceptions of female sexuality and prostitution. As sources, these pamphlets enable historians to view the social dialogue of this period, and they should be utilized as far more than documents on murder.

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