Women, Performance, and the Household in Early Modern England
1580-1660

by

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Abstract

The texts and records of the household performances of early modern women collected and examined in this thesis, which together have not yet been the subject of any extended scholarly work, reveal that women performed in the household far more often and in many more ways than is yet acknowledged in scholarship. These texts and records also show that the household could be an amenable performance space for early modern women, both amateur and professional, aristocratic and not. This reconceptualization of the place of women’s performances in the household, I argue, necessitates an adjustment of received ideas of the ethical and moral status of those performances as well as a reevaluation of the household itself. I reassess the equation between theatrical performance and immorality and interrogate the “inherent subversiveness” that one critic argues is found in all women’s household plays. While I maintain that women’s household performances could have multiple significations, this thesis focuses on performances that permitted women to shape their own reputations positively in household space, where women were agents influencing domestic life through their theatre. Chapter 1, the Introduction, outlines the critical field, positions women within the performance tradition of the household, and discusses the status of their performances, centering on the relationship between theatrical performance, agency, and feminine virtue. Chapter 2 focuses on royal progress entertainment, discussing the performances of domestic virtue of Queen Elizabeth’s female hosts which not only had the capacity to be received as virtuous, but worked to promote familial and class
legitimacy. Chapter 3 talks about the banquets created and served by women, identifying those banquets as a form of theatre, and linking women’s creativity with their embodiment of domestic ideals through the performance of hospitality. Chapter 4 discusses touring women performers as accepted, acknowledged, and skillful theatre professionals who were licenced by the state to perform and who were permitted to perform in households and towns across England.
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The Texts and Records of Women’s Household Theatre in Early Modern England

We have not . . . theorized within the cultural strategies of theatre history of almost any form of event that is non-metropolitan and/or non-professional.

— Peter Holland

The remaining texts and records of early modern women’s household theatre document a rich and various performance tradition. To give a few examples, in both 1626 and 1627, Judith Edwards staged masques for her daughter, Susan (Sussex 198). Women in the family of Sir Thomas Salusbury performed in his plays and masques which were “presented in a variety of manor houses” in the 1630s (Stokes, “Women and Mimesis” 186). Salusbury’s A Masque at Knowsley House (1640), commissioned and performed by the Stanley family, featured male and female aristocratic actors in speaking roles. A masque was performed by the daughters of Sir John Croft at Croft’s house, Saxham Parva, on 22 December 1621 (McGee and Meagher, “Preliminary Checklist of Tudor and Stuart Entertainments: 1614-25” 101). In Eccles, the St Mary’s Parish Register records the 1616 death of “Ellen Thropp, called Mr Atherton’s fool” (Lancashire 244). Thropp also appears in the household account books of the Shuttleworth family as

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1 Holland “Theatre without Drama” 53-4.
a temporary dairy keeper, and, possibly, as a musician representing Atherton (Harland 39-40).\footnote{In 1587, \textit{The House and Farm Accounts of the Shuttleworths of Gawthorpe Hall} record a payment to “Ellen Throppe the dey [dairy keeper] for a quarter and a forte night services” (40); earlier in that year, the Shuttleworth accounts record a payment to “a musicione of Mr. Athertones” (39) who could possibly be Thropp herself, though this is not verifiable. If Thropp was the musician, she would have worked as fool to Atherton, as a temporary dairy keeper to the Shuttleworth family, and, possibly, as a musician paid by the Shuttleworths over the course of her lifetime.}

\footnote{BL 25707 contains evidence of the dramatic pieces performed by Huntingdon’s circle. Furthermore, the dramatic games included in Sloane 848 following the manuscript account of the entertainment given to welcome the Dowager Countess of Derby at Ashby by the Countess of Huntingdon in 1607 might have been played and performed by the circle as well.}

\footnote{Although the scope of this study is restricted to late sixteenth and seventeenth century drama, there is evidence, like the Cawarden record, which substantiates women’s involvement in medieval and late-medieval household theatre. See especially Suzanne Westfall “‘A Commonty a Christmas gambold or a tumbling trick’” 39-58 and James Stokes “Women and Mimesis” 187.}

The Countess of Huntingdon had a dramatic circle at house, Ashby.\footnote{In 1533 Thomas Cawarden was commissioned by the Earl of Northumberland “to apoynt out a couple of fayre masques, oon of men and another of women” to be performed at a number of weddings (Stokes, “Women and Mimesis” 186). Margaret Robert orchestrated a spectacle for which she borrowed a horse to have it beaten, possibly as entertainment (Sussex 208). On 28 April 1607, the Churchwarden’s Presentments to the Peculiar Court in Wimbourne Minster “present[ed] margaret fuller for kyping of play at service & sermon” (Bristol 285). And in the mid-1670s, the Bruce family commissioned two plays from R. Carleton, one of which, \textit{The Martial Queen}, featured an almost all-female cast,}
complete with women dressed as men.\textsuperscript{5}

None of these records or texts has been the subject of extended scholarly discussion. All of them confront in important ways the prevailing narratives of women, theatre, and the household in early modern England. Plays and records which document the range of women’s household performances put to rest the fiction that theatre before 1660 was the exclusive purview of men.\textsuperscript{6} These examples also indicate that women performed in far more various ways than the few acknowledged exceptions—the silent dances of female masquers, closet dramas written (and perhaps performed) by a select group of elite women, and performances in guild drama—allow.\textsuperscript{7} The large number of

\textsuperscript{5} Carleton’s manuscript, MS Eng Poet d2 is at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The manuscript also features other plays written for the Bruce family, including Concealed Royalty or The May Queen (performed 1674).

\textsuperscript{6} For more on women’s theatre, both amateur and professional, see Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin’s Women Players in England, 1500-1660. Sophie Tomlinson’s Women on Stage in Stuart Drama finds too that the emergence of the actress on the Restoration stage was the culmination of the dramatic engagement of women throughout the seventeenth century, though she focuses exclusively on the performances of aristocratic women:

if we take a long view of the sixty-year period leading up to the Restoration, it is possible to chart changes of attitude towards the idea of actresses in English society, culminating in the experimental productions of William Davenant in the late 1650s in which women stand on a semi-public stage. These changes can be shown to have originated in the innovative theatrical performances of the Danish Queen Anna and the French Queen Henrietta-Maria at the early Stuart courts. (2)

As for the performances of women before the Restoration which are acknowledged as a part of theatrical history, there has been, of course, much scholarship.

\textsuperscript{7} On women in masque, see especially Claire McManus Women on the Renaissance Stage 1-59. Women’s closet dramas and their performability have been the subject of much criticism; see Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, and Gwen Williams’s Women and Dramatic Production 68-95 in particular. Finally, for a discussion of women’s involvement in guild drama, see James Stokes “Women and
extant plays and records also raise the important question of whether women’s performances in the household were as morally vexed as is frequently claimed. Scholars, like those included in the collection *Women Players in England 1500-1660* in particular, are beginning to be more and more aware that women’s customary exclusion from the commercial stages of London was anomalous in a culture where women performed in every other theatrical medium. Concomitant with this recognition of women’s imbrication in the dramatic culture of early modern England, though, needs to be an interrogation of received ideas about the ethics of women’s performances, which still equate performance with improper sexual display and a “disgrace to the feminine sense of shame and modesty” (qtd. in Shohet 147), in the words of Puritan John Rainolds. Simply put, our rubrics for understanding the moral and ethical position of women’s performances in early modern culture have not shifted with the mounting evidence of women’s performances in the household. Moreover, we do not have an available rubric with which to read the many extant women’s household performances that were not openly subversive, oppositional, contestatory, or even controversial.

Despite the wealth of available materials, critics of household theatre still read its plays and performances quite narrowly. Greg Walker and Suzanne Westfall, both of whom write exclusively on early Tudor household theatre, read household plays as “a prominent form of largess and education (perhaps to the point of propaganda), and a means of ensuring political and aesthetic control through household lines” (Westfall,

Performance” 25-43.
Neither Walker nor Westfall attend to women’s performances in any depth, and their focus on one type of household theatre, drama performed either by touring troupes or by in-house performers in the homes of the elite, ignores many of its manifestations. Feminist scholars of household theatre, who tend to centre on the scripted drama of the women of the aristocratic Cavendish and Sidney circles in the seventeenth century, present a similarly narrow reading of women’s household performances. Alison Findlay’s Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama argues convincingly for the ways in which women’s drama imaginatively transforms household space, but Findlay also positions women’s theatre in binary opposition to Walker and Westfall’s elite political theatre by nature of its “inherent subversion” (12) of the place and proper duties of women in the household:

8 Walker modifies Westfall’s thesis somewhat, arguing that courtier-playwrights could, through their entertainments, instruct their patrons and exert political influence through their drama (51-2).

9 Alison Findlay’s work on women’s household performances has set the standard in the field. See Women and Dramatic Production especially 68-94, Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama 68-95, and “Playing the ‘Scene-Self” 154-76. For other perspectives on women’s household theatre, see also Marion Wynne Davies’s “My Seeled Chamber and Dark Parlour Room” 60-8 and “Here is a sport will well befit this time and place”’ 47-63.
Findlay’s argument repeats the standard line in scholarship on women’s theatre which says that when women like Cavendish and Brackley did take to the stage in their household plays, their performances were exceptional, subversive, and feminist *avant la lettre*. Because theatrical performance and womanly virtue, in Findlay’s conventional reading of early modern culture, are antitheses, women’s performances necessarily challenge and confront the patriarchal household, and as such are always already subversive.

But the existing texts and records of women’s household theatre contradict this limited reading. The texts and records collected in this thesis, which have not yet been the subject of any extended scholarly work, reveal that women performed in the household far more often and in many more various ways than has yet been acknowledged. They also reveal that the household could be an amenable performance space for early modern women, both amateur and professional, aristocratic and not. Given the accumulation of evidence of women’s household performances in the Records of Early English Drama and in the archives, ought we not be open to understanding the status of women’s performances in the household differently? Also, should not women’s plays and performances be acknowledged as having multiple significations, instead of a fixed meaning? Even considering the ephemeral and frequently non-textual nature of household theatre, which makes the survival of its records and texts uncertain at best, evidence survives which proves that early modern women did participate meaningfully in household theatre. Furthermore, the accumulated evidence indicates that, although women’s performances could be subversive, their performances were not *a priori*
Against the evidence of women’s performances we have very little proof to support the notion that theatrical performance in the household was necessarily scandalous and a risk to a woman’s reputation. This evidence consists of the oft-quoted anti-theatrical and misogynistic rants against women’s performances by William Prynne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Stephen Gosson as well as the prescriptions of conduct literature.  

As Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin write of the anti-theatrical statements against women performers leveled by the Puritan Tractarians:

‘Notorious whores,’ ‘unnatural bearded ladies, ‘lean-cheek’d Moors,’ ‘French women, or monsters rayther,’ ‘immodest and lascivious’ entertainers, actresses ‘hissed, hooted and pippin-pelted from the stage,’ ‘unchaste shamelesse and unnatural’ Italian acrobats, ‘squirting baudie comedians,’ ‘common Curtizens,’ ‘a Pantaloun, a Whore and a Zanie’ — all are contemporary reactions to women players. Reading such phrases in the scanty literature on the topic, one might assume that everyone found female performers repellent . . . In fact, the evolving picture pieced together . . . shows [that] the woman player was a lively presence whose impact on culture and drama was profound, and demands more attention than given the subject by studies focused on anomalies, absences, and ‘firsts.’ (2-3)

Additionally, this ‘evolving picture’ which puts antitheatrical discourse in its place needs to acknowledge that the chief concern of these anti-theatrical sources is not household performance, but, as the list cited above make clear, the performances of foreign actresses, court masquers, and touring performers.

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10 Both Brown and Parolin 2-3 and Lauren Shohet’s “Figuring Chastity” 146-50 summarize antitheatrical discourse as they relate to women’s theatre, including the arguments of Prynne, Hutchinson, and Rainolds 147-8. See also Prynne’s Histriomastix, The Player’s Scourge; Hutchinson’s Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson (42); Gosson’s The schoole of abuse.
Conduct book writers do not address women’s household performance directly either, nor do they include it among the small range of activities deemed acceptable for early modern women. There is some debate between conduct book writers about the seemliness of practices related to household performance like musical performance and the reading or attending of plays. Richard Braithwait’s *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), for instance, condemns those women who “sacrifice the Morne to their Glasse, the Afternoone to the Stage, and the Evening to revelling” (no pagination). In *The Mirrhor of Modestie* (1579), Thomas Salter addresses the debate over the appropriateness of women’s musical performance, acknowledging that most deem musical performance to be an acceptable activity for a virtuous woman, though he does not:

But now adaies it semely to some, and that to the most parts, thaut it is a godly ornament, and a brave settyne [. . .] to a yong Maiden, if she emong the rest [. . .] shewe herself, to be an excellent fine singer, or a cunning plaier upon Instrumentes . . . I for my parte doe not only discommente, but judge that a thing of no little daunger, which ought in all women to be eschewed. For Musicke if it be used to a laudable and good intentiō, hath no evill in it, but deserveth a place emong the other Artes, the which appertainyng properly to menne. (45)

In contrast to these negative attitudes towards women’s play-going and musicianship, conduct books do affirm widely that women were responsible for providing hospitality to guests. Felicity Heal notes that English women had a large role in household life, and that they “exercized greater control over domestic affairs” than women in Europe (*Hospitality* 179). Heal’s explanation for why this was the case, quoting from the advice

11 See Deborah Harkness in “Managing an Experimental Household” 251-2. Harkness writes that women were “educated in housewifery” in the period, and learned how to cook, sew, manage money, and “offer [the] hospitality that was an important feature of any Christian household”(251).
Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland, gave to his son reveals that it was the demands of English hospitality [that accounted for women’s large amount of domestic control and involvement]: since a man had to pursue business elsewhere, his wife perforce had to manage the domestic establishment, ‘entertayning all comers, conducting there guests to there chambers; carefull of there breakfasts, keeping them company at cards, with many more complements of this nature.’ (Hospitality 179)

William Gouge in Of Domesticall Duties (1622) affirms Northumberland’s advice, writing that it is the responsibility of husbands and wives to offer hospitality to “such as come to their house” and offer them “kind and courteous entertainment” (262). Indeed, Gouge asserts that “the entertainment will be better by mutuall help” (262), that is, if both husband and wife entertain their guests together. Gouge in all probability does not use the word “entertainment” in the sense of theatre here, but, at the same time, given the theatrical nature of hospitality in this period which involved not just the performance of plays but dance, music, and spectacular, theatrical banquets, this endorsement of women’s role in hospitality counters, to some extent, the anti-theatrical and negative attitudes to women’s performance and theatrical involvement expressed elsewhere in conduct and anti-theatrical literature.¹²

Additionally, while the prescriptions of conduct literature, antitheatrical tracts, and the customary exclusion of women from performing on the London commercial

¹² Wotton even describes the house as a “theatre of . . . hospitality” in his Elements of Architecture:
Every mans proper Mansion house and home, being the theatre of his Hospitality, the seat of self-fruitition, the Comfortablest part of his own life, the Noblest of his son’s inheritance, a kind of private princedom; Nay, to the Possessors thereof an Epitome of the whole World; may well deserve by these Attributes, according to the degree of the master, to be decently and delightfully adorned.(qtd. in Heal, Hospitality 6-7)
stages are important, it is necessary to separate practice from theory, life from conduct literature, household theatre from the commercial and court stages. As Lena Cowen Orlin writes, “while it is important to establish the guiding structures for domestic life by referring to contemporary literature about how it should have been conducted, we can also find many points of access to how it was actually conducted” (*Elizabethan Households* vii). Furthermore, the use of tracts and conduct books as evidence of practice or of widely held beliefs and attitudes has been found by Thomas Postlewait to be an inconsistent and unconvincing means of gauging cultural beliefs.13 “Surely any attempt to construct what Hans Robert Jauss calls ‘the horizon of expectation’ for theatre performance must move beyond a few select textual documents (1982: 88)” (108), Postlewait writes. He continues, arguing that

all too often we tend to grant authoritative status to key documents, such as Stephen Gosson’s attack on the stage, even though these documents are not only highly idiosyncratic but quite marginal to the theatrical events and daily life we are attempting to understand. In the process we ignore some basic guidelines for historical evidence, such as the basic assumption that usually there needs to be proximity between evidence and event. So, a tract from 1579 written by Gosson (or a tract from 1583 written by Phillip Stubbes) is unlikely evidence for theatre practices and attitudes in 1605 or 1612 when Shakespeare and Jonson were writing. (108)

Moreover, Postlewait states that

the idea of antitheatricality . . . has distorted our understanding of not only the drama and theatre of the period but also the society and its religious and political conditions . . . Perhaps it is time to raise questions about both the historical place of antitheatrical attitudes in renaissance [sic] London and the assumptions that lead us into grand arguments about representation, theatre practices, and societal attitudes and values. (108-9)

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13 See also Stephen Orgel *Impersonations* 2-8.
Just as Gosson’s 1579 attack on the stage bears little relevance to a play like *As You Like It*, so too does Richard Braithwait’s 1631 *The English Gentlewoman*, which was published only twice, have little to do with the women listed at the start of this chapter. Even if conduct book and anti-theatrical writers addressed household performance by women directly, their opinions cannot be taken as straightforward evidence of public opinion or of widely held cultural attitudes.

It is undeniable that the *content* of some women’s plays is subversive. It is also undeniable that a woman performing would be intrinsically subversive in some households. But at the same time it is important to acknowledge that not all women’s theatre would have been received in this way. In this thesis, I am concerned especially with how some women performed in such a way that was not just socially acceptable, but also socially and politically advantageous. This reading of women’s theatre strikes new ground, presenting women’s theatrical performance as a medium in which women not only had agency but in which they also had a legitimate—and important—role in promoting personal and familial interests. Following an *a posteriori* approach to women’s household performances, as opposed to the *a priori* one which has characterized the field to date, I move away from received theories of the moral valence of women’s performances which were formulated before women’s performances in the household, or anywhere else in the culture, were acknowledged. Indeed, I argue that performance could be a tool for women to shape the perception of personal virtue.

I also consider women as writing and performing *within* a broad tradition of household theatre, one in which women were expected to entertain guests and serve
elaborate banquets. Women also could be involved in the entertainment program of their households as patrons, performers, or both, and even, in the case of lower class women, as professional touring performers. Such an examination of women’s household theatre brings to light a very different understanding of the performance culture of the early modern household than is current in scholarship, and in feminist scholarship in particular, but, given the amount of primary material still extant which as yet has no place in theories of household performance, just this kind of adjustment in how the field is understood is long overdue. Wendy Wall, in an article about critical practice, writes that while it has been important for current feminism to recover traces of women’s opposition to patriarchal norms throughout history (Krontris; Lewalski, Writing Women), we are now in a position to ask questions that elasticize our primary models. Women writers may no longer fit the pattern of heroic liberal subjects valiantly fighting patriarchy, but the trade-off is that their works allow for a more historically accurate picture of the circumstances in which gender functioned as a social force. (“Circulating Texts” 49-50)

The definition of ‘theatre’ used throughout this thesis differs with other definitions of the term articulated in theatre studies. Richard Schechner argues that theatre is specifically “an event enacted by a specific group of performers” and is usually “the manifestation or representation of the drama and/or script” (Performance Theory 72). Some of the events discussed in this thesis which I describe as theatre would not be defined by Schechner as theatre, but as performance. For Schechner, performance is “a broad spectrum of activities including at the very least the performing arts, healing, sports, popular entertainments, and performance in everyday life” (“Performance studies” 7). Critics like Peggy Phelan and Noel Carroll understand the distinction between performance and theatre in a similar fashion to Schechner. I move away from describing the events discussed in this thesis as performance because this term lacks the specificity to adequately explain the events designed and enacted by the women. The entertainments, banquets, and acts of itinerant performers discussed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were not just social performances, but events staged before an audience who knew they were watching a theatrical event. While the events discussed here were not always scripted, there was in all cases a guiding conceit which directed the presentation. What is more, there is no evidence to suggest that Schechner’s strict definition of theatre is consistent with Renaissance practice and terminology.
In terms of women’s household theatre, the records and plays document that such an elasticization of our historical models is necessary. Now it is time for early modern scholarly accounts of women performers in early modern England to catch up with the archives.

I.

Women’s Household Performances and Theatrical History

Writing about the lack of recognition of women’s performances in early modern scholarship, Stephen Orgel states that “obviously our evidence does not support any blanket claim that women were excluded from the stages of Renaissance England, but it may certainly indicate that the culture, and the history that descends from it, had an interest in rendering them unnoticeable” (8-9). Orgel is right to argue that women’s performances became invisible in literary scholarship and cultural history. However, women’s performances are not invisible in early modern record books nor would they have been invisible in the household itself. Clearly, then, this invisibility is not a cultural product of the Renaissance, but instead postdates the period. Such invisibility, in fact, probably has more to do with hierarchies of literary value imposed on Renaissance literature, which privilege the commercial stage over the household and court stages, more than anything else.

Take, for instance, the household account books of the Shuttleworth family, who were significant dramatic patrons at their two houses, Smithils and Gawthorpe. The
surviving accounts show that the mistresses of the house, first Margaret or Margery Shuttleworth, and her eventual successor, Fleetwood Shuttleworth, patronized players and musicians separately from their husbands, Sir Richard Shuttleworth and his heir, also Richard Shuttleworth.\textsuperscript{15} There are three kinds of records outlining the dramatic patronage of the Shuttleworths in the accounts, which run from 1582 to 1621. The first does not indicate who commissioned or sponsored the event, as in this record from 16 September 1612: “Item given to my Lord staffords players ... xl s. / Item given to Arture Gurney piper” (\textit{Lancashire} 173). The second type denotes an appointment of the players by the master of the house: “Item given to a piper by my master his appointment” (\textit{Lancashire} 172). The third kind specifies explicitly the performers and players who performed at the behest of the mistress of the house, Margery Shuttleworth from 1582 to 1592 and Fleetwood after 1608 and until 1621. A record from 17-23 January 1591 reads: “Item done by appointmente of my ladie unto players which came furthe of cheshire ... xijd” (\textit{Lancashire} 169). Other records outlining female patronage at Gawthorpe include: “Item to the piper of Padiham by my mistris appointment ... vj d./” (\textit{Lancashire} 171) (30 December 1609), “Item to foure musicians which came to gawthorpe by my mistris apointement ... xij d./” (\textit{Lancashire} 171) (30 December 1609), “Item to three musitians

\textsuperscript{15} Margery Shuttleworth died in 1592 and her husband Richard died in 1599 (Harland II. 288). Lawrence Shuttleworth inherited the house and estate from Richard Shuttleworth. Lawrence Shuttleworth never married and died in 1608. The mistress recorded in the household accounts at this time was likely his sister-in-law. But the evidence of women's taste and choice over the dramatic program of the household does not reemerge in the records until 1608-9, when Richard Shuttleworth inherited it. He was married to Fleetwood, daughter of Richard Barton of Barton. For more on Shuttleworth genealogy and the inheritance of the estate, see Part II of \textit{The House and Farm Accounts of the Shuttleworths of Gawthorpe Hall}. 

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by my mistris appointment . . . xij d./” (*Lancashire* 171) (2 January 1610), “Item given to a beareward by my mistris . . . xij d./” (*Lancashire* 173) (3 August 1612), “Item given to three plaiers by my mistris her appointment . . . xij d./” (*Lancashire* 176) (11 March 1617), and “to a pip at my Mps her commantment iiiij"” (*Harland* I: 218). This evidence of women’s direct patronage within the household, separate from their husbands’, demonstrates women’s agency and taste over the dramatic program of the household.

More than this, inscribed within the record books is evidence of women’s place in the theatrical culture of the household. There is a category for the patronage, choice, and display of beneficence of Margery Shuttleworth and Fleetwood Shuttleworth within the accounts just as there is a category for their husbands’ patronage. Neither of these women is any more invisible in the record books than is her husband.

What is more, the women of the Shuttleworth family were not exceptional in their patronage and dramatic involvement. Other household accounts reveal a similar discretion taken by women over the performances of touring troupes and minstrels. The household accounts of Thomas Walmesly from 3-19 February 1633-4 include a payment “given mrs Elenor which she gave the fiddlers at Christen mas 00 02 00” (*Lancashire* 205). In 1637-8 a payment was “given to man with a hobbie horse by Mrs Julian 00 02 06” (*Lancashire* 211). In 1640-1, another record relates a payment “given mrs Elenor to give dicke the fidler 00 02 06” (*Lancashire* 212). Similarly, the household account books of the Earl of Devon reveal payments to “the kyng servant to a harper and a tumler by my ladys grace commandment” (*Devon* 308) and “to the Kynges players *vidilicet* to englysse hys company for playeing before my ladies grace” (*Devon* 308). In the gentry family of
Curwen of Workington, in Cumberland, the accounts record payments for entertainments from the Lady of the House. A record from 15-24 September 1627-8 preserves her patronage: “to my Lady, for Anthony the [p]pyper” (Cumberland 129). In 1629-30, another record from the 26 September-4 October shows a payment “to the musicians for my Lady” (130). There are also records for payments to musicians on 27-29 September 1628 and on 18-23 April 1630-1 there is a payment “To players, by my Lady” (Cumberland 131). The accounts of a much richer family in Cumberland, the Howards of Nawarth, has left records of payments to performers who played under the authority of Mary Howard. On 27 February 1618-19, there is a payment “to iij minstreells given by mrs mary” (Cumberland 137). Howard also patronized fiddlers in 1618-19 (Cumberland 139), the players of Penreth in the November 1622-3 (Cumberland 140), a piper in 1626-30 (Cumberland 142), another piper in 1629-30 (Cumberland 142), a company of players in 1629-30 (Cumberland 143), “a fellow with a Hobbie Horse by my ladies Command” (Cumberland 143) in 1633-4, a piper on New Year’s day 1633-4 (Cumberland 143), “a blinde Harper” (Cumberland 143), and another harper (Cumberland 144). In addition to attesting to the very lack of invisibility of women in the performance culture of households described above, it also should be noted that these records of patronage need not be taken as evidence of women’s passive spectatorship. Studies of touring practices surmise, based on the repertoire of troupes and the representation of household performance by touring troupes in plays like Hamlet and Sir Thomas More, that a patron likely had some choice over what was performed and that the troupes might have even
In addition to the records attesting to a place for women’s taste and choice in the theatrical programs of their households, there is also evidence that architectural changes in the late sixteenth century within elite—and, to an extent—lower class dwellings also provided women with performance spaces in the great hall and beyond. The early great houses of the elite featured a great hall which was the ceremonial heart of the house. Household performances generally took place there, although, as Westfall notes, every part of the house was fair game for performance: “any space, from a bedchamber to a field in Calais, could and did become a stage, a fact that challenges twentieth-century notions of appropriate theater space” (Westfall, “A Commonyt a Christmas gambold” 42). As the sixteenth century went on, the hall diminished in importance and households began to have more space given over to leisure, and more division between public space and private space in general. Heal finds that architects in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century simply did not know what to do with the hall, since the space had symbolic importance, linking Renaissance elites to the chivalric past they idealized, at the same time as the communal nature of the hall became distasteful to evolving ideas of privacy:

16 In 3.2. of Sir Thomas More, More joins in during the inept performance of players who perform during a feast he hosts. This incident is reportedly derived from an event in More’s life. Of course, Hamlet’s play in Hamlet features a troupe who turns up at Elsinore only to perform Hamlet’s own play, “The Mousetrap.” Siobhan Keenan outlines probable touring procedures and the patron’s scope for choice in Travelling Players 75-7.

17 See also Heal Hospitality 153-5 on the architectural revolution which took place during this period.
the nobility and gentry did not abandon the hall completely as an eating and entertainment room: only after the construction of Coleshill by Sir Roger Pratt in the 1650s was that a serious option. However, the hall underwent all possible modifications short of losing its function as an eating-room completely. It was sometimes placed centrally across the line of the services and the chamber, thereby surrendering the processional impact of a linear plan. Or the size of the room might be reduced to save space for other, more valued, apartments. In some of the prodigy houses the hall might be isolated from the more important ceremonial rooms of the house by one or more floors. In even more cases the size of the hall was reduced until it became merely another chamber, suitable enough as a place for servants to wait and greet the individual guest, and adequate for one or two dining-tables, but hardly the dramatic focus of the house. (158-9)

Not only did the hall diminish in importance, but the lodging part of the house came to be separated from the business side of the house, a movement Orlin argues cuts across class lines (Elizabethan Households vii). Moreover, the parlour first appeared in the homes of the middle and lower classes in this period, marking “a conceptual revolution, as householders formally acknowledged the pleasures of leisure and practiced the appropriate activities: feasting with friends; enjoying music; playing cards, dice and tables (or backgammon); reading aloud” (Orlin, Elizabethan Households 82). In addition to the parlour, aristocratic houses had a fashion for drawing rooms, great chambers, long galleries, and banqueting pavilions and rooms, all of which became popular performance spaces for music and drama and were in the part of the house accessible to women.

Virginia Woolf’s notion of the ‘room of one’s own’ is widely thought to explain how private space fostered women’s writing, but few critics have considered how the increase in private space in the household outlined above could also allow and enable
The early modern household, especially in terms of the architectural innovations that took place over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provided a space for women separate from the rest of the household, giving them a space to pursue their own creative endeavors as well as to stage them. The hall, in its heyday, was an almost completely masculine realm, and the theatre staged in it made it largely, as Greg Walker argues, a venue where the courtier-bureaucrats who populated the medieval and late-medieval household in huge numbers sought to influence the master of the house (51-2). Concurrent with the architectural changes in the late-sixteenth century comes a diminishment in the number of male courtiers in aristocratic households (Heal, Hospitality 164). It is likely not a coincidence that more performances and plays by elite women emerge in this period because of the changes in how life was lived in the household; there was simply more space for their performances, and the performance culture of the household ceased to be as dominated by the male courtiers seeking advancement and influence. Perhaps it is not incidental that Gawthorpe Hall (completed in 1600), seat of the Shuttleworths, which, as we have seen, had a tradition of female involvement in dramatic revels, had not just a hall, but a drawing room as well as a long gallery (Harland II. 325-6). Further substantiating this claim is that the evidence of the Shuttleworth women’s involvement in the theatrical program of the household increased markedly after the move to Gawthorpe from Smithils, a house built in an older style, had

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18 See Marta Straznicky Privacy, playreading, and women’s closet drama.
This change could also be related to the change in patron as well. There are far more records of Fleetwood Shuttleworth’s patronage than there are of Margery Shuttleworth’s. In this way, the increase evidenced under Fleetwood Shuttleworth at Gawthorpe could relate to the new spaces in the house for performances or to the fact that her interest in dramatic patronage ran deeper than Margery’s. The increase in patronage could also be a combination of both factors.

It should be stated that, for Alice Friedman, the movement towards a division of public and private space which began with the architectural changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries restricted even further the mobility of aristocratic women within the early modern household and limited their connection to the world outside the domestic sphere. The architectural changes which took place at Wollaton in the 1570s and 1580s altered this way of life entirely, isolating the family from the town, and women from the rest of the household in particular:

from the evidence of surviving household accounts, it is clear that the master alone had full access to all parts of the house and estate: the status of his wife in this respect seems to have been far more limited. She was expected to play only a supporting role in the formal rituals of power . . . Her traditional activities took place in such areas as the nursery and kitchen, while her domestic and social responsibilities were fulfilled in the great chamber, parlour, and bed chambers, areas in which she might read, visit with children and friends, practice needlework, play music, or entertain guests, shielded from contact with most members of the household and with strangers. This spatial division rigidified as both class and gender were more scrupulously differentiated. Using threats of sexual shame and loss of position, religious theorists, lawyers, and writers of conduct books sought to restrict upper-class women to the private world . . .. (44)

The transition in how people lived in space, which Friedman describes as taking place at

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20 For a discussion of the medieval household, see D. Vance Smith *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary.*
Wollaton, is representative of the changes in how everyday life was lived in the culture at large. Yet while the transition from the medieval manor to the Elizabethan and Jacobean country house may have limited the movements within the household of early modern women and restricted their contact with the larger community, it also gave women a space of their own which could be used for their creative endeavors. Indeed, within the limited framework Friedman lays out, there is increased scope for women’s theatre and performance.

Despite the space devoted to women’s theatre and performance in account books and found in the household itself, part of the reason why there has been a lack of acknowledgment in criticism for many of the plays and performances created, produced, and performed by women in the household is that they simply do not resemble what we expect Renaissance theatre to look like. In short, acknowledging women as an important part of the tradition of household theatre means adjusting our conception of what constitutes theatre in the period.\textsuperscript{21} The household was an entirely different dramatic context from the other recognized theatrical contexts in early modern England, with its own conventions which were not only separate from those of the commercial and court stages but which also differed from household to household. While there are extant texts of coterie plays which bear at least a superficial resemblance to commercial plays, many of the records of women’s performances or productions were not based on written texts at all or, if they were, the texts have not survived. Moreover, many plays and texts are

\textsuperscript{21} See also Westfall “A Commonty a Christmas gambold” 39-40 on the necessity of this adjustment in the study of household theatre in general, not just in terms of women’s household theatre.
deeply embedded in the context in which they were produced, presenting sometimes
insurmountable interpretive hurdles. The extant coterie plays, like Jane Cavendish and
Elizabeth Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies* and Lady Mary Wroth’s *Love’s Victory* in
particular, have been amongst the most studied women’s plays. Though still highly
occasional and site-specific, *The Concealed Fancies* and *Love’s Victory* bear a
relationship to the idea of the play current in early modern scholarship, are dense with
allusion to the plays of the London stages, and permit traditional modes of scholarly
inquiry since complete, scripted texts remain. Accordingly, it is not altogether surprising
that plays like these have attracted the most notice, while the records of performances for
which critical frameworks are lacking have been all but ignored. Susan Bennett finds this
to be a trend in scholarship of early women’s drama, arguing that pre-existing generic
categories often tend to exclude women’s theatre:

women’s plays . . . become ‘categorized’ or ‘categorizable’ only in as
much as the few—the exceptional—can be demonstrated to meet, or at
least to come close to, the criteria that men’s plays and genre theory have
laid down, through history, as exemplary in a given moment or for a
particular trajectory of dramatic genre. (75)

In other words, women’s household plays tend to have been recognized and written about
when they bear a relationship to existing examples of the genre – when they fit into
existing narratives instead of challenging them. As Patricia Badir puts it, “historiography
. . . is an institutionalized action which establishes authentic sources and designates
historical subjects, thereby naturalizing certain versions of the ‘real’ as more thinkable
than others” (257).

The limited focus with which women’s household theatre has been read has meant
that many of the instances of household theatre that cannot easily be understood by the existing rubrics have not been studied. To rectify this gap, this thesis attends to performance records from such sources as household account books, court records, and the records compiled by the Records of Early English Drama, both in print and online.

For Westfall, this kind of far-reaching and eclectic approach is necessary for the recovery and recognition of household theatrical traditions:

Many . . . assume that the absence of dramatic text indicates the absence of drama, and fail to seek sources and resources that might indicate the conditions and contexts of performances. In this respect, the work of theatre historians resembles that of social, art, and music historians. We find evidence for our reconstructions not in scripts alone but also in many artifacts belonging to household auspices: financial accounts, chronicles, archaeological digs, letters, biographies, local histories, legal documents, paintings and sculpture. In addition, because of the visual, aural, and kinesthetic nature of performance, we must also consider music and dance history, as well as the arts of engineering and science, since all of these contribute toward the mise en scène and the physical production. (“’The useless dearness of the diamond’” 42)

From the available sources, I have drawn a wide range of theatrical (performative) and dramatic (textual) events. I study scripted plays, masques, and entertainments, but also dance, musical performance, acrobats, animal acts, performances of disability, and the preparation and serving of banquets.

I also examine the household performances of women of different social classes, something studies of women’s household theatre do not do. While they performed very differently, at the same time women of different classes found the household to be a place of creative expression. Accordingly, this thesis attends to such performances and productions as those by aristocratic women who performed in entertainments for visiting royalty (Chapter 2); women of the aristocracy, gentry, and emergent merchant classes
who prepared and served elaborate banquets as well as the lower class women who engaged in banquet commerce (Chapter 3); and lower class women who toured the houses, inns, and towns of England as itinerant performers (Chapter 4). Most of the extant examples of women’s household theatre are, as Westfall notes, of women from “the two social extremes” (“A Commonty a Christmas gambold” 44), although her categories for understanding women’s performances are limited to touring performers and silent masquers. This framework omits the possibility of women from the middling classes being involved in household theatre (as well as limiting, unnecessarily, the scope of how women of the lower classes and the aristocracy could perform). Admittedly, detailed evidence relating to the theatre of women of the middling classes is somewhat slim. The information in REED about middle class household entertainment derives mostly from religious and civil infractions. REED contains copious evidence of women being involved in entertainments like the one Peter and Margaret Edwards put on in 1606 in Sokesay, where they were cited for “keeping . . . dancing, and playing” (*Shropshire* 624) in their home or the event recorded in the Churchwarden’s Presentments to the Peculiar Court in Wimbourne Minster on 28 April 1607 which “present[s] that the widow thringes kept daunsing in her house at the time of evenyne prayer upon the sabaoth day, william lukas minsrell, and Robert homer with others were there daunsinge” (*Bristol* 284-5). While it is clear from records like this that something was going on in private homes, we cannot say what that might have been. Given such evidence, which exists in large numbers in the REED volumes, it seems incorrect and irresponsible, though, to assume that middle class women did not participate in household theatre, simply because the
historical details are elusive.  

As much as I am committed to an elastic definition of theatre to account for women’s theatrical performance in its various forms, I am conscious of the concerns expressed by Postlewait about the over-use of the concept of theatricality in early modern studies:

in some of the current scholarship on renaissance [sic] theatre and society the idea of theatricality has become a pseudo-concept; it neither describes nor classifies events in a historically specific manner because, in its reified manner, it exists, before the fact, as a framing (tautological) condition. In this manner it is applied to acts, scenes, agents, agencies, and purposes like a motiveless malignancy. In the flush of analogical thinking, we have embraced the idea of theatricality, which has become an empty register of historical meaning. (121-2)

All of the examples described in this thesis derive from actual theatrical events. I have purposefully avoided branding all sorts of practices as theatre, or of reducing all social life to a kind of theatrum mundi, a practice Postlewait warns against. The expanded definition of what constitutes theatre elaborated here derives from historical practice; indeed, I would posit that it does just as much a disservice to theatrical history to accept a limited definition of theatre which excludes women’s household performances as it does to overuse the concept of theatricality in the way that Postlewait describes.

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22 Low rates of literacy among women of this class are a factor that mitigates against the survival of any of these women’s household performances aside from the short records included in ecclesiastical and civic records. No definitive study of literacy rates has been established, but suggestions have been made that overall literacy in the general population was at about 20 percent of men and 5 percent of women in the mid-sixteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century, 30 percent of men and 10 percent of women are thought to have been literate. And by 1715 45 percent of men and 25 percent of women are thought to have achieved the standard of being able to sign their own name (Sharpe 278).
II.

Performance, Virtue, and Agency in Women’s Household Theatre

One of the central arguments developed over the course of this thesis, and in Chapters 2 and 3 in particular, is that performance in the household was not only socially acceptable for women but was also a means for women to gain personal and familial esteem. While particularities of this argument will be expanded in Chapters 2 and 3, some introduction into the ways in which performance could shape the perception of a woman’s virtuous reputation is necessary here, especially since the theatrical performance of virtue touches on the anxiety in early modern culture, and in conduct literature especially, about the impossibility of discerning with certainty whether a woman’s perceived identity correlates with her actual virtue. These anxieties raise some important questions about the performance of virtue in a theatrical context. Can theatrically performed virtue be trusted? Can a woman be given the agency within the household to perform her own virtue? What does it mean if women have that agency in the household?

For conduct book writers like Braithwait, Salter, and Gouge the answer to these questions is surprisingly ambiguous. These writers do not, of course, address theatrically performed virtue directly, but they do articulate the necessity for women to demonstrate outwardly their inward virtue, a practice linked to, but not co-extensive with, theatrical performance. At the same time as these writers find it to be necessary for a woman to demonstrate her virtue, they also betray doubts that such a performance of virtue will
always be true. This double bind between the impossibility yet necessity of demonstrating virtue has been discussed by both Lena Cowen Orlin and Kathryn Schwarz. For Orlin, the anxieties revealed in this double bind see their fullest expression in the plays of the London stages, which repeatedly show women feigning virtue to conceal vice (“Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance” 199). Kathryn Schwarz makes a similar point about the “problematically articulate nature of chastity” (271) revealed in John Milton’s A Maske at Ludlow and Margaret Cavendish’s Assaulted and Pursued Chastity where, because chastity, unlike virginity, has no objective dimension, chaste women effectively “parse their own bodily meaning[s], defining, defending, enforcing, and even reclaiming the condition of virtue” (271). In this way, Schwarz argues “chastity may be most problematic with the will to perform itself as true” (271).

Neither Orlin nor Schwarz consider performance in a household context, an omission especially surprising in Schwarz’s case considering that Milton’s A Maske, no matter how much it was altered by Milton from its performance version, was a household masque, performed by the children and household retainers of the Earl of Bridgewater at Ludlow Castle to celebrate Bridgewater’s Presidency of Wales. In fact, there are a few

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23 See Orlin “Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance” 183-203 and Schwarz “Chastity Militant and Married” 270-85.

24 Milton’s Maske was first published in 1637, but two earlier manuscripts exist. One of them, the Bridgewater manuscript, is widely accepted as the performance version of the masque. It is quite different from the published versions, featuring, among other changes, a much reduced role for the Lady, who was performed by Alice Egerton, Bridgewater’s daughter. For more on the changes in the Bridgewater manuscript, see Brown John Milton’s Aristocratic Entertainments 171-79.
factors which suggest that the performance of virtue in household theatre may not cast women under suspicion in the way that Schwarz and Orlin suggest. Both the important role of women in the performance of hospitality and the widely accepted generic characteristic of household theatre to perform domestic and dynastic ideals intimate that theatrical performances of virtue in the household may be one context in the culture where women could perform virtue without raising the suspicion of vice.

The best evidence of this anxiety about discerning women’s virtue comes from conduct books and London commercial plays. The inadequacies of extrapolating general public opinion from such sources as conduct literature have already been discussed, but the persistence of these concerns in conduct literature as well as their presence in commercial plays merits some discussion here. Barnabe Rich’s *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, for instance, articulates his sense of the impossibility of telling the difference between feigned and actual virtue:

> But let us enter into consideration, how we might distinguish between a good woman and a bad; we cannot do it by outward show; for if we ayme our judgements according to their lookes, we might sometimes think the old painted face of *Proserpina*, to be the same that it was, when she first became to be *Plutoes* wife. (254)

Similarly, Thomas Salter, in *The Mirrhор of Modestie* writes that women must be forbidden from all those thynges that anyware make her unworthie of a laudable reputation, emong whiche, it is not beethought how hurtfull and daungerous, the acquaintaunce and famyliaritie of yong gossopes is, who under couverture, of gentillitie, gallant attire, and costly ornamentes, or (which is moste infectious) under fained Religion and honestie, doe hide corrupte and wicked manners, and yet such as are evill maie easily bee knowne, when the aucthoritie of greate personages supporte them, and even have a colour lively, and most likely to bee healthfull, to vice hide
Neither of these authors address directly the theatrical performance of virtue, though John Ford’s *Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, a play which features a number of monstrous women, does. In fact, it is the least feminine of the play’s women, the adulterous, murderous, and Amazonian Hippolyta who stages and dances in a wedding masque for her former lover Soranzo and his bride. Hippolyta and her ladies cloak themselves in virtue by dressing in white and presenting themselves anonymously as some “young maidens of Parma” (4.1. 30-1) in the masque. But Hippolyta’s show of virtue is short-lived and her monstrosity is revealed quickly in the course of her performance. Not only does Hippolyta have to feign virtue to compensate for her lack of it, but her reason for staging the masque is to give her the opportunity to murder Soranzo, compounding the negative representation of women’s performance in the play. Hippolyta, of course, is duly punished for her deeds, since Ford contrives to have her performance culminate not with Soranzo’s murder but with her own spectacular death in front of the entire wedding party. She is “a fearfull sight” (4.1. 102), and her performance is a striking display of improper, violent, and revengeful

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25 See also William Gouge’s *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622). Gouge writes, for instance, that:

A wives outward reverence towards her husband is a manifestation of her inward due respect of him. Now then seeing the intent of the heart, and inward disposition cannot be discerned by man simply in itselfe, that the husbande may know his wives good affection towards him, it is behouefull that she manifest the same by her outward reverence. (111) Gouge goes on to say that this outward reverence is demonstrated both in a wife’s “gesture” and “speech” (111).
womanhood.

In contradiction to these fears about performed virtue, numerous treatises, including Salter’s *Mirrhor* itself, also give women instructions on how to act so that their outward appearance matches their inward virtue. Such a discussion clearly imagines women as having a role in demonstrating their inward virtue, indicating that Orlin and Schwarz’s negative reading of women’s involvement in proving and demonstrating virtue is not complete. Salter writes in his 1583 treatise of how a morally upright woman should perform her virtue:

> likewise where it behoveth her to shewe her vertue, she all bee readie but not to bolde, and by sodaine blushyng, which immediately will overspread her lillie cheekes with roseat red, she shall shewe that she beareth in her breaste a reverente harte, farre separated from infamous and reproachful shame. In suche wise I saie, she shall with a cheerfull countenaunce, and a well tempered gravitie, castyng her eyes to the yearth, shewe of her selfe that which nevertheless, although she knowes it will redounde to praise and commendation, she would willingly dissemble and faine not to care for. With the commendible confidence, when it behoves her through request to recite any Psalme, or other Spirituall song, or godlie sentence, she shall set her selfe forthe to doe it with a milde refusall, yet altogether voide of unduect affectyng, which thing the moste part of people can hardly eschewe . . .. (58)

Although Salter does not conceive of such a demonstration of virtue as taking place in a theatrical performance, what he gives here is effectively a script, including proper gestures and physiological reactions for the demonstration and public affirmation of virtue in a young woman. While a performance like Hippolyta’s is a transparent attempt to use the guise of virtue to conceal crime, Salter here conceives of the physical performance of virtue to be an exact outward expression of internal thoughts and feelings, where the appearance of virtue, signaled in very specific ways, functions as a trustworthy
index of moral worth. The young maiden’s show of virtue, then, is not a performance concealing her base nature, but rather reveals her truly virtuous self. As much as women were enjoined by writers of conduct literature like Salter to keep to the home, to ensure that their eyes were cast downwards on their needlework, and to keep their thoughts to themselves instead of speaking them, it is clear that, at times, virtue demanded to be presented and even performed publicly, though in a very mediated and scripted way.

As Salter’s title suggests, his conduct book is in the exemplum tradition, and as such his work lists examples of women after whom his readers should model themselves.26 Salter’s use of the trope of the mirror in his title also conforms with the early modern conception of the functioning of the mirror as Debora Shugar has explained it. She writes that the mirror functions “according to an ontology of similitude rather than identity/difference; it reflects those whom one will or can or does resemble” (37). In this way, Salter’s prescription of how a proper woman should demonstrate her virtue is quite literally a script directing reactions to future circumstances, since his reader is to ape the behaviour of the virtuous Matron whom she models herself after as well as

26 The mirror trope is very persistent in conduct literature. The books themselves are models of good conduct against which women should measure their own conduct. Braithwait’s The English Gentlewoman, for instance, states that his book presents “unto your view one of your owne Sexe; One whose improved Education will bee no blemish but a beautie to her Nation. Peruse her, and I make little doubt, but you will so approve of her Behaviour, as you shall acknowledge her right worthy title of a Sister” (3). The book, then, offers a model of womanly behaviour that the reader should strive to emulate. More than this, Braithwait states that he made the book “portable” so that a woman could have it with her always (no pagination). Braithwait also counsels his reader to find an older woman to model herself after: “set always before your eyes; an imitable mirror, some good woman or other, before whom you may live, as if she ey’d you, she view’d you” (30).
conforming her behaviour to the prescriptions of Salter’s book. Salter also addresses directly the fact that the performative imitation implicit in his notion of his book as a “Mirrhor” can be perceived negatively and that he, conversely, conceives of a positive form of imitation for young women:

For as muche as the weakenesse of our nature is such, as we are more inclined and prone to imitate and followe those thynges that bee hurtfull unto us, then those that bee good and profitable. In my judgemente there is nothyng more meete, especially for yong Maidens then a Mirrhor, therein to see and beholde how to order their dooing, I meane not a Christall Mirrhor, made by handie Arte, by whiche Maidens delight daily to tricke and trim their tresses, standying, tootyng twoo hours by the Clocke, lookyng now on this side, now on that, least any thyng should bee lackyng needefull to further Pride, not suffering so much as a hare to hang out of order, no I meane no suche Mirrhor, but the Mirrhor matter, and is of much more worthe then any Christall Mirrhor, for as the one teacheth how to attire the outwarde bodie, so the other guideth to garnishe the inwarde mynde, and maketh it meete for vertue . . . . (13-4)

After listing at length the dangers of the “Christall Mirrhor,” Salter makes the argument that imitation in a certain way can be a mark of virtue, that a young woman, if she performs in the prescribed way can be a virtuous one. Acting, then, is a necessary component of virtue, as long as it means acting out inward virtue.27

Performing virtue theatrically is a long way from the outward expression of inward virtue which Salter describes. At the same time, though, his argument that virtuous actions can at times be taken at face value suggests that when, for instance, women fulfilled their obligations as virtuous housewives by serving elaborate, theatrical banquets that their theatre could possibly gain the esteem of guest and household alike.

27 Salter’s text was not an especially influential one—it was printed only twice—but it was part of the much larger ‘mirror’ genre of conduct literature of which its arguments are representative.
Coupled with the necessity of women’s involvement in hospitality, it becomes even harder to see such performances as an immediate indicator of vice.

Furthermore, while the reception of women’s performances is unquantifiable, there is good evidence to suggest that the anxieties surrounding the performance of virtue, as in 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore and in conduct literature, might be diminished in a household performance context. Household theatre is widely understood by its critics in all camps—that is, those who discuss royal progress entertainment, early Tudor political theatre, and women’s household theatre—as a medium in which everyday life is staged, and where the ideals and values of the household are performed. Greg Walker, Felicity Heal, Helen Cooper, and Alison Findlay concur on this basic characteristic. 28 Greg Walker writes of early Tudor household theatre that the workplace of playwrights such as Heywood, Udall, and Lindsay, was a theatrum mundi indeed, coterminous with the world they inhabited in their extra-dramatic lives as courtiers, scholars, and politicians. Their drama lived in the space in which the real events which they allegorized also took place, and it drew rhetorical and symbolic strength from that fact. (1)

Felicity Heal makes a similar argument in Hospitality in Early Modern England: the social ritual of the great household, at its most effective when presented for a large audience, was a coded language; designed to articulate both power and magnanimity. This was not the mere manipulation of symbols, the acting out of limited roles: since late medieval culture did not fully differentiate the person from the image, the household in some measure was its head, its behaviour the physical presentation of the attributes of the man. (6-7)

Furthermore, Findlay’s application of Lefebvre’s conception of space to the early modern

28 See Walker The politics of performance 1, 51-2; Heal Hospitality 6-7; Cooper “Location and Meaning” 137; and Findlay Playing Spaces 1-10.
household and its entertainment demonstrates the way in which women’s theatre—and all household theatre for that matter—manipulated space to shape imaginatively the conditions of daily life:

A performance space is both a representation of space (a critical, creative intervention into spatial texture which imposes order) and a representational space, lived through associations and images. It is, moreover, a space that is produced to be read and lived, at least temporarily, by the spectators and the actors. Participants read the stage with a dual consciousness; theatre is both truth (live bodies in real space) and fiction, so they can appreciate performance on two levels . . . Although he never discusses theatre in any detail, Lefebvre does appreciate that it is composed of ‘an interplay between fictions and real counterparts’ and an ‘interaction between gazes and mirages which actor, audience, characters, text, and author all come together but never become one.’ This space is neither simply a representation of space or a representative space but both. (10-11)

In this case, if we accept that the interplay between performed reality and reality—the very issue which makes women’s performances of virtue so complicated for Salter, Rich, and Ford—is itself a characteristic of the household as a performance space, as all of these critics maintain, what grounds are there for assuming that a women’s performance of virtue imperils her in such a context? Could not a woman’s performance of virtue, in a theatre devoted to the performance of ideals and to the promotion of the household’s wealth and hospitality, be continuous with the aims of household theatre to promote the ideals of the domos? Moreover, the importance of distinguishing theory from practice, Puritan minority viewpoint from mainstream perspective cannot be over stated. Women’s performances of virtue, then, in a household context, not only had the capacity to be perceived as true, but also had real political power to promote familial and personal worth. Of course it is true that women could feign virtue to cover vice in household
theatre just as easily as they could anywhere else, but the point I want to make is that
performance in the household might not expose women to the suspicion of compromised
virtue in the way that performance in other contexts, such as the commercial plays like
*The Roaring Girl* and *The Atheist’s Tragedy* which Orlin outlines, do.

In this way, it is somewhat unfortunate that Cavendish and Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies* has become the most widely discussed women’s household play.\(^{29}\) *The Concealed Fancies* is in many ways the standard against which women’s household plays have been read, which has meant, effectively, that performances like those described above and discussed in the upcoming chapters have not figured into discussions of women’s household theatre. Their play displays a clear interest in the discursive formation of social and gender roles, presents its heroines as poor domestic women (*Findlay, Playing Spaces* 47), and imagines a world where women had choice over whom they married.\(^ {30}\) Moreover, the idea that there could be a congruence between real and performed identity is roundly mocked in the play. In fact, it is only fools like Corpolant who do not dissemble:

> CORPOLANT: O Courtly, my pouch of gold, with my way of craft, shall gain your mistress from you!

> COURTLY: Do you think your bank of sordidness can make her

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\(^{29}\) See Findlay *Women and Dramatic Production* 74-81 and “Playing the scene-self” 154-70; Lisa Hopkins “Play Houses: Drama at Bolsover and Welbeck” 25-44; Catherine Burroughs “‘Hymen’s Monkey Love’” 21-31; Marion Wynne-Davies “My Seeled Chamber and Dark Parlour Room” 60-68; Sophie Tomlinson “Too Theatrical? Female Subjectivity and Caroline and Interregnum Drama” 65-79.

\(^{30}\) There is some debate over whether the play sustains its feminism to the end. See, for instance, Findlay *Women and Dramatic Production* 74-81.
misunderstand herself?

CORPOLANT: Why sir, what can she wish, but she shall have! If title please her I’ll lay out twenty thousand pounds for what know or name she likes best and I know her discretion is not taken with a rich suit or fair face that appears like one of your polished pictures.

COURTLY: No Sir, nor she is not taken with your piece of deformity of fat, whose face appears as your worst rustic! Have you even spoke to her in the way of marriage?

CORPOLANT: No, but I intend to speak to her cousin to make the way, and then to her father.

COURTLY: You’re mistaken. Because she carved you once a leg of capon and gave you sauce to boot, your puffed-up bladder thinks to marry her, by reason she gave you the civility of the house, as being your father’s friend, which modest courtesy blows your brain up as gun powder into folly. (2.1. 20-43)

Conversely, Luceny and Tattiney, dissemblers to the end with their frequent costume changes, games, and insistence on the performed nature of identity, complicate the equation between real and performed identity, with radical implications. In fact, Luceny and Tattiney only have “scene sel[ves] (1.1.4); they don’t appear to be at all. In Cavendish and Brackley’s representation of all social life as performance, as seeming without being, the sisters do not perform to lay claim to virtue, but instead perform to show that such concepts as virtue are only ever performative.

I do not want to undermine the achievement of Cavendish and Brackley, but at the same time I want to argue that the women discussed in this thesis display an agency which is just as important and far less anomalous than that which Cavendish and Brackley’s play manifests. The chapters that follow expand this discussion of the performance, virtue, and the agency in women’s household theatre as well as place of
women within the tradition of household theatre. For instance, in Chapter 2, “Domestic Performances in Elizabethan Royal Progress Entertainment,” I discuss the performances of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, Lady Alice Egerton, Dowager Countess of Derby (grandmother to Alice Egerton of *A Maske*), and Lady Elizabeth Russell in royal progress entertainments for Queen Elizabeth in the last decade of Elizabeth’s reign. In these entertainments, Sidney, Russell, and Egerton perform actions associated with idealizations of feminine domesticity. Instead of being performances of submission, these virtuous performances serve the important political role of promoting their nobility and their right to rule. This chapter builds on the argument first articulated by Kerri Boyd McBride in *Country House Discourse* where she postulates that women were essential to the performance of nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially once the neo-feudal ideals of nobility became incompatible with the emergent economies of the period. For McBride, it was women who demonstrated the values of nobility by their enclosure in the household and isolation from city life. I argue instead that Sidney, Egerton, and Russell accomplished this performed nobility, not through their passive enclosure in the household, but through the active embodiment of the ideals upon which nobility rested in their performances for the queen.

Chapter 3 “‘To the great delight and pleasure shew to the company’: Early Modern Receipt Books and Women’s Theatrical History," also discusses the relationship between performance and virtue. Early modern recipe books which catered to the gentry

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31 I follow the convention in scholarship of Mary Sidney’s work to call her by her maiden name as opposed to her married name.
and merchant classes presented their female readership with scripts which they could adapt for their own uses when presenting banquets (which involved such dramatic food as fire-breathing peacocks, marzipan animal kingdoms, and pies filled with live birds).

This chapter examines the banquets these women created, and argues that by making original and elaborate banquet dishes, a housewife demonstrated her family's wealth through her banquet's vast display and consumption of expensive goods. By extension, the more creative a housewife's banquet, the more she earned credit for her skills of housewifery. In this way, women's creativity, theatre, and virtuous hospitality go hand in hand. The chapter also compares recipe books written for male professional chefs to recipe books written for non-professional female home cooks to demonstrate the agency afforded to women in the preparation of the banquet. While the books designed for the professional male chefs prescribe how the banquet shows should be assembled, the books designed for women are not nearly as prescriptive, and defer to the creativity of the housewife to design her own spectacles.

Chapter 4, “Touring, Women, and the Professional Stage,” examines professional women touring performers. In one sense, this chapter is a departure from other chapters in this thesis since it does not focus solely on performances in the household but on performance in households, towns, universities, and all the other venues in which touring performers played in the period. Since itinerants performed in such a wide variety of venues, and because records documenting their performances have survived inconsistently, it is necessary to look beyond the household records because those records, taken alone, do not tell the full story of the place of early modern women
professional entertainers in the household and in the culture beyond it. Despite the marginal status of these performers—and every other professional performer in the period—the records which do still exist indicate not just that these women were able to earn a living performing, but that they were an accepted part of the professional performance culture of the time. They were licensed by the state to perform and permitted to perform across the realm; similarly, they were not allowed to play with a frequency akin to their male counterparts. This chapter discusses some of the many records of early modern women touring performers and focuses particularly on the career of one performer, Joane Provoe, whose audacious performance of disability and domestic virtue demonstrates the vitality and political potential of these kind of performances.

Recognizing women as a part of the performance culture of the early modern household requires some crucial theoretical and historical adjustments. We need to acknowledge that performance was something that many women did, and that, although there were controversial statements against women’s masquing and against foreign actresses, there were at the same time women who found performance to be socially acceptable and an available means of creative and political expression. Moreover, the household itself needs to be understood not so narrowly (or dramatically), as Marion Wynne-Davies does in her presentation of it as a “secure space, [where] wealth and male complicity . . . allowed a few Renaissance women dramatists to evade the lonely suicides visualized by [Virginia] Woolf, and to experience an environment suited to literary productivity” (“‘My Seeled Chamber’” 60). Instead, the household ought to be recognized as an institution, and as a patriarchal institution, in which women did still
have the agency to perform. Furthermore, a traditional rubric for understanding theatre
derived from the commercial stages needs to be put aside to acknowledge the various
formal and informal, scripted and unscripted, conventional and idiosyncratic ways in
which women performed in the household. To be sure, I do not attempt to rewrite the
place of women in the culture, but I do want to suggest that the broader approach to
reading women’s plays and performances in the early modern household does greater
justice to the diversity, complexity, abundance, and power of their theatre.
Chapter 2

Domestic Performances in Elizabethan Royal Progress Entertainment

Feminine silence, then, is in [Richard] Braithwait’s phrase ‘a moving Rhetoricke,’ a signifier which slides unmanageably from chastity to desire, from obedience to defiance. While there is no doubt that there were women in early modern England who were simply silenced—either by scold’s bridle or by an internalized fear of authority—we should be wary of replicating that silence by ignoring the multiple and mobile possibilities inscribed in feminine reticence.¹

— Christina Luckyj; ‘A moving Rhetorick’

Before she was sent to prison for insider trading, Martha Stewart’s television show, *Martha Stewart Living*, was set, or at least was made to look as if it was set, in her Connecticut home, Turkey Hill.² At Turkey Hill, Stewart’s own personal space was transformed into a home television studio into which her viewer was invited. Stewart’s show also, for the most part, concealed the work of her staff, making it seem as though Stewart, with the occasional help of her expert guests, conceived and created the elaborate dishes, sewing projects, and manicured gardens all on her own. The implication of Stewart’s performance of domesticity within her own home on *Martha

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¹ Luckyj ‘A moving Rhetorick’ 70.

² *Martha Stewart Living* aired from 1993 to 2004.
Martha Stewart’s post-prison television show, *The Martha Stewart Show*, takes a different approach to its presentation of domestic life and of Stewart’s own domestic acumen. Stewart, after leaving the West Virginia prison where she spent five months in 2005, vacated the Connecticut home studio which her television show, magazine, and books made so famous, and moved to a new house in Bedford, New York. Her show, similarly, changed locations: it no longer appears to be taped in her own home, but instead is obviously taped on a soundstage in New York. Although Stewart made much fanfare in the opening segments of *The Martha Stewart Show* in September 2005 about how the New York set mimics her new house with its use of the same “Hampton Grey” colour palate, the set calls attention to itself as a simulacrum of Stewart’s own domestic space in a way that *Martha Stewart Living* never did, since its country interior contrasts with the simulated urban view from its fake windows. Furthermore, the new show has a studio audience as well as a team of chefs who work in a professional kitchen off to the side of the home-like set where Stewart chats with the studio audience, cooks with guests, and gives household tips. Stewart’s new show, which features celebrity guests doing most of the cooking, and shows the chefs doing the work of preparing samples of the day’s recipe for the studio audience, works to humanize Stewart. *The Martha Stewart Show* seems to be designed to translate the fall that accompanied Stewart’s prison sentence and subsequent house arrest into an opportunity for her public to see her as a more imperfect, regular woman. Even the titles of her television programs indicate this change. *Martha Stewart Living* declares Stewart herself to be the exemplary domestic woman. Conversely, *The Martha Stewart Show* denotes the kind of television program that it is, positioning Martha more as a public personality and television host than as a domestic goddess. *The Martha Stewart Show* calls attention to itself as a representation of the domestic and its theatricalization of domestic life in a way that *Martha Stewart Living* never did. Instead of naturalizing the theatrical, staged quality of Stewart’s domestic skill as was the case in *Martha Stewart Living*, *The Martha Stewart Show* draws back the curtains and reveals it.
demonstrating favourite recipes—Stewart’s television performance was made to seem like an accurate transmission of her reality and her domestic skills. Her home became, in Baudrillard’s terms, “a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of the truth” but of a “hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital reoccurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences” (2-3). In short, Stewart’s performance of the domestic naturalized what was a performance and made it seem real.

While Martha Stewart’s late twentieth and early twenty-first century television program is worlds apart from the entertainments performed at aristocratic country houses for Queen Elizabeth in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, useful parallels can be drawn between Stewart’s domestic performance and the domestic performances of Elizabeth’s female hosts. Despite their relative invisibility in many progress texts and the lack of critical attention paid to their contributions to the genre, women were important and necessary participants as hosts, organizers, performers, designers, and writers in royal and court progresses. In fact, Mary Hill Cole’s study of the genre reveals that Elizabeth, in her 44 years of rule, visited over 400 noble and civic hosts and that for 40 of those visits, her primary host was a woman (28). Women also often hosted the queen with their husbands and families, so the number of women involved in the entertainment of the traveling monarch was greater than Cole’s statistics reveal. This chapter studies the performances of three of Elizabeth’s female hosts: Lady Elizabeth Russell; Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke; and Lady Alice Egerton, the Dowager Countess of
Like Stewart on *Martha Stewart Living*, these women, who were no more conventional housewives than is Stewart herself, all performed the activities and behaviours associated with the Renaissance domestic ideal. Their entertainments, which took place in 1592 (when Russell hosted Elizabeth at Bisham), 1599 (Sidney’s planned entertainment at Wilton), and 1602 (Egerton’s Harefield event) featured their performances of needleworking, housewifery, and silence. Similarly, their performances share much in common with the model of performance of *Martha Stewart Living* where the performance of domesticity and domesticity itself intersect radically. For Alison Findlay, women’s performances in the household always manifest this kind of “spatial practice” where lived reality and imagined reality collide, and where the performance is at once a representational space and a representation of space, in Lefebvre’s terms (3-4; 11) (see also Chapter 1). At the same time, however, the performances of domesticity by these women move beyond a simple reimagining or reconceptualization of domestic space in time as Findlay envisions. The women’s performances of idealized feminine domestic roles in the explicitly theatrical context of progress entertainment obscures their performances, blurring the line between performance and reality, and bolstering their status as domestic ideals for the assembled guests and for Elizabeth herself.

But what is at stake for these women to perform conventional ideals of domestic womanhood and virtue in this genre? Like Martha Stewart, all the women studied here led remarkable, privileged lives which were far from ordinary. Furthermore, their day to day activities, while not necessarily lacking in virtue, were also not limited to the conservative and restricted identities they performed in the entertainments. Sidney was a
noted translator of Garnier’s *Antoinie*, Petrarch’s *Trionfio della morte*, and other works. She also was a poet, literary editor, and promoter of her brother’s ouevre, and her house at Wilton was the centre of the most important literary circle of the age. As Margaret Hannay writes: “in the interval between the death of Leicester . . . and the coming of age of [Sidney’s] son William [Herbert] . . . stands the Countess of Pembroke, the primary patron of Protestant letters. For more than a decade, she assumed the role that would have been her brother’s” (1990, 78-9). Russell was also a patron and a translator of *A Way of Reconciliation touching the true Nature and Substance of the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament* (published in 1605). She was one of the daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, who were famous for the quality of their educations. Furthermore, Russell’s brother-in-law was William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and she herself was a friend of Queen Elizabeth. Egerton, though apparently not a writer or translator, was a noted patron of Spenser, Milton, and others, as well as a central part of the Northern court of the Stanley family. After her first husband’s death, she married into the important Egerton clan. In part, it could be argued that Sidney, Egerton, and Russell may have performed orthodox domesticity because of the controversies surrounding women’s

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4 For a detailed treatment of Sidney’s life and influence see Hannay’s *Philip’s Phoenix*.


6 For more on Russell’s life, see Alexandra Johnston’s “The Lady of the farme” 71-5; Felicity Heal’s “Reputation and Honour in Court and Country” 162-4; and Patricia Phillipy’s *Women, Death, and Literature in Early Modern England* 179-210.

7 See French Fogle “Such a Rural Queen” 3-28.
performance in the period. But a better explanation lies in the nature of the genre in which the women performed and the role of progress entertainment in performing the legitimacy of the Elizabethan ruling class.

Entertainments staged for the queen and her court on progress were not simply Foucauldian performances of state power, but were also important political events in and of themselves where the values and ideals of the hosting domos were articulated. Progress theatre served the purpose of praising the queen and of promoting the legitimacy of her hosts as landowners and as members of the ruling class as well as communicating their particular interests to the queen herself. To do so, progress entertainments featured a conceptual transformation of the house and household of the host into a stage on which the values, ideals, wealth, status, and aspirations of the household were performed for the queen and her travelling court, and beyond that, communicated to the readers of the published versions of the entertainment. More hyperreal than real, the entire occasion of a progress visit was a show, not just the speeches which tend to be preserved and published; indeed, James Sutton’s study of Cecil’s Theobalds demonstrates how Theobalds itself was conceived architecturally and artistically to perform the ideals of the Cecil family and to act as a stage during the family’s entertainments for Elizabeth.\(^8\) The progress entertainment, then, elided theatrical space and lived space. The entertainments also blurred theatrical time and real time. At Wanstead, for instance, Elizabeth’s walk in the Earl of Leicester’s park was interrupted by the entertainment we know as The Lady of

\(^8\) See Sutton *Materializing Space* 79-129.
May in which she was forced not just to watch, but to participate. As Michael Leslie writes of this event:

The activity that marks the experience of the landscape spectacle [like The Lady of May] as different from that of a masque is the central figure’s movement into unpredictability. [Elizabeth] must move out of the territory she knows and controls, entering physical, theatrical, and physiological realms in which she has no knowledge of what is to happen next nor where and when it will happen—a particularly sharp reversal for a monarch. (54)

Helen Cooper writes further of the progress genre’s concatenation of real and imagined space:

the spectators literally inhabit the same world that the playing space represents in epitome; the two are not only physically continuous but allegorically coextensive. The interplay between actors and spectators becomes much more than theatrical device: it serves to underline the unity of the two worlds. (137)

John O’Toole in The Process of Drama talks about the “contract” (49) made between audience members and performers to demarcate fiction and reality. Progress entertainments make no such contract with their audience, and their bleeding together of reality and fiction had a real strategic aim to transmute the performed values, ideals, and policies into political realities.10

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9 See Michael Leslie’s “‘Something nasty in the wilderness’” 53.

10 Both William Leahy in Elizabethan Triumphal Processions and David Scott Kastan in “‘Shewes of Honour and Gladnes’” discuss the possibility that royal entertainments were not successful, though neither talk about this with relation to the women discussed here. Kastan writes that

But though pageantry would ideally construct the captivating monarch and the captivated commonwealth in a powerful drama of reciprocal love, the actual event was inevitably more complex and contradictory in its effects, . . .it presumes or pretends that it is solely the monarch who presented herself immediately to an unspecified or undifferentiated (if always loyal)
According to Kerri Boyd McBride in *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England*, the values of the country house and of the class who inhabited the great prodigy houses of the English countryside had to be constructed discursively and performatively through country house poetry, art, architecture, and entertainment:

To borrow Judith Butler’s schema regarding the production of gender, legitimacy was an ‘act, as it were, which [was] both intentional and performative.’ Legitimacy required a certain kind of agency: one ‘did’ nobility, just as one did/does gender in any of its multifarious varieties. And the performance of legitimacy demanded a particular public stage (the great hall of the country house), costume (hence, in part, the revival of the sumptuary laws in the seventeenth century), and a retinue of supporting actors (from peasants, to tenant farmers, to chaste wives, to ‘blackamoors’). Country house discourse, then, provided the script, set, and cast for the performance of legitimacy. (3)

The values, of course, upon which the country house and noble legitimacy were founded depended upon conservative gender politics. McBride writes further that nobility and legitimacy were understood to be fundamentally and ontologically male. That is, the exercise of power depended on a distinction between masculinity and femininity or, more accurately perhaps, on the control of everything associated with the feminine by those who claimed the fulness of masculine privilege . . . . The country house—the *oikos*—may have been the proper sphere of the gentlewoman, but its management—its *oikonomos*—was ultimately the concern of the populace and denies the heavily mediated forms of representation that mark the display—and indeed denies them representation. (3)

Leahy pursues a similar line of argumentation:

The visual contemplation was one of progress’ main functions . . . precession and pageant analysis has traditionally conceived of [the propagandist] aim [of progress entertainment] as having been successful. While it is quite clear that the processions were intended, among other things, as public relations exercises, their success in achieving their aims . . . is more ambiguous than has previously been suggested. (2)

We can’t know how successful the entertainments of these women were; but what is most important about them is the way in which the entertainments conceive of the active and political uses of women’s domestic performances.
What is more, the ideal of nobility and legitimacy that had currency in the period depended on noble women’s enclosure in country houses and on their embodiment of ideals of feminine virtue and reticence. Women became increasingly associated with their country estates and lived there much of the time, McBride argues, because noble men lived increasingly urban lives, apart from the country estates upon which their claims to nobility rested, earning their incomes through capitalist and mercantile enterprises instead of the idealized—but not nearly as profitable—neo-feudal economy of the country house (91-2).\footnote{As Richard Braithwait puts it in The English Gentlewoman: “Her constant reside is in the Country; where hospitality proclaims her in-bred affection to works of piety. All which she exerciseth with that privacy, as they will witnesse for her, she feares nothing more than vain-glory” (Gglv).}

There was so much anxiety about the departure of elites from the country, Felicity Heal writes, that there were a number of proclamations issued “from the 1590s to the later 1630s . . . [which] forbade the gentry to live in or about the city outside the law terms, and specifically required them to return to their country houses for the Christmas period” \textit{(Hospitality} 118). The enclosure of women in country houses accomplished “the fiction of timeless values of a chivalric culture that defined noble status” and made the country house into “a kind of living museum for the very ideals that aristocrats were in the process of abandoning” (McBride 91-2).

In this light, the performances of conservative domesticity by the women studied in this chapter cease to be simple performances of subjection and instead become
powerful tools for asserting familial and class legitimacy. As the entertainments examined in this chapter reveal, Sidney, Egerton, and Russell were instrumental in promoting the appearance of unchanging, conservative, neo-feudal values not necessarily in their enclosure in country houses, although all three did spend much of their time in the country, but through the active embodiment of the signifiers of feminine virtue in the entertainments they hosted for the queen. By actively performing domestic virtue instead of passively exemplifying it, these women did not manage to shift the terms with which women were understood or valued in the culture, but their own performances of virtue had a real political use for their families and for their class.

Furthermore, the agency demonstrated in the performances of Egerton, Russell, and Sidney is not insignificant. While these women may not have been able to, or may not have even desired to, alter the conditions under which they lived, that they were able to claim virtue through performance suggests that reputation could be manipulable and fashionable in a positive way. More than this, it shows women to be active participants in the promotion of their households and families. According to Christina Luckyj, in the quotation which serves as the epigraph for this chapter, “we should be wary . . . of ignoring the multiple and mobile possibilities inscribed in feminine reticence” (70). Although Luckyj’s work is limited to a discussion of silence, her warning to pay heed to the potential within seemingly repressive prescriptions is central to my project here. The performances described in this chapter may challenge the feminist tendencies of criticism of women’s literature, which tend to privilege outwardly oppositional, contestatory writings and performances. But continuing to ignore performances such as those of
Russell, Sidney, and Egerton misses the real political power that is paradoxically located in the performance of activities associated with powerlessness.

I.
Bisham, 1592

In the summer of 1592, Lady Elizabeth Russell hosted Queen Elizabeth at her Berkshire house, Bisham Abbey. Remaining records of the visit indicate that in addition to a meeting of the privy council which took place during the visit, Elizabeth was greeted with an entertainment written by Russell herself and in which Russell and her own daughters performed. Importantly, Russell had her daughters perform their scene while needleworking, a performance of idealized domesticity which I argue had two objectives: to promote the girls as potential ladies-in-waiting to the queen, as Alexandra Johnston has also argued, a position both girls achieved after the entertainment was performed; and,

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12 Alexandra Johnston first established Russell’s likely authorship in “The ‘Lady of the farme’” 71-85. The entertainment was published anonymously with two other entertainments given for the queen on progress in 1592 at Sudely and Rycote. For Johnston, it is the particularly ‘feminine’ nature of the entertainment which provides the most convincing evidence of Russell’s authorship:

All the contextual evidence points to the conclusion that Elizabeth Cooke [Russell] herself wrote this ‘toye’ which she and her daughters presented to her old friend Elizabeth Tudor. The final piece of the puzzle for me was the discovery of the word play in the embroidery stitches embedded in the dialogue. This is, and was, ‘woman speak,’ references only a practitioner of the art would understand, and appreciate. (79)

Johnston’s argument is convincing and is accepted here, by Alison Findlay in Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama 80-1, and by Claire McManus in Women on the Renaissance Stage 85.
more importantly, to present Bisham, the realm of Elizabeth Russell, to be a model of Protestantism, feminine virtue, proper governance, and nobility, just as the entertainment declares Elizabeth Tudor’s England to have been.¹³

Bisham was an important house for Russell; she was married in its adjoining church and continued to live there after the death of her first husband, Sir Thomas Hoby, in 1566. Russell gained possession of the house after Hoby’s death and continued to use it during her second marriage to John, Lord Russell. She lived there after his death in 1584 as well. Russell owned other homes, including one in Blackfriars as well as Donnington Castle, also in Berkshire, over which she engaged in a lengthy, and ultimately losing battle in the 1590s and early 1600s with Charles Howard.¹⁴ But it was at Bisham where Russell was buried and where her remarkable tomb is located. Simply put, Bisham was Russell’s place (so much so, perhaps, that Berkshire legend says that her ghost still haunts the house) (Phillippy 179). As an aristocratic widow living in her own house, Russell enjoyed an anomalous position in her household, and had far more freedom than would have been afforded to a married or never married woman. Alice Friedman writes that wealthy aristocratic widows “exercised considerable independent authority over their families and households” since they were “no longer subject to either parental authority or their husbands’ control and too old to serve as intergenerational or interfamilial conduits through their offspring” (“Architecture, Authority, and the Female

¹³ Both Findlay 81 and Johnston 77 argue that the aim of the performance was to support the girls’ aim to be ladies-in-waiting to the queen.

¹⁴ See Heal “Reputation and Honour” 163.
Gaze” 50). Russell’s proprietary interest is evident in the entertainment. But despite her widowhood and exceptional status, Russell’s entertainment is conventional in its promotion of the nobility and legitimacy of her family through feminine virtue.

The entertainment that Russell wrote and staged to greet Elizabeth, which was published in 1592, reveals Russell’s entrenchment in Bisham and her desire to perform its legitimacy. The spatial movement of the entertainment has the queen and her retinue being stopped at three points on the way down the hill on the approach to the house itself: at the top of the hill where a Wilde man greeted the queen, at the middle of the hill where Russell’s daughters performed their dialogue, and at the entry to the house where Russell, “the Lady of the farme” herself, greets the queen and welcomes her into her house. The entertainment begins, then, at the furthest distance from the house, where an outsider, a worshiper of Sylvanus greets the queen. It is not known who would have performed the part of the Wilde man, but he is styled as an outsider by his distance from the house, his gender, and by his worship of a deity who is not Elizabeth, though of course, as is the case in entertainments of this kind, the mere presence of the queen is enough for him to renounce Sylvanus. “Vertue tameth fiercenesse, Beauty, madnesse. Your Majesty on my knees will I follow, bearing this Club, not as a Saluage, but to beate down those that are” (Aii), the Wilde man says, demonstrating his new allegiance to the queen. At the middle of the hill, closer to the house, are Russell’s daughters, who play “two Virgins keeping sheepe, and sewing in their samplers” (Aiiv). The girls, unlike the Wilde man, already worship Elizabeth, though their virtuous emulation of her is tested by Pan’s advances. The girls pass the test with flying colours, all the while adding compliments to
Elizabeth’s Protestant principles and governorship for good measure, in a statement which at once communicates the nobility of their estate and of Elizabeth’s England:

This way commeth the Queene of this Islande, the wonder of the world, and natures glory, leading affections in fetters, Virginities slaves: embracing mildnees in Justice, Maiesties twinns. In whom nature hath imprinted beauty, not art paynted it; in whom wit hath bred learning, but not without labour; labour brought forthe wisdome, but not without wonder. By her it is (Pan) that all our Cartes that thou seest, are laden with Corne, when in other countries they are filled with Harneys, that our horses are ledde with a whipp: theirs with a Launce, that our Rivers flow with fish, theirs with bloode: our cattel feede on pastures, they feed on pastures like cattle: One hande stretcheth to Fraunce, to earken Rebels; the other to Flaunders, to strengthen Religion; her heart to both Countries, her vertues to all. (Aiiiv)

Subsequently, the girls get to their knees just as the Wilde man did to escort the queen to the “bottome of the hill, entring into the house” (Aiij). The scene Queen Elizabeth was greeted with at the threshold of Bisham Abbey was one of “Ceres with her Nymphes in a harvest Cart . . . having a Crowne of wheat-ears with a Iewell” (Aiij). Ceres pays homage to Elizabeth, giving her the crown and ceding her rule to Elizabeth:

Greater than Ceres, receive Ceres Crowne, the ornament of plenty, the honour of your peace, heere at your highnes feete, I lay downe my feigned deity, which Poets have gowned with happiness, the world with wonder, birth with dignitie, nature with perfection, we doe all Homage, accounting nothing our but what comes fro you. And this much we promise for the Lady of the farme, that your presence hath added manie daies to her life, but the infinite ioyes shee conceyes in her heart, who presents your highness with this toye and this short praier, poured from her hart, that your daies may increase in happines, your happines have no end till there be no more daies. (Aiijv)

This concluding speech shifts mid-paragraph, from Ceres’s capitulation to the greeting, presumably still spoken by Ceres, from “the Lady of the farme” herself. That it is Russell

15 See also Johnston “The “Lady of the farme” 77-8.
who greets the queen at the door of the house communicates Russell’s own close
association with her house; she designed her entertainment so that it was she who invited
Elizabeth in. Alison Findlay argues that gardens and outdoor space “offered a more open
environment in which to nurture a unified sense of self” (69) for early modern women
writers, but it appears as though, for Russell, it was the house itself to which she wished
to lay claim.

Russell’s mastery of her own domestic space, evidenced by her control over the
threshold of the house, is, within the logic of the entertainment, both proper and
powerful. While the association between “lady of the Farme” and Russell herself is clear
enough, it is also possible that the character of Ceres acts as an analogue to Russell. The
parallels between Ceres’s powerful rural femininity and Russell’s own position at Bisham
support the notion that Ceres’s capitulation to the power of Cynthia is analogous to
Russell’s own temporary capitulation to the queen for the duration of the visit:

_Swel Ceres now for other Gods are shrinking,_
_Pomona pineth,_
_Fruitlesse her tree;_
_Faire Phoebus shineth_
_Only in mee._

_Conceite doth make me smile whilst I am thinking,_
_How every one doth read my story,_
_How every bough on Ceres lowreth,_
_Cause the heavens plenty on me powreth,_
_And they in leaves doe only glory,_
_All other Gods of power bereven,_
_Ceres only Queen of heaven._

_With Robes and flowers let me be dressed_
_Cynthia that shineth,_
_Is not so cleare,_
_Cynthia declineth,_
When I appeare,

Yet in this Ile she raignes as blessed
   And in everyone at her doth wonder,
   And in my eares still fonde fame whispers
Cynthia shalbe Ceres Mistres,
   But first my Carre shall rive a sunder,
   Helpe Phoebus helpe my fall is suddaine,
Cynthia, Cynthia, must be soveraigne.  (Aiij-Aiiijv)

If in fact we accept that Ceres is an analogue for Russell herself, Russell found a way to promote her own power and possession over her estate while ceding authority to Elizabeth over the course of her visit.

Russell thus establishes Bisham as her own space to which she graciously welcomes the queen; she presents her household to be one that is fecund, virtuous, and devoted to Queen Elizabeth. Anne and Elizabeth Russell’s performance of domesticity in the middle scene of the entertainment, as designed by Russell, has similar implications, promoting the girls’ virtue, and by extension, the virtue and legitimacy of Russell’s Bisham itself. The case for Russell’s daughters being the performers who play “the Virgins keeping Sheepe, and sowing in their samplers” (Aii) is supported by Pan’s description of them as the daughters of the owner: “. . . you are but the Farmers daughters of the Dale, I the god of the flocks that feede upon the hills” (Aii). The action of needleworking the girls performed was a practice strongly linked with feminine virtue in the period. The submissive posture of the needleworker and the consuming nature of the work made it an activity that was widely endorsed by even the most rigid of conduct book writers.\(^{16}\) As John Taylor writes in *The Needles Excellency*, a pattern book which also

\(^{16}\) See also Dympna Callaghan “Looking well into linens” 54.
includes an introduction praising women who practice stitchery, needleworking

will increase their peace, enlarge their store
To use their tongues less, and their Needles more,
The Needles sharpenesse, profit yeelds, and pleasure,
A Needle (though it be small and slender)
Yet is both a maker and a mender:
A grave Reformer of old Rents decayd,
Stops holes and seames and desperate cuts displayd,
And this without the Needle we may see,
We should without our Bibs and Riggins bee. (A)

Needleworking is represented by Taylor as a practice that keeps women in line by occupying their time and mental energy. Taylor’s frontispiece (see Figure 1) shows the seated, passive needleworker and contrasts her with the upright Follie, whose open posture and lack of any kind of activity to fill her hands and occupy her mind clearly signifies other kinds of openness as well. By presenting the girls needleworking, Russell depicts them as virtuous women, embodiments of the cultural ideal.

17 But at the same time needleworking—as Taylor himself acknowledges—was a useful and even a creative skill. Taylor’s pattern book does not prescribe the sorts of designs women should produce, but gives patterns to be assembled creatively by the needleworker; his book gives needleworkers the tools to put their own designs together, enabling creativity. He even includes a grid at the back of the book where women can make their own designs. Moreover, his book associates needleworking with powerful women, since he writes a sonnet praising the stitching gifts of Katherine of Aragon, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, Mary Sidney, and Lady Elizabeth Dormer, an argument which has been picked up on by scholars like Roszika Parker, Susan Frye, and Lena Cowen Orlin. Orlin sees the description of powerful women stitching “as a way of normalizing these most visible of women” (192). Callaghan provides an alternate reading of Taylor’s poem, arguing that “the needle becomes the emblem of phallic resilience in the face of extraordinarily vigorous copulation which leads even to venereal disease . . .” (67).
In the scene performed by the girls, they fend off the advances of Pan through their description of the needlework. Clare McManus describes the Bisham entertainment’s presentation of needleworking as “a quasi-linguistic medium, predicated through gender” (185) since this entire part of the entertainment is centred around the samplers the two girls work on and their description of them. The girls, who in the entertainment would likely have sat in the posture of the needleworker pictured in Taylor’s frontispiece, at one point are asked by Pan: “How do you burne time, & drowne
beauty in the prickling of clouts, when you should bee penning of Sonnets?” (Aii), a question which at once highlights the girls’ virtue and Pan’s depravity, since it shows them focusing their attentions on works that will enhance their virtue instead of spending time on pursuits which would compromise it, like writing sonnets. Orlin’s “Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance” argues that the “propagation of needlework as the ideal female occupation” (192) in prescriptive literature does not acknowledge the concerns about such practices evidenced in the plays of the commercial stage where “the ‘cover’ of stitchery offer[ed] women a . . . means of deceit” (192) (see also Chapter 1). Orlin’s argument about the connection between performed stitchery and vice on the commercial stage is convincing, but at the same time it is clear, as we shall see, that Russell’s entertainment avoids such perils.

It is important that the scene indicates that it is “Samplers” (Aii) that the girls sew. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, unlike today, “samplers were not for display, but were evidence of a girl’s progress and could be kept rolled up in a workbox as a record of patterns and techniques” (Arthur 59-60). The sampler, then, provides evidence of the girl’s education in her craft, but, additionally, in this entertainment, the virtuous content of the sampler shows the girls’ education in the precepts of feminine modesty as well. In the entertainment, Pan asks the girls to explain “what is wrought in this sampler?” (Aiii), and the girls respond by deciphering the allegorical significance of each figure they have made:

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18 See Linda Dove’s “Mary Wroth and the Politics of the Household” 141-56 on the negative implications of women’s sonnet writing.
PAN. . . . what is wrought in this sampler?
SYB. The follies of the Gods, who became beastes, for their affections.
PAN. What in this?
ISA. The honour of Virgins who became Goddesses, for their chastity.
PAN. But what be these?
SYB. Mens tongues, wrought all with double stitch but not one true.
PAN. What these?
ISA. Rose, Egletine, harts-ease, wrought with Queenes stitch, and all-right. (Aiii)

Not only do the girls indicate their mastery in different kinds of stitches in this dialogue, showing that their education in that respect is sound, but their explication of the significance of their work shows their virtue, since it glorifies chaste virgins and castigates lying men and foolish gods. Following Rozsika Parker’s foundational The Subversive Stitch, scholars have seen needleworking not just as a sign of feminine subjection, but as a creative and expressionistic medium. For Susan Frye, some early modern female

needleworkers did not confront their society’s equation of needlework with chaste labour so much as they accepted it and made it their own. They took seriously the masculinist association of needlework with the tongue, but instead of letting the needle silence them, they used it as their instrument of communication in the tradition of the silenced Philomel. (166)

The girls exemplify this process, at once demonstrating their virtue but letting their virtuous works speak.

Sybilla also uses the imagery depicted in the next part of the sampler to refute Pan’s claim that men’s and women’s speech is equally prone to lies:

PAN. I never hard the odds betweene mens tongues, and weomens, therefore they may be both double, unlesse you tell mee how they differ.

SYB. Thus weomens tongues are made of the same flesh that their harts
are, and speake as they think: Mens harts of the flesh that their tongues, and both dissemble. But prythy Pan be packing, thy words are as odious as thy sight, and we attend a sight which is more glorious, then the sunne rising. (Aiii-iv)

That sight is, of course, Elizabeth. Through this speech, Sybilla asserts the truth of her own self-representation in the entertainment. Sybilla’s deciphering of her needlework for Pan proves her virtue, and does not undermine it. The conceit of having the girls sew as they perform, and to make the performance essentially a description of their sewing, their technique, and their education in virtue allows them to display and assert their virtue to the queen and her travelling court. Deciphering their needlework enables the girls to both assert and perform their embodiment of proper feminine virtue, and long held virtue at that, since the sampler is meant to show the development over time of the skill of the needleworker.

What is more, the entire interaction between the girls and Pan enacts courtly rituals, and shows the girls behaving properly at each turn, demonstrating that they are equally effective at attracting and deflecting attention, an attribute Elizabeth sought in her maids of honour (Wilson 3-13). Pan describes how his attempts to win the girls have been stymied:

How often have I brought you Chestnuts for a love token, and desired by acceptance for a favour . . . you are but the Farmer’s daughters of the Dale, I the god of the flockes that feed upon the hills. Though I cannot force love, I may obedience, or else send your Sheepe a wandring, with my fancies, coyness must be revenged with curtnesse . . . (Aii)

Russell, then, even demonstrates Isabella’s and Sybilla’s stratagems for dealing with improper suitors like Pan. Isabella says, in response to Pan’s threats, that “experience hath provided us with a remedy, to laugh at them when they know not what to saie, and
when they speake, not to beleeeve them” (Aiii). Indeed, the girls’ virtue is shown to be so effective that it transforms Pan, and he cedes his worship of Jupiter and yields his land to Elizabeth, breaking his phallic pipe (Aiii).

But this bid for positions at court for Russell’s daughters is not the only bid the entertainment makes. Russell uses needleworking to show her daughters embodying ideals predominant in early modern culture, at the same time as defining the meaning of these ideals through performance and thus taking control of how they are to be read. The propriety and virtue of the girls which is claimed through performance promotes Bisham as a place of nobility, honour, and legitimacy, asserting the family’s, and Russell’s own, right to rule it.

In a reading of Russell’s correspondence, Heal notes that in Russell’s legal correspondence, she often relied on feminine virtue while at the same time revealing frustration at the limitations of such a strategy:

Like many of her sex, Elizabeth often found it expedient to emphasize the vulnerability of the woman in order to protect her interests. In 1597, towards the end of a conflict with a Windsor tradesman about debt, she wrote to her nephew Robert Cecil thanking him ‘with all my heart for defending my poor part in honour.’ Another letter in the same series asserts that she would not have been insulted by mere tradesmen demanding payment had she possessed a ‘husband honourable.’ In the Star Chamber case she made much of the refusal of Nottingham’s men to allow her to take her coach to the castle and of the subsequent incident in which she sat up all night outside the castle lodge. These and other of Lady Russell’s statements migrate between the purely manipulative—the use of her position as a means of attracting male sympathy—and vigorous resentment of her inability to use female honour as a means of empowerment. (164)

In the Bisham entertainment, it appears as if Russell found a way to do just this. At Bisham, feminine honour, virtue, and reticence were deployed to show just how
legitimate and powerful her estate was.

II.
Wilton, 1599

Mary Sidney’s entertainment features a very different performance of domestic femininity than that of Russell and her daughters, although her entertainment makes a similar bid for familial legitimacy and influence through her own performance as an exemplary silent Renaissance woman. Sidney herself wrote the pastoral dialogue, “A Dialogue betweene two Shepheards, Thenot and Piers, in praise of Astrea,” in anticipation of Elizabeth’s 1599 progress. The dialogue was to be performed at the Pembroke family estate of Wilton House, in rural Wiltshire, but the queen never made it to Wilton probably because of the news of a possible Spanish invasion which reached the queen right before the visit was to have taken place (Erler, “Davies’s Astrea” 43). The threat was not realized, but it meant that most of the progress for that year was cancelled, especially the visit to distant Wilton (Erler, “Davies’s Astrea” 43). The Earl and Countess of Pembroke very much needed Elizabeth to come to Wilton in 1599 since they were caught in the struggle between Robert Cecil and Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex:

The death of Lord Burley in early August 1598 led to a culminating struggle between Essex and Robert Cecil, with the balance of power and influence over the queen moving Cecil’s way. Although Essex was appointed as Governor-General of Ireland in 1599, Robert Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke may have already sensed that their friendship with Robert Devereux could become a personal and political liability. As always, the absolute key to success at court remained the personal favour of the queen and it must have been a severe
disappointment to the Countess of Pembroke when in July 1599 a proposed royal visit to Wilton House was unexpectedly cancelled. (Brennan 110)

Because of the cancelled visit, the entertainment was likely never performed, and it certainly was never performed at Wilton for Elizabeth, the only context where its full resonance would be evident. The dialogue did circulate in manuscript and was published in Francis Davison’s 1602 Sidnean miscellany, A Poetical Rapsody.¹⁹

In addition to the political tensions and difficulties for the Sidney and Herbert families at the end of Elizabeth’s reign, there was also the problem, for both families, of demonstrating their nobility. Both the Sidneys and the Herberts were late arrivals to the upper echelons of the nobility, gaining their country seats quite late. The work of constructing the values of nobility and legitimacy discursively and performatively was especially important.²⁰ William Herbert, the first earl of Pembroke, received Wilton House from Henry VIII only in 1543 when his wife’s sister, Catherine Parr, married Henry VIII (Lever 4). McBride notes that Mary Sidney’s own family were social arrivistes whose tenure at Penshurst dated only from Edward VI’s reign . . . . Such an aristocrat [as Robert Sidney] could not, in fact, exist outside this discursive and semiotic process . . . . The Sidneys, like many others, needed both to link themselves to the history of the country house and the noble status engendered there and to discount the unique valorization implicit in the estate. They needed both to pretend they had always lived there and to pretend it didn’t matter that they hadn’t. (49-50)

¹⁹ Notably, the Earl and Countess of Pembroke had already once entertained Elizabeth on progress, in 1592 at Ramsbury, another of their Wiltshire estates. The Ramsbury visit “confirmed their centrality to both Wiltshire county life and [Elizabeth’s] London court” (Brennan 101). There are no surviving records of the Ramsbury visit.

²⁰ For more on the Herberts ascent to power, see Tresham Lever’s The Herberths of Wilton 18-35.
The Herbert family was no different from the Sidneys’ in this respect. The entertainment at Wilton was an opportunity for the Herberts to perform their nobility, and it was not just Mary Sidney’s writing of the dialogue that would have accomplished that performance of nobility but her performance of idealized feminine silence as well.

Wilton was Sidney’s primary residence, though she did spend time at other Pembroke homes such as Baynard’s Castle in London and Ramsbury, also in Wiltshire. Penshurst, her father’s home, tends to be the home most associated with all the Sidneys because of Jonson’s memorialization of it in “To Penshurst,” but it was Wilton, her husband’s seat, which is most closely associated with Sidney’s famous literary circle. For Karen Raber, Sidney’s literary achievements in translation, poetry, and patronage are “inseparable from her place as manager of Wilton and the Pembroke family’s daily life. Her influence in the domestic role of aristocratic ‘housewife’ makes possible, but also complicates her exercise of literary authority and political power” (103). The complication of which Raber writes arises from the fact that it was only as her husband’s wife that Sidney had such a prominent literary role. This context informs Sidney’s planned performance at Wilton. That is, the very status and house that gave her the opportunity and means to write, publish, and nurture other writers required her, in her progress entertainment, to perform her own submission.

Mary Sidney had a long experience of entertainments. She participated in a royal entry with her spectacular entry into London for the Ascension Day festivities in 1588 after her parents’ and brother’s deaths. She entered the city with a brilliantly arrayed train in the Sidney blue and gold livery (Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix* 59-60; Brennan 100). An
existing account describes her spectacular appearance on that day:

On Thursday the wife of the earl of Pembroke made a superb entrance into the city. She has been for more than a year on her estates in the country. Before her went 40 gentlemen on horseback, two by two, all very finely dressed with gold chains. Then came a coach in which was the Countess, a lady, then another coach with more ladies, and after that a litter containing the children, and four ladies on horseback. After them came 40 or 50 servants in her livery with blue cassocks. (qtd. in Hannay, Philip’s Phoenix 59-60)

This procession moved from Wilton to London, and was meant to symbolize Sidney’s reentry into society and assumption of her brother’s role. In addition to the evidence of the 1588 festivities, there is also evidence of Sidney sponsoring, if not performing, in story-telling activities among her circle (Hannay et al, The Collected Works 13).\(^{21}\) Additionally, a manuscript volume of Canzonets by Thomas Morley which was written for Sidney in 1593, says in its dedication:

Receive then (most worthy Lady) these simple gifts, worthy to be received, even of the greatest Princes the world hath (not because they are mine but because they are yours) to which if at any time your Ladyship shall but vouchsafe your heav’n’ly voice; it cannot be but they will return perfumed with the sweetness of that breath, as the air will be made even delightful thereby, and for that cause come to be in request & sought for ever after. (no pagination)

Morley imagines Sidney as a vocal performer of his songs. Sidney also may have been involved at a Christmas feast at Ludlow in 1596 where the guests performed an Arthurian entertainment (Hannay, Philip’s Phoenix 38). Yet when it came to performance for Elizabeth and her court circle at Wilton, Sidney presented herself differently, and with

\(^{21}\) Hannay also speculates that Sidney’s daughter may have participated in the circle as well, since the Bright MS “includes among anonymous poems possibly written by a woman in the Sidney circle, whether Lady Anne or one of Pembroke’s nieces” (Hannay et al. 13).
more reticence than on any of these other occasions when we know she performed; the
difference in her performance marked the difference in the kind of role she had to play.
At Wilton House in 1599, her role was to legitimate the house and her family.

Sidney’s pastoral dialogue features two shepherds debating the merits of different
modes of praise: excessive compliment and silence inspired by the wondrousness of the
Queen. Thenot praises Elizabeth (Astrea) excessively, but each of his declarations of
Astrea’s wonder is contradicted by Piers, who postulates Astrea’s essential
indescribability:

THEN. I Sing divine ASTREAS praise,
    O Muses! help by wittes to raise,
    And heave my Verses higher.

PIERS. Thou needst the truth, but plainly tell,
    Which much I doubt thou canst not well,
    Thou art so oft a lier.

THEN. If in Song no more I show
    Then Heav’n, and Earth, and Sea do know,
    Then truely I have spoken.

PIERS. Sufficeth not no more to name,
    But being lesse, the like, the same.
    Else lawes of truth be broken. (1-12)

Thenot’s effusions are tempered by the more even-handed Piers, who does not accept
Thenot’s conventionalized, excessive praise. The dialogic nature of the entertainment
lets Sidney have it both ways: as the writer of the dialogue, she praises Elizabeth
excessively through Thenot, but also communicates the incomprehensibility and
inexpressibility of Elizabeth’s wonder through Piers.

There is evidence, though, that it is Piers’s stance that the dialogue endorses over
Thenot’s. Hannay has established the link between Piers’s and Sidney’s own Protestantism, not just in the austere form of praise he endorses but in his name:

Because of its association with Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, read in the sixteenth century as a ‘Protestant’ text, the name Piers was usually used for satiric comments on abuses in the Church, as in Spenser’s ‘Maye.’ In ‘October,’ Piers asks Cuddie to Praise Eliza, thereby associating the name with encomia. The name may also allude to John Piers, who would have been well known to Pembroke because of his association with Leicester’s militantly Protestant alliance at court and because he was Bishop at Salisbury from 1577 to 1589, during her residence at Wilton. (*The Collected Works* 84-5)

Shannon Miller similarly links Piers with Sidney because his ethos mirrors that of Sidney’s Psalms, which were widely believed to have been prepared for presentation to Elizabeth at the Wilton visit: “Mary Sidney could be considered a figure for Piers, the voice of resistance to hyperbolic language” (160). What is more, Sidney gives Piers the last word in the dialogue:

THEN. Then Piers, of friendship tell my why,
My meaning true, my words should ly,
And strive in vaine to raise her?

PIERS. Words from conceit do only rise
Above conceit her honour flies
But silence none can praise her. (55-60)

Sidney’s mastery and comfort in the encomium is evident in her dismissal of its characteristically effusive praise, which critics like Hannay, Miller, and Erler have

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22 Hannay argues in *Philip’s Phoenix* that in the late 1590s, Mary Sidney planned to speak for the nearly defunct [Protestant] alliance through a handsome volume of the Psalms prepared for the queen’s visit to Wilton. This may have been the volume (then in the Wilton library), that John Aubrey described as ‘all the *Psalms of David* translated by Sir Philip Sidney, curiously bound in crimson velvet,’ or it may have been a transcription of that volume. (85)
productively argued challenges the genre of praise, making it more of a “meta-panegyric” in its “commentary on the failure of the language of encomia” (Hannay 86).

Sidney’s endorsement of Piers’s perspective would have been similarly accomplished in performance by the fact that Wilton, at the time Mary Sidney was its mistress, was a working sheep farm:

Before the elaborate reconstruction of the gardens [of Wilton] by de Caus in 1632-6, its formal knots would have been relatively close to the Wiltshire Downs outside the walled gateway to the eastern front. John Aubrey commented that ‘the downes are intermixt with boscages that nothing can be more pleasant, and in summer time doe excell Arcadia in the riche turfe and moderate aire . . .. The innocent lives here of the shepherds does give us the resemblance of the golden age.’ (Findlay, Playing Spaces 81-2)

For Alison Findlay, the presence of real shepherds ironizes the artificial pastoral encomium spoken by Thenot and Piers, although the passage she quotes from Aubrey betrays no irony in its exalted description of the estate. But Findlay’s assumption of the ironic contrast between the real shepherds and Thenot and Piers is too quick. As a meta-panegyric, to follow Hannay’s description of the “Dialogue,” which works to critique the genre of praise, is the pastoral entertainment necessarily so artificial that there would be a blatant contrast between performed reality and lived reality? Piers lambastes Thenot for his artificiality, and most certainly the outdoor setting of the dialogue would have undercut Thenot (if this is in fact how it would have been performed; there is no direct textual evidence to support Findlay’s assumption that it would have been performed outside). As Findlay writes, “Thenot’s extravagant praise of [Elizabeth] as a ‘field in flowry Roabe arrayd’ . . .. seems all the more artificial if spoken outside, amid the realities of nature” (Playing Spaces 82). But such a setting, while discrediting Thenot, would only
serve to support Piers’s claims and his status as a plain man (though an eloquent one), like the shepherds in the fields. The setting, then, easily discredits Thenot but not Piers, whose ethos is not of pastoral artificiality but plain country values. Performing an anti-pastoral on a working sheep farm might, instead of discrediting the performance, have worked to elide living space and performance space, imprinting the claims Sidney makes through Piers of Protestant restraint and silent praise on the lands of Wilton itself.

At the same time that the dialogue endorses Piers’s silence over Thenot’s effusions, the dialogue’s declaration of silence as the best way to praise Elizabeth makes Sidney’s own silence during the dialogue significant and, indeed, performative. It makes Sidney, as writer of the dialogue and as silent host, exemplary amongst those celebrating the queen, since Sidney actually is silent over the course of the performance, while Piers simply talks about being silent. In this way, the dialogue transforms Sidney from being simply the writer of the entertainment, host to the queen, and audience member during the performance of the “Dialogue” into an exemplary silent woman and chief admirer of the queen; it makes her into a performer. Since Sidney’s performance is one of textual and verbal absence, it is, admittedly, difficult to conceive of through the printed version of the dialogue. In performance, though, silence can be extremely expressive. Sophie Tomlinson writes on the long tradition of silent performances by women in Jacobean court masque that

the fact that women in masques were mute meant that the power of their performances lay chiefly in their sumptuous appearance and physical movement. Women’s ability to ‘work the best motions,’ therefore depended on a ‘silent rhetoric’ similar to the virtuous influence attributed to the elite female audience . . . The masquer’s silence in no way lessened the theatricality of her or his role; indeed, combined with the wizards
which customarily obscured their faces, the masquers’ silence must have heightened the initial mysteriousness of their appearance. (21)

Sidney’s performance of her capacity for silence has a different effect from the sumptuous, sensual performances of women in masque, but it may have been equally powerful in performance in its promotion of plain, Protestant, and conventionally feminine ideals instead.

The ideal of feminine silence which Sidney embodies in the conceived Wilton performance correlates with the ubiquitous injunctions to feminine silence in early modern conduct literature and culture. Thomas Wilson writes, for instance, in the *Arte of Rhetorique*,

> What becometh a woman best, and first of all? Silence. What seconde? Silence. What third? Silence. What fourth? Silence. Yea of a man should ask me til downes day, I would stil crie, silence, silence, without the which no woman hath any good gifte, but having the same, no doubt she must have many other notable giftes, of which of necessitie do ever follow such a vertue. (qtd. in Luckyj 40)

Like Russell, Sidney betrays a keen awareness of this ideal both in her entertainment and in her written correspondence, frequently invoking silence in her letters, as she does in two letters written to Sir Robert Cecil within two months in 1597. In one letter, written in August 1597, she starts by writing:

> Sir to bee silent now finding so Just Cawse to bee thankfull were a wrong to yow and an Injury to my selfe whos disposision hath ever held yow in very worthy regard and yowr owne merrit doth chaling much more then my best acknowledgmemt to acquit. (289)

In another letter to Cecil dated the 29th of September, she writes him to apologize for an indiscreet comment. She writes that

> I understand report hath bin made unto yow of sum speech that shoold
pass my Lord . . . tuching Cramborne. My desire is yow should be trewly satisfied therein, and that in regard of truth and the respect I beare yow, for otherwise I woule be silent. I protest unto yow the report was most untrue; And uppon myne owne knowldg, word, and honor, do assurer yow ther was not any word spoken at any time to which had yowr selfe bin present yow coulde have taken any exception. (290)

Furthermore, Sidney hesitates when she has to speak plainly. In a letter from 1604 to the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury, Sidney writes to them about the marriage of her son:

And so woulde appeere if to speake plainly, as I love to do (without disguise) and at that now at first, as last, and ever I say if bace instruments (with he whom I am in no sort of partisopate) stood not in the my way such a one as hath devided myne own from me (he that was held the dearest part of me). (296-7)

In this sentence, Sidney makes a number of corrections, which is notable since this is a sentence where she says she will speak the most plainly. Sidney conceives in these letters of silence as a way of gaining and retaining power, just as in her performance of feminine silence in “A Dialogue.”

By highlighting her capacity for silence and her understanding of its cultural meaning in these letters and in her entertainment, Sidney aligns herself with the silent feminine ideal, presenting her authorship of a great house entertainment to be co-extensive with the ideals of Renaissance womanhood, defining this silence as a powerful performative tool to gain political influence, and even suggesting that her status as a proper Renaissance woman makes her most suited to praise her queen. Silence, in Sidney’s “Dialogue,” is not so much an evil preventing Sidney from speaking, since,

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23 Her letters to Sir Julius Caesar are less ceremonious. Hannay notes as well that Sidney’s addresses to her social inferiors are not nearly as self-effacing in manner (“When Riches Growes” 82).
through her characters of Thenot and Piers she gets to say all that she needs to say, but is instead a source of creative and persuasive power whereby she could use the occasion to level a critique at a genre known for its ridiculous excess, please her queen with her wit and her praise, make a case for her own talent and work, and assert her proper femininity to her queen and to her household. Mary Erler, who does not consider Sidney to be a performer at all in the planned dialogue, reads the dialogue’s ending as turning entirely to its subjects’ “transcending nature” (51). She writes further that “Piers the plain man moves, in the course of the poem, from plain speech to none at all, to the total abdication of poetic power and even poetic identity” (51). While Piers disappears in the logic of the entertainment, contrary to this reading, his silence actually brings Sidney, the most silent of the Dialogue’s agents, to the fore. Although the entertainment never had the opportunity to perform the nobility of the Herbert family, the performative strategies in the planned Dialogue do reveal to us the political uses of feminine reticence in progress entertainment, and the strategic importance of its performance to a family much in need of proving their status and winning the favour of the queen.

A final note: several years after her husband’s death, Mary Sidney built a house of her own, Houghton Conquest, in Bedfordshire. The house was built between 1616 and 1620 and was very different from the monumental estates of Penshurst and Wilton where she lived as a daughter and as a wife. Friedman finds the Palladian Houghton to be exceptionally innovative in design, distinguished not only by its departing from tradition in the handling of the great hall, but further by the presence of distinctive Italianate entrance loggias that provide access to the hall from the north and west sides. (“Architecture, Authority, and the Female Gaze” 55)
Moreover, Friedman writes that many of the differences between the noble family seats
which Sidney had previously inhabited and the house she built for her own purposes
derive from her status as a woman. She had no family seat to call her own
and no traditional ties of service and hospitality to maintain. Like Bess of
Hardwick, she had less to gain from the reiteration of conventional forms
than she did from an association with a new style. (‘‘Architecture,
Authority and the Female Gaze’’ 55)

Presumably, then, if Sidney, who no longer had the role of promoting her husband’s
family (that would have fallen to the new Countess of Pembroke), had entertained King
James at this house, she would have had the opportunity to perform very differently than
she had planned to do at Wilton. At Wilton, her duty to her family required her
performance of subjection; we can only speculate at what kind of performance she would
have staged at Houghton.

III.

Harefield, 1602

In 1602, on her final summer progress, Queen Elizabeth and her court were
entertained at Harefield by Sir Thomas Egerton and his wife, Lady Alice Egerton,
Dowager Countess of Derby. Lady Alice’s trustees bought Harefield for her in just
1601, not long after she and her husband, Sir Thomas Egerton, were married in 1600.24

24 Lady Alice Egerton had money of her own, inherited from Strange: “since she
and [her husband] Derby had no male issue but only three daughters, the earldom passed
to Ferdinando’s younger brother William. Much of the estate had been willed to her.
The new earl tried to keep as much land as he could with the title. In the legal wrangles
over Ferdinando’s estate, Egerton acted for the countess” (Brown 16). The legal dispute
Egerton had just acquired the house at the time she hosted Elizabeth, but she was to form a strong association with it; she lived there until her death in 1636. Moreover, the house passed through her own line, and was willed to her daughter Jane Stanley, wife of Grey, Lord Chandos, not to any of Egerton’s children. Harefield itself was an old estate, which had been held mainly by the Newdigate family until it was sold in 1585 to Sir Edmund Anderson and then to Egerton’s trustees (Nichols III:581). The house burned to the ground in 1660, and there appear to be no existing likenesses of it, but it was described as “a fair house, standing on the edge of the hill; the river Colne passing near the same, through the pleasant meadows and sweet pastures, yielding both delight and profit” (qtd. in Nichols III:581).

The rural setting of the house is very much a feature of the entertainment, which presents Harefield’s owners, and especially Egerton, its mistress, as dedicated household managers with a fertile, well-managed estate. The entertainment promotes a homey, self-deprecating picture of the estate and its owners, to the extent that the entertainment has a character named Place who is a personification of Harefield itself, dressed in “a partie coloured roabe, like the brick house” (III:588), who wishes that the house was more grand to please the queen:

Doth not the presence of a Prince make a Cottage a Court, and the presence of the Gods make every place Heaven? But, alas, my littlenes is not capable of that happines that her great grace would impart onto me: but weare I as large as there harts that are mine Owners, I should be the fairest Pallace in the world; and weere I agreeable to the wishes of there hartes, I should in some measure resemble her sacred selfe, and be in the outward frount exceeding faire, and in the inward furniture exceeding rich.

was not resolved until 1609.
As a new couple in a new home, it was important that Sir Thomas and Lady Alice Egerton establish the nobility of their marriage and their claim to the house. Moreover, although Egerton’s first husband, Ferdinando Strange, was of a very old and wealthy family, Alice Egerton’s own family, the Spencers, were not of the same stature (Brown 16). Sir Thomas Egerton himself “was a very important self-made man at court,” but not nearly as well-born as [Egerton’s] first husband or as rich (Brown 16). Under such circumstances, the performance of nobility, of the values of the aristocracy, were very important.

Egerton had a remarkable career as a courtier. She married well twice, attained great wealth, and was celebrated in entertainments by John Marston, in “The Entertainment at Ashby” (1607) which was commissioned by her daughter, the Countess of Huntingdon, and by John Milton in “Arcades” (163) which featured performances by Egerton’s own grandchildren. She also danced in at least two court masques: Samuel Daniel’s *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604) and Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Beauty* (1608) (Brown 15). When she hosted Elizabeth, though, the entertainment presented a

Brown notes that the marriage was not a successful one: Egerton . . . found his wife too independent and self-interested for his tastes, after he had married her. They had a notoriously bad relationship. There was personal antipathy and a clash of wills. According to sad and embittered notes which Egerton left for his only surviving son, John (the future earl of Bridgewater), the troubles began early, after John had been married to Frances, one of the countess’ daughters, in 1601. Egerton accused the mother [his wife] of resisting delivering the dowry out of the Stanley estates and of grasping at his own wealth. Disputed inheritances can hardly have helped, but both were holding and trying to better what they had. (16-17)
picture of the Countess not as a court sophisticate but as a dedicated housewife.

The authorship of the entertainment is undetermined, although it has been suggested that the verse was written by Sir John Davies and the prose speeches by John Lyly (Erler, “Chaste Sports” 4). The entertainment was never published. Mary Erler’s study of Harefield and of the entertainment at Ashby in 1607, where Egerton’s daughter, the Countess of Huntingdon, entertained Egerton herself with an elaborate entertainment and masque, identifies both Ashby and Harefield as “female entertainments” in that they contain traces of female taste. This argument is buttressed by the fact that an unidentified, later hand on the back of the Harefield manuscript describes it as the “Entertainment of Queen Elizabeth at Harefield, by the Countess of Derby” (Nichols III. 586). Erler’s modest assessment of the involvement of women in the entertainments does not consider the possibility of women’s performances in the Harefield entertainment. However, the Egerton family is one of the few in the Renaissance who are widely recognized for having something of a tradition of household female performance.26

Although Alice Egerton did not write the entertainment, and did not, from the remaining

26 The families of Lady Alice’s two husbands were deeply involved in theatre. Alison Findlay notes that “the Stanley Household was popularly known as ‘the northern court,’ patronizing two groups of professional players, and acting as a touring stop for other all-male professional troupes. As in the royal court, however, there was a tradition of female performance in masques” (“Payments, Permits, and Punishments” 57). Furthermore, on the Stanley family, French R. Fogle writes that it is clear from all the evidence that we have that the Stanleys were active patrons of many of the notable literary figures of the day, that they were immediate participants in the theatre activity of the period, and that Lady Strange [Egerton], as a member of that family was involved in patronage. (16)

J.J. Bagely offers a good summary of the Derby household theatricals in The Earls of Derby 71-77.
textual evidence, have a speaking or dancing role in its performance, Egerton, as host of
the queen, in an entertainment obsessed with hospitality, was a performer in it.

The entertainment used different buildings on the property as sets, and the actors
in the opening dialogue who greeted Elizabeth played household servants. The scene
Elizabeth was greeted with took place at the dairy house:

after the Queene entered (out of the high way) into the Deamesne
grounds of Harefielde, near the Dayrie howse, she was mett with 2
persons, the one representing a BAYLIFFE, the other a DAYRIE-MAIDE
with the Speech. Her Majesty, being on horsebacke, stayed under the tree
(because it rayned) to heare it. (III.586)

Joane, the dairy maid, mistakes the Queen and her retinue as “idle hearvest folkes”
(III.588), and plans to put them to work as Egerton, her mistress, has instructed her to do
with such people.\(^\text{27}\) In the scene, Joane and Richard, the Bayliff, debate about where the
visitors should stay, what their status is, and how the two servants can best meet the
expectations of Egerton. The Bayliff disagrees with Joane’s assessment of the group, and
wishes to lead them on to the manor house. Joane, conversely, tries to dissuade them
from going with him, arguing that the main house cannot accommodate lowly strangers
as well as she can:

I pray you hartley forsooth, come neare the house, and take a simple
lodging with us to-night; for I can asuere you that yonder house that he
talks of [Harefield] is but a Pigeon-house, which is very little if it were
finisht, and yet very little of it is finisht. And if you believe me, upon my
life Lady, I saw Carpenters and Bricklayers and other Workmen about it
within less than those two howers. Besides, I doubt my Mr. and Mrs are
not at home; or, if they be, you must make your own provision, for they
have noe provision for such Strangers. (587)

\(^\text{27}\) The gender of the actors is not indicated in the text.
The litotes deployed in Joane’s speech communicates to Elizabeth just how fit Harefield is for her habitation. Joane’s speech tells them that they have improved the house for her with their builders, and they most certainly will have “provision” for these strangers. The declining standards of hospitality that were so frequently lamented in the period are the subject of the joke here.\(^{28}\) Richard Braithwait, for instance, as quoted in McBride, writes on the failures of hospitality, which he thought to be endemic to the period, that

> ‘this neglect of *Hospitalitie*, which may be observed in most places throughout this Kingdome,’ was caused by ‘riot and prodigalitie,’ especially visible in ‘suptuous and goodly *Buildings*, whose faire *Frontispiece*, promise [sic] much comfort to the wearied *Traveller*’ but that disappoint because ‘*Provision* (the life of *Hospitalitie*) hath run out their *gates*, leaving vast penurious houses apt enough to receive, but unreproved to releve.’ For Braithwaite, the chief cause of this neglect of hospitality was the gentry’s ‘love to the *Court*’ . . .. (94)

Joane’s declarations of lack of hospitality to be had for such visitors at Harefield serve the purpose of communicating just what good hosts the Egertons were to be.

Although Joane wants to put the travelling party to work, she does offer to feed them the rich, fresh food of the farm. She says to them:

> You should seeme to be Ladies: and we in the country have an old saying that ‘halfe a pease a day will serve a Lady.’ I know now what you are, neither am I acquainted with your dyet: but, if you will goe with me, you shall have cheare for a Lady: for first you shall have a dayntue sillibub; next a messe of clowted creame; stroakings, in good faith, redd cowes milk, and they say in London that’s restorative: you shall have greene cheeses and creame. (I’ll speake a bould word) if the Queene herself (God save her Grace) [were here] she might be seen to eat of it. We will not greatly bragge of our possets, but we might be seen to eat of it; and if you love frute, forsooth, wee have jentings, paremayns, russet coates, pippins, aple johns, and perhaps a pareplum, a damsone, I or an apricocke

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\(^{28}\) Heal writes of the persistence of the idea of the decline in hospitality in *Hospitality in Early Modern England* 93.
too, but that they are noe dainties this yeare; and therefore I pray, come neare the house, and wellcome heartily doe soe. (587)

The plain food Joane describes is not the “dainties” or elaborate conceits that were the norm at aristocratic banquets (see Chapter 3), but were fresh farm cheese and fruits (though a good array) promoting the fecundity, labour, and wholesomeness of the farm.

In response to Joane’s country hospitality, Richard says:

B. Goe to, gossip; your tongue must be running. If my Mrs. should heare of this, I faith she would give you little thankes I can tell you, for offeringe to draw so faire a flight from her Pigeon-house (as you call it) to your Dayrie-house.

JO. Wisely, wisely, brother Richard; I faith as I would use the matter, I dare say shee would give me great thankes: for you know my Mrs. charged me earnestly to retaine all idele hearvest-folkes that past this way; and my meaning was, that, if I could hold them all this night and to-morrow; on Monday morening to carry them into the fields; and to make them earne their entertainment well and thriftily. (587-8)

The debate about how to meet their mistress’s expectations, of what she would like them, as her servants, to do with these guests, puts Egerton’s own housewifery at the forefront of the entertainment. Egerton does not speak a word of the dialogue in this part of the entertainment, but she is very much a presence in it, since she—and her standards of domestic management—is the subject of so much discussion. The Harefield entertainment represents Egerton as a housewife dedicated to household management and as a firm-handed manager; in this way, she is at once a character in the entertainment and a bystander; she is in the realm of fiction and in the realm of the real. The entertainment’s depiction of Egerton’s role in the household shows her tending to the needs of her household, managing it, ‘keeping’ it, and avoiding public life in a way that is congruent with the ideals of prescriptive literature. The Harefield entertainment performs
Egerton’s domestic virtue and her embodiment of the ideals of virtuous femininity as
domestic manager and conscientious housewife. It is Elizabeth, of course, who is
proclaimed by Joane to be the “best Huswife of the company” (588) and to whom is
presented “2 Juells” in the shape of a rake and a fork which she is to use the next day
when Joane hopes to put her to work to earn her keep, continuing the joke about her
mistaken identity (Nichols 588), but the entertainment makes clear that Egerton is
exemplary in this respect as well.

While the entertainment is largely conventional in its presentation of nobility and
the role Egerton performed in the performance of the legitimacy and nobility by her
exemplary huswifery, the closing monologue of the entertainment is delivered by Place,
who laments that the visitors are to leave her behind, moves beyond the conventional:

Sweet Maiestie, be pleased to looke upon a poor Wydow, mourning before
your Grace. I am this Place, which at your comming was full of joy: but
now at your departure am as full of sorrow. I was then, for my comfort,
accompanied with the present cheerful Time; but now he is to depart with
you; and, blessed as he is, must ever fly before you: But alas! I have noe
wings, as Time hath. My heaviness is such, that I must stand still, amazed
to see so great hapiness so some berefti mee. Oh, that I could remove
with you; as other circumstances can! Time can go with you; they can
move like Heaven. But I, like dull Earth (as I am Indeed), must stand
unmovable. I could wish myself like the inchaunted Castle of Love, to
hould you heere for ever, but that your vertues would dissolve all my
inchauntement. Then what remedy? As it is against the nature of an
Angell to be circumscribed in Place, so it against the nature of Place to
have the motion of an Angell. I must stay forsaken and desolate. Yoe
may goe with majestie, joy, and glory. My only suyte, before you goe, is
that you will pardon the close imprisonment which you have suffred ever
since your comminge, imputinge it not to mee, but St Swythen, . . . And I
pray to him that made both Time and Place, that, in all places where ever
you shall arrive, you may anchor as safly, as you doe and ever shall doe in
the harts of my Owners. (593-4)

Place’s construction as a widow lamenting the fact that the court leaves her behind can be
seen as an important commentary on the lives of women in estates like Harefield. Couched as a lament for the queen’s departure, the speech also is a lament for the fixedness of women in the home, of their entrenchment in the “dull earth.” The Harefield entertainment, in this way, betrays a fascinating duality. It perpetuates the imprisonment of women by its construction of Egerton as a domestic ideal in order to claim the legitimacy and nobility of the estate, while it also, by the inclusion of this remarkable speech, laments the fixity of women’s place in such a system.

The system Place laments, though, was to change, and not long after the Harefield performance. Women’s performances in the Renaissance were rooted both in the places where they were performed as well as in their genre. And changing fashions in genre, similarly, changed the way women performed in Jacobean England. After 1603 and Elizabeth’s death, King James and Queen Anna still went on progresses, but the masque became the prevailing theatrical way to perform state power and to seek royal favour in progress entertainments. The masque genre was not restricted to the Jacobean court, but proliferated in the country houses of Jacobean England. Just five years after Harefield, in fact, the entertainment staged for Egerton at her daughter, the Countess of Huntingdon’s house, Ashby, featured a masque, complete with elaborate scenic effects. There is still an interest in and celebration of virtue in the masque, since the presence of Egerton is shown to transform the witch-like crone who greets her on her arrival into a woman

29 The entertainment was written by John Marston with some contributions from William Skipwith.
arrayed in white. But masques expected a very different kind of performance from its female dancers than the ones discussed here, and it can be argued that the masque afforded women forms of dramatic expression beyond that of these earlier performances. What masque did not offer was an active role in the performance of class and legitimacy in the same way demonstrated here. The performances of domesticity by Egerton, Russell, and Sidney had real power to assert familial legitimacy and to claim through performance virtue for themselves in a way that the silent dances of the court masque did not. In Jacobean England, women still served the role of promoting the fiction of the ruling class, but they did so passively, through enclosure in country houses, rather than actively, through performance— which was, in Place’s view at least, not a good thing.
Thou mayst say (gentle Reader) what hath this man to do with Hus-wifery, he is now out his element; and to be so general of all qualities is to express more in one Booke than can be found expressed in two women. I shall desire thee to understand, that this is no collection of his whose name is prefixed to this work, but an approved Manuscript which he happily light on, belonging some time to an honourable Personage of this Kingdom, who was singular amongst those of her rank for many of the qualities here set forth. This onely he hath done, digested the things of this booke in a good method, and so made it common for thy delight and profit.

— Gervase Markham, *The English Huswife* (1615)

After giving a detailed receipt for cooking a peacock that will look even more striking dead than it did alive—a feat achieved by carefully killing the bird, removing its flesh from the still-feathered skin, roasting the flesh, and then sewing the cooked flesh back into the raw skin—the English translation of Giovanne de Rosselli’s receipt book, *Epulario, or The Italian Banquet*, published in England in 1598, gives instructions on how to make the dish even more spectacular:

If you will have the Peacock cast fire at the mouth, take an ounce of Camphora wrapped about with Cotton, and put it on the Peacocks bill with a little Aquanitiy, or very strong wine, and when you will send it to the table, set fire to the Cotton, and he will cast ore a good while after. And to make a greater shew, when the Peacock is rested, you may gild it with leaf gold, and put the skin upon the same gold, which may be spiced
very sweet. The like may be done with a Pheasant, or any other birds. (C)

This receipt, and the many other receipts like it found in early modern medicinal and cookery books, conceive of the production and serving of food not just as sustenance, as an occasion for community gathering, or even as an opportunity for the upwardly mobile to display expensive and rare goods to their guests, but as theatre, literally a “shew” in the term chosen by Roselli’s translator.

Figure 2. Anonymous. “Peacock in his Plumage presented to be Served at the Table.” From William Edward Mead’s The English Medieval Feast (177).
Starting in the late sixteenth century and continuing throughout the seventeenth century, there was an explosion in the publication of banquet receipts like this one from *Epulario*, many of which, as Figure 2 indicates, had their origins in medieval aristocratic and ecclesiastical feasting. The receipts, published in books like Hugh Plat’s *Delights for Ladies* (c.1600), Gervase Markham’s *The English Huswife* (1615), and John Murrell’s *A Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen* (1617), were targeted to a lower class of audience than would have been privy to the medieval receipts, namely the urban citizenry, yeomanry, and emergent merchant classes (Wall 24; Wilson 4). The published books gave instructions to women readers and users for producing spectacular banquet dishes like *Epulario*’s fire-breathing peacock and were extremely popular as is demonstrated by the array of books published and the number of times many of the books were reprinted. Plat’s *Delights for Ladies*, for instance, was published consistently throughout the seventeenth century, with the number of extant copies indicating that it had at least 13 different print runs.¹ The majority of the published books contained the two kinds of receipts that women of the classes targeted by the books required: medical receipts, since women were expected to care for the health of their households and communities, and banqueting receipts, because these women, who likely were not responsible for day-to-day cookery in their households, were still responsible for the

¹. The *English Short Title Catalogue* lists sixteen extant copies of *Delights for Ladies*. The still extant editions were published in 1600(?), 1617, 1624, 1628, 1630, 1635, 1636, 1640, 1644, 1647, 1651, 1654, 1656. Hunter notes that John Partridge’s *The Treasure of Commodious Conceits and Hidden Secretes*, first published in 1573, “was one of the most influential and long-running books of the period, being published fairly consistently until 1637” (42). Gervase Markham’s *The English Huswife*, which was part of his *Country Contentments* (1615) was also enormously popular (Hunter 46).
creation and production of elaborate banquets, which were central to hospitality in the period.²

This chapter reads the “shews” scripted in receipt books as a form of women’s household theatre. “Shew,” in the sense used by Rosselli’s translator, specifically designates the spectacle of Epulario’s fire-breathing peacock as a kind of theatre, though one which differs from that of a stage play. The OED lists several contemporary meanings of “show,” including (13.a), “a spectacle elaborately prepared or arranged in order to entertain a number of spectators; a pageant, a masque, procession, or similar display on a large scale . . . Not applied to regular dramatic performance.” The explicit designation of the spectacle of the peacock as a show links the theatre of the banquet with all of the theatrical, spectacular, though not necessarily literary events that were characteristic of the English Renaissance. Read as instructions for producing theatrical spectacles, early modern banquet receipts challenge modern day conceptions of the recipe since they describe how to make creations meant to shock, delight, dazzle, and impress, not for their taste, but for their appearance. The banquets conceived and prepared by women, similarly, challenge conceptions of the meal (though perhaps less so with current trends in molecular gastronomy), since the banquet was not an occasion for sustenance, but for creative, ostentatious, and frequently inedible display. Instead of being akin to recipe and meal, the banquet and its receipts share more in common with theatrical spectacle and playscript.

² For the importance of feasting to conceptions of hospitality in the period, see Heal Hospitality 70-80.
Recognizing the production and serving of banquet dishes as theatre is an important step towards acknowledging women’s involvement in English theatrical culture before 1660. More than this, the recognition of women’s banquets as theatre rediscovers women’s creative agency in their own households and supports my larger argument that theatre—in certain forms—was not antithetical to women’s virtue as it is so often understood, but was something that women did, and were expected to do. As Gervase Markham writes in *The English Huswife*, which contains banquet receipts, the recipes he prints contain “all the vertuous knowledges and actions of minde and bodie, which might bee in anie complete Housewife of what degree or calling soever she bee” (no pagination). Moreover, not only was the banquet the responsibility of the housewife to produce, it also gave her scope for creativity. While women used published receipt books to learn aristocratic banqueting trends and techniques for producing impressive banquet dishes, the published receipts, like a play-text, provide just a glimpse of what the individual banquets produced by women might have been like. The combination of dishes served at a banquet, the arrangement of the dishes on the table, the overall conceit (or theme) of the banquet, and its allegorical significance were all the choice of the individual who prepared the banquet.

Furthermore, the originality encouraged by the receipts and scope for personal taste within them meant that each banquet was different, the product of an individual creating a spectacle for a singular circumstance. Banquets and their receipts are fundamentally aleatory, with each iteration of a given receipt having a different result and significance. From the published receipts, then, we can glimpse the banquets produced
by early modern women, recovering, in Benjamin’s terms, the “aura” of these individual theatrical events, their “presence in time and space, [their] unique existence at the place where [they] happen to be” (220). Each banquet can be appreciated as a separate, individual work of art, enmeshed in the context out of which it was produced and significant to the producer and to those who experienced it. The ephemerality, site specificity, and temporality of the banquet means that we can never fully access the original event and its significance to the audience, yet traces of the spectacles and the aura of individual banqueting practice remain.

Through readings of published receipt books, women’s involvement in the commerce of banquet goods, manuscript receipt books used by individual aristocratic women like Elinor Fettiplace, published receipt books written by women, and a masque written by Sir Thomas Salusbury for the Stanley family at Knowsley House in 1640 in which women’s banquet goods have an essential role, this chapter will reclaim the banquet as a medium of theatrical expression for women of the aristocracy and of the moneyed middling classes. The banquet will be read as a medium in which women could be creative, and whereby they were given time and space within the household to stage whatever they chose to express, projecting their skill, wit, power, virtue, and strength to their guests. Since the creation and production of banquet goods was so intimately tied to notions of hospitality and proper femininity, it also will be argued that the banquet was used by women to shape the perception of their own role within their households, though by no means was this the only use for the banquet for early modern women. Women fulfilled their proper domestic roles through the design and creation of their
extraordinary, spectacular, and often life-cheating creations, adding to the esteem of their households and of themselves, while declaring with their delights just how powerful domestic virtue could be. Cookbooks directed to women gave them the techniques for producing spectacular dishes, but the theatre that these dishes became a part of, and the act of self-definition which was the aim of that theatre, was entirely the doing of the women themselves.

I.
The Banquet: History, Practice, Space

There were two meanings of ‘banquet’ current in the early modern period. The first denoted a feast consisting of many courses whereas the second described a popular post-prandial meal, also called the void, that was devoted to dishes of sugar-work and confectionary (Fumerton 112). It is this second sense of the term, which is actually the precursor to our dessert course, which is most applicable to this chapter.3 The void or banquet popular in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is connected to, but distinct from, the medieval feast, or soteltie. The soteltie essentially combined the two senses of “banquet” into one event, featuring a piece of sugar-work as part of a play

3 Girouard writes on the origin of the term “void” that the void was originally a way of passing the time until the hall or great chamber had been prepared for after-dinner activities; a collation of sweet wine and spice was eaten standing while the table was being cleared or ‘voided’ after a meal. In the later seventeenth century when words of French origin became fashionable, ‘void’ was replaced by a French word of much the same meaning, ‘dessert.’ (104-5)
performed during a feast. “Bishop Morton’s Installation Feast” from 1479 is an example of a soteltie where each course was accompanied by an elaborate dish in sugar-work with verses spoken on its behalf (Brannen 3). Accordingly, the first course of Morton’s feast featured “Un solette de lyon blanke rehearsal” which praised the archbishop (6). The soteltie was served with “Frumenty and venyson, Syngnet rosted, Graunt luce in sarris, Roo roested regardaunt, Feasaunt roosted, Venison in paste, Grete custarde, Leche porpul” (6). The subsequent courses featured sotelties of the island of Ely, a shepherd, Saints Peter, Paul and Andrew, among others, all of which were accompanied by speeches spoken by actors on behalf of the sugar-work. The late sixteenth and seventeenth-century banquet similarly featured sugar-work, usually without an accompanying performance; the banquet itself was the performance. With the growth of the middling classes, wider availability of sugar, and the desire for social advancement within the moneyed middling classes, the production and serving of sugar-work ceased to be strictly an aristocratic or ecclesiastical practice. Newly wealthy families on the make could trumpet their status with their consumption of sugar and other luxury goods, and participate in the ostentatious practices which characterized aristocratic banqueting. Receipt books marketed to women gave instructions for preparing banquets no less marvelous than those served at Morton’s feast.

Published receipt books addressed to women contain a wide variety of remarkable, theatrical recipes. *The Queen’s Closet Opened*, for instance, gives instructions for how to prepare “Collups like Bacon of Marchpane” (263), which was said

The Queen's Closet Opened was tremendously popular, with many editions still extant. Not only does it contain receipts of Queen Henrietta-Maria’s, but it contains receipts from other queens and aristocratic women. Lynnette Hunter notes how Delights and Closet are often bound together, which speaks to how they were used. She writes that although these two works cover much of the same ground, they are often bound together. Delightes contains sections on preserves and conserves as well as candying, distillation, cookery, and beauty. The Closet covers preserves and conserves and ‘banqueting stuffe,’ medicine and distillation. To bind together two such books implies that people wanted cookery from one, medicines from the other, and sugar-work and ‘banqueting stuffe’ from both. Indeed, one copy in the Brotherton Library binds together the cookery section from Delights and sugar-work and medicine from the Closet, alone. (44)
chains, and letters to create their own surprising and dramatic spectacles (F1v-F4).

In addition to spectacular receipts like these, receipt books contain a number of smaller-scale receipts which are no less theatrical. Most of all, published receipt books are preoccupied with the appearance of food, especially how to manipulate the colour and appearance of preserved fruits and jellies to make them appear marvelous to the eye. Indeed, receipts make reference to the appearance of a dish far more frequently than they comment on its taste. There are countless receipts for different colours of paste, which were to be put into decorative molds that could either be bought or fashioned by the lady herself. The anonymous *A Closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen* even provides the technique for making the “birds and beasts” cast in molds “stand on their legs” (no pagination). Hannah Woolley’s *The Queen-like Closet* includes a receipt for both making molds for wax-works and “a very fine way to make the likeness of many several things in Wax, without the help of a Mould” (184). The receipt instructs its user to

Melt pure white-wax and colour it for what you intend it; then take an Orange, Lemmon, Apple, Pear, Plumb, or any other Fruit which you fancy, and tie a string to the stalk, and anoint your Fruit first with Sallad Oyl, then let it down by the string into the melted Wax, and presently pull it up again, and hang it on a line till it be cold; then with a hot knife again cut it gently down each side, and take out the Fruit within; then heat your knife again, and hold the two halves together, and close them neatly with your hot knife, and so you have the direct shape: You may do so with an Egg, if you first make a little hole at each end and blow out the meat, and then draw a string through it with a knot of one end. Radishes with their Green-tops look very prettily, Green-Peascods, Beans, Walnuts or small Nuts, Chesnuts, black and white Puddings, Sausages, Dishes, little Cups, Plates, or anything you can think of; for there is nothing which represents things more lively than Wax. (18 5-6)

For those who do not wish to form their own worlds out of wax, John Murrell’s *A Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen* (1617) includes an advertisement right after the
table of contents which says: “Gentle Reader, if any shall bee desirous to buy any of the moulds wherein any of the formes specified in the Booke following are made, they may have them also where these Bookes are to be soyled” (no pagination).

Receipts giving instructions on how to manipulate the colour of food were also very popular: Epulario, for instance, gives a receipt for a roast which is white in colour, even though it has been cooked in the fire (it is covered with grated bread to achieve its white appearance) (B). Similarly, Murrell’s A Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen contains a receipt “to make a rough red Marmalade of Quinces, commonly called lump-Marmalade, that shall looke as red as any Rubie” (17). Additionally, there is a preoccupation in the receipt books with preserving food, especially fruit, to look the same—or better—candied as it did fresh, which would have made for a remarkable spectacle at a winter feast (the most popular time of year for banquets in the early modern period), since the fruit which appeared to be fresh from the tree simply could not be so. Elizabeth Grey, the Countess of Kent’s posthumously published A True Gentlewomen’s Delight (1653) gives a receipt typical of this trend: “To preserve Grapes to look clear and green” (50). The effort of preserving fruits at their peak was not only magnificent, but also made the work of the banquet, and the Christmas banquet in particular, easier for the cook:

for all its magnificence, this sort of display was not nearly so much trouble to produce as it sounds for the Elizabethan housewife relying on the contemporary equivalence of convenience foods. By far the greater part of it came out of marmalade boxes, biscuit boxes, the gallipots and glass jars filled earlier in the year with tartstuffs, conserves, and jellies. A

7 On the importance of Christmas, see Heal, Hospitality 73.
Recipes to make edible replicas of fruit would have been more challenging. Murrell gives a receipt “to make a Paste of Pippins, after the Genua fashion, some like leaves, some like Plums, with stalkes and stones” which instructs the cook how to make the paste look as much like actual fruit as possible. To accomplish this, the recipe instructs the cook to

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fashion it on a sheete of glasse in some prettie forme as you thinke best, and stove it either in a Stove, or in a warme Oven. If you desire to have any of it red, colour it with a spoonefull of Conserve of Damsons, before you fashion it upon your glasse or plate, and that will make it shew as though it were made of red Plums. If you put a stone betwixt the two halfes, will shew like a Plum, you may keepe Cherrie stalkes drie for the same purpose. (6)
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The receipt gives specific instructions for how to make the simulated fruit as real-looking as possible, down to the stone and the stem.

Scholars have read early modern banquets and their outrageous offerings variously: as a kind of culinary tourism where guests consume exotic and foreign foods; as events where guests are served unsettling replicas of real-life objects; and, most commonly, as opportunities for the upwardly mobile to display their wealth and social standing to their guests. Instead of questioning these approaches to understanding early

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8 For discussion of food, travel, and imperialism, see Hall “Culinary space, colonial spaces” 168-90. See also Sidney W. Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* 151-86. Wendy Wall’s *Staging Domesticity* discusses the ways in which the violent nature of early modern household work undermines romantic, sentimental notions of the home, especially 1-58. Finally, key sources that discuss the use of banquet dishes to display wealth are Jennifer Stead’s “Bowers of Bliss: The Banquet Setting” 115-157 and Patricia Fumerton’s *Cultural Aesthetics* 111-68.
modern banquet culture, this chapter seeks to add to the excellent work already done by situating the preparation and serving of banquet dishes in a larger tradition of women’s domestic theatre. Patricia Fumerton, Kim F. Hall, Lynette Hunter, and Hilary Spurling have noted the theatrical nature of banquet receipts, but the production of performative foodstuffs has not yet been considered in any meaningful way as a part of the tradition of women’s domestic performance.9 Wendy Wall’s Staging Domesticity comes closer to understanding the centrality of theatre to the production and serving of these dishes, describing them as performance art (2), but her larger interest in the alienated domestic sphere and the ways in which that alienation is expressed in the plays of the London amphitheatres means that her book does not attend to the receipts as evidence of women’s theatre in and of themselves.

Despite the lack of any extended treatment of the banquet as theatre, the way that banquets were served has strong parallels with more conventionally acknowledged theatrical forms. Moreover, although theatre and the serving and creation of meals may seem to be two distinct practices, Brad Kessler notes that the etymology of the word ‘table’ is inherent in theatrical events: “we find its diminutive in the old French, *tableau*: a striking scene, a picturesque representation, produced unexpectedly and dramatically.

9 Hall argues that “recipe books give testimony to an established - and growing - form of women’s artistic and literary production” (171), but does not focus on their theatricality, nor what that theatricality might mean. Fumerton writes about how the aristocratic female confectioner “personally fashion[ed] ornamental conceits, . . . [and in doing so became] a kind of culinary limner painting an edible self-portrait” (125), a reading which correlates with her larger interest in privacy and isolation in the aristocracy in the early modern period. Fumerton’s focus on individual expression and withdrawal, however, fails to account for the effect of serving such conceits to family and guests. Spurling correctly sees the banquet as a showpiece (23).
Here too, we find drama in the very meaning of the word ‘table’” (153). Similarly, the practice of serving unexpected, unfamiliar, and fanciful food casts the guest in the role of an audience member, and the lady of the house, as the creator of the dish, as the presenter. In this way, the serving of a guest at a banquet shares a commonality with the production of a play at a theatre, since the guest waits, not sure what is in store, while the host presents her marvels. The seventeenth-century trend to serve the banquet course in a space separate from where the meal was served, often in small rooms at a great distance from the hall or great chamber, resonates with theatre as well. Marc Girouard finds that this practice of serving a banquet in a space separate from the traditional spaces in the household where food was served coincides with the architectural fashion for withdrawing rooms, which became popular in the seventeenth century: “once withdrawing chambers came into use the void or dessert was often served in them . . . but sometimes it was served in a special room, or in the turret on the roof or a building in the garden. . .” (104-5). Girouard also discusses Sir William Sharington’s two banquet rooms, built in 1550 at Lacock Abbey (See Figure 4), in *Life in the English Country House*. The rooms are contained in the octagonal tower . . . One was approached through the main rooms of the house, the other, on the floor above it, was only approachable by an external walk across the leads, both contain octagonal stone tables, delicately carved with Renaissance beasts and ornament . . . neither room could conceivably fit more than six people. The climb, the walk and the view must have made an agreeable after-dinner impression on Sharington’s guests, including his friend Sir John Thynne of Longleat. In the 1560s Thynne scattered the roofscape at Longleat with the little domed banqueting turrets, some square and some octagonal, and none of them

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10 See Marc Girouard’s *Life in the English Country House* 8-118.
Although some banqueting houses were small, it should be noted that not all banqueting houses were so. The banqueting house at Holdenby, built in 1580-5, “only a hundred yards or so from the great house, was three storeys high and had six rooms to a floor” (Girouard 106). Whatever the size, the theatrical nature of the space is evident.

But these purpose-built rooms and structures account only for banqueting among the highest classes. Even in houses where purpose-built and fanciful banqueting houses would have been impossible, the transformation of everyday space into theatrical space was entirely possible, simply by the movement from one room to another or by the elaborate spectacle of the banquet in and of itself. Travelling to a different part of the house, to a room built for banqueting, or just to a different space in the household in which a theatrical spectacle was to be unveiled, suggests, in its use of household space, a removal from the everyday household while still remaining in the space of the everyday household itself.

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12 See also Findlay’s discussion of the transformation of space, discussed in Chapter 1.
Figure 3. A banqueting house at Montacute House (Sim 62).

Figure 4. Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire (c. 1550) (Girouard 95).
From the laboriously prepared dishes which vied to out-do reality, to the trend towards serving banquets in distant parts of the house in spaces that were at once in the house and divorced from everyday space, the receiver of the banquet was encouraged to engage with the banquet at a different register than that in which everyday life was lived. In this light, it is not surprising that banquets reportedly featured scandalous behaviour on the part of guests which involved the destruction of the conceits, and even rioting, behaviour which was a departure from normal interactions between host and guest.¹³ Indeed, receipt books consistently feature receipts to make dishes out of sugar which

¹³ See Fumerton *Cultural Aesthetics* 159-67.
guests could break; much effort was made to make the dishes look real, or as if they were even made of marble.\textsuperscript{14} In this case, damage to household goods was more symbolic than anything else. The riotous, unruly behaviour at banquets is usually (and correctly) explained as part of the ostentatiously wasteful aspect of banquet entertainment which served to demonstrate the wealth and largess of the host. But it also points to the complicity of the spectators in the heightened reality of the performed household, indicating that the banquet was at once part of household life and distinct from its realities, in the same way that its dishes were food and not food at the same time. The housewife, in such an environment, was offered tremendous creative freedom, as well as an ample opportunity to control whatever performed reality her banquet constructed for her guests. Our conception of early modern domesticity does not acknowledge this creative and powerful potential within the early modern home, but it appears as if, with the theatre women were expected to produce, there was significant opportunity and scope for women to express themselves and their concerns. In this way, accepting the banquet as a form of women’s household theatre involves not only extending the concept of Renaissance theatricality from stage-oriented conceptions of theatre, but also adjusting as well, to an extent, conceptions of the role of women in the domestic sphere.

\textsuperscript{14} Elinor Fettiplace, whose manuscript receipt book is still extant, includes such a recipe (Spurling 107).
II.

Published Receipt Books, Women’s Creative Agency, and the Performance of Virtue

But what did women use the theatrical space of the banquet to achieve? For Wendy Wall, receipts like Hugh Plat’s marzipan chicken from Delights for Ladies “playfully invited people into a world of fantasy that could confuse critical categories operative in early modern life, namely by putting quotation marks around the ‘real’” (2-3). This seems clear enough, but for Wall, the specific aim of the theatrical space of the banquet is to call into question the domos as a place of comfort. Served individually, as Plat conceives the marzipan chicken to be served, the receipt does undermine the home as a place of comfort. But most banquet dishes were not served in this way. A spectacle of alarming banquet conceits, however far from food’s regular role as nourishment, is less alienating given that the banquet dishes were supposed to be spectacular, original, and surprising. Wall reads the picture of housewifery presented in early modern cookbooks as one where

the civilized and upwardly mobile housewife is someone who regularly had blood on her hands or mischief in her thoughts . . . called attention to how her chores did not accord with the ideals of femininity articulated elsewhere in the culture. When conduct book writers instructed housewives and servants to remain at home quietly learning subjection, for instance, did they have in mind scenes of wit or dismemberment? . . . While these manuals refract the everyday so as to make it available for the reader’s consumption, they also hint that domestic practice might itself have appeared at times disturbing or fantastic. (Staging Domesticity 5)

But if we accept that theatrical performance was not an immediate sign of immorality,
then is a banquet and the spectacular receipts that characterized the banquet contrary “to
the ideals of femininity articulated elsewhere in the culture”? The banquet course carried
with it the expectation of wit and theatre. Plat’s marzipan chicken with its fake skin
made out of bread crumbs, taken alone and substituted for a real one, questions the home
as a source of comfort, but served after a meal, as most banquet conceits were, when the
guests had already been fed, the chicken became a witty and skillful display of the
housewife’s aptitude at domestic work and trumpeted her embodiment of her feminine
role. Creating fanciful, theatrical, and surprising dishes—all in the service of promoting
family, wealth, and status—had the effect of reflecting back on the skill, creativity,
imagination, and power of the producer, a not insignificant achievement.

In this way, the banquet conceits can be read as a way in which women could
manipulate and shape their role in the household, proving their domestic virtue. The
importance for women of being perceived as virtuous in the early modern household and
culture should not be underestimated. Nor, as discussed in both the Chapter 1 and
Chapter 2, should virtue be conceived as a passive characteristic. Just as the
performances of conventionalized feminine virtue described in Chapter 2 had real
political implications for the families of Egerton, Russell, and Sidney, so too did the
performances of hospitality in the production and serving of the banquet work to promote
family wealth and status as well as the skill, taste, and virtue of the housewife herself.
The waste of household goods is a prevailing argument, according to Wall, for the
evidence of banquet goods’ contradiction of normative domesticity, which called for
women to ‘keep’ their houses (Staging Domesticity 3). But Heal notes that the vacillation
between liberality and prodigality was a part of the ethos of the early modern household:

[Household ordinances] were, of course, intended to sustain establishments of the nobility, and hence were dedicated to magnificent display and to operation on a grand scale. Nevertheless, their objective was to combine order with magnificence, to limit and control waste, and to secure good discipline. (Hospitality 27)

The waste in the banquets produced by women cannot be taken, then, as evidence of the immorality of the practice. Instead, the movement between luxury and moderation was one that was characteristic of how hospitality was practiced in the period.

Published receipt books are insistent on the virtue inherent in the production of banquet conceits. Gervase Markham notes in his *The English Huswife*, a book geared to a slightly lower class of reader than those Plat courts, and which, as a result, contains both practical cookery and banqueting receipts, that banqueting dishes are “not of general [i.e., everyday] use, . . . [but] whoever is ignorant therein is lame, and but the half part of a compleat housewife.”  

Markham’s conglomeration of the production of banquet goods with such mundane and inassailable tasks as the ordering of wool indicates the cultural valence of such activity.

The link between the cooking of banquet dishes and ideal womanhood is reinforced by Sir John Harrington’s poem of praise of the urban housewife in his poem “To his Wife of

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15 For more on Markham’s courting of a lower class audience, see Wall, *Staging Domesticity* 26.
Women’s Virtues.” Hall also quotes this poem in her discussion of women’s imbrication in the early modern sugar trade (175).

It is the aristocratic lady who does not cook but only dances, chats, and “Can make disgrace and honor, sinn a merit” (292) who earns Harrington’s disapproval. He says to his wife that he hopes she emulates the country wife and the urban one, but never the aristocrat.

Banquets, as Harrington’s poem makes clear, were public events, and the woman who made banqueting dishes for her friends embodied feminine virtue for him. By fulfilling her role as housewife by presenting elaborate banquet dishes, demonstrating her household’s wealth through her spectacle’s vast consumption of expensive goods, and harnessing nature’s power for her own purposes in the strange verisimilar nature of many of the life-like forms she created out of food, the housewife affirms for her guests the importance of her role as a housewife as well as her skill in that role.

16 Hall also quotes this poem in her discussion of women’s imbrication in the early modern sugar trade (175).

17 It is the aristocratic lady who does not cook but only dances, chats, and “Can make disgrace and honor, sinn a merit” (292) who earns Harrington’s disapproval. He says to his wife that he hopes she emulates the country wife and the urban one, but never the aristocrat.
The production of elaborate banquet conceits was not just a quality of proper domestic womanhood; the expertise of women over this aspect of household life was seen as a special preserve of feminine knowledge. Most of the writers of cookbooks at the start of the seventeenth century were male (a trend that started to change in the latter half of the century with the publication of books by Hannah Woolley and Elizabeth Grey,

![Figure 6. Title page of Gervase Markham’s The English Huswife, published with Country Contentments (1615).](image)
the Countess of Kent), but the male cookbook writers often defer to women’s native expertise in the field of banquet cookery. John Murrell’s *A Daily Exercise for Ladies and Gentlewomen* justifies its existence, and Murrell’s own authorship of the text, only by declaring that it has the most recent fashions in cooking (A4). Markham says that the book he published under his own name was actually at one time the manuscript book of an unnamed countess:

> Thou mayst say (gentle Reader) what hath this man to do with Hus-wifery, he is now out his element; and to be so generall of all qualities is to expresse more in one Booke than can be found exprest in two women. I shall desire thee to understand, that this is no collection of his whose name is prefixed to this worke, but an approved Manuscript which he happily light on, belonging some time to an honourable Personage of this Kingdome, who was singular amongst those of her ranke for many of the qualitites here set forth. This onely he hath done, digested the things of this booke in a good method, and so made it common for thy delight and profit. (no pagination)

William Rabisha dedicates his *The Whole Body of Cookery Dissected* (1661) to four ladies, the Duchess Dowager of Richmond and Lynox, the Duchess of Buckingham, Lady Jane Lane, and Lady Agnes Walker, and his dedicatory epistle states that

> Those boundless unspeakable vertues dwelling in you which have been daily manifest . . . in your Liberality and Hospitality . . . and in particular that of the said Mysterie of Cookery, who have not only entertained those of the Arts as Domestick Servants in your houses, but have conferred many big favours on them besides . . . if admitted to your Treasury of Volumes, I question not but upon perusal, it may, as the Widows mite, find acceptance. I humbly crave your favourable construction thereof that thereby it may receive further strength under the shadow of that gracious Canopy, which is the height of his ambition . . . (A2v)

Rabisha’s obsequious dedication to the four women indicates his hope that these women will add his book to their collections. In addition, Rabisha, in his biographical note, says
that he was trained in his knowledge by “an honourable Lady” (A3). Every published receipt book contains many receipts within it which are attributed to women cooks as well. *The Queen’s Closet Opened*, for instance, includes recipes not only from Queen Henrietta-Maria, which W.I. claims to publish on her behalf, as well as receipts for “*My Lady Mildmay’s drink for Cough or Cold*” (164) and “*a Cake the way of the Royal Princess the Lady Elizabeth daughter to King Charles the First*” (256).

But the fact that the production of banquet conceits enhanced the perception of women’s virtue within the household needs to be combined with an acknowledgment of the creative agency the banquet also offered to women. The link between virtue and agency in the production and serving of banquet receipts is central to my argument, namely because the books conceive of virtue and creative theatrical agency to be co-extensive. The books defer to the creativity of the user to shape her own banquet at the same time as the banquet which the user produces will promote her own virtue and that of her household. This presentation of women’s creativity is markedly different from how we usually understand it in the period, but it is also unsurprising given the cultural use-value of such banquets. An over-the-top, theatrical, skillful banquet impresses guests with its deployment of the latest banqueting trends; in this way, the more creative a

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18 It must be noted that Rabisha’s relationship to women’s domestic arts, as a male professional chef, is vexed. An anonymous “Commendation of the Author” also given in the prefatory material of his book, implores readers to

*Cooks burn your Books, and vail your empty brains;*
*Put off your feigned Aprons: view the strains*
*Of this new piece, whose Author doth display*
*The bravest dish, and shew the nearest way*
*T’inform the lowest Cook.* (no pagination)
woman’s banquet, the more value the banquet is to her family, the more she is the ‘complete’ housewife.

I will explain how receipt books directed to women reinforce the notion of the banquet as theatre of their own creation by contrasting them with Robert May’s *The Accomplish’d Cook* (1660), which was written specifically for professional male chefs. A close comparison of these texts shows that while the texts directed to women present the receipts necessary to conceive of a unique theatrical banquet of their own, May’s text dictates to its user far more specifically how a banquet is to be put together. The user of the banquet receipt books directed to women, then, is given far more agency in how to go about using the receipts than does the one who uses May’s text. This agency given women readers’ in the published banquet books defers to the creativity of women, giving individual conceits, but making clear that the larger scheme and theatre of the banquet is the work of the individual woman herself.

The distinction between the two types of receipts found in Plat’s and May’s books correlates with theoretical discussions of the recipe as a genre, which posit two models for understanding the form. The first sees the recipe as a transmission of knowledge from one cook to another, where there is a reciprocal relationship between the writer of the recipe and its user (Pennell 253). Sara Pennell writes in her discussion of this model that the “text [of the recipe] is only a fraction and refraction of practice: there are still omissions, elisions, and assumptions of intuition” (253). The second model of recipe is the prescriptive model, where the recipe directs its user to a specific practice, and does not leave room for his or her own input. Comparing the texts directed to women with
May’s text for male chefs in aristocratic households, it is clear that the women’s texts fall under the transmission model while May’s text is prescriptive in its attempt to limit the creativity of its user. The authors of cookbooks for women acknowledge, in their refusal to prescribe the ideal form of the banquet, their users’ creative freedom. May’s prescriptive text does not give the same respect to his readers’ knowledge, and he himself proclaims to his users the best and most effective way to present his outrageous banquet dishes.19 The vague receipts included in women’s cookbooks, in some ways, retain the aura of the original work of art of which Benjamin writes most of all, since they reveal the individual, aleatory nature of banquet theatre. That is, the vagueness of the receipts records just how creative women banquet cooks had to be, and just how individual their banquets were. While cookbook users derived ideas from a given book or combination of books, the receipts leave much to their own discretion.

Importantly, where May’s The Accomplish’t Cook is most prescriptive is in terms of the spectacle of the banquet and the presentation of dishes, areas where the texts for

19 Wall notes the difference between May and Plat, but she does not see a difference based on the gender of their audiences. Instead, for Wall the differences indicate not just different readerships for domestic advice, but mixed desires within the same readership. In these texts, domesticity, in part because of its incarnation as a printed object, was refracted for readers in myriad ways: framed as nostalgia, regulated to a country past, linked to a culture of expertise, tied to foreignness, eroticized as secret delights, championed as the backbone of national culture. (58) Wall is correct in identifying these various impulses in the books, but there is at the same time a difference in the ways in which receipt books for women approach the creation of banquet conceits as opposed to those geared towards professional male chefs, a difference that speaks directly to how women expected to use such receipts in the home and the information they needed to make their conceits.
Similarly, William Rabisha’s text, which also caters to male professional chefs, is titled as such:

The whole Body of COOKERY
DISSECTED

Taught, and fully manifested,
Methodically, Artificially, and according to the best Tradition of the English, French, Italian, Dutch, &c.

OR

A Sympathie of all varieties in Naturally Compounds in that Mysterie.

Wherein is contained certain Bills of Fare for the Seasons of the year, for Feasts and Common Diets.

Whereunto is annexed a Second Pare of Rare Receipts of Cookery. With certain useful Traditions.

20 Similarly, William Rabisha’s text, which also caters to male professional chefs, is titled as such:

The Accomplish’t Cook
or the
Art and Mystery of COOKERY
Wherein the whole Art is revealed in a more easie and perfect Method, then hath been publisht in any Language. (See Figure7)

women are generally least prescriptive. May also makes clear that his chefs require a different kind of instruction than had been given in earlier cookbooks, and claims that his book will tell them everything they need to know to put a banquet together. The full title of May’s text is:

The
Accomplish’t Cook
or the
Art and Mystery of
COOKERY
Wherein the whole Art is revealed in a more easie and perfect Method, then hath been publisht in any Language. (See Figure7)
In contrast to May’s title, which claims comprehensiveness, clarity, and the revelation of the “perfect” method of cookery, Plat’s title page reads:

**DELIGHTS**
**FOR LADIES,**
to adorne their Persons,
Tables, Closets, and Di stillatories

**WITH**

Beauties, Banquets, Perfumes,
and Waters

*Read, practice, and censure.* (See Figure 8)

The final line of Plat’s title invites his reader to give her own judgement on the book (to not only use it but to judge it, contrasting markedly with May’s text).\(^{21}\) In the impressive ephemera at the start of his book, May focuses on his expertise which enables him to write such a book. He writes that he is qualified to write this because of his “Fifty Years Experience and Industry . . . in his Attendance on several Persons of Honour” (no pagination). This invocation of his professional experience contrasts with women’s texts, which acknowledge the non-professional, inherited, domestic nature of their

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**With a Book of Preserving, Conserving, and Candying after the most Exquisite and Newest manner: Delectable for Ladies and Gentlewomen.**

Notably, it is women who are said to be pleased by the efforts of the cook here, and that they are not the one producing it.

\(^{21}\) Another way of reading this complicated last line of the title page is that Plat’s use of “censure” argues that ladies censure the works of others through what they learn in the book, hence the book is a tool towards fashioning their taste and judgement.
The book is also dedicated to several lords known for their hospitality and who May himself claims to have served: Lord Lumley, Lord Lovelace, Sir Kenelme Digby, and Sir Frederick Cornwallis. Digby wrote a cookery book of his own, *The closet of the eminently learned Sir Kenelme Digby* (1669).

Figure 7. Title page to the first edition of *The Accomplish’t Cook.*
Books like *Delights for Ladies, A Closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen*, and *The Queen-like Closet* served the role of introducing women to the fashions and techniques of the day, but not much else, presumably because this was not what the market demanded. The vagueness about presentation, emphasis on how women are to apply their own wit, and failure to indicate how the banquet table is to be put together that is characteristic of women’s receipt books indicates that this is a task that women expected to do for themselves. May, in his preface to *The Accomplish’t Cook*, notes what has been lacking in previous volumes of cookery and seeks to rectify that absence with his own book:

> Nor is there any book, except that of the Queen’s Closet, which was so *enrich’t with Receipts* presented to her Majesty, as yet that I ever saw in
any Language, that ever contained so many profitable Experiences as in this Volume, in all which the Reader shall finde most of the Compositions, and mixtures easie to be prepared, most pleasing to the pallat, and not too chargeable to the Purse: since you are at liberty to employ as much or as little therein as you please. (no pagination)

His compliment to *The Queen’s Closet Opened*, which contains receipts of Queen Henrietta-Maria’s, stems from May’s deference to royalty, but despite his respect for the Queen, May still trumpets the value of his own work over and above all that which had been produced before.

The first receipt listed in May’s book, included amongst the prefatory materials to highlight its exemplarity, outlines the entire spectacle of a banquet. May entitles the receipt, “Triumphs and Trophies in Cookery, to be used at Festival Times as Twelfth Day” and presents it as an ideal of banqueting which has been lost: “these were formerly the delights of the Nobility, before good-Housekeeping had left England, and the Sword really acted that which was counterfeited in such honest and laudable Exercises as these” (no pagination). May seeks to revive the glories of pre-civil war aristocratic feasting with receipts like this one. The individual receipts that form the overall conceit of the banquet are similar to those found in the books directed to women: there are similar pies of live birds, life-like animals fashioned out of paste and marchpane, and so on. But what is markedly different is that where Plat and the other cookbook writers give instructions about making individual recipes, they never give an entire banqueting conceit; the theatre of the banquet is left to the lady preparing it. May, in contrast, is extremely specific about how the chef is to put together the spectacle. He describes a ship, castles, and drawbridges made out of pasteboard and
a Stag made of course paste, with a broad arrow in the side of him, and his body filled up with claret wine. In another Charger of the end of the Stag have the proportion of a Castle with Battlements, Percullices, Gates, and Drawbridges made of Pasteboard. . . At each side of the Charger wherein is the Stag, place a Pie made of course paste, in one of which let there be some live Frogs, in the other live Birds (no pagination)

May instructs his professional chefs precisely how to put their tableaux together. He even tells them how to position the food on the table; there is little imagination required on the part of the chef here, since all he has to do is execute the feast (admittedly, a huge task). This imagined chef does not have to conceive of the feast and how it is to be composed. Moreover, May even imagines how the banquet will be received by the guests:

order it so that some of the Ladies bee persuaded to pluck the Arrow out of the Stag, then will the Claret wine follow as blood running out of a wound. This being done with admiration of the beholders, after some short pause, fire the train of the Castle, that the pieces all of one side may go off . . . This done to sweeten the stink of the powder, the Ladies take the egg shells full of sweet waters and throw them at each other. All dangers being seemed over, by this time you may suppose they will desire to see what is in the pies; where . . . out skips some Frogs, which makes the Ladies to skip and shriek; next after the other pie, whence comes out the Birds; who by a natural instinct, flying at the light, will put out the candles: so that what with the flying Birds and skipping frogs . . . will cause much delight and pleasure to the whole company: at length the candles are lighted, and a Banquet brought in, the musick sounds, and everyone with much delight and content rehearses the actions in the former passages. (no pagination)

Whether the spectacle would unfold as smoothly as May postulates is rather dubious, but that he assumes the action can be controlled, and that his cook needs to be told how to execute the spectacle is typical of the prescriptive nature of his receipts. It is also notable that May makes the women in this spectacle his performers; women start the Stag’s bleeding and toss the deodorizing egg cups at one another. The women precipitate the mayhem of the explosions, leaping frogs, and frenzied birds. But although women are
performers here in a sense, they are not the organizers of the spectacle. Instead of using theatre on their own terms, as the women who put together spectacles from Plat’s book did, here the women just follow the script which May has written. Moreover, May imagines the spectacle in such detail that there is certainly no need (or room) for the cook to add his own touches to it. May, by setting such an impossibly high standard of what is to be expected of the receipt, contrasts markedly with the can-do approach exemplified by Plat.

Although this is the only banqueting conceit spelled out in such detail in The Accomplish ‘t Cook, the book gives a number of templates for decorative forms for pies, fish cakes, and fritters, which similarly stifle the creativity of the cook. The recipe for “Minced Pies in the Italian Fashion” gives nine different forms for what the pies can look like; the cook has choice here, but it is not limitless and May lays out all the possible forms the pies can take, showing a failure to recognize his user’s own creativity. Figure 9, which shows four different ways to cook animal heads, similarly prescribes what they should look like in addition to how they should be prepared. May’s book is filled with diagrams and drawings of what dishes should look like, a characteristic which to my knowledge is found in his book alone. In the following receipt, May gives the following instructions on how to serve a many-colored jelly:

dish it as you see good, or cast it into what mould you please; as for example these

*Scallop sheles, Cockel shells, Egg shells, half Lemon, or Lemon*

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23 Hall finds similarly. She writes: “Even in a spectacle created (we assume) by men, women are an integral part of the spectacle since May scripts female curiosity and cowardice into the void” (175).
peel, Wilks or Wrinkle shells, Muskle Shells, or moulded out of a butter squirt.

Or serve it on a great dish and plate one quarter of white, another of red, another of yellow, the fourth of another colour, and about the side of the dish oranges in quarters of jelly, in the middle a whole lemon full of jelly finely carved, or cast out of a wooden . . . mould, or run into glasses four or five in a dish, on silver trencher plates, or glass trencher plates. (189)

In contrast, a similar paste receipt in A Closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen, a book which follows the same model as Plat’s Delights for Ladies in its accommodation of women’s creativity, gives instructions on how to make a coral coloured paste, and then it reads “print it with your molds: then stove it, and then gild them” (B2). There is much less direction here on how to present these pastes, or what molds to use, in the book for women as opposed to May’s elaborate discussion of their presentation possibilities in his book for chefs.
Additionally, the start of May’s cookbook gives bills of fare for all of the major holidays and feast days, giving cooks pre-set menus (Rabisha does so as well in *The Whole Body of Cookery Dissected*). Some women’s books do this, but not in as much detail. In *The Good Huswifes Handmaide for the Kitchin*, the author lists “All necessaries appertaining to a Banquet.” The author of *The Good Huswive’s Handemaide* writes that a banquet should feature:

- Cinnamon, Sugar, Nutmegs, Pepper, Locoras, Saunders, Coleander, Anniseeds, Licoras, all kind of Comfets, Orenge, Pomegranate, Tournesall, Lemmons, Prunes, Corrans, Barberries conserved, Paper white and browne seeds, Rosewater, Raisins, Rie flower, Ginger, Cloves, and mace, Damaske water, Dates, Cherries conserved, Sweete oranges, Wafers for your Marchpanes, seasoned and unseasoned, Spinnages. (42)

This list of expensive items reads more like a grocery list than instructions for preparing a banquet; it bears no relationship to the detail and orchestration May gives. It states what one needs, but not how one might do it. It also understands that the cook will know how to prepare these dishes. Markham’s bill of fare is more specific than is the author’s of *A Good Huswifes Handmaide*, though, as noted previously, Markham’s text courts a lower class of housewife than Plat’s, which likely accounts for the increased instruction and didacticism in the following description of how to order a banquet:

Thus having shewed you how to preserve, conserve, candy and make pastes of all kinds, in which four heads consist the whole art of banqueting dishes; I will now proceed to the ordering and setting forth of a Banquet, wherein you shall observe that March-panes house the first place, the middle place, and the last place; your preserved fruits shall be disht up first, your Pastes next, your wet Suckets after them, then your dried Suckets, then your Marmelades and Goodinjakes, then your Comfits of all or roasted, and your Orenge and Lemmons sliced: and lastly your Wafer cakes. Thus you shall order them in the closet, but when they goe
to the table you shall first send forth a dish made for shew only, as beast, bird, fish, or Fowl according to invention, then your Marchpane, then Preserved fruit, then a Paste, then a wet Sucket, then a drie Sucket, Marmelade, Cumfets, Apples, Peares, Wardens, Orenge and Lemmons sliced; and the Wafers, and another dish of preserved fruits, and so consequently all the rest before: no two dishes of one kinde going or standing together, and this will not only appeare delicate to the eye, but invite the appetite with much varietie thereof. (78-9)

Markham here is very prescriptive, a quality, presumably, his upwardly mobile target audience would require. Importantly, though, it is in the most theatrical, creative part of the banquet, the “shew” made “according to invention” which he leaves open to the taste, choice, and imagination of the cook. Hannah Woolley, in The Queen-Like Closet, also gives bills of fare for various feasts for different classes of households. These bills of fare are specifically related to the nature of the volume, which discusses Woolley’s own development from servant to gentlewoman, and models for her reader how to have a similar kind of advancement (245-254). Woolley’s book, though it gives instructions along the lines of an etiquette manual, still maintains the artistic autonomy of the cook when preparing her banquet dishes.

There is obviously no guarantee that May’s readers will follow his recipes to the letter. But what is important about the rhetorical difference between the transmission and prescriptive models of receipts is the different relationship that is imagined between the writer and user. The writers of texts for women were primarily male, but they are deferential to their female readers’ expertise in the household. Their receipts are open-ended, and up to their user to execute. To return to the fire-breathing peacock recipe with which this chapter began, that recipe is nowhere in Epulario given as part of a pre-set entertainment plan; the author gives options for how to set it up to good effect, but the
dishes to be served with it and the order of serving are entirely at the discretion of the cook. Recipes in the cookbooks directed at women often give instructions about how to make a particular dish, but the details of the presentation are left up to the cook herself. Indeed, Plat’s preface to Delights for Ladies expresses the hope that his reader will make more of his recipes than is contained in the book, a sentiment absent from May’s book because of his expert tone. Plat writes at the end of his preface to Delights for Ladies

Accept them [my receipts] well, and let my wearied Muse Repose herself in Ladies laps a while: So, when she wakes, she haply may record Her Sweetest dreams in some more pleasing stile. (A3v)

Plat here confirms Susan Leonardi’s reading of the recipe genre, where she finds that “a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are encouraged to reproduce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own” (344). This is not to say that Plat does not have his opinions. In one of his many marzipan receipts, he writes of “a Countrey Gentle-woman, whom I could name, which venteth great store of sugar-cakes made of this composition. But the only fault which I can find in this paste is, that it tasteth too much of the sugar and too little of the Almonds” (B5). Yet he still includes her receipt, and emphasizes it as a banqueting receipt that a woman actually used. From the receipts published in books like Plat’s, we cannot know precisely what women did when they produced their banquets, but it is this very lack of knowledge which points to the artistic autonomy of the female cooks who used his book.
IV.

Women, Theatre, and Commerce: Banqueting Outside the Home

In addition to producing banquet goods for their own homes, it is important to acknowledge that women—albeit of a different class than those described above—were involved in the economy of selling banquet goods. While it was thought that a woman was most virtuous if she made a banquet herself, she could also buy banquet goods. Wilson writes that during the sixteenth century [the small gentry and urban farmers] could afford to buy the necessary sugar, almonds, and spices at the grocer’s shops, which, in turn, were increasing in number to meet the new demand. Indeed, people could purchase many of the finished articles ready-made at the comfit-makers’, if they so chose. But the country gentry grew their own fruit and herbs, and the townspeople could obtain theirs from the markets, supplied by market-gardeners, another expanding trade. Then, as now, it was a matter of pride to one’s self and it flattered one’s friends if one offered them fare that was both attractive and home-made; and so a great deal of ‘banquetting stuffe’ was prepared at home. (29-30)

Individually were not the only ones who purchased banquet goods. Guilds, who frequently held banquets for their membership, also purchased goods made by women. Because women’s involvement in these activities was not part of recognized economic practices, their work has not been fully acknowledged:

our knowledge of women’s work has also ‘frequently been overshadowed and its characteristics obscured,’ as Beverly Lemire has argued, by our own prejudices, particularly when these characteristics deviated ‘from the standard male paradigms of employment.’ Women, [Lemire] observes, ‘found work where they could, flourishing in ad hoc businesses;’ and while such ‘irregular household-based trade’ was disapproved of by the guilds, ‘historical evaluation should not end with the guildsman’s assessment.’ For these ‘disorderly commercial practices were as common as they were reviled,’ and formed a ‘vast network of commerce, which
must be integrated in our concepts of the market.’ (Korda, “Women’s Theatrical Properties” 204-5)

Indeed, Natasha Korda finds payments to women for the creation of banquet dishes in the Revels accounts:

The Revels accounts list a payment to ‘Thomas Blagrave esquier for more mony by him payde for Mowldes to cast the frutes & ffishes in 1 & to the weemen that tempered the stuf & made up the same.’ The previous entry makes it clear that the props in question were banqueting stuffs: ‘Banqueting frutes necessaryes . . . Thomas Blagrave esquier for mony by him disbursed in Reward . . . ffor suger for Marchpane stuf . . . Gowlde leaves to gilde the Marchpane stuf . . . Dishes of suger . . . frutes counterfete boughte of Brayne thappoticary.’ The women confectioners in question may thus have worked for Brayne, or been hired separately by Blagrave, the Clerk of the Revels. (‘Women’s Theatrical Properties” 212)

It is not clear which play these goods would have been produced for, although the frequent appearance of banquet goods on the commercial stage in plays like Antony and Cleopatra, Titus Andronicus, Macbeth, and The Witches of Lancashire makes for several likely candidates (if these plays were in fact performed at court).

The Lord Mayor of London’s dinner entertainments from 1619 to 1620 outline in detail the banqueting goods used by the guild for the event. William Cockayne (who was Lord Mayor in 1619) and Frances Jhones (who followed Cockayne in the post in 1620) put on a series of banquets, most of which combined verse with banquet dishes. Thomas Middleton wrote speeches for both Cockayne’s and Jhones’s entertainments, and the banquet dishes, somewhat anomalously, function similarly to the ones made for Bishop Morton’s fifteenth-century feast, as speaking objects and as objects of veneration. One entertainment put on at the house of Cockayne, celebrating the last feast of his tenure, featured “one attir’d like a Mourner, [who] enters after a made Dish like a Herse,
struck with sable Bannerets, Drums and Trumpets expressing a mournfull Service” (Cv).
Another entertainment, for the Haberdashers at the house of Sir Frances Jhones, featured “a device like a made Dish, expressing Two naked Armes breaking through a Cloud, supporting a wreath of Lawrell, being part of the Haberdashers Arms” (C3v). In the account of the entertainment put on at the house of Cockayne during Easter week in 1620 to celebrate the marriage of Cockayne’s daughter, Mary, to Charles Howard, Baron of Effingham, an “Artificiall Cocke” is brought into the room and addressed and venerated. The rooster is held up as a model of how the magistrates of the city ought to behave:

An Emblem of your worth, charge, power, & state,
   None, Nobler can expresse a Magistrate;
For all this is in this Bird, Quality,
   Is in you Vertue, Justice, Industry,
What do’s his early morning note imply?
   But in you, early care and vigilancie . . . (B2)

After this, each alderman is told to eat a piece of the rooster’s heart, and drink out of its detachable head so that he can take on the properties of the noble, productive bird and apply these characteristics to his leadership. Though Middleton’s texts are all that have survived of these banquets, it is clear that it was the spectacle of the artificial rooster, the hearse, and the sugar haberdasher’s arms that was at the centre of each of the entertainments.24

The Lord Mayor’s entertainments on the surface have no connection to women. Though it is clear who paid for the banquet and who wrote its poetry, the producer of the

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24 More to the point, though the dinner entertainments were published, Ceri Sullivan notes that Middleton, who, as the first London city chronologer, “was required ‘to collect and set down all memorable acts of this City, and occurrences thereof’” (321), was paid £10 a year for writing the entertainments.
sugar-work behind it is entirely unclear; the published accounts of the dinner entertainments, unsurprisingly, do not record the source of the properties. The rooster entertainment even suggests, in its rhapsodic description of the virtues of the bird, that it was created divinely. It is possible that Cockayne’s wife made the dish; she is precisely the class of woman to whom Plat’s texts were marketed. It is equally possibly that the women involved in the *ad hoc* businesses surrounding the commercial playhouses which Korda describes were involved in its creation. The London guild records which may be able to provide details surrounding Cockayne and Jhones’s dinner entertainments have not yet been published by the Records of Early English Drama, but the records for Chester, another city with a large number of guilds with a significant theatrical and banquet history, support Korda’s argument about women’s work in producing banquet conceits for events like Lord Mayors shows and guild entertainments.

As did the Lord Mayor of London, the Chester guilds put on elaborate feasts throughout the seventeenth century, many of which featured banquet goods. A typical record from the Mercers, Ironmongers, Grocers, and Apothecaries’ Records from 4 May 1610 shows the following expenditures on banquet goods to accompany their pageant:

- 1½ sugar
- ½ Sinemond 2 oz.
- Cordlings
- ½ li. Suckett and prince biskie
- j li. ½ Sinemond 2 oz. Cordlings
- xjviijd
- js viijd
- j s viijd
- j s iijd
- x ij s oo
- paide for wyne and beere
- iiij s l
- paide for cakes and spice
- paide for Musicke
- paide for ij yardes of Reben
- vsiijd
- iij d

(Chester 267)

The 1611 list of expenditures for this guild shows that the same items were purchased
again, with the addition of spending on “conceates” and “suger and Rose water” (Chester 274). All of the items listed here are the sort of dishes which are featured prominently in cookbooks for women. There is not a receipt book, for instance, which does not feature a receipt for comfits or prince bisket, a decorative bread. Furthermore, other records from the Chester guilds show expenditure on cups which were purchased to be broken, a common banquet activity and an allusive record, repeated over a series of years, which specifies a payment to William Landcocke for “gilding the little phenix” (Chester 314), suggesting perhaps that they had an edible gilded bird similar to the receipt from Epulario.25

The Chester guild records rarely list where the guilds obtained their banquet goods, though their records do show a heavy involvement by women in many aspects of guild life, including the performance in their drama, the preparation for their plays, and the hosting of social events. For instance, the Innkeepers’ records show that their Midsomer play featured a woman riding on a horse and that women were involved in preparing the costume of the child who was part of their procession. The Chester guilds also held events at women’s houses. The Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers have an entry from 18 October 1611 which reveals they “spent St Lukes day at Mistres Rathburnes” where there was “Musick” (Chester 269).26 There are, however, two records

25 One record which mentions the cup breaking tradition is this: “Item payed for vij doussen of Cuppes to bee Brocken one mydsomer even withe the womane that Ryd afore our compenye” (Chester 176).

26 Additional records buttress this account. A record from Newcastle upon Tyne, in 1592 records a payment from the Chamberlain’s account books to “3 musions which was ‘did’ plaied att wedowe shafto when the 24th was att dynner ther” (84). Another
which point to both men’s and women’s involvement in the preparation of banquet goods in the same way that the Revels office records do. The Cordwainers and Shoemakers’ Records record a payment for the Midsomer Eve banquet of 1625 “to Thomas Crosse the Shopkeeper for banquetting stuffes” (Chester 363). However, the Mercers, Ironmongers, Grocers, and Apothecaries’ Records from 1631 note a payment “for Cakes from the ladye” (Chester 406). These two records show both men and women participating in the production of banquet goods for guild theatre and events. Similarly, in Kendal in Westmorland, the Chamberlains accounts record a payment to “william fox wif for the Ale bread & Apples at A banket” in 1585-6 (Westmorland 172). Mary Wack’s study of the Chester mystery cycle supports this finding:

We know that women were strongly represented in the retail food and drink trades, that they belonged to the bakers’ guild, and that in 1575 (the last year in which the cycle was performed) five women blacksmiths could be found in the city. As wives of guild members, women provided food, drink, and cloth for rehearsals and performances, and they were paid for it. In 1567-68 the Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers paid Richard Chalewodde’s wife a total of more than 17 pence for haggis, bacon, a calf’s head, bread, and ale for the Whitsun plays. (37)

The meal that Richard Chalewodde’s wife prepared in 1567-68 does not feature any banquet goods, but the occasion dates from long before the publication of the cookbooks discussed in this chapter and the rage among the broader populace for banquet foods.

From the Chester records, it is clear that women produced banquet dishes not only

record from 1592 shows another widow hosting: “paide for a banquett to the auditors in wedowe raines: vi” (85). The records show Widow Shafto hosting a banquet again in both 1595 and 1596.

27 For more on women in the Chester mystery cycle, see Wack’s “Women, Work, and Plays in an English Medieval Town” 33-51.
in their own houses but for sale as well. The women who produced banquet dishes for sale did not have the same opportunity to define or assert their own virtue as did the women who produced banquets for themselves. But their involvement in the wider commercial networks surrounding the various forms of theatre in the period contributed productively to their own households. In both the production of banquet goods for their households and in the selling of them as commodities, then, women are revealed as agents, actively contributing to familial and/or social success.

V.

The Banquet in the Household

The published banquet receipt books attest to the involvement of the gentry and urban citizenry in the preparation and serving of banquets. The comments written in the margins of the printed cookery books which are still preserved, and the sheer existence of so many books in the marketplace, proves the importance of banqueting for women of these classes. Similarly, the guild records cited above document women’s commercial involvement in the production of banquet goods. However, the most direct and detailed evidence that survives of women’s banqueting practice is of aristocratic women. Some aristocratic manuscript receipt books have survived, and some aristocratic women even published their receipts (or had their receipts published for them). While all that remains of the individual middle class banquets is this historical aura, with some of the aristocratic banquets we have far more access to the events. For instance, the elaborate
and extravagant banquet at Elvetham in 1591 given for Queen Elizabeth by the Earl of Hertford and his wife on the third day of the entertainment is recorded in great detail for its spectacle, although the identity of who conceived and executed the work behind it is obscured:

there was a banquet served all in glass and silver, into the low Gallerie in the Garden, from a hill side fourteene score off, by two hundred of my Lord Hertfordes Gentlemen, everie one carrying so many dishes, that the whole number amounted to a thousand: and there were to light them in their way, a hundred torch-bearers. To satisfie the curious, I will here set downe some particulars in the banquet.

Her Majesties Armes in sugar-worke.
The severall Armes of all our Nobilitie in sugar-worke.
Many men and women in sugar-worke, and some inforst by hand.
Castles, Forts, Ordinance, Drummers, Trumpeters, and soldiers of all sorts in sugar-worke.
Lions, Unicorns, Beares, Horses, Camels, Buls, Rams, Dogges, Tygers, Elephants, Antelops, Dromedaries, Apes, and all other beasts in sugar-worke.
Egles, Falcons, Cranes, Bussardes, Heronhawes, Bytters, Pheasante, Partridges, Qualies, Larkes, Sparrowes, Pigeons, Cockes, Oules, and all that flie, in sugar-worke.
Snakes, adders, vipers, frogs, toades, and all kind of wormes in sugar-worke.
Mermaides, whales, dolphins, cungars, sturgions, pikes, carps, breams, and all sorts of fishes, in sugar-worke.
And these were standing dishes of sugar-worke. The selfe same devices were also there all in flatworke. Moreover these particulars following, and many such like, were in flat sugar-worke, and sinamond.
March-panes, grapes, oisters, muscles, cockles, periwinkles, crabs, lobsters.
Apples, pears, and plums, of all sorts.
Preserves, suckats, jellies, marmelats, pasts, comfits, of all sorts.

The feast shares something in common with the feasts May advocates his cook to create in The Accomplish’t Cook. Although it is not known who prepared this banquet, it could have been purchased, but it is also not unreasonable to suggest that Hertford’s wife might
have had something to do with its conception or production. Aristocratic women did prepare food for royal visits. Lady Grace Mildmay, for instance, was a noted banquet cook who prepared dishes herself when James I visited Apethorpe:

King James I visited Apethorpe twice and that Lady Mildmay was not merely present but also actively involved in the culinary preparations, although there is no mention of this in her memoirs. He dined there on his journey from Scotland to England in 1603 and was regaled there with a sumptuous dinner ‘wherein everything most delicate for the taste proved more delicate by the art that made it beautiful to the eye, the lady of the house being one of the most excellent confectioners.’ (Pollack 20)

The account of the Elvetham banquet gives a clear impression of what transpired and of the fanciful worlds of sugar created for the event at a level of detail that simply has no correlative in the banquets produced by women of the lower classes.

Similarly, the receipt book of Elinor Fettiplace, a seventeenth-century housewife whose manuscript receipt book is extant, records both banquet and practical receipts she prepared for her household. The manuscript is written mostly in the hand of a scribe, Anthony Bridges, yet there are frequent annotations and notes by Fettiplace herself (Spurling 21). There are far more practical, everyday receipts than fantastic ones in Fettiplace’s book, which she began in 1605, and which was apparently in her possession until 1647 when she left it to her niece and god-daughter, Ann Poole (Spurling xi). Writing on the seeming modesty of Fettiplace’s food, Hilary Spurling writes that Conservatives like Chandos and Berkeley... still subscribed to the old Tudor principles of feasting and good lordship. But Lady Fettiplace and her friends already inclined towards the new order beginning to favour smaller and more intimate meals, often served in the new ‘withdrawing’ or ‘drawing chambers’ and consisting of the sort of simple but sophisticated food—imaginative, carefully prepared, delicate and decorative but not over-rich—she describes in her book. People who lived in Jacobean country houses, seated in the high, airy rooms hung with gold and
Fettiplace and her husband were part of the country gentry, though not exalted members of it. Spurling finds that Fettiplace and her husband were perceived as “country cousins” (7) by the London elite. They did have important connections, though, including the Untons and Lady Elizabeth Russell. The book contains receipts from others in Fettiplace’s circle, including Lady Tracy (Spurling 1), but also has unattributed recipes, which Fettiplace likely adapted for herself, conceived herself, or copied from another source, be it a published book or a manuscript book from one of her ancestors.

Among the banquet receipts she records, Fettiplace’s book features a receipt for plates made of sugar that look like marble to use as edible banquet dishes. Notably, Fettiplace’s receipts follow the transmission model set forth in the published receipts; her practical receipts are detailed in terms of method but not in terms of conceit. Like the published receipts for women, Fettiplace’s receipts do not prescribe the creative work. This feature of her book means that we do not know precisely what conceits Fettiplace designed with her receipts, but each year she could use her own creativity to put together her theatrical Christmas banquets, and to impress and surprise her guests with the spectacle she devised. Accordingly, Fettiplace’s receipts show that the conceits would change from year to year, but that the basic receipts stayed the same. For instance, her marzipan receipt reads as follows:

A Receipt to Make a Marchpane

Take a pound and a half of almonds blanch them and bruise them in a mortar by themselves, then take a pound and a half of sugar and pound it small, search out as much of it as you think will serve to ice your marchpane, and to mould it up in, Take the rest of your sugar and mingle it with your almonds, and beat them in a mortar till they come to paste, not putting too much at once in your sumdragen upon your pestills and, when

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28 Fettiplace and her husband were part of the country gentry, though not exalted members of it. Spurling finds that Fettiplace and her husband were perceived as “country cousins” (7) by the London elite. They did have important connections, though, including the Untons and Lady Elizabeth Russell. The book contains receipts from others in Fettiplace’s circle, including Lady Tracy (Spurling 1), but also has unattributed recipes, which Fettiplace likely adapted for herself, conceived herself, or copied from another source, be it a published book or a manuscript book from one of her ancestors.
you have pounded it all mould it upon a bottome made with marchpane bread, make your own conceits as you see fit, set your marchpane in the oven not too hot, and when it is reasonably well hardened take it out and ice it, and set on your conceits, then put it in the oven againe untill yor icing bee hardened, then take it out, and stick on yor comfits and when it is cold gild it, your icing is made with nothing but rosewater and sugar beated togerther, it must bee somewhat thick, I think some 3 greate spoonfulls of sugar will serve for the icing of it. (288)

Fettiplace’s book is detailed in terms of practical instruction but nothing else.

Quite a few manuscript receipt books from the seventeenth century survive. One such book, BL Additional 34722, *RECIPES medical (f.3) and culinary (ff. 44b, 50)*, was begun about 1650, and continued in various hands through to the nineteenth century. The seventeenth-century owners and contributors to the manuscript include Francis Bowles, who wrote recipes starting in 1674 (ff. 87,88), Cisilia Haynes, who owned the book in 1659, Anne Lovelace, wife of John, 2nd Baron Lovelace and the later Baroness of Wentworth, who contributed medicinal receipts (ff. 3-7), and C. Mildmay who owned the volume in 1663. The volume is an accumulation of cooking, medical, and banquet knowledge from a number of women. Each added to the text, edited its recipes, and credited other women for their work. In addition to the receipts of the owners, the book records receipts by Lady Loules, Lady Franklin, Lady Kilegre (likely Kilegrew), Mrs Clark, Jane Goody, Lady Chichly, and the unidentified mother of the writer (4-14). The number of owners and hands makes it difficult to attribute a receipt to a particular user, but that very difficulty demonstrates the interest of the book, its collected, cumulative wisdom. The writers did not add their contributions sequentially, but wrote where there was room. There is a rough organization to the volume, with medical receipts towards the front and banquet dishes towards the back, but it cannot be assumed that the additions
are sequential. Of the banqueting receipts, there are receipts telling how “to preserve pound sitrens” (52v), receipts for preserving raspberries, currents, and whole barberries (56), “to preserve Quinces white” (51v), “to make a geley of Pipens the color of Amber” (57v-58), “to dry pipenes that shall loke as clere as Amber” (59), and to make all sorts of candied fruits and spices (60) which the individual cook can tailor to her needs. There is a receipt “to colur Befè” (63), to “preserve quinses rede” (65), and “to make Sugar Paste” (72v), though it does not say what to do with it; that is a choice left to the discretion of the cook. The book is also characterized by a dialogue between users; in the receipt “to make my Lady Jarmens Cake,” the recorder writes that the addition of raisins specified by the recipe does not work: “I thnk this makes it heavey” (73). Finally, the book contains a receipt to make “sno;,” which is as follows:

take A pint of thicke cream & put thar in 2 or 3 peses of softe suger & A Littel pes of Isinglos & A little pes of Leamon pill: Leaf it stand about hafe an ouer: then whip it with a white rod of burch & skim of the bubels as thay ris into the dish or glassses, & sarve it in As will yo and 2 or 3 ours. (82v)

This is a banquet dish, a counterfeit of nature. All of these dishes were prepared by women and the book stands as a record of what they prepared, their knowledge, and their experience.29

Banqueting receipts in Elizabeth Grey, the Countess of Kent’s posthumously

29 Another manuscript receipt book, Sloane 2214 Miscellaneous Receipts has no attribution, so it is unclear to whom it belonged. It is a small quarto from the seventeenth century, and a well used book, with receipts packed in and little white space. There are receipts “to Counterfiet mutton, Capon, and Pheasant” (11b), “A counterfiet of pigg Lambe and Kidd” (13), “Counterfiet Puffins and Pigion” (13b), “counterfiet venison” (16b), “counterfiet sturgeon” (29b), and “a greene to coulour meats” (29b-30).
published banquet cookery book, *A True Gentlewomans Delight*, also reveal a conceit of Grey’s own devising. While the text of the book was not prepared for publication by Grey herself, but rather by W.I., Gent, as he describes himself on the title page, the receipts themselves can be taken as evidence of her practices. W.I. defers to women’s expertise, even writing in his dedicatory epistle to Letitia Popham in the portion of the book dedicated to medicinal receipts that

> After mature deliberation, what to tender unto your acceptance worthy your Patronage, nothing has occured more probable, than this small Manuall; which was once esteemed as a rich Cabinet of knowledge, by a person truely Honourable. May it auspiciously procure but your Honours like friendly Estimation, and then I doubt not, but it will find a universall acceptance amongst persons of greatest Eminency. Sure I am, it may be justly deemed as a rich magazene of experience, having long since taught the world its approved excellency, yea, even in many dangerous exigencies. (A2-A2v)

In one receipt, Grey describes how to “make paste Royall white that you may make Court Bouls, or Caps, or Gloves, Shooes, or any prettie thing Printed in Moulds” (51). She does not describe the effect of this conceit, but she does show here a conceit she would have made which featured clothing made of food, leaving the overall scheme to the cook herself and hinting at a fanciful event she presented in her own life. Even more popular than Grey’s books was *The Queen’s Closet Opened* (Hunter 52) and Hannah Woolley’s *The Queen-like Closet* which similarly give evidence of women’s use of banqueting

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30 Grey’s book has two parts. *A True Gentlewoman’s Delight* is devoted to preserves and banquet stuffs and *A Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chyrurgery*, which is devoted to medicines and treatments. The Countess of Kent’s book was published in 1653, 1659, 1661, 1663, 1664, 1671, 1683, and 1687.
conceits in their own households.\footnote{31}

\textit{A Masque at Knowsley House}, which was written by Sir Thomas Salusbury, a retainer of the Stanley family, and performed by the men and women of the Stanley household in 1640-41, provides the final evidence to be explored here for women’s serving of banquet foods as a form of household theatricality.\footnote{32} The masque is the only remaining evidence of their Christmas masques, which were staged each year.\footnote{33} The

\footnote{31} Hunter writes on the publication history of the volume:

[the book], attributed to Queen Henrietta-Maria, wife of Charles I, and brought together by a ‘W.I.’ Henrietta-Maria died in 1669, but the work continued to be published until 1713. \textit{A Queen’s Closet} is made up of the \textit{Pearl of Practice} (medicine), \textit{A Queen’s Delight or the Art of Preserving} (sugar-work), and the \textit{Compleat Cook} (cookery), again maintaining that three-part division of Ruthven’s \textit{Ladies Cabinet}. But here the parts are clearly thought of as distinct and separate. One often finds just one section alone bound in what appears to be a unique edition. There are, for example, even at a rough estimate, twenty-one or twenty-two editions of \textit{A Queen’s Delight}, but only sixteen or so of \textit{A Queen’s Closet, Pearl of Practice}, and each part changes according to the times. (52)

\footnote{32} The editor of \textit{Lancashire} notes that this masque is “the only extant specimen of the Twelfth Night masques known to have been performed in the Stanley household” (252). The editors of REED suggest that the Stanley Christmas masques could have been put on through the 1630s and 1640s.

\footnote{33} The Stanley family had a long and illustrious tradition of theatrical patronage and involvement. Ferdinando Strange, the 5\textsuperscript{th} Earl of Derby, patronized a troupe of players. The Stanleys also permitted travelling players to perform for them, and there was, as Salusbury’s masque attests, a strong tradition of performance within the household by its own members. For a more detailed summary of the Stanleys’ patronage, see J.J. Bagely’s \textit{The Earls of Derby}. Henry Stanley even had a purpose-built playhouse on the grounds of Knowsley house, which was built in the 1580s. Of this theatre, which would no longer have been in use by the time \textit{A Masque at Knowsley House} was performed, Richard Wilson writes:

this building, which survived as late as 1902 as Flatiron House, so called from its shape, sixty-foot deep and with a stage about thirty foot wide: almost exactly the dimensions of an auditorium such as the Cockpit-in-Court. Like the Yorkshire troupe which toured the Dales with \textit{King Lear}
Stanleys were noted theatrical patrons throughout the sixteenth century, as was already discussed in Chapter 2, and the Stanley family for whom *A Masque at Knowsley House* was written were no less theatrical than their ancestors.\(^\text{34}\) The plot of the masque is that

and *Pericles* in 1609, the purpose-built theatre that operated until that year on the estate of a northern territorial magnate does not fit the dominant model of the Shakespearean stage, with its fixation on the bourgeois city and the commercial amphitheatre. Provincial stages are supposed to have been improvised in halls, inn yards, or barns; but the Earl of Derby’s Lancastrian theatre was a permanent structure expansively equipped for professional performance and its quarter-century history offers a glimpse of an alternative itinerary to that of Stratford or Southwark. (51)

Bagely’s account of the theatre is slightly different, suggesting that Wilson may have exaggerated the Earl’s involvement and ownership of it. Bagely characterizes the Earl’s involvement in the theatre as approval, encouragement, and possibly planning (76). Finally, REED’s Patrons and Performances website [http://link.library.utoronto.ca/reed/](http://link.library.utoronto.ca/reed/) lists a series of performances from 1587 to 1590 which took place at Knowsley by Sir Thomas Hesketh’s Players (1587), Lord Strange’s Players (1587), Lord Dudley’s Players (1589), Earl of Essex’s Players (1589), and the Queen’s Players (1589, 1590, 1590).

34 Also extant are songs composed for the Stanleys by Archdeacon Rutter at Castle Rushen. The songs, deeply embedded in the civil war context, are printed in *Lancashire* (270-81). At Castle Rushen, where the Stanleys moved after the royalists lost power in Lancashire, they hosted players, including Lord Vause’s men (*Lancashire* 270) and there is a record from 1644 outlining a masque there, the abundance of which suggests what Salusbury’s masque might have been like:

> The right honourable James Earle of Derbie and his right honourable Countesse invited all the Officers Temporall and Spirituall The Clergie the 24 Keyes of the Isle of Crowners with all theire wives & likewise the best sort of the rest of the Inhabitation of the Isle to a greate maske; where the right honourable Charles lord Strange with his traine the right honourable Ladies with their attendance were most gloriously decked with silver and golde broideder workes and most costly ornaments bracellets on there handes chainise on there neckes Jewles on there foreheads, earrings in there eares & Crownes on there heads and after the maske to a feast which was most royall and plentifull with shutting of ornans & c  nd this was on the twelfth day (or last day) in christmas in the yeere 1644 All the men just with the earle and the wives with the Countesse likewise there was such another feasts that day was twelve moneth at night beinge 1643. (*Lancashire* 281)

The letter is signed Thomas Parre, Vicar of Malew.
Christmas, an old man in his night cap, wants the celebration of his festival to continue, but he is told that he cannot continue on, since his time is up and the time of the fast days is near. The obvious allegory of the masque’s struggle between Christmas and the fast days is the contrast between Royalist festivity and Puritan austerity. There is in fact at the start of the masque a war between Christmas’s players, the “plump festivall days & gambols” (Lancashire 255), and the dancers representing the fast days, “the ghostly things yat looke like soe many shapes of death” (Lancashire 256). Portentously, Christmas’s gambols lose, and are carried out on the backs of the emaciated fast days.\footnote{David George notes that the masque reflects contemporary controversy about the proper keeping of Christmas-tide . . . In Christmas-tide 1640-1, both Christmas Day and New Year’s Day fell on Friday. The Church of England normally kept Fridays as fast days, but Christmas, as a major feast, clearly pre-empted the Friday fast, and 1 January as the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ might also be held to do so. In any case by ancient custom (to which the Stanleys evidently adhered) no fast was observed at any time during the Twelve Days of Christmas . . . The fasting days of the masque represent puritans, who disliked traditional holy-days as relics of popery (Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (London, 1964) 146-53) and agitated to have the number of compulsory fasting days increased. (Lancashire 254)
. . . but beleevve it
that in the kitchin you are dead already
now more till Candlemas to bee remembered
then Coffin’de in [could] cold crust, some small solemnity
may bringe you to your grave.  (Lancashire 256)

After the reading of his will to all the officers of the household, Christmas dies, and
antimasque changes to masque with the revelation of the “Temple of ye New year,” with
men representing each of the winter months, and women representing the summer
months, giving the feast/fast schedule for the year. The disorder of Christmas is
transformed in the movement from antimasque to masque to a measured approach to
festival. Importantly, while Christmas was likely played by Salusbury himself, New
Year was played by Stanley’s son, Charles Stanley, who would have been a young
teenager at this time. This change, from household retainer to family heir as ruling figure
of the masque reinscribes and reinforces the power dynamics of the household, with the
family seated as the head of order and proper behaviour.

In addition to being immersed in its political context, the masque also is
immersed in the Stanley domestic context. The Masque at Knowsley House was never
published, and Salusbury’s text does not trumpet its literary quality. The full title of the
Masque reads:

A Masque as it was presented at ye right honourable
ye Lord Strange his at Knowsley on Twelfth night 1640
Christmas day yat year lighting on Friday
Designed & written in six howres space
One reason, despite Salusbury’s disclaimer, that the masque was not published is its involvement in the Stanley household. For instance, the masque is full of in-jokes. The apothecary of the Stanley household, Abraham L’Anglois, who speaks the prologue, is made fun of for his poor English. And in the will Christmas gives before his death, in which many members of the household are mentioned, in a section which has little resonance to the reader outside of the Stanley circle, L’Anglois is bequeathed “one fox tayle, to fright away his breathern the flyes, from his potts and glasses, One paire of stilts that hee may be seene, with some quantity of English hony, to annoynt his tongue, that hee may bee understood” (261), apparently making fun of L’Anglois’s smell, height, and accent. This is a masque, then, like most household theatre, that is entirely contingent on the context out of which it was produced, important for the moment for the people for whom it was produced. Salusbury’s masque is not much different from the banquet receipts explored elsewhere in this chapter: contingent, personal, and ephemeral.

The chief interest in the masque for this chapter are the women who play the spring and summer months of the year at the end of the masque. There is internal evidence within the speeches which indicates that the women distributed food to the audience. In her speech, April, who was played by Lady Molineaux, says:

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36 The manuscript of the masque is in a miscellany including Salusbury’s dramatic pieces, poems, and verse translations. It is held in Aberystwyth at the National Library of Wales, MS 5390D.
The dawne of the encreasinge daie by mee
presents her Tribute of felicitie,
and evergrowing blisses, perpetuall springe
of honor, love, and everie precious thinge
crowne all your dayes, and as the teeming earth
now glas the halfe starv’d world, with a new birth
of long lost sweets, soe may you ever blesse
this place with your continued fruitfullness. (Lancashire 263)

Lady Molineaux may have presented a treat to the audience after this speech. Mrs Phill played May, Mrs Duckerfield June, Mrs E. Duckerfield played July, and she gave out summer fruits: “July as much as shee can give, bestowed / her best, and earliest fruits: you are sure of those” (264). Since this masque takes place in the winter, the fruits distributed by Mrs. Duckerfield could not have been actual young fruit, but were either preserved fruits, of which many receipts are extant, or marzipan replicas of fruit, which were also commonly made. Both August and September are said to distribute food as well. August, played by Mrs Mesieur, says

The Seasons all by mee are fedd
I gather in, and give out bread
for ye whole yeare of this as due
My Lord, I Tribut pay to you
plentie, that may [keepe up] support your free
and bounteous hospitality,
And if occasion bee agaime
to feed, an Army, shall mayntaine

37 The Duckerfield ladies are better known as the Duckenfield ladies: “Robert Duckenfield was a member of the Cheshire gentry who fought on the parliamentarian side in the Civil War, but showed friendship to the Stanleys when Lathom House was forced to capitulate at the end of the siege in 1644; ‘Mrs. Duckenfield’ (1.10) and ‘Mrs. E. Duckenfield’ (1.15) may have been his wife Martha and one of his sisters, or else two sisters” (Lancashire 253).
a guard for ye whole Realme, that they
as a debt in Justice may
to you acknowledge and confesse
they safety owe, and happiness (264)

The bread she likely distributed is a bisket bread or one of the other banquet breads
mentioned in receipt books. The masque works through the rest of the seasons, back to
bleak December (none of the male producers distribute food), but after the months have
been cycled through, July speaks again, and the masque makes it clear that she speaks “at
the request of the faire representer of that Month” (265). Her correction has to do with
the kind of food she distributed to the audience previously. She says:

Bright Summers glory July comes to pay
her full ripe Cherryes, those of June and May
that did prevent her gift, and came before
were taken pale, halfe colour’d from her store
But theise are red, sweete, swelling in theire pride
as tempting lippes of the expectinge Bride,
Or those that open to pronounce your blisse
Then seale it with a chast, and mutuall Kisse. (265-6)

This passage suggests that the cherries distributed earlier were stored cherries from the
summer before; but these second ones she distributes, which are red, were clearly made
and made to look spectacularly real. There are many important things about July’s
return: the competitiveness with her fellow female presenters over the banquet conceits
they distributed, the sexual nature of her description of the tempting fruit, and the ability

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38 Perhaps the Duckerfields’ familial association with the Parliamentarians and the
ascription of this role to Mrs Duckerfield is an attempt to make her undermine her own
family. But being Parliamentarian did not make them Puritanical (Lancashire 252-3).
of July to trump nature and produce this fruit out of season. July shows she has done what all the other women could only attempt to do: her production of the banquet conceits is the most masterful, and she is the one who gets the last word, and who gives the audience their last taste. The masque ends with her triumph and the continuation of carnival and feasting. Christmas may not have the power to extend the Carnival, but Mrs. Duckerfield, with her masterful life-like creations, can.

VI.

Banquet and Anti-banquet

The performance of Mrs. Duckerfield in *A Masque at Knowsley House* demonstrates the theatrical and creative agency inherent in the production and serving of banquet goods. As active producers of banquet goods, creative cooks, and providers of hospitality, women had the opportunity and the responsibility to produce elaborate displays for their families, and by doing so, they bolstered the status of their families and of themselves. It must be noted that, as the anti-feasting elements in *A Masque at Knowsley House* indicate, there was an anti-banqueting faction in early modern society. Interestingly, the anxieties surrounding banqueting are especially evident in the plays of the commercial stage.\(^{39}\) It is no coincidence that it is Shakespeare’s Cleopatra and not

\(^{39}\) Some conduct literature presents banquets negatively. Braithwait is especially negative about the attendance of public banquets, but he even concedes that they cannot
Octavia who consistently has luxurious banquets delivered to her, or that in Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire*, banqueting conceits are linked with witchcraft. Admittedly, these plays are concerned with more than the trends in feasting in the culture at large, but in these plays the banquet is connected with other morally suspect practices.\(^\text{40}\) Heywood and Brome’s play, for instance, is full of banquet scenes.\(^\text{41}\) The witches in the play prepare a banquet, transform a wedding cake into bran, be politely avoided. His ideal English Gentlewoman is “no common frequenter of publique feasts, but if neighborhood require it, she will admit of it: wherein she demeans herself so civilly, as there is no discreete person but joyes in her soceity” (no pagination). The widespread endorsement in conduct literature of women’s involvement in the entertainment of guests mitigates the importance of anti-banqueting statements such as these in conduct literature. So too does the marginality of such writings to views regarding banqueting held in the culture at large (see Chapter 1).

\(^\text{40}\) See also T.D.’s *The Bloodie Banquet*, a play where the banquet becomes an occasion for cannibalism, like in *Titus Andronicus*. Anti-banquet pamphlets were also popular at the time. See Thomas Dekker’s *The bachelor’s banquet* (1604) and *The Married mens feast, or The banquet at Bar-net* (1671).

\(^\text{41}\) The play makes a contrast between plain cookery and hospitality and the spectacular banquet scenes. Master Generous, who does not realize that his wife is a witch, spells out this contrast, signaling his endorsement of plain cooking:

> And gentlemen,
>
> Such plainness doth best please me. I had notice
> Of so much by my kinsmen, and, to show
> How lovingly I took it, instantly
> Rose from my chair to meet you at the gate,
> And be myself your usher. Nor shall you find,
> Being sit to meat, that I’ll excuse your fare
> Or say ‘I am sorry it falls out so poor’
> And ‘had I known your coming we’d have had
> Such things and such,’ nor blame my cook, to say
> ‘This dish or that had not been sauced with care’---
> Words fitting best a common hostess’ mouth
> When there’s perhaps some just cause of dislike

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and at a dinner party, change food from a plain, unspectacular meal into banquet dishes that bear a striking resemblance to the banquet receipts popular at the time. Indeed, a pie is transformed into one with live birds in it, a receipt included in Plat’s Delights for Ladies. One character, Joan, present at this bewitched banquet, exclaims in horror

JOAN: O husband! O guests! O son! O gentlemen!
   Such a chance in a kitchen was not heard of. ‘All
   the meat is flown out o’ the chimney top, I think,
   and nothing instead of it but snakes, bats, frogs
   beetles, hornets, and humble-bees. All the salads
   are turned to Jews-ears, mushrooms, and
   puckfists, and all the custards into cowshards! (3.1. 120-6)

Most of the housewives in the play are witches, and the play mocks the community’s inability to see the witches living under their noses. The depiction of the culinary creativity of women is quite different in this play than it is revealed to be in the published receipt books discussed above, since it is associated not with hospitality, the performance of wealth and status, and the domestic skill and virtue of the housewife herself, but with witchcraft, trickery, and social chaos. The tensions and anxieties regarding banqueting are important contexts to the larger religious and political debates in the years leading up to civil war, where the struggle over what the banquet meant stems from its luxury, consumption, and association with the aristocracy—and, in the preponderance of titles

But not the table of a gentleman;
Nor is it my wife’s custom. In a word,
Take what you find and so. (1.1. 176-91)

In contrast to this statement of the values of masculine, unfussy hospitality, witches and women in general are associated with banquet conceits.
and recipes linked to Queens Elizabeth, Anne, and Henrietta-Maria—royalty. The existence of anti-banquet literature does not mean that the banquet and its female producers widely came to be thought to be unvirtuous or improper, just that the banquet came to be a field over which such things were contested. The continued popularity of banqueting into the late seventeenth century, after the civil war, demonstrates how these anxieties about the practice were resolved. What is more, there is little evidence that these controversies enacted on the commercial stage touched household practice. In fact, receipt books for women continued to be printed in large numbers during the interregnum and it was in this period where the volumes written by women—like Grey’s—first started to be published.

42 There was even an anti-Cromwellian cookbook, called The Court and Kitchen of Elizabeth, Commonly called Joan Cromwell The Wife of the Late Usurper Truly Described and Represented, and now made Publick for general Satisfaction (1664). The book highlights Cromwell’s weak appetite (though profligate drinking) and contrasts it to his immoderate ambition.
The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. “The truth will not run away from us”: in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of this past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)

— Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

Henry Farley’s “St Paules-Church her Bill for Parliament” (1621) includes an antitheatrical complaint which descries the popularity—and financial success—of the various kinds of theatre available to the early modern English spectator:

To see a strange out-landish Fowle,
A quaint Baboon, an Ape, an Owle,
A dancing Beare, a Gyants bone,
A foolish Ingin more alone,
A Morris dance, a Puppet play,
Mad Tom to sing a Roundelay,
A Woman dancing on a Rope,
Bull-Baiting also at the Hope;
A Rimmers lests, a lugglers cheats,
A Tumbler shewing cunning feats,

1 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” 270.
Or Players acting on the stage,
There goes the bounty of our Age.
    But unto any pious motion,
There’s little coine, and less devotion. (A)

The poem’s catholic description of what constitutes theatrical entertainment, its conglomeration of a diverse range of performers, and its inclusion of a woman on its list achieves its aim of declaring the price of such popular spectacles in terms of the decline of religious devotion. At the same time, though, the poem confronts radically scholarly narratives of the early modern professional stage, which privilege the “players acting on the stage” over “a dancing beare” and assert that women did not become theatre professionals until the Restoration.

Furthermore, while Farley’s list ultimately criticizes and finds complicit all the performers mentioned, his poem’s teleology provides an additional corrective to the status of professional women entertainers in the culture. Working from the most “out-landish” performer to the least, from animal, to other, to tumbler, to player, Farley’s list hierarchizes the performers, denoting their relative sensationalism and culpability for the decline in religiosity by their place on the list. The most sensational, different, and least acceptable acts are listed at the start of the poem and

2 Farley’s “St Paules-Church her Bill for Parliament” was presented to King James to promote the interests of the church. The complaint was actually part of an entertainment presented to the King at Christmas after his return from Scotland (E3) and is spoken by a character named Zeale. Farley apparently had a better opinion of court theatre than he did of popular theatre.

3 Books like Brown and Parolin’s Women Players in England 1500-1650: Beyond the All-Male Stage (2005) have made great strides in showing how women were professional entertainers, but there is still much work to be done to convince the larger critical community of this fact.
the acts become increasingly more ordinary as the poem progresses. Farley’s placement of the “woman dancing on a Rope” in the middle of his list is significant. The rope dancer is marginal in the sense that all professional performers described in the poem—and in the culture at large—are marginal, but that the performance of a female professional entertainer does not merit surprise, shock, or more prominent position on the list suggests that women professional performers were neither rare nor any more culturally unacceptable than their male counterparts. The existing records of women itinerant performers corroborate this reading, similarly preserving the catholicity of early modern professional entertainment as well as the imbrication of women in the performance culture of early modern England.

Indeed, in addition to records of the provincial tours of the Queen’s Men, Lord Strange’s Men, and other noble-sponsored and London-based troupes, a significant body of records exist which document the careers of itinerant women performers.\(^4\) Although they have not yet been recognized as such, these records reveal nothing less than a tradition of female involvement in the professional theatre long before 1660. Despite the historical exclusion of women from the commercial stages of London, touring women were acknowledged as professional entertainers, licenced by the state to perform, and paid for their performances in cities and towns across the country. Account books

\(^4\) I do not wish to question the findings of scholars who have done superb work on the liveried, noble-sponsored troupes as much I want to argue that itinerant performers should have a place in theorizations of touring practices in Renaissance England.
indicate that professional women entertainers performed in households as well. Natasha Korda’s work on Moll Frith and the involvement of non-aristocratic women in the commercial networks surrounding the London stages has begun the process of understanding women in this period as theatre professionals. Korda’s work, though, is predicated on the assumption that Frith’s 1612 performance at the Fortune after the staging of *The Roaring Girl* is anomalous and that “Moll’s status as a ‘worker’ allow[s] for a more thoroughgoing critique of the all-male stage than . . . her status as a ‘player’” (72). 5 From the records of itinerant women performers assembled in this chapter, it is clear that women were involved both in the business of playing and as players and performers themselves. Moll Frith, in the context of England as a whole, was less of an anomaly as a performer than she first appears. Widening the scope of inquiry from the London commercial stages to the larger theatrical culture of England as a whole, then, makes it clear that the critique of the all-male stage goes deeper than Korda’s exploration of the London stages acknowledges. To make this critique and to recover women’s participation in the professional theatre, this chapter collects a sample of records documenting women’s itinerant performances and interrogates how such records—the best available source of the performances of itinerants—should be read. This chapter will

5 For a larger discussion of women’s labour and the London stages, see Korda’s “Women’s Theatrical Properties” 202-229. Korda argues in “Women’s Theatrical Properties” that the marginal nature of the theatre and the lack of guild involvement in it made it an amenable place for female labour (204). Similar conditions apply to itinerant professional performance, which did not feature noble sponsorship in the way that troupes like the King’s Men did.
also strive to understand the status of itinerant performers. In this sense, it moves beyond the scope of women’s drama alone, since itinerant un Liveried performers of either gender have not been the subject of any kind of extended study, and the excellent work of Peter Greenfield, Barbara Palmer, Sally-Beth MacLean, and Scott McMillan on the status of liveried, noble, or royal sponsored theatrical troupes has no correlative when it comes to itinerant performers. Finally, through a case study of one particular performer, Joan Provoe, this chapter will argue that the performances of women theatre professionals were not necessarily exploitative, amateurish, and vaudevillian, as they have been characterized by the few critics who attend to their performances, but instead had the potential to be no less skillful or political than the plays of Shakespeare and his touring King’s Men.

Criticism of the touring culture of early modern England, especially in terms of liveried troupes, is well underway. Alan Somerset recently characterized the provinces as “the welcome second home for well-organized, well-planned, profitable provincial visits by London companies or even the first home for those companies that rarely or never trod the boards in the capital,” countering the traditional view that the provinces were “places where nothing interesting ever happened” (135). We are starting to have a good sense of why troupes toured, where they played, and what they were paid for their efforts.\textsuperscript{6} Yet

\textsuperscript{6} Eliza Tiner’s “Patrons and Travelling Companies in Warwickshire” summarizes the field thoroughly. Barbara Palmer’s “Early Modern Mobility: Players, Payments and Patrons” similarly seeks to dispel the outdated views of touring performers as ‘rude mechanicals’ (259), though she too privileges the liveried companies.
Henry Herbert’s Proclamation of 3 July 1661 demonstrates the catholic definition of theatre operative in the period which we no longer acknowledge:

To all Mayors Sherrifs Justices of the peace Bayliffs Constables, and other his Maiesties Officers, True Liegemen and Subjects whom it may concerne and to every of them Whereas I am credibly informed that there are manie and very great disorders and abuses comitted by divers and sundry companies of Stage Players Tumblers, vaulters, dauncers on the Ropes, and alsoe by such as goe about with motions and Showes and other like kind of persons by reason of certeyne Grants Comissions and Lycences which they have by secret means procured from the Kings Maiestie by vertue whereof they do abusively claime unto themselves a kinde of Lycentious freedome to travell as well to shew plaie and exercise in Eminent Citties and Corporacions within this kingdome as alsoe from place to place without the knowledge and Approbacion of his Maiesties office of the Revells, and by that means doe take uppon them att their own pleasure to act and sett forth in many places of this kingdome divers and sundry plaies and shewes which for the most parte are full of scandal and offence both against the Church and State and doe likewise greatlie abuse thier authoritie in lending, letting and settling their said Comissions and Lycences unto others By reason whereof divers lawless and wandring persons are suffered to have free passage, unto whom such grants and Lycences were never intended Contrary to his Maiesties pleasure the Lawes of this Land his Maiesties grant and Comission to the Master of the Revells and the first institucion of the said Office, Thus are therefore in his Maiesties name straightly to charge and command you and every of you, That whosoever shall repaire to any of your Citties Boroughs, Townes Corporate, Villages, Hamletts, or parishes, and shall there by vertue of any Comission warrant or Lycence whatsoever act, sett

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7 Henry Herbert’s Proclamation of 3 July 1661 demonstrates the catholic definition of theatre operative in the period which we no longer acknowledge.

itinerant performers who were not part of a troupe do not figure into theories of touring, nor have their performances been studied in any detail, an omission which, given the broad definition of theatre described by Farley (which is repeated in a variety of early modern sources, including ones written by the Master of the Revels himself), speaks more of a bias among present-day scholars for scripted, London-based drama, and against provincial, non-scripted, popular entertainment. Both Siobhan Keenan’s *Travelling*
therefore, shew or present anie Play, Show, Motion, texts of activitie and sights whatsoever; not haveing a Lycence now inforce under the seale of Office of Sir Henry Herbert Knight now Master of the Revells or under the hand of his Deputy and sealed likewise with the said Seale of the office, That you and every of you att all tymes for ever herafter doe Seize and take away all and every such grant pattent, Comission, or Lycence, whatsoever from the bringer or bearer thereof, and that you fortwith cause the said Graunt or Lycence to be conveyed and sent unto his Maiesties said offices of the Revells there to remaine at the disposicion of the foresaid Master of the said office, And that to the uttermost of your power you doe from henceforth forbidd and supresse all such Plaies, Shewes, mations, feats of Activitie sights and every of them, untill they shall be approved Lycenced and authorised by the said Sir Henry Herbert or his said Deputy in the manner aforesaid, who are appointed by his Maiestie ... Herein faile you not as you will answer the contrary at your perrills ... (Halliwill 42-44).
discussion of the various manifestations of women’s theatre before 1660: “they were paid for singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments; they were exhibited as freaks, and they were granted licences to exhibit freaks” (104). Mark Thornton Burnett, similarly, writes on the careers of men and women who were displayed in theatres, fairs, and about whom pamphlets and ballads were circulated (8-32). Bella Mirabella has published an excellent article which focuses specifically on female mountebanks who performed as “actors and healers” (89) in Italy and England. James Stokes writes a more thorough account of women itinerants in his description of women’s performances in Somerset in general, noting that, in that county at least, “the idea of women entertainers operating in

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9 Mirabella writes that the mountebanks’ free open-air entertainments took place in any space where people might congregate, such as fair, church-ale, harvest celebration, or carnival (Morley, 295). In some piazzas or squares, mountebank performers were daily attractions. While mountebanks worked all over Europe and England, some of the most vivid descriptions come from Italy. In the late 1590s, Fynes Morison wrote about ‘a generation of empirics’ who haunt marketplaces in Italian cities: these are called ‘montibanci of mounting banks . . .and ciarlatani of prating’ (424-5). Mountebanks rarely performed alone and were usually accompanied by other performers, male and female, who worked as clowns, musicians, dancers, actors, or acrobats. Many traveled with a female companion, often depicted dancing or playing an instrument . . . Some had performing apes and bufoonish sidekicks, called a Merry Andrew in England or a zanni in Italy. Women often took part in the comic action. Morison describes how the mountebanks ‘proclaim their wares upon these scaffolds, and to draw a concourse of people, they have a zani or fool with a visard on his face, and sometimes a woman to make commical sport.’ (91)
the county in the early seventeenth century was quite acceptable” (179).

The paucity of modern-day scholarship on itinerant performers stems in part from the difficulty of obtaining records of their performances, especially before the inception of the Records of Early English Drama. Early editors of the office book of Sir Henry Herbert like Malone were uninterested in the kinds of theatre performed by itinerants and recorded few details about them, beginning the tradition of privileging printed play-text over performance record which, as seen above, remains with us today, and promulgating a sanitized version of Renaissance drama that promoted the plays of the Shakespearean stage over the popular non-textual theatre of itinerant performers (Bawcutt 76). Bawcutt spells out more precisely the failures of the early critics to record and preserve the records documenting itinerant performance as such:

Malone showed very little interest in publishing this material, and it is to Ord that we owe most of the thirty or so surviving examples, though there might have been more if Halliwell-Phillips had preserved the Ord transcript intact. (Burn copied out the Ord play-licences but ignored those for miscellaneous shows.) (76)

The omissions of these early scholars are especially important because Herbert’s office book was lost, and the lost or never-made citations have had a huge impact on the information we know about itineracy.

What is more, twenty-nine years after the publication of York, the first REED volume, the difficulties of using REED and widespread scholarly inattention to its wealth of resources has similarly prevented the recognition of the rich tradition of itineracy—both in terms of liveried troupes and itinerant performers—from being fully
realized. Although REED’s volumes publish documents relating to itineracy (indeed, this chapter would be impossible without REED), a strong bias towards the study of liveried troupes is evident. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the companion website to the project, *Patrons and Performances*, where one can only search the records by patron, event, venue, or troupe, none of which are usable search terms for itinerant performers who did not have patrons and were not, accordingly, part of a troupe named for their patron. Despite the tradition of neglect of the records of itineracy, the difficulty of obtaining and reading performance records, both before and after REED, and the snobbish dismissal of itinerant performances as irrelevant, amateurish, simplistic, or unsuitable for the era that produced the plays of the Shakespearean stage, an examination of the records which do remain of itinerant performances makes it clear that itinerants were an important part of the theatrical culture of the towns and households of Renaissance England.

The remaining records of itinerant performers represent but a trace of actual practice, not just because of the historical treatment of the documents, but because of the non-textual theatre itinerants performed. It is not impossible that itinerants worked from scripts, but if there were texts or scripts they have not survived; they certainly were not

10 For criticisms of REED, see Peter Holland’s “Theatre Without Drama: Reading REED,” Patricia Badir’s “Playing Space: History, the Body, and Records of Early English Drama,” and Theresa Coletti’s “Reading REED.”

11 One could, presumably, search by event or venue, but such a search requires that one knows what to look for. See http://link.library.utoronto.ca/reed/.
published. Our sources are limited to civic records, ecclesiastical court records, household account books, diaries, and licences from the Master of the Revels to perform, all of which have survived inconsistently. The peripatetic state of the evidence—as well as the mobile life of touring performers—means that this chapter necessarily has a wider scope than previous ones. Touring performers of all stripes travelled on a circuit, performing in towns, households, theatres, universities, and cities. Because of the vagaries of record keeping in the period and the inconsistent survival of pertinent records, it is impossible to trace fully the careers of most individual troupes or performers or to limit the spaces in which they performed; that is, restricting this discussion only to records of household performances by itinerants would not accurately represent the performances of these individuals in early modern households. The fact that records do not exist of a given performer staging her act in a household simply cannot be taken as clear evidence that she never played in a household; similarly, performers who played in households but of whom no evidence is recorded in civic accounts cannot be assumed to have never performed in a city or a town. Only by mapping the touring practices of itineracy in its fullest expression in the remaining records can we start to recover the place of these performers in the playing spaces of early modern theatrical culture.

At the same time as this chapter moves away from an exclusive focus on the household, it should be noted that recent research shows that the household was a far

12 Sally Beth-MacLean and Scott McMillan’s study of the Queen’s Men is the notable exception.
more important part of early modern touring than has previously been thought. Barbara
Palmer’s work on the touring practices of liveried troupes suggests that the household
was a central performance space for touring companies. Her analysis finds that, in
comparison to civic records from York and Doncaster, the household accounts of the
Cavendish and Clifford families reveal the household to be a more vital, lucrative
performance space than the cities themselves:

For travelling players ‘the great house option’ was a requirement, not an
elective. If we eliminate the 1570s and 1580s (for which household data
essentially do not exist) and eliminate the 1640s (when almost no one is
playing anywhere), we have 90 visits to towns and 105 to great houses, a
balance that emphatically underscores the desirability of playing in houses.
The primary reason is obvious: playing in houses paid well. In April
1616, the Cliffords’ receiver records a total of £15 8s. spent at Skipton
Castle alone during the preceding eleven months on ‘players and others,’
compared to the £5 4d. spent by the city of York on ‘honourable mens
servantes & playeres” in 1617. In 1629, York spent £4 . . . while in 1629-
30, the Skipton summary account shows a total of £44 19s 2d. given to
players. The Skipton summary account of 1631-32 shows an expenditure
of £82 9s. 7d. for players. These figures, which suggest that one great
household spent an annual minimum of three times more on players than
did the second largest city in England, may not be simplistically
comparable, because the complex renumeration methods, terminology,
and sums of town records admit numerous variations. At the least,
however, one can assert with confidence that the Cliffords spent a great
deal of money on players. (271-2)

Palmer’s findings suggest that the household was, in her terms, “central to touring
circuits” (272). As noted above, she does not attend to itinerants, but the evidence which
does exist of household performances by entertainers of all stripes suggests that the
household could well have had a similar importance to them.\textsuperscript{13} In this way, though the extant records of touring take this chapter beyond the scope of household performance, the performers described here may have found the household to be the most amenable, lucrative, and desirable place to play and may have hence performed there more frequently than extant and discovered household accounts might suggest at first glance.

Within the household and civic records that are still extant, the status of women itinerant performers is comparable to the status of male players and liveried troupes. Records of performances by all these types of performers are recorded in the same way; there do not appear to be differences in payments and they were permitted to perform and to not perform with the same amount of frequency. For instance, Joyce Jeffries’s account book for the years 1639–40 records payments to the following entertainers:

\begin{flushleft}
\textit{(10 January)}
\textit{\ldots}
gave the waites of heriford \hspace{1cm} 2s.6d.
\textit{\ldots}
\textit{(3 April)}
\textit{\ldots}
gave the waites of heriford at ester \hspace{1cm} 18d.
\textit{\ldots}
\textit{(22 June)}
\textit{\ldots}
gave a man that had ye dawncing hors \hspace{1cm} js.
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{13} Palmer even suggests that household performance may have been preferable to performances in towns: “In Marston’s \textit{Histrio-Mastix} a well-oiled Master Mosthast the Poet sees the advantages of great houses to be ‘beefe and beere, and beds.’ Put more soberly, the advantages include not only meals and lodging but also stabling and feed for horses, performance lighting, bed chamber candles and charcoal fuel, repairs to the gear of players or horses, and a money reward which is pure profit” (272–3).
Jeffries’s account book, preserved at the British Library, lists her expenses for each quarter in a matter-of-fact way. Her description of the performance of Meg the dancer does not differ qualitatively from her description of the fiddlers who played for her at the New Year. Jeffries’s manner of record keeping is entirely typical of record keeping of the day, and the ordinary status of women performers in Jeffries’s account book is further evidence that their performances were ordinary events.

While travelling players like the Queen’s Men needed noble, and after 1603, royal patents as well as a licence from the Revels office to perform, itinerants needed only a licence from the Master of the Revels, which was usually issued annually (Bawcutt 83).

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14 Jeffries’s autograph account book is called *A new Booke of receights of rents, anuities and interest moneys begininge at St. Mary Day, 1638; written at Heryford at John Fletcher’s howse*. It covers her expenses and income for the years 1638-47.

15 Meg the dancer is paid less than the others recorded in this account. It is ambiguous why this is the case; there is no indication that it relates to her gender.

16 In rare instances, royal patents were granted to itinerants. One of these was granted to the Genovese Siamese twins, Lazarus and Baptista Colloretti or Colloredo. Lazarus was attached to Baptista’s navel, and the two became celebrities, with “poems written about them” as well as being the subjects of “medical treatises” (Bawcutt 81).
Licences were necessary, of course, because of the 1572 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the Poor and the Impotent, legislation which was the culmination of centuries of efforts to contain vagrancy. The act determined that a vagabond was a person of more than fourteen years old and whole and mighty in body and able to labour, having not land or master, nor using any lawful merchandise, craft, or mistery whereby he or she might get his or her living. And all fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, and minstrels not belonging to any Baron of this realm or towards any other honourable personage of greater degree. (qtd. in Barroll et al. 9)

As often as this act is quoted, it is rarely noted that performers of both genders are considered in the statute, pointing to a tradition of professional female performance. On

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17 The act was a culmination of a series of attempts to contain and control playing, which started as early as 1559 in Elizabeth’s reign. Badir writes that:

In 1559, Queen Elizabeth altered the national procedures of enforcement in a minor but significant way by authorizing local magistrates to license or prosecute beggars, players, and minstrels according to their own discretion. This move is significant, notes Janet Clare, for though it is contextualized by a general trend towards the reliance on local authorities for the enforcement of royal agendas, the proclamation firmly established that it was to be the urban magistracy which assured the uniformity of representational practice. Though instructed not to permit any play ‘wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal; shall be handled or treated,’ local authorities were entrusted with the regulation of a powerful means of community building which hitherto had been the jurisdiction of the Privy Council. This was clearly a move designed to promote Protestantism and to legitimize the strict regulation of public gathering places. Nevertheless, such a shift in judicial practice invested further authority in urban oligarchs to fashion self-interested versions of Commonalty—not unlike their immediate predecessors who had so carefully orchestrated Corpus Christi pageants and plays. (271-2)
the Act, *The Revels History of Drama in English* notes that

> Such persons, among whom were also included ‘jugglers, pedlars, tinkers, and petty chapmen,’ if they were apprehended and defined as ‘rogues’ or ‘vagabonds,’ would be immediately condemned to be ‘grievously whipped or burned through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of an inch about’ unless some respectable person indicated his willingness to take the offender into his service for a calendar year. (9)

The punishments escalated for repeated infractions. A performer caught for the third time could be put to death (Barroll et al. 9). Formally legislated under Elizabeth, the practice of regulating playing only increased under the Stuarts, who consistently centralized the censorship of all theatrical activity in the country.\(^{18}\)

Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels from 1623 to 1673, enthusiastically embraced the licencing of itinerants, according to Bawcutt “probably more from a wish to maximize his income than from a desire to assert an ideological hegemony over drama” (41). John Quincy Adams in *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert* finds that “during the administration of Sir Henry Herbert, the Master of the Revels . . . exercised

\(^{18}\) Paola Pugliati, in *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* argues that the legislation associating players with vagabondage, though most fully articulated in 1572, was part of a long trajectory of legislation to contain vagrancy. Players were described as vagrants in 1545 (1), and, a survey of legislation shows that the story of the progressive delegitimization of minstrels, bards, rhymers, and similar ‘performers’ started with an ordinance issued by Edward I in 1284. The ordinance, which was published soon after an expedition which ended with the annexation of Wales, established that beggars, together with ‘Bards, Rhymers, and other idlers and vagabonds,’ should not be supported by the population, ‘lest by their invectives and lies they lead the people to mischief and burden the common people with the impositions’ (Ribton Turner, 1887, p. 35). (2-3)
not only peculiar jurisdiction over the stage, the plays, and the players, but also an
unlimited authority over every other show; whether natural or artificial whether of trick or
ingenuity (S.A. 208)” (Adams 46). \(^{19}\) Adams records a litany of what Herbert considered
licence-worthy performers and performances:

Sir Henry Herbert granted, on the 20\(^{th}\) August 1623, a licence \textit{gratis} to
John Williams, and four others, to make \textit{showe} of an \textit{Elephant}, for a year;
on the 5\(^{th}\) of September to make showe of a \textit{live Beaver}; on the 9\(^{th}\) of June
1668 to make showe of an outlandish creature, called a \textit{Possum}; a licence
to a Dutchman to show two \textit{Dromedaries}, for a year, for which, the
licenser received one pound; a warrant to Grimes, for showing the \textit{Camell}:
— On the 14\(^{th}\) of August 1624, a licence was granted to Edward James to
sett forth a \textit{Showing Glass}, called the \textit{World’s Wonder}: On the 27\(^{th}\) of
August 1623, a licence was granted to Barth,Cloys with three Assistants to
make show of a \textit{Musical Organ}, with divers motions in it; to make show
of an \textit{Italian Motion}, to show a \textit{Looking Glass}; to show the \textit{Philosopher’s
Lanthorn}; to show a \textit{Virginal}:
— A licence was granted to Henry
Momford, and others, ‘for tumbling, and vaulting, with other tricks of
sleight of Hand;’ for a prize of the Bull by Mr Allen, and Mr Lewkner; to
William Sands and others to show ‘the \textit{Chaos of the World};’ to show a
motion called the \textit{Creation of the World}; to show certain \textit{freaks of
charging} and \textit{discharging a gun}; a licence to Mr Lowins, on the 18\(^{th}\) of
February 1630, for allowing of a \textit{Dutch Vaulter}, at their Houses, [the
Hope, and Blackfriars] A warrant was given to Francis Nicolini, an Italian,
and his Company, ‘to dance on the ropes, to use \textit{Interludes}, and \textit{masques},
‘and to sell his powders, and balsams: — to John Puncteus, a Frenchman
professing Physick, with ten in his Company, to exercise the \textit{quality of
playing}, for a year, and to \textit{sell his drugs}: On the 6\(^{th}\) of March, a licence
was given gratis to Alexander Kuhelson to teach the \textit{art of musick} and
dancing for one year; to make shew of pictures in wax. (S.A. 208-209).
(Adams 46-7)

While Herbert’s motives might have been mostly pecuniary, his licencing of all manner

\(^{19}\) The ‘S.A.’ Adams quotes is \textit{A Supplemental Apology for the Belivers in the

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of acts and support of the performers’ right to play also was strongly informed by an anti-
Puritanical support for theatre. Herbert even went so far as to issue an arrest warrant for John Platt, a constable from Warre, because he prevented “players to show there” in 1631 (Bawcutt 173). Despite all of the efforts to licence performers, given Herbert’s repeated statements to town officials to arrest those performing without a licence, it is clear that, despite the threat of punishment, entertainers could and did perform without a licence.

The licencing of players and itinerants was so important because it transformed a marginal group—players and itinerants—from unlawful vagabonds to representatives of the state. Peter Greenfield writes on the cultural logic of licencing and noble-sponsorship that

the great irony of dramatic patronage was that it involved employing as symbols of royal and aristocratic authority a group usually considered outside or at least on the margin of the social hierarchy and thus viewed as a threat to the social order. Without the licence and livery of their patron, the players appeared to be masterless wanderers, the sort of men thought to be the greatest threat to the social order by aristocracy and civil magistracy alike. The players’ visit to a town provided a temporary escape from the unchanging regimen of work, and of freedom from authority of master, guild, and city, of freedom to determine one’s own time, movement, and actions. (258-9)

Greenfield’s account does not include—or even acknowledge—other kinds of touring performers. By Greenfield’s logic, itinerant performers, always un liveried, sometimes un licenced, would be perceived as impossible threats to the social order. Yet in plain fact they were permitted to perform. To the extent that an itinerant performer played at the behest of a given town’s Mayor or of the head of a household, thus trumpeting the power
and beneficence of mayor and host, itinerant performers were contained in the sense that
Greenfield describes the liveried players being contained.  Greenfield writes that

at the mayor’s play (as cultural performance), the forces of subversion
were represented by the players themselves, those wanderers who
occupied a position outside, or at least on the margin of, the Elizabethan
social order.  Yet the livery they wore made their status as some ‘noble-
men’s servants’ clear, and their performance of the mayor’s play made
them temporarily the mayor’s men as well.  Performances in aristocratic
households could have had much the same effect, with the players
representing their patrons but also of the head of the household who
authorizes the performance.  (261)

Although itinerants did not have noble sponsorship in the way that the liveried troupes
did, the process of licencing can be seen to do the same work of containing their
potentially politically explosive difference and making them into servants of the state,
though it is doubtful that the subversion/containment model Greenfield asserts
necessarily worked so neatly.  The temporality of performance gives it a potential that
could easily, if momentarily, disrupt the containments of livery and/or licencing.

What licencing did accomplish, to the extent that it contained the subversion of
travelling performers, was that it made women performers into acceptable servants of the
state.  Siobhan Keenan even finds it to have been instrumental in establishing acting as a
profession:

the act was not apparently intended to stigmatize players en masse, and
need not be interpreted as anti-theatrical in its provisions regarding actors.
The order was not solely or primarily concerned with players, but with two
social ‘problems’: vagrancy and poverty.  Mobile, masterless men and the
discontented poor were both perceived as potential threats to political
security and stability in Elizabethan England . . . Similarly, while there
was much discussion about the Act’s parameters of application and its
phrasing (particularly in relation to players), parliamentary debate about the Bill ‘was characterized by Puritan hostility [. . .] to itinerant entertainers; and the eventual Bill provided for an enlarged list of those eligible for licences.’ The Act had its benefits for those players who were able to obtain authorization to perform, too. Licenced players were afforded legal recognition and protection. The Act may have even helped to establish acting more firmly as a profession. (7)

Because Herbert’s office book no longer survives, licences issued to performers or players of any kind are extremely rare. Of the seven remaining licences of itinerant performers which survive and are printed in N.W. Bawcutt’s *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels 1623-73,* two of the licences name women performers. The first was issued to the Jones family in 1630. In the licence, Herbert directs all

Mayors Sheriffes Justices of the peace Bayliffes Co<. . .>and all other his ma<lies> officers true Liegemen and subjectes . . . [that he has] by these p<rese>ntes lycenced and authorized Iohn Iones Anne his wief Richard Payne Richard Iones and their assistance To sett forth and shewe <. . .> Motion w<ih> dyers storyes in ytt As alsoe tumbleing vaulteing sleight of hand and other such like feates of Activity Requyreing you and eu<er>y of you . . . p<er>mytt the said Iohn Iones Anne his wief Richard Payne Richard Iones and their assistantes quietly to passe and to try their said shewes w<ih> <. . .> Trumpettes as they or any of them shall think fitteing for the same from tyme to tyme and at all tyme & tymes w<ih>out any of yo<ir> letts or molesta<cons> w<ih> <. . .> places of Iurisdiccon Townes Corporate Citties or Buroughes whatsoever ... (Bawcutt 308-9)

Herbert’s strong language in support of the Jones’s right to perform is indicative of the struggle between the Revels office and the increasingly Puritanical town authorities who were resistant to the disturbances of performances. In the licence, the Jones family are authorized by the crown to perform; not permitting them to perform constitutes a
violation of the king’s will. Moreover, although Anne Jones alone is defined by her relationship to her husband, her inclusion is not highlighted as being exceptional; she is an accepted member of the troupe.

The second licence was granted to Sisley Peadle on 29 August 1631. In the licence, Herbert states that

**I haue** by these presents Licenced and authorized Sisley Peadle; Thomas Peadle her sonne Elias Grundling and three more in their Company to use and exercise Dancing on the Roapes, Tumbling, Vaulting and other such feats which they or any of them are practiced in or can performe **Requiring** you and every of you in his Maiesties name to suffer and permit them . . . quietly to passe and to sett forth and shewe those things before menconed with such musicke Drume or Trumpetts as they shall thinke fitting for the same from time to time and at all time and times without any of your Lets or molestacions with any of your Liberties and place of Jurisdiction . . . and alsoe to be ayding and assisting unto them if any wrong or Injury shall be offered unto them or any of them They behaueing themselves honestly and according to the Lawes of this Realme and forbearing to make shewe on the Saboth day Or in the time of Devine service you according them your Townehalls, Mootehalls, Guildhalls or some convenient place to shewe . . . (Bawcutt 309)

The remainder of the licence issued to Peadle warns town officials not to allow any unlicenced performer to perform, to strip unlicenced performers of what licence they carry, and imprison them (309-10). Similar to his use of the Jones; licence, Herbert uses Peadle’s licence to stake out his authority over town governors, indicating that their refusal to let Peadle perform constitutes a violation of the King’s wishes. The licence also instructs town authorities to act to maintain Herbert’s own authority as Master of the Revels by asking them to police the licences of performers who arrive in town.

Furthermore, Herbert’s mention of the good behaviour of the troupe offers a panacea to
Puritan town authorities. Sisley Peadle’s name is the first on the licence, so it is reasonable to infer that she was in charge of the troupe, and responsible for its business. Her performative role in the troupe is unclear, as are the roles of all the people mentioned in the licence. Bawcutt notes that Peadle’s troupe “included at least two generations of performers whose careers extended between 1609 or earlier and 1639” (80). Such longevity indicates a professional, well-managed, skillful troupe of performers. As the head of a successful and long-lasting troupe, Peadle is situated as a business woman who performed with the authority of the King behind her.20

To a certain extent, this chapter embraces a positivist approach, considering the evidence that does survive of women itinerants as important evidence of a tradition of women’s professional theatre. At the same time, this chapter questions positivism and the status of the archive, especially in the way that the materials recording the existence of these performers were treated by early literary historians, the inherent ambiguity of the dramatic record itself, and the historical conditions under which dramatic records were produced in the first place. We cannot quantify the performances of itinerants, the records remaining cannot be taken as a representative sample of what occurred, and the

20 Writing of earlier records of the troupe, Bentley finds further that “the Peadle family, rope dancers, are first heard of in Germany in 1614 and 1615, but their troupe is found most frequently in the provinces in England. The fact that Peadle is called an actor at the Fortune probably does not indicate that he was a Palsgrave’s man, as has sometimes been said, it is more likely that his troupe of rope dancers was the one which occasionally performed at the Fortune and for which Gunnell, the Fortune manager, twice paid fees to Herbert in March 1624/5" (II. 521).
records themselves are slippery, biased, and grounded in the time and place of a singular instance. The existing records are important because they document a tradition which would otherwise be lost, but at the same time they cannot be taken as uncomplicated, straightforward histories. As Theresa Coletti writes:

> facts do not reside in some recuperable and neutral way in documents that refer to and convey information about empirical reality. Rather, the documents have their own historicity, their own relation to the processes that produced them. Historical knowledge, therefore, is always mediated, not only because the historical record is incomplete, but also because practitioners of the historical discipline are themselves historically situated. (250)

In terms of the production of dramatic records on early modern England, Andrew Gurr’s article, “The loss of records for the travelling companies in Stuart times,” suggests importantly that in Caroline England players “were regularly visiting towns and playing at inns as a matter of routine without first securing leave from the mayor, or at least receiving any payment, so that the accounts take no note of them” (3). Critics have normally seen the decline in records of performances from the Caroline era as evidence in a decline in touring in general in the face of growing Puritanical influence over town authorities.21 Gurr’s argument asserts just the opposite: that touring increased during these years because there was nothing the town authorities could do to stop performers from playing. There are of course no records in civic documents of performers who did

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21 See for instance James Gibson’s “Stuart Players in Kent: fact or fiction? (2). Gibson refutes Gurr’s reading, arguing that playing did, in fact, decline in Kent in Stuart and Caroline England.
not bother to seek the permission of the town to perform, and the records that do exist in the period document town authorities trying to get control of a practice over which they no longer had any control, hence making the civic authorities appear in their own records to be more in control of town drama than they really were. Gurr notes that, with the increased power of the Master of the Revels under the Stuarts, mayors were no longer required to act as censors, as they had done under Elizabeth (3-4):

Although the civic municipalities did continue to grant permission for companies to give performances in their municipalities for some decades after 1603, it is not easy to see whether in doing so they were simply hanging on to a by then long-running practice, or more positively clinging to their privilege of controlling the plays to be offered to their citizenry in spite of the centralised controls that now existed. Under James, with the Master of the Revels taking over censorship and licensing of plays they soon gave up the privilege of a mayoral performance for censorship purposes, but they did try to retain the authority to allow performing for only a limited time in their own territory. (4)

Moreover, while the matter of inadequate licensing was a legitimate reason for turning away a performer, Gurr makes it clear that the towns, whatever their religious stance on drama, had a limited ability to regulate—and even record—touring performers:

the civic records became less adequate as records of visits as the successive Masters of the Revels made improvements in the centralization of playing . . . As time went on, especially under the first Stuarts, the process of authorising companies to travel by royal patent became the Master’s and the Privy Council’s chief instrument of control. It often brought the visiting professional companies in conflict with the local authorities, and seems to have given them an extra incentive to ignore corporations and play in their towns without first seeking their authorisation. That was a spiral leading down into departure from civic records. (6)

The implications of Gurr’s reading of trends in Stuart civic record-keeping for itinerant
performers are tremendous, since such records are a primary source of their performances. If itinerants did not require leave from the mayor to perform, then there may have been far more performances than are preserved in the civic record books which remain. Furthermore, if Gurr’s hypothesis is correct, then it must be concluded that itinerant performers had enough status with their licences from the Master of the Revels to perform without town permission, but also that the result of their accepted right to perform significantly limits the sources we have which record their performances. Paradoxically, it is likely that the more itinerants performed, the less we hear of them.

Similarly, the ambiguities within the documents themselves make a strictly positivist approach to dramatic records of itineracy impossible. For instance, in Carlisle, payments for minstrels were recorded as such from 2 June 1602-3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item unto John grayson waitt of Cohermouthe</td>
<td>xij d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item unto ij Scotes minstrels</td>
<td>xij d</td>
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<tr>
<td>. . .</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Item unto John nixon piper</td>
<td>vj d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item unto j scotes gentlewoman minstrell</td>
<td>ijs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item into my lorde evers players</td>
<td>xiiij s iiiij d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Cumberland 66)

There is ambiguity in this record whether this is a female Scottish minstrel or the minstrel of a Scottish woman. The ambiguity is unresolvable and not uncommon in dramatic records. This record cannot be reduced to a singular meaning; both are possible.

Similarly, the St. Michael Parish Register in Cockerham records the death of two women in such a way that it is unclear whether the women or their husbands were musicians:
1623 23 June wife of Robert Hodgson of Ellel, piper buried
1623/4 21 March Elizabeth, widow of Michael Jackson, piper buried
1626 4 October Janet, daughter of John Jackeson, piper christened
1632 16 December Henry, son of Henry, the piper of Pilling christened
1642 23 November Elizabeth, daughter of John Haworth, fiddler christened \( \text{(Lancashire 243)} \)

While the fact that the children who were christened are described in terms of their father’s profession may indicate that the same is true for the wives, this does not efface the ambiguity in the records which suggests that the women could have been pipers themselves or that they could have been married to a piper, or even both. In this way, women’s performances are unquantifiable and irreducible to statistical analysis.

Simply put, the dramatic records of itineracy require to be read in a different way than do the texts and records of text-based drama for the reasons listed above and because the dramatic record is entrenched in a specific time and place, recorded by an individual in particular historical circumstances. Patricia Badir has written about how the dramatic record is grounded in the local and in the body of the performer itself and how it reactivates the creative capacities of the body . . . reach[ing] outside the confines of discursive forms of knowledge and reinvigorates the here and now of the playing environment. The phenomenological parameters of both the performance site and the urban environment are reoriented by the physical presence of spectators and actors so as to focus attention on the corporeal inhabitation of the rather unstable boundaries and perimeters of ordered space . . . Thus, while sovereign and civic representational practices may ultimately have sought to sustain reconciled communities upon designated territories, the transformation of bodies into abstractions happens only in the everyday and therefore has no meaning outside of the everyday. Wherever it is within the city, the stage becomes a socially transformed place in which the quotidian alters representation as it is altered by it. While performance frames representation, determines frontiers and establishes spaces for legitimate social actions, it is also a
part of everyday life which has, as Alan Read remarks, ‘remarkably little control over audiences’ imaginings.’ The spectacular becomes much more than a commitment to memory of power relations, as it inserts into hegemonic ideology a destabilizing contact with the unruly plurality of urban space. (275-6)

For Badir, the temporality of the performance preserved in the record is evidence of the ways in which theatrical performance can disrupt tactically, in a de Certeauian sense, the aims of the entertainment to promote noble, royal, and civic largesse. Yet the records of itineracy present a further dimension which Badir does not discuss. Within the record itself we have the record of a moment, of an opinion, of the performance itself. That is, the records themselves inhere a challenge to positivism and an interpretive richness because of the historicity of these documents which is embedded in the instant of performance. They have a pregnant locality and a temporality in their preservation of a moment in time and in their communication of a single reaction which cannot be taken as uncomplicated evidence. This failing to communicate qualitatively a performance, or to

22 Michel de Certeau distinguishes between tactic and the strategy as means of political action in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. A tactic, he writes, insinuates itself onto the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances . . . because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’ Whatever it wins, it does not keep. (xix) Conversely, a strategy “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*) and thus serves as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it” (xix). The strategy is connected to power, the idea of the ‘proper,’ and the institution, and hence is a less radical form of practice.
communicate unbiased ‘truth’ is in fact, in some ways, the greatest potential of the record in that it registers the precise moment of the performance in the way that a play text rarely does, offering us an entirely different way of reading early modern theatre. In this way, when we read the existing records of women’s itinerant performances as balladeers, minstrels, players, acrobats, fools, and what can be termed ‘freaks,’ they ought to be taken not as a bland description of a performance event, but as a rich repository of performance history.

The records which are still extant demonstrate that women performed alone, with their husbands, and with troupes. Like Jones and Peadle, many of the women listed in the records were licenced by the Master of the Revels and permitted to perform. A record from Norwich from 14 March 1638 indicates that “f'francis Stolly brought into this Court a lycence for him his wife and assistance to shewe sundry storyes with slight of hand Date xx Septembris 1637 to hold for a yeere, they have leave to shewe till Saturday next night, and noe longer” (Norwich 227). Stokes records evidence of a man and wife team who travelled with their dancing horse (179). Ciprion de Roson and his wife in Norwich in 1614 were “licenced to show feats of activity with A beast called an Elke” (Stokes 182). 23 Herbert granted “A licence to Tho'. Barrell with one man his wife & children to toss a

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23 The Records of Early English Drama feature many records of performances with animals. One record from Bristol reads: “Item payd to one Edmond Jones a Tumbler for shewyng before master Mayor and the Alderman cetaign feates of vaulting upon a horse and tumbling agilitie of his bodie” (112). Another from Bristol reads: “Paide given to one John Shepheard 15 February last who came with Commission to shew a Sow with 6 Leggs” (Bristol 443).
pike for a y'. 20th Aug'. 1622—10”” (Bawcutt 42). An animal act was licenced in 1623: “A licence to Marke Bradley with his wife to make shewe of a Ramme with 4 horns for a year . . .” (Bawcutt 142). William Smith and his wife Jane were licenced with their two assistants “to show a birde called a Starr for 6 months” (Bawcutt 154). This selection of performers licenced to play demonstrates at least some of the range of performances in which women participated.

Of course, not even licenced performers were always allowed to perform, though there is no evidence to support Michael Shapiro’s supposition that “provincial theatrical troupes may have anticipated that traveling with women would jeopardize their ability to secure the permission they needed . . . to perform” (192). In Norwich, on 13 September 1600 “William Nynges his wife was Commaunded that neyther he nor his wife shall singe nor sell any Ballettes within this Cytty after this day upon payne of whippynge” (Norwich 126). There were also continuous problems with dubious, false, and out of date licences. A performance in Norwich on 9 October 1616 involved feats of two Frenchmen “with Dancinge on the Ropes performed by a woman & also A Baboone that can doe strange feates” (Stokes 182). This troupe was not allowed to play “because the lycence [from the master of the revels] semeth not to be sufficient” (Norwich 150); their licence was significantly out of date, dating from Elizabeth’s reign. In his introduction to Somerset Stokes notes that women were not permitted to perform in that county more often for reasons having to do with licencing and insufficient respect for religious devotion rather than with their sex:
A woman fiddler was placed in the stocks at Merriot in 1637. A consistatory court act book in 1608 includes a description of a young woman of Skipton Mallet who lives as wife with a man who had a dancing horse; they travelled together when he performed. Whether the woman also assisted or took part in the performance is not mentioned in the record. The fiddler was arrested not because she was a performing woman but because she was a vagabond and was performing on a Sunday. The stated complaint against the horse master and the woman was not that they were travelling but that they were living ‘incontinently.’ (495-6)

While many women were licenced performers, there also was a body of performers who were unlicenced and yet still performed, as the records indicating the problems such performers present denote. One document, from Norwich’s Mayors Court Books 29 January 1625 says,

I am credibly informed that there are many & very great disorders & abuses daily committed by diverse & sundry Companyes of Stage players Tumblers vaulters Dauncers on the Ropes And also by such as goe about with motions and Shewes & other the like kinde of persons by reason of certaine grantes Commissions & lycences which they have by secret meanes procured both from the kinges Maiestie & also from diverse noblemen by vertue whereof themselves a kinde of licentious fredome to travell as well to shew play and exercise in eminent Cities & Corporations within this kingdome as also from place to place without the knowledge & approbacion of his Maiesties office of the Revelles & by that meanes doe take upon them at their owne pleasure to act and sett forth in many places of this kingdome diverse and sundry playes and shewes which for the most part are full of scandall and offence both against the Church & State & doe lykewise greatly abuse their authority in lendinge lettinge & sellinge their said Comissions & lycences to others by reason whereof diverse lawles & wandringe [Courses] persons are suffered to have free passage unto whome such grantes & lycences were never intended contrary to his maiesties pleasure & the lawes of this land. (Norwich 188)

This attempt by the town council to contain playing is a clear effort to reassert their authority over performances that were spiraling out of their control. Like the efforts of
the Norwich council, Herbert repeatedly issued documents condemning performance without licencing, continuing to do so into the 1660s, suggesting that the aims of the 1572 act still had not been achieved with any consistency nearly 100 years after its issue.

Household records are also good repositories of records of touring performers.\(^{24}\)

In Lancashire there is a reference to “Ellen Thropp, called Mr Atherton’s fool” \((\textit{Lancashire} 244)\). The household book of John, 1\textsuperscript{st} Viscount Scudamore in 1642-3 on the 29 December records a payment for musicke to “a man & a woman” \((\textit{Herefordshire} 197)\).

In Rochdale in 1588, the Churchwarden’s Presentments to the Quarter Sessions cites “Adam Holte gentleman uppon the Saoboathe days in the Eveninge being eyther the Laste Sundaye in December or the fyrste in Ianuarie had a minstrael \textit{which} plaied upon a Gythorne a hys house with a greate number of men and women dauncinge” \((\textit{Lancashire} 89)\). In Bishop’s Frome, the Archdeaconry of Hereford Acts of Office in 1619-20 cited “James Poslons and Mary his wife for suffering dancing and minstrels playing in their house at the time of evening (prayer) upon the sabbath day” \((\textit{Herefordshire} 207)\). Stokes records evidence of Thomas Houlder and Barbara Browning who were cited in the court records in Westbury in 1603 because “They did play the mummers by night, and hee

\(^{24}\) Earlier evidence of touring performers comes from Tavistock, Devon’s St. Mary’s Abbey Plea Roll: “Likewise, that the said Brother Robert, long before the time of the election which he claims was made of him, gave jewels (or precious things) from goods of the aforesaid monastery to the value of £60 sterling over a two-month period to entertainers, male and female, and whores, and other frivolities and untrustworthy persons in the city of Exeter and (that) the report of these events was and is public and serious” \((\textit{Devon} 434)\).
ware her clothes and she ware his . . .” (178). In West Thorney, “Thomasine Bonny was sought by the same (summoner) on the same day for dauncing in mans apparell” (Stokes 180). Joyce Jeffries’s account book records her patronage of both male and female performers. In 1638-9, several payments to female performers were made, including payments to “Mrs mary wallwin, mary powell & fidler” (Herefordshire 190), “ Elyzabeth Acton to give the musick at Master Aldermans at the play” (Herefordshire 191), and Meg the dancer, who has already been discussed.

Some women performers are easily subsumed into the category of ‘freak performers’ and as profiteers from the display of freaks. A record from Norwich shows a woman involved in marketing and displaying a freak performer for her own ends:

This day Thomas wyatt and Joane his wife brought into this Court A lycence dated the xxvjth of June last under the hand & seale of George Buck knight maister of the Revelles for the shewinge of one Peter williams a man monstrously deformed And he hath liberty to shew him this present day & no longer. (Norwich 156-7)

Mark Thornton Burnett, who focuses exclusively on the pamphlets about freaks, not on the records of their touring practices, lists women freak performers as well, including Margaret Verg Griffith, “an elderly Welsh woman who had ‘a horne foure inches long most miraculously growing out of her forehead downe to her nose’” (16), Barbara Urselsin the “‘hairy-faced woman’ from Angesburg, [who was shown] in England from the 1630s onwards” (17), and Tannikin Skinker who was “constructed as resembling a pig and communicating only in grunts” and whose “ill-fated quest for a husband were marketed in the late 1630s via a chain of publicity exercises” (17) (see Figure 10).
The display of difference was a common phenomenon in Renaissance England, but while it is important to acknowledge the repugnant practice of displaying people with disabilities and physical anomalies, it is similarly important to acknowledge that these people could also be *bona fide* performers. Many critics of the freak show dispute that the display of difference could possibly constitute a performance, but Robert Bogdan, in

*Figure 10.* Title page of a pamphlet featuring Tannikin Skinker (1640).
his study of American carnival culture of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries argues for a different approach, understanding the freak as a performer: “for sideshow participants, the world view was that of show business, and the images were fabricated to sell the person as an attraction” (35). That is, for Bogdan, there is a consciousness in the display of the freak that the display itself is a show; in the context of the sideshow, the category of freak itself is performed. He writes that “freak is a frame of mind, exploited for marketing purposes” (35). While David Gerber notes that “the physically atypical . . . have historically existed under conditions of ostracism and stigmatization, and have had to endure the oppression of unwanted attention—the desire of others to stare at them . . .” (47-8), Bogdan’s reading opens up the possibility that in the context of a show, there is a confrontation of that gaze by the performers as well as an exploitation of it for profit. Gerber himself offers two models of freak show performers, both of which he dismisses as being intrinsically and inescapably exploitative:

An armless man such as the famed German sideshow performer and vaudevillian Carl Unthan, a classically trained musician who played the violin with his feet, is indeed engaged in a performance that may be appreciated for its skill, discipline, and difficulty as well as its aesthetic value. But Unthan and those like him were decidedly in a minority. More common was, say, the giant or the bearded lady who did little beside attempt, through environmental props and clothing, to look even taller and hairier, while perhaps carrying on some monologue or sometimes perfunctorily, and usually poorly, singing a song. Or what of the legless man who attained high speeds walking on his hands, demonstrating what

25 Gerber himself later argues that the freak show needs to be seen both as a “socially constructed phenomenon of commercial entertainment and a product of unequal social relations, oppression, and exploitation” (39).
Gerber’s distinction between the two kinds of freak show performers amounts to an aesthetic and ethical objection. As repugnant as the performance of difference could be, it still ought to be recognized as a viable, lucrative, and potentially politically challenging performative mode.

How were ‘freak’ performers, who were extremely popular, received in the Renaissance? Paul Semonin has noted that displays of freaks became less and less respected as the seventeenth century wore on:

> From the early days of the English Renaissance, there had been a growing criticism of the gullibility of the penny audience, the ‘Mob’ which patronized the monsters’ shows. By the mid-eighteenth century an appetite for the marvelous had become, as Hume declared, the hallmark of

26 Mark Thornton Burnett’s *Constructing ‘Monsters’ in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* finds that by the time Shakespearean representations [of monstrosity] were circulating, the ‘monstrous’ had become a focus of intense fascination. In a range of guises, ‘monsters’ and their associations found a sure place in the early modern psyche. The appeal of the ‘extraordinary body’ was attested to in ballads, diaries, proclamations and satirical verses, as well as in plays. Wonder-books and their generic relatives flourished, thanks in large part to their ability to draw upon and commemorate the most celebrated ‘monsters’ of the day. In the same moment, ‘monster’ exhibitions, which assumed a range of forms, were cultivated by the populace across the country. The fairground, the market, the tavern and the private house were all spaces where various types of monstrosity were elaborated. (4)
the ‘ignorant and barbarous,’ antithetical to the study of nature as conducted by the man of ‘good sense, education, and learning.’ Monsters came to symbolize the imbecility of popular beliefs, the perfect metaphor for descrying the sheep-like mentality of the masses, who were the butt of ridicule by everyone from satirists to scientists. (71)

Katherine Park and Lorraine Datson echo Semonin’s argument, finding that

In the early years of the Reformation, the tendencies to treat monsters as prodigies—frightening signs of God’s wrath dependent ultimately or solely on his will—was almost universal. By the end of the seventeenth century only the most popular forms of literature—ballads, broadsides, and the occasional religious pamphlet—treated monsters in this way. For the educated layman, full of Baconian enthusiasm, and even more for the professional scientist of 1700, the religious associations of monsters were merely another manifestation of popular ignorance and superstition, fostering uncritical wonder rather than sober investigation of natural causes. (24)

The period which this chapter examines is just at the point when attitudes towards freak performers were changing. But it does not appear that the class distinctions in how freaks were viewed which became so evident in the eighteenth century were as clear in the seventeenth:

By 1600 monsters were a prominent attraction at Bartholomew Fair in London and continued as such into the eighteenth century: during the rest of the year they could commonly be seen in pubs or coffee houses for a small fee. Broadsides, the most popular and conservative form of literature, continued to emphasize the spiritual and apocalyptic implications of prodigies, but as the tensions of the Reformation lessened, monsters began to lose their Religious resonance. For example, in a sermon preached at Plymouth in 1635, on the occasion of the local birth of Siamese twins, the minister castigated the practice of showing monsters for money. He argued it was unlawful to ‘delight in the undesirable,’ and he lamented the lack of popular interest in the portentous meaning of monsters: ‘the common sort make no further use of prodigies and strange-births, than as a matter of wonder and table talk.’ (Park and Datson 35)
It is clear that the attitudes of seventeenth-century audiences to freak performers would have been quite different from eighteenth-century ones. Moreover, that such anti-freak attitudes were present in the eighteenth century provides part of the reason why eighteenth-century editors of dramatic records were less interested in these performers and did not think them fitting of the age of Shakespeare.

Very few critics of Renaissance freaks are willing to see these individuals as performers. Parolin and Brown, for instance, find that “these women cannot be seen as players in the agential sense because they were entirely subjected to the violence of representation, experiencing its coercive power without designating or controlling their own display” (8). But do we know this? In fact, a record from the Mayor’s Court Books of 9 October 1616 in Norwich describes a different kind of freak performance, one where it seems that the act strives to create difference. The records says that

John De Tue and Jeronimo Galt fFrenchmen brought before mr Maior in the Counsell Chamber A Lycence Dated the 23rd of fFebruary in the xijth yeare of the Reigne of Elizabeth & in the yeare of our Lord 1616 thereby authorisinge the said John De Rue & Jeronimo Galt fFrenchmen to sett forth & shewe rare feates of Activity with Dancing on the Ropes performed by a woman & also A Baboone that can doe strange feate, And because the lycence semeth not to be sufficient they are forbidden to play. (Norwich 150)

One exception is Burnett who does so in his discussion of the entertainment industry surrounding the display of people for their physical or performed difference. He writes: “If in the contemporary puritan sensibility, fairground ‘monsters and playhouse actors traversed a comparable ideological terrain, this may have been at least in part because they worked with similar material arenas. Jeffrey P. Mason has argued that ‘the street fair as a site or venue is comparable to the theatrical stage,’ emphasizing the parallel behaviors of the participants at each event” (10).

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This act is a spectacle of difference layered upon difference. The woman’s French origin, her unusual rope dancing skill, and the baboon she performs with make this woman’s performance one that aims to create an exotic spectacle. The performances’ creation of difference undermines Parolin and Brown’s argument.

Another record of a ‘freak’ performer comes from the diary of Sir Thomas Crosfield, a fellow at Queen’s College. In an entry from 11 July 1630-1, Crosfield lists the types of entertainment available during Oxford’s ‘Act’ of that year, the only time that players and itinerants were permitted at the university (Bawcutt 77). His list of “Things to be seen for money in ye City,” include:

1. Playes: 2. dancing upon ye Rope & Vaulting upon ye Sadle. 3. virginalles and organs playing by themselves 4. a dutch-wench all hairy & rough upon her body. 5. The history of some parts of ye bible, as of ye creation of ye world, Abrahams Sacrificing his Sonne, Nineveh besieged & taken, Dives & Lazarus. 6. The dancing of ye horse at ye Starre. (Oxford 490)

Crosfield’s brief description of “the dutch woman all hairy & rough upon her body” registers at once her alterity, her monstrosity, and her aberrant femininity all at once. The record gives us no sense of the kind of act she would have performed, if she performed any at all; she may have been simply a body on display, as Rosemarie Garland Thompson characterizes the display of women in the nineteenth century like Saartje Baartman, commonly known as the Hottentot Venus, and Julia Pastrana, marketed as “The Ugliest Woman in the World,” both of whom were displayed as objects when they were alive and whose embalmed bodies and body parts continued to be displayed after their deaths.
(Extraordinary Bodies 51). Bawcutt suggests that the Dutch woman recorded by Crosfield might be the same woman mentioned in this record, in which Herbert issues “a licence to Balthazar Ursty to shew\Anne Christi/a female childe \of 70 y\ of age / overgrown with Heare \ from the face to the foote” (Bawcutt 178).  Furthermore, the woman Crosfield describes also bears a marked resemblance to Barbara Urselin:

Barbara Urselin (or Van Beck), sometimes known as the ‘hairy-faced woman from Augsburg,’ was shown in England from the 1630s onwards . . . On initial inspection, it was Urselin’s fur-clad figure that impressed, and this was publicized via the associations of her name, which was probably created for performance purposes: ‘Barbara’ and ‘Urselin’ bring to mind an arresting conjunction between barbarity, beards, and bears. In particular, a publicity machine focused on a construction of Urselin as a paradoxical combination of the ‘wild beast’ and the lady of accomplishment. She was, for instance, engraved in 1653 and 1658 at play on a harpsichord, a move that advertised her as a performative attraction while simultaneously highlighting a unique mixture of feminine graces and bestial appearance. (Burnett 17)

Whether all these women were the same person or if there were as many as three hirsute Dutch women performing in England in the 1630s is unresolvable. The woman described by Crosfied suggests the second model of freak performance defined by Gerber: the unskilled spectacle of difference which invites repulsion and reinforces conceptions of normalcy and attractiveness. The display of the Dutch woman appears to be a display of unappealing difference, does the same kind of cultural work which David Hevey finds in photographs of the disabled in the present day:

[an image of a disabled person’s] purpose was not as a role model, or as

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28 It is more likely that the girl was 7 years old.
references for observed people, but as the voyeuristic property of the non-disabled gaze. Moreover, the impairment of the disabled person became the mark, the target for a disavowal, a ridding, of existential fears and fantasies of non-disabled people. (377)

Yet to restrict the Dutchwoman’s performance to how it was received by one observer seems insufficient to characterize her whole career. Moreover, if the woman Crosfield describes was Barbara Urselin, she could have been a harpsichordist or virginal player as well, and perhaps even a skilled one (see Figure 11). Mark Albert Johnston writes of the illustration of Urselin or Urslesin, as her last name is also recorded, that the portrait “operates to neutralize the ideological threat posed by Barbara’s beard by offsetting it with a symbol of domestic and social decorum specifically appropriate for young maidens” (10).

This is certainly the image transmitted by the portrait, with her hair neatly combed and even braided in a kind of parody of the normal treatment of women’s hair. What this account misses, though, is the nature of her performance, as well as the question of her musical skill. Whether or not the Dutchwoman was a spectacle like Baartman or a performer trading on her physical difference, it seems reasonable, given the nature of the record which describes her, to keep open at least the possibility of performative agency, to allow that she was not always reduced to the way Crosfield described her in his list.

Johnston records more reactions to Urselin in “Bearded Women” 10-11.
While the record of the Dutch woman’s performance provides more questions than answers about the political valence of her act, the career of Joan Provoe suggests the possibility for the performance of a ‘freak’ to move beyond exploitative display or exoticist exploitation into a politically challenging theatrical event. Records of Provoe, of which I have found two, communicate Provoe’s right to perform as well as the powerful political potential of her act. The records of Provoe’s performance make

**Figure 11.** *Barbara Urslerin, the Hairy-faced Woman* (1658?) (Johnston 12).
manifest what Badir describes as “the potential of the archive” to “figur[e] by default the illegitimate, the marginal, the masterless, and the non-conformist, whose disruptive appropriation of urban space tactically altered strategic fashionings of both Commonwealth and Commonalty” (276). Such a moment is preserved in the remaining accounts of Provoe’s performance.

The first record of Provoe appears in the diary of William Whiteway, mayor of Dorchester in the 1630s. Whiteway’s diary runs from 1618 to 1634 and features entries from both Whiteway’s personal and professional life. The entry about Provoe, who toured from town to town in the mid-1630s, makes it clear that she had no hands, and performed for her audience everyday activities like sewing, washing, and writing with her feet. One of the reasons why we know so much about Provoe is Whiteway’s penchant for detail in all of his entries, especially those relating to the theatre. Indeed, Whiteway describes a number of theatrical events, including a man at Glastonbury who was killed by a falling maypole (Dorset 205), the controversy surrounding the 1633-4 masque put on by the Gentlemen of the Inns of Court (204), and an account of the play Ignoramus, put on at Cambridge 1634-35, which resulted in a suicide because the king did not enjoy the play (206). The following is Whiteway’s full account of Provoe’s appearance in Dorchester, written on 5 December 1634: “here came a french woman that had no hands, but could write, sow, wash, & do many other things with her feet. She had a commission under the seale of the Master of the Revelles. not allowed here” (206). REED’s Norwich volume contains another reference to Provoe, this time referring to her by name.
and mentioning her husband, two details absent from Whiteway’s record:

This day Adrian Provoe & Ioane his wife brought into this Court a lycence under the Seale of Revelles dates the xij of November 1632 whereby she beinge a woman without handes is lycenced to shew diverse workes &c done with her feete, are lycenced to make their shewes for fower dayes. (211)

There is much to be gleaned from these two records which can be instructive in recovering the potential of women’s performance since, relatively speaking, more information survives about Provoe than the average woman itinerant. Provoe, like many other women described in this chapter, had the permission of the Master of the Revels to perform. Furthermore, she clearly travelled large distances across England, from Dorset to Norwich at least. Thus we can assume that she likely played in inns, cities, and households in between, though I have as yet found no other records of her in civic or household accounts. Whiteway’s diary entry reveals that Provoe was not allowed to play in Dorset, but the disallowance of her performance is not remarkable in and of itself, since many performers were turned away from the city at this time. The editors of REED’s Dorset volume, Rosalind Conklin and C.E. McGee, write that Puritanism and poor behaviour by touring actors turned Dorset authorities against playing in general (46). They note that “players travelling as the Prince’s men (see p 198), puppeteers who ‘had a warrant under the King’s hand’ (see p 200), and Mrs Provoe who ‘had a commission under the seale of the Master of the Revelles’ (see p 206) were all summarily dismissed . . .” (46-7). Provoe and her husband did, however, earn the permission to perform for four days in Norwich. Importantly, Whiteway’s diary records Provoe’s performance no
differently from any other act. He gives the same amount of detail about her, indicating that her status as a performer is on par with the other performers recorded in his book who wished to perform in Dorchester and that her disallowance to perform had more to do with town politics than with her gender.

It is the content of Provoe’s act that is so remarkable and which can be read to be a political confrontation of ideologies of femininity, domesticity, and disability. Not only was Provoe able to make a living from her act and from her disability, but she was able to use her performance to make a political comment. Although her act involved the performance of mundane domestic work and everyday projects, Provoe’s French origin, handless arms, and extremely dextrous feet transformed the mundane actions she staged into an extraordinary and unfamiliar spectacle, essentially recasting the quotidian as the carnivalesque. This burlesque of domesticity performed by Provoe is a compelling, if extreme, example of the potential of itinerant women’s performance to upset norms and enact cultural anxieties. While in Chapter 2 we saw many instances of women performing domesticity, Provoe’s performance of domestic normality signifies differently from those of Egerton, Sidney, and Russell, and works to confront the culture that understood her as a freak and which paid to see her physical difference. Her performance, then, was not simply an exploitative spectacle as Gerber might argue, but a politically charged challenge to accepted values. Provoe was not just licenced to perform and permitted to perform legally, but also a performer who staged complicated, challenging performances. While Provoe’s performance was certainly one that displayed
her difference, her performance did not serve to make her into a freak in the way that the
performance of the rope dancer who performed with the baboon likely did. On the link
between femininity and disability, Rosemarie Garland Thompson has written that
disabled women are, of course, a marked and excluded—albeit quite varied—group within the larger social class of women. The relative
privileges of normative femininity are often denied to disabled women (Fine and Asch 1988). Cultural stereotypes imagine disabled women as
asexual, unfit to reproduce, overly dependent, unattractive—as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty.
(Thompson, “Integrating Disability” 266)

By Provoe’s assumption of the roles of normative femininity despite her disability, her
act questions the very polarities of ability and disability, of normality and the abnormal.
Her performance of everyday activities calls out for recognition as a part of the everyday,
or even better, for a reconsideration of such concepts of the everyday and of the domestic,
and criticizes the society that recognizes only her difference. Provoe’s performance,
instead of being a conservative presentation of difference, is instead a radical
confrontation of that difference and a plea for recognition as a woman and not as a freak.
That she was licenced by the state to perform this act and made a living doing so is all the
more remarkable, and goes a long way towards demonstrating the vitality of women’s
professional theatre before 1660. Like the other women who performed domestic virtue
as discussed in the foregoing chapters, Provoe had a sanctioned performance space within
the culture, and she transformed that space into a performance which she addressed the
circumstances of her day to day life. Her performance has far more radical implications
than that of Mary Sidney or of Elinor Fettiplace, since Provoe’s act protests that the
category that of virtue and normality that those women can embody is denied her. But at the same time, like those women, Provoe addresses her own self-representation in the culture, and attempts to shape it.

Unfortunately, records as rich as those describing Provoe are few and far between. It is entirely possible that the Dutch woman described by Crosfield was not exploited as it might appear; there is simply no residual trace of her performance in the record. The record only transmits the spectacle of her body, her reduction to her physical difference, and assumed repulsiveness. In fact, Crosfield’s record of her makes a spectacle of her in a way her performance in the moment might have resisted. It is he who reduces her to her bodily difference in the record, but she may have performed in such a way as to confront that difference in other circumstances and in ways viewers other than Crosfield might have appreciated. Provoe’s record, though, preserves the politics of her performance.

The transitory, ephemeral nature of itinerant non-textual theatre means that the performances of these women were not recorded in detail. The potential of the moment in these performances and the opportunity for audience interaction that they permitted presented opportunities for comment which elude historical preservation, but were entirely possible in such a performative space. It is well known that early modern audiences were ribald, active participants in the spectacle taking place on stage. Gurr’s Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London finds that “the audience was an active participant in the collective experience of playgoing, and was not in the habit of keeping its reactions private” (46). But, as much as the audiences’ jeers, shouts, missiles, and applause would
have been a feature of seeing a play in one of the London amphitheatres, where actors may have reacted to the taunts or may have let them pass, the audience interaction with a performer like Provoe, who did not appear to follow a script, could be even more profound. The non-textual, improvisational nature of her performance made the potential for engaging with a particular audience a real one and one which offered the possibility for politically charged improvisation at any time. In the Whiteway record, we can glimpse what Whiteway and the other town officials saw in that moment in 1634 brings us to Provoe’s performance being staged for the town officials. Those town officials, perhaps alone in Dorset, but certainly not alone in England (and even quite possibly in a household, where her performance would be most potent), witnessed Provoe’s powerful interrogation of the very norms of the culture. Whiteway’s record of her has the ability to take us back to that moment, and recall for us the important political work Provoe’s act did for the spectators who saw her perform.

As more REED volumes are published and as more household accounts and accounts of women’s performances are unearthed, the more we can know about the ways in which women performed professionally and for their own households in early modern England. Yet no matter how much we recover we will never recover the full performance history of itinerant performers, of banquet cooks, and of household performances. Nor can we, in the face of such a rich recorded tradition, limit the performances of early modern women. Benjamin writes in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in the quotation that serves as the epigraph of this chapter that “the true picture of the past flits
by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” (255). Further archival discoveries might bring us more of these “flashes” of the past. But we can never contain or fully capture the performances of women in the household. What is most important, though is that this need not be seen as a failure of the genre, or as an indicator of its insignificance, but instead as evidence of the tremendous vitality of this performance tradition.
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