ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WORKING LITERACIES: GENDER, LABOR, AND LITERACY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Danielle Griffin, Doctor of Philosophy, 2022

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"Working Literacies" explores the literacy abilities and practices of early modern working women, paying attention to the ways that ideologies of patriarchy and labor as well as the institutionalization of poor relief mediated their engagements with literacy. By examining little-studied archival material such as administrative records, literary ephemera, and petitions, "Working Literacies" nuances assumptions about working women's (il)literacy in the period, showcasing the multiple layers of literate ability that women leveraged as available means in making arguments about their lives as economically precarious workers in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. In centering the reading and composing habits of pre-modern working women, this dissertation provides historical depth to intricate relationships of gender and class in histories of rhetorical education, economic systems, and labor activism.

In my three major chapters, I analyze little-studied literacy artifacts of three sites: 1) curricular and administrative materials from charity schools and orphanages; 2) ephemeral reading materials such as popular chapbooks and ballads; and 3) petitions that address working conditions for women. Although these sites may seem disparate, they present compelling

evidence about the literacy of working women at different points in their lives: learning literacy skills, reading as evidence of literacy, and the use of those literacies in the act of petitioning. Furthermore, "Working Literacies" illuminates that ideologies of gender, labor, and literacy were complexly interconnected: lower-class children learned literacy skills in ways that sought to make obedient and industrious workers and wives, yet working women made inventive use of those literacy skills to engage representations of and forward arguments about their lives as workers and their gendered workplaces. In demonstrating the intricate interrelationship between class and gender in theories and practices of literacy, "Working Literacies" enters into and energizes conversations about women and labor as well as histories of literacy and rhetorical education.

WORKING LITERACIES:

GENDER, LABOR, AND LITERACY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

by

Danielle Griffin

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Introduction

"I whole in body, and in mind,

but very weake in Purse:

Doo make, and write my Testament

for fear it wyll be wurse."

Isabella Whitney, "Wyll and Testament" (1573, E.iii.r)

"Just because the popular classes were less adept at wielding the written word does not mean that

they lived without constructing representations of themselves. The archive has many resources in

this vein, and you need only to make the trouble to look for them."

Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archive* (1989, 102)

Project Overview

In her groundbreaking call to regender the rhetorical tradition in *Rhetoric Retold*, Cheryl

Glenn attempts to "[remap] rhetorical territory" (1) from antiquity to the Renaissance. Of

Renaissance women, she notes, "The Renaissance Englishwoman continued to be marginalized

from the body of linguistic performance. The literary participation of even the most erudite and

talented was limited to patronage, religious writing, and translation" (119). In this section of her

book, Glenn goes on to explore such genres as translation and a "rhetoric of silence" (153) to

theorize women such as Margaret More Roper and Anne Askew as significant rhetors in a canon

that greatly privileges their male counterparts.

Since Glenn's influential call in 1997, feminist historiographers have cultivated a variety of innovative methods and methodologies to research the history of women rhetors and our own ideological underpinnings as a discipline.[1] In light of these developments, I am interested in how we can further "remap" the rhetorical history of Renaissance rhetoric in order to expand the margins of the early modern era to theorize the rhetorical contributions of working women— women who were marginalized from the rhetorical tradition not only by gender but also by class.

"Working Literacies: Gender, Labor, and Literacy in Early Modern England" intervenes in such histories by exploring the relationship between gender, labor, and literacy in early modern England. Significantly, instead of engaging texts simply about working women, I cast early modern working women *as rhetorical agents* and use innovative methodologies to uncover and analyze their reading and composing practices. Although there is a vibrant conversation about women and work in the field of rhetoric and composition,[2] my dissertation adds historical depth to this body of research by exploring this relationship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When scholars of rhetoric take up this temporal moment, they often assume that non-aristocratic women of this period were completely illiterate. However, my research challenges this assumption by demonstrating that working women were literate in a variety of ways that the scholarly emphases on humanist education and traditional definitions of literacy have failed to address. In my three major chapters, I analyze rarely-studied literacy artifacts of three sites: 1) curricular and administrative materials from charity schools and orphanages; 2) ephemeral

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[1] For a helpful overview of feminist rhetorical practices in rhetoric and composition, see Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* (2012).

[2] See, for example, Risa Applegarth, *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science* (2014); Carolyn Skinner, *Women Physicians and Professional Ethos in Nineteenth-Century America* (2014); Jessica Enoch, *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work* (2019); and David Gold and Enoch, eds., *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* (2019).

reading materials such as popular chapbooks and ballads; and 3) petitions that address working conditions for women. Although these sites may seem disparate, they present compelling evidence about the literacy of working women at different points in their lives: learning literacy skills, reading as evidence of literacy, and the use of those literacies in the act of petitioning. Furthermore, my research illuminates that ideologies of gender, labor, and literacy were complexly interconnected: lower-class children learned literacy skills in ways that sought to make obedient and industrious workers and wives, yet working women made inventive use of those literacy skills to engage representations of and forward arguments about their lives as workers and their gendered workplaces. In demonstrating the intricate interrelationship between class and gender in theories and practices of literacy, "Working Literacies" enters into and energizes conversations about women and labor as well as histories of literacy and rhetorical education.

As this description makes clear, this project is reliant upon and builds on the decades of work of feminist rhetoricians. As Glenn declared in 1997, "rhetorical history has replicated the power politics of gender, with men in the highest cultural role and social rank. And our view of rhetoric has remained one of a gendered landscape" (2). Given this gendered discrepancy, feminist rhetoricians in recent decades have cultivated multiple methods to address the lack of women in rhetorical studies and focus on gender as a site of analysis in histories of rhetorical practice and literacy education. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch summarize these efforts in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*:

> We look at people at whom we have not looked before, in places we have not looked
> seriously or methodically before, at practices and conditions at which we have not looked
> closely enough, and at genres that we have not considered carefully enough, and we think

again about what women's patterns of action seem to suggest about rhetoric, writing,

leadership, activism, and rhetorical expertise. (72)

Royster and Kirsch's statement encapsulates many of the goals of this dissertation project: by

closely engaging the literacy acts of working women of the early modern period, I hope to

extend the historical focus of feminist rhetorical scholarship and to make the categories of labor

and class more central points of analysis to feminist rhetorical inquiry.

I see "Working Literacies" as being in conversation with some of Glenn's key questions

from *Rhetoric Retold* about the rhetoricity of historiography itself--why weren't these influential

women's texts canonized or taught in rhetoric classrooms? How and why were women who

spoke publicly and wrote prolifically lost in the tide of history? How has rhetoric been gendered-

-both historically and as a discipline--to exclude the rhetorical contributions of women and other

marginalized rhetors?

Yet, in *The Allure of the Archives*, historian Arlette Farge asks a different question: "How

can we rescue from oblivion these lives that were never made note of even when they were

alive?" (14).

Feminist scholars have repeatedly described the necessary methods of reading against the

grain when searching for women in the archives; these concerns are multiplied tenfold when we

consider poor and/or illiterate women in the archive. As with those concerning middle- and

upper-class women, archival sources dealing with poor and working women suffer from lack of

preservation. The texts plebeian men and women have encountered historically have been

deemed disposable, valueless, or "ephemeral," in their own time and centuries later by archivists

and collectors who decided what was worth preserving. As Paula McDowell writes, "'Ephemera'

is not a *thing* but a classification. The category 'ephemera,' like the category 'Literature,' is not

transparent, timeless, or universal, but a classification, existing in history, that has done and continues to do powerful, rhetorical, practical, ideological, and disciplinary work" (32; emphasis original). Historically, the ephemeral material that working women may have engaged directly was usually considered "cheap print," and after serving its literary function could be used as insulation, wallpaper, liners for cooking, wrapping material, or even toilet paper (Cressy, "Books as Totems" 93).

If such material did manage to survive, it must reckon with the ideological biases of curators, archivists, and scholars: "a notebook left in an aristocrat's muniment room or a lawyer's study was much more likely to survive the ensuing centuries than one tucked into the wooden chest of a shopkeeper or farmer" (Waddell, "Writing History" 242). Even if the texts that documented the lives of ordinary people made their way into archives, English scholars show little interest in such objects that "lack some of the basic attributes of a work of art" (Murphy & O'Driscoll 5) and those that are interested may be unable to locate such texts in archives usually organized by author and title (Solberg 54), categories that may be meaningless to the everyday texts of working people.

Contending with these gaps and trudging through the volumes of quotidian, seemingly unimportant archival material is significant, because, as Lynée Lewis Gaillet reminds us, "Ultimately, archives shape identity" (54). The subject of the archive itself has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years in rhetoric and composition, as a pedagogical tool, as a site of power and resistance, and as a wellspring of disciplinary history.[3] I suspect that the role of the archive

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[3] See, for example, Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplatteneier, and Lisa M. Mastrangelo, eds., *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* (2010); Kelly Ritter, "Archival Research in Composition Studies: Re-Imagining the Historian's Role" (2012); Lori Ostergaard and Henrietta Rix Wood, eds., *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools* (2015); Pamela VanHaitsma, "New Pedagogical Advancements with Archives: Student Inquiry and Composing in Digital Spaces" (2015); Gaillet, Helen Diana Eidson, and Don Gammill, Jr., eds., *Landmark Essays on Archival Research* (2016); and Wendy Hayden, "And Gladly Teach: The Archival Turn's Pedagogical Turn" (2017).

will be under increased scrutiny and reflection in the years immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, when access to many archives was eliminated, stalling investigation of many research projects and spurring new questions about methodology and access. (In)access to archives plays a crucial role in what David Gold terms "revisionist historiography," in which "scholars have complicated and challenged the conclusions drawn by more general earlier histories by considering alternative rhetorical traditions and sites of instruction and production" (16). While all of my archival research was fortunately conducted prior to the pandemic, the necessity of physical access to archival materials for this dissertation project (hopefully) calls renewed attention to the essentiality of the archive to class-based revisionist historiography, what historians have sometimes referred to as "history from below" (Reay; Waddell) or the history of "ordinary people" (Reay; Mendelson and Crawford).

Of course, feminist scholarship also enjoys a robust and intellectually rich presence in early modern studies, and like feminist rhetoricians, feminist scholars in early modern history and literature have cultivated innovative methodologies to foreground women and gender in studies of the period. As historians Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford describe in the introduction to their influential work *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720*, "we devised ways and means of getting around the intractability of the sources, developing techniques of reading against the grain, using conventional sources in innovative ways, and finding new sources on which we could deploy the traditional methods we had learned as students" (3). Catherine E. Kelly and Heidi Brayman Hackel elaborate on such methods in their study of early modern women's reading practices, "If it is true that female readers...left *fewer* records to document their reading habits than did elite males, it is also true that female readers left *different* records. Scholars who would recover the complex world of the early modern--much less the

women who operated within that world--must therefore think creatively about sources and evidence" (3; emphasis original). Kelly and Hackel's observation again reminds us of the importance of the archive to feminist scholarly practice. As it is with feminist rhetorical scholarship, this dissertation is indebted to the work of feminist scholars in early modern studies and their efforts at recovery, critical reading, and theory.

It is essential to note another important tenet of feminist scholarship: intersectionality and the necessity of avoiding essentializing women. Kimberlé Crenshaw is famous for coining the term in 1989 with the article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." In this influential piece, Crenshaw examines three legal cases in which the ruling focused on a single issue of discrimination rather than how overlapping categories of discrimination affected the experiences of Black women in particular, and she uses the term "intersectionality" as a lens to think through how different forms of inequality simultaneously interact and shape experience. This political mindset is obviously crucial to twenty-first century political movements, but it is also equally pertinent when considering the early modern period. As literary scholar Sasha Roberts states, "Even as early modern women's reading and access to literary culture were fundamentally different from men's at many levels, the interests, operations, and agency of early modern women readers cannot be reduced to gender alone; even as it remains foundational, gender cannot always be the central category of critical analysis in the history of women's reading" (51) and literacy practices more broadly. Roberts goes on to name categories such as "politics and spirituality, class and age, region and locality" (51) as factors as integral as gender to shaping experience in the early modern world.

In addition to class, the category of labor is one particular aspect of women's intersectional identity that is central to this dissertation project. In "Mapping Topoi in the Rhetorical Gendering of Work," Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith argue for the importance of a focus on work-related rhetorics as central to understanding the history of women's rhetorical practice, especially in "introduc[ing] labor as a useful alternative to political citizenship as the primary lens for understanding women's rights and rhetoric" (205). Hallenbeck and Smith point out that "a too-narrow focus on national citizenship and civic participation" (205) leads to a scholarly neglect of other areas of women's rhetorical participation. While they only address work-related rhetorics since the American Industrial Revolution, their insight is particularly relevant to non-democratic cultures like early modern England and gives us a lens to examine women who did not have access to the court. Moreover, early modern scholars like Michelle Dowd have argued for the significance of a scholarly focus on early modern labor: "though sexuality is often heralded as a key component of modern subject-hood, my [research] suggests that the ideological category of 'work' played an equally significant role in the construction of the early modern female subject" (*Women's Work* 18).

Moreover, focusing on labor has additional benefits, from "support[ing] recent moves away from the individual speaking subject towards examinations of larger histories of gender" (Hallenbeck & Smith 202) and spotlighting "the rhetorical construction and valuing of work" (200-1). In particular, I am interested in theorizing how ideologies of labor helped construct and maintain hierarchies of social class, especially through attention to how certain categories of labor were placed in close proximity to poor relief. Through examining work in this way, I hope to direct attention to ways that particular kinds of women's work have been constructed in opposition to those of other women in order to maintain class-based hierarchies. Equally

important, though, are the ways in which lower-class women existed within, shaped, and resisted those constructions, especially through their interactions with literacy.

This aim highlights another philosophical tenet of this dissertation: to reframe as agentic historical persons (poor and working women) who have largely been cast as insignificant and disenfranchised. Arguments concerning agency have warranted skepticism in recent years, in what has been deemed "a kind of 'safety' argument" in which agency is used as a reductive conclusion free from counterargument, rather than as a lens through which to understand historical actors or historicize circumstances of agency (Thomas 329). Similarly, Gold calls attention to the importance of nuance and complexity in rhetorical historiography: "Moving beyond recovery also means that we can also no longer afford simple narratives of heroes and villains. It is not enough to simply point to the past for evidence of practices that align with our own constructions of what is progressive, what is reductive" (24). These reminders of heedfulness underscore the necessity of attentiveness to practices of rhetorical historiography.

While being mindful of the cautions warranted from simplistic agency narratives, and not losing sight that structures have immense influence in shaping opportunities for agency, I follow in the footsteps of feminist historians such as Allyson M. Poska and Lynn M. Thomas in continuing to be attentive to women's agency as a central point of analysis while envisioning agency as a robust concept that gives us more complex information concerning women as historical actors. Poska outlines what she terms "agentic gender norms" as a way to historicize women's experiences, conveying that even gender roles and expectations contain the capacity for agency within those frameworks, or what she terms as "agentic" (354). Centering agentic gender norms rather than a simplistic narrative of agency yields robust historical analysis:

Going forward, rather than redefine patriarchy, or ignore it altogether, recognising

women's agency as a starting premise allows scholars to consider not only the range of

possible behaviours and responses that such agency promoted but also the ways that

agentic expectations interacted with patriarchal ideas and religious differences, as well as

race and class hierarchies around the early modern world. By normalising women's

agency, women's experiences in the early modern world become less reactive, more

complex and more in line with the current research than ever before. (361)

Thomas also advocates for a more expansive view of agency, one that does not necessarily

revolve around democratic citizenship but that "highlight[s] psychical desire, fantasy and just

getting by" (332) as a method for understanding human motives, especially when those

behaviors do not align with our modern views of what counts as progressive or resistant. As

Diane Willen has observed, "Excluded from politics and power, [early modern] women of the

working poor participated in public matters—albeit in ways that did not challenge traditional

patriarchy and hierarchy" (559). Similarly, Amanda J. Flather declares in her study of early

modern domestic labor, "agency can best be seen in the continual negotiation of everyday

interactions rather than in occasional acts of resistance" (347).

Indeed, these more capacious views of agency are also applicable to studying working-

class persons in addition to women. In "Expanding Working-Class Rhetorical Traditions: The

Moonlight Schools and Alternative Solidarities among Appalachian Women, 1911-20," rhetoric

and composition scholar Jane Greer laments that histories of working-class rhetoric are almost

solely tied to images of organized labor, an imbalance that is both reductive to working-class life

and that implies that the contrast--the laborer at work--lacks rhetorical agency (232). Instead, she

calls for "expanding our sense of working-class agency to include the less remarkable, more

everyday forms of solidarity that poor people have used to improve their lives and maintain their communities" (231).

By being mindful to these acts of agency--"the continual negotiation of everyday interactions"; "everyday forms of solidarity"; and acts of "just getting by"--I cast early modern working women as historical actors worthy of study. In some cases, they participated in actions we would associate with traditional activism, such as organizing mass petitions for labor reform. In other cases, they engaged in behavior that we would not describe as resistant--consuming ideologies of obedience in order to learn to read, exchanging cheap print that could be deemed as mere wish fulfillment, or signing into highly rigid apprenticeship indentures. I argue that all of these acts are equally significant to understanding what Hallenbeck and Smith deem "sites where gender and work themselves are rhetorically contested and constructed" (201). Through focusing on women's actions within systems of labor, we enhance our understanding both of the history of women's rhetorics and the historicization of work, as well as the ways the two mutually construct each other.

Having outlined the philosophical and intellectual impetus of this dissertation project, I now describe the primary scholarly contributions I see this dissertation making, especially in feminist historiography, studies of class and labor, and literacy studies. Then, I provide a historical context section relevant for all of my major chapters, helping to situate the cultural constructions of gender, class, and literacy of the period which inform the rhetorical situations of these women's engagements with literacy. I conclude this introduction with a deeper look at my chapters in order to preview my major analyses in the rest of the dissertation.

Scholarly Contributions

I see "Working Literacies" as a project with inherent interdisciplinarity. In researching for this dissertation, I have consulted the work of scholars in rhetoric, composition, women and gender studies, communications, literature, history, sociology, economics, and political science. I hope that this dissertation engages and intervenes in many scholarly conversations, although I see particular resonance for the fields of feminist historiography and early modern women's writing; histories of class and labor; and literacy studies.

Feminist Historiography and Early Modern Women Writers

As previously stated in the Project Overview section of this introduction, "Working Literacies" builds on feminist rhetoricians' scholarly endeavors to expand our knowledge of the history of women's rhetorical practices. This dissertation contributes to these efforts in several key ways. First, while the majority of feminist rhetorical historiography addresses American women's activism, especially in the nineteenth century,[4] feminist rhetorical scholarship addressing early modern women's rhetoric is severely underrepresented.[5] "Working Literacies" extends the historical scope of much feminist rhetorical theory by focusing on women's rhetorical activity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By widening the historical scope of feminist rhetorics, this dissertation offers new pathways for readers to consider alternative

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[4] See, for example, Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (2000); Lisa Mastrangelo, *Writing a Progressive Past: Women Teaching and Writing in the Progressive Era* (2012); Lisa Shaver, *Beyond the Pulpit: Women's Rhetorical Roles in the Antebellum Press* (2012); David Gold and Catherine Hobbs, *Educating the Southern Woman: Speaking, Writing, and Race at the Public Women's College, 1845-1945* (2013); and Jessica Enoch, *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work* (2019).

[5] Glenn does address early modern women's rhetoric in a chapter in *Rhetoric Retold*. Other notable exceptions include sections of Andrea Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition* (1995); Jane Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1500-1800* (2012); Cristy Beemer, "The Female Monarchy: A Rhetorical Strategy of Early Modern Rule" (2011) and "God Save the Queen: Kairos and the Mercy Letters of Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots" (2016); and Jessica Enoch, Danielle Griffin, and Karen Nelson, eds., *Feminist Circulations: Rhetorical Explorations Across Space and Time* (2021).

cultural constructions of gender, as well as the ways women negotiated these expectations in pre-modern and non-democratic contexts.

Of course, early modern women's writing has received a great deal of scholarly attention, just not from scholars of rhetoric. Many feminist scholars have done important work to recover early modern women's writing and integrate it into the literary canon. In recent decades, recovery of women's writings in early modern and eighteenth-century English literature has flourished, and scholars have incorporated women's writings into the literary canon and classroom. Critical works include (but are by no means excluded to) Betty Travitsky, *The Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance* (1981); Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (2001); Lynnette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern* England (2002); Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (2006); and Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith, eds., *Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing* (2014). In addition, other innovative work has been done to shed light on women's education and literacy practices during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, such as Heidi Brayman Hackel's *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (2005); Edith Snook's *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England* (2005); and Elizabeth Mazzola's *Literacy and Learning in Female Hands, 1520-1698* (2013). This project could not exist without the work of these feminist scholars in English studies and seeks to build on their ambitious and significant criticism.

"Working Literacies" diverges from most previous studies of early modern women's writing in that it focuses on working women (who were often lower in class and rank than the early modern female writers who are most likely to be anthologized) and studies rhetorical genres rather than literary/fictional ones. Because of considerations of access to writing and

attribution of authorship, the majority of women writers--and even women readers--addressed by early modern scholars are royal, aristocratic, or gentlewomen. Moreover, given the influence of literary studies, female authorship is often studied through a literary lens, focusing on women's contributions to genres like poetry, drama, and prose fiction. In order to explore the literacy activities of working women specifically, my project necessitates that I examine other genres, such as meeting minutes, cheap print, and petitions. Genres like petitions, for example, tend to be understudied because they are not considered aesthetically significant, yet attention to such genres can shed great light on the composing abilities of working women, especially women who were outside the court or aristocracy.

Feminist historians have been crucial in elucidating the lives of early modern women outside of the aristocracy. While most of these studies have not necessarily focused on literacy acts, they have been instrumental in helping me contextualize the lives of early modern working women and the ideologies of gender and labor that constructed their environments. Some key works focusing on everyday life of early modern women of all ranks include: Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919);[6] Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (1988); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (1996); Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (1998); Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (2005); and Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (2012). Since this body of scholarship largely comes from historians, it focuses less on the writing and speech acts of such women and instead on the

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[6] Although many of Clark's claims have been subject to criticism or even disproven, her publication of a study highlighting working women in 1919 was a pivotal moment in the study of women's history, and her work has influenced many other feminist historians for generations.

historical context in which they lived. By combining the literacy focus of rhetorical and literary scholars with attention to the everyday lives of lower-class women contextualized by historians, "Working Literacies" illuminates the intersection of rhetoric, literature, and history, particularly in its ability to theorize historically marginalized groups (here, lower-class women) as rhetorical agents.

Relatedly, with my focus on lower-class and plebeian women, I contribute to efforts in historiographical calls to theorize rhetorical efforts of collective groups of women rather than exceptional individual women, a view most notably espoused by Barbara Biesecker in her critique of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. Biesecker writes, "Already entailed in the valorization of the individual is a mechanics of exclusion that fences out a vast array of collective rhetorical practices to which there belongs no proper name" (144). Biesecker extends this critique to feminist recovery practices aimed at including more women into the rhetorical canon. While I do not share the harsh assessment of any recovery efforts, I do agree with Biesecker's call to emphasize collectivist rhetorics and put this into practice through this dissertation project. Rather than focus on the rhetorical efforts of a few exceptional women, this project looks at several artifacts that would have touched the lives of a great many ordinary working women of the period, many of whom have been rendered nameless. For this project, I have consulted hundreds of archival sources--including administrative records, pamphlets, chapbooks, ballads, and petitions--whose totality I hope illuminates the everyday rhetorical interactions of plebeian women, showcasing a whole "rhetorical ecology" for these women, to borrow from Marilyn Cooper, rather than a single significant speech act.

Histories of Class and Labor

My emphasis on plebeian women articulated in the previous section highlights class position as a tenet equally central to gender in this dissertation. Importantly, as Ann Baynes Coiro critically pointed out in her pivotal 1993 article, "[feminist scholars] have also tended to group women writers together simply as women" (358). When comparing the poetry of Aemilia Lanyer and Ben Jonson, she observes that class position is as significant in the construction of authorship as gender in their respective works and reminds scholars of early modern women's writing that "it is virtually impossible to separate out gender as a category unrelated to class position" (358). Highlighting class as a focus for analysis is necessary for understanding the lives of women since class is a major aspect of intersectional identity, especially during the early modern period.

However, while studies of gender in the early modern period have flourished, attention to class has been much less substantial and certainly less cohesive, usually engaged as an afterthought if attended to at all. In her preface to *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*, Patricia Fumerton declares "This study began as an act of scholastic penance" (xi). She considers that she began *Unsettled* after realizing and reflecting on the fact that her previous book project "represented but some 10 percent of the early modern English population and effectively disenfranchised the rest" (xi). Fumerton's meditation on her own scholarly biases is affecting and unique, but her prior lack of engagement with working poor and vagrant early moderners is hardly uncommon.

Certainly, part of the lack of a unified subfield of class studies is that class--especially in the early modern period--is much more fluid, ambiguous, and difficult to define and theorize than gender (a point upon which I will elaborate in the Historical Context section). Significantly,

though, this scholarly imbalance is also driven by classism in academia. In his own study of early

modern laboring subjects, Matthew Kendrick observes, "[i]n the field of early modern literary

studies, the systemic erasure of working-class perspectives manifests as a preference for a mode

of economic criticism that attends almost exclusively to financial mechanisms while neglecting

the socioeconomic role of labor" (x). Indeed, while Marxist criticism is plentiful in early modern

studies, Kendrick's insight illuminates that the focus on economic structures rather than laborers

allows scholars to continue practices of social classism, as class is analyzed without considering

the experiences and perspectives of lower-class persons themselves. The intelligentsia retain a

position of social elitism through presenting class solely as an economic and ideological

structure--a mode of theoretical and literary criticism in which they have expertise--and erasing

class as a lived, embodied, and social subject position--knowledge of which they are unlikely to

have expertise. And if they do, these scholars must actively erase signs of that status in order to

effectively deploy the professional class status that academia demands and that is incompatible

with a working-class disposition.

     Early modern and rhetoric/composition scholars alike have argued that classism is not

merely present in academia: the academy has a large role in creating class hierarchies. In *Class,*

Critics, and Shakespeare: Bottom Lines on the Culture Wars, literary critic Sharon O'Dair writes,

> the affirmation of a lower-class identity is hardly compatible with the affirmation of an
>
> (upper) middle-class identity, which is what higher education affirms. Working-class kids
>
> who succeed in the academy or subsequently in the professions are reconstituted and
>
> normalized as (upper) middle class. In the academy, working-class identity is not merely
>
> not affirmed, but actively erased. (3)

Composition scholar Donna LeCourt elaborates on this argument, showing how this classism manifests specifically in English and writing studies as opposed to the university at large: "working-class and academic discourses exist in a dichotomous relationship where one discourse is depicted as in almost complete opposition to each other. Following this logic, working-class students succeed only if their class identity is stripped away in favor of a middle-class habitus" (30-1). While LeCourt is primarily interested in the classed experiences of students and teachers, her insights prompt us to consider how this classed erasure has also manifested itself in scholarly research. Whose discourses are deemed artful and perceptive enough to be worthy of rhetorical and literary analysis when the goal is to produce (upper) middle class subjects? How have these benchmarks informed our pedagogical models, our research methodologies, and our construction of archives?

While class studies remains nebulous as a subfield, this scholarly imbalance is beginning to be addressed, particularly through attention to labor. Although studies of class are not equivalent to studies of labor, as Dowd observes, "This scholarship [on labor] shifts focus from the analysis of consumption...to production. In doing so, it turns needed attention to the working men and women who labored to produce the material goods that were increasingly becoming part of daily life in early modern England" ("Shakespeare and Work" 186). In other words, careful attention to labor as a topic of analysis leads scholars to be cognizant of all the types of labor--beyond strictly authorial--that were necessary to the circulation of texts.

This new recognition of labor is important to addressing classist gaps in our understanding of the early modern period, which have often been neglected. Kendrick notes that "The topic of labor and of England's nascent working class is often overlooked in the historical and literary scholarship of the early modern period due in part to the long-standing equation of

working-class consciousness with industrialization" (2). For this reason, much historical and literary scholarship concerning working-class identity has focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century subjects, leaving early modern constructions of labor and laborers greatly understudied. More recently, however, early modern scholars have noticed this lack as a scholarly opportunity and are animated by "[a] belief that labor is not only mutable but fundamentally historical (rather than unchanging or universally transparent)" (Dowd, "Shakespeare and Work" 186). Many literary scholars such as Kendrick, Michelle Dowd, and Natasha Korda have examined depictions of labor in early modern texts. Kendrick and Dowd examine narratives of labor in drama in order to theorize how literary narratives shed light on cultural constructions of labor, while Korda looks at women's work related to theatrical production behind the scenes of Renaissance drama (*Labors Lost*). Similarly, many other scholars call attention to labor through understanding writing and authorship as a form of labor, while critics like Peter Stallybrass and Zachary Lesser study the work of printers and publishers in thinking about the circulation of printed material.

The analysis of labor by literary scholars reveals much about cultural ideas about work in the period, but in continuing to center canonized literature such as poetry and drama, we usually can only glimpse the laboring classes through representation rather than through their own interactions with texts. Therefore, "Working Literacies" adds to the field's understanding of labor during the period by extending similar questions about narrative to texts not usually emphasized as the subjects of study in such analyses: charity school curricular materials, chapbooks, ballads, petitions, apprenticeship contracts, and other texts not typically considered aesthetically significant will be put in conversation with canonical literature such as early modern English drama. Furthermore, this dissertation considers literacy alongside narratives of

labor, analyzing how working people (especially women) interacted with representations of their labor through educative literacy as students, consumption of narratives of laborers as readers and purchasers of cheap print, and reformers of their workplaces as petitioners.

Literacy Studies

Obviously, it is impossible to concisely summarize the entire history of literacy studies in one subsection of this Introduction. Therefore, here I summarize just relevant studies of literacy that are particularly important to the fields of rhetoric and composition and to early modern studies. Moreover, I pay special attention to scholarship that emphasizes the role of reading in literacy to show how the literacy abilities of the subjects of my dissertation are under-theorized and exigent in both fields.

Between the Protestant Reformation and the advent of the printing press, literacy is an absolutely prolific topic in early modern studies, both to historians and to literary scholars. Among this vast body of literature, studies of literacy/rhetorical education and of the literacy abilities of the plebeian classes are the most valuable to this dissertation project. Studies of Renaissance rhetorical education often emphasize the schooling and rhetorical practices of boys and men who were taught a humanist curriculum, including Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (1988); Martin Carmargo, *Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition* (1995); Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380-1620* (2011); and Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (2012). Efforts to redress this gender imbalance in early modern literacy studies include Joan Gibson, "Education for Silence: Renaissance Women and the Language Arts" (1989); Barbara J. Whitehead, ed., *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800* (1999); Margaret Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender,*

and Empire in Early Modern England and France (2003); Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (2005); and Catherine E. Kelly and Hackel, eds., *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (2008). However, the literacy education and abilities of the early modern lower classes have received much less attention; although historians of literacy and some early modern literature scholars have attended to this area with differing conclusions,[7] it is virtually untouched by literacy scholars from rhetoric and composition. This omission is unfortunate, as rhetoricians are uniquely suited to theorize literacy users as practitioners of rhetoric and to show how literacy is used in varied ways by multiple actors to make and respond to social and political arguments. In Chapter 1, I consider the place of early modern poor girls in our histories of rhetorical education, and in Chapters 2 and 3 I highlight how early modern working women used these gained literacy skills as they were deeply enmeshed in and respondent to arguments about gender and labor, addressing rhetorical scholars' relative inattention to early modern literacies, especially of the poor.

A large factor in this scholarly gap is the narrow and presentist definitions of literacy that have greatly curtailed what scholars seek out as evidence of literacy. In *Literacy Myths, Legacies, & Lessons*, Harvey Graff describes how "literate biases" arise from privileging alphabetic literacy or "school" literacy over other kinds of literacies (90). Instead, he proposes a more expansive definition of literacy:

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[7] See, for example, Margaret Spufford, "First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers" (1979) and *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (1981); David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (1980); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (1987); Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain, 1590-1660* (1999); and Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (2000).

literacy is defined as basic or primary levels of reading and writing and their analogs

across different media, activities made possible by a technology or set of techniques for

decoding and reproducing printed materials, such as alphabets, syllabaries, pictographs,

and other systems, which themselves are created and used in specific historical and

materials contexts. (37)

Graff's capacious definition of literacy that enables broader recognition of language use informs "Working Literacies" and the multiple literacies that working women had access to and utilized. Equally relevant, Graff stresses the importance of "grounding definitions of literacy in specific, qualified, and historical particulars" (37). Academics and other educators have often cast alphabetic or school literacy as inherently liberatory, but, citing the role of nineteenth-century textbooks in preserving inequality among other examples, Graff advises scholars to pay close attention to the historical and social circumstances of various literacy practices (44) and to move toward a "historical cultural politics and a historical political economy of literacy" (96). Other texts by Graff, as well as work by Deborah Brandt, Mike Rose, and Bruce Horner, among others, have urged scholars of literacy to be cautious about literacy's role in promoting democracy and social change, noting multiple ways literacy has both enabled and prevented egalitarianism and the civic good.

Just one of many ways that certain literacies have been valued over others is through a prioritization of writing over reading. In *The Rise of Writing: Redefining Mass Literacy*, Brandt argues that writing has usurped reading as "the literate experience of consequence" (3); whereas historically "[r]eading [was] seen as the avenue to intellectual and moral improvement" (5), writing has now become "the dominant grounds of daily literate experience" (3), largely due to the proliferation of digital literacy technologies as well as late capitalism's structuration of

writing as a measure of economic production (3). Writing is seen as active, whereas reading is seen as passive, and English studies usually operates with notions of writing as central to measures of authorship and literacy ability.[8] This binary is applied both to objects of historical study--who we see as participating in literate culture and how--and to our students--which of their literacies we recognize as important and attempt to cultivate in our classrooms.

While there are numerous effects of this narrow scope, I want to highlight the ways writing preference obscures the literacy efforts of women and working men, and especially working women, in considering myriad histories of literacy. In "Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture: Reading and Writing in Historical Perspective," Jonathan Barry explains that

> it was only in the late nineteenth century that literacy became defined as ability in both reading *and* writing--and defined as a specific area of primary educational attainment. This notion of literacy is the product of the emergence of universal primary education in which children are taught reading and writing together, so that possession of the two skills...can generally be taken to go together. ... Indeed the notion of *illiteracy* gained currency precisely because it identified a socially problematic minority in educational circumstances where the link between reading and writing was axiomatic. (92; emphasis original)

By pointing to the coupling of reading and writing in the nineteenth century, Barry reveals that our assumptions that literacy must include both reading ability and writing ability is actually historically specific, and we may be mapping contemporary notions of literacy and illiteracy onto our studies in ways that are ahistorical.

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[8] Chapter 2 discusses alternatives to this reading-writing schema, especially through the work of Michel de Certeau. See especially the section "Reading in the Academy: The History of Reading and Popular Literature."

Even histories of early modern literacy, which aim to describe the scope of literacy practices and users, tend to rely on methods that preclude women and working men. Historical measures of literacy in the period rely on the ability to sign one's name (see, for example, David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor-Stuart England*, 1980). However, reading and writing instruction were separated in the early modern curriculum, and, crucially, the shift between reading and writing instruction often coincided with the age in which children could join the workforce and contribute to the family's income. Furthermore, even if girls did not leave to work and continued their schooling, they often were separated from boys to learn how to sew instead of how to write. Scholars such as Margaret Spufford ("First Steps in Literacy," 1979; *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England,* 1981; *Figures in the Landscape: Rural Society in England, 1500-1700,* 2000), Adam Fox (*Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700*, 2000), and Hackel ("Popular Literacy and Society," 2011) have shown that this narrow definition that relies on counting a signature as evidence of literacy makes immeasurable estimates for more complex understandings of literacy, such as reading ability only. Tellingly, Hubbard points to an archival source naming Elizabeth Ellel, who describes herself by noting "she taught young children to read and work with their needles," yet she signed the document with a mark instead of her signature, meaning she would be counted as illiterate through traditional methods (224). All we know is that our estimates of literacy rates in the period are almost certainly far too conservative.

Yet, as Kenneth Charlton and Margaret Spufford remind us, it is reading "which brings about cultural change and the openness to the spread of ideas" (27). The history of reading as a subfield has gained traction in literary and historical studies, but it has not gained the same prominence in rhetoric and composition. However, rhetoricians have much to contribute to

considering the rhetoricity of reading, particularly in recognizing the role of audiences, circulation, and collectivity in rhetorical situations and social change. Consider how James Raven's description of the trend of histories of reading is ripe for rhetorical analysis, even though he is a historian and not a rhetorician:

> New histories of reading, currently as much strategic suggestion as applied research, begin and end with the personal reading experience, grounded in the notion that the text does not exist until given signification by readers. Concepts of full literacy, or of a sharp divide between the literate and the non-literate, are replaced by awareness of different literacies and of different ways of revisiting the same text. ... *At issue are the different ways not only of performing reading but of readers believing in their empowerment by reading performance, whether by an individual alone with the text, or by communal activity and ritual*. (285; emphasis added)

Perhaps the discipline of rhetoric has been slow to prioritize reading over writing (or even put it on equal footing), feeling that it is in the purview of literature studies. However, Raven's summary highlights the rhetorical work of reading and readers. Moreover, considering the historically specific constructions of literacy and thus of reading invites new ways to theorize the history of rhetoric and its users. By isolating reading ability from writing production methodologically, "Working Literacies" seeks to recover histories and literacy practices from populations that have been understudied, namely working and lower-class women. To do so, I highlight literacy practices such as reading and collaborative writing that showcase the rhetorical agency that non-writing persons had access to and have exercised historically.

However, despite the de-emphasis of reading in favor of writing in the history of rhetoric, there has been a resurgence in focus on reading instruction in composition studies. With the

proliferation of reading resulting from the explosion of digital technologies--including exposure to media bias, "fake news," and foreign propaganda--scholars in composition such as Howard Tinberg, Ellen Carillo, and Mariolina Rizza Salvatori and Patricia Donahue have prompted writing teachers to more deeply engage the place of reading in literacy instruction,[9] with Tinberg declaring "we [writing instructors] have a moral and civic obligation to teach reading in our writing classroom" ("The Activist-Reader"). Although "Working Literacies" does not address contemporary composition pedagogy, it does provide a theoretical framework to think about reading as agentic that is both a rhetorical act itself and a means to facilitate broader rhetorical production. It contributes to these discussions in composition studies by emphasizing active reading alongside writing and composition as crucial to the history of literacy and rhetoric broadly.

Historical Context

      Since this dissertation project is interdisciplinary, I offer here a historical context section to help situate my findings for readers with little familiarity with the early modern period. I start with an overview of gender roles and women's lives in the period, then discuss social and economic class hierarchies as well as their relationship to ideologies of labor, and then conclude by observing the impact of gender and class on developments of literacy. The historical information summarized in this section is relevant to and helps contextualize each of the subsequent. major chapters.

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[9] See also the National Council of Teachers of English position statement on "The Act of Reading: Instructional Foundations and Policy Guidelines," published in 2019.

The Lives of Early Modern Women

Unsurprisingly, early modern England was a patriarchal culture, and women lacked many of the political rights that we associate with contemporary democratic culture and, as a result, rhetorical action. However, we must be wary of progress narratives when thinking about women's participation in early modern society, both because of the ambiguous nature of citizenship in monarchical England as well as arguments by historians that women actually *lost* political rights through the eighteenth-century and increasing industrialization. Mendelson and Crawford call it "deliberately anachronistic" (49) to attempt to measure women's civic participation in the period, noting "[i]t was not clear to contemporaries (nor is it yet to historians) precisely what citizenship meant for *men*. Women's civil rights and privileges were even more ambiguously defined, when they were defined at all" (49; emphasis original). As we will see, complicated and sometimes competing class structures further obscured women's position in the sociopolitical hierarchy. This fuzziness opens up spaces to examine alternative modes of rhetorical participation. Moreover, traditional ideas about women's gains in political rights through democracy are actually contested by many historians. For instance, Deborah Simonton posits varying factors that could have contributed to women's loss of sociopolitical influences in the transition from the long eighteenth century into the Enlightenment period:

> Economic change and increasing industrialisation which may have loosened English society seemed to have the immediate and ultimate effect of undercutting women's economic position. At the same time, environmentalist thinking tended to restrict women's options by linking their education to their children's benefit and not necessarily to their own. Similarly, development of companionate marriage, instead of creating a

freer more equal role for women, could have tended to subsume women under men, with

a resultant loss of identity. (198)

Mendelson and Crawford's and Simonton's observations remind us of the importance of

historicization in studying women and to avoid mapping presentist assumptions onto objects of

historical study. When women faced rhetorical constraints, where were there gaps and

ambiguities they took advantage of in order to exercise influence? And where did they have

regular avenues for rhetorical action that may be unfamiliar to twenty-first century scholars?

While there was great variation among the lives of early modern women, especially due

to class position, there were overarching gender roles ascribed to all women. Mendelson and

Crawford describe the three primary "life-stages" (65) that all women were expected to occupy

throughout their lifetimes: maid, wife, and widow. In each life-stage the woman's role is defined

by her sexual and legal status relative to a man. She began life as a maid, which had several

meanings in the period, including girl, virgin, and unmarried woman; the *Oxford English

Dictionary* notes that these meanings were used interchangeably. It could also mean "female

servant" or be short for maidservant. This is because most adolescent and teenage girls worked

as maids in another household after leaving the homes of their parents and before marrying

themselves. While the transfer of the woman as property from father to husband is commonly

analyzed, the early modern period included this extra step for women of being transferred to a

master of the house before marrying. As a maid(servant), they learned crucial labor skills that

would be essential to fulfilling their duties as wives in their future households and they

(hopefully) began to save funds for that household. Importantly, they were still under the

supervision of a man (the master) during this time. While there were a multitude of attitudes

about marriage among women (as Chapter 2 will explore more thoroughly), many maids looked

forward to transferring to the wife stage, especially because wives held more social status than maids: "Because matrimony conferred adult status on women, wives and widows assumed more respect and weightier responsibilities in the local power hierarchy" (Mendelson and Crawford 131). Married women were also less likely to be in poverty than singlewomen due to the additional income of their husbands, and men enjoyed higher wages than women. While much scholarship has focused on women as wives, women's social position before and after marriage was often more ambiguous and is therefore especially fruitful for scholarly inquiry since women had more opportunity to speak for themselves. At the same time, maids and widows were must vulnerable to poverty (Korda, "Isabella's Rule" 140), so casting those life-stages as the ones in which women could exercise the most authority is also problematic.

Though women had opportunities to exercise agency within the socially acceptable roles of maid, wife, and widow, there was of course a limit to how far they could push boundaries. Mendelson and Crawford contrast the three positive stereotypes of maid, wife, and widow with the three negative stereotypes of "scold, whore, and witch" (65) which were used to mark gender deviant behavior. Accusations of these three deviant categories are rife in early modern culture, both in fictional literary texts and in factual court cases and administrative records. It is clear that there were severe social consequences for being placed into any of these categories, and women exercised great effort in avoiding these social fates and in defending their social and sexual reputations if marked in such a way.

Theories of Class in Early Modern England

Theorizing the exact social status of women in the early modern social hierarchy is immediately complicated by the additional consideration of class position. Mendelson and Crawford effectively summarize the ambiguity that existed even within early modern culture:

To contemporaries, the difference between the two sexes was a fundamental principle upon which society was constructed. Writers assumed that woman was inferior to man. Unresolved was the problem of social levels, the contradictions between class and gender. Contemporaries knew that Queen Anne was not inferior to the lowest footman, but they still insisted that all women ought to be subordinate in some sense. (15)

The category of class makes more complicated and uncertain the social hierarchy not only due to its potential intersection with gender, but because the category of class itself was in great flux in a period that many historians, including Marx, argue marked the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Old social hierarchies accentuated, overlapped with, and contradicted emerging hierarchies based on economic standing.

Class as a category of analysis remains an ambiguous concept even today. O'Dair explores the tension between "economic and cultural determinants of class" (*Class, Critics, and Shakespeare* 9), and academics often focus on economic class at the expense of social status. It is also a concept that is hard to define because class is by definition a relative term. In his examination of the role of class in Renaissance sonnet sequences, literary scholar Christopher Warley uses the concept of "social distinction" as a way to theorize class (13). LeCourt underscores the importance of a "performative concept of class" (39) that does not focus solely on material differences but more capaciously on habitus, which "results from differences in

[how] income, labor, and power are *lived*; how we make meaning of our material circumstances, understand our experiences, and communicate them to others" (38; emphasis original).

While class is still a murky concept today, even its basic tenets cannot necessarily be assumed to be shared in early modern culture: "it is anachronistic to think in terms of 'working-class' or 'middle-class' groups in the period, social formations which characterize the increasingly urban and industrializing societies of the late eighteenth-century" (Wheale 20). For many reasons, it is anachronistic to think of a "working class" in the same vein as today, although people having what we might think of today as "working-class" jobs--especially women--were much more likely to be lower in the social hierarchy. In fact, some scholars reject using "class" as a term in theorizing early modern culture at all. While there tends to be agreement that early modern society followed and differentiated from the medieval system of "estates" (Wheale 19), there is broad disagreement about how to name the early modern social hierarchy and describe how it functioned. Neil Rhodes proposes using the term "rank" (109-110), while Keith Wrightson prefers "sorts" (34). Other terms include "orders," "degrees" (Wheale 20), and "status" (Warley 74). Whatever term for social differentiation used, it "indicated status deriving from a whole complex of qualities including family standing, gender, kinship ties, political connection and place in the community, property and how it was possessed, as well as conspicuous display and consumption as a function of wealth" (Wheale 20). Oftentimes, different ways to assess class were in conflict with one another, which produced great anxiety in the period evident in numerous attempts to create elaborate taxonomies that clearly ranked different social groups.

Some of the most frequently referenced works that attempt such a feat include William Harrison's *Description of England* (1577) and Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum*

(1583). In the chapter titled "Of Degrees of People in the Commonwealth of England," Harrison explains, "We, in England, divide our people commonly into four sorts, as gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen, and artificers or labourers" (1). Smith also utilizes a four-tiered social hierarchy similar to Harrison's with slight differences, comparing it to that of Roman society (Gillespie & Rhodes 6). Harrison's and Smith's work is also similar in their relative inattention to the lower social orders, perhaps more clearly exemplified by Edward Chamberlayne's *Angliae Notitia*: in "the 1702 edition of his most popular work Chamberlayne has a table showing 'The degrees and names of all men and women' arranged in twenty-eight ranks. After twenty-seven gradations of nobility and gentry comes 'Citizens, yeomen, husbandmen, labourers and their wives'" (Cressy, "Describing" 32). In general, these writers documenting such social hierarchies were interested in the governance of the state and saw the lower orders as having little relevance to this goal. Harrison exemplifies this logic when explaining the common feature of the fourth group in his schema: they "have neither voice nor authority in the commonwealth, but are to be ruled and not to rule other" (13). Even more tellingly, Smith refers to the entirety of his fourth group as "rascals" (qtd. in Cressy, "Describing" 30).

While it is perhaps unsurprising that a hierarchical society would exhibit such lower-class prejudice, it is worth noting that this last group, which receives little attention in such works, constituted approximately 95% of the whole population (Wheale 31). Moreover, most authors come from the upper three groups (Wheale 31), so the imbalance tends to be perpetuated in early modern literary studies. Even within this fourth group, Barry Reay explains that "[w]e know least about the culture of the bottom 50 per cent (possibly 60 per cent) of the population, the labourers, cottagers, paupers; those at or below subsistence level" (1), since even scholars

focusing on the plebeian population usually attend to the middling sort as opposed to the lower sort.

Some scholars have attempted to theorize a more balanced taxonomy. David Cressy in "Describing the Social Order of Elizabethan and Stuart England" proposes the following schema (35): gentlemen; clergy and professions; merchants, tradesmen and craftsmen; yeomen; husbandmen; and laborers and servants (or "dependent people" 42). This more comprehensive model does a much better job of including those who depended on labor, but it still obscures the sheer extent of poverty in the period. Through my attention to social proximity to poor relief, I intend to be more inclusive of this massive group.

The Advent of State-Based Poor Relief Systems

For a range of reasons including a sharp population increase (doubling in the sixteenth century), inflation, trade patterns, and crop failures, there was an explosion of poverty during the early modern period, peaking around the 1590s (McIntosh, "Poverty" 460). Although charity had been a common practice in years prior, it was usually administered through individuals alms-giving and later by local parishes. The extent of the poverty crisis in the second half of the sixteenth century resulted in the nation's first state-based welfare system:

> A system of relief developed during the Elizabethan period, culminating in the Poor Law of 1601, whereby parishes collected rates from the wealthier inhabitants which they distributed to those who were distinguished as the "impotent" poor: the sick, the very young, the old, and the incapacitated. Those willing and able to labour were to be given work; the unwilling were to be punished and forced to labour. (Mendelson and Crawford 282)

While many scholars have focused on the Protestant Reformation and the advent of the printing press as profound cultural shifts in the early modern period, I find the creation of a state-based poor relief system to be a seismic development in Western culture; even if it was not equal in impact to the former events, it is greatly under-theorized in comparison. The development of national welfare programs created attendant shifts in many aspects of the culture: schooling, labor, criminality, religion and secularization, governance, and, as I argue here, literacy. Furthermore, the majority of the population were directly and immediately affected by poor relief systems, as it was developed around them, whereas the effects of the Protestant Reformation and printing took longer to reach the plebeian classes, starting with the higher social orders with access to schooling and full literacy. Importantly, too, early modern England's poor laws and poor relief system have had huge and multiple reverberations in modern Western societies, with direct lineage to current practices of wealth distribution, incarceration, and social castes.

The sheer breadth of poor relief administration in early modern England signals its extent as a cultural force. Historian Alexandra Shepard estimates that between 35 and 50 percent of all households required some form of assistance in the late 1600s, although only a portion of those needing relief would receive it (54-55). The inability to meet demand resulted in the development of ideologies of deviance that would distinguish the "deserving" poor--people who were incapable of working to support themselves, usually represented by children and the disabled--from the "undeserving" poor--those who could work but supposedly chose not to out of laziness or malice. Elaborate mechanisms then emerged in order to put the undeserving poor to work, including the criminalization of vagrancy and homelessness and the establishment of workhouses. Here we witness the first instances of "bootstraps" logic, in which labor became "an

ideological mechanism for explaining the plight of the lower classes as a matter of personal moral failure" (Kendrick 40). Religious and moral discourse condemning the idle, paupers, and vagrants proliferates exponentially in the period (Kendrick 40).

Despite the scope of this segment of the population, finding sources in which they describe their own social position can be difficult due to their lack of writing literacy. In "Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England," Shepard examines court records to see how they described themselves and their social station when providing testimony. She observes a "concentration of the language of poverty as a form of self-description amongst women, servants, the young and the old compounded associations between poverty, dependence and social subordination" (92) as well as a "mapp[ing of] the moral hierarchy onto the social hierarchy" (92) through the questioning of and defensiveness from the poor when they explained themselves. Among the poor, receiving poor relief was the marker of the absolute lowest in social station (58, 70), and many felt compelled to justify their need for aid by describing exceptional circumstances or their own hard work (58-59).

Crucially, Shepard also observes that "[w]omen declared themselves worth little or nothing at significantly higher rates than men, and also deployed the language of poverty with greater frequency" (72-74). The femininization of poverty has deep roots in early modern England, both in terms of the greater frequency with which women experienced poverty as well as the language used to describe poverty. Mendelson and Crawford estimate that about half of all women were poor, with an even greater number--two-thirds--falling into a period of poverty over their lifetime (261). McIntosh describes the "increasingly gendered language" that came to characterize discourse about poverty: "The deserving poor of both sexes were represented as weak and dependent. Like women, they needed support but were not respected. The idle poor, by

contrast, were associated with uncontrolled, potentially violent, and threatening masculinity" ("Poverty" 463). Clearly, then, the advent of state-sponsored poor relief should be of note not only to those interested in economic history, but also to those committed to gender studies.

While women in poverty were certainly on the lowest end of the social spectrum, discerning the exact social position of women in the middling classes was much more ambiguous. Cressy observes, "Women were at least half the population, but they were effectively separate in the social order" ("Describing" 34-35). So where did women fall in the social order, then? It is almost impossible to pinpoint now, especially as there was much confusion *then*. Many scholars, including Hubbard, conclude that protecting the socioeconomic hierarchy was more important than preserving the gendered one: "An examination of those sites of conflict [economic order and sexual anxieties] makes it clear that both magistrates and communities were inclined to privilege worries about money over those about sex, creating unexpected opportunities for women" (2). Of course, whether gender or class was a more oppressive or more definitive experience cannot be answered objectively, and it's clear that their intersection created the most constraints for poor women. And despite their socioeconomic status, women of all ranks endured similar patriarchal constraints, especially when concerning marriage and regulation of female sexuality (Mendelson and Crawford 4). "Working Literacies" intends to be inclusive of both gendered and classed constraints, examining how women used literacy in response to threats faced by women of all classes, such as sexual violence, as well as those particular to lower-class women, such as need of poor relief and physical abuse by employers.

Ideologies and Practices of Labor

One important differentiation between women of the higher and lower social orders had to do with labor. Although all women were expected to perform domestic labor and child care, only women lower in social station were expected to work outside of the home.[10] Aristocratic women were strongly discouraged from working outside the home, not only due to sexual anxieties but also because dependence upon labor for income was seen as marking a lower social status. However, work outside the home was a normalized experience for plebeian women (Flather 344; Poska 357; Hubbard 190-91)--meaning, the vast majority of women. Mendelson and Crawford consider, "One hypothesis to be tested here is that the higher the social level, the more rigid the divisions between men's and women's work. The lower the status, the more likely it was to find men and women engaging in similar tasks" (256). This theory encourages us to reconsider assumptions about women's versus men's work that were espoused by aristocrats and prescriptive literature; by centering higher-class expectations of gender, we may inadvertently disregard or under-theorize the normality of women working outside the home. Moreover, the increase in population and thus the labor force in early modern England created numerous opportunities for women to work outside the home (Dowd, *Women's Work* 3). The opportunity and/or need for women to work outside the home also generated a large-scale "urban migration," in which many women migrated to London to find work, especially as servants but in other trades, as well (4).

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[10] To be clear, I certainly consider domestic labor to qualify as labor. However, after noting the different kinds of labor expectations, focusing on labor outside of the home as a method allows me to better distinguish women by class and concentrate on women lower in social station. For an overview of women's domestic work and reproductive responsibilities, see Mendelson and Crawford, esp. Chapter 5 "The Makeshift Economy of Poor Women," and McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620*.

Yet, due to the ubiquity of poverty and poor living conditions, in many cases these "opportunities" might be better construed as necessities, because a second source of income was essential to maintain a household. With the steady growth of capitalism, the period also saw the normalization of the exploitation of labor. Kendrick writes, "With the growth of commerce and market relations came a corresponding degradation and exploitation of workers. The expansion of capital is inseparable from the expansion of an underclass of dispossessed laborers consisting of enclosed peasants, dismissed servants, and unemployed apprentices, artisans, and tradespeople" (xii). In a shift that had particular impact on women, Dowd describes how the position of the servant shifted in the early modern period from being seen as primarily a social relation to instead almost wholly as a form of low-paid labor ("Shakespeare and Work" 188).

In a related manner, while women's work was normalized, it was also true that these labor patterns existed within and were policed by patriarchal ideology. Hubbard notes that while working women were socially acceptable, "they were readily construed as a threat when women competed with men for work" (189). Women were expected to contribute to the household income, but if they outearned their husbands it became a source of great social anxiety. Hubbard ascribes a steep decline in female apprentices in guilds due to fears that any specialized training enabled them to compete with men for labor (189). Women became especially suspect if they earned enough to support themselves, meaning they resided without the supervision of a man, destabilizing both the economic and sexual social orders.

Thus, ordinary women regularly worked outside the home, but the kinds of work that were available to them were limited. Hubbard summarizes the typical range of this work, concentrating on women within the city:

Women spun, sewed, knitted, and made lace for shopkeepers. They retailed food and

drink, on the street or in shops and victualling houses. Women's skills in laundry,

cleaning, and nursing were readily converted to waged labor performed for neighbors or

almshouses, livery companies, or the Inns of Court. A few women claimed professional

status as midwives, or through teaching or surgery. However, their work was nearly

always ill paid. Skilled or unskilled, any occupation open to women was swamped by

poor wives and widows willing to work for a pittance to help make ends meet. (190)

In "The Female Labour Market in London in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth

Centuries," Peter Earle includes a table listing "Occupations of London women, 1695-1725" that

also includes occupation by percentage of total employed (339). The most popular occupations in

descending order are: domestic service, 25.4% (although "spinsters" are greatly over-represented

compared to wives and widows in this category); "making/mending clothes," 20.2%;

charring/laundry, 11.1%; nursing/medicine, 9.1%; catering/victualling, 8.7%; shopkeeping,

7.7%; hawking/carrying, 7.2%; textile manufacture, 4.6%; misc. services, 2.9%; misc.

manufacture, 2%; and "hard labour/daywork," 1.1% (339).

While Earle's data is extremely valuable in conveying the range and frequency of

women's work, it is misleading in that it suggests women had and were known by a singular

occupation when this is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. First, while men were referred

to and known by their occupational identity, women were defined by their marital identity

(Mendelson and Crawford 257). In court records, while women's income is recorded for

singlewomen and widows, for many wives, their occupation is not recorded but instead their

husband and his occupation (257-58). Second, while some women of the middling ranks had a

singular or main occupation that they continued throughout their lives (302), women of the lower

ranks did not have this stable option and instead pieced together as much income as they could from multiple, diverse, and temporary sources. Mendelson and Crawford call this a "makeshift economy" (256) and note that this "multiple occupational subsistence identity, not a single professional work identity" (4) better described the lives of most poor women and also of many poor men. Dowd observes that women were more likely to switch occupations frequently and thus more likely to engage in more varied labor practices (*Women's Work* 3). So, to define a working woman in the period by her occupational identity is often anachronistic, in ignoring both the reality of the instability and variety of her economic situation, and also the inseparability of many professional identities from marital ones (i.e. "maid," which meant both maidservant and unmarried woman).

However, while occupational identity may not be a wholly useful concept to understand how these workers saw themselves and their labor, many scholars have traced emergent theories of working-class identity among workers, observing a shared class consciousness and solidarity among laborers of the same social order. Though some scholars argue that lower-class protest was "motivated by community rather than class" (Barry, "Introduction" 21), other scholars find a shared class position as a primary factor; also, it seems class would be an essential component in any formation of community. Scholars find declarations of shared class identity in petitions of early modern workers (Kendrick), different interpretations of religious readings and arguments (Hill),[11] popular literature devoted to "vocational knowledge" (Waddell, "'Verses'" 161) and "promoting occupational fraternity" (175), and in widespread animosity for university learning, which many populist thinkers felt was "part of a system of exploitation and oppression...[that

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[11] For example, the proto-Community group the Levellers regularly used Cain and Abel as a symbol for class oppression. See Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* (1993) for much more detail, particularly during the middle of the seventeenth century.

led] to contempt for the vulgar" and was thus "Antichristian" (Hill 380). "Working Literacies" considers articulations of women's class identity through identification with women's labor narratives evidenced by reading practices and collective petitioning strategies among women with shared occupations.

Literacy and Class

Clearly, these points about popular literature and sentiments about university education show that literacy and class had multiple and differing valences in the early modern period. Competing definitions of literacy were discussed in the Scholarly Contributions section above; it is worth noting that the definition of literacy was in flux and a source of deep debate in the early modern period, too. The early modern period marked an era of both expanding literacy as well as changing and/or destabilizing definitions of literacy (depending on your perspective). What counted as literacy and thus who counted as literate expose deep social divisions.

For many, "literate" had historical roots in classical learning and referred to those who graduated from training in the humanist curriculum and knew Latin; thus, "illiterate" often specifically referred to those who could not read Latin regardless of their reading and writing ability in the vernacular (Barry, "Literacy and Literature" 90).[12] This association between lacking Latin and illiteracy continued into the eighteenth century (Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture* 46). Even among definitions that counted knowledge in the vernacular, some commoners would describe themselves in various forms of illiteracy because they could read print but not handwriting (Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture* 48) or only certain handwriting styles or printed fonts (Hackel, "Popular Literacy" 97). Tellingly, Hackel writes, "the ways of indicating

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[12] Interestingly, in the medieval period, the *litteratus* referred to men who could speak Latin, so one could be unable to read or write in any language and still be considered literate (Hackel, "Popular Literacy" 89).

ignorance in letters were more various, numerous, and charged in the period than their

counterparts, and they often identified it with manual labor and low class status" ("Popular

Literacy" 89). The Scholarly Contributions section above has already elaborated on critical

debates about using signature rates to assess literate ability, and writing "has been conclusively

shown to be tied to one's social status" (Charlton and Spufford 27) since children from lower-

class families needed to leave schooling earlier in order to find work and contribute to the family

income, meaning they often learned to read but then left before progressing to the writing

curriculum. Even then, many readers received incomplete reading education and were only able

to read aloud: "There seems to have been a clear division between those for whom reading was a

private act and those for whom it remained a communal act, perhaps even an act of class

solidarity" (Chartier, "The Practical Impact" 165). Debates about literacy are not helpful in

revealing what is literacy and what is not; rather, they show what types of literacy were valued

and why: "The hierarchy of social rank in pre-industrial England is precisely and vividly

illuminated by the study of literacy" (Cressy, "Literacy and the Social Order" 118).

These debates about what counted as illiteracy and the differentiation between reading

and writing skills prove that, much like today, it is reductive and misleading to speak of a

singular definition of literacy in the period. Literacy took multiple forms in multiple contexts,

and it is overwhelming to attempt to catalogue them all. Hackel describes the range of scholarly

efforts to do so:

> Scholars have come up with many terms to suggest both the degrees and forms of popular
>
> literacy in the early modern period: alphabetic, abecedarian, reading-only, marginal,
>
> partial, full, signature, comprehension; delegate, surrogate, artisanal, material, nontextual,
>
> nonverbal, and others... As these phrases [as well as contemporary ones] suggest, literacy

and illiteracy in early modern England formed not a binary but a spectrum. ...scholars

need to think in terms of literacies because of the variation not just in degree but in kind.

("Popular Literacy" 97).

Thus, conceiving of literacy as a spectrum not only opens up new avenues of study, but it is also

more historically accurate. Such a conception offers more tools and evidence to think through the

rhetorical activities of the early modern populace, especially women and working people.

"Working Literacies" engages in this goal through centering learning to read, reading literacy,

and collaboration as examples of literate ability that working women used to act rhetorically in

their schools, sites of leisure, and workplaces.

Chapter Overviews

The Historical Context section provided above is relevant to contextualizing the analyses

of my subsequent major chapters. Here, I provide an overview of those chapters, their

organization, and their respective primary sources to situate "Working Literacies" as a whole.

To undertake the goals of this dissertation articulated in the Project Overview section, I

examine in my three major chapters sites of education for poor girls, popular literature aimed at

working women readers, and collaborative composing between maidservants and professional

scribes. Focusing on these primary sources highlights, respectively, literacy acquisition, reading

literacy, and collaborative literacy as rhetorical tools available to and utilized by working women

in this period. Each chapter has a "rhetorical" focus: rhetorical education, rhetorical reading, and

rhetorical collaboration. Although there is already a robust field of study concerning rhetorical

education (which will be discussed in Chapter 1), I theorize the terms "rhetorical reading"

(Chapter 2) and "rhetorical collaboration" (Chapter 3) as methods to attend to reading and

collaboration with the same scholarly investment given to rhetorical education. By highlighting a

distinct form of rhetorical participation in each chapter, I hope to foreground methods in which

lower-class subjects were able to perform in rhetorical culture and to show how actions like

learning, reading, and collaborating are persuasive acts worthy of the same attention we give to

teaching, writing, and speaking.

My first chapter, "'[T]he vertuouse bringinge vp of the miserable youth': Rhetorical

Education in Early Modern Orphanages and Charity Schools," employs archival research

conducted at the London Metropolitan Archives using the records of Christ's Hospital, an

orphanage that was one of the first English institutions to educate poor girls. I primarily analyze

manuscripts from this little-studied institution, as well as some administrative and pedagogical

material from similar educational sites, to show how such iterations of literacy education worked

to reify contemporary ideologies of the period concerning class and gender by coupling literacy

instruction with practices of obedience and industriousness.

However, my remaining chapters show that young women with such schooling utilized

the literacy skills they learned in ways that were not intended by the overseers of such

institutions. Chapter 2, "'Poets of Their Own Acts': The Rhetorical Reading of Early Modern

Working Women," extends this exploration of literacy by highlighting women's consumption of

narratives of labor in texts such as chapbooks and ballads through the literary representations of

working women. By examining subgenres of popular literature featuring and aimed at lower-

class women readers, I explore untraditional rhetorics of courtship, marriage, sexual assault,

workplace safety, and poor relief. My engagement with popular literature aimed at women

readers thus illuminates counternarratives of traditional ideas about women and work authored

by upper-class (usually male) writers, and my research shows that working women engaged and

forwarded these alternative representations through their reading habits and participation in reading markets.

My third major chapter, "Petitioning and Co-Laboring: The Rhetorical Collaboration of Early Modern Maidservant Petitioners," examines another way these literacy skills were used through the study of petitions addressing women's labor conditions. In this chapter, I consult archival materials from the Middlesex Records at the London Metropolitan Archives and from seventeenth-century printed petitions concerning maidservants. My study of these texts demonstrates that women used their basic literacy skills to collaborate with professional scribes, and my analysis of these petitions offers evidence as to how working women rhetorically constructed their own identities as laborers and how their literacy skills enabled them to make arguments for workers' rights and women's rights in an era in which women were supposed to be silent and obedient. More specifically, I find and interrogate how working women petitioners brought discussions of women's workplace safety into public space through the genre of the petition.

Finally, my conclusion, "Reflections on the 'People Who [Are] Rarely Visited by History'" offers meditations on the contributions "Working Literacies" makes as whole, especially to feminist rhetorics and early modern studies. I also consider avenues for further research and why studying the early modern poor is relevant today.

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As questions of class and literacy have become increasingly relevant in rhetoric and composition, especially in light of today's sociopolitical landscape, my dissertation brings needed

historical depth to these conversations. "Working Literacies: Gender, Labor, and Literacy in Early Modern England" shines light on understudied precedents of the intersection of socioeconomic class and gender in shaping education systems, reading practices, and arguments concerning women's rights and labor reform. Furthermore, theorizing many different literacies based in historical and social circumstances enables a more capacious way of reconstructing how early modern women acted as rhetorical agents in their day-to-day lives. A focus on work reminds rhetoricians that there are many ways to "retell" the herstory of rhetoric and that the continued work to do so is well worth our labor.

Chapter 1:

"[T]he vertuouse bringinge vp of the miserable youth":

Rhetorical Education in Early Modern Orphanages and Charity Schools

"Through this we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken

as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is

the outward image of a good and faithful soul."

Isocrates, *Antidosis* (*The Rhetorical Tradition* 75)

"Plebs in englishe is called the commonaltie, which signifieth only the multitude, wher in be

contayned the base & vulgare inhabitantes nat avanced to any honour or dignite…"

Sir Thomas Elyot, *The boke named the Gouernour* (1531, A.ii.r)

"Obscured by mean and humble birth

In ignorance we lay.

Till Christian Bounty called us forth

And led us into day."

Hymn Sheet from the charity school at St. Mary's Parish Church, 1792 (qtd. in

Jones 76)

In December 1556, the governors of Christ's Hospital met to discuss business related to

the overseeing of the newly established orphanage in the city of London. In one of the earliest

recorded meetings in the institution's minutes, the governors discussed the "learnyne" of the

children who were housed there. They did not specify matters of curriculum, but it was indicated

early on that placing children into eventual apprenticeships and service positions would be the

culmination of the education of children at Christ's Hospital. These minutes provide evidence of

the early decision to contact companies willing to take poor children as apprentices.

> It was thare agreed that the wardens of all the companies
>
> wythin this citie shulde be sent for, and by them a request to
>
> be made to their companies that so maunye as wanted
>
> anye apprentices, that they wolde take of the biggest sorte
>
> of children kept by the charitie of the Citizens in the
>
> hospitall, which are not geuen to their learnynge. (London Metropolitan Archives, City of
>
> > London CLC/210/B/001/12806/001, p. 3r, from the Christ's Hospital Collection)

Because the governors and aldermen of Christ's Hospital were not educators, there is

comparatively little of the educational and curricular matters of the orphanage recorded in the

minutes. Instead, the minute books are filled largely with matters related to land, rent, and

revenue. However, occasional glimpses clarify that the children in attendance were learning

basic literacy skills alongside manual labor.

At least during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is almost certain that such

students were not learning Latin or the classics, subjects that were reserved for upper- (and

sometimes middling) class boys in grammar schools and universities.[13] These institutions have

been the subject of a great deal of scholarship in rhetorical and early modern studies.[14] In no

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[13] For a comprehensive overview of the early modern humanist curriculum, see, for example, Don Paul Abbott, "Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric in the Renaissance" in *A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Contemporary America*, edited by James G. Murphy, 3rd ed. (2012).

[14] See, for example, Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (1988); Martin Camargo, *Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition* (1994); Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380-1620* (2011); and Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (2012). See also the "Literacy Studies" subsection under the "Scholarly Contributions" section in the introduction of this dissertation for more context and resources.

small part, this attention occurs because the curriculum of humanist grammar schools and universities included the explicit teaching of traditional rhetoric, a qualification that some scholars see as essential to determining what constitutes a "rhetorical education."

However, this imbalance has meant that other sites of education have been understudied in rhetorical scholarship. I seek to address this disproportion through attention to early modern charity schools and orphanages. This chapter has two primary goals: 1) to establish sites like charity schools and orphanages as places of rhetorical education for poor children, and to show how their existence provides evidence for the literacy abilities of early modern working women; and 2) to explore the ideological construction of class in these educational institutions to understand how theories of labor and social status shaped and were shaped by practices of literacy and rhetoric. First, I revisit existing scholarship on rhetorical education in order to demonstrate how studying charity schools and orphanages enriches this scholarly conversation. Then, I examine themes of labor, discipline, and obedience that were interwoven with literacy instruction at these institutions to theorize how class impacted rhetorical education. Because many of these classed goals were shared for boys and girls, the chapter will initially have a coeducational focus. Then, however, I will isolate gender as a factor to explore ways gender and class overlapped at these institutions. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that the rhetorical education of poor girls in various early modern sites was designed to convey certain ideological patterns and therefore was substantially different from the traditional humanist education that more privileged children (usually boys) enjoyed. Thus, writing the history of literacy instruction for poor girls not only reveals an alternative curriculum; it also demonstrates that these differences were heavily influenced by class and explores how rhetorical education was constructed in order to preserve certain class hierarchies. In this chapter, I show that poor girls do

belong in our histories of rhetorical education, as well as how the transmission of patriarchy coupled with anxieties around dispensing poor relief were central to literacy access and learning for lower-class children in early modern England.

Revisiting Rhetorical Education from Below[15]

As rhetoricians have sought to design their own rhetorical education curriculum and trace the history of the discipline, they have generated much conversation about what constitutes a rhetorical education. Scholars such as Jeffrey Walker "have taken the general position that what makes rhetoric rhetoric is its teaching tradition" (*The Genuine Teacher of this Art*, 285), tracing the contemporary goals of the discipline of rhetoric back through figures like Isocrates, Cicero, and Aristotle who treated rhetoric as a *techne*.

However, other scholars have seen Isocrates's notion of "studies which will enable us to govern wisely both our own households and the commonwealth" (*Antidosis* 78) as facilitating a broader scope for the subject of rhetorical education. Scholars such as Jessica Enoch and Shirley Wilson Logan engage a more capacious understanding of rhetorical education. While traditional scholars see rhetorical education as learning specific treatises and working with particular rhetoric teachers, of this approach Enoch notes in *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, "Because this method looks for well-known rhetoricians and their students, it often tracks how enfranchised men accessed exclusive schools to teach and learn a set of rhetorical skills that would in turn enable them to make full use of their enfranchisement" (9). Instead, to ensure histories of rhetorical education reach what she terms "the margins of rhetorical education's

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[15] For more on "history from below," see, for example, Barry Reay, ed., *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (1985) or Brodie Waddell, "Writing History from Below: Chronicling and Record-Keeping in Early Modern England" (2018) as well as the introduction of this dissertation.

history" (11), she argues for a definition that "equates rhetorical education with any educational program that *develops* in students a communal and civic identity and *articulates* for them the rhetorical strategies, language practices, and bodily and social behaviors that make possible their participation in communal and civic affairs" (7-8; emphasis original). According to Enoch, even if rhetorical education is not deliberately invoking the ancients, "[it] interrogate[s] the basic questions that the ancients asked" (11) about how students should use (or not use) rhetoric for civic and social engagement. Similarly, in *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*, Shirley Wilson Logan writes, "I define rhetorical education as involving the act of communicating or receiving information through writing, speaking, reading, or listening" (4). In utilizing broader definitions of rhetorical education, Enoch and Logan are able to engage marginalized practitioners of rhetoric that would otherwise be excluded from studies in the discipline.

In her introduction to *Rhetorical Education in America,* Cheryl Glenn notes that rhetorical education has a deep historical relationship with inequity, because rhetorical education has typically been available to men of the upper classes and unavailable to other groups: "the problem of equality in rhetorical education is not in its quality so much as its distribution, and then not so much in its distribution as its reception" (viii-ix). After all, she adds, "Ideally, rhetorical education shapes all citizens for public participation" (viii).

Despite their differences, though, the studies of Walker, Enoch, Logan, and Glenn tend to emphasize sites and practitioners of rhetorical education in which rhetorical education was (or is) liberatory.[16] Although rhetorical scholars have recognized that rhetorical education can be used for conservative and problematic purposes, studies in the field tend to emphasize its civic

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[16] A notable exception to this model, though, is the Carlisle Indian School addressed by Enoch, which sought to enforce ideologies of white supremacy among its Indigenous students.

potential. Like these liberatory models, early modern orphanages and charity schools were interested in providing an education that attended to the civic interests of the community. In an entry in the minutes from 1557, the mission of Christ's Hospital is described as, "the *vertuouse* bringeinge vp of the myserable youth" (LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/001, p. 8v; emphasis added), sharing the commonplace of the interrelationship between education and virtue advocated by Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian. However, while both grammar schools and charity schools/orphanages saw themselves as integral to shaping productive members of early modern society, they very much differ in *how* these students would perform their respective social roles. "Virtue" has meant (and still means) very different social practices and habits to different groups. For charity schools and orphanages, the emphasis of future social engagement was through *labor*, as the institutions taught reading and writing to prepare students to be obedient and self-sufficient workers. While the founders of charitable institutions like Christ's Hospital present themselves as benevolent Christians concerned with the well-being of children, it seems more likely that the primary goal of educating poor children was not for altruism or even to spread religious ideas, but to prevent those children from needing poor relief as adults. Perhaps the chief moral imperative of education for the poor involved the cultivation of self-sufficiency to prepare children to be independent laborers who would not fall into poverty, homelessness, or prostitution.

I follow Enoch and Logan in conceiving of rhetorical education more broadly in order to see how historically marginalized groups were instructed to use reading and writing to participate in society; however, I note that these models of reading and writing instruction were transmitted to cultivate active workers rather than active citizens. In this way, rhetorical education was complexly interrelated with labor practices, and the corresponding pedagogical

goals to produce moral and self-sufficient persons also worked to advance cultural norms of social discipline, female chastity, and class hierarchy.

While attending to class difference in the education of sixteenth-century through early eighteenth-century children has obvious exigence in the history of rhetoric, there are very real methodological challenges that make such a project a difficult undertaking. Most prominently, there is little primary evidence. While we have printed books of rhetorical theory that were used for Renaissance grammar schools and universities, we lack such documents for poor children. Written composition exercises from upper-class children are extremely rare; those from poor children are virtually nonexistent. We do have, however, various circulated printed materials from the administrators of charity schools and some surviving archival material from orphanages. Such material offers only snippets of the actual curriculum. Moreover, as Thomas Max Safley states in his study of the orphanages of Augsburg, Germany, "Their statutes make clear the ideal, but their records preserve almost nothing of the real" (269). However, while these records are unable to describe classroom practices and offer only partial views of curricula, they do convey certain ideological underpinnings of literacy instruction through their stated goals and recommended instructional practices. The reasoning and recommendations offered in these limited primary materials still provide important information to focus on class and gender difference in the history of rhetorical education.

This chapter, then, attempts to begin to redress the inattention to the literacies of poor girls and boys in histories of Renaissance rhetorical education by examining the role of orphanages and charity schools in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While there were still other sites of education for the poor, as Margaret Spufford makes clear in her research about the literacy habits of the rural poor (i.e. *Small Books and Pleasant* Histories,

1981; *Figures in the Landscape*, 2000), this chapter will focus on orphanages and charity

schools. Although these two institutions were different, they shared related goals and often

educated similar populations of children. After providing a brief historical background of these

educational sites, I explain how the educational agenda outlined for these places constitutes a

kind of rhetorical education. I further explore the ways that these stated educational goals

communicated both classed and gendered ideologies of the period. Finally, I focus on these

institutions' practices of reading and writing instruction, showing how the teaching of writing in

particular offers complexities in considering the history of rhetorical education and

contemporary definitions of literacy.

This chapter engages two main bodies of primary sources: 1) archival material from the

records of Christ's Hospital, an orphanage in London established in 1553 that provided

educational services to its children;[17] and 2) various printed administrative material from charity

schools in England. First, I describe Christ's Hospital, which is one of the earliest known

institutions in England to educate poor girls. Describing the social context of Christ's Hospital

illuminates the desirability for poor children to have literacy skills, providing more evidence for

the future literacy abilities of working women. Then, I analyze archival material from the records

of Christ's Hospital at the London Metropolitan Archives, showing evidence of what children

(especially girls) learned, why they learned it, and how the orphanage expected them to use those

literacy skills later in life.

In addition to the analysis of the archival material from Christ's Hospital, I turn to some

printed administrative material from various charity schools and orphanages. Most of this

material comes at the turn of the eighteenth century (about 150 years after the founding of

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[17] This archival material was previously stored at Guildhall Library and is now located at the London Metropolitan Archives.

Christ's Hospital), but it illuminates educational practices and rationales that were shared by Christ's Hospital and other institutions that provided literacy learning in some way to orphans and children of poor or working parents.

Christ's Hospital: Instruction for "Honest Callings and Occupations"[18]

The intricate interrelationship of economic and education systems in the case of early modern charity schools and orphanages is evident from the very origin of Christ's Hospital, as its inception is a result of the expansion of poor relief in London. To consider the incentives of literacy instruction for poor children in this period, Deborah Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy" is a useful concept. In her article, Brandt points to an over-emphasis on "literacy as an individual development" as opposed to "literacy as an economic development" (166) in the field of composition studies. She proposes the concept of "sponsors of literacy," which she defines as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy--and gain advantage by it in some way" (166). Brandt's work helps theorize and explain efforts to educate poor children in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly as it highlights the economic incentives guiding such institutions. This section will offer further evidence to arguments of increased literacy among those in lower stations in the period by showing how such literacy instruction was borne out of economic and structural conditions. I describe how historical increases in poverty led to state-based poor relief systems, which then produced cultural anxieties over distribution of resources to the impoverished and needy. In this way, I show that charity schools and orphanages became

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[18] "Translation of the Charter of King Edward the Sixth of Foundation of the Hospitals of Christ, Bridewell, and St. Thomas the Apostle." *The History of Christ's Hospital: From Its Foundation by King Edward the Sixth, to Which Are Added Memoirs of Eminent Men Educated There; and a List of the Governors*, edited by John Iliff Wilson. John Nichols and Son, 1821.

sponsors of literacy for poor girls and boys to limit recipients of welfare and to promote class-based ideologies of labor.

As discussed more thoroughly in the Introduction to this dissertation, the early modern period certainly saw an explosion in poverty.[19] While the Middle Ages sought to alleviate poverty through alms-giving, the problem of poverty was too severe in the early modern period to resolve through individual acts of charity, and thus emerged the practice of poor relief as provided by the state, which grew out of local efforts to address the severity of poverty. In addition to the formulation of institutionalized poor relief, the early modern period also saw a huge spike in discourse about poverty. This discourse is particularly marked by an urge to distinguish between the poor who deserved charity and the "undeserving" poor who did not (those who were feigning poverty out of laziness, usually targeted at vagrants). Children were almost always considered to constitute members of the "deserving" poor, and orphanages and charity schools were thereby constructed to provide them shelter and keep them out of poverty. The primary purpose of charity schools was, of course, education, while orphanages were responsible for a much greater part of the children's lives. Still, orphanages often acknowledged education as a central duty. Despite these differences, the two types of institutions shared several educational goals in providing for similar student populations.

In 1964, historian M. G. Jones chronicled the eighteenth-century charity school movement and succinctly summarized the impetus of such sites of education and their emanation from poor relief efforts:

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[19] See the "Historical Context" section of this dissertation, especially the "Advent of State-Based Poor Relief Systems" subsection. For a more thorough account, see Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

The political and religious unrest of the seventeenth century contributed in no small

degree to the desire of the upper and middle classes to establish social discipline among

the poor, who in contemporary opinion were peculiarly susceptible to the poison of

rebellion and infidelity. An organisation which would provide for them religious and

social discipline would solve two acute problems of Church and State, the growth of

irreligion and of pauperism. Instruction in Bible and catechism during the formative years

of childhood, before the infant population was ready for apprenticeship or service, would

build up a God-fearing population and, at the same time, would inoculate the children

against the habits of sloth, debauchery and beggary, which characterised the lower orders

of society. (4)

While Jones's analysis applies to the charity schools of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

centuries, such reasoning is also applicable to the foundation of Christ's Hospital. After hearing a

sermon urging help for the impoverished of London, King Edward VI founded the institution in

1552 along with St. Thomas's Hospital and Bridewell Hospital. Together, these three institutions

were to take care of the poor and the sick in London, with Christ's Hospital focused on the well-

being of poor children.

In particular, Christ's Hospital had a unique relationship with Bridewell, the infamous

London prison. To return to the institution's self-proclaimed goal of virtuous education, the full

context of the line is,

And it is further ordered by the generall assemblye in consyderacion of that as the good

houses of Christes hospitall hathe been erected for the vertuouse bringinge vp of the

myserable youth, and St Thomas hospitall for the releuynge of the neadye and deseased,

and Bridewell for thenforcinge of the lewde and naughtie sorte to labor and worke. (LMA

CLC/210/B/001/12806/001, p. 8v)

This juxtaposition of the "neadye and deseased" alongside the "lewde and naughtie"

communicates clearly Brandt's point that "[literacy] sponsors deliver the ideological freight that

must be borne for access to what they have" (168), here meaning the "ideological freight" of

cultural constructions of deviance that came with access to literacy instruction. The co-founding

and shared governance of the orphanage, St. Thomas's Hospital, and Bridewell Prison reveal the

complex intersection of education with mechanisms of poverty, (dis)ability, criminality, and

social hierarchy that characterized the period.

One particularly frequent way that this interrelationship manifested itself at Christ's

Hospital was with the taking in of children whose parents—almost always mothers—were

vagrants. Begging was against the law at the time, and such children were taken from their

parents and placed into Christ's Hospital while the parent was sent to Bridewell for punishment.

Sometimes the parent abandoned the child, and other times the child was taken from the parent.

Consider this typical passage from 1556:

Wheare by the Lorde Mais^r and his bretherne Thaldermen

it was adiudged that a woman named Horton

dwellinge in Sowthwerke for leauynge and forsakinge

of a childe in the streates shulde be whipped att

Bridewell, and from thence sent vnto the gou^rno^rs.

of Christes hospitall for further reformacon

whiche thing beinge done she was sent vnto the

pillorye in Chepe[20] wyth a paper on her hed, wherin

was written . in greate letters . Whipped at Bridewell

for leauynge and forsakinge hir childe in the streates

and from thense caryed in to Sowthwerk, and banyshed

for hir offence out of the citie (December 7, 1556, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/001, p.

3v)

While such instances are recorded in the minutes presumably as a way to register admitted

children (a common entry type in the minutes), these depictions disproportionately emphasize

the crime of the mother as opposed to the admittance of the child. They also clearly delineate the

model of "deserving" poor versus "undeserving" poor that characterized Elizabethan poor relief,

for the child is admitted for shelter and education while the mother is interpellated as deviant,

punished in public, and exiled. Particularly in the early years of the minutes, there are numerous

accounts of children taken in from the streets. There are also several instances expressing anxiety

over nearby vagrants, such as records of paying men to patrol nearby streets in order to drive

away "foreyne and straunge beggers and other poore that annoye the same" (October 1558, LMA

CLC/210/B/001/12806/001, p. 17v). Carol Kazmierczak Manzione concludes in her history of

the early years of Christ's Hospital that "the governors had three main concerns besides the

admission and care of children[:] to maintain income, to reduce beggary, and to locate fathers of

illegitimate children and force them to pay for their children's care" (56-57). Although such

incidents were not part of the instruction at Christ's Hospital, they shed important light on the

context for such education: the obsession over such details in the minutes at the expense of other

matters of schooling reveals the true incentives for instruction and their inextricability from

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[20] This is most likely a reference to Cheapside or Eastcheap, streets in central London close to markets.

discourses of phobia of poverty and the impoverished. These repeated social fears echo Brandt's reminder that "it is useful to think about who or what underwrites occasions of literacy learning and use" (166) when considering models of rhetorical education.

Although the scribes took great care to record numerous instances of children taken in from the streets, these represent the most dire circumstances. There was a different employment of the term "orphan" in the period, in that "orphan" could refer to a child that had lost a father only and did not need to refer to a child without either parent. This broader definition suggests that some of the children enrolled might have belonged to families of or close to the middling classes.[21] At least in the early years of Christ's Hospital, children were admitted solely on the basis of this orphan status and their residence in the city of London. However, the institution regularly struggled with the cost of this task, and several entries in the minutes stipulate that no children could be admitted for a time. Other entries bemoan the large numbers of pupils per schoolmaster. Almost 400 children were taken in during the first year, with some as young as three. Registers of children record pupils of all ages from eight weeks to fourteen years, although infants were sent to nurse with foster parents rather than stay at Christ's Hospital. Basic care of the children, as opposed to their education, was probably prioritized much more in the beginning years of the institution, although the educational focus increased in later years, especially with the establishment of a reading school, writing school, and mathematical school in the late seventeenth century (none of which admitted any girls as students). From its beginning (and still today), children of Christ's Hospital became known for their signature blue uniforms, which contributed to the orphanage being known as a "bluecoat school." Other similar schools sprang

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[21] Children did not need to be orphans to attend charity schools. M. G. Jones estimates that the majority of children attending charity schools at the turn of the eighteenth century were "drawn from all the ranks of the laboring poor" (21).

up in London following Christ's Hospital, and they, too, were known as "bluecoat schools." In the sixteenth century, blue was considered one of the cheapest dyes, and thus blue clothing was associated with lower status (Manzione 35). Even as the institution sought to provide opportunities to lift children out of homelessness and poverty, it did so in a way that marked the children as low in socioeconomic origin.

Notably, even from its earliest years, Christ's Hospital admitted many girls (until 1891, when it became a boys-only school for a time). It is also clear that the girls received an education, and this suggests that Christ's Hospital was one of the oldest English institutions to offer a formal education to girls, and certainly to girls from poor families. Histories of women's education in the early modern period usually focus on tutoring or informal and domestic education.[22] Yet, Christ's Hospital is not an alternative site of literacy learning but a hyper-institutional one; although girls were excluded from humanist schools, they did receive literacy education in institutional settings, albeit in lesser numbers and with a different curriculum than boys.

There are not exact numbers of the gender distribution at Christ's Hospital, but evidence of staffing and from wills directing gifts to girls suggest that girls were the minority.[23] At one point, there is a record of six Masters for the boys and one Governess for the girls, which gives us an idea of their number (Lempriere 4). In a register of admitted children in 1616, only thirteen of the admitted 78 children were girls (LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/003, p. 208r-210v). Similarly, a 1720 will of John and Frances West specified that their donation should go to both boys and girls but also clearly noted "whereof more than three fourths always to be Boys" (LMA

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[22] See the Introduction for more information, especially the "Feminist Historiography and Early Modern Women" and "Literacy Studies" subsections of the "Scholarly Contributions" section.
[23] Tikoff encounters similar findings regarding gender distribution in her study of eighteenth-century Spanish orphanages.

CLC/210/G/BWD/001/MS12817). Despite these lesser numbers, William Lempriere estimates in *A History of the Girls' School of Christ's Hospital* that the institution educated "thousands" (vi) of disadvantaged girls in its first few centuries.

Like the boys, though, girls were placed into work positions immediately after their education concluded. While boys were usually placed as apprentices, girls were usually placed as maidservants and only sometimes as apprentices.[24] This placement usually occurred in adolescence. Upon the admittance of four girls and one boy to Christ's Hospital, the minutes declare that they are

> …to be educated vntill they shalbe fitt to be putt
>
> to service and that when they shall come to the age of
>
> 12 yeares the boy to be plased apprentice in Bridewell
>
> and the girles to be disposed of as the said Courte shall
>
> thinke fitt (July 12, 1644, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/004, p. 408v)

A different entry some years later orders "Maiden Children to be discharged att 14 yr of age" (Feb. 6, 1662, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/006, p. 129r). Although girls were most often placed in positions of service at the end of their education,[25] some early eighteenth-century minutes record that they also went on to work in such positions as pastry cook, "child's coatmaker," "hair seller," and even schoolmistress (LMA CLC/210/B/005/12811/007, p, 423, p. 548).

Given the ultimate goal of children going straight into positions of apprenticeship or service, labor—both as a manual practice and as an ideology of diligence—was interwoven into

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[24] There were a few boys who did go on to university, although these cases were very much the minority (Manzione 151).

[25] Safley states that 95.8% of all female orphans went into service at Augsberg, while the majority of remaining girls became seamstresses (338). While the majority of girls also went into service from Christ's Hospital, the percentage was not this high.

the daily life and studies of students at Christ's Hospital and other institutions. In his study of Augsburg orphanages, Safley makes note of strict disciplinary educational routines that taught manual labor alongside basic literacy skills and religious instruction:

> The earliest surviving orphanage ordinance, that of 1599…prescribed a steady regimen of study, work and prayer. Throughout the week, mornings were given over to school, afternoons were times of labor and evenings were devoted to worship. The grind was unvarying and relentless. … A fixed, daily routine would foster stability, persistence and regularity. … Truly Augsburg's orphanages were "schools of labor" in the sixteenth century, such as any modern industrialist might have admired. (265)

While other scholars such as Juliane Jacobi have questioned whether this harsh assessment is colored by our knowledge of nineteenth-century orphanages, there is no doubt that teaching children the skills of manual labor was central to the educational project of these institutions. An entry from 1668 in Christ's Hospital's minutes notes the order that a doctor and matron "looke over the Children that shall be admitted that they are not lame, Crooked or deformed" (Sep. 22, 1668, LMA CLC/210/B/005/12811/005, p. 35r). Another entry documents that children were involved in making their own coats and other items of clothing (Dec. 28, 1637, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/004, p. 180v).[26] And while orphanages may have emphasized the cultivation of labor skills more since they placed boys and girls into apprenticeships and service positions, charity schools, too, saw a strict labor ethic as an important component of Christian education: "And this advantage hath attended this and other Foundations of the like Kind, that the Children, both Boys and Girls, are accustomed to Labour, and thereby better fitted to be put out as Servants or Apprentices" (*The Methods used for erecting Charity-Schools…* 5). One girls'

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[26] Although it was true that most households made their own clothing, I am interested here in how this labor was integrated as part of the learning curriculum.

charity school in Westminster was even explicitly turned into a working school shortly after its founding (Jones 93).

Coupling discipline with instruction would ensure that the education would mold poor children into obedient laborers who would not require poor relief. Jones explains that the founders of the charity school movement in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were influenced by John Locke's theory of the *tabula rasa* and that "[b]y habitual response to carefully selected stimuli the evil hereditary and environmental influences which surrounded the poor from birth would be modified, and, though they remained hewers of wood and drawers of water, they would be conditioned to perform these duties as good Christians and faithful servants" (5). Late eighteenth-century writer and philanthropist Hannah More declared in a letter, "Principles, not opinions, are what I labour to give them" (qtd. in Jones 75). Of course, these were the predominant modes of thought at the time; social hierarchy was seen as an inherent fact of life, and such educators, administrators, and theorists merely reflected theories about social status that were largely seen as the will of God.

Although almost a hundred and fifty years after the founding of Christ's Hospital, in 1792 a hymn from a charity school in St. Mary's parish exemplifies the views of social discipline, obedience, and inferior status that the children were expected to internalize:

Obscured by mean and humble birth

In ignorance we lay.

Till Christian Bounty called us forth

And led us into the day.

Oh, look for ever kindly down

On those that help the poor

> Oh, let success their labours crown
>
> And Plenty keep their store. (qtd. in Jones 76)

This hymn is illuminating in that it exemplifies not only the discourse of social hierarchy typical to discussions of the poor and charity schools, but also shows how the children were inculcated to repeat such discourse about themselves. Significantly, it not only confirms recipients of charity as lower in position; it also establishes bestowers of charity as high comparatively. Although they bring poor children from ignorance to lightness (in keeping with the metaphor of the hymn), charity schools ultimately reinforce the existing social hierarchy in which those with the means to offer charity are the ones who deserve praise and high standing: "let success their labours crown / And plenty keep their store," with the "they" here being "those that help the poor," not the poor themselves. Again, considering Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy" is a useful approach here, as she notes that "literacy as a resource becomes available to ordinary people largely through the mediations of more powerful sponsors" (173). This observation confirms that such children were given access to literacy only through the "mediations" of existing class hierarchies.

While these aims may seem appalling by modern standards, charity schools faced severe backlash for their efforts to educate poor children at all:

> …charity schools were subjected to vehement and destructive criticism throughout the eighteenth century. [...A] vast army of persons who were opposed to any form of education for the poor…demanded as an essential of economic nationalism an adequate supply of cheap labour. … The function of the poor was to provide manual labour; it was their duty, just as it was the duty of the middle classes to develop trade by their wits. From such premises it followed that any scheme of social improvement which would

unfit the poor for their work as hewers of wood and drawers of water was, to the great

bulk of middle class opinion, ruled out. (Jones 85)

This resistance to charity schools[27] illuminates a central anxiety these institutions constantly

negotiated: the tension between preserving social hierarchies and making possible social

mobility. On the one hand, early modern society was structured upon very strong hierarchies of

social class, and the period is marked by great anxiety over the possibility of social mobility. On

the other hand, the problem of poverty was so widespread that it needed to be alleviated. These

orphanages and charity schools did provide opportunities for the mobility of poor girls and boys.

It seems, though, that these sites of education for the poor were designed for limited mobility,

and the emphasis on discipline, labor, and service existed to keep children out of vagrancy and

prostitution—a social position most likely for them without institutional support—but to still

maintain the dominant social castes that would mark them as inferior to the aristocracy and

gentry. "Obscured by mean and humble birth," the hymn cited earlier, offers an attempt to

negotiate such competing aims by indoctrinating into poor children the acceptance of the existing

hierarchy that places recipients of poor relief permanently below bestowers. Much later,

nineteenth-century America would see debates about charity schools for the opposite reason: that

attendance in such a school could mark the children as coming from humble origin and hinder

rather than facilitate efforts to achieve equality (Carlton 52-53). In early modern England,

though, any mobility at all was seen as disruptive by many of higher social status.

Strict disciplinary practices were also standard for the period, and children were almost

certainly punished by the rod for behavioral offenses. Like the obsession with vagrancy, the

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[27] See especially Bernard Mandeville's critique of charity schools in "An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools" (1723), in which he claimed schooling encouraged idleness in the poor and that church attendance would suffice for their learning.

Christ's Hospital minutes devote much more detail to establishing rules for the children's

appropriate behavior and modes of disciplinary surveillance than that of literacy instruction (or

any instruction, for that matter). In 1675, the minutes noted the "Orders for the Children in the

Hall and Wards," recording that every day

> That in the morning at the Ringing of the second Bell every Nurse shall put
>
> her Children before the Steward and Matron in the Hall, in a handsome & cleanly
>
> dresse, and then and there make complaint of what misdeameanors haue bin Acted by
>
> their Children the night past, And the Steward to take care to reforme ye s*ai*d Abuses
>
> (Mar. 8, 1675, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/005, p. 575v)

Similarly, orders for the Reading, Writing, and Mathematical schools established in the second

half of the seventeenth century focus much more heavily on matters of deportment than of

curriculum. The transcribers of these minutes were not the teachers, and this also suggests a

greater emphasis on outward appearances and obedience as opposed to the learning of

educational content. The orders specify rules for when the children should be in class, the

specific hours they could enjoy leisure time, and even the times of day in which they could use

the bathroom. Schoolmasters were regularly ordered to "duely observe the behaviour and decent

apparell of the Children that they presume not to come before him wth dirty hands &c. to the

disgrace of the Governm^t of this Foundation" (Nov. 21, 1662, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/006,

p. 578v), and children were regularly warned to not make noise in the halls. An entry from the

1679 minutes expresses concern over unsupervised children and advocates for a solution "that

the Said Children may be better Governed for the future" (Dec. 19, 1679, LMA

CLC/210/B/001/12806/005, p. 226v).

In some instances, the discipline was so severe that it could be constituted as abusive. In 1607, the usher of the grammar school was dismissed for abuse of a pupil:

> Robert Goodman vsher of yᵉ grammer schoolle being complained of for his hard and
>
> cruell dealing in his correcting yᵉ children of this house and other children of
>
> yᵉ citty wᶜʰ are under him to bee taught in yᵉ same schoole and haueing bin many
>
> times admonished of yᵉ same seeing hee hath not noe doth reforme himselfe in
>
> his said vnmertifull correction as at this tyme appeered by one George
>
> Bright one of yᵉ children of this this [sic] house whome hee had stricken over yᵉ
>
> hands wᵗʰ yᵉ great end of yᵉ Rod in such sort yᵗ both his hands were very much
>
> swollen therwth to yᵉ indangering of yᵉ losse of both his hands (Oct. 12, 1607, LMA
>
> CLC/210/B/001/12806/003, p. 103r)

While instances as severe as a child potentially being permanently disabled are rare, there are widespread allusions to cruel charity school teachers in literature of the era (Jones 103).

There are, however, snippets of information that children resisted—or tried to—such abuse and authority. An entry recording the "defects" and proposed "remedys" for the schooling of the children bemoans boys' "Crimes of disdaineing to weare their Badges, Disobedience to Com*m*and, and even the runing away of one (if not more) from their Masters" (LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/006, p. 663r). Another lamented "defect" was "The misbestowing a chargeable and usefull education vpon one who doth not, and preventing its being employed vpon another who would both Esteeme and deserve itt" (665r). At a different orphanage in 1788, girls and boys were beaten so badly that boys broke the windows of the institution and girls started a fire to draw attention from the governors: "When the governors made enquiry into the 'rebellion' they were answered that the children were so 'utterly wretched' from constantly

flogging and semi-starvation, that they could endure it no longer" (Jones 103). A matron was even arrested for the severity of the abuse to the children.

While it is clear that the disciplinary and instructional practices of such institutions sought to preserve the social hierarchy, there were also debates about the primary purpose of the education. Matters of child labor and the curriculum were discussed at an almoners' meeting in 1674. Under the entry titled "Children not to wash Wards," the scribe records,

> The said persons doe thinke itt inconvenient that the Children
>
> should be imployed in Washing their wards in regard they doe
>
> not only thereby spoile their Apparrell but loose their schooling (Aug. 29, 1674, LMA
>
> LMA CLC/210/B/005/12811/005, p. 442v)

This entry illuminates debates about the role of labor in children's education at the time. Although through a modern lens we might read this move favorably, it also suggests that the children had been performing such labor as the norm until this moment, well over a hundred years after the founding of the institution.[28] Either way, it is clear that discourses of labor and obedience were central to the overseeing of Christ's Hospital and to the lives of the children under its care.

More important for the interests of this chapter, this ideology of discipline and social hierarchy did not exist only in the behavioral rules and policies; it also undergirded practices of literacy instruction. As the Introduction to this dissertation has illuminated, estimates of literacy rates in the early modern period are most likely too conservative, especially those of women.[29] This chapter supports this theory not only by pointing to the literacy instruction poor girls

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[28] As this dissertation concerns women's work, it is worth noting that the labor instead fell to the nurses for no additional compensation.

[29] See especially the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section and the "Literacy and Class" subsection of the "Historical Context" section.

received at orphanages and charity schools, but also by highlighting the reasoning behind such

instruction. There was a great social impetus for expanding literacy skills to the poor, because

literacy was beneficial for employment, even in positions of labor with low social status: "A

degree of functional literacy was expected of apprentices in many companies, especially those

associated with the city's retail, wholesale, and overseas trades, since an apprentice often ran the

shop in his master's absence" (Rappaport 298). Kenneth Charlton and Margaret Spufford

contend that increased commerce and an attendant demand for commercial skills was "the main

motor for improved literacy," rather than Protestantism as a sole or even central cause (19). This

was also true for women, as merchants' wives would often stand in for their husbands. Even

basic reading was "useful preparation for the pupil's future life in trade, service, or agriculture"

(Clarke 20). The use of literacy instruction as a solvent for poor relief suggests that differing

degrees of functional literacy may have been more common than rates of signatures suggest.[30]

Moreover, this impetus suggests similar literacy instruction outside of institutions like charity

schools and orphanages;[31] non-institutional and domestic settings would also have served as sites

for literacy learning.

  While literacy skills would have made the boys of Christ's Hospital more useful

apprentices, it would also have made the girls more desirable servants and, eventually, wives and

mothers, for the education of girls in charity schools and orphanages not only sought to create

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[30] See the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section in the Introduction for more on scholarly debates about using signatures as a method for determining literacy rates.

[31] It is very difficult to estimate how many children were educated at orphanages or charity schools. Jones tracked 15,761 children placed from London charity schools from 1698 to 1733 (51). She also claims that "thousands" of such schools existed during the eighteenth century (3), which gives a sense of the scope of the charity school movement and the extent of children who would have learned basic literacy skills. Importantly, the 15,761 figure only applies to charity schools in London and not in other cities or in rural areas. Furthermore, this figure only refers to children who were placed in apprenticeship or service positions and does not account for children who were not placed (i.e. death, marriage) or took on different employment (some pupils of Christ's Hospital stayed there after their education as employees, for example). However, there were many more charity schools in the eighteenth than the seventeenth century and especially more than in the sixteenth century.

obedient laboring bodies, but also chaste and marriageable ones. As servants, lower-rank girls not only made themselves useful to the upper classes, but service was also seen as a "stepping-stone to marriage" (Jacobi 63) because here girls learned how to run a household. The emphasis on marriage as the desired result for poor girls makes sense given the lack of self-determinacy for most women in the period. At a girls' charity school in 1789, an opening prayer recited by the girls declared, "Make me dutiful and obedient to my benefactors, and charitable to my enemies. Make me temperate and chaste, meek and patient, true in all my dealings and content and industrious in my station" (qtd. in Jones 76). Although these institutional sites offered some of the only opportunities for poor girls to get an education, they did so while communicating and reifying preexisting patriarchal views. This tension provides fuller context to studies of rhetorical education that emphasize its liberatory aspects; in studying sites that offer evidence that more poor girls and young women practiced literacy in ways that histories of rhetoric have little engaged, we are also met with the conclusion that such literacy instruction transmitted ideologies of patriarchy and classism at the same time that it enabled workplace opportunities for women that they would otherwise not have had.

Plain Work: Girls and Literacy

While many histories of early modern literacy express assumptions that women of lower status in the early modern period were almost entirely illiterate,[32] educational material from Christ's Hospital shows that a body of poor girls were at least learning to read as early as 1553. Teaching reading to girls was standard in almost all charity schools, even if some emphasized

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[32] In the Introduction, see the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section and the "Literacy and Class" subsection of the "Historical Context" section.

needlework and knitting more than reading.[33] Establishing a degree of reading ability among working women is integral to this dissertation project; therefore, the remainder of this chapter presents evidence showcasing that poor girls did, in fact, often learn to read. It also explores what they learned to read, how they learned to do it, and why. Finally, I discuss the lack of writing instruction such girls received and how it complicates contemporary definitions of literacy. However, I also present archival material demonstrating that some girls of charity schools, as well as of Christ's Hospital, did learn to write, which demonstrates a spectrum of literate ability not only among women, but a spectrum of literate ability among women of similar lower ranks.

Much surviving material from charity schools and orphanages shows that girls were taught to read. *An Account of Charity-Schools Lately Erected in England, Wales, and Ireland* (1706) lists 113 cities and towns with charity schools, and reading is almost always listed as provided for girls. At Christ's Hospital, we know there was vested interest in teaching girls to read from several wills and deeds that specify that their gifts go toward teaching girls to read. While the deeds of John and Frances West together left sums toward boys and girls, the will of Frances West without her husband specified that funds go to the education of "Six poor Girles" (LMA CLC/210/G/BWD/001/MS12817). Margaret Astell's will similarly directed funds toward the "yearly maintainance liuelyhood and educaon of such poore & Female Children" (LMA CLC/210/G/BAC/001/MS12890, p. 29). Elizabeth Clere in 1644 left funds "towards ye Maintenance of a schoole Mrs. To teach ye guirles of [the] house to read English" (Aug. 13,

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[33] Although this dissertation is primarily interested in exploring reading and writing literacy, other scholars have explored sewing and needlework as a kind of literacy for women. See Maureen Goggin and Beth Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950* (2009). For readings specific to the early modern period, see Lisa M. Klein, "Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework" (1997); Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (2010); and Michele Osherow, "'With Cunning Needle Told': Working the Susanna Narrative in Seventeenth-Century Domestic Embroidery" (2021).

1652, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/005, p. 136v). The gift of Sarah Wale in 1638 was even more specific, as she left funds not only to the girls, but money to a mistress to teach reading, a separate amount for the girls' catechism, and another amount for purchasing books for girls (Lempriere 6). In addition, when the institution lacked a reading master for the boys for a time, a governor proposed that the girls' schoolmistress teach the boys reading for the time (Mar. 23, 1699, LMA CLC/210/B/005/12811/007, p. 75v). Despite the fact that the committee instead chose to find a new reading master, the proposal itself suggests that the girls' schoolmistress had experience in or at least was capable of providing reading instruction.

Although the surviving archival material from Christ's Hospital records little of the girls' learning, it can be assumed that their curriculum was similar to that of other charity schools:

> In the girls' educational programme [a vocational education] was the predominant element. Reading and repeating the catechism played as important a part in the instruction of charity school girls as in that of the boys, but writing was seldom taught, and arithmetic was even more rare. Plain needlework, knitting, sometimes spinning, and, when possible, housewifery took their place, that the girls might be prepared specifically for one type of work, never adequately supplied, that of domestic service. (Jones 81)

Lempriere asserts that girls were only taught reading, needlework, and religious instruction at Christ's Hospital for at least a century, although he includes no citation for this claim. Interestingly, because many girls needed to learn needlework and housewifery skills by the onset of adolescence, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford conclude that this may not have prevented girls from learning to read but rather may have compelled them to *learn to read earlier*:

From some literary evidence, we can infer that girls may have learned to read at a very early age, around 4 years or even younger. In many families, the acquisition of literacy was closely linked to religious education. Godly mothers found it convenient to teach piety and reading simultaneously so as to reinforce each other. Once girls had learned their letters, they were launched on the church catechism or the Bible as a practice at 4 to 6 years of age. *In poorer families, girls were expected to start manual work as soon as they were old enough, so reading had to be fitted in early.* (90; emphasis added)

The widespread acceptance of reading instruction for girls in the period clearly urges reassessment or at least nuancing of modern assumptions about the history of lower-class women and (il)literacy.

That being said, orphanage/charity school reading instruction differed greatly from humanist reading instruction, largely in what was read and why. Reading was the foundation for the education of poor children, because it was seen as necessary to understanding the Bible and therefore leading a good Christian life. As part of their learning, the texts poor children read consisted almost entirely of the Bible and religious material. In a sermon delivered in 1724 at the opening of a charity school, Thomas Bisse made this connection between religion and education clear:

Now among the many advantages of this education with respect to the children, the first I shall mention is: The teaching them to read: a faculty, which is of a thousand advantages in life, but in religion is little less than necessary. For what advantageth it a man, that the Scriptures are translated into his mothertongue, when, tho' they lie open before his eyes, writ in the only tongue he speaks, yet they are in effect the same to him, if he cannot read, as if they were still fueled up in their learned originals? (12)

The justification that reading would produce virtuous citizens because it enabled them to study

religious texts was used for both boys and girls. Religious texts provided them with models of

virtuous behavior. In addition, for a woman, being able to read Scripture helped her "fulfill her

maternal duty" (Tikoff 20) since she would be able to understand and teach Scripture to her

future children. Poor children were most frequently taught the catechism, the Bible, and the

Book of Common Prayer. The schoolmasters of Christ's Hospital were ordered to "spende an

houre in Catechizeing the boyes & Maiden Children publickly in the great hall every Sunday"

(1682, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/007, p. 335). Poor children might read Aesop's fables, but

they certainly wouldn't encounter the classical literature or poetry that provided models to

children in grammar schools, even though those children also received explicit religious

instruction. In fact, many endowments to charity schools explicitly forbade the teaching of Latin

with their gifts (Jones 18). Book lists for charity schools consist entirely of religious and/or

didactic texts (several documents, such as *The Methods Used for Erecting Charity Schools*

(1716), include catalogues of books and reading recommendations as appendices, although there

is no proof that these were the sole texts actually used). Occasional exceptions might include

dictionaries, arithmetic books, grammar books, or texts such as "Youth's Introduction to Trade"

(37).

Several primary sources from the period use the same language in describing the

pedagogy for teaching reading: "The Master shall teach them the true spelling of Words, and

Distinction of Syllables, with the Points and Stops, which is necessary to true and good Reading,

and serves to make the Children more mindful of what they Read" (*An Account of Charity-

Schools Lately Erected* 3). This passage, which is repeated in several similar documents,

demonstrates the specific linguistic awareness such poor children were expected to cultivate as

they learned to read. Children learned spelling, which is interesting considering the relatively recent standardization of spelling, and they also learned to distinguish syllables and punctuation. Other passages reveal that students were expected to be able to read out loud, although that seems to be the extent of any oratorical element. In contrast, the humanist education of grammar schools and universities used oratorical theory as its foundation. This distinction, unsurprisingly, points to the disproportionate participation members of varying classes were expected to enjoy in public rhetoric.

The bulk of material suggests that the teaching of reading was through rote memorization and was hardly inspiring. Despite this seemingly didactic and tedious pedagogical model, a call to "make the Children more mindful of what they Read" in *An Account of Charity-Schools Lately Erected* suggests that at least some schoolmasters and schoolmistresses did not merely seek to teach strict memorization to their pupils, but they also expected these poor children to develop some critical thinking and close reading skills. There are also several instances at Christ's Hospital and in other schools in which the children were taught musical instruction, even though some criticized this practice, claiming that music was a fine art inappropriate for children from low status and caused them to conceive of themselves as above their God-given station (Jones 80-81).

While the teaching of reading seemed to rely on rote instruction and specific details, other texts provide interesting insights into how the unimaginative teaching of reading would progress into the teaching of writing. The long title of one document from 1713, for example, reveals its purpose: *Lessons for children, historical & practical; to which are added, some prayers and the chief rules for spelling and dividing words into syllables; designed to bring them to read well and distinctly in a shorter time than is usual. Drawn up for the use of a charity-*

school in the country. The almost 100-page long book includes a series of cumulative lessons and therefore suggests what the curriculum might have been like for children attending such schools. After learning basic alphabetical skills, students would read and learn from religious stories (Noah's Ark and Samson are particularly emphasized), which are described as "history" lessons. After reading these historical/religious stories, children engage in question-and-answer sessions (again, all these questions have to do with religious knowledge). Already, it is evident that such a curriculum relied on some scaffolding, for after the building blocks of literacy instruction, children go on to read longer passages and then respond to questions themselves. Following these questioning techniques, there are several passages "Of Relative Duties, in the Words of Scripture" (57). Again, while this mode of literacy instruction might seem didactic, it still follows some element of scaffolding as students are now being asked to connect previous lessons to their own future social roles. The "Duties" described in this section of the book include those of husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, and servants. Following these lessons, the children learned several prayers. The end of the book, though, returns to grammar instruction, where students learn such grammatical concepts as syllables, consonants, and punctuation, among others. The building blocks for future writing instruction are foreshadowed in sections such as "What is a paragraph?" (91), although the text does not discuss explicit writing instruction.

It is here—in the transition between reading and writing—that the differentiation between boys' and girls' curricula is most pronounced. The separation of teaching reading from teaching writing was standard in the period. In fact, a complaint was made to Christ's Hospital in 1632 that apprentices had spent so much time in the writing school that they had "quite lost theire Reading for want of exercise" (Mar. 1, 1632, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/007, p. 6v). This split

created multiple stages of literacy, stages particularly relevant for women. Because the stage between reading and writing instruction often coincided with the age at which children could join the workforce and begin contributing to the family's income, many children learned to read but did not learn to write. These children were most likely to be boys of the lower classes and girls of all social classes. This division is even sharper along gender lines, because even when girls continued with their studies past reading instruction, they were often taught sewing and other domestic skills in place of writing.

Margaret W. Ferguson and Mihoko Suzuki discuss this disconnection in their article "Women's Literacies and Social Hierarchy in Early Modern England":

> In fact, reading and writing skills were not taught together, either in schools or homes, and this fact has significant consequences for students of early modern literacy. Children in England learned to read religious texts—and recite catechisms—several years before they learned to write, if they learned the latter (expensive) skill at all. Many children, especially girls and lower-class boys, did not stay in school long enough to embark on writing instruction. (576)

In one extreme example, a 1594 statute for a grammar school explicitly stated that girls could not stay "above the age of nine nor longer than they may learn to read English" (qtd. in Clarke 20). While this instance is from a grammar school and not a charity school, it reveals the gendered discrimination commonly associated with writing instruction in particular (even if it simultaneously reveals that girls sometimes did attend grammar school). Moreover, initial writing instruction was largely relegated to learning the technique of forming letters through copying sentences, far from our contemporary association of writing with composition. These myriad levels of reading and writing ability call into question scholars' claims of extremely low

literacy rates and further support the need for the recognition of a variety of literate abilities

based in historical and social circumstances.

The gendered dimension of writing instruction is made clear in two companion

documents from 1701 titled "The Orders and Rules of the Charity-School for Boys" and "The

Orders and Rules of the Charity-School for Girls." The two documents are remarkably similar,

and the distinctions between the genders might actually be much less than one would assume.

Aside from a few different qualifications needed of the schoolmaster as opposed to the

schoolmistress and more explicit instruction about the amount of praying required of the girls,

there is one substantial difference: "As soon as the Boys can Read competently well, the Master

shall teach them to Write a fair legible Hand, with the Grounds of Arithmetick, to fit them for

Services and Apprentices," whereas "As soon as the Girls can Read competently well, the

Mistress shall teach to nit their Stockings and Gloves, and to Sew, Mark, and mend their Cloaths,

and to Spin and Write, as the Trustees shall direct." A conservative reading might view this

school to be atypical, as girls did learn some small amount of writing here (clearly, though, it

was emphasized less than with boys' instruction). Many other charity schools and orphanages

did not teach their female students composition instruction at all.

It is difficult to discern how many students went on to receive writing instruction since

practices varied widely across local institutions. Some places, as Jacobi observes, evidence high

rates of writing instruction: "the clear majority of 76% of Saint-Esprit orphans signed their

apprenticeship contracts during the second half of the seventeenth century, as did slightly more

than half of the Trinité orphans" (59). However, even in these places, "the gender breakdown for

the two institutions differs markedly" (59). While the former institution did not distinguish

writing instruction by gender, the majority of female students at the Trinité orphanage could not

sign their names when the majority of boys could (59). In fact, the supposedly equal educational treatment of boys and girl at Saint-Esprit could well be an anomaly. At least in England, it seems to have been the norm to separate boys and girls after they learned to read. When Christ's Hospital founded a Writing School in the 1670s, it admitted no girls as students.

Even though it is explicitly clear that no girls attended the Writing School of Christ's Hospital, there is evidence that some girls *did* learn to write. Like the wills that specified sums go toward teaching girls to read, at least one will---that of Elizabeth Earswell—set aside funds to teach "Maiden Children to write" (Oct. 3, 1653, LMA CLC/210/G/BEA/001/MS13225) and also included plans to continue the donation for several years. Most explicitly, a lengthy entry from 1686 titled "12 Maiden Children to be taught to write by two boys" outlines rules for the establishment of teaching girls to write. I quote several relevant sections of this passage here:

1 That the two young men Children of this house that seeme most proper to us for the first Instruction of the Maiden Children in Writeing &c. are Thomas Raine and - William Gardner who we desire may be appointed to begin this worke.

2 That as either of these youngmen shall be placed out, the succession of such as shall teach the said Maiden Children from time to time be recomended by the Writeing M^r. to the Visitors of the Schooles for the time being for their approbation and appointment.

3 The Writing M^r. now and for the time being having bookes Quills Inck and necessaryes from the Compting house allowed him, be desired dayly to take care That Penns, Ink, bookes Coppies Sum*m*es and all other things needfull be provided, and be in readinesse for the use of the said Maiden children, as they shall have occasion for them.

…

8 That the Nurse of the Maidens Ward be obliged to attend constantly and be in sight

during that space of time that the young men are teaching the s*ai*d Maiden children

9 That if any misbehaviour shall happen to be done by the said youngmen they shall

be subject to such Correction as the Writing M[r]. shall think fitt to inflict on them

if by the Maiden children, then to be corrected by their Nurse at her discretion

10 That the Visitors of the Schooles be intreated as often as it shall consist wth. their

leisure and conveniency to supervise the management of this affaire, and that the

writing M[r] now and for the time being doe the same, and to take astrict accompt

what proficiency is made therein

The Com[te] after reading thereof approved of the same and ordered it should be

presented to the next Generall Court for their approbation.

This Court unanimously approved of the said Report, and gave the Com[te]

thanks for the paines they had taken herein (Nov. 11, 1686, LMA

CLC/210/B/001/12806/007, p. 755v)

This entry in particular raises a number of questions about what was and what was not happening

regarding the literacy education of girls in such sites. At its most basic level, this is further

evidence that the girls were learning to read. Since students learned to read before learning to

write in this period, one can deduce that these girls would have already learned to read if they

were beginning writing lessons. As we continue to look for evidence of women's literacy

practices, insights like this confirm our suspicions that focusing on the ability to sign one's name

excludes a number of persons who had access to other literacy skills that we cannot measure as

easily.

Simultaneously, we can take this entry to provide a point about women's *lack of literacy*, or, at least, lack of a traditional understanding of literate ability that includes both reading and writing. After all, this entry implies that girls were not learning to write (at least at Christ's Hospital) until this proposal in 1686, over a hundred years after the institution started taking in and educating girls. Moreover, given that this is the first instance in the minutes in over a hundred years that mentions girls writing (and by this point, there was a whole Writing School for boys), its appearance raises questions about the advent of this situation and any controversy or anxiety it may have brought forth. On the one hand, this practice had to be approved by the court, and it merited a list of rules documented in the minutes; on the other hand, the measure was approved unanimously. When and why this practice changed is of note, and it prompts efforts to continue pursuing this line of inquiry about shifts in attitudes regarding gender and writing.

Like the rest of the minutes, though, there is very little about the content of teaching writing in this passage,[34] but there's a near obsession with potential misbehavior and creating mechanisms of surveillance (i.e. the Nurse must "be obliged to attend constantly and be in sight"; visitors are able to "supervise the management of this affaire"). Part of this preoccupation with the children's (mis)conduct is reflective of the entire breadth of the minutes, as it is further evidence that ideologies of obedience and discipline were central goals for the children that were reiterated repeatedly across the minutes in various contexts. This is the primary way in which the centrality of social hierarchy is communicated through the archival material. Of course, some of this anxiety over the pupils' behavior is ensuring that children are actually teaching other

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[34] However, this passage provides an interesting dimension to discussions of technologies of writing. Wax tablets were often seen as cost-effective methods for instruction since they could be used repeatedly. Yet the children here are clearly using ink in their lessons.

children and is understandable. I also suspect, though, that some of this anxiety is due to the intermixing of the genders, because adolescent boys and girls were usually taught separately in Christ's Hospital specifically and in most schools generally.

This is the most information provided in the Christ's Hospital minutes about the teaching of writing to girls. However, with the establishment of the boys-only Writing School—as well as a Mathematical School—in the 1670s, matters of curriculum were discussed much more frequently and in more detail. The proportion of matters relating to education versus those relating to revenue become much less disproportionate. For the first time, there is even evidence that the children became exposed to the canonical thinkers that we associate with the rhetorical tradition: orders for the Grammar School mention a long list of canonical authors, including Homer, Virgil, and Erasmus (May 18, 1682, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/007, p. 332r), and expectations are voiced that the pupils should become "well versed in the several Authors" (Nov. 14, 1699, LMA CLC/210/B/005/12811/007, p. 42v). While these later minutes still emphasize the importance of curbing disobedient behavior, they also for the first time express repeated investment in assessment of the proficiency of the boys, oversight of the curriculum, and displaying the learning of their best pupils to influential members of the philanthropic community.

However, as Christ's Hospital moves closer toward Walker's view of "what makes rhetoric rhetoric," the girls all but disappear from the entries. Denied entrance into the grammar school, writing school, and mathematical school, girls seem to have been almost wholly ignored by the governors and scribes in these later years, or at least the administrators did not view matters of girls' education as worth recording. The girls become so absent from the records-- sometimes for tens or even hundreds of pages at a time--that one might forget they attended the

institution at all, until a passing reference notes where they are to eat or that their sink needs to be repaired. The closer to "traditional" education the school moves for poor boys, the less we learn of the poor girls' education, of basic literacy instruction, and even of how and from where children were admitted.

Conclusion

Even if an idealized definition of rhetorical education traces our discipline's lineage to the Writing School of 1673--with its turn toward the classics and its ability to place a few children in university--the writing school's lineage was the orphanage: the two are inextricable. Scholars such as Mike Rose and Patrick J. Finn have illuminated ways classism impacts the American education system.[35] Crises over admissions scandals, the school-to-prison pipeline, and skyrocketing student loan debt reveal the extent to which ideologies of classism, social deviance, and poverty are still deeply embedded in modern education systems. I contend here that these roots have much deeper historical origins and can be traced as far back as early modern anxieties about poor relief, "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, and social discipline.

Furthermore, the centrality of social hierarchy and economic institutions to histories of rhetorical education is inextricable from patriarchal systems. In focusing on the literacy instruction of poor girls, we are able to conceptualize a broad range of literate ability despite a shortage of primary materials and gaps in the archive. Theorizing a multitude of kinds of literacy enables a more capacious way of reconstructing how early modern women acted as rhetorical agents in their day-to-day lives. The rest of this dissertation will move beyond literacy

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[35] See, for example, Rose, *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educationally Unprepared*, 1989, and *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*, 2009; and Finn, *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest*, 2009.

acquisition to explore how women repurposed these basic literacy skills. In ways the administrators at institutions like Christ's Hospital never intended, working women used a myriad of reading and composing abilities and practices to attest to and negotiate their identities as workers.

Chapter 2:

"Poets of Their Own Acts":

The Rhetorical Reading of Early Modern Working Women

"…olde men may teach to spell, but young folkes will put together."

Foggo (a servant), *The Wit of a Woman* (1604)

The archives of the institutions examined in Chapter 1 would suggest that the pupils at these places only encountered religious texts such as the Bible and the catechism as part of their education.[36] This is, after all, what made their education "vertuouse" (London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, LMA CLC/210/B/001/12806/001, p. 8v, from the Christ's Hospital Collection).

However, different contemporary sources reveal that children had other ambitions in mind. Correspondence in the archives of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), a prominent foundation that established and ran many charity schools from the late seventeenth and through the eighteenth century, reveals anxiety over children reading chapbooks like *Laugh and Be Fat*, a collection of jests and stories filled with scatological humor, and *The Irish Rogues and Rapparees*, a collection that reveled in the (mis)adventures of outlaws. Administrators of the S.P.C.K. called these stories "indecent" and feared that they would not merely distract students from their religious studies, but would actively corrupt them by causing children to confuse what constituted virtue in their adulation for these "indecent" and "lawless" stories and the transgressive figures in them (1729, qtd. in Jones 83).

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[36] Although in rare cases, especially during the later seventeenth-century at Christ's Hospital, for example, gifted children (almost always boys) might encounter classical texts. See p. 83 in the previous chapter.

In fact, there seemed to be widespread fears of similar stories debasing children. Juan Luis Vives, an influential educational theorist from a century earlier, wrote that stories like the romantic chivalric tales chronicled in chapbooks have "no other purpose, but to corrupt the manners of young folkes" (1592, qtd. in Lamb 79). Other notable thinkers described these texts as "sweete songs and wanton tales" (Henry Cross, 1603, qtd. in Grenby 33) and "the very poison of youth" (Richard Baxter, 1660, qtd. in Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* 8). In *De pueris instituendis*, Erasmus referred to such literature as "stupid often vulgar ballads, ridiculous old wives' tales…all those unedifying falsehoods taken from popular storybooks…all those things we learned as children sitting with our grandfathers and grandmothers, or with nurses and girls at their spinning" (1529, qtd. in Charlton 457). Crucially, Erasmus's condemnation reminds us that these stories weren't just for boys: girls could be corrupted by them, too. The gendering of such potential deviation is made evident by Philip Stubbes, a late sixteenth-century Puritan pamphleteer, who not so subtly warned that these popular stories would "corrupt men's minds, pervert good wits, allure to bawdry, induce to whoredom, suppress virtue and erect vice" (1583, qtd. in Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* 8).

Such reading posed a threat to the well-being of all girls and boys, these theorists argued, but the criticism implied that children of the lower classes were at greatest risk. Many critics blamed parents for using such material in education: "O ye fathers and mothers learn your poor chyldren these things, and not tales of Robin Hood, with such other vayne fables" (Robert Legate, 1545, qtd. in Charlton 453). They bemoaned parents who suggested "a *Tom Thumb*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Valentine and Orson*, or some such foolish Book, before the Book of Life!" (R.H., 1702, qtd. in Grenby 35). Such criticisms seem especially likely to be targeted at the lower classes since these boys and girls were unable to afford schooling fees and thus more likely to be

taught literacy by their parents instead of a schoolmaster. Similarly, a letter in the eighteenth-century publication the *Reflector* noted an adolescent boy's obsession with Jack the giant-killer and described him as "always reading when he has time from driving the plough" before providing a long list of religious and pedagogical texts that were better suited to those "in the lower ranks of life" (1788, qtd. in Grenby 36).

Aside from the ubiquity of this line of criticism, it is notable how long it endured. Erasmus's *De pueris instituendis* was published in 1529 (and written several years earlier) and the letter in the *Reflector* in 1788. The numerous and repeated attacks on such literature only attest to its popularity and influence. In her study of representations of childhood reading in the early modern period, Edel Lamb notes, "The existence of such literature, and more importantly, the constant stream of criticism directed toward it, should serve to remind us above all that 'education' took place as much *outside* the classroom as in it" (471; emphasis original). Lamb's observation about early modern children echoes Anne Ruggles Gere's focus on the "extracurriculum" of composition from the nineteenth century to today, a site of literacy learning "constructed by desire, by the aspirations and imaginations of its participants" (80). While Gere's study of literacy practices concentrates on writing, we can apply this line of thinking to reading, too: students don't only "write outside and beyond us in an extracurriculum of their own making" (91), they *read* outside and beyond, too.

Historiographies of literacy that emphasize reading are especially important in early modern studies since so many learned to read without learning to write, and this disproportionately affected women and the lower classes, and thus especially women of the lower classes.[37] In her introduction to *Early Modern Prose Fiction: The Cultural Politics of*

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[37] See especially the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section and the "Literacy and Class" subsection of the "Historical Context" section in the Introduction.

Reading, Naomi Conn Liebler writes, "Reading--especially reading for pleasure--became the means by which people in a range of classes and communities discovered, fashioned, knew, and imagined not only 'themselves' but also the relation of those selves to a nearly infinite world of other selves both real and invented" (4). British historian James Raven further describes the benefits of attending to reading in our scholarship: "by recovering and offering an interpretation of a range of texts available, we help rescue the history of popular thought and discursive practice from the canon of great texts studied in isolation" (286).

Of course, emphasizing reading is methodologically more difficult than analyzing writing. As Catherine E. Kelly and Heidi Brayman Hackel state, "reading is embedded in a range of social, textual, and material practices, and readers survive in the historical record only when some form of textual or visual production accompanied or followed their reading. Reading on its own, in other words, is invisible" (147). Recovering reading, then, is not only a methodological difficulty, but an archival one, too. What has survived? And how can we glean reading from the little that posterity has preserved?

Moreover, although recent scholarship in the history of reading has attempted to redress the notion, reading is largely construed as a passive act. In the binary of reading and writing, writing is the active one. To write is to act, to make, to create, to compose; to read is simply to receive. Especially relevant to the project of this dissertation, this dichotomy of reading and writing is also deeply gendered. It is gendered both theoretically, in which reading is seen as the passive one in a binary construction, and literally, since women were less likely to be taught to write and were discouraged from writing in their books even if they could (Hackel, *Reading Material* 196).

Given the availability and engagement with reading to the lower classes and women, this chapter theorizes reading as a kind of rhetorical agency. Building on histories of reading and calls to de-center authorship and publication, I aim to displace writing as the standard for rhetorical action. I do this methodologically and philosophically by focusing this chapter on what I call "rhetorical reading," which recognizes reading as a rhetorical and persuasive act in the same ways that speaking and writing traditionally are. By refiguring reading as an active rather than passive act, I am able to highlight the literacy practices of women who were denied access to writing instruction because of their gender, class, or both. In this chapter, I explore the circulation of representations of lower-class women's work but narrow my search to genres that would have been easily accessible to working women themselves, meaning I concentrate on popular literature as opposed to poetry and drama.

In an effort to recover "the mental world of the peasant reader" (1), Margaret Spufford turns to the narratives within popular literature: "Because there is so little direct evidence of the readership of the chapbooks, we are forced back on the indirect evidence of the contents of the chapbooks themselves" (*Small Books* 50). In fact, many scholars of early modern literature explain the value of attending to narrative as a method. For example, Michelle Dowd in *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* writes, "in the process of defining women's work, these [literary] texts inevitably produce innovative depictions of working women, ushering in new ideas about women's marketable skills, domestic authority, and professional responsibilities" (6). Dowd notes her specific interest in popular literature in such depictions, or what she describes as "recurring narrative structures in the cultural redefinition of women's labor" (6). Importantly, James Phelan argues for the rhetoricity of narrative in *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*: narrative is rhetorical

because it is "telling a particular story to a particular audience in a particular situation for, presumably, a particular purpose" (4). In a related manner, John O'Banion argues that Quintilian saw *narratio* (narrative or narration) as equally important to logic and crucial to argumentation: "*Narratio* was one's case proffered in the form of a story, a continuous form that emphasized the sequence of events constituting the case" (328). Although in this context Quintilian was considering forensic rhetoric, we can of course adapt these points about narrative and story to a much larger range of rhetorical situations, including literary ones. After all, *narratio* is Latin for "story." For her own literary and narrative analyses, Dowd does include some ballads and other non-canonized texts, but she mainly focuses on canonized texts such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. I employ Dowd's aims in focusing on how narrative elucidates key information about early modern women's work, but because of my interest in lower-class literacy, I treat only popular literature and thus the narratives that would have been most accessible to women readers of the lower classes.

Although "rhetorical reading" is usually used in the field of composition studies to refer to modern pedagogical practices (Bosley), it can also be applied to historical studies of literacy. Here, I recognize reading as a site of available means of persuasion and look for "rhetorical readers," or how readers' interactions with texts and interventions in reading marketplaces enabled the circulation of varying arguments and narratives. In noting the importance of circulation to the study of rhetoric, rhetoric scholar Laurie E. Gries declares, "In such scholarship, circulation is neither implied nor considered to be a passive transmission of ideas, images, and information" (4); Gries's observation elucidates why examining readers should be central to theories of rhetorical circulation. Moreover, a historiographic application of rhetorical reading contributes to feminist histories of rhetoric in expanding our understanding of how

ordinary women used rhetoric. This emphasis on texts written for and read by lower-class women also reveals that the rhetorical constructions of gender varied greatly by class; popular literature for the plebeian masses of the early modern period imagine women much differently than the "chaste, silent, and obedient" dictates of prescriptive literature aimed at upper class women.

In order to center the rhetorical reading of early modern working women, I consider a variety of reading practices as evidence of such rhetorical reading. After all, like writing, reading is not monolithic; "reading" is a capacious term that refers to a practice that can take many forms depending on the reader (or rhetor) and rhetorical situation. Attending to reading thus requires scholars to recognize reading's abundancy and exhibit versatility in our analyses in order to best capture its profusion. In this chapter, I look at a few different genres of text that address working women in the period and consider the agentic interactions of women readers with these texts. Through analyzing narratives that are under-studied in scholarship but omnipresent in the literature available to women of the lower classes, I consider how working women used their reading choices to politicize literacy by advancing certain themes in popular literature and thereby in cultural discourse broadly. First, I look at ballads, texts which could be encountered aurally through song or reading aloud or visually through being posted on alehouse walls or the woodcuts accompanying the printed sheets. Many early modern scholars have noted that the ballad is a site that collapses print and orality, but less emphasized has been how this collapse has textually preserved and recreated a network of non-elite women passing on advice to other non-elite women. I examine this rhetorical reading of giving/seeking advice through attention to what I deem the "anti-carpe diem" and "Crafty Maid" ballads, which are ballads that address themes of avoiding bad husbands and the seduction of men. Second, I consider the genre of the

chapbook with a reading of *Long Meg of Westminster*. In this section, I look at how readerly practices of identification and escapism result in the circulation of discourse about women's workplace safety and non-traditional gender roles through the fantasy figure of Long Meg. Reconfiguring working women's engagement with these genres and their attendant narratives as "rhetorical reading" opens up avenues to see how women likely without writing literacy participated in contemporary rhetorics of work through print culture.

Before beginning my analyses, however, I offer a context of histories of reading in the period as well as general descriptions of this category of popular literature and its corresponding genres. I also discuss the impact of popular literature on literacy (and vice versa) and describe common narratives of labor and gender offered by such popular literature. These contexts help situate the means available for working women to participate in these cultural deliberations through reading, and they clarify how critical attention to the rhetorical reading of these women deepens both studies of feminist rhetoric and early modern literature.

Reading in the Academy: The History of Reading and Popular Literature

In recent years, especially in light of critiques of canonization and of the centrality of authorship to English studies, scholarship of the history of reading has flourished. Studying reading--sometimes referred to as reception or audiences--offers an important way to historicize texts and culture that is not accomplished through attention to literary authors alone: "For it is these [ordinary] readers, not the celebrated poets or career scholars, whose entry into the print marketplace provoked debate and changed the definition of literacy in early modern England" (Hackel, *Reading Material* 8).

Scholarship of reading in English studies first became prominent through reader-response theory. In tracing the place of reading through the history of composition studies, Mariolina Rizza Salvatori and Patricia Donahue provide a concise summary of reader-response theory and its early impact on the field of English:

> In its basic form, the story goes like this: thanks to the development of reader-response theories…theoretical attention shifted from what texts mean to how readers make them mean. … Rather than conceptualize readers as the passive, if respectful, recipients of textual power governed by authorial intention, reader-response theorists situated readers at the center of the interpretive enterprise. It is because of these understandings of reading that it is now possible to say that, thanks to readers, texts are sites of potential. (202)

Salvatori and Donahue describe the initial shift from author to reader as "earth-shattering" (202) for the field. However, reader-response theory, despite its polyvocal nature, soon came to be viewed with suspicion as a less than rigorous "anything goes" approach (205). Simultaneously, composition studies was attempting to establish its own disciplinary identity distinct from literature studies, and critical attention to student writing far outweighed (and still does) attention to student reading.[38] While there has been a welcome increase in composition scholarship on student reading in the past decade,[39] it still does not come close to the attention paid to student writing. Similarly, there is very little scholarship on the history of reading from rhetorical scholars, although a notable exception is Peter Mack's recent *Rhetoric's Questions, Reading and Interpretation*, which aims to "show what might happen if we treat the doctrines of rhetoric as

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[38] The tendency of the field to pay far more attention to writing than reading despite the truism that they are inherently linked is asserted by many scholars who study student reading, although Salvatori and Donahue assess this disproportion qualitatively through an analysis of several years of Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) programs. One exemplary finding is that "reading" was absent as a CFP category for seventeen years of programs despite a notable presence in the late 1980s that vanished in the subsequent decades.

[39] See the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section in the Introduction for more information.

questions or categories which we might apply to our reading, rather than as instructions about how to write" (1-2).

Fortunately, study of the history of reading is much more prominent in the fields of early modern literature and history, even though it is no longer associated with reader-response theory and instead approaches reading as a historically situated act. Scholars such as Roger Chartier and Harold Love called for further study into print culture, book history, and reception, opening up avenues for studies of readership to flourish. Unsurprisingly, though, studies of early modern readers disproportionately focused on male readers (Donawerth, "Women's Reading Practices" 986; Hackel, *Reading Material* 11; Kelly & Hackel 2). Studies of early modern women readers continued to be lacking even when studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women readers rose (Kelly & Hackel 2). This is an unfortunate gap considering that women's literacy greatly expanded during the early modern period, especially during the seventeenth century. Moreover, reading is a historically and socially contingent activity, and the practices of and anxieties around women's reading across historical eras reflect different sociopolitical environments and constructions of gender and patriarchy. In describing the historical range of their edited collection, Kelly and Hackel explain clearly the differences between the ideological associations of women's reading in early modern England, which has received less study, compared to nineteenth-century America, which has been the subject of numerous scholarly works: "we begin…with the Tudor dynasty, which would usher in a new consolidation of monarchal power and a new era of self-presentation, and we end with the creation of the United States, which yoked reading and gender to the republican project" (5). Projects like Hackel's *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* and Kelly and Hackel's *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* have been important in

redressing the gap of scholarship on early modern women's reading, although these studies have mostly focused on upper-class and gentry women of the period. Attention to the reading practices of early modern women offers clear contributions to several disciplines, including rhetoric and composition, early modern studies, and the history of women's reading.

Shifts to increase scholarly criticism about reading have necessitated new methods in order to recover reading, a practice that usually leaves no historical record. Scholars have examined paratextual material, reader annotations, signatures of ownership, books left in wills, commonplace books, diaries, translations, and literary representations of readers. While these are creative methods that recover some reading practices, they are, ironically, still studies of writers (Hackel, *Reading Material* 196). As Hackel points out, the expectation that women remain silent in the "chaste, silent, obedient" prescription was not only relegated to speech but extended to print, as women were less likely to learn how to write[40] and were discouraged from annotating their books even when they had learned to do so (196). Kelly and Hackel note,

> If it is true that female readers, like nonelite male ones, left *fewer* records to document
> their reading habits than did elite males, it is also true that female readers left *different*
> records. Scholars who would recover the complex world of the early modern--much less
> the women who operated within that world--must therefore think creatively about sources
> and evidence. (3; emphasis original)

Hackel's *Reading Material in Early Modern England*, in particular, utilizes several innovative methodologies to recover women's reading practices, including examining "elaborate bindings, careful catalogues, commissioned portraits, gift exchanges, and final bequests" (254). Even these

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[40] In the Introduction, see the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section and the "Literacy and Class" subsection of the "Historical Context" section. In Chapter 1, see the "Plain Work: Girls and Literacy" section.

creative methods that displace writing as evidence, however, are much more likely to be found for elite women rather than their plebeian counterparts.

The shift in emphasis from upper-class writers to upper-class readers has prompted some scholars to call for a more collectivist view of reading history. In "Rereading the English Common Reader," Jonathan Rose argues for a shift to "a history of audiences": "Whereas reception histories have generally traced the responses of professional intellectuals (literary and social critics, academics, clergymen), audience histories would focus on the common reader-- defined as any reader who did not read books for a living" (424).

In fact, reading itself has been theorized as a "classed" activity in the binary of reading-writing, in which readers only receive the products of writers. However, theorists have attempted to complicate this hierarchy. Famously, French theorist Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* reframed the role of the consumer from a passive to an active one: "…'consumption'... is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order" (xii-xiii; emphasis original). In other words, consumers are not passive receivers of dominant culture but creatively and strategically take in that culture in a pattern of their own remaking. De Certeau refers to this model of consumption as a "hidden" *poiesis* (xii) in which "users make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules" (xiii-xiv). Despite their perceived inferiority by elite classes, consumers are "poets of their own acts" (xviii). The marginal position of the consumer does not make her powerless but rather "elicits an increased deviousness, fantasy, or laughter" (xvii). Leading to the title of his work, de Certeau asserts, "The tactics of consumption, the

ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices" (xvii).

In the subsequent chapters, de Certeau then analyzes these "everyday practices" as politically subversive tactics, including walking, dwelling, shopping, cooking, and, importantly, reading. Through the act of reading, "He [the reader] insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body... A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place" (xxi). Readers do not simply receive the text of the author, nor does the reader and author exist in a mutually constitutive relationship in which meaning is created; rather, readers actively displace authors and create their own meaning, a theoretical reversal of the traditional hierarchy.

Importantly, while de Certeau's theories advanced in *The Practice of Everyday Life* have been central to Chartier's scholarship on book history and print culture (see especially "Labourers and Voyagers"), they are equally fruitful for the field of rhetoric.[41] In fact, de Certeau deliberately invokes rhetoric as a means of understanding the "everyday practices" of the consumer as rhetorical agency: "Both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system--that of language or that of an established order" (23-24). Akin to Susan Jarratt's influential linkage of the Sophists and feminist rhetoric, de Certeau sees the space of the plebeian consumer as inhabiting a Sophistic one:

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[41] While some rhetorical scholars do use de Certeau's theories, they focus on philosophy, subjectivity, rhetorical space, and walking rather than reading. For some rhetorical scholarship engaging de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, see Jane Donawerth, "Poaching on Men's Philosophies of Rhetoric: Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Rhetorical Theory by Women" (2000); Kendall R. Phillips, "Rhetorical Maneuvers: Subjectivity, Power, and Resistance" (2006); Kundai Chirindo, "Rhetorical Places: From Classical Topologies to Prospects for Post-Westphalian Spatialities" (2016); Jason Kalin and Jordan Frith, "Wearing the City: Memory P(a)laces, Smartphones, and the Rhetorical Invention of Embodied Space" (2016); and Lili Pâquet, "A Rhetoric of Walking and Reading: Immersion in Environmental Ambient Literature" (2020).

In the enormous rhetorical corpus devoted to the art of speaking or operating, the

Sophists have a privileged place, from the point of view of tactics. Their principle was,

according to the Greek rhetorician Corax, to make the weaker position seem the stronger,

and they claimed to have the power of turning the tables on the powerful by the way in

which they made use of the opportunities offered by the particular situation. (xx)

Paying closer attention to the Sophistic role of the non-elite reader-as-consumer offers the

rhetorical scholar new and promising methods to think about the role of rhetoric in "everyday

practices"; exploring this role from the perspective of early modern women does this scholarly

work while also contributing to histories of gender and labor.

Focusing on the rhetorical reading of early modern plebeian women also requires that

scholars confront issues of classism within academia that have prevented critical attention to the

popular reading material that such non-elite women may have enjoyed. Lori Humphrey

Newcomb, a scholar of early modern popular literature, explains that "those committed to the

study of popular culture…still feel called upon to defend publicly the validity of 'popular

culture' as a historical category and the artefacts so categorised" ("What Is a Chapbook?" 57). In

fact, when scholars do study popular literature genres available to non-elite audiences, they often

disparage the genres or the readers in the process. In an early and influential call for scholars to

heed the importance of ballads to early modern culture, Natascha Würzbach describes the

charges scholars have hurled at the genre: "Irregular verse-formation, inelegance of style,

incredible and fantastic content, obscenity and dubious morality, together with a general lack of

'poetry', 'culture', and 'taste', are the criticisms levelled at the street ballad" (4). In a separate

work, readers of popular short fiction are described as "retarded culturally" (Mish, *Short Fiction*

361).

Unfortunately, as Newcomb points out, greater awareness of classism brought on by cultural studies has only caused this line of criticism to morph rather than disappear: "Disapproval of nonelite reading practices on nakedly elitist grounds...may be replaced by disapproval on ideological grounds, a tendency still troubling popular culture studies. If fiction is wish fulfillment, consuming it is seen as denial; if, on the other hand, fiction works like ideology, consuming it is seen as false consciousness" (*Reading Popular Romance* 212). Indeed, while it is a faux pas to nakedly paint members of the plebeian class as stupid in academia, it is still perfectly acceptable to label them as conservative. While using different language, this disapproval of the consumption of popular culture ultimately has the same effect of casting the intelligentsia as more enlightened and the lower classes as intellectually--and therefore socially-- inferior. As literary critic Sharon O'Dair points out in her study of classism in academia and in Shakespearean studies in particular, "We oppose capitalism in the name of the people but do so to protect our own prerogative of judgment over them in the marketplaces for culture" (*Class, Critics, and Shakespeare* 69).

To avoid reproducing this classist structure in her own scholarship, Newcomb outlines her approach to studying early modern popular romance, a genre maligned during the early modern period and still today: "Thinking about how these romances were constructed as popular advances some of the most urgent projects of cultural studies: imagining pleasure reading as more than a cloak of false consciousness [and] seeking more diversified models for the cultural uses of reading" (*Reading Popular Romance* 19). Newcomb's work imagines readers of early modern popular romance--who were often women--as more than empty receptacles for conservative ideology; instead, the romance reader can serve as de Certeau's tactical consumer.

Jonathan Barry also shows that our modern scholarly aesthetic hierarchies are born from practices of classism that emerged with the rise of print culture in the early modern period:

> Until the eighteenth century literature was a general term meaning anything that could be read by the literate. … But, faced with the popularisation of print, authors and publishers from the sixteenth century onwards, but above all in the eighteenth century, sought to establish a superior sphere of writing, "literature", that would, while taking advantage of the market for print, be able to avoid the democratisation and dependence on the reader that characterised mere publishing. (90)

Newcomb demonstrates the construction of this divide between literature and "Literature" in an analysis of a work of popular fiction in the early modern period, *Pandosto*, which served as the basis for Shakespeare's *The Winter Tale*. In *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England*, she shows how literary critics worked to construct *Pandosto* and its adaptations as lowly popular literature while constructing Shakespeare's work as one of genius and worthy of canonization. According to Newcomb, the "cultural stratification" (6) of *Pandosto* and *The Winter's Tale* mirrors a larger one that emerged when the expansion of literacy and printing obscured leisure reading as a mark of status: "The obvious cultural boundary between literate culture and popular (oral) culture was no longer sufficient to maintain elite exclusivity; increasingly, distinctions were needed *within* print culture and within print genres" (8; emphasis original). In order to maintain and create new modes of cultural differentiation, then, contemporary writers and critics "increasingly emphasized the materiality of popular print and implicitly constructed literary texts as transcendent" (9). Newcomb's popular romance readers echo de Certeau's consumers: "Modern views of popular culture as economically and morally wasteful are continuous with early modern scenes of consumption that placed romances in the

hands of nonelite buyers, whose touch could turn cultural objects into worthless commodities" (96).

However, like de Certeau, Newcomb sees the deep-seated reaction against the leisure reading of early modern popular romance as evidence of its potential political efficacy. Such popular literature would not have prompted so much criticism and anxiety if non-elite reading was not a means of challenging the status quo. In "The Cultural Politics of Reading," Liebler elaborates on the political nature of popular reading but concentrates on the impacts in the early modern world:

> By "distracting" readers from more serious occupations like work or worship, they [works read for pleasure] disturbed orderly systems of stratification and otherwise regulated behaviors. Leisure itself was seen as subversive, or at least potentially disruptive to the orderly household, shop, farm, and thus, by extension, polis. Even when the apprentice or the domestic servant remained seated, book rather than implement of service in hand, the adventures in which they participated imaginatively as they read the romance, the picaresque adventure, the cony or the trickster tale, suggested alternative, if unreal and unrealizable, lives. The fixed destiny of walking contentedly in one's vocation was less unquestionable, more tenuous, especially given the social fluidity of positions of servitude. (8)

Liebler's observations about the "potentially disruptive" role of leisure reading shows how popular literature of the period fits in with my model of rhetorical reading. Through popular reading habits, lower-class readers were able to entertain alternative fantasies, discourses, and worldviews of class hierarchies, publicly consuming and creating demand from printers and authors for these transgressive narratives.

I follow de Certeau, Newcomb, and Liebler in treating the maidservants, schoolgirls, and other women readers of non-elite literature as "poets of their own acts" rather than as uneducated, indecent, or uncritical readers. Told by the state, educational institutions, and upper classes that they should only read religious material if they read at all, early modern working women repurposed their basic literacy skills to enter into worlds of song, adventure, and fantasy. This resistance to (only) consuming the godly literature prescribed to them is evidence of my theory of rhetorical reading: working women readers made active choices about the textual material they read, and, in turn, the narratives of gender and class they consumed and propelled through market demand.

These lesser-studied narratives advanced in ballads and chapbooks illuminate rhetorics of early modern women's work that have seldom been the subject of rhetorical or literary analysis. Through the "obscenity and dubious morality of streets ballads," they participated in all-women networks relaying advice about avoiding bad marriage partners and preventing sexual assault. Through what critics saw as "repetitive, hackneyed, derivative, old-fashioned, conservative, formulaic, ill-informed and...juvenile" chapbooks (Newcomb, "What Is a Chapbook?" 62), they engaged in practices of imagination that challenged gender and class hierarchies, and the popularity of those texts extended those rebellious ideas to audiences beyond their own social ranks. Importantly, rhetorical reading enabled them to practice critical thinking and reader-response even if the archive might never preserve their interactions with the text. The next section contextualizes early modern popular literature in order to situate the rhetorical reading of working women that I will explore in my later analyses of ballads and chapbooks.

"Scene[s] of Consumption":[42] Early Modern Popular Literature

The previous section of this chapter established early modern popular literature as an understudied site; fortunately, however, there is increasing innovative scholarship that takes seriously these non-elite genres, especially ballads. This section summarizes that current scholarship around early modern popular literature and provides an overview of the genres, circulation patterns, and common narratives of this category of reading material. After this synopsis, the subsequent sections will provide more in-depth analyses of women's reading of particular genres through examination of primary sources.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a surge in interest in non-elite early modern popular culture, evidenced by works such as Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe.* "Popular culture" was a term that was loosely defined; Burke stated it was best understood "in a negative way as unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite" (xiii). Barry Reay described it as "the 'little' as opposed to the 'great tradition'" (2). While the early 1980s saw much inspired scholarship around popular culture, the term itself soon became problematized. Many scholars, prominently including Chartier, pointed out that there was not a neat break between elite and popular cultures. The break between cultures was porous, and elite women and men also participated in sites frequently associated with the "popular" classes. This extended into print, too: elite readers could and would peruse ballads, chapbooks, and jestbooks often associated with the plebeian classes. Furthermore, the term "projects cultural unity backward onto social phenomena that were not lived as united" (Newcomb, "What Is a Chapbook?" 58); even among the "popular" classes, there was still a complex hierarchy of rank, and customs could also vary by locality or the age and gender of participants.

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[42] Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance* 217.

While it is not possible to reconstruct a singular culture of the lower classes, as Tessa Watt argues in her influential study *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, "Should we completely abandon the concept of 'popular culture', or can we find a more constructive way of using it?" (2). Indeed, although elites could participate in "popular culture," as M. O. Grenby points out, non-elites "could not, in general, cross out of their cultural boundaries by participating in elite culture" (32). Thus, while we cannot point to a cultural practice or text and say that belonged wholly to a single social group, we can highlight understudied texts and events in which the lower classes could and did participate.

In order to recover, then, practices that the lower classes did engage in (even if not exclusively so), scholars began to turn to texts available to those classes. Spufford most influentially began this endeavor with *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*:

> The attention of historians interested in pre-industrial communities and in non-élites within them has only recently slowly turned from the reconstruction of the economic frameworks of such communities to the much more nebulous and more difficult attempt to recreate the mental world and imagery which such people had at their disposal. One of the very limited ways in which this can be done is to describe the fictional world to which the men, or women, who could read but could not necessarily write could be admitted in the late seventeenth century… (1-2)

Through attention to popular literature of the period like chapbooks, Spufford attempted to recreate "the mental world of the peasant reader" (1) and, in doing so, argued that reading-literacy was much more extensive than scholars had previously estimated.

Like "popular culture," "popular literature" is also a term with a fuzzy definition. In "Popular Literature," Bernard Capp defines it as "the short tracts that seem, by style and price, to

have been aimed at the lowest levels of the literate" (198). Other scholars have pointed to its

distribution by itinerant peddlers (Newcomb, "What Is a Chapbook?" 29), low cost of purchase

or "cheapness" (Watt 1), opposition to elite literature ("a marginal position with respect to the

kinds of works on which literary studies and art history have ordinary concentrated," Murphy

and O'Driscoll 5), and ephemerality (McDowell). Indeed, along with elitist biases in the

academy, the archival challenges posed by the ephemerality of much popular literature has also

contributed to its being under-studied. Thankfully, the expansion of digital archives has helped

improve access to the resources that have been preserved, although one must be cognizant of the

partiality of the archive: Angela McShane Jones estimates that approximately ten thousand

individual copies of ballads from the second half of the seventeenth century have survived,

which suggests that several million were printed in the same period (qtd. in Fox, "Approaches to

Ephemera" 119).

Due to the expansion of digitization and the hard work of archivists, however, studies of

early modern popular literature have made important contributions across several disciplines in

recent years. In particular, concentration on these ephemeral and popular materials has been

valueable to study of the lower classes. Patricia Fumerton, who has done much work to study and

make accessible ballads as an important genre in early modern literature, argues that ballads are a

much better means of studying non-elite culture than the much more frequently studied site of

the theater:

> If we are truly to see the mobile lower orders, we must instead look to more lowly street
>
> literature. … Through these popular songs that were also ownable texts--the only works
>
> of the period that could really be afforded, and thus made their own, by the lower
>
> orders… To such lowly street literature, not to rogue pamphlets or drama, we must turn if

we are fully to inhabit the aesthetic space of the itinerant working poor. ("Making

Vagrancy (In)Visible" 204)

Fumerton's edited work on *Broadside Ballads from the Pepys Collection* as well as a special

issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly* focused on early modern ballads (*Living English

Broadside Ballads*) are some more recent examples of the expansion of the study of ballads in

particular.

Ballads, however, are not the only genre associated with early modern popular literature.

Chapbooks (short, usually unbound books distributed by chapmen, or peddlers), almanacs, news-

sheets, and pamphlets were all very common. It is almost impossible to summarize the content of

this literature, other than genres of all types were found: religious and secular, fact and fiction

(and fiction titled as history), prescriptive literature, and fantasy. Some popular themes include

prophecies and astrology, chivalric romances, husbandry and recipes, jestbooks and tales of

practical jokes, didactic religious texts, outlaws and rogue literature, courtship advice, proverbs,

and fantastic stories of monstrous births, to name a few. Charles C. Mish counted as the most

popular texts of short fiction in the seventeenth century *Aesop's Fables*, *The Pilgrim's Progress,

Isle of Man* (a religious story), and *Pandosto* (a romance) ("Best Sellers"). Capp summarizes

well the range of this group of texts: "One lasting impression from this survey is of the immense

diversity of popular literature and of the popular culture behind it, which absorbed bawdy

jestbooks and doom-laden warnings of Hellfire in equal measure" ("Popular Literature" 229).

The breadth of these texts are a reminder of the diversity of perspectives and beliefs, often

contradictory, that are available to a group of people, complexity which can be reduced in the

effort to create historical narratives.

Most scholars trace the inception of such literature to around 1550 and link its development to advances in literacy and education as well as printing. Spufford argues that the rapid increase in the printing of this literature is evidence of greatly increased reading literacy among the plebeian classes (*Small Books* 9-10); certainly, publishers and printers would not be able to distribute so much reading material unless there were a market for it (Hackel, "Popular Literacy" 94). Ballads were "the most printed and disseminated form of literature" and were printed in the millions (Fumerton, "Introduction" 169), and hundreds of thousands of almanacs were printed in the same period (Kesson & Smith 14). When a publisher died in 1664, his stock included approximately 90,000 chapbooks (Capp, "Popular Literature" 199). While literacy and access to printed materials were greatest in urban areas, especially London, rural places, too, had access to such cheap literature through the chapmen who traveled all over the country to sell such material (Watt 28). In addition to encountering such cheap print through the hawkers selling it, readers could come into contact with these texts through listening to ballads being performed in the streets, hearing literature read aloud by others, or seeing cheap print (especially ballads) posted on the walls of alehouses and churches, the outsides of buildings, or in people's homes as decoration. The sheer extent of the numbers of printed copies and the avenues for encountering such text surely indicate that this popular literature extended far beyond the elite classes and was readily available to and embraced by lower class women and men, too. Scholars have deduced other pieces of evidence for determining whether the popular literature was aimed at and read by the lower classes, including pointing to stories with apprentice heroes (Burke 70-71), the simplicity of the language suggesting easy access for those with rudimentary literacy skills (Burke 347), literacy narratives in spiritual autobiographies of those from modest backgrounds

(Spufford, *Small Books*), and prefaces identifying intended readers as poor people (Watt 294) or specific groups of workers (such as in the work of Thomas Deloney).

The copiousness of such material necessitates that there were hardly singular narratives advanced in this literature. However, while it would be impossible to address every theme in this enormous body of texts, addressing common themes of labor and gender in these texts helps to situate the primary materials I analyze. Although knights and royalty were common heroes in popular romances inherited from medieval traditions, so, too, were ordinary people from humble backgrounds that went on to accomplish heroic deeds and enjoy wealth and fame, such as Tom Hickathrift and Dick Whittington. Spufford refers to these as the "Poor Boy and Girl Make Good" stories (*Small Books* 245). One argument for the reach of popular literature into the laboring classes is that these stories often had workers as the protagonists or even heroes in their stories. This pattern is best exemplified by Thomas Deloney, a weaver who became a writer, who wrote several pieces of fiction that lionized particular occupations, including *Jack of Newbury* (1597, weavers), *The Gentle Craft* (1598, shoemakers), and *Thomas of Reading* (c. 1600, clothiers). Mark Hailwood argues that ballads played a central role in establishing and celebrating occupational identity formation. However, some professional and middling-class occupations were treated with total disdain, above all lawyers, but this group also included landlords, merchants, and occasionally masters of apprentices and servants. The admiration for royalty but contempt for the professional classes is best illustrated by the ballad *The King and Northern Man* (1688-1709?), in which a poor man is deceived by his lawyer, so he goes directly to the king, who sides with the poor man and rights the wrong. Themes of cross-class disguises are common, too, with an ordinary person being revealed as nobility in many ballads and chapbooks. Of course, the most well-known text dealing with wealth distribution is Robin Hood,

a popular figure in ballads and chapbooks. However, while Robin Hood and his merry men were inherited from pagan stories, the component of the outlaw stealing from the rich to give to the poor is actually a theme invented in the early modern period (Capp, "Popular Literature" 207), a time coinciding with the development of national poor relief systems.

Although these stories might be dismissed as wish fulfillment, and in many cases magic is involved, these narratives are ones in which the social order is severely disrupted and, therefore, called into question. In focusing on the reading of servant women in particular, Newcomb observes,

> When a scene of consumption involves a romance of service, the problem of lower-class women's fiction reading is put in its most intense form. The scene imagines the servant girl's dream of marriage and freedom as, precisely, unimaginable. By dismissing her reading as a fulfillment of fantasy, the scene masks elite fears that the romance of service may tell her something all too true: that service is founded on an arbitrary system of social assignment, riddled with self-contradictions. Servant readers may not gain their ambitions without revealed parentage or lucky marriage, but they may see the thinness of ideology that keeps them where they are. (*Reading Popular Romance* 217)

The ways the poor became rich, or were revealed to be all along, highlight the arbitrariness of the social hierarchy for the reader who, as de Certeau says, "insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation." I see Newcomb's description of realization and de Certeau's "insinuation" as practices of rhetorical reading in which lower-class readers absorb and re-circulate discourse that questions seemingly unquestionable systems of social rank that governed all aspects of early modern life.

While popular literature typically offered sympathetic portrayals to and of the working classes, the narratives of gender were much more contradictory. Ballads and chapbooks put forth stories of valiant warrior women alongside misogynistic tracts of shrews and wanton women. "Proverbs commonly asserted that women were morally frail or inherently wicked" (Mendelson and Crawford 61), yet the reader also encounters great delight in one story in a jestbook in which a maidservant of an alehouse pees in the beer of a rude male customer (*Pasquil's Jests*, 1629). A common trope is the voyeuristic detailing of a woman's crimes, especially those of sexual transgressors but also "shrewish" wives, and then a grotesque description of her punishment; another common trope is the "transvestite heroine" (Dugaw 183) in which a woman dressed as a man, often to serve as a soldier or to best men in physical combat. (In one ballad, Maid Marian disguised in male attire even beats Robin Hood![43]) And, of course, we cannot deduce everything about women readers from female characters. Through examining discourse about reading romances, Newcomb concludes that women were the most common readers of chivalric romances in the period, even though the protagonists of these stories were knights and other male heroes (*Reading Popular Romance*). The massive breadth and variation of stories about women is evidence that gender was a site of deep contestation and that women encountered multiple and conflicting views of their roles, views to which they no doubt contributed, through their own writing of such tracts, their oral culture which filtered into the texts, and their rhetorical reading in its ability to affect market demand and patterns of circulation.

The next sections will analyze these narratives about gender, using different genres of popular literature and means of reading them as lenses for exploring themes of courtship,

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[43] This ballad, titled *A Famous Battle between Robin Hood and Maid Marian, declaring their Love, Life, and Liberty*, is reprinted in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1965), edited by Francis James Child. The ballad includes no date, and sources date the ballad differently, some in the sixteenth century and some in the seventeenth century.

heroism and femininity, and women's work. I start with the ballad, offering an overview of the ballad as a genre before more deeply exploring how ballads often served as vehicles for the circulation of ideas about women and class that are mostly absent from better known and more frequently studied early modern narratives about gender.

"I wish I the Poet could get in my clutches": The "Anti-Carpe Diem" and Crafty Maid Ballads

Of all the forms of literature and all the genres of texts in the early modern period, Watt asserts definitively, "The printed broadside was the cheapest and most accessible form of print" (11). Ballads were songs, usually with a rhyme scheme, printed on one sheet of paper (either single-sided or double-sided). Their typical length of 80-120 lines is usually determined by the size constraints of this single sheet (Würzbach 2). The sheet did not include musical cues but after the title included a note along the lines of "Sung to the tune of…", showing how familiar certain ballads and their tunes could be (Dugaw 18). Most ballads also included a woodcut image in addition to the text, but authors were seldom recorded.

Ballads were primarily distributed by "hawkers" in the streets of London, who would perform the ballads as a way to sell them to potential customers. Ballads were cheap and financially accessible to many of the lower classes (Würzbach 20), but an early moderner could encounter a ballad in multiple avenues without ever purchasing one: "The ballad was a very public medium: performed to gathered crowds, passed around in taverns, sung at work or in holiday festivals" (Watt 69). These multiple encounters--textual, aural, and visual--also created several avenues of participation for people of varying literacy abilities. In a religious text from 1595, the author recalls observing illiterate people hanging ballads in their home: "though they

cannot read themselves, nor any of theirs, yet will they have many Ballades set up in their houses, that so might learne them, as they shall have occasion" (Nicholas Bownde, *Doctrine of the Sabbath*, qtd. in Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* 12-13). Many early modern scholars have pointed to the ballad as evidence that the early modern period was not the point in time in which society transitioned from orality to print culture, but rather a time in which oral and print were completely interdependent: "both manuscript and printed works enshrined material gathered from circulation by word of mouth and, on the other [hand], they fed back into it. The boundaries between speech and text, hearing and reading, were thoroughly permeable and constantly shifting so that the dichotomy is difficult to identify and impossible to sustain" (Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture* 39). Since the ballad provides multiple entry points to be able to be "read," it is a fruitful genre to trace the textual participation of those who were semi-literate or who sought to teach themselves to read.

Although ballads seldom noted their authors, historian Adam Fox employs the creative method of looking at libel suits claiming defamation from ballads. He finds that "obscure tradesmen and artisans, yeomen, and husbandmen of England's small towns and villages" (*Oral and Literate Culture* 334)--and some plebeian women--were named in lawsuits as authors of these defamatory ballads. While this archival finding is one of our only direct sources of plebeian women participating in ballad creation, the theoretical association of women with oral culture and storytelling meant that non-elite women were regularly linked to the performing and purchasing of ballads. Women were commonly associated with oral storytelling, especially through the passing down of fairy tales and "old wives' tales" (Mendelson and Crawford 217). Well-known characters in popular literature like Old Mother Bunch, an alewife famous for telling tales and prophecies, embody this association, and we find many women characters

providing the oral voices in printed ballads. In 1631, Richard Brathwaite bemoaned leaving the city for the country by noting that "every poore Milk maid can chant and chirpe [news ballads] under her Cow, which she useth as an harmeless charme to make her let downe her milk" (*Whimzies, or a New Cast of Characters*, qtd. in Smith 152). Elite denigrations of ballads were often done through the guise of the balladwoman as a symbol of promiscuity (Smith 152).

These associations make the ballad a ripe site of investigation for the literacy practices of early modern working women as ballad consumers. Watt remarks, "Although we cannot recover the reaction of the individual buyer, we [can look] at how the collective responses of cheap-print 'consumers' exercised an influence on what was printed, and especially what was reprinted…we [can] look at a body of long-enduring ballads which was to some extent 'produced' by the consumers through the process of selection" (4). In light of this observation, I turn to two popular themes in ballads that are largely absent in more frequently studied genres of the early modern period, including those written by women. These two narrative themes are ballads that discourage women from hasty marriage in order to avoid bad marriage partners, or what I call the "anti-carpe diem" poems, and humorous ballads in which women trick lecherous men trying to seduce them, referred to as the "Crafty Maid" ballads. These two themes are very popular in the ballad literature despite their relative absence in other genres, and their popularity lasted for many decades. I analyze the prominence of these ballads as evidence of plebeian women's prominent participation in ballad exchange, since these sets of ballads could not have maintained their popularity without an active market. Through emphasizing the role of ordinary women as agentic consumers in the ballad market, we can recover a rhetorical reading tradition of advice-giving passed from women to women over issues of courtship and sexual predation.

While early modern popular literature and elite literature have many dissimilarities, they do share an almost overwhelming preoccupation with love and courtship. However, while elite literature is dominated by the perspective of elite men in themes regarding courtship, there is evidence of efforts to appeal to non-elite women in many ballads. Interestingly, courtship was likely a site in which lower-class women enjoyed *more* agency than their aristocratic counterparts: "Because of their relative youth and their physical and financial dependence on parents and other kin, women from the highest ranks had least agency in courtship... They might be allowed to veto a disliked match, but had very limited powers to insist on their own choice" (Mendelson and Crawford 112). Without the obligation to satisfy the economic interests of their parents, women of the lower classes enjoyed an active role in the courtship process:

> For most women, courtship was more like a lengthy series of private negotiations than a *fait accompli* arranged by parents… Throughout all the stages of this process, women were active in negotiation and choice, and in signalling and controlling their preferences. The repertoire of gesture through which women mediated the sequence of courtship was generally less overt--and indeed deliberately more ambiguous--than the forceful role allotted to men; nevertheless women's active participation in the process was equally important. (Mendelson and Crawford 116)

Moreover, young women in the courtship process comprised a significant share of the population. Girls often left their homes as teenagers to be servants, yet the average age of first marriage for women was in the late twenties for much of the period and even reached as high as thirty in some years (Spufford, *Small Books* 157).

As a result, historians Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford observe that popular literature "often contrasted the matrimonial slavery of daughters of the aristocracy with the

relative freedom of choice enjoyed by poor women" (108-109). In *Love's Downfall* (1693-95?), a Romeo-and-Juliet-esque ballad in which the parents prevent the union of two young lovers who commit suicide, the female protagonist laments,

> Would I have been a scullian-maid
>
> or a servant of low degree,
>
> Then need not I have been afraid,
>
> To ha' loved him that would love me.

Women's active role in coutrship results in a wide range of ballads and other popular literature devoted to young women navigating the search for a desirable romantic partner, as well as warding off threats from men who were not so desirable. While this body of literature also includes many potentially patriarchal themes, especially an obsession with the preservation of chastity, it also includes many themes that are under-studied in the period. The most prominent theme in popular literature about love is an ideal and happy marriage, which accommodated both male and female perspectives. However, the category of love did not shy away from narratives of love gone wrong. While some ballads mocked "shrewish" wives and cuckolds, other ballads "denounced the masculine vices of drinking, whoremongering, gambling, and jealousy" (Hubbard 50). As one interesting narrative of women's courtship choice, in the ballad *Will the Merry Weaver, & Charity the Chamber-Maid* (1672-96?), the chamber-maid accepts the weaver's advances only after he teaches her to read. This ballad, for example, illuminates how women could negotiate and pursue marriage as a site of social advancement rather than solely as a vehicle for romantic love. These alternative narratives provide nuance to discussions about the history of gender, particularly for women of the lower classes.

Compared to these alternative narratives, Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" (published 1681) and Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (1648) are among the most frequently canonized and taught poems of the seventeenth century. Often described as "carpe diem" poems, these poems encourage women to marry or find a mate before they age and their beauty fades, revealing stereotypical attitudes about gender and age. However, alongside the carpe diem poems exists a broad culture of ballads *discouraging* women from marrying hastily. These ballads encourage women to exercise caution in courtship and marriage. Instead of the fading beauty and decay omnipresent in the carpe diem poems, they warn women against men taking their money, being deceitful, or abandoning them. I deem this set of texts the "anti-carpe diem" ballads. While there are multiple ballads in this genre, here I focus on the two ballads *The Married-womans Case: OR Good Counsell to Mayds, to be carefull of hastie Marriage, by the example of other Married-women* (Parker 1625?) and *The cunning Age. OR A re-married Woman repenting her Marriage, Rehearsing her Husbands dishonest carriage. Being a pleasant Dialogue between a re-married Woman, a Widdow, and a young Wife* (Cart 1625?).[44]

These ballads are addressed to young women readers potentially seeking a marriage partner. They warn young women against impulsively entering into relationships with men, in both cases of yielding to men's sexual advances only to be abandoned or marrying quickly to discover their husband is abusive, drunken, and/or a gambler. Men as potential suitors across the class spectrum are presented as liars, drunks, spendthrifts, and "whoremongers," whereas women are presented as honest and well-intentioned, if perhaps naive. Unlike prescriptive conduct

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[44] Other examples include: *Here begins a pleasant song of a Mayden faire, To purchase her desire, her Coine she did not spare, And shee most freely parted with her money To a Youngman, the which shee call'd her dearest Honey* (1630?); *An Excellent New SONG, Call'd The Injur'd LADY; OR, The hard hearted Gentleman, Being a true Relation of a young Lady Two Miles from London, (after Contract to a young Gentleman) was dishonorably left, notwithstanding her great Fortune, which may be a warning to all Virgins* (1691); and *A Warning for Maides: Or the false dissembling,,* [sic] *cogging, Cunning, cozening young Man, Who long did try and use his skill, To wo a coy young Maid to his will And when he had obtain her love, To her he very false did prove* (Crimsal 1634-58?).

literature which often consists of a male author imparting advice on how women should behave, the "anti-carpe diem" ballads are usually told in a female voice advising young women against repeating her mistakes. Other popular literature considering courtship commonly acknowledged women's agency in rejecting partners: chapbooks such as *The Academy of Complements* (1670) and *The Art of Courtship* (1686), which were collections of stories, advice, and letters related to courtship, provide template rejections for maidens alongside template compliments and dialogues for men. What is unique about the "anti-carpe diem" ballads, however, is that this genre set presents an all-woman rhetorical situation, with a woman narrator speaking (singing?) to an audience of young women. These ballads then textually recreate an oral culture of women passing on advice to other women; in theory, young women could seek advice from older women by "reading" these ballads.

While *The Married-womans Case* does not explicitly name its narrator, its full title shows its intent of passing down women's experience to other women: *Good Counsell to Mayds, to be carefull of hastie Marriage, by the example of other Married-women*. In this ballad, the trials of the wife are recounted so as to "Let no woman heedlesly marry a man, / before she has tride his condition." While the stock figure of the "shrew" and her long-suffering husband are much discussed in early modern literature, ballads like *The Married-womans Case* instead present sympathetically the long-suffering wife. While wife-beating was legally tolerated in early modern England depending on the reason and extent of the beating, *The Married-womans Case* reframes physical abuse as no fault of the woman:

> For when to the Alehouse he bringeth a Fox home,
>
> hee'l finde some occasion to baste her:[45]

---

[45] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to catch the fox" or "hunt the fox" meant to get drunk. "Baste" can mean to beat or to thrash.

> She seldome shall goe without her face blacke

> She shall not want blowes, though vitle she lacke

In addition to physical abuse, the ballad also describes the wife's susceptibility to venereal disease due to her husband's adultery, the additional women's labor required to take care of her children when her husband provides no support, the stress caused by her husband's jealousy, and her loss of financial support due to her husband's gambling. In recreating advice passed between women through reading, these ballads are an important source of women's issues that are seldom discussed in canonized literature.

Many of the "anti-carpe diem" ballads are not as serious as *The Married-womans Case*, which is notable in the range of issues covered. However, almost all of these texts heavily warn young women readers against men who will steal their money. Men commonly promise to be good husbands, only to use their wives' earnings on alcohol and gambling. This is an interesting theme given that working women are often assumed to be financially dependent on men; in fact, it shows that singlewomen enjoyed more financial agency than married women. This observation highlights a potentially more subversive theme in a subset of these ballads: the rejection of marriage altogether. While the majority of ballads dealing with these themes encourage young women readers to exercise caution and deliberation, a significant minority include women spurning marriage altogether or finding contentment in widowhood. Despite the fact that singlewomen might have constituted more than 20% percent of the population in the period (as estimated by Mazzola 118), few scholars outside of Amy M. Froide's landmark study *Never Married* have focused on singlewomen. Mendelson and Crawford note, "Both contemporaries and demographers have problematized celibacy, treating marriage as normal, and then 'explaining' singlewomen's failure to marry…it should be equally valid to explore why people

marry; it is no more 'natural' than the single state" (167-68). These ballads are an interesting disruption to common narratives about love and marriage in the period, and they evidence the multiplicity of views women had about marriage and singlehood.

As much as *The Married-womans Case* presents a network of women passing on advice to women readers, *The cunning Age* does so much more overtly. This ballad is presented as a dialogue with three female characters: a remarried woman, a widow, and a young wife, and the characters are assigned to different stanzas to recreate a conversation via song. The ballad begins with just the remarried woman and the widow. Having married again after her first husband died, the remarried woman recounts her regrets at having remarried, chronicling her young husband's penchant for visiting prostitutes and wasting her money. After the widow hears of the remarried woman's experience, she announces that she has two potential suitors but will reject them both ("I shall never be so doting mad"). A young woman named Katherin then joins them, who immediately describes how awful her new marriage is. Her husband promised her that he was rich but is actually poor and now expects Katherin to take care of his five young children, and he torments her with his unfounded suspicion that she will commit adultery. The widow speaks the final stanzas, reaffirming her commitment not to remarry, but also speaking against the negative stereotypes of widows and maidens that pervade poetry:

Yet 'tis said in London, that when we doe bury

Our Husbands, next moneth we are ready to marry:

Oh this is a lying Age,

Oh this is etc.

Nay more, to abash us, the Poets o'th times,

Doe blazon us forth in their Ballads and Rimes,

With bitter invective satyricall lines,

As though we had done some notorious crimes.

Oh this is a scandalous Age.

Oh this is etc.

I would I the Poet could get in my clutches...

These stanzas showcase the rhetorical reading work that non-elite women were involved in through ballads. The reference to the poets in *The cunning Age* accomplishes several tasks related to practices of reading as an agentic act: 1) the women in the ballad "read" or are familiar with misogynistic cultural discourse, especially that advanced in literature; 2) they practice critical reading through their recognition that these narratives are untrue and sexist and through their refusal to passively consume them; and 3) they respond to the misogynistic tropes, both literarily through their dialogue in ballads and as consumers in the ballad market that popularized narratives that challenged patriarchal ones. Through all of these methods that fall under a capacious definition of reading, we can trace non-elite women's literacy practices and better explore multiple perspectives about women's lives through ballads. By framing this engagement as rhetorical reading, we see how women readers (en)countered arguments about gender and engaged in cultural debate through their choices to propel and circulate popular narratives.

While much of the popular literature that concerns deceitful men and their harmful impact on women is sorrowful and serious in tone, some of it is quite playful. A key example of this tonal approach can be found in the Crafty Maid ballads, a subset of ballads in which a man is trying to seduce a young woman only for her to trick the predator by using her wits. These

ballads are humorous and cast young women protagonists as clever, sympathetic, and capable of defending themselves. One can trace the influence of the popular genre of the jestbook in them: "'Jest' meant 'prank', and most jestbooks consist of a number of humorous exploits loosely grouped around a central character…and the ingenious ways in which the hero outwits those he encounters by his repartee, cunning and sheer effrontery" (Reay 216). The audience then delights in the "cream of the jest," in which the hero outwits the antagonist in a way that elicits great laughter. Unsurprisingly, most of the protagonists of jestbooks are men, but texts like the Crafty Maid ballads show that women in popular literature could also be depicted as funny, clever, and cheeky.

I also find the Crafty Maid ballads notable from a gender perspective not only because they offer amusing, sympathetic portrayals of female heroes, but also because the "cream of the jest" of these heroines is often meant to prevent sexual assault. Creating a subgenre of the jestbook devoted to the amusing prevention of sexual harassment and violence suggests that young women readers constituted a sizeable audience for these narratives. Moreover, many of the Crafty Maid ballads make maidservants their protagonists, a population who were "sexually vulnerable" (Dowd, *Women's Work* 23) due to their being outside of the protection of their parents or a husband. In some stories, the male predator is in fact the maidservant's own master, a hazard unfortunately common in the maidservant's workplace of her master's home. Yet, the Crafty Maid ballads acknowledge these sites of gendered and labored peril and subvert them through wish fulfillment and humor. These texts recall the "increased deviousness, fantasy, or laughter" of the consumer of whom de Certeau speaks and show that engagement with certain genres, tones, and themes constituted a kind of rhetorical reading in which women confronted and addressed sexual hierarchies.

The delight of these ballads is, of course, discovering the ways the young maiden outsmarts the pervert harassing her. Many of these ballads adapt the conventions of the "bed trick" to young working women, especially maidservants.[46] In *Crafty Maid of the West: OR, The lusty brave Miller of the Western Parts finely trapan'd. A merry new Song to fit Young-men and Maids* (Wade 1672-96?), a maiden promises the "lusty miller" that she will join him in bed only if he is completely naked, then secretly sprinkles chopped up horse hair and nettle seeds in the bed. She never arrives to join him in bed, but does meet him again when he's naked, covered in rashes, and cursing her; she replies, "tho you thought me beguild / I have cool'd his courage for being so wild." In *Frauncis new Jigge, between Frauncis a Gentleman, and Richard a Farmer* (Attowell 1617?), after a gentleman tries to seduce a farmer's wife, the farmer's wife conspires with the gentleman's wife to pose as her to deceive the gentleman into thinking he has bedded her, only to reveal his wife is aware of his adulterous ways. Similarly, when a master tries to seduce his maidservant in *The Westminster Frolic: Or, The Cuckold of his own procuring. Being a true Relation of a Vintener, who for a considerable quantity of Guinnies undertook to perswade his Servant Maid to prostitute her self to a young Spark...* (1681-84), she takes his money but then tells her mistress who takes her place in bed to trick her own husband while the maid keeps the money.

There are many more ingenious devices that populate these ballads, but I would like to focus more closely on *The subtil Miss of London OR, The Ranting Hector well fitted by this cunning Miss, Who by putting certain Ingredients into his Wine, laid him into a deep sleep, and*

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[46] The "bed-trick" was very common in early modern English literature. While the device is most commonly associated with drama, particularly Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, I am interested here in how the convention is presented for and consumed by working women readers and thus concentrate on its appearance in ballads. For more on the bed-trick in early modern literature more broadly, see Marliss C. Desens, *The Bed-Trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power* (1994).

striping his Gallant Attire, cloathed him in a red Petticoat, and a Coyf on His Head, then sent

him in a great Chest by water to Gravesend (1685-88?). This ballad is notable not only through

its representation of the Crafty Maid subgenre,[47] but also through the sophisticated way it uses

that subgenre to play with tropes of feminine vulnerability and emasculation that results in a

comical and subversive gender reversal. This interrogation of the gender hierarchy demonstrates

the rhetorical reading work of women and their ability to popularize certain narratives through

reading via text selection and circulation.

The subtil Miss of London begins with the typical Crafty Maid set-up: an older man tries

to seduce a young woman and offers her money to sleep with him. More so than other Crafty

Maid ballads, this one strives to establish the class difference between the lecherous man–"a

Ranting brave Gallant"--and the young working woman–"A Miss who near London did set up

her trade." The eventual reversal of the class as well as gender hierarchy makes this ballad

particularly rich for analysis. The young woman invites the Gallant to the home she shares with

her old mother where they serve him dinner. During the dinner, though,

> They ply'd him with Bumpers,[48] which he ne'r deny'd
>
> And likewise with other ingredients beside,
>
> They gave him in order, his courage to cool,
>
> Which quickly did make him as wise as a fool.
>
>
> This Liquor up into his Noddle[49] did creep,

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[47] Aside from the content of the ballad, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that "subtil" meant cunning or crafty, clearly placing *The subtil Miss* into the Crafty Maid tradition.

[48] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a bumper is "A cup or glass of alcoholic drink filled to the brim, esp. for a toast."

[49] "The head" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

So that in short time they had laid him to sleep…

So, after the young woman and her old mother collaborate to get her seducer so drunk that he

passes out, they strip him and dress him in women's clothes:

Thus while he was sleeping they stript off his Cloaths

His Hat, Wigg and Cravat, his Shirt Shoes & Hose;

Then being as naked as e're he was born,

In other Apparrel they did him adorn.

It is at the moment where the young and old women strip the man naked that the gender reversal

of the Crafty Maid ballad becomes most apparent; not only is the narrative reversing the

hierarchy to which we are accustomed, it is also enacting a gender-reversed form of sexual

assault with the women stripping the man naked while he is unconscious. While other ballads,

including anti-carpe diem ones, warn young women of the extreme defenselessness they face if

they are seduced by men, here the man is put into the position of sexual vulnerability.

The goal of the women in *The subtil Miss of London* is not sexual violence, however, but

emasculation. They do not leave the Gallant naked but instead re-dress him in women's clothing:

A course Hempen Smock they did put him on there,

One which the old Woman was used to wear;

A red Petticoat, with a Coif on his Pate,

Then he was array'd at a notable rate.

By dressing the vulnerable man as a woman, the ballad makes clear the reversal of sexual

politics that is at the core of this Crafty Maid's jest. Through the narrative, then, the masculine

theme of sexual prowess is actually overturned into one of comical castration. Significantly, the

replacement of his wig and cravat (a neckcloth usually made of fine cloth) with a smock made of

"course" (coarse) material (a low quality fabric) suggests that the fantasy is not only one of gender reversal, but one of class reversal, as well. The intersection of gender and class to this fantastical readerly disruption to the social order is furthered by the women's decision to choose a red petticoat for the man, as the color red was associated with prostitution.

The crafty women are not done after the clothes business. Rather, they also lock the Gallant in a chest (with a small hole so he can breathe, the text assures us) and have him delivered in the chest back to his rich uncle. The uncle opens the chest to find the drunk Gallant dressed in women's clothing, and "With wonder and laughter did fill the whole town." The women not only reverse the gender politics, but they also make the knowledge of the Gallant's crime public. "With grief, shame and sorrow his Heart it did bleed," so the Gallant goes to find the Miss who embarrassed him so. However, the ballad ends by noting that the Gallant could never find her. In another trope of early modern popular literature, the *subtil Miss* becomes the figure of the outlaw, bending the rule of the law to right wrongs and evading the legal consequences as a sign of her moral rightness.

While many Crafty Maid ballads offer subversive gender themes, it is worth a reminder that the gender politics are sometimes much murkier from the standpoint of contemporary feminism. For example, in *West-Country Lawyer OR, The Witty Maids Good Fortune; Who wisely maintaind her Virginity against the Golden Assaults of the Laywer, who at length Married her to her hearts Content* (1690?), the maid "tricks" the lawyer trying to seduce her by getting him to marry her first. Even with a generous interpretation emphasizing the maid's economic agency through choosing a husband of higher social standing, the ballad's suggestion that concerns of the "assaults" are dismissed through marriage reminds the reader that these narratives circulated in a time in which marital rape was not recognized as a crime. The

juxtaposition of ballads--even those within the same genre or with the same themes, like *The subtil Miss of London* and *West-Country Lawyer*--demonstrate that early modern women encountered competing ideals of gender, and that ideas about women's role in courtship were constantly debated and in flux. Many ballads advance heteronormative patriarchal narratives where all of the maid's desires are fulfilled through finding a husband, and others are overtly misogynist in their delight over the punishment of women who fail to observe traditional gender roles.

However, as we have seen, sometimes women in ballads reject marriage altogether, or sometimes they team up with their mothers to humiliate rich men trying to seduce them. In addition to showcasing the multiple ideas of gender pre-modern women encountered, ballads like the "anti-carpe diem" and the Crafty Maid ballads show how women consumed and therefore created market demand for ballads with more subversive gender narratives. This ability to intervene in marketplaces is evidence of rhetorical, purposeful reading that created new and vital rhetorical situations through the popular genre of the ballad. Ballads may have been dismissed by contemporaries and scholars alike as frivolous, stupid, or culturally inferior, but de Certeau reminds us: "The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices." Something as simple as reading, purchasing, or singing ballads shows how plebeian and working woman of the early modern period used varying degrees of reading literacy to advance non-normative themes of gender and all-female networks, even if these themes and networks could be dismissed as wish fulfillment or time wasting. Clearly, ballad singers, buyers, and readers were "poets of their own acts."

"A Proper Woman": *Long Meg of Westminster* and the Depiction of Women Workers in Chapbook Literature

In addition to ballads, chapbooks constitute the most prominent genre of early modern popular literature. In fact, "by the late seventeenth century the 'chapbook' had begun to take over from the ballad as the most prevalent form of cheap print" (Watt 259). Watt and other scholars take the increasing popularity of chapbooks in the seventeenth century as a sign of increased literacy for laypersons:

> The chapbooks were not, one would have to argue, as adaptable to oral and visual uses as the broadsides [ballads]; they could not be sung for recreation at brideales, transmitted in the performances of minstrels or pasted up on the wall. The fact that the authors now chose a wholly literate form, which had severed its musical ties with the oral culture, may be an indication of how literacy in the countryside was progressing. (Watt 32)

However, the boundary between chapbooks and ballads could sometimes be blurry. Stories, especially about popular characters like Robin Hood and King Arthur, could cross over and move back and forth between chapbooks and ballads without any clear indication of which text came first. Also, many chapbooks included ballads in them as parts of collections of short stories and maxims, including those concerning courtship. Another key difference between chapbooks and ballads is that although there has been substantial renewed interest from scholars in attending to ballads, chapbooks remain deeply understudied despite their popularity and ubiquity in early modern life.

So what exactly was a chapbook? Although the ballad is fairly easy to define, pinpointing a definition for the chapbook is much more difficult. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes in its definition that the term was created later by critics rather than used by early modern readers

themselves: "A modern name applied by book-collectors and others to specimens of the popular literature which was formerly circulated by itinerant dealers or chapmen, consisting chiefly of small pamphlets of popular tales, ballads, tracts, etc." While the most common definitions characterize the chapbook through its distribution by traveling chapmen (and the source of the word "chapbook"), it is clear that the genre has many other associations. It is also known through its "[physical s]ize, length, type, price, content, cultural associations and tone" (Grenby 32). In "What Is a Chapbook?", Newcomb elaborates on how the genre came to be known through its low price:

> The defining poverty of the format [chapbook as "cheap"] is redoubled by the content of chapbooks, which is said to be repetitive, hackneyed, derivative, old-fashioned, conservative, formulaic, ill-informed and though not for children, juvenile... Thus the various descriptors of price, size and content all essentialise chapbooks in terms of lack. (62-63)

Grenby elaborates on how the chapbook carried associations of cheapness through just its appearance:

> A small, cheap book, even if it contained a poem, narrative or sermon which had, in other contexts, been the cultural property of the elite, would still have plebeian associations stemming from its physical form. After all, chapbooks looked very different from the books of the middle and upper classes. They were generally small and short, as we have seen, and often but not always poorly printed on cheap paper, using often fairly rudimentary woodcuts, and, at least before the eighteenth century, were often printed in black letter type. (32)

In other words, through everything from appearance, size, content, circulation, price, materiality, and readership, the chapbook was marked and marketed as "low."

The prevalence and accessibility of chapbooks make them a worthy object of study like the ballad. However, like the ballad, we have almost no way of spotlighting individual readers. While a printed book might be preserved by librarians, hold annotations from its reader, or be an item in a will, the chapbook is almost inevitably lost to history: the very cheapness that indicates its accessibility and value for studying the non-elite reader also marks the ephemerality that makes it difficult to find and analyze. Luckily, we have some preserved chapbooks from archivists and collectors, although those do not indicate individual or even general readership. Thus, again here I turn to narrative, considering popular representations of gendered work in this widely accessible genre to point to narratives of women's labor that working women themselves could have encountered and forwarded by contributing to the popularity of key chapbooks.

In order to explore narratives of working women in early modern popular literature, as well as the role of rhetorical reading in driving the circulation of these representations, I turn to the chapbook *Long Meg of Westminster* (1620). Long Meg was a popular character in early modern popular literature, similar to male characters like Robin Hood and Tom Thumb. However, Meg is unique in that she is a woman who embarks on adventures while serving in a series of occupations including maidservant, laundry maid, and alehouse worker. Alongside the tasks of everyday labor, Meg engages in great feats of physical combat, serves as a soldier and meets the king, and, like Robin Hood, takes from the rich to give to the poor. It is worth returning to de Certeau here, who says of such tales, "[they] frequently reverse the relationships of power and, like the stories of miracles, ensure the victory of the unfortunate in a fabulous,

utopian space. This space protects the weapons of the weak against the reality of the established order" (23).

In this spirit, I focus on three aspects of *Long Meg* to consider early modern working women as rhetorical reading agents in the chapbook marketplace. First, I consider how Long Meg flouts traditional gender roles without resistance, but instead as signs of readerly adulation. Second, I examine the representation of women's labor in the piece, specifically to show how the text illuminates readers' frustrations with women's working conditions and uses Long Meg as a device to remedy those grievances. Finally, I analyze the element of Meg's charity to the poor, a fantasy of wealth redistribution that reframes the anxiety of poor relief for readers whose incomes were precarious. Through these readerly processes of equal parts identification and fantasy, early modern working women acted as rhetorical readers in the early modern print marketplace, advancing the popularity, reach, and legacy of their subversive heroine.

Since *Long Meg of Westminster* is no longer a popular text, it is worth summarizing the work. Patricia Gartenberg provides an essential gist of the chapbook, which "consists of eighteen short chapters, portraying Meg as a courageous if rough-handed heroine who bests her adversaries (always male) in a comic and often roisterous manner. Chronologically arranged, the book begins with Meg's journey to London in her sixteenth year and ends with an old, ill Meg having one last escapade…" (49). Spufford considers it one of what she deems the "Poor Boy and Girl Make Good" narratives and provides a lengthy summary, which is worth quoting at length here for her synopsis is equal parts pithy and lively:

> Meg is a Lancashire lass who comes to London in the carrier's cart aged eighteen, with
> two other girls, in search of a place of service. She is a strapping wench, who beats up the
> carrier when he tries to overcharge the girls, and also uses her fists to set right other

injustices. She is an Amazon, and acts as chucker out, when necessary, at the inn in

Westminster where she is hired as a servant. She meets there, amongst other people, Sir

Thomas More. She ruffles round London at night dressed in men's clothes with a sword

and buckler, but is not thought of, or not presented as, a feminine threat to a male

audience, but on the contrary is universally beloved even by those she beats in fair fight.

(*Small Books* 245)

Despite the fanciful nature of these events, scholars have debated whether Meg was

actually based on a real person (Mish, *Short Fiction* 82; Gartenberg 49; Ray 930). While the

original source for Meg will probably never be known, the first documented mention of her

occurred in 1590, when a chapbook was entered in the Stationers' Register and a ballad titled

"Long Meg of Westminster" was licensed (Mish, *Short Fiction* 82; Gartenberg 49).

Unfortunately, both of these texts are no longer extant. There are numerous mentions throughout

the subsequent decades, but the oldest surviving material we have is the chapbook from 1620

(Mish, *Short Fiction* 82), which is the text analyzed here. While we lack some primary texts, we

do have multiple records of new editions, reprintings, and mentions by prominent writers that

make clear the popularity and familiarity of the character of Long Meg. Capp notes that the story

was reprinted in various chapbooks until the nineteenth century ("*Long Meg*" 302), although the

seventeenth century marked the heights of her popularity. Long Meg also served as a character in

Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (1598) and was the subject of a lost play which was

performed at least fifteen times in a period of three years (Gartenberg 53) and was more

profitable than Christopher Marlowe's two plays during these years (Ray 929-30). As these

examples elucidate, the story of *Long Meg of Westminster* is not a rare archival find or an

exceptional outlier, but rather was deeply interwoven into the popular literature and popular

culture of its time. Its existence is not evidence of a singular subversive author but a whole collective of reader-consumers that propelled the heroine's popularity through rhetorical reading.

Long Meg's following prompts scholars to further interrogate ideals of gender in the early modern period; Meg might be chaste, but she was hardly silent or obedient. Instead, she was known for her physical strength, courage, and boisterous wit. Her acceptance in popular literature again underlines competing standards of femininity in the period. Or, perhaps, it suggests that gender roles varied widely by class. While upper-class women undoubtedly had more economic security and influence in state politics than lower-class women, non-elite women may have had greater freedom in matters of expression, dress, and decorum. Like the Crafty Maid ballads, *Long Meg* is often grouped in the "jestbook" subgenre, and Meg's adventures are often described as "pranks" (106) due to the adventures' comical tone and Meg's own rambunctious yet whimsical manner.

Most obviously, Meg subverts gender roles by dressing up as a man and beating up men. In one particularly amusing story that also echoes the Crafty Maid ballads, Meg's mistress is pursued by a man called Sir James of Castile even though she prefers another suitor. Meg's mistress then offers to buy Meg a new petticoat if she'll dress up as a man and beat up Sir James ("the devil take me if I lose a petticoat," Meg responds 90). Once Meg is in male attire, her mistress tells Sir James that (s)he insulted her and asks him to duel on her behalf. Of course, Meg wins handily, and "Sir James went home with hostess sorrowful and ashamed, swearing that his adversary was the stoutest man in England" (91). Everyone goes to dinner, where Sir Thomas More also happens to be dining.[50] In front of everyone, Meg takes off her hat to reveal her long hair and thus her gender. Everyone bursts into laughter, and "Meg after was counted a proper

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[50] The presence of Sir Thomas More recalls an interest in popular literature in the period in which fantasy and history are blended and casts Meg into the category of legendary "historical" figures.

woman" (92). The multiple layers of gender in this scenario showcase the text's playful

interrogation of gender: Meg is deemed a "proper woman" after successfully beating up a man

while cross-dressing in order to get a new petticoat.

In addition, the chapbook includes several woodcut images, a feature common to

chapbooks. Because of the cheapness of chapbook literature and the expense of creating new

woodcuts, woodcuts were often reused across different publications. The woodcuts used in Long

Meg are ones of a woman beating up a man. Because the characters are in different clothing in

each woodcut, it suggests they were reused woodcuts rather than ones created for this

publication. What is particularly fascinating about these reused woodcuts, though, is that these

images were probably used in stories or ballads about shrewish wives who emasculated or

cuckolded their husbands. The reframing of these images presents a fascinating way in which narratives about gender circulated, were rewritten, and re-circulated depending on context and audience.

Figure 1. Woodcut from Long Meg of Westminster

In the eighteen short chapters of *Long Meg*, the device of Meg beating up a man,

sometimes cross-dressed and sometimes not, is a recurrent one. Meg's physical prowess is

another way in which the story plays with gender expectations through the way it describes and

calls attention to Meg's body. The "Long" of her name refers to her great height, and in the very

first sentence of the text, Meg's extraordinary height is introduced: she was "called for her excess in height Long Meg; for she did not only pass all the rest of her country in the length of her proportion but every limb was so fit to her tallness that she seemed the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a woman's mold" (84). This is a rare instance in early modern literature where a woman's appearance is not defined by her beauty nor by her ugliness; she is instead defined by her height and strength. Moreover, the attention to her body is not voyeuristic but helps explain her character and her feats. Frederick O. Waage elaborates: "The aesthetics of Meg's body are important. Her feminine identity is not compromised by this near-androgyny, because, though physical, it resides in her body's articulation or expression, and not in some basic biological nature" (108). Similarly, in her study of female warrior ballads of the period, Dianne Dugaw argues that they were more pertinent to women of the lower classes, since "physical toughness and energy" (122) were normal for women of these ranks since they were often expected to engage in hard labor.

Meg's body does not just help her win fights, though; it also makes her a more successful worker. Meg is chosen from among other women as a maid for her mistress because of her size:

Methinks she is of a large length,

Of a tall pitch and a good strength,

With strong arms and stiff bones:

This is a wench for the nones.

…

She'll do more work than these twain… (86-87)

It is worth focusing on the moments of women's labor in the text, because they pinpoint probable areas of frustration and vulnerability for women workers of the period, sites that are mediated through the fantasy figure of Long Meg.

In the beginning of the text, for instance, Meg travels with some other young women in search of employment as maidservants in the city. It was common for young women to travel from the country to London and other urban areas to seek positions as maidservants and advance socially through advantageous marriages (see, for example, Hubbard 17) or to save for a dowry and return back to the country. When the carrier attempts to overcharge the "poor wenches" (85), Meg attacks him in order to allow safe and fair passage for the other prospective maids. After a rude customer refuses to pay at her mistress's alehouse and calls Meg a whore, Meg "pummel[s] him so that he was clean out of breath" (89). And when Meg is dining with friends, she witnesses a different rude customer break the servant's pot and begin to beat her. In response, Meg nearly kills him, drags him home to dress him in women's clothes, puts herself in men's attire, and declares his misdeeds to the town, upon which he exiles himself and is never seen again (109-110).

Although these episodes might be dismissed as scenes of comical violence and adventure, they are actually revealing in highlighting economic and gendered anxieties for the working women readers engaging these texts. While in the workplace and trying to secure work, lower-class women (and men) risked being taken advantage of financially and physically. Working women could face financial duress from men who overcharged them for basic services or who refused to pay for their goods, and the workplaces of those in the lower classes (women and men) carried the potential danger of verbal and physical abuse from male customers and masters. *Long Meg of Westminster* calls attention to these issues of class- and gender-based workplace

safety through the fantasy of amending them. In this way, rhetorical reading can be seen as a key

rhetorical resource for lower-class women to participate in cultural debates. Even without access

to influence state officials or the ability to record their own political treatises, they could

encounter, mediate, and advance discourses of women's workplace safety and financial

vulnerability through purchasing and promoting fantasy literature in which it *was* treated as a

social problem.

Working women's financial insecurity is also highlighted through the reverse-poor relief

fantasy that is included in but not unique to Long Meg. Most famously in the tales of Robin

Hood, many heroes and heroines in popular literature of the period display their good character

by giving their wealth to the poor. Meg's charity is portrayed as one of her most heroic traits:

> ....she was famoused amongst all estates, both rich and poor, but chiefly of them which
>
> wanted or were in distress, for whatsoever she got of the rich (as her gettings were great)
>
> she bestowed it liberally on them that had need; there was no poor neighbor dwelling
>
> nigh whom she would not relieve, and if she had seen one come in that looked like a man
>
> and was in distress, if he called for a pot of beer and had no more money in his purse than
>
> would pay for his pot, she would straight of her own accord set before him bread and
>
> beef, and if the man said he wanted money, "Eat, knave," quoth she, "for they must eat
>
> that are hungry, and they must pay that have money." (92-93)

I believe this emphasis on being charitable to the poor in early modern popular literature serves

two major functions. First, broadly, it calls attention to the injustice of the socioeconomic order.

It casts the poor as deserving, and the rich (with the exception of the one distributing the charity)

as undeserving. Given the context of the emergence and expansion of national poor relief during

the period,[51] it also casts that system as insufficient. While other literature of the period delights in stock figures of the able-bodied beggar who relied on poor relief in order to be lazy and refuse to work, these popular stories imagine recipients of charity as worthy and virtuous, which suggests resistance to contemporary models of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor delineated by poor relief overseers and other didactic literature of the period. Second, the identification with the protagonist, here Long Meg, speaks to the hovering prospect of poor relief in the lives of early modern workers. The fact that poor relief became a major theme in their escapist literature suggests omnipresence in their own identities and financial situations. Moreover, the fantasy is not only to accumulate wealth for one's self and to avoid financial uncertainty, but to be the agent of poor relief. These fantasies of wealth redistribution in popular literature do much to highlight the economic situations and anxieties of their rhetorical readers in the same way they call attention to issues of women's workplace safety.

However, *Long Meg* is not an entirely progressive narrative, and there are certainly moments where the politics are ambiguous or conservative. It is worth noting the contradictory role of gender even *within* Long Meg. Chapter 13 is partially titled "how she was married, and how she behaved herself to her husband" (105). In this chapter, Meg submits to her husband and emphasizes her obedience. Yet, there are still five chapters remaining, chapters in which she resumes her deeds of fighting and cross-dressing while her husband is never mentioned again. This chapter highlights the importance of hierarchy within marriage in early modern society, but by juxtaposition to Meg's other exploits shows the possibilities for transgression that existed for singlewomen.

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[51] See the "Advent of State-Based Poor Relief Systems" subsection in the "Historical Context" section of the Introduction for more information.

While Meg's subversion served as exhilaration and amusement in her own chapbooks, other contemporary authors did not appreciate Meg's gender politics. Long Meg emerged as a positive character in works such as the plays *The Womans Sharp Revenge* (1640) and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611), but other texts tarnished Meg's reputation. While *Long Meg* ends with the titular heroine running an alehouse where she provides free meals for the poor, other writers took the alehouse ending as a means to cast doubt on Meg's subversive character. Alehouses were sometimes associated with brothels, and this turned into an opportunity for male writers to reframe Meg as lewd and lascivious. At the end of Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, a text which is sympathetic to male laborers but not women, Meg becomes a woman "common to the call of every man." Meg's association with prostitution is repeated by William Vaughan, Ben Jonson, and Nicholas Goodman (Gartenberg 54). Additionally, Dugaw notes a decline in the trope of the female warrior character in the eighteenth century, a drop that coincided with the upper-class producing more cheap literature emphasizing "idealization of feminine delicacy" after realizing that popular literature "both reflected and shaped lower-class manners" (142).

However, the heated reaction against Meg only speaks to the "long" shadow she cast, a shadow inevitably influenced by the readership that bought again and again the cheap literature that featured her and her deeds. I argue that the text's presentation of lower-class gender roles, its knowledge and depiction of the vulnerabilities of women's working conditions, and its questioning of the unfairness of wealth distribution provide evidence that working women were a substantial portion of its readership. Crucially, such reading is not passive act, but one of rhetorical reading in which women used reading as an available means of persuasion to highlight

and circulate narratives of women's work even if they lacked more traditional methods of intervening in the polis.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of some ballads and the chapbook *Long Meg of Westminster*, this chapter has attempted to recover the rhetorical reading of early modern working women and their agency in the popular literature marketplace. In attending to these under-studied genres, we gain insight into themes of courtship, marriage, sexual assault, workplace safety, and poor relief that are lacking in canonized or prescriptive literature of the period. And without physical evidence of their reading habits, we can engage in "critical imagination" (Royster & Kirsch) to understand working women as agents in print culture. De Certeau reminds us that consumers make "innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules" (xiii-xiv). Rhetorical reading thus emerges as a persuasive act of transformation and adaptation as we see alternative narratives of gender and women's work circulating and re-circulating across multiple genres, printings, and editions in the early modern world. The poets may have failed them, but they were "poets of their own acts" all along, even without writing a single word.

While this chapter has emphasized how early modern working women used wish fulfillment as devices of politicized literacy to circulate alternative narratives about women's work, such women did not solely rely on fantasy and imagination to make interventions in their workplaces. The next chapter will look at how they participated in local judicial systems by using scribal collaboration and petitions to raise awareness about their working conditions.

Chapter 3

Petitioning and Co-Laboring:

The Rhetorical Collaboration of Early Modern Maidservant Petitioners[52]

On February 28, 1716, Anne Allen's indenture contract was signed. As was standard in the early eighteenth century, Allen's indenture was mostly printed, with only a few blank spaces to be filled in with the particulars of her apprenticeship. In this case, the indenture was drawn up and printed by St. Martin's Grey-Coat Charity Schools. The fact that the indenture contract was printed suggests that a substantial number of children and young adults faced similar expectations for their work as apprentices or maidservants.
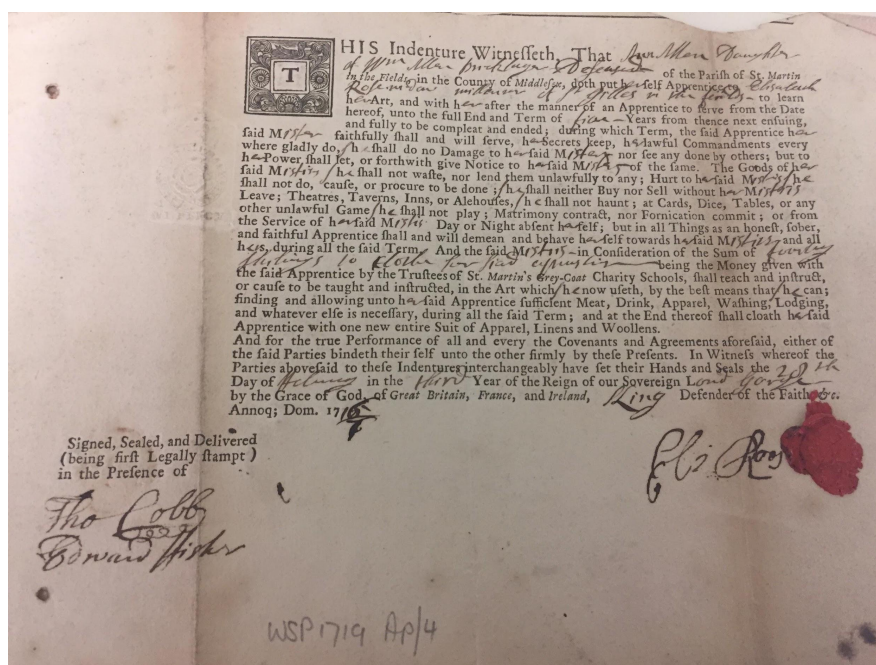

Figure 2. Indenture of Anne Allen (LMA/WSP/1716/AP/4)

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[52] A portion of this chapter provides the basis of a chapter, "To 'meddle with a multitude': Gender at Work in the Petitions of Early Modern Women Servants," in the edited collection *Feminist Circulations: Rhetorical Explorations Across Space and Time*, edited by Jessica Enoch, Karen Nelson, and myself (Parlor Press, 2021).

The majority of the document is pre-printed. This contract includes the following information: the parish of the apprenticeship; the moral obligations of the "honest, sober, and faithful Apprentice," including the expectations that she will not hurt the reputation of her mistress or divulge her secrets, waste her mistress's goods, attend irreputable institutions such as "Theatres, Taverns, Inns, or Alehouses," engage in indecent acts such as gambling and fornication, or marry while bound by her indenture; and the professional obligations of the mistress, which consist of proper instruction in her particular trade and providing sufficient food, lodging, and clothing, and "whatever else is necessary" during the length of the apprenticeship. Only small portions of the contract are available to be edited: the name of the apprentice, the name of the mistress and her trade, the genders of the apprentice and master/mistress (though the obligations of neither the apprentice nor the mistress change because of gender), the length of the apprenticeship, the amount to be paid (female apprentices were regularly paid less than their male counterparts), the date, and the potential for signatures at the bottom of the document. The mistress signed the document "Eliz Roes." There is no signature or mark from Anne Allen.

The existence of such a document--with its blend of pre-printed expectations and small blank spaces for recording particulars--prompts the modern reader to question how much (if any) agency young apprentices and maidservants had upon entering this major phase of their working lives.[53] Likely taught in the charity school to read but not to write because of her gender, young Anne Allen did not even record an "X" for her signature as acknowledgement of her consent to this apprenticeship. With just this evidence, one might conclude that female apprentices like

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[53] See also Urvashi Chakravarty's forthcoming *Fictions of Consent: Slavery, Servitude, and Free Service in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022) in which she explores several early modern texts, including apprenticeship contracts, to show how the "ideologies of slavery were seeded in the quotidian spaces of English life" and these "conceptual genealogies" enabled future practices of racialized slavery.

Anne Allen had little agency in their work and were deeply constrained by contracts like this indenture.

Three years later, Anne Allen, now identifying herself as a "Spinster," submitted a petition to the Justices of the Peace of the city of Westminster. The body of the petition reads:

That yo[r] petitioner being some time agoe bound as an Apprentice to Elizabeth Rose Milliner by the Trustees of the Charity School of St. Martins in the Fields that her sd M.[rs] does refuse to allow her sufficient meat Drink Washing & Lodging & does not take care to instruct her in her s[d] business which if not reminded by yo[r] Worspps it will end in the ruin of your s[d] Peticoner.

Your petitioner therefore humbly prays your Worshipps to take the premises into Consideration & grant her such reliefe as your Worshipps shall think fitt.

(LMA/WSP/1719/AP/3)

As with the apprenticeship indenture, there is no signature from Anne Allen.

Anne Allen's petition is dated April 1, 1719. Just three days later on April 4, the Justices of the Peace of Westminster "pronounced and declared and doe pronounce and declare that for the reasons aforesaid [in Allen's petition] they have discharged and doe discharge the said Anne Allen from the said Indenture of Apprenticehood to the said Elizabeth Rose" (LMA/WSP/1719/AP/5). Early modern administrators often recorded brief summaries on the back quarter-folds of such documents for the purposes of record-keeping. This document is summarized as the "Order for discharging Anne Allen a poor child from her Indenture of Apprentice hood."

Although Allen may have had little say in the terms and placement of her apprenticeship, she later demonstrated great rhetorical savvy in navigating varying legal, textual, and oral environments that would enable her to change the terms of her employment. Her successful bid to exercise agency in her workplace required knowledge of how and where to file a petition, to collaborate with the professional scribe who would physically write the content of her petition with her, and to navigate (and perhaps attend) the Quarter Sessions of the Justice of the Peace. Her ultimate success was a product of her understanding her social and legal environment as well as the expectations for her mistress laid out in her apprenticeship indenture. Her rhetorical action also required the literacy skills to access and use a particular genre in a way that deployed existing genre conventions toward a personal goal.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation documented how charity schools (such as St. Martin's Grey-Coat Charity School, which Allen presumably attended) and orphanages used rhetorical education as a means to transmit ideologies of labor and gender. Female students learned habits of industriousness and obedience alongside basic literacy skills, such as reading. This model of rhetorical education would mold young girls into the "honest, sober, and faithful" apprentice or servant that was self-sufficient enough not to require poor relief, but subservient enough to perform all tasks required of them and to never question their place on the social hierarchy.

However, the intended goals of charity schools and orphanages are at odds with another fact of the archive: maidservants and apprentices petitioned in large numbers. They petitioned to be discharged for all sorts of reasons, such as Allen's claim that she was not receiving proper instruction. They petitioned for back wages, for better wages, and for owed clothing; they petitioned to clear their name if their masters or mistresses accused them of wrongdoing; and they petitioned for safer workplaces, sometimes from their exposure to the plague or being

overworked, and sometimes to address emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by masters and mistresses.

Thus, I focus on petitions that address the working conditions of early modern maidservants to extend understanding of working women's literacy practices of the period. Although women of many other professions petitioned, the petitions of maidservants are a particularly rich archival resource due to maids' *feme sole*[54] status: petitions of married women were usually either done in tandem with or subsumed by their husbands (though not always), yet maidservants were almost always singlewomen so there was no husband to subsume their identity in this way. But while maidservants petitioned without being filtered through their husbands, their petitions *were* written down by male professional scribes. None of the petitions of maidservants examined in this chapter were, in all likelihood, physically written by women.

Despite this lack of women's physical writing, in this chapter I argue that petitioning in this period constituted an act of *rhetorical collaboration* between petitioner and scribe. Like in previous chapters, I emphasize the rhetorical actions of women without writing literacy. In Chapter 2, I emphasized reading-only literacy through women's consumption of texts; here, I show how women without writing literacy were also able to participate in the *production* of written texts through this key resource of scribal collaboration. While the scribe often filled in genre conventions, contents of petitions are marked by great variation in the construction of the ethos of the petitioner, and the petitions of maidservants also display intimate knowledge of women's lives and their working conditions. I argue that these facets of maidservants' petitions demonstrate that working women leveraged their reading and oral literacy skills to rhetorically collaborate with scribes in the production of a textual document. My study of these petitions

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[54] An unmarried woman.

demonstrates that working women--many of whom were poor and low in status--used these basic literacy skills to bring discussions of workplace safety into public space.

In this chapter, I offer an overview of the culture of petitioning in the early modern period (both before and after the English Civil War, which changed petitioning culture drastically) before turning my attention specifically to maidservants. After outlining the work and status of maidservants in the period, I examine select petitions from maidservants as evidence of their collaborative literacy skills. This chapter considers both petitions by individual maidservants who sought intervention in their personal working situations as well as collective petitions on behalf of groups of maidservants and observes specific rhetorical strategies of each. Various petitioners utilized different subgenres of petitions, cultivations of ethos and humility topoi, and models of circulation, but they all exhibited a class and labor consciousness on the part of their being maidservants. Foregrounding the rhetorical collaboration necessary to the early modern petition shines light on how women without writing literacy were able to act as rhetorical agents in their workplaces.

Petition and Gender in Early Modern England: An Overview

Although the genre of the petition has received notable work from rhetorical scholars such as Alisse Portnoy and Susan Zaeske, its analysis in rhetorical studies is almost solely relegated to the nineteenth (and sometimes twentieth) century. The early modern petition has been explored primarily by historians with very little attention from scholars of rhetoric. However, exploring the petition outside of the history of the United States can greatly expand our knowledge of the genre and of women's rhetorical endeavors. First, the political situation of early modern women living under a monarchy is drastically different from that of the numerous

studies of the rhetorical efforts within American democracy; Portnoy's interest in rhetorical

participation where "women's political intrusion [is declared] as extraordinary" is magnified

when we consider societies without even the affordance of a democratic government. As early

modern historian Amanda Whiting notes, "while petitions may well be a 'marginal' *literary*

genre, they were not marginal to social and political life. Rather, petitioning was a hegemonic

cultural and social practice, and petitions were crucial to, and constitutive of fundamental

relations of power in early modern English society" (*Women and Petitioning* 17; emphasis

original). Furthermore, in focusing on nineteenth-century women's petitions, rhetorical scholars

often emphasize the work of middle- and upper-class women, with Portnoy observing that

"petitions were appropriate vehicles for upper-middle-class women" (617) and Zaeske noting

that women's antislavery petitions were often authored by "thousands of northern, middle-class,

predominantly white women" (148). While Portnoy and Zaeske offer relevant observations about

the role of the petition in enabling rhetorical agency and constituting political subjectivities,

extending the historical focus of the petition yields greater insight into women's rhetorical

constraints as well as the way their rhetorical subjectivities were not only gendered, but also

classed.

    Although the role of the petition in the early modern period has received little to no

attention from scholars of rhetoric, it has received considerable attention among early modern

scholars, with much of the scholarship focused on the petitions produced during the English

Civil War (1642-51), especially from the sudden increase of printed petitions that came with the

breakdown of censorship during the period.[55] Some Renaissance scholars, however, have

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[55] Most prominently within contemporary scholarship, David Zaret argues that the use of petitions during the English Civil War led to the "invention" of the public sphere (*Origins of Democratic Culture*, 2000). For studies of women petitioners during the English Civil War, see Patricia Higgins, "The Reactions of Women, with Special Reference to Women Petitioners" (1973); Ann Marie McEntee, "'The Uncivill-Sisterhood of Oranges and Lemons':

researched the petition outside of its prominence during the English Civil War. Both Erin

Sadlack and James Daybell, for example, look at women's rhetoric in letters of petition, which

contained the formal request elements associated with the petition genre but were presented in

the form of a letter. Unlike more frequently studied petitions that address national politics, such

as the House of Lords' petition to Queen Elizabeth I to marry and produce an heir or petitions

addressed directly to Parliament, petitioning could also take the form of "[p]rivate petitions [that]

communicated the complaint of a private individual about a matter of personal interest"

(Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 9). Daybell provides a thorough history of the petition and its

use by women, noting that letters of petition were "influenced in different measure by the

classical art form of the medieval *ars dictaminis*, early modern rhetorical theory and revived

theory of the 'familiar' letter" (5). He also observes that instructions for letter-writing in

vernacular manuals speak to the availability and knowledge of the genre among literate women

of lower ranks (5). With increased accessibility of knowledge of the form of the petition, women

heavily utilized this genre for various effects:

> Female petitioners made a broad range of patronage suits, both for themselves and on
>
> behalf of family, dependents and other groups: [friends], neighbours and clients. For
>
> themselves, women wrote to procure grants of land, wardship, pensions and annuities,
>
> and to settle disputes over jointure and inheritance; they also wrote seeking favour and
>
> advice, to influence local officials, and to secure justice and release from imprisonment.
>
> Acting as patrons and intermediaries, women wrote concerning the preferment of suitors

Female Petitioners and Demonstrators, 1642-53" (1991); Patricia-Ann Lee, "Mistress Stagg's Petitioners: February 1642" (1998); Mihoko Suzuki, "Petitioning Apprentices, Petitioning Wives" (2003); and Amanda Whiting, "'Some Women Can Shift It Well Enough': A Legal Context for Understanding the Women Petitioners of the Seventeenth-Century English Revolution" (2004) and *Women and Petitioning in the Seventeenth-Century English Revolution* (2015).

to offices, and the bestowing of titles and honours, thus performing many of the same patronage functions as men… (3-4).

Daybell's analysis speaks to the ubiquity of petitioning in early modern society and to the range of purposes it served in women's economic, social, and political matters. Other historians such as Amy Erickson, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, Laura Gowing, and Eleanor Hubbard have documented the normalcy and frequency with which women participated in courts and other local legal systems, as petitioners, witnesses, and litigants.[56]

While Daybell focuses on letters of petition and therefore women's letter-writing, the genre of the petition was also available to women considered illiterate. Thus, petitions are significant in examining the rhetorical endeavors of working women. Sadlack notes that easy access to professional scribes meant that "[m]any petitioners employed such professional scribes, so that even if the petitioner herself could not write she was still able to petition" (232). In some instances of petitions, the document even acknowledges the authors' illiteracy. Consider, for instance, the justification for the signees' act of petitioning in *The Apprentices Petition and Propositions, presented unto the Honourable House of Commons in Parliament Assesmbled* (1647): "Nor can we see any reason why a poore or illiterate man (being injured) should not seeke redresse of his grievances, as well as a rich and learned" (qtd. in Suzuki 138). Here, the apprentices' petition makes explicit the use of the genre by illiterate persons. Such evidence points to the accessibility of the genre of the petition, and it also establishes a long precedent of petitionary activities that occurred throughout the early modern period, long before the American antislavery and antiremoval petitions of the nineteenth century.

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[56] For a specific number, Tim Stretton records that women "appeared as litigants in almost one third of cases" in Elizabethan England (39).

Moreover, petitioning was available to the imprisoned, who petitioned to be released or to clear their name. It was also a common practice associated with poor relief, and many women petitioned for access to welfare or housing. Examining petitions concerning poor relief is also a potentially rich site for examining other understudied aspects of women's work; in 1644, for example, Mary Luck petitioned the Justices of Westminster for poor relief for taking care of an orphan (LMA/WJ/SP/1644/012). Foundlings, orphans, and children of imprisoned persons were often sent to be raised by other women who received poor relief for taking care of the children. Such a practice may not immediately come to mind when we think of "professions," but many lower-class women partially or wholly relied on this income from childcare. Examination of petitions addressing illiteracy and poor relief is one means of expanding our understanding of how poor and lower-class persons in the period exercised rhetorical agency.

The centrality of petitioning to early modern society is also evident from the extensive use of the word "petition" during the period, and it points to the multiple shapes this fluid genre took. Petitions could be presented as the direct political request we associate with the word today, but they could also be embedded in personal or business letters or published as pamphlets. The word "Petition" also functioned prominently as a verb; "to petition" often meant delivering a written request, but it could even refer to the act of making a request without a corresponding written document or gathering in public space to make such requests ("Petition, v." *Oxford English Dictionary*). For this chapter, I am interested in employing a broader definition of the petition than a document with a request delivered to Parliament or the monarch. Carolyn R. Miller's critical definition of "genre as social action," as opposed to genre as form, allows us to think more copiously about the function that a petition might perform. For example, while I am interested in using archival research to examine how individual maidservants sent petitions to

local officials, I also consider how women used printing and pamphleteering as avenues for petitioning. Keeping this fluid definition in mind expands the body of texts we might consider and also helps us to see that women were inventive rhetors who adapted genre to various exigencies.

Furthermore, defining "petition" not only in terms of use, but also more theoretically in terms of reoccurring social actions enables us to better understand the extent and types of women's engagement in the polis. Whiting offers this useful theory for defining "petition:"

> ...in addition to these two formal contemporary classifications--type of letter and division within the letter--petition is essentially a mode of address and not merely a formal written instrument. Thus it exists also as the mood in which various other kinds of spoken and written performances are cast. That is to say, the word "petition" simultaneously signifies three things: first, the thing requested and the means of expressing it—both as nouns (*the petition*); second, the act of requesting, a verb (*to petition*); third, the mood of the action of that verb. Thus, petitioning establishes a subjunctive mode of political discourse; for just as the grammar of the petition may be described as operating in the subjunctive mood…so petitioning as a social process operates in a domain of unfulfilled yet hypothetically realizable desires. (*Women and Petitioning*, 143; emphasis original)

Whiting's description of petitions as a "subjunctive mode of political discourse" indicates that even though women lacked official citizenship status (using modern definitions of the term), they were able to use petitions as a form of civil participation. Moreover, when considering petitions related to work specifically, I am able to heed Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith's call to focus on work-related rhetorics, which "consider[s] the rhetorical positioning of work itself--both as a broad concept and as it manifested in specific occupational contexts" (200). Yet, in doing so,

I also complicate their theory of "labor as a useful alternative to political citizenship" (250) in histories of feminist rhetoric, showing that to study labor *is* to study political engagement, even in cultures lacking democratic models of citizenship. Thus, this focus on labor extends our knowledge of women's participation in both areas of work and politics simultaneously.

Although petitioning took on varying forms in the period, the written document of a petition typically shared certain rhetorical features, particularly in terms of arrangement and style. Parliamentary petitions "typically adopt[ed] a five part structure: identification of the addressee; identification of the supplicant; a statement of the complaint; request for remedy, often specifying what form it should take; and the appeal for the remedy (the petition proper)" (Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 8-9). Petitions addressing local courts, such as those maidservants and apprentices would use to be released from their indentures, were typically shorter. The first section always consists of the identification of the addressee (i.e. "To the Honorable Justices of the Peace…"), the date, and the name of the petitioner and their declaration to petition. After the petitioner's name, the phrase "Sheweth" or "Humbly sheweth" follows before the body of the petition. The body contains the context of the situation and a description of the petitioner's grievance. This section can vary in length from a few sentences to three or four paragraphs. The last paragraph--which is typically indented from the rest of the petition--contains the request of the petition and a promised exchange of gratitude by the petitioner, which is almost always expressed as prayer: i.e. "And your petitioner shall ever pray &c."[57] Such petitions may or may not include a signature (they often do not). A response to the petition may be recorded on the same document in a different hand, either below the petition

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[57] Jane Donawerth chronicles women's use of poetry to participate in a "gift-exchange" culture since they were "legally propertyless" ("Women's Poetry" 18). It seems similar here, as poor and working petitioners would not be able to offer money or goods but could only offer prayer as an expression of gratitude.

itself or on the back. It may be recorded on a separate document that is sometimes organized in

close proximity to the original petition by an archivist. Often, we are left with only the contents

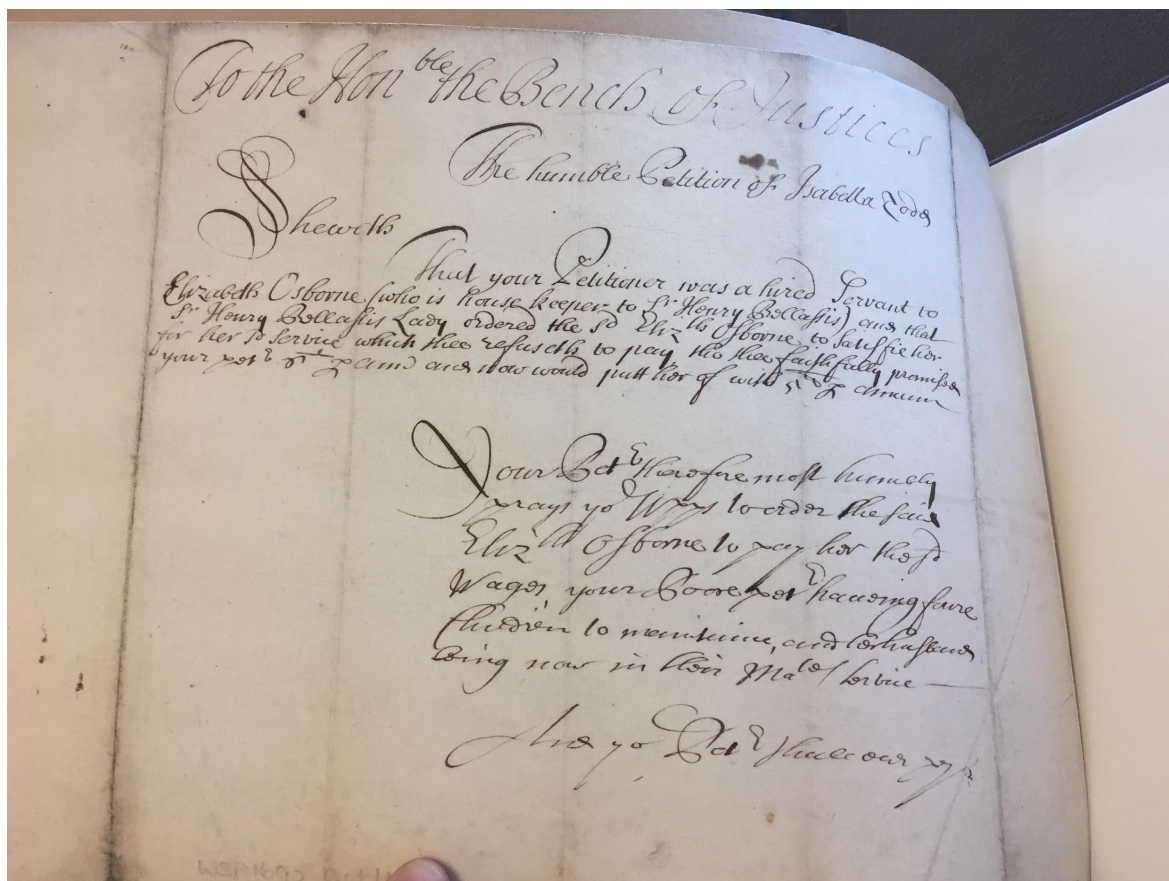of the petition and no means of knowing the outcome of the request.

Figure 3. Petition of Isabella Todd, 1692 (LMA/WJ/SP/1692/10/001). In this petition, which is typical in form to other petitions of the period, Todd petitions her former mistress Elizabeth Osborne to pay her owed wages from her work as a servant.

In addition to form and organization, petitions often shared similar stylistic features,

particularly in their deployment of humility topoi (rhetorical strategies of ignorance and/or

inferiority that the speaker uses to achieve a desired outcome) and pathos (emotional appeals). In

these instances, petitioners portray themselves as helpless, miserable, and weak as a means of

creating emotional appeals that convey the urgency of their case and the inability for petitioners

to resolve the matter without intervention by a higher power such as the court. This deployment

of humility topoi has been a significant subject in the existing scholarship concerning early modern women's petitions, particularly in regard to the gendering of this humility topoi and whether it can be considered a "feminine" style. The deployment of helplessness and emotional appeals of pity particularly marks petitions by wives and widows, especially for women petitioning for the end of the English Civil War to ensure the return of their husbands (and husbands' incomes). "The Humble Petition of Many Thousands of Wives and Matrons" (1643) makes extensive use of this strategy of humility: "in all humility shewing the greatnesse of our dolors and sufferings" (4; A.2.v); "we women are the weaker vessels, and so have the frailer flesh, and are more subject to our failings then [sic] men" (5; A.3.r); "we poore distressed Wives this cold weather lying alone in our beds, without the warme touches and embraces of any man to comfort us" (7; A.4.r); "the terrour of all Christian people, especially of us weake and tender-hearted women" (8; A.4.v). The petitioners' cultivation of humility was widespread in the early modern period, but it was heightened in the language of many women petitioners. Alison Thorne notes that "in deploying the rhetoric of helplessness, these female petitioners are clearly exploiting received assumptions about the physiological and intellectual inferiority of their sex as the readiest means of inducing sympathy for their plight" ("Women's Petitionary Letters" 29). Therefore, employing this hyperbolic gendered imagery would serve as a strong pathetic appeal for women and gain sympathy for their cause.

However, focusing on this humility rhetoric as "feminine" obscures the facts that 1) men also used this rhetoric of weakness in their petitions; and 2) not all women invoked pity and helplessness in the same way or to the same degree. For example, when Richard Keymer petitioned in 1644 for his employer, Thomas Mills, to resume his pay, he described himself as "Hee the Pet^r Richard being a very weake, sickly, poore, Aged, & impotent man"

(LMA/WJ/SP/1644/006). When male apprentices petitioned to be discharged from their indentures due to physical abuse, their descriptions of beatings as emotional appeals are similar to those used by female servants in similar circumstances (with the glaring exception of sexual abuse, which will be discussed later in this chapter). Keymer's self-description reveals another important aspect of the rhetoric of petitioning: even when women (and men) deployed such weakness and pity, this pathos was often associated with poverty, old age, or disability rather than gender, revealing the extent to which interlocking systems of power cannot isolate gender as a factor and must also consider concomitant categories such as class, age, and (dis)ability.

Moreover, maidservants--and women petitioners in general--deployed gender and pathos to differing degrees and sometimes hardly at all. When the daughters of Thomas Nevile petitioned for the uncollected wages of their deceased father, they relied little on emotional appeals and barely invoked gender. The body of the petition notes "That ye said Cor Nevile is now dead and hath left a Family altogether unprovided for, and Debts not yet discharged, so that his children are left wth:out any maintenance, & his Creditors without hope of satisfaction" (LMA Court of Aldermen Paper 1676), a notable but hardly hyperbolic deployment of pity. Even more striking given the scholarly emphasis on a "feminine" language of petitioning, the daughters never mention their gender; the reader only knows the petition is sent by women (or girls) due to the description in the header as "The humble Petition of ye Daughters," and gender is never mentioned again as the body of the petition mainly gives a detailed description of the amounts of debt owed.

Maidservants could also demonstrate remarkable confidence in the construction of their petitions. In 1691, Isabella Lamb petitioned to be discharged from Elizabeth Wood, and far from

being a weak vessel in need of help, Lamb frames herself as self-assured and convinced that she was in the right:

> That yr Pet.r is bound an Apprntice for :7: yeares to Elizabeth Wood Bone lace Maker only to learn her Trade. In Consideration whereas yr Pet:rs streinds were engaged to provide Meat, drink, teaching, lodging and Apparell; which they have hitherto done & performed. That for 5: yeares past of her Tyme, yr Pet.rs mistress for ye most part thereof hath putt her to doe household work & other Business; instead of teaching yr Pet:r her Trade.

> And since yr Pet:r is very Sensible yt her mistress cannot perfectly instruct yr Petr in her Trade whereby yr Pet:r may gett her Living hereafter.

> Therefore yr Pet:r humbly prayes yt she may be discharged from her sd Mistress & from her Indenture of Apprnticeshipp. to ye End yr Pet.r may be placed with some skillfull person using ye same Trade for the Remainder of her Term. (LMA/WJ/SP/1691/07/009)

The "very Sensible" Isabella Lamb stands in stark contrast to the "poore distressed Wives" of "The Humble Petition of Many Thousands of Wives and Matrons"; importantly, it also differs greatly from Richard Keymer's self-description as weak and sickly.

I contend that the extent to which these petitions--even in such similar circumstances as all maids who petitioned to be release from an indenture--varied in their construction of ethos and employment of appeals to pity is evidence of their rhetorical agency in crafting these petitions. They demonstrate *kairos* in their attention to the specific rhetorical situation and the individualization of ethical and pathetic appeals. Their honing of *kairos* to produce a written

document that responds to a rhetorical exigence, even if they did not physically transcribe the words on that document, demonstrates a certain cultivation of literacy, even if these women did not (or could not) sign their names to the paper.

Rather than focusing on whether petitioning is evidence of some sort of distinctly feminine speech, it is more productive to recognize women's petitions as evidence of their ability to recognize genre conventions and to adapt them in order to be persuasive. As Lynne Magnusson makes clear, the humility topos of petitions should not be viewed as a sign of women's internalized inferiority (or the expectation that they should perform as such) but instead as a key feature of the rhetorical work of a petition in acting within political and social environments:

> ...it is important to be able to recognise the expected moves in this script so that women's copious and competent performances...are not imagined to be uncontrolled products of desperation or of extreme mental states but instead *rhetorical performances of power relations*, with their own legitimate forms of decorum. … [They involve]...complex strategies requiring instruction and that powerlessness can be as much a performance in language as domination. (57; emphasis added)

Magnusson's pointing to petitions as central to the "rhetorical performances of power relations" is extremely significant in thinking about the history of women's involvement in political, legal, and governmental discourse. Women's successful participation in petitioning culture demonstrates their ability to engage in "petitioning as a culturally sanctioned and highly structured political performance" (Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 16). Whiting also observes, "Rhetorically, the strongest location from which a woman petitioner could address her governors was from a self-designated position of weakness" (*Women and Petitioning* 229). Women's

strategic representation of themselves as weak and suffering in order to make demands about their personal lives, communities, and--as is the subject of this dissertation chapter--their workplaces not only showcases their general rhetorical savvy, but also offers a glimpse into how ordinary women exercised social (and sometimes political) influence in a non-democratic culture.

While it is anachronistic to ask whether and how women were "citizens" in a monarchy in the contemporary sense of the word, it is appropriate to consider how even ordinary women exercised political agency in day-to-day circumstances. The petition is a rich archival resource in thinking about the involvement of ordinary women and men in sociopolitical endeavors. Early modern society was unquestionably hierarchal, structured by a social hierarchy that was normalized to actors across all social strata. The monarch had absolute power, and yet, a monarch showed benevolence by hearing and addressing petitions from commoners. This pattern permeated down the sociopolitical ladder, with local government officials quick to address the petitions of those in their parish. The petition as a "rhetorical performance of power relations" further cemented the existing power relations at the same time that it demanded that the more powerful petition recipient serve the humble petitioner:

> Because petitioning was an act of submission, it reaffirmed the social and political order.
> Because, by definition, it expressed criticism and an alternative to the present—the
> preferred remedy—it challenged that order. Petitioning was not simply a thing, the paper
> or parchment on which the request was written, but also a process, continually creating
> and reaffirming patterns of authority and obligation, and so continually opening them to
> the risk of redefinition. (Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 2-3)

Working and lower-class women were keen to recognize this crack in the divinely ordained

social hierarchy, even if they did not have the language or ability to recognize it as such. Indeed,

the agency that such women yielded prompts scholars of women's rhetorics to examine seeming

democratic participation in non-democratic cultures. After all, such women used their

marginalized experience of lower rank and labor in order to argue for their political betterment,

not in spite of it.

Although the relationship between petitioning and political involvement is clear, it is

admittedly a larger leap to connect such agency to literacy. There is no clear method for

discerning the contribution of the petitioner from that of the professional scribe. In addition to

debating whether petitions employed gendered language, scholarship concerning early modern

women's petitions is also consumed with the question of authorship. Some scholars have

attempted to determine the sex of the author of petitions by discerning these gendered stylistic

differences described earlier (Thorne, "Narratives of Female Suffering" 137), with Patricia-Ann

Lee even positing such a "distinctively female voice" (244) as evidence of authorship. However,

Daybell claims that such gendered language is "a 'scripted' female voice that could be

appropriated by both men and women" (4); therefore, such variations in style are performative

and may shed light about the intentions of the petitioner but not necessarily her gender. While

Sadlack explores other methodological solutions, such as examining "a petition's deviation from

scribal conventions" (231) as a possible indicator of authorship, there is ultimately no way of

determining with certainty whether the petitions were authored by (or to what degree they were

authored by) women as the text may indicate.[58]

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[58] However, there is interesting evidence to suggest that the authorship of petitions mattered much, at least during
the English Civil War period. Patricia-Ann Lee describes at least one petition circulated as a pamphlet in which the
"authenticity was challenged in an investigation by the House of Commons" (248). This observation merits more

Of course, given the legacy of English studies, it is hardly surprising that the question of authorship looms large, even though literary scholars themselves have called into question the fixation on the single author. While the author function was first famously theorized by Foucault, scholars of early modern literature have offered expansive and historically nuanced views of authorship that also yield great potential for scholars in the history of rhetoric. In particular, in *Attributing Authorship* Harold Love defines authorship "[not as] the condition of being an originator of works, but a set of linked activities (*authemes*) which are sometimes performed by a single person but will often be performed collaboratively or by several persons in succession" (39). Although Love is not focusing on class or labor in his book, his insights are applicable to thinking about how middling and lower-class rhetors participated collaboratively in rhetorical activities during the early modern period. Their struggles with literacy and other rhetorical constraints often necessitated collaboration in order to yield written texts like petitions, as Whiting points out:

> Moreover, even if the petitioner did write her petition herself, to the extent that a petition functions as a legal document, then the voice, identity, and wishes of the litigant would have been shaped, as a matter of course, by scriveners and attorneys tailoring it for the legal process, and so we should not expect unmediated access through such documents to the lived reality of litigants or witnesses. (Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 262)

In other words, discerning whether a woman was or was not the "author" of her petition is a misguided task. As Magnusson declares in her study of a subgenre of early modern women's letters, "it is not my intention to promote any single woman writer for her singular accomplishment and potential inclusion in the canon" (51). Instead of viewing these petitions

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scholarly inquiry in order to understand the significance of authorship of petitions in the period; it may also yield methodological insight into questions of authorship.

through the lens of authorship, I propose rhetorical scholars frame their attention through a focus on *rhetorical collaboration*. I use the term "rhetorical collaboration" here to highlight work done by multiple persons or parties in order to produce a rhetorical text or speech act as opposed to focusing on a single rhetor/author. Understanding reading and writing (and potentially other modes of communication) as inherently social and collaborative processes enables us to better reflect on the social dimension of rhetorical acts and move away from authorial intent as a sole or primary lens of interpretation.

Perhaps more importantly, building rhetorical collaboration into our analytical methods is a way for us to recover more marginalized rhetors as well as groups of rhetors. Feminist rhetorical scholars such as Barbara Biesecker, Wendy Sharer, and Lindal Buchanan have noted the significance of collectivity in women's rhetorics specifically. In particular, Buchanan notes the importance of collaboration to women's rhetorical endeavors: because of "the social, material, and ideological conditions around them" (58), women and other marginalized groups have relied particularly on cooperative efforts in order to make their rhetoric heard. While Buchanan's own research investigates the "supportive collaboration" that facilitated nineteenth-century American women's public discourse, her insights are equally applicable to early modern working women, marginalized by class, gender, and lower levels of literacy. Their ability to participate in rhetorical discourse would have been facilitated or even enabled by relationships forged with professional scribes, printers, and educated men and women who assisted them in the articulation and textual production of their arguments.

Appropriately, the word *labor* is built into *collaborate*--petitioners and scribes co-labored to create a petition. Rather than discounting women's petitions due to the authorial ambiguity, or attempting to map modern notions of authorship onto women who lived in vastly different

historical and social circumstances, it seems more fruitful to build into our interpretative

frameworks the notion that all literate activity is social and therefore to some extent

collaborative. Although the configuration of rhetorical collaboration may vary by text, genre, or

context, all acts of reading and writing rely on an expected interaction from another person

(although that audience is sometimes only anticipated or imagined). To that extent, I contend that

early modern maidservants used rhetorical collaboration to construct petitions alongside scribes,

leveraging their oral literacy skills and potential reading ability in cooperation with professional

scribes and lawyers who possessed writing ability and familiarity with legal topoi that such

women may have lacked. Regardless, all texts--single-authored or collectively composed--are

mediated by outside discourses, constraints of genres, and sociopolitical ideologies, among other

things. Accepting that the literacy acts of early modern maidservants are no different enables us

to focus on early articulations of gendered class consciousness, which in turn deepens the study

of women, work, and rhetoric.

Humble Petitions of Humble Maids: Servants and Petitioning in Early Modern England

In order to examine select petitions from maidservants, in this section I describe the

general culture around female service and apprenticeship in early modern England. While

contextualizing early modern maidservants' work, I will also include excerpts and analyses of

petitions archived with the Middlesex Records at the London Metropolitan Archives.

Service was a highly common stage of life for young women, an important phase

between childhood and establishing their own households as wives and mothers. Mendelson and

Crawford describe it as "the archetypal 'growing up' experience for young women" (92).

Hubbard estimates that approximately 75% of the young people ages 15-24 became servants or

apprentices (24). As so much of the female population went into service, it is evident that servants came from a wide range of class backgrounds (except for the highest social classes). The conventions of the petition, including the language in which petitioners frequently positioned themselves as poor and distressed, makes it extremely difficult to discern the class backgrounds of individual petitioners. There are some exceptions, such as in Anne Allen's case, in which her indenture and the response to her petition reveal that she came from a charity school. In her case, then, we can deduce that she probably came from a class background lower than the typical maidservant. However, instances such as this are the exception, and the experience of service was shared by young women across poor, laboring, middling, and minor gentry ranks.

Another similarity across classes for young women was that service was seen as a site of continuing education. While in service, girls and young women were expected to learn the skills necessary for running a household of their own later in life. Much of this education consisted of housewifery and varying vocational training. However, mistresses were also expected to attend to their servants' moral education, as well, especially in continuing their religious education (Mendelson and Crawford 104). Importantly, conduct books and other literature of the period stressed that mistresses should continue their maids' literacy education, because literacy was seen as both a valuable means for further religious education as well as an advantageous skill in assisting with trades and businesses. Maids who already possessed some degree of literacy could further develop their literacy skills in service, and illiterate maids stood the chance of becoming literate should they serve in a household in which the mistress was able and willing to provide literacy instruction.

Maidservants were also extremely common in early modern culture, because there was a large number of singlewomen in early modern England. Since a maidservant typically ended her service by marrying and thus entering into another household, women often remained maidservants if they were not married. Common narratives about unmarried women's lack of security coupled with didactic literature expressing fear and misogyny toward singlewomen caused scholars to significantly underestimate the number of singlewomen in early modern culture for many years. However, more recent work by scholars such as Amy Froide, Amy Erickson, Eleanor Hubbard, and Natasha Korda has shown that singlewomen were very common in early modern society, with more than one-fifth of all women being single (Mazzola 118). Using burial registers as a source, Hubbard concludes that upwards of 20% of women born around 1606 never married at all (54). Similarly, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh observes that "the average age of first marriage for non-elite women was probably high. …during the second half of the sixteenth century, the average age of marriage for women was twenty-two to twenty-seven years" (*Working Women* 9). More singlewomen inevitably meant more maidservants.

Focusing on maidservants is fruitful not only because they were common and represented a large group of women, but also, as was mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter, because unmarried women were much more likely to use courts--and petitions--as individuals. Coverture[59] often prevented women from presenting themselves as litigants; they were either represented by or alongside their husbands in documents such as petitions. Of course, there are exceptions in which married women petitioned on their own behalf regardless of their husband (or against their husband, in some cases), but maidservants were rarely impacted by this subsuming of legal status. In some cases, parents petitioned on behalf of their children who

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[59] The legal practice in which women's legal identity was "covered" or subsumed by their husband upon marriage.

worked as servants or apprentices, but in most cases involving servants, the servant herself is the petitioner. Thus, focusing on the petitions of maidservants is one way of confronting ways in which history and archiving have excluded or buried the voices of women, especially lower-class women. I wish to acknowledge the myriad other kinds of women's work that my focus excludes due to the additional barriers presented by the archive. Although concentrating on maidservants is inclusive of a wide range of lower-class backgrounds, it is also unrepresentative of others. In particular, maidservants were much more likely to be younger than most working women. They were also unlikely to have children for which they were obligated to provide care (although care of a mistress's children might be part of their service duties). Nonetheless, the petitions of maidservants are a rhetorically rich archive for considering questions of literacy, workplace reform, and the history of women's labor.

Once in service, maids performed a wide range of duties, including cleaning, cooking, sewing, washing clothes, childcare, and helping with errands and shopping (McIntosh, *Working Women* 50-51). If servants were placed in a rural household, they also most likely performed agricultural labor traditionally gendered masculine (Mendelson and Crawford 100-101). Mendelson and Crawford delineate some of the differences required of maidservants depending on the rank of the household in which they served:

> An important factor which determined a maidservant's work routine was the size and wealth of the household. At one extreme, large noble households included a host of live-in female personnel allotted to precise vocational niches: house cleaning, laundry, cooking, childcare, and different types of personal service. Lower down the social scale, there were more connections between female and male sectors, with a blurring of gender divisions and a female work routine which took on an increasingly multioccupational

character. At the lowest level, the artisan or labouring family employed a single maid-of-all-work for the full range of household tasks. (102)

Even among maidservants, then, it is clear that there were a multitude of experiences and skills gained that varied by class and location.

Depending on the household in which they served, it was also possible that maids could learn and perform trade skills (McIntosh, *Working Women* 47). While this was a possibility for maidservants, it was initially the key training of female apprentices, but the practice of apprenticeship for young women slowly shifted to largely a system of exploitative labor: "Apprentices, who agreed to work for a longer period of years, were supposed to gain more specialized training, but by the later sixteenth century, most arrangements that were called apprenticeships had become simply an extended period of service" (McIntosh, *Working Women* 47). In theory, apprentices signed a much longer contract of usually five to seven years and were supposed to be trained in a particular trade, while servants performed a variety of household tasks and were bound to their master or mistress for only a year or two. In practice, male apprentices often learned a trade over their lengthy contract, but female apprentices were treated as servants with less mobility than actual servants due to the length of their indentures. At least in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, female apprentices were also more likely to come from poorer families:

> While apprenticeship had the merit of stability, it offered little else. Most apprentice girls did not choose their lot: they were orphans, foundlings, or the children of overburdened parents who agreed to give up their children in exchange for poor relief. These pauper apprentices began their terms at a much younger age than craft apprentices, in extreme

cases directly after leaving their nurses, and parishes paid masters and mistresses a small

premium for their keep. (Hubbard 44)

Class also played an important role in terms of the age at which girls entered into service or

apprenticeship: "poor girls were commonly apprenticed at a younger age: in their early teens, if

by parents, or at ten to twelve years if by parish officials" (McIntosh, *Working Women* 137). In

the most extreme cases, girls could be put to service as young as seven years old, especially if

they were the responsibility of the parish instead of their parents, such as daughters of homeless

women or orphans who lived in a parish without a functioning orphanage or foundling hospital,

or one that was poorly funded (Mendelsen and Crawford 86).

While both McIntosh and Hubbard claim that female apprentices seldom received proper

instruction in a trade, the petitions of Anne Allen and the "very Sensible" Isabella Lamb

described earlier in this chapter raise questions about the extent of such a conclusion. Petitions

from female apprentices asking to be discharged from their indentures due to lack of proper

instruction provide evidence for the expectations surrounding young women's learning--

especially when petitions such as Allen's were successful. Moreover, neither Allen nor Lamb

point to abuse or desperation as reasons for their requested discharge. The lack of instruction is

clearly presented as sufficient cause. However, both of these petitions are later in the period,

which may demonstrate a shift in attitude toward female apprenticeship during the seventeenth

century.

While maidservants may have enjoyed certain advantages over female apprentices, they

both were disadvantaged when compared to male apprentices of comparable age and skill: "[I]t

was an economic axiom that female workers should be paid no more than one-half to two-thirds

as much as males for comparable work" (Mendelson and Crawford 103). Service was no

exception to this custom. Maidservants suffered lower wages both because of sexist assumptions about the value of women in general, as well as the devaluing of housewifery due to "the assumption that housework was unpaid because it was not really 'work' at all" (Mendelson and Crawford 103).

Perhaps the most significant gender variation was that maidservants were legally required to stay in service or marry per the 1563 Statute of Artificers, while no such law existed for male apprentices. Another reason that service was such a common part of women's lives was that it ensured women were never independent but always remained bound in the social hierarchy of a household. The centrality of hierarchy in early modern life led to great fear and anxiety over "masterless" men and women who were not subservient to a superior; this unease was especially prominent for women, who transgressed gendered norms in addition to classed ones. The period of service was crucial in ensuring that women were under the supervision and social hierarchy of a household after leaving the home of their parents but before marriage and thus coverture.[60] Because of the Statute, singlewomen who attempted to leave their apprenticeships without going through local courts--or even those looking for service who could not find it in a saturated market--risked severe social stigmatization at best and imprisonment at worst.

Instead, the proper avenue out of service was marriage. Many young women looked forward to marriage, both because it offered a conclusion to the ill-paid toil of service and also because marriage presented an opportunity for social advancement. This opportunity for social mobility was especially true for young women from lower-class backgrounds and from rural parishes who migrated to London in hopes of better wages and more marriage opportunities.

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[60] See "The Lives of Early Modern Women" subsection in the "Historical Context" section of the Introduction for more information about the expected life stages of women in early modern England.

These young women risked much, including exposure to plague, in search of an improved social standing and stability through marriage.

If maidservants were lucky, their mistresses might help them find a beneficial marriage partner. It was one of many expectations maids had for their mistresses, since they "expected their mistresses to show concern for their advancement in life, which might mean promotion in the service hierarchy, help in launching a vocation, or an advantageous marriage" (Mendelson and Crawford 105). In addition to their social advancement, mistresses were also expected to provide for the well-being of their maids. This included ensuring proper lodging, food, clothing, and sleep (Hubbard 36), in addition to instruction in religion, literacy, and in all the obligations of maintaining a home. So, when maidservants like Anne Allen petitioned that they were not receiving proper instruction or sufficient food, that they worked in dangerous environments that exposed them to illness and overwork, or that they were not being paid as outlined in their indentures or contracts, we can understand that there were clear social (and sometimes legal) expectations for mistresses, and failing to adhere to those expectations gave servants the right to leave the household, as long as they did so through the proper legal channels.

Of course, many maidservants had positive experiences and formed close relationships with their mistresses. Focusing on petitions tends to obscure this fact. Literature and letters of the period often depict positive relationships between maidservant and mistress, both from the perspective of maids and of mistresses. Other evidence suggests that servants and mistresses could enjoy close relationships: Mendelson and Crawford find that approximately 25% of Manchester wills included gifts to servants (267).

However, many maidservants did not enjoy such a positive relationship with their mistresses. Many petitions from maids detail physical abuse and assault, often on the part of the mistress:

> Masters and mistresses had the right—and indeed, according to godly writers, a moral obligation—to punish their servants when they misbehaved, though beatings were not supposed to threaten health or life. … In practice, punishment could be brutal. Very young maids may have been particularly vulnerable to physical abuse, especially when they were orphans without nearby kin. In 1592, three women were imprisoned by the Court of Aldermen for severely beating their child servants. (Hubbard 37)

While the corporal punishment of servants was sanctioned due to "spare the rod" cultural attitudes, excessive force was looked down upon. Even though such beating was not condoned, maids had limited options for addressing physical abuse. Since they were legally obligated to be in service until marriage, fleeing even an abusive service position could result in imprisonment. Furthermore, masters and mistresses were not responsible for anything that happened to servants if they ran away: "If a servant or apprentice should die while running away, her master or mistress was not held responsible. In the case of a 9-year-old runaway who died of exposure, the verdict was suicide" (Mendelson and Crawford 88).

I contend that the petition was a key rhetorical resource that maidservants leveraged given their limited options in addressing abuse. Moreover, in utilizing the petition in large numbers, maidservants not only acted to rectify their immediate working situations, but also to raise awareness of gendered workplace abuse in general. In fact, women (and men) also used petitions to address public harassment and assault, but I find the petition to be particularly

important to maidservants and female apprentices and their work environments given the 1563 Statute of Artificers.

For example, in a seventeenth-century petition, Ann ap Thomas, "a poore servant," documents physical abuse before requesting she be released from the arrangement:

> Whereas Elizabeth Totnam Wyddow a Milkwoman and Elizabeth her Daughter haue
>
> from tyme to tyme abused and beaten yo[r] poore pet.[r] and doe still threaten to contynue
>
> the same abuse soe that shee cannot goe aboute her M[rs] buisines for them in quiett but is
>
> in dayly danger and feare of her life by heir vniust malice.
>
> For that the younger ^Elizabeth is bound oute here before yo[r] wor.[ps] at the instant, Shee
>
> humbly prayeth shee may be still bound oute. (LMA/WJ/SR/NS/002B/01)

Strategically, I would argue, Thomas does not merely frame the abuse as harmful; instead, she leverages the abuse as impacting her ability to be in public spaces and to perform her service labor. While Thomas does use emotional appeals to pity concerning her abuse, she also links that pathetic appeal to her identity as a servant. The cultivation of emotions such as pity links servants' marginalized position to the exigence of the situation, and it reflects the complicated hierarchical political work that the petition performed. Petitioners--especially women like maidservants--emphasized their lower status as a way of compelling the higher-status addressee to respond to their petition. In this way, the petition simultaneously affirms a sociopolitical hierarchy *and* destabilizes it; petitioners like ap Thomas show keen awareness of the petition as a crack in the hierarchy by foregrounding their lack of sociopolitical power as a way to enact sociopolitical change.

In many maidservants' petitions documenting abuse, the maids more commonly accuse their mistresses and other women of abuse, as opposed to their masters. This is probably partially because maidservants worked in closer proximity to their mistresses, but it also suggests that there were additional barriers to female servants making public accusations against men as opposed to against women. Consider this 1640 petition from Margaret Bennet, in which she directly accuses the wife of her master of abuse and then more indirectly also implicates her master, James Wright, as the petition progresses:

> But may it please yo:ʳ worᵖᵖˢ notwᵗʰstanding the good service done by yo:ʳ pet.ʳ the wife of the said James Wright, hath often misused yoʳ petʳ & hath beat her out of dores 3. or 4. tymes, & threatneth her to kill her, & to make yoʳ pet.ʳ stay wᵗʰ her, that she may be revennged one yoʳ poore supp.ˡᵗ & yoʳ pet:ʳ is in bodily feare to be mischeifed[61] by them, so that she feareth to goe out of dores… (LMA/WJ/SP/1640/006/001)

The shift in pronoun use from "her" to "them" is subtle yet striking. In such instances, it's clear that something happened between the maid and the scribe that created this subtle language shift, but we can only speculate as to the how and why when considering their collaboration.

Although maidservants often implicate their mistresses in petitions, other sources, such as witness testimony, show that maidservants often enjoyed positive relationships with their mistresses but feared violence from their masters: "Maidservants in particular often reported aiding their mistresses by seeking help from neighbors and even confronting their masters" (Hubbard 122). However, masters were named much more often than mistresses in one significant area: allegations of sexual abuse. The threat of sexual harassment and rape was another way in which the service and apprentice experiences of young women differed greatly

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[61] "Mischief" here means "to inflict injury upon; to bring to grief or ruin" (OED).

from those of young men: "Although children of both sexes were at risk of neglect or cruelty,

girls were far more vulnerable to the additional hazard of sexual abuse. A great deal of evidence

shows that sexual exploitation of female servants in general was widespread" (Mendelson and

Crawford 89). While servants from more privileged backgrounds may have had more resources

in dealing with sexual abuse, "no social class offered maidservants a haven from sexual pursuit...

The most obvious variation between social classes was not men's attitude to female servants, but

rather the extent to which wealthy masters could bribe or threaten their way out of a shameful

predicament" (Mendelson and Crawford 107). The sexual exploitation of maidservants has been

a much-discussed topic in early modern studies. Scholars such as Michelle Dowd and Mendelson

and Crawford stress the sexual peril that such young women and girls faced; Mendelson and

Crawford declare, "for some, it [service] was more hazardous than the life of a vagrant" (107).

More recently, other scholars such as Hubbard have suggested that the emphasis on sexual

exploitation has been exaggerated considering the relatively low rate of illegitimate births (88),

but using births out of wedlock as a basis for this claim obviously disregards sexual abuse that

did not involve intercourse, did not result in pregnancy, or in which impregnated women had

abortions.

Yet, Hubbard does acknowledge the difficulty women (and girls) faced in attempting to

prosecute such crimes: "...[authorities'] confidence in testimony about rape...was very weak

indeed. The difficulty of proving lack of consent meant that only the rapists of girls under the age

of consent and especially under the age of 10 were regularly convicted" (100-101). Mendelson

and Crawford agree that "[v]ery few women attempted to prosecute for rape, and conviction was

unlikely unless the girl was under 18" (48). In some cases, women--and even children--could

face punishment for fornicating when reporting sexual abuse: "When John Turner was brought to

Bridewell in 1574 for sex with a 12-year-old, he was corrected 'with whips' while the girl was corrected more gently 'with rods'" (Hubbard 101).

While women were unlikely to attempt to prosecute for such crimes, they were much more likely to use the courts to address matters of sexual abuse in another way--through petitioning. Violence against women in the early modern era has been the subject of a great deal of scholarship, especially through examining representations of gendered violence on the early modern stage and in poetry of the period.[62] Such work has been extremely significant in understanding the historical extent and manifestations of patriarchal culture. Yet, the angle of how women themselves--especially ordinary women--responded to such violence (rhetorically) has been less studied. Hubbard does note that "some maidservants also felt sufficiently comfortable with the machinery of the law to deploy it against their superiors" (102). Even though maidservants (and women in general) seldom brought such cases to criminal court, they did strategically address matters of sexual abuse through petitions. By petitioning to be released from their contracts due to abuse and for child support from being impregnated by their masters, maidservants used the petition to broach matters of the sexual exploitation of maidservants in public space. Successful use of the petition to address such urgent labor concerns required a keen awareness of the rhetorical situation and the "available means" of addressing such a sensitive subject, and it also required the literacy skills to know how to collaborate with a professional scribe to produce a textual petition that would perform this rhetorical work.

Although women were unlikely to win cases against men when attempting to prosecute for rape, they were likely to win cases against men when petitioning for monetary relief to

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[62] See, for example, Joseph P. Ward, *Violence, Politics, and Gender in Early Modern England* (2008); Kim Solga, *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance: Invisible Acts* (2009); and Mara P. Wade, ed., *Gender Matters: Discourses of Violence in Early Modern Literature and the Arts* (2014).

support children resulting from rape. Local officials felt little responsibility to side with women in rape cases; however, as Hubbard points out, siding with women on matters of child support meant that the biological father was responsible for economic support for the child, rather than the parish (100). To prevent the state needing to allocate poor relief--a recurring, all-encompassing theme in the life of the early modern poor--authorities often sided with the woman. These legal patterns remind the modern scholar of the importance of heeding the ways in which gender and class intersected in unexpected ways in the early modern period, and that women's experiences of child-rearing and providing economic stability for children could vary wildly by their economic and social class.

One example of such petitioning for monetary relief occurred in 1644, when Margaret Davies petitioned against Michaell Clarke for money to raise her child. The petition describes her sexual assault, even though it does not charge Clarke with rape:

> y^t your poore petitioner not long since was placed in Seruice and hired w.th one Michaell Clarke a frentch man for iii.^{li} a yeare wages. whear she had not beene aboue 3 weeks with him (at his house in ye strand) but he daily sollicited hir to incontinence; but beinge resisted, he forced ye doare & Locke of ye roome whear she laie in ye darke & came into hir bed and swore deeply he would marrie hir if she would yield to his desire. But being resisted vnless he first should make hir his wife; he by strength stoptt hir mouth with a cloath; and laie with hir whether she would or no.

> Afterwards she findinge hir selfe with chylde acquainted him thearwith & demanded his p*r*omise wch he had oft reiterated. (LMA/WJ/SP/1644/008)

The petition goes on to chronicle several other distressing consequences that Davies endured as a result of her rape: Clarke accused her of stealing to damage her reputation and cast doubt on her claims that he was the biological father of the child, she was imprisoned due to his allegations that she stole from him, she is now unable to find lodging or a husband due to her being pregnant outside of wedlock, and she continues to endure threats by Clark.

In sensitive petitions such as Davies's, the agency of the petitioner is especially evident. Not only do maidservants offer knowledge of service work and expectations, but they also frame the experience of sexual violence in ways that relay personal experience of assault and a keen awareness of gender roles that a male scribe would have most likely lacked. One aspect that is particularly striking about such discourses of sexual violence is not what is said but what is *unsaid*. Petitioners such as Davies are aware that they are to make clear the crime but to never name it; they adeptly craft emotional appeals of pity, but they never relay other emotions that can mark the experience of survivors of sexual violence like anger or frustration that would be unseemly to women, especially in the public space of the court.

In addition, women used petitions not only to call attention to the sexual violence they endured, but also to point out the systems of power that often protected their masters from facing any consequences. Like Davies, Bridget Tolly, describing herself as a "poor distressed woman," petitioned that her former master pay her child support in 1619. Her petition is similar to Davies's in its description of the conception by rape, but Tolly's is notable in that she takes great pains to describe the structures of class privilege that have prevented her former master from suffering any consequences, including paying for monetary relief for the child:

> ...aboutes one yere last past shee dwelled as a howshold and hired servent with one
>
> Edward Broade of Dunkeley Parke in the county aforesayd gentleman at which tyme the

sayd Master Broade *by his lewde enticementes and forcible mociones procured the*

peticioner to yeld to his carnall desier and soe in truth deflowred the peticioner and

begatt her with child vowing and protesting in his unlawfull love pretended to

the peticioner to geve unto her greate meanes and mayntenance but meaning nothinge

lesse sythence such tyme as yt appered that the peticioner was with child by him as

allso sythence the tyme of her deliverance of the sayd child (which was aboutes nine

wekes past) not only refuseth to accept and receave the sayd child, but allso refuseth to

geve to the sayd child or to the peticioner any penny at all *but by his greatenes and by his*

greate frendes escapeth all punishmentes provided for such offence in his majesties

cortes ecclesiasticall. And the peticioner sheweth to your worshepes that the sayd Master

Broad *hath proffered by men of good credyt to geeve to the peticioner*

mayntenaunce which hee now denieth. ("Worcestershire Quarter Sessions: 1619";

emphasis added)

Tolly's petition reveals not only an agentic effort to call attention to gendered violence in service

work, but also a keen understanding of the intersection of gender and class in securing legal and

economic privilege. Notably, her awareness of her lower-class and gender position does not

prevent her from seeking redress; rather, she leverages both her own and his positionality as

means of heightening the exigence of the petitionary request.

Although a contrarian might ask whether such claims of sexual assault were exaggerated

or even manufactured for the purposes of making the petitioner look weaker and thereby

rhetorically stronger, women also routinely petitioned for monetary relief from the fathers of

their children without alleging sexual assault. The same year, Martha Johnson petitioned the

court for relief for her child from William Carter. After promising to marry her and impregnating

her, he left Johnson and married another woman. Of the conception, Johnson's petition notes, "that yor Pett^r was a seruant in the house wth one William Carter a barber they liuing in the Countrie together being both single wear Contracted together wheare vppon he the said Willyam Carter got yor Pett^r wth child" (LMA/WJ/SP/1644/013). While Johnson does describe the economic and reputational distress caused by Carter's abandonment, she never accuses him of sexual impropriety. Considering that legitimate petitions for child support could or could not allege rape and sexual assault shows the intentionality with which petitioners addressed sexual abuse in their petitions.

In "Resisting Rape in the Middle Ages and Now," medieval scholar Carissa Harris analyzes medieval literature to show that a singular focus on the law when addressing the history of sexual violence is inadequate to understanding the experiences of historical women (and men). Specifically, definitions of resistance to rape in *medieval law* were much less narrow than definitions of resistance in *medieval culture*. Harris asks scholars engaging in historical research to consider the many acts of resistance to sexual violence, including both individual and collective acts, in order to look toward "a more sexually ethical future."

I see these petitions as acts of both individual and collective resistance. Although historians and not rhetorical scholars, Mendelson and Crawford describe the way in which women leveraged legal and public discourse to address matters concerning abuse:

> One way women modified male behaviour was by broadcasting men's covert acts. In so doing, they also established a context of excessive male violence or immorality which might persuade the judiciary to act. Thus female discourse constructed a collective view whereby accusations became a "public" concern of which formal authorities were compelled to take notice. (216)

Keenly aware of the likely ineffectiveness of relying on the criminal courts, maidservants used

petitions, both as individuals to rectify their working and social environments, and as part of a

collective of maidservants who used petitions to raise public awareness about the sexual abuse

that was all too often a hazard of their work. Moreover, such women didn't just "use" the

petition; they navigated concomitant constraints of gendered violence, patriarchal law, and

limited education in order to produce written documents that called attention to the abuse of

maidservants as a social problem. From my perspective, this rhetorical endeavor required

immense literacy skills. The scribe just wrote it down.

"Considering the greatness of our number": Maidservants and Collective Petitioning

While the previous section addressed how maidservants leveraged their individual

experiences and petitions toward collective goals, this section will discuss how collective

petitions--petitions written or signed by many women--also advanced arguments related to the

working conditions of and labor reform for early modern maidservants. As with the individual

petitions, maidservants engaged in collective petitioning required the literacy skills necessary to

navigate genre conventions, legal apparatuses, gendered decorum, and scribal collaboration.

However, in addition to those expectations, collective petitioners were also required to deploy

circulation as a rhetorical skill, and they needed to collaborate with printers in addition to

scribes. In this section, then, I consider not only the rhetorical collaboration between maidservant

and scribe, but also the rhetorical collaboration between maidservant and fellow maidservants:

these documents provide insight into the "rhetorical contributions of collective women" (144)

advocated by Biesecker.

This section provides a brief overview of collective petitioning during the early modern period, especially in relation to the English Civil War. While collective petitioning during the interregnum has been the subject of a great deal of scholarship, less attention has focused on the collective petitions that were unrelated to the English Civil War. Then, I will analyze two collective petitions from groups of maidservants to explore how collectivity is leveraged rhetorically in an effort for labor reform: *A Letter sent by the Maydens of London* (1567) and "The Petition of the Women-Servants of the City" (1700, "Unto the Right Honourable…"). Both of these petitions are texts that argue for labor rights for women servants specifically, with the collective authorship afforded by the petition allowing working women the rhetorical agency to articulate arguments about gendered labor and equitable working conditions. More significantly, in using their literacy skills to argue for improved working conditions for women servants as a group, these petitions theorize a collective of working women that calls attention to the intersection of gender and class, contributing to our field's expanding knowledge about the ways rhetorical subjects were (and are) not only gendered but also classed. In other words, these petitions indicate awareness of a political subjectivity defined by labor; a focus on these early articulations of gendered class consciousness enriches the study of women, work, and working women's literacy practices.

Despite the ubiquity of petitions throughout the early modern period, the frequency and nature of petitioning changed drastically with the breakdown of censorship during the English Civil War. One manifestation of these radical changes were public petitions written and presented by large groups of women, usually calling for an end to the war due to the disruption that the war had on their families, the release of their husbands who were usually imprisoned for political reasons, or welfare to help take care of their families due to the loss of income

stemming from their husbands' absences. Although the act of women petitioning was not at all

novel or radical, as this chapter has established, the act of large groups of women in public

petitioning about matters of governmental policy was virtually unprecedented.

The breakdown of censorship also resulted in drastic new circulation models for

petitions. Whereas typical petitions were recorded by hand in a single document and delivered to

the appropriate local or national office, petitions now were often printed in large numbers and

circulated as pamphlets or other ephemera. This practice was common, especially if Parliament

(or another body) denied the petitioners' request. Instead of ending their struggle, petitioners

strategically used printing and circulation as "follow-up attempts designed to put additional

pressure upon the authorities" (Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 95). Whiting elaborates upon

the printed petition:

> …the printed petition functions like a political leaflet or a manifesto… The nominal
>
> audience of the petition is the authority addressed at the top of the page, but the actual
>
> audience is the reading public of fellow subjects and citizens who are thus called upon to
>
> assess in the court of public opinion the justice of the appeal, and to condemn the failure
>
> of the rulers to dispense justice. (*Women and Petitioning* 71-72)

Printed petitions and pamphlets could be circulated by hawkers and political activists in both

London and the countryside. They were often read aloud or posted on the walls of taverns. To

understand the extent of the culture of printing and circulating petitions, consider the numbers of

just one bookseller: "between 1604 and 1641, the bookseller George Thomason collected

approximately fifty-eight separate printed petitions or publications about petitions; during 1642,

he amassed approximately 219" (Whiting, *Women and Petitioning* 11). These numbers and

avenues establish that there were multiple new audiences for petitions, and petitioners took advantage of these opportunities as they sought reform.

Of this multitude of petitions, those explicitly concerning government and radical reform have been heavily studied by scholars. The interest is understandable: proto-communist groups such as the Levellers and the Diggers made radical demands about equality that anticipated the American and French Revolutions by over a century. However, the emphasis on collective petitions that are both explicitly political in addressing matters of government and directly concerning the English Civil War means that a sizeable chunk of petitions is under-studied. Collective petitioning and circulating printed petitions as pamphlets were not unique to political radicals as a rhetorical resource; other groups, such as maidservants, also relied on collective petitioning as an important available means of persuasion.

Before an analysis of the texts themselves, a brief summary of each petition I analyze in depth is useful. The Maydens' *Letter* (1567) serves as a response to an earlier pamphlet (which is no longer extant) by Edward Hake that employs stereotypes about and attacks the character of the maidens and mistresses of London. The text of the Maydens' *Letter* itself is written from the persona of a group of six servants, whose names are possibly pseudonyms, and if they are not pseudonyms, the text provides no last name for the women, effectively rendering them anonymous. Although it is written in response to Hake's tract, the text itself is addressed to their "moste woorthie Matrones & Mistresses" (A.3.r), or the women who employed them. The Maydens' *Letter* is summarized cogently by Ilona Bell in her book chapter exploring the *Letter* and its authorship: "The gist of the Maydens' argument is that the servant/mistress relationship must be mutually rewarding, answering not only the needs but also the pleasures of both parties" (189). Here, the Maydens make arguments about the conditions of their labor as a kind of

petition to their mistresses. "The Petition of the Women-Servants," on the other hand, is a much more formal petition and is addressed to the town-council of Edinburgh. In this petition, the women seek key "Necessities" from the government, such as welfare and housing for women workers who encounter hardships that affect or are a result of their employment as well as a pension program for women servants set up by the local government. Despite the variations in their construction of the petition genre, both documents call attention to gendered labor and argue for rights to equitable working conditions for women servants specifically—not for women as a whole, and not for servants of both sexes.

While questions of authorship plague individual petitions, they are even more complicated with collective petitions. The subject of the authorship of the Maydens' *Letter* is explored in depth by Bell in her book chapter on the document. While Bell concludes that there is no "extrinsic data" (192) to determine whether the *Letter* was authored by a man, a single woman, or a group of women as the text indicates, she notes that the text "demonstrates … knowledge of and immersion in the actual daily life of London serving women" and that it "derives much of its rhetorical power from personal testimony, compellingly supported by precise accounts of serving women's daily chores and weekly schedules" (183). The use of personal experience and knowledge of the quotidian lives of maidservants may support a hypothesis that the document was, in fact, authored by a woman or a group of women. Engagements with service tasks are described (and sometimes bemoaned) in the Maydens' *Letter* as well as in "The Petition of the Women-Servants." Although such surmising about who put pen to paper only amounts to a researched conjecture, the text is nonetheless significant in its contribution to understandings of authorship: as Bell states, "By inviting the reader to wonder whether the author could be a woman, the Maydens force us to reexamine our assumptions about

what sixteenth-century women were capable of knowing and doing" (179). Similarly, Margaret

W. Ferguson and Mihoko Suzuki note that "[t]he petition is predicated on the assumption that

maidservants were capable of authoring it; moreover, since the text takes their perspective, we

can conclude that it assumes and appeals to an audience of female servants" (579). In other

words, even if scholars cannot discern exact authorship, the Maydens' *Letter* challenges

assumptions about who had access to the writing and reading of petitions, because the text

imagines collective female authorship and readership. Similarly, present-day historians have no

evidence concerning the authorship of "The Petition of the Women-Servants"; yet its very

existence imagines a community of serving women who had access to the literacy skills

necessary for composing their own petitions and utilized them for political purposes.

    Having considered uncertainties about authorship, I turn to the texts themselves and their

rhetorical efforts concerning labor and collectivism. Despite authorial speculation, the

articulation of a subjectivity determined by gendered labor exists in both texts. The requests of

the petitions are rooted in working conditions, thus in order to make the requests, the texts define

their petitioners by their labor, a move that distinguishes them from the addressees of the

petitions. Early in *A Letter sent by the Maydens of London*, the Maydens envision a hypothetical

scenario that exemplifies their demands. They postulate that if their mistresses were to condemn

their servants as Hake's tract suggests,

> that in a verie shorte time and space, ye should have gotten very few or no
>
> servants at al, when such as are born in the countrey shoulde choose rather to tarie
>
> at home, and remaine there to take paines for a small stipend or wages with

libertie: and such as are Citizens borne, should repaire also to the country, or to other

Cities where they might be free, than to abide as slaves and bondewomen in London.

(A.3.v)

Such a scenario makes explicit the importance of the labor that maidservants perform, and it

provides a justification for the Maydens' complaint that certain mistresses "have done their

duties to use [servants] as slaves or bondewomen" and have made servants "take intolerable

paines for a trifle" (A.4.v). These observations lead the Maydens to argue for days of

recreation:[63] "How much against al reason were it, so straightly to deale with us, and so straitely

to use us, that after all the toile we take in the whole weeke, we might not enjoye a piece of the

holyday, to refresh our spirites, and to rest our wearied bones?" (A.4.v-A.5.r).

The authors of "The Petition of the Women-Servants within the City" do not request

regular days of leave, but they do make similar requests based on the nature of their work. In

response to the lack of support women servants faced when they were no longer capable of

laboring, the authors request welfare from the city and support such as funding, housing, and

healthcare in order to prevent such women from becoming homeless. Their appeal describes

information about the conditions of their employment: "That to our inexpressible Grief, we dayly

see when any of us are rendered Incapable to serve either through Old Age, Sickness, Infirmity,

or other Accidents, we are presently exploited in an Ignominious Manner to seek our Bread."

The petition makes explicit the labor conditions that might lead a women servant to "Infirmity"

or cause her to become "Incapable," which in turn render her likely to become homeless if she

does not have a support system or alternative employment. In both texts, as the women servants

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[63] Such a request may have referred to Sundays (as holy days), or it may have referred to time off in general. For instance, an ordinance was passed in June 1647 that granted "lawful recreation days" to male apprentices on the second Tuesday of each month (M'Arthur 704-5).

utilize the petition to make requests, the authors offer key information about their working

conditions in order to justify their arguments.

Importantly, the working conditions articulated in these petitions show that the authors'

subject positions are informed not only by gender, but also by class: both petitions explicitly

distinguish servants from the women for whom they work. As I discussed earlier, the Maydens'

Letter is addressed to their mistresses. As Bell observes, "The Maydens' argument not only

consistently emerges out of their experiences as servants, but it is also carefully constructed to

persuade, not a general reading public, but the particular women who control the Maydens' lives

and supply their very likelihood" (183). While the Maydens do make some supporting arguments

that are applicable to women in general, particularly concerning marriage,[64] their act of

addressing their mistresses distinguishes themselves and their class positions from women of

higher rank. This distinction--while often used pejoratively to lower-class women--is here

described from the perspective of working women in order to author their own experience and

enable them to convey important information about the labor conditions they face.

Similarly, "The Petition of the Women-Servants" treats maidservants as separate from

and not belonging to the family they serve when it advocates for a "House or Hospital [that] will

prevent the inhuman ejecting of [women servants] from Families where [they] serve." This

argument works both as a logical appeal for providing such housing and as a pathetic appeal

concerning abandoned maidservants, but it also figures such women as separate from the

households in which they serve. The petition argues that maidservants deserve rights specifically

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[64] Specifically, the Maydens argue for women's choice in choosing whom to marry, as well as their ability to travel around the city as desired, with emphasis on taverns and theaters. Bell provides a more thorough analysis of the Maydens' arguments as applicable to women of all classes.

as women servants and that these rights are justified on the basis of the conditions that such gendered labor entails.

It may seem obvious that documents concerning maidservants would make explicit the connection between gender and class, but this significant marker differentiates these petitions from many other petitions by wives and widows that were authored during the English Civil War and by letters of petition that individual women wrote. While these other petitions were likely to include information about the hardships women faced due to poverty or childcare, they usually do not discuss labor conditions or workers' rights as part of their arguments. As a comparison, "The Humble Petition of Many Thousands of Wives and Matrons of the City of London," which was cited earlier in this chapter while noting different deployments of humility topoi by women petitioners, employs a much different cultivation of ethos than the texts of maidservants. In contrast to the maidservants who are defined by their work, the authors of the English Civil War women's petitions are defined by their roles as wives and mothers. The petition begins, "It was the first act of God Almighties favour, to our first parent in Paradise, to ordaine him a helper meet for him; namely, a Wife; such as we are, to the number of many thousands, who doe hereby present this Petition for the rectifying of our dreadfull and increasing grievances" (3; A.2.r). From the outset, then, the authors of this petition are defining themselves in relation to men both in title (as wives) and in function (as "helper meet for him"). This description was normal in the early modern period, as McIntosh notes, "While men were usually labeled by their employment, as a carpenter or merchant, women were normally labeled by their marital status" (*Working Women* 7) and far less likely to be seen as having an "occupational identity" (123).

The women of "The Humble Petition" also justify their use of the petition by giving themselves a civic significance based on childbirth and mothering: "Wives are those who people

and replenish the Common-wealth with Inhabitants; …Wives are the Mothers of the faithfull, and the producers of good subjects" (3; A.2.r). Here, the women establish their ethos by employing traditional gender roles, a much different rhetorical strategy than that utilized by the maidservant authors. Although many signees of the petition would have been working women like the Maydens and perhaps even lower-class like the authors of "The Petition of the Women-Servants," the content of "The Humble Petition" and its explicit involvement in matters of war and state necessitate that women express their gender in a much different way. For instance, the authors of "The Humble Petition" do mention their roles as working women when they say that the effects of the wars "afflicts [them as] Oyster-wives, Apple-wives, Tripe-wives…the very Ale-wives" (7; A.4.r); however, these mentions are not the emphasis of the petition and are presented as secondary details. These differences in the presentation of ethos reveal that women petitioners employed multiple rhetorical strategies suited to the persuasive goals of the subject of the petition and audience.

I have already discussed the emphasis on humility tropes and feminine weakness in the English Civil War petitions, and this observation makes the Maydens' *Letter* and "The Petition of the Women-Servants" interesting in the relative *absence* of these supposedly genre-defining rhetorical markers. While there are a few references to weakness or sorrow, these instances are only occasional and less exaggerated than those in the petitions of wives and widows from the English Civil War. After the accusations in Hake's tract, the Maydens say, "We were in a very evil case, and ryght good cause had we to dread to dispaire of oure well doings…wer it not that we knew ye [the mistresses] to be such as are not moved wyth every wynde" (A.3.r). So, while the Maydens begin with the humility topos, they alleviate their hardship within the same

sentence. Other instances of humility are conditional ("might have bred us siely girls" A.3.r) or very brief ("unto us your pore hand maides" B.5.v).

Similarly, there are much fewer instances of such vulnerability or despair in "The Petition of the Women-Servants." In addition, when the women-servants employ imagery of weakness, they pinpoint the cause of such frailty not to their gender as a whole but as a result of their working conditions: "That to our inexpressible Grief, we dayly see when any of us are rendered Incapable to serve either through Old Age, Sickness, Infirmity, or other Accidents, we are presently exposed in an Ignominious Manner to seek our Bread, from the Charity of others." In this way, the Maydens' "Letter" and the "The Petition of the Women-Servants" take into account the intersection of gender and class in the early modern period and do not treat all women as one collective group. The differences between the rhetorical strategies of these maidservant petitioners and other women petitioners also contribute to our knowledge about the range of discursive tactics women employed in varying early modern rhetorical situations. Importantly, the scarcity of feminine humility topoi and the reliance on descriptions of labor highlight the significance of class and work to women's understanding of their own identity and the different ways they expressed that identity through literacy.

Importantly for the concerns of this chapter, descriptions of gendered labor do not function merely as part of the argument; they also work to theorize a collective that reflects an skillful employment of class consciousness as argumentative strategy. Unlike letters of petition which make requests based on the interests of individual women, these petitions make requests on behalf of collective groups. While the Maydens' *Letter* is "signed" by six women, its argument is applicable to maidservants in general, and textual moments showcase the petition's awareness of its collective position. When addressing Hake, the petition asks, "For what one

wise man will willingly meddle with a multitude, or contende with a whole company?" (A.7.r).

Furthermore, the Maydens declare, "We must then of necessitie address our selves to Replie in

defense of our liberty, and eke of our honesty, least our silence yeld us gilty" (A.8.v). The use of

the plural pronoun and the broad purposes of their writing showcase the element of collective

voice that undergirds the petition. As Bell states, "Regardless of who the Maydens actually were,

their defense represents itself as the voice not of a single, isolated individual, but of a group of

women working together to urge their employers to resist any attempt to curtail 'their lawful

libertie'" (184). The *Letter* perhaps makes this knowledge of collectivism most explicit when the

Maydens note of Hake, "when he recited six of us by name, and under those sixe names above

sixe thousand of us" (A.7.r). This rhetorical amplification from "six" to "sixe thousand" reflects

the women petitioners' awareness of their own collective representation and their willingness to

deploy it on behalf of the interests of women servants as a whole.

"The Petition of the Women-Servants" also makes clear the collective interests of the

document's demands: "And we judge our Condition generally much better than many of these

especially considering the greatness of our number." Embedded in this phrase is not only a

justification for the right of these women to speak but also an articulation of the collective

identity that informs the requests they are making. They boldly state in their conclusion, "And

seing this Project is of great a Concernment not only of us, but to the City, yea the whole

Nation." The collective voice that these petitions represent both justifies their existence and

serves as strong evidence for the merit of their requests. Both documents also realize the extent

to which serving women in early modern England constituted a political subjectivity; the

maidservants in both petitions use literacy to leverage personal experience in the petitions in

order to make arguments applicable to large groups of women. Even as far back as the early

modern period, it seems women were aware that "the personal is political," even if they would not word it as such.

Despite women's conscious deployment of collectivism, it is worth noting the resistance women faced when petitioning in public. As women strategically used novel ways of printing and circulation to support their arguments, so, too, did misogynists. Women's public petitioning was accompanied by the manifestation of deep-seated backlash to these rhetorical endeavors (as historic interventions customarily are) in the form of satiric petitions that were printed and circulated to mock women petitioners as irrational and sexually promiscuous. Brian Patton explores this phenomenon, observing that such mock petitions "refus[e] to take seriously the opinions of women on any topic of political or religious significance" and "frequently blend flippant antifeminist satire with earnest pleas for an end to fighting and a restoration of proper order in the kingdom" (76). One specific mock petition is titled "The Maids Petition" (1647), and it imagines and satirizes requests of maidservants to be granted days of rest, as had been recently given by law to male apprentices. The majority of mock petitions actually keep arguments in line with real petitions from women, such as by requesting the cessation of war, or welfare and resources to help with poverty or debt. The central requests of these mock petitions were rarely exaggerated or invented, although later in the seventeenth century, hyperbolic arguments did occasionally become a feature of these mock petitions (such as 1674's "The Women's Petition against Coffee"). Satirists usually did not attempt to mock the arguments or requests made by women petitioners; in fact, they repeated them and instantiated them in a different venue.

Instead, they attempted to discredit the character of women petitioners, questioning their very right to petition and act as political agents, regardless of their motives. In "The Maids Petition" as well as several other satirical texts, women's involvement in politics is undermined

through their depiction as hyper-sexual and sex-deprived. Although the reduction of female subjects to their sexualization is a misogynistic trope generally, this tactic is also specific to the English Civil War in that women petitioners often petitioned for the end of the war and the return of their husbands. Their reasons often included their hardship in familial and economic matters due to the absence of their husbands. In the satirical petitions, though, the absence of the husbands and men made women sex-deprived, and this lascivious nature made women irrational; this construction of ethos of women petitioners as raving, prurient, and indecent worked to cast doubt on them as political subjects and to undermine their legitimacy to petition at all. Whether exploited in the households in which they worked or debased and disparaged in public discourse, sexuality was routinely weaponized against maidservants as a means to discredit their testimony and ability to make arguments about having safe workplace environments. It is a reminder that literacy--or varying degrees of literacy--can be powerful resources in crafting arguments and working toward social change, but literacy alone is hardly a sufficient rhetorical resource. Collaboration, too, provided security with greater numbers, but it also raised new concerns about women's intervention in public spaces. However, the existence of these mock petitions signal the reality and rhetorical force of women's actual petitions and their potential rhetorical power.

Conclusion

This chapter has chronicled varying rhetorical efforts that early modern maidservants undertook to make work in service safer and more equitable. Maidservants used rhetorical collaboration, different deployments of genre, and collectivism in order to produce written documents that took maids' experience within the household into larger public forums of legal and political discourse. Through varying petitioning strategies, maidservants demanded proper

instruction for their lives past maidenhood, fair and sufficient compensation, access to necessities like food, shelter, and clothing, and an end to the physical and sexual abuse they endured due to their gender. To achieve their goals, they collaborated with professional scribes, printers, and, most importantly, other maidservants.

The petitions of early modern maidservants are thus an especially rich rhetorical site, as these rhetors had to negotiate gender, class/rank, and the right to political participation in ways that acknowledged and navigated the complexities of their rhetorical situation. Observing their petitions has a number of implications for rhetorical studies. First, theorizing multiple iterations of literacy allows me to reframe as agentic historical persons who have largely been cast as insignificant and disenfranchised. Studies of early modern literacy and education often operate with notions of writing and authorship as central to measures of literate ability. However, by centering the rhetorical collaboration necessary in literate acts such as written composition and printed publication, I am able to recover histories and literacy practices from populations that have been understudied, namely working and lower-class women.

Relatedly, case studies like the petitions of Anne Allen, Margaret Davies, and the Maydens deepen the study of women, work, and rhetoric. Their consideration contributes to ongoing discussions about how women have acted rhetorically in work environments throughout history, as well as how certain forms of labor and workplaces are rhetorically gendered. Moreover, in historicizing issues of women's work, I call attention to the use of literacy and genre in creating public collectives that address women's workplace safety, long before but anticipating conversations about #MeToo in our own historical moment.

Conclusion:

Reflections on the "People Who [Are] Rarely Visited by History"

The first epigraph of the Introduction to this dissertation is taken from Isabella Whitney. Although little is known about her life, she is considered the first woman to publish secular poetry in England, publishing two books of poetry in the 1570s. Aside from the remarkable feat of a woman publishing her own poetry in the sixteenth century, Whitney enjoyed a far lower social status than the other early modern women writers with whom she is anthologized and discussed (when that does occur). Her exact social position is difficult to discern given the lack of biographical details. She describes herself as a maidservant in earlier portions of *A Sweet Nosgay*, the second of her books of poetry, and while we lack details about Whitney's life, it is likely that she served as a servant to a more prominent family. Although we are uncertain about the extent to which her poetry was autobiographical versus fictionalized, Whitney's social position was much lower than more commonly studied women writers like Mary Sidney and Mary Wroth, and it makes her two books of poetry even more noteworthy.

The concluding poem of *A Sweet Nosgay* is titled "Wyll and Testament" and falls into the "mock-will" genre. The speaker of the poem and author of the will is impoverished and exiled from the city of London, and she writes her will to London in the style of a spurned lover. However, as the woman is impoverished, she has nothing to bequeath, and thus bequeaths back to London what it already has in what might be argued is a kind of redistribution. As Laurie Ellinghausen astutely observes, writing to London as a deserted lover "presents readers with the less familiar viewpoint of a woman forsaken *economically*. This emphasis highlights the need to complicate gendered authorial identity with questions of economic and occupational discourse"

(19; emphasis original). Indeed, Whitney's wit and her socioeconomic commentary make for a subversive take on class relations and the "true" city of London hidden from view in aristocratic writings. She offers a view of London that doesn't gloss over laborers in a way that is extremely uncommon in early modern poetry.

> In the conclusion of the poem, Whitney proclaims that she
>
> Did write this Wyll with mine owne hand
>
> And it to London gave:
>
> In witnes of the standers by,
>
> whose names yf you wyll have.
>
> Paper, Pen and Standish were:
>
> at that same present by… (367-72)

After Whitney's bold assertion of authorship--and thus of literacy--we have absolutely no records of her life. We don't know where she went after her exile from London (or if she left at all), if she married and lost her name, if she participated in community or civic life, or if she ever wrote again.

The second epigraph of this dissertation is taken from historian Arlette Farge. The case of Isabella Whitney recalls another observation by Farge about the archive:

> The archival document is a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse offered into an unexpected event. In it, everything is focused on a few instants in the lives of ordinary people, people who were rarely visited by history, unless they happened to form a mob and make what would later be called history. (6-7)

I see "Working Literacies: Gender, Labor, and Literacy in Early Modern England" as a kind of synthesis of Arlette Farge's scholarly inquiry and Isabella Whitney's declaration of writing. How

do we discover the lives of those for whom academic methodologies have discouraged us from looking? When (if) we find them, how do we make sense of the limited worldview they preserve? But most importantly, what do we gain when we persist in the face of these challenges?

"Working Literacies" has presented a historical case study, focusing on the lives of working women in the early modern period and how they engaged with literacy despite social barriers in their own time, as well as modern archival ones to retracing their steps. This dissertation has explored the literacy abilities and practices of these working women, paying attention to the ways that ideologies of patriarchy and labor as well as the institutionalization of poor relief mediated their engagements with literacy. By examining little-studied archival material such as administrative records, literary ephemera, and petitions, "Working Literacies" nuances assumptions about working women's (il)literacy in the period, showcasing the multiple layers of literate ability that women leveraged as available means in making arguments about their lives as economically precarious workers in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. In centering the reading and composing habits of pre-modern working women, this dissertation provides historical depth to intricate relationships of gender and class in histories of rhetorical education, economic systems, and labor activism.

In Chapter 1, "'[T]he vertuouse bringinge vp of the miserable youth': Rhetorical Education in Early Modern Orphanages and Charity Schools," I explore the place of early modern sites of education for poor girls within the legacy of rhetorical education and its scholarship. This inspection reveals that there were more opportunities for poor children to receive schooling than conservative estimates of literacy rates might suggest, pushing back

against assumptions of vast levels of illiteracy in the period.[65] Furthermore, I show how labor, obedience, and patriarchy animated these iterations of rhetorical education. In particular, while lower-class girls and orphans gained new opportunities for education (especially reading literacy) and limited social mobility due to emerging state-based welfare systems, such schooling was incentivized to ensure these children would not need poor relief as adults. Archival administrative and pedagogical material reveals that phobia of the poor--rather than a desire to instill learning or encourage civic participation--undergirded access to rhetorical education for a large body of poor children, especially girls who were not allowed to attend grammar schools on the basis of sex in addition to class.

However, women would go on to use these newfound literacy skills in ways that did not reflect the ideologies of obedience prescribed by these models of rhetorical education. I examine how working women used their reading literacy to fulfill their own desires through the consumption of popular literature in Chapter 2, "'Poets of Their Own Acts': The Rhetorical Reading of Early Modern Working Women." I use the framework of "rhetorical reading" to portray working women as active, rather than passive, in their reading, highlighting the popularity of resistant narratives found in ballads and chapbooks aimed at women readers about rejecting marriage, evading sexual assault, making women's workplaces safe, and distributing poor relief. The sheer popularity of these subversive narratives about class and gender indicate that working women could use their reading literacy to advance these narratives (and, by extension, arguments) through their own actions of text selection and market influence as readers. This chapter establishes the exigence of attending to reading and narrative in rhetorical

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[65] See the "Literacy Studies" subsection of the "Scholarly Contributions" section in the Introduction for more on scholarly debates about determining literacy rates in the period.

scholarship and offers ideas about recovering the literacy engagements of historical persons without writing literacy.

Chapter 3, "Petitioning and Co-Laboring: The Rhetorical Collaboration of Early Modern Maidservant Petitioners," continues to center working women's active engagement with literacy but shifts from emphasizing reading to focusing on collaboration. With the concept of "rhetorical collaboration," I provide methods for moving concern away from authorship as a primary lens for engaging texts and toward the social and collaborative processes necessary in the production of a rhetorical text or speech act. To conduct this work, I examine petitions, since women with limited literacy skills could collaborate with a professional scribe to produce a petition. Specifically, I examine petitions of maidservants, revealing that maidservants leveraged adept argumentation skills, especially of ethos, pathos, and humility, in collaboration with the professional scribe's writing literacy and knowledge of genre conventions. Through analyzing a range of maidservants' petitions–by individual women and by large groups of women–I highlight how maidservants brought discourses of gendered labor rights and workplace safety into public space through the genre of the petition, considering such issues as lack of proper instruction, owed wages, and physical and sexual abuse. Chapter 3 offers historical depth to contemporary discussions about women's labor activism, and it also provides methods for studying collectives of women, especially lower-class women, with its focus on collaboration.

Ultimately, "Working Literacies" has explored how economic systems and gender ideologies affect literacy practices broadly. These areas of study are not unique to early modern England, although, as I've argued, this period is a particularly rich site for such an inquiry. In addition to its early modern focus, I hope that this dissertation inspires conversations and methods pertaining to literacies and rhetorics across time periods.

Avenues for Further Research

Like any extensive research project, this dissertation has inspired more questions than answers for me. "Working Literacies" suggests multiple opportunities for primary sources, methods, and subjects that deserve further research, and I cannot name them all here. However, I spotlight some specific avenues for further research, especially within the scope of early modern studies and feminist rhetorics. In particular, the work here invites further archival research, especially in rural sites outside of London; explorations of class differences in feminist historiography; and interrogations of the legacy of Elizabethan poor laws and their influence today.

Archives Beyond London

The bulk of my archival material, particularly in Chapters 1 and 3, comes from London, and this emphasis is largely due to archival access. Yet, there were a large number of charity schools outside of London, with many in rural locations. And, especially later in the period, many of these schools were designed for girls only. These archives are scattered across England and can be more difficult to access, especially for a foreigner with limited time and travel ability, but our inattention to them could mean there are especially rich artifacts awaiting discovery. Furthermore, the intersection of lower-class position and rural location is an important one, and this population remains understudied and underrepresented in multiple avenues across scholarly studies (and contemporary politics). For example, scholars regularly claim that literacy rates were higher in London than in the countryside (i.e. Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* 129; Wheale 33); however, this dissertation has shown that many assumptions about illiteracy rates are lacking nuance at best or flat-out wrong at worst. More productive questions might be: what

kinds of literacies did rural women have proficiency in? What different opportunities did they have for using those literacies, and what were the different constraints for accessing and using different literacy skills? Engaging in further archival research from across England (and beyond), rather than emphasizing the centrality of London, would enable us to consider how location also intersects with patterns of gender, class, and literacy in the period, and it would enhance our understanding of the variations across England, rather than continuing to center London as representative of the entirety of Britain.

Expanding the geographic scope of the archive is also true for the circulation of popular literature and the study of petitions. In *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, Margaret Spufford uses the rural circulation patterns of peddlers and hawkers of popular literature to argue for the reading literacy of rural populations, and this is an avenue that could use further research. How did buying and reading habits differ between urban and rural marketplaces? What does that suggest about levels of literacy and reading interests across geographic regions? Similarly, scholars such as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have described variations of service tasks across households (102). In addition to household wealth and class position, geographic location significantly impacted the types of labor a maidservant would perform, and rural women were more likely to engage in agricultural labor and other more traditionally masculine kinds of work (101-02). Looking at petitions from more rural sites would further our understanding of how geographic location affected women's labor. It could also call attention to differences in local governance and poor relief administration, since petitioning and poor relief were often handled by local parishes. Attending to such differences would expand our understanding of the political and rhetorical constraints women from different geographic regions faced, as well as opportunities that may have existed outside of London.

Class-Based Interventions in Feminist Historiography

While "Working Literacies" sets its scope within the early modern period, its ambitions and questions can be extended to feminist inquiries across time periods. Common subjects of feminist scholarly analysis include access to women's education, republican motherhood, and defenses of women's political rights. What would it mean to reconsider these gendered arguments from the perspective of class? For example, while Hannah More was a known proponent for women's education in the eighteenth century, Dianne Dugaw observes that many of her efforts to increase access to education for poor girls actually were efforts to transmit upper-class ideologies of "feminine delicacy" (142) onto the lower social orders. From a perspective focusing on gender, efforts such as republican motherhood may have opened up opportunities for women they would not have otherwise; from a perspective focusing on class, such endeavors may have aimed to transmit upper-class ideas of gender essentialism onto lower classes with different constructions of gender. In what other feminist histories have we implicitly assumed middle- or upper-classness to be standard or invisible? Continual efforts to make feminist scholarship more intersectional will enrich our histories and make them more representative.

The English Poor Laws: Then and Now

When thinking about historiography broadly, there is much more to be done to explore the long history of the early modern poor laws and their 400-year legacy. Scholars of literacy have much to contribute to this discussion and should actively consider how models of literacy and rhetorical education continue this cultural tradition. While I have not engaged in fully theorizing these modern resonances, they certainly were on my mind as I struggled to find

sources from the perspective of the poor, traveled to and trudged through the archive in search of their voices, and wove together a series of primary sources with no prominent author. They were also present when I took out additional student loan payments to be able to pay my rent, had to halt work on my dissertation to find an alternative assistantship after mine was cut, and watched as the academic job market crashed (again) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discourses about the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor are ubiquitous in 21st century America, yet we rarely consider the early modern roots of our own discourses about poverty. In a 2018 *New York Times* article, journalists Emily Badger and Margot Sanger-Katz chronicled recent right-wing attacks on recipients of welfare programs, including food stamps, Medicaid, and subsidized housing. Badger and Sanger-Katz not only describe these recent (and ongoing) attempts, but also trace these efforts to discern supposedly lazy--and therefore immoral--welfare recipients to Elizabethan England, especially the Poor Law of 1601. In addition to noting this historical lineage, they observe how the landscape has shifted in twenty-first century America:

> Under Elizabethan poor law, the job of making these distinctions [about who deserved poor relief] went to church wardens and parish overseers, people who lived in the community. Today, we've constructed vast and expensive government bureaucracies to draw these lines. … Such exemptions…erect more elaborate barriers to assistance as another way of winnowing out the unworthy.

Badger and Sanger-Katz name several ploys devised to prevent the so-called "undeserving" poor from receiving financial relief, including drug testing, "welfare-to-work" programs, and increasingly labyrinthine documentation for medical and disability exemptions. Clearing these ever-mounting hurdles affects the poor's ability to access basic necessities like housing, health care, and food.

One governmental system based on financial need that Badger and Sanger-Katz do not discuss, however, is financial aid for college students. In a recent article from *The Atlantic* tellingly titled "How College Became a Ruthless Competition Divorced from Learning," Daniel Markovits compares the "marriage plot" from eighteenth-century novels to the "college plot" now, concluding that "The path to the top looks very different today, almost a mirror image in which work and school have traded places with inheritance and marriage…. [D]egrees, preferably from the top universities, are the new inheritances." In 2020, ABC News reported that because of universities' drive to secure more prestige, affluent students actually receive more financial aid than poor students (Helhoski). In another revealing title, "Do Financial Aid Policies Unintentionally Punish the Poor, and What Can We Do About It?", education scholars Courtney A. Campbell, Regina Deli-Amen, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar describe a "climate of penalty, where various punitive measures are levied against students and dominate their experience of financial aid" (68), especially community college students who are more likely to be non-traditional students and have higher financial need. Perhaps most explicitly, *Vox* journalist Libby Nelson writes, "Most financial aid isn't really about helping students pay for college. Instead, it's part of an elaborate strategy colleges use to attract the students they want, admit the students they need and encourage others to stay away."

It's hard not to see the tentacles of the discourses and debates about early modern poor relief in these modern examples, as well as the prominent role literacy and higher education play in the afterlives of this history. The upper classes have mapped morality onto existing social hierarchies in order to maintain their socioeconomic advantages, and they continue to do so in different terms. Contemporary structural racism is an obvious addition to these moral frameworks that seeks to maintain social castes. Interrogating the early modern influence of our

modern ideas about poverty and labor would both enrich our historiography and prompt more informed educational and political policies.

<p style="text-align: center;">***</p>

There have been numerous challenges in writing this dissertation (as there are in any dissertation), but my guiding light has always been to treat a lowly maidservant as equally worthy of scholarly analysis as Shakespeare or Aristotle. In the home page of his personal blog, Mike Rose wrote that the philosophy that animated his work as a scholar and educator was "A deep belief in the ability of the common person." "Working Literacies" was written in this spirit, "remapping rhetorical territory" not just from the margins, but from below, as well.

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