7 The patriarchal commonwealth

'She did know and could tell all that was done in Mr Mayor's house'

In 1607 Anne Taylor and Susan Swapper were accused of witchcraft by civic magistrates in Rye, a cinque port on the border of Sussex and Kent. Anne had recently married a minor Kent gentleman but continued to live in the town with her mother, Anne Bennett, who was a renowned local healer and also widow of a wealthy butcher and freeman. Susan was the wife of a poor sawyer, as well as a neighbour and tenant of Bennett.[1] The accusations came at a particularly telling moment in the endemic civic politics that characterised the port. Against the backdrop of a silting estuary and shrinking local economy, this politics centred on two rival factions: the brewers and the butchers. The brewers represented the entrepreneurial and aristocratic spirit of the town: an alliance of families that, until very recently, had at once prospered materially despite difficult circumstances and, in the process, secured an effective monopoly on civic office. The butchers, in contrast, were demonstrably poorer and also representative of the artisans and smaller tradesmen in the borough. Although the brewers had enjoyed a relatively long period of civic supremacy in the town, by 1607 their authority was precarious – not least because three of their leading burgesses had died in quick succession. It was in these circumstances that Anne Taylor became a focus for factional hostility. Heiress to an old civic dynasty with close connections with the butchers, her husband was also pushing for enfranchisement as a resident householder.[2] It was in this context that Anne Taylor was accused of using *maleficium* against her enemies: in particular, Martha Higgins, the recent widow of two ex-mayors, accused her of bewitching to death her first husband, Thomas Hamon.[3] This was in addition to initial charges that Anne and Susan had sought the counsel of fairies in order to obtain treasure. However, when the case finally came to trial in 1609 the local jury acquitted Anne; Susan was released by a

[1] Annabel Gregory, 'Witchcraft, politics, and good neighbourhood in early seventeenth-century Rye', *P&P*, 133, 1991, pp. 35–6.
[2] Ibid., pp. 38–50. [3] Ibid., pp. 37, 62.

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general pardon two years later; and, in the meantime, Anne's husband, George Taylor, secured his freedom and became an active member of the civic elite.[4]

Anne Taylor's public presence was palpable. A central figure in the town's political allegiances and conflicts, the power she wielded was rooted in those reproductive aspects of personal and communal relations that early modern people regarded as feminine: the rituals, practices, and morality surrounding sex, birth, sickness, and death.[5] Like the masculine spheres of civic decision-making and participation, this feminine realm had its places, conversations, and social codes and knowledge: forms of female company that Anne Taylor prowled, and which provided a forum for political criticism quite as telling as any common council. This was because, as historians have increasingly realised, the bodily, moral, and 'domestic' concerns that constituted the realm of gossip, slander, and reputation were not only gendered but also politically charged, making 'women the brokers of oral reputation'.[6] Anne Taylor's talk, made the more authoritative by her status as a 'cunning' woman, was a case in point. It was deposed 'that Mrs Taylor did then tell her that she the said Mrs Taylor heard that Mr Mayor was taken sick and that he should die of the said sickness for she knew it well'. As described by Susan Swapper, Taylor was the quintessential gossip whom 'did know and could tell all that was done in Mr Mayor's house and in every house in Rye if that she Mrs Taylor would trouble herself above it'.[7] The power of a woman who made all acts public could only be enhanced by her knowledge of spirits and bodies. Anne allegedly told Swapper 'that everybody would see that after Mr Mayor was dead what an ugly corpse he should be to look upon and that one side of him should die before the other'. Moreover, 'one of the spirits before his death should give him A gripe upon his members and that they should look very black after his death'. Most worryingly for her civic enemies, Anne's knowledge and skills facilitated a scathing moral critique of Higgins' suitability to govern that was informed by her own millenarian sensibilities.[8] Swapper continued: 'And after Mr Mayor's death Mrs Taylor further said that it were no matter if the devil did fetch away his body for ever to be an example to others for.' Indeed, 'she doubted not that the devil had his soul already for that he was an evil liver for he had misused his other wife greatly which she knew very well'. In particular, 'this woman which he married last should sit at meat with him and his old wife should sit in the kitchen and pick the bones that this woman left and be glad of them if she could get them'. As far as Anne was

[4] Ibid., pp. 38, 49.
[5] Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in early modern England* (Oxford, 1998), p. 204.
[6] Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, pp. 121, 123.
[7] ESRO, Accession N 2936, third examination of Susan Swapper.
[8] Gregory, 'Witchcraft, politics, and good neighbourhood', p. 45.

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concerned, 'his lewd life would bring him to his end and that he did never any man good but such as was of his Religion'.[9]

A pressing question for historians of early modern gender is the extent to which women could act and think politically in a society that was patriarchal in theory as well as practice.[10] It has been shown that, in terms of their offices and responsibilities, women were perfectly capable of behaving as *de facto* citizens; that they appropriated the legal discourses and institutions that defined the English subject; and that they could achieve direct (and indirect) representation within local and national civic realms.[11] Well-placed women – be they queens and courtiers or educated gentry like Lucy Hutchinson – could exercise significant degrees of political and discursive power.[12] Beyond these elevated ranks, women filled places and roles ostensibly enclosed by men: as members of guilds, for example, or as civic functionaries exercising authority within their communities.[13] Likewise, as members of godly congregations, 'societies', and reading communities, or as petitioners and remonstrators within local and national politics, women clearly impacted on early modern political culture.[14] None of these participatory practices was exclusively feminine, and most depended on mitigating factors for their efficacy: social position and wealth; kinship networks and marital status; a certain level of education or religiosity. However, as Patricia Crawford has recently reiterated, the absence of women in a setting like the Putney Debates need not imply their exclusion from politics more generally. While not always visible, they were certainly present.[15]

Although these accounts reveal women appropriating ostensibly masculine places and roles, what they largely fail to address is the kind of public activism regarded by contemporaries as specifically, if not exclusively, female. The contention of this chapter is that feminine political agency – symbolic, sociological – was rooted in precisely the places and conversations that Anne Taylor patrolled: company that historians have traditionally described as 'private'. It argues that the division between public and private – and its conflation with civic and domestic – is not only anachronistic but also elides the very real powers of

[9] ESRO, Accession N 2936, third examination of Susan Swapper.
[10] Crawford and Mendelson, *Women in early modern England*, ch. 7.
[11] Ibid., pp. 49–58; Patricia Crawford, '"The poorest she": women and citizenship in early modern England', in Michael Mendle, ed., *The Putney debates of 1647: the army, the Levellers and the English state* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 197–218.
[12] Ibid., pp. 365–80; David Norbrook, '"Words more than civil": republican civility in Lucy Hutchinson's "The life of John Hutchinson"', in Jennifer Richards, ed., *Early modern civil discourses* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 68–84.
[13] Crawford and Mendelson, *Women in early modern England*, pp. 52, 56.
[14] Crawford and Mendelson, *Women in early modern England*, pp. 387–94; Crawford, '"The poorest she"', pp. 206–7, 214–16; Ann Hughes, 'Gender and politics in Leveller literature', in Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky, eds., *Political culture and cultural politics in England: Essays presented to David Underdown* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 162–88.
[15] Crawford, '"The poorest she"', pp. 197, 216–18.

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public criticism and intervention possessed by women both locally and, when circumstances allowed, nationally. Focusing on the phenomenon of 'common fame', the first sections examine how conceptions of *honestas* – and the possibilities of their subversion – served as a framework for talk and association within feminine public spheres. The second half of the chapter considers the patriarchal household. It suggests that, far from encapsulating absolute notions of hierarchy and subordination, it, too, was a place of *honestas* in which masculine authority was perceived in terms of sociability and reciprocity and structured, like other kinds of association, by the everyday contingencies of company. As with the practice of urban freedom, an ungoverned will within the house was regarded by commentators, householders, and servants alike as uncivil and illegitimate: a mode of 'slavery' every bit as dangerous as unmediated economic or civic power. In this way, the household commonwealth was at once a political entity in its own right and analogous to political practices more generally. The chapter concludes with the household of Andrew and Mary Marvell: an arrangement that in its very particularity encapsulated the diversity and complexity of urban domesticity by the later seventeenth century.

Publicness and the conceit of privacy

The public efficacy of female agency has been obscured by the assumption that it was private. Sir Thomas Smith was not unusual when he noted that it was for male heads of household to 'consult in common' as the 'politic body'. Women, 'whom nature hath made to keep home and nourish their family', were not to meddle with matters abroad, nor to bear an office in a city or commonwealth no more than children and infants'.[16] A tradition of interpretation within gender and social historiography has tended to recycle this 'fantastical' division as a framework for historical analysis, presenting 'female culture' as 'private', 'separate', and segregated from the 'male and public' settings of communal life.[17] The most authoritative survey of women in early modern England focuses on the creation of distinct 'female cultures' that were 'organically linked' across a range of 'private' spaces, associations, rituals, and conversations. It argues that this culture was, by and large, exclusive of men and engendered a 'shared . . . female consciousness': even 'the dominant [patriarchal] discourse acknowledged (however reluctantly) that women had created private spaces and distinctive rhetorical genres'.[18] Steve Hindle has argued that the 'political

[16] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 20; John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godlie forme of householde government: for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of God's word* (1612), pp. 167–8.

[17] Alexandra Shepard, 'Manhood, credit and patriarchy in early modern England, c.1580–1640', *P&P*, 167, 2000, p. 76.

[18] Crawford and Mendelson, *Women in early modern England*, pp. 204–5, 218.

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charge' that women's words possessed in the seventeenth century stemmed from their 'clandestine' nature. He claims that 'the world of private speech was regarded by women themselves as an arena of social autonomy [and] the repository of a specifically female "social memory"', offering 'an important refuge from patriarchy'.[19] However, the characterisation of female place and words as private hardly fits with the 'sociability, neighbourliness, and mutual interdependence' that characterised them. Households were 'fluid and open expanses' and the 'flexibility and liminal ambiguity of feminised household boundaries were embodied in women's habit of posting themselves at their doorsteps'.[20] Laura Gowing has observed that 'throughout the seventeenth century, the nature of the female body was necessarily both a private matter and public business: the politics of sex and reproduction were at the juncture of household and state'.[21] This was a nexus of surveillance that, as the talk of Anne Taylor suggests, also had male bodies in its sights. That women's words had civic currency is further suggested by Crawford's consideration of women and citizenship in the seventeenth century and Ann Hughes' examination of the gendered rhetoric deployed by Levellers and their wives in political pamphlets of the 1640s. Both point to the empowering and public nature of household rhetoric, and the links that were repeatedly made by both men and women between domestic exigencies and civic decision-making.[22] Likewise, the importance of female talk to the 'development of public opinion' was by no means limited to Rye, but rather occurred across the corporate system and beyond.[23] In this sense, the words of women were not distinct from civil society; they were civil society.

Neither is the conflation of public/masculine and private/feminine consistent with the language 'of historical actors themselves'.[24] By the seventeenth century, the most general and usual meaning of 'public' was simply all that was 'common, open, abroad'.[25] The term was certainly tethered to the idea of legitimate political power, and, as we saw in chapter 3, a rhetorical strategy of any political interest or party was to style opponents as acting 'privately'.

[19] Steve Hindle, 'The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender, and the experience of authority in early modern England', *Continuity and change*, 9 (3), 1994, pp. 393, 408.
[20] Crawford and Mendelson, *Women in early modern England*, pp. 207–8.
[21] Laura Gowing, *Common bodies: Women, touch, and power in seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, 2003), p. 208.
[22] Crawford, '"The poorest she"', pp. 214–16; Hughes, 'Gender and politics in Leveller literature', pp. 170–2.
[23] Hindle, 'The shaming of Margaret Knowsley', pp. 393, 403–6; Bernard Capp, *When gossips meet: women, family and neighbourhood in early modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 272–81; Adam Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), p. 362; Ulinka Rublack, *The crimes of women in early modern Germany* (Oxford, 1999), ch. 1.
[24] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *HJ*, 1993, 36, p. 412.
[25] John Bulloker, *An English expositer. Teaching the interpretation of the hardest words used in our language* (1616).

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However, the term also conveyed a sense of audience, spectacle, and observation within any context of sociability or 'company'.[26] Understood in these terms, certain places were, by their very nature, public on a recurring basis: markets, streets, neighbourhoods, playhouses, taverns, common councils, or, indeed, coffeehouses. For example, the annulment of the marriage between Frances Welburne and the husband of her deceased sister, Robert Harpham, entailed that they 'shall not privately meet or talk together, but openly in the market, church, or public place'.[27] However, it was the possibility of observation, display, and subsequent dissemination – of the fact of company itself – rather than the inherent nature of a location that defined the publicness of speech and action. Welburne and Harper were also warned, for example, from meeting anywhere 'except it be in the presence of two or more honest and sufficient witnesses'. It was this sense of an observatory 'presence' that formed the public basis of neighbourly and, increasingly into the seventeenth century, national relations. When midwife Bridget Hodgson gossiped about Hester Browne in first the parlour of Leonard Thomson and then the churching ceremony of Anne Ramsden it was a public act not because of the domestic setting so much as because she did so 'in company'.[28] Likewise, Elizabeth Ballard accused the York hearth-tax collector, Henry Penrose, of treating her publicly 'in a haughty and uncivil manner'; 'crushing her against a table'; and calling her as 'A whore, A bitch . . . London whore, Newgate whore and Billingsgate whore' despite the incident occurring in the Ballard's parlour.[29] It was nevertheless a public moment, involving public defamation, because three witnesses observed it. As was shown in the previous chapter the defence of Penrose centred on proving them not only poor but also dishonest, so discrediting their testimony and their status as creditably public persons.

Three points follow from this. First, England's cities and boroughs contained local and often female-dominated public spheres in which, as Jacobean minister Robert Horne stressed, civility was closely tied to 'honest' conversation and reputation, and in which news and opinion was constructed, contested, and circulated through what contemporaries termed 'company' and 'discourse'.[30] Second, distinctions between public and private were not synonymous with the boundaries between civic power and the households and neighbourhoods they governed. On the contrary, the civil sociability and opinion of 'honest' and 'substantial' persons – be they male or female – was common to both: the cultivation of *honestas* was required both within and outwith the council chamber. Third, because publicness in whatever context was based around acts and words that were spoken and witnessed honestly, those that were 'secret'

[26] Shagan, *Popular politics*, p. 19.
[27] BIHR, CPH 2626.
[28] BIHR, CPH 2560, 1662, Hester Browne c. Bridget Hodgson.
[29] BIHR, CPH 3692, 1686, Elizabeth Ballard c. Thomas Penrose.
[30] See above, chapter 5.

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were implicitly uncivil and anti-social. Although historians have stressed the pejorative connotations of the 'common' woman, the badge of secrecy was no less dangerous – especially when conflated with sexual immorality.[31] It was alleged in 1663 that Ann Whitely of Halifax 'kept with other wives' husbands secretly' and 'was not fit to live in the town'.[32] Sarah Hudson of York was discredited as a servant of 'light and unhandsome carriage' who 'much frequented the company of soldiers in very unbefitting and secret places'.[33] However, such distinctions were not spatially fixed as it was quite possible to act secretly in public locations, Margaret Green noting that 'going to the market' in the postal town of Tadcaster she saw Thomas Pinder and Ann Stower 'privately in company together'.[34] In fact, it was men rather than women who were, by and large, capable of public privacy, if only because public in the sense of civic activity was regarded by contemporaries as peculiarly masculine. It was Andrew Marvell, not Mary, who kept a private closet in which to compose his political writings and thoughts. Likewise, when the Leeds landowner William Pickering was accused in 'public' of fathering a bastard child, the 'Justices not wishing to hear the business in open court' transferred the meeting to the privacy of the mayor's house.[35] Indeed, while the many publics of honest, substantial, and civil neighbours that constituted England's city commonwealths were distinctly feminine in nature, the possibility of legitimate privacy existed for the most part as a masculine privilege. This was especially the case for the common councils and other civic bodies: companies that, no matter their aristocratic or democratic structures, were at once male, discrete, and enclosed by oaths and conventions of secrecy.[36]

Viewed in these terms, it was masculine places that were exclusive and private, feminine places that were inclusive and public. This was certainly the inference of Jacobean literature. City poets used either the idealised or pejorative forms of the female body – the nurturing mother on the one hand, the incontinent and 'common' whore on the other – to characterise the civil (or uncivil) basis of city commonwealths. Either way, it was the female city that shaped its male protagonists, her body imprinting itself on her progeny. In Thomas Middleton's *The triumphs of truth*, London took the form of 'a grave feminine shape . . . attired like a reverend mother, a long white hair naturally flowing on either side of her'. Having nurtured her citizens to be free of 'all pollution, / Sin, and uncleanness', she now watches over them and keeps them

[31] Lyndal Roper, '"The common man", "the common good", "common women": gender and meaning in the German Reformation commune', *Social History*, 12, 1987, pp. 1–22.
[32] BIHR, CPH 2429, 1663, Anne Nichols c. Anne Whitely.
[33] BIHR, CPH 3023, 1673, Martha Coates c. Elizabeth Ashton, deposition of John Salmon.
[34] BIHR, CPH 2690, 1666, George Haxby c. Thomas Pinder, deposition of Margaret Green.
[35] BIHR, CPH 2951, 1671, Martha Thornton c. William Pickering, deposition of Abraham Horne.
[36] Paul Griffiths, 'Secrecy and authority in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century London', *HJ*, 40, 4, 1997, pp. 925–51.

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honest.[37] For Ben Jonson, in contrast, London predictably crawled with 'comically misshapen civic functionaries who highlight the city's insistent sexual and excretory energies'.[38] In his *Famous voyage*, Jonson evoked the 'grotesque exposition of female excess': a city that is 'mother' only to 'famine, wants, and sorrows many a dozen, / The least of which was to the plague a cousin'.[39] Likewise in city comedies a usual narrative was the sexual threat presented to enfranchised households by gallants and others, and the resourcefulness, or not, of 'she-citizens' in resisting or negotiating those encroachments. Plots excavated and tested female dispositions, developing situations that exposed feminine avarice, incontinence, vanity, and other kinds of dishonesty, or else revealed conscience, discretion, modesty, and an appreciation of the conversational and associational resources at their disposal. In the course of events, the moral boundaries of city commonwealths were examined and redrawn, the wives and daughters acting and speaking not only for themselves but also for their husbands, households, and communities. In two exemplary versions of the 'Old' and New' comedic form – Shakespeare's *The merry wives of Windsor* and Middleton's *A chaste maid of Cheapside* – female characters form the moral centre of the play, acting as custodians of civil society. Conversely, in *Bartholomew Fair* Jonson personifies urban degeneration in the form of Ursula and her pig-booth: a woman who stands as 'the seedy metropolis in microcosm'.[40] The final breakdown of civility and citizenship occurs when the prominent 'she-citizen' of the play, Mistress Overdo, accompanied by Win, wife of a young attorney, are seduced by Whit and Knockem into relinquishing their honest status, become whores, and cuckold their husbands. The transformation begins in the pig booth, where Ursula is told to 'take 'em in, and fit 'em to their calling. Green gowns, crimson petticoats, green women' (4.5.88). The process is complete when Adam Overdo – the Ciceronian magistrate who acts only 'for the good of the republic in the Fair' – is not only revealed as foolish, but also robbed of his eloquence by the sight of his wife vomiting and attired as a whore (5.6.65). The collapse of female civility precipitated, in effect, the collapse of civic authority: an inevitable causality when, as dramatist after dramatist reiterated, the one was inextricable from the other.

Common or public fames – also known as 'reputes' and 'voices' – marked the quintessence of this inextricability. Indeed, it was in the politics of opinion and reputation that the full extent of female public agency – and also the femininity of early modern political culture – is to be found. Fames were characterised by two, related dynamics. First, they were about someone or something. They

[37] Middleton, *The triumph of truth*, pp. 2–3.
[38] Andrew McRae, '"On the famous voyage": Ben Jonson and civic space', in Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein, eds., *Literature, mapping and the politics of space in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 192.
[39] Ibid., p. 190. [40] Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan grotesque* (London, 1980), p. 159.

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denoted publicly what someone or something actually had done, said, or was, and so arbitrated issues of reputation, credit, honesty, custom, and other forms of socially constructed fact. Second, they were the sets of practices through which such facts were constructed: a complex and 'collective process of gathering and exchanging information' about issues of common concern within communities.[41] Fames that achieved the status of truth were an important and sometimes binding feature of legal process, and authorities constantly sought to evaluate their social provenance, motives, and reliability. In so doing, distinctions were drawn between honest discussion, such as public fame and its synonyms, and types of dishonest talk: secret gossip and malicious rumour, scandal, and libel.[42] The innumerable instances of defamation, gossip, slander, and insults that made up the business of the church courts reflected at once the social power of these fames and the uncivil ways in which they were constructed.[43] Less recorded, but also much more usual in the parochial neighbourhoods of early modern England, was the civil construction of public opinion through legitimate modes of conversation and what contemporaries described as 'discourse'. The distinction was drawn when Francis Taylor, a well-placed apothecary and citizen of Restoration York, was accused of fathering the illegitimate child of his mother's maidservant, Mary Stanley. The court demanded whether the fame against him was civil or uncivil. It asked, 'of what persons as [the witness] heard the said pretended public fame? And where did it originally arise?' It wondered 'was it from any lewd or dishonest behaviour or carriage of the said Francis Taylor or was it from any secret suspicious meeting or communication with infamous persons in suspected places'. In particular, did it emanate 'from the bare and sole accusation of the said Mary Stanley or from the secret whisperings of the greatest enemies and ill-wishers of the said Francis Taylor'?[44]

It was, therefore, quite possible to have a common fame constructed in a civil and legitimate fashion. It was equally possible to engender defamation 'secretly', and for malicious and uncivil purposes. Women were central to the construction of both. The power of fame lay in the apparent objectification of subjective opinion. Its considerable dangers lay in the prospect of counter-fames, legal retribution, and the stigmatisation of its formulators as 'dishonest': a fate that threatened Anne Taylor and overwhelmed the more socially vulnerable Margaret Knowsley in contemporaneous Nantwich.[45] One feature of post-Reformation cities and towns was the way in which ecclesiastical courts increasingly acted as public sites in which opinions that had already been constructed publicly could be expressed and contested, encouraging a constant

[41] Rublack, *The crimes of women*, p. 26. [42] See above, chapter 5.
[43] Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, chs. 3, 4; J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and sexual slander in early modern England: the church courts in York* (York, 1980).
[44] BIHR, CPH 2828, 1667, Office c. Francis Taylor, response of Taylor.
[45] Hindle, 'The shaming of Margaret Knowsley', pp. 404–6.

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interplay between the civil and social spheres.[46] They also brought an additional set of concerns and procedures to bear on the business of opinion that varied according to subject matter. In cases of defamation, the plaintiff had to prove that their public reputation had been seriously, maliciously, and falsely damaged by the words of the defendant. In cases of marital separation and adultery, public fames were relied upon as indicators of the 'truth' – for example, whether Francis Taylor was indeed the father of Mary Stanley's child. However, public fames were concerned not only with the sexual proclivities, moral reputations, and material responsibilities of neighbours and acquaintances, but also arbitrated local issues traditionally regarded as public in the civic sense, such as disputes over parochial taxation, local elections, responsibilities of public office, and the provision of education. In both respects, they were the means by which people digested and regurgitated rumour and news of national significance, in the process demarcating and regulating their communities.

To be participant in or the subject of fame was to join in a shared conversation. It was also to be susceptible to the conventions and expectations on which conversation and company drew. This was as true for men as it was for women. Certainly causes of defamation in Restoration York suggest that, no matter the 'double standard' that characterised early modern attitudes to male and female sexuality, men – and in particular married men – had much to lose from sexual scandal, especially if it was implicated in an abuse of place.[47] This was clearly the case for religious ministers, who were especially vulnerable to charges of immorality and the undermining of their place and calling.[48] It was also true for politically active citizens. In Restoration York, apothecary Francis Taylor was excluded from his mother's will in the light of his seduction of Mary Stanley, her maidservant; his name became synonymous with sexual double-dealing in York and the surrounding area; and his career in civic politics was notably curtailed. Thomas Pinder, for example, blamed the pregnancy of Anne Stower on her 'going to Doctor Tailor to take some physick off him'.[49] In the later 1670s the soap-maker John Mould, a renowned Tory in a Whig city, was suspended from the common council while rumours of his attempted rape of Margaret Richardson – euphemistically styled 'several misdemeanours and breaches of law tending to the Dishonour of this City' – were investigated.[50] So damaging was Margaret's assertion 'that Mr. John Mould was uncivil to her and that he

[46] Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, ch. 2.
[47] Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, pp. 114–15; Shepard, 'Manhood, credit and patriarchy', pp. 76–7.
[48] For some Yorkshire examples see BIHR, CPH 2419, 1663, Office (churchwardens) c. John Legard; CPH 2739, 1666, Office c. Richard White; CPH 2786, 1669, Office (John Baines) c. Gerrard Desborough; CPH 2999, 1672, Office (John Hardy) c. Christopher Smedley; D/C 1673/5 Office (Sir Philip Monckton) c. Reginald Hopwood; D/D 1681/1 Office (Richard Coulson c. Robert Sharpe; D/C 1690/1 Office (Francis Jeffries) c. Charles Howlett.
[49] BIHR, CPH 2690, 1666, George Haxby c. Thomas Pinder, deposition of Robert Morley.
[50] YCA, B38, f. 189v.

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rent the smock from her shoulder [. . .] and took her by the crocky' that he eventually accused her of defamation in the church courts.[51] The causes of defamation launched by Susan Hartness in 1662 and Hester Browne in 1663 not only defended their own reputations but also the reputation of eminent male citizens. Elizabeth Addison accused Hartness of whoring with George Lamplough, an alderman of the city: she told anyone who would listen that 'Mr George Lamplough had had the use of her for five years together both above stairs and below or any where he pleased and he had her at command'. The implication was that the husband of Hartness was a cuckold, their tavern a bawdyhouse, and Lamplough a wilful and dishonest rogue.[52] Similarly Hester Browne was in all probability a serving maid in the household of Christopher Topham, another alderman of the city and one politically aligned against the company in which Bridget Hodgson, as we saw in chapter 5, disseminated her rumours. Certainly it would have taken household support for someone of Hester Browne's standing to meet the potential costs in money and reputation that a defamation suit against Hodgson – the most powerful midwife in the city – required.[53] If this is a reminder that the behaviour of householders reflected on the household as well as themselves, it also corroborates the boast of Martha Thornton of Leeds after warnings from Elizabeth Bowes and Alice Sykes against fathering her bastard falsely on Mr William Pickering, 'a person much above her'. Martha replied 'If I lay it on his back let him get it of as he can I'll lay such scandal upon him as he shall never claw of whilst his name is Pickering'.[54]

Fames did not materialise out of thin air. Rather, certain people were instrumental in both disseminating a rumour and convincing of its veracity. To do so, they drew on different forms of social authority, association, and conversational technique. Grace Johnson, wife of Thomas, a humble cordwainer who also ran a licensed alehouse off Thursday Market in the centre of York, was the architect of the successful fame against the much better-placed Francis Taylor, who lived a few streets away on the boundary of the parish. In court, Johnson carefully based her opinion that Taylor was the father of Mary Stanley's child on the existence of the public fame. When pressed by the court as to the genesis of the fame, all the deponents – even those supportive of Taylor – had testified that it 'did originally arise from Mary Stanley'. Johnson alone merely reiterated that she 'cannot particularise any single person of whom she heard it, the report being so general, yet for her part believes in her conscience the said common voice and fame to be true'. This obfuscated her role as mistress of the alehouse where Mary Stanley 'lay-in' and the fact that she not only cared for Mary during

[51] BIHR, CPH, 1680, Margaret Richardson c. John Mould.
[52] BIHR, D/C 1661/2, Susan Hartness c. Elizabeth Addison, deposition of Isabel Slater.
[53] BIHR, CPH 2560, 1662, Hester Browne c. Bridget Hodgson.
[54] BIHR, CPH 2950, 1671, William Pickering c. Martha Thornton, deposition of Alice Sykes.

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her pregnancy but also stage-managed the birth.[55] She gathered the women, or gossips, to witness Stanley in labour and persuaded Jane Smith, a sixty-year-old midwife from the other side of the river, of 'the necessity and occasion of her going' to Mary Stanley's side. Smith in turn established herself as an authoritative and neutral witness, assuring the court that she was a stranger to Mary, Taylor, and all the women gathered for the birth. The interrogative technique of midwives in establishing the identity of the father was tried and tested: at the point when Mary was 'in strong labour and peril' the midwife 'desired her declare before the good women then present who got her with child'. Mary answered 'Mr Francis Taylor her Mistress son and none other' and described the 'sundry times he had solicited her to act with him'. The gossips were then able to tell their husbands – some of who were involved in parish government – of 'the many oaths she has taken thereupon and with weeping tears affirmed none but him ever had any thing to doe with her'. Jane Smith could draw on the authority of her skill and experience to inform the court that she 'verily believes in her conscience Mr Taylor to be the true and only father' of the 'bastard child'.[56] This ritualised and semi-official form of objectification was supplemented by the robust doorstead culture of which Johnson was also a part – a setting captured, albeit fleetingly, in a series of depositions describing a long-term feud between two of Johnson's neighbours, Elizabeth Ashton and Martha Coates, during the 1670s. One Sunday afternoon in 1673 Grace Johnson was already 'standing at her husbands door' when hostilities commenced, Coates telling Ashton 'go thou brazen-faced whore I had better have no children then have them ill-begotten as thine are [...] go thou pocky whore you have a fireship in your Arse'. It does not take too much imagination to see how, on another occasion, the condition of Mary Stanley would have been the topic of conversation.[57]

By utilising the discursive settings of bedside and doorstead, Johnson ensured Taylor's guilt despite wealthier parishioners like Mr Robert Hunter testifying that he believed 'in his conscience Mr. Taylor to be innocent'. As Mrs Rachel Hunter also put it, she believed Taylor 'not at all guilty of committing this Crime for that he behaves himself civilly amongst his neighbours and was never before nor since suspected of any such crime'. However, even the Hunters had to acknowledge that the common fame was against their friend, suggesting that it was possible for humble householders like Johnson to use conversational strategies in order to curb and militate against the will and opinion of ostensibly

[55] BIHR, CPH 2828, 1667, Office c. Francis Taylor, response of Taylor, deposition of Grace Johnson.
[56] Ibid., deposition of Jane Smith.
[57] BIHR, CPH 2923, 1674, Martha Coates c. Thomas Ashton; CPH 3145, 1674, Martha Coates c. Elizabeth Ashton.

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more powerful neighbours.[58] That said, the quite different experience of Martha Thornton in Leeds revealed the politics of reputation as extremely hazardous. This was despite the fact that her previous employer, Mr William Pickering, had begrudgingly agreed to maintain her child at the quarter sessions in Leeds in 1670, observing that while 'he did take up Martha Thornton's coats he would not get her with child with his finger'.[59] Despite this acknowledgement of guilt, Martha lost control of the fame upon which her maintenance depended. Instead, a counter-fame was disseminated in Leeds, Bradford, and surrounding townships that had Martha, under direction from her father, maliciously and falsely fathering the child onto Pickering. According to the fame her motive was to revenge her dismissal for 'taking money out of his pocket' and to cover the desertion of the real father, Robert Calsey, whom Martha loved.[60] As a further twist, it was rumoured that Robert Thornton clearly relished the predicament in which the much-wealthier Pickering now found himself. Entering alehouses he would ask if anyone had 'seen his son Pickering' and, when challenged, explain 'he got my daughter with child and he would call him son whenever he met him'.[61] This inversion of status was too much for Pickering; and it was women who were central to reclaiming his reputation by establishing the Thorntons' dishonesty. Ellen Locke, wife of the constable, encouraged Martha to confess that 'Robert Calsey and she was long in love together' and that they would have married 'but that her friends would not consent to it'.[62] Midwife Isabel Walker reported that, at the birth, neighbours had been excluded and Martha in any case named Calsey as the father.[63] Alice Sykes described how Martha admitted in an alehouse in Bradford that Pickering was accused 'undeservedly' and laughed when warned on the dangers of compromising a 'person much above her'. Sykes also deposed that, during the York assizes, she 'drank a glass of ale' with Robert Thornton and agreed 'to prevail with [Pickering] that . . . Martha might come and ask him forgiveness' and 'endeavour a reconciliation betwixt them'.[64] By these means, Alice Sykes brokered Pickering's fame in much the same way that Grace Johnson decided Francis Taylor's.

The significance of fame and defamation for civic politics is clear enough. Whether in Rye, York, or Leeds, men as well as women – and governors as well as governed – had to protect their honesty in order to vindicate their communal place and social position. Certainly for household-heads this honesty was less gendered than historians have sometimes suggested. Just as women

[58] BIHR, CPH 2828, 1667, Office c. Francis Taylor, response of Taylor, depositions of Robert Hunter, Rachel Hunter.
[59] BIHR, CPH 2951, 1671, Martha Thornton c. William Pickering, deposition of Abraham Horne.
[60] BIHR, CPH 2950, 1671, William Pickering c. Martha Thornton, deposition of Margaret Ward.
[61] BIHR, CPH, 2954, 1671, William Pickering c. Martha Thornton, deposition of John Comyn.
[62] BIHR, CPH 2950, 1671, William Pickering c. Martha Thornton, deposition of Ellen Locke.
[63] Ibid., deposition of Isabel Walker. [64] Ibid., deposition of Alice Sykes.

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were fully implicated in the credit of their household economy, so men were susceptible to accusations of immorality levelled against themselves and their household-dependants. Moreover, the fact that women were so important in constructing opinion inevitably imbued them with degrees of authority not necessarily reflected in the minutes of civic meetings: this was especially the case for midwives, healers, and those with skill in, and power over, bodily and reproductive processes. However, the efficacy of opinion was also closely connected to the company in which it was generated and the techniques used to disseminate it. The company of midwife Bridget Hodgson was impeccable, her authority as York's premier midwife unimpeachable. What she could not account for was that Hester Browne had not, in fact, given birth to a child. Margaret Richardson, in contrast, had no friends of substance and no ritualised setting with which to substantiate her claims of incivility against Mould – claims that were themselves tainted as dishonest by the fact that her husband owed Mould money. Similar problems faced Elizabeth Addison. Her claim that Susan Hartness was 'an arrant whore and Mr George Lamplough's whore five years together and he had the use of her seventeen times where he pleased' was contested on three counts. It was shown that among her neighbours 'Susan Hartness was accompted an honest woman'; that the rumour against her was the product of malicious assertion rather than civil and inclusive 'discourse'; that it was motivated by economic jealousy on the part of Addison.[65] While similar doubts, cleverly assimilated by Alice Sykes, dogged the fame of Martha Thornton, Grace Johnson used every discursive trick in the book to pit the word of Mary Stanley against the civility and class of Francis Taylor. Sixty years earlier, Anne Taylor likewise emerged triumphant from her protracted and vicious struggle against oligarchs in Rye.

It is worth noting, finally, that the political power of fame and defamation – and also the gendered associations of this kind of power – had repercussions far beyond particular locales. Just as common fames formed an interface by which news and information outwith communities were disseminated and interpreted within them, so they were one dimension of the formation of early modern 'public opinion'. The development of scribal networks; the trade in print and politicisation of traditional literary products like almanacs and ballads; and the intermingling of 'oral' and 'literate' cultures provided new technologies and genres for common fames to be disseminated as 'rumours' among discursive communities that transcended the propinquity of place.[66] Pamphlets by the

[65] BIHR, D/C 1661/2, Susan Hartness c. Elizabeth Addison, depositions of Isabel Sanderson, Ralph Lane, Jane Fernwell; D/C 1662/4, Susan Hartness c. Deborah Young, deposition of Isabel Slater.

[66] Fox, *Oral and literate culture*, ch. 7 and 'Rumour, news and popular political opinion in Elizabethan and early Stuart England', *HJ*, 50, 1997, pp. 597–620; Ethan H. Shagan, 'Rumours and popular politics in the reign of Henry VIII', in Tim Harris, ed., *The politics of the excluded, c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 30–66.

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Presbyterian propagandist Edward Bowles were a case in point. In 1643 Bowles explained that 'Common fame, none of the worst witnesses, hath brought to every man's ears the noise of the King favouring the Irish Massacre' and his plan to use the Irish against the 'English Parliament and Puritans, as the King's enemies and theirs'. His own, printed contribution was, in turn, an attempt to persuade 'honest men' to 'withdraw their thoughts from their perplexed reflections . . . and apply themselves to a diligent observation of the contexture and comprehension of affairs, as they have been these latter years managed by our Adversaries'. For Bowles, this involved showing the 'common fame' to be true – not 'as if a judicial proceeding were undertaken' but in the sense that 'a rational judgement may be passed'. His evidence, which hinged on a reported conversation between two strangers in a Dublin tavern, was hardly more convincing than reported conversations in York and Leeds alehouses. However, he assured his 'honest reader' that 'I have not written any willing or negligent falsehoods, nor (to my best understanding) any unseasonable or unnecessary truth'. Indeed, if 'other men do their share as I have done mine, and the world will certainly be either honester or wiser'.[67] The same year he acknowledged that 'a judicial proof could not be produced to satisfy the world' about the 'work of darkness' threatening the realm. What did exist was 'the common fame which runs abroad': a fame which his 'bare opinion', printed for the judgement of 'indifferent men', could only corroborate.[68]

Although the community was enlarged, the same rules that characterised the construction of local fames applied: insofar as he justified it, Bowles was propagating an honest opinion for the attention of an honest audience. Although the subject, genre, rhetorical strategies, and audience were very different, as a broker of opinion he was little different to Grace Johnson or Alice Sykes. The power of common fames nationally likewise corresponded to their influence locally – an efficacy best measured by attempts to prevent them. Richard Atkins explained to Charles II in 1664 that 'the Liberty of the Press was the principal furthering cause of the confinement of your most Royal Father's Person'. It ensured that 'every Malcontent vented his passion in Print: some against his Person, some against his Government, some against his Religion, and some against his Parts'. It was by virtue of this pronounced incivility that 'the Common People became not only Statists, but [also] Parties in the Parliament's Cause, hearing but one side'.[69] Just as common fames in towns were often the product of libels, malice, and 'secret whisperings', so for Sergeant Morton 'the dispersing of seditious books is of great danger to the kingdom': an act 'very near akin to raising of Tumults'. Indeed, 'they are as like as Brother and Sister; Raising of Tumults

[67] Edward Bowles, *The mystery of iniquitie* (1643), p. 33.
[68] Edward Bowles, *Plaine English* (1643), p. 8.
[69] Richard Atkins, *Original and growth of printing collected out of history and the records of the kingdom* (1664), A.

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is the more Masculine, and Printing and Dispersing Seditious books, is the Feminine part of every Rebellion'.[70] There was nothing especially 'royalist' about this position. By 1646, Bowles, like many Presbyterians, had changed his perspective on the legitimacy of discourse outwith authorised places and company. With his 'party' now a dominant grouping in the post-war parliament, he noted that 'Men in trust and Authority should take care that the People may rather have the advantage, then the knowledge of their proceedings. Things that are done by them are necessarily to be made known to them, and to satisfy them in their obedience, the ground of the command, or something showing the Equity and necessity of it, is usually permitted, as is done in the preamble of Acts, Ordinances, and Declarations.' However, 'to make known the debates, and those humane passions incident thereunto, it were sometimes to discover nakedness where it ought not, to minister strifes, to make the people Judge of them whom they have made so'. He had heard 'that the custom in Scotland is otherwise, where there is a diligent eye had on the Press . . . and a reverend reserve kept upon their Counsels and actions'. In this way, the link between personal and public civility was retained, the Scots showing that 'those that are reserved at home, will not judge it meet to be very open elsewhere'. In England, in contrast, 'one of our faults' is that the 'Press' was 'prostitute to the lust of every Pamphlet'.[71]

Bowles' language was telling. Unauthorised printing was 'feminine'. The press was a 'prostitute' to lustful and passionate opinion. Its revelations were as intrusive and titillating as 'secret whisperings' and doorstead 'conferences', leaving statesmen as 'naked' as the mayors of Rye after Anne Taylor had finished with them. Intended to stigmatise the trade in seventeenth-century opinion, such language also confirmed that common fames and public opinion were analogous both in terms of their political efficacy and their gendered associations. Just as 'gossip, whether simply informative or, more especially judgmental, was overwhelmingly regarded by contemporaries as a female activity', so 'public opinion' fomented outwith civic authority was characterised in the same pejorative and gendered way.[72] Whether they liked it or not, male commentators were faced with the fact that an increasingly important dimension of seventeenth-century public life was feminised in terms of their own patriarchal categories. It was just such a realisation that informed *The parliament of women*, a complicated and ongoing satire on parliamentary practice that described women forming an

[70] 'An exact narrative of the tryal and condemnation of John Twyn for printing and dispersing of a treasonable book' (1664), in *Freedom of the press: four tracts with the diary of Edmund Bohun* (London, 1975), 50.

[71] Edward Bowles, *Manifest truths* (1646), p. 18.

[72] Hindle, 'The shaming of Margaret Knowsley', p. 393; Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, p. 121; Dagmar Freist, *Governed by opinion: politics, religion and the dynamics of communication in Stuart London, 1637–1645* (London, 1997), pp. 290–1, 298.

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assembly 'to the Dignity and Profit of the Female Common-weal'. By 1684, its central conceit was that various kinds of pejorative female behaviour could be used to ridicule the nation's male representatives, who were accused, in effect, of behaving like uncivil women. The problem of female conversation was a recurring theme. Early on in the pamphlet the Speaker explains that Bishops 'have their Convocations, Soldiers their Council of Wars, even Emmets have their assemblies upon *Ant-Hills*; only Women of all Creatures are debarred from all Society'. The reason is not difficult to fathom. Verbally incontinent women constantly interrupt the Speaker, who also warns the 'membresses' that, now they have been called 'to the great work in hand, not to be tumultuous in your disputes, but to show yourselves moderate and discreet'.[73] In order to 'out-do our Oppressors Men as well in Fact as in Talk . . . prudence and good Management' were required. A particular concern was the feminine tendency towards immoderate disclosure. Given that 'Women are not ignorant that Women do those things in secret which they would not have all the world know; therefore if any Gentlewoman or Lady be privy to any secret of her Friend, let her by no means divulge it in Heat and Passion.'[74] Another was the effeminate desire for talk to be open and unregulated rather than 'private' and 'reasonable'. Lady *Twittle-cum-Twattle*'s opposition to committees was:

> that some must be packed one way into one Room others another way into a Room and there forsooth they must have all the Talk by themselves, and we must sit hear by ourselves, and not hear a word what they say – No, no, by my Faith, that's not the way; I say let's all talk together. I am for that Court ye call *Dover Court*, all Speakers and no Hearers.

Committees proved unavoidable. However, the 'tyranny' of Reason was not; and the women vowed that the educational institutions that enabled men to 'beat us down with our own Weapons, Long Talk and Words' to be spoilt 'with a Vengeance'.[75]

According to *The parliament of women*, the feminisation of political culture was based on verbal incontinence, public disclosure, and discursive cacophony – charges that were also levelled at coffeehouse culture.[76] Feminisation was also linked to the sexualisation of the representative body and the commonwealth it served: for female representatives, cuckoldry, bigamy, adultery, and pornography were to be sanctioned by statute. This, too, was consistent with more general perceptions regarding the uses and abuses of political power. Bodily corruption was a recurring idiom of political criticism throughout the seventeenth century, marking another point of equivalence between common fames

[73] *The parliament of women* (1684), pp. 5–6. [74] Ibid., pp. 7–8. [75] Ibid., p. 17.
[76] Pincus, '"Coffee politicians does create"', p. 824.

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and public opinion. The point was made by Milton: 'Court ladies, not the best of Women . . . when they grow to that insolence as to appear active in State affairs, are the certain sign of a dissolute, degenerate, and pusillanimous Commonwealth.'[77] Be it in the letter books of Robert Horne, the scandalous newsbooks of Marchamont Nedham, or the Restoration satires of Andrew Marvell, the personal deficiencies and degradations of courtiers and courtesans were as vicariously exposed as those of any civic dignitary.[78] The paradox was that, just as the presence of women sexualised politics, so the public disclosure of sexual transgression was implicitly effeminate. Either way, public knowledge of courtly corruption increased rather than decreased over the course of the century. This was in part because of technological and commercial developments. The proliferation of cheap print during the civil war brought the Jacobean commerce in libel and scandal among scribal communities and urbane 'wits' to new audiences. It was also due to the conflation of 'defiant royalism, cuckoldry and immodesty' as part of the 'same cause' during the 1650s.[79] The stereotype harked back to Jacobean city-comedies: the sexual vulnerability of city commonwealths and the custodial role of she-citizens in protecting them. It could only be confirmed by the priapism of the Restored Stuarts. The well-documented insinuation of sexual and political power by Charles and James; their 'arbitrary mix of hedonism and repression'; and the sheer incompetence of the monarchical state after the relative successes of the 1650s dictated the form that political criticism should take. Certainly the 'fundamental distinction between the serious public sphere and private realm of pleasure' did not obtain in England in the decades after 1660.[80]

This was as true for a 'model subject' like Samuel Pepys – a royal administrator fully committed and loyal to the 'king's service' after 1661 – as it was for an archetypal citizen like Andrew Marvell. Both could not help but link the inadequacies of the restored monarchical state with its libertinism. It was what they did with their knowledge that distinguished them. On one day in July 1667, for example, Pepys had a number of conversations with fellow administrators and servants of the 'king's service'. He talked about how diplomacy was made 'only to preserve the King for a time in his lusts and ease, and to sacrifice trade and his kingdoms only to his own pleasures; so that the hearts of merchants are quite down'. He heard 'the King and Court were never in the world so bad as

[77] Cited in Norbrook, *Writing the English republic*, p. 116.
[78] Marchamont Nedham, *Mercurius Britanicus*, 92, 28 July–4 August 1645; Colclough, 'The muses recreation', pp. 386–7; Steven N. Zwicker, 'Virgins and whores: the politics of sexual misconduct in the 1660s', in Conal Condren and A. D. Cousins, eds., *The political identity of Andrew Marvell* (Aldershot, 1990), pp. 85–110.
[79] Gowing, *Common bodies*, pp. 38–9.
[80] James Grantham Turner, 'Pepys and the private parts of monarchy', in Gerald MacLean, ed., *Culture and society in the Stuart Restoration: literature, drama, history* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 106–9.

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they are now for gaming, swearing, whoring, and drinking . . . so that all must come to naught'. He learnt that 'the Court is in a way to ruin all for their pleasures' and that the 'Duke of York is suspected to be the great man that is for raising of this army and bringing things to be commanded by an army'. He was told that the King must at least make 'a show of religion in the government, and sobriety; and that it was that that did set up and keep up Oliver, though he was the greatest rogue in the world'. After all, 'it is so fixed in the nature of the common Englishman, that it will not out of him'. It emerged that 'the King adheres to no man' but vacillates between factions 'to the ruin of himself and business'. And it was 'discoursed', finally, that the King 'is at the command of any woman like a slave': he lacked control of both his personal and corporate bodies.[81] Pepys kept his conversations to himself and his diary. Marvell did not. In his *Last instructions to a painter*, the 'scratching courtiers' who 'undermine a *Realm*' were exposed to the eye through a series of pictorial vignettes that moved ever closer, and finally fully implicated, the 'lust and infidelity' of the king's own body.[82] His 'naked Narrative' of England's drift towards 'Absolute Tyranny' and 'downright Popery' was equally clear about its revelatory duty to 'the public' – an obligation fulfilled anonymously and by the printed equivalent of 'secret whisperings'.[83] Marvell played, then, a game every bit as dangerous as Anne Taylor, Grace Johnson, Martha Thornton, and countless other women across the corporate system: that of naming and shaming in order to shape opinion. That one Widow Brewster was accused of publishing his 'late libels' is a reminder, finally, of the unusually large number of women involved in licensed and unlicensed printing in the years after 1660.[84] Like common fames, the trade in public opinion was feminine, uncivil, and a crucial dynamic of political culture.

Civility and slavery

Whether they liked it or not, the conversations and places that early modern people styled (and stigmatised) as feminine were fully insinuated within the political cultures of both city and national commonwealth. *Vice versa*, the civic household was a public construction perforated by, and permeated with, the functions and language of the body politic. This immediately runs the risk, of course, of joining the unusually large number of 'dubious statements' and 'contradictory claims' that have been made by historians of 'the early modern family' over the previous forty years.[85] Given the nebulous nature of the subject,

[81] *The diary of Samuel Pepys*, *Vol. VIII, 1667*, pp. 354–6.
[82] Zwicker, 'Virgins and whores', pp. 101–5.
[83] Marvell, *An account of the growth of popery*, p. 17.
[84] TNA SP29 406, 37.
[85] Collinson, *The birthpangs of Protestant England*, p. 81.

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it is worth clarifying what 'household' means in this instance.[86] A starting point is Sir Thomas Smith's notion of the kind of 'house' upon which commonwealths were ideally built. This he defined as 'the man, the woman, their children, their servants bond and free, their cattle, their household stuff, and all other things, which are reckoned in their possession, so long as all these remain together in one'.[87] This framing of the household as a place of co-residence under the authority of a head or heads has been shown by Naomi Tadmor to remain predominant well into the eighteenth century.[88] However, while Smith and other commentators placed conjugality at the household's authoritative centre, Tadmor has demonstrated that, within the parameters of the house, a variety of relationships and hierarchies could pertain. It was the fact of co-residence – rather than specific ties of blood and marriage – that mattered. Her extrapolations from the 'household-family' mark, in effect, a decisive break with the sociological categories that have traditionally dominated the historiography. Rather than looking for 'pre-modern' and 'modern' families, 'extended' and 'nuclear' families, or, indeed, 'Open Lineage', 'Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear', and 'Closed Domesticated Nuclear' families, Tadmor has elucidated a 'descriptive concept' similar to that of cultural urbanisation – an interpretative tool that identifies, without determining, a key component of early modern society.[89]

The proximity of house and *polis* was accentuated by the Ciceronian-invigorated Aristotelianism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Smith felt that in any 'society that consists only of free men', the 'natural and first conjunction of two toward the making of a further society of continuance is of the husband and of the wife after a divers sort each having care of the family'.[90] Educationalists like Mulcaster and Perkins accentuated this interdependency by encouraging parents to educate their children in ways at once consistent to their 'calling' and beneficial to 'the public'. More controversially, John Milton justified divorce on the grounds that it could only be 'unprofitable and dangerous to the commonwealth, when the household estate, out of which must flourish forth the spirit and vigour of all public enterprises, is so ill-contented and procured at home, and cannot be supported'.[91] In each of these perspectives the household served as a base from which men served their commonwealth

[86] Keith Wrightson, 'The family in early modern England: continuity and change', in Stephen Taylor, Richard Conners, and Clyve Jones, eds., *Hanoverian Britain and empire: essays in memory of Philip Lawson* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 1–22.
[87] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 13.
[88] Naomi Tadmor, 'The concept of the household-family in eighteenth-century England', *P&P*, 151, 1996, pp. 111–40.
[89] Wrightson, 'The family in early modern England', p. 17.
[90] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 12.
[91] John Milton, 'The doctrine and discipline of divorce restored to the good of both sexes', in Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, eds., *John Milton: a critical edition of the major works* (Oxford, 1991), p. 187.

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'abroad', women taking the complementary role of 'nurturer' or 'help meet'. However, the fact that, over the course of the period, households also came to be conceived as commonwealths in their own right meant that their internal structures were also configured politically. Although the conflation of monarchical and patriarchal sovereignty by Jean Bodin and subsequently Robert Filmer are the most familiar of these representations, they by no means reflected the full gamut of commonwealth ideology.[92] For Smith, household government was ideally aristocratic, whereby 'a few and the best do govern, and where not one always: but sometime and in something one, and sometime in some thing another doth bear the rule'. Endowed with complementary skills and abilities, husband and wife 'each obey and command other and they two together rule the house'.[93] Milton in turn regarded 'conjugal society' as an opportunity for discursive reciprocity: 'in God's intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and the noblest end of marriage', allowing the man to become 'copartner of a sweet and gladsome society'.[94] In Ben Jonson's *The alchemist*, Dol somewhat naively conceives her house with Subtle and Face as democratic: a place of 'common work', a 'republic' and 'venture tripartite' that was 'begun out of equality' to bring 'all things in common . . . without priority' (1. 1. 110, 133–5, 155). More pragmatic was the contractual arrangement negotiated by Millament and Millecent in William Congreve's *The way of the world* – a legal agreement that apportioned roles and rights on an equal, if gendered, basis (4. 1).

The use of such language was widespread. However, its relevance either to political discourse or social practice is less clear: Smith himself acknowledged that 'this cannot be called Aristocracy, but Metaphor, for it is but an house, and a little spark resembling as it were that government'.[95] That said, there are good reasons to take the 'little spark' more literally. Well into the seventeenth century, citizens assumed that the imperatives of communal- and self-governance naturally extended from *polis* to house. In the early 1660s, for example, William Smith exasperated not only his parents but also a series of masters with his roguish and petty-criminal behaviour. When magistrates warned that, if he could not be taught self-discipline, he would be brought before quarter sessions, William's father paid for his own son's transportation to America.[96] When the Dean and Chapter in York complained about Shrove Tuesday riots in the cathedral precinct in 1673, the civic response was twofold. A delegation of prominent citizens was sent to London 'to vindicate this city and

[92] Tuck, *Philosophy and government*, p. 26; J. P. Sommerville, *Politics and ideology in England 1603–1640* (Harlow, 1986), pp. 27–34.
[93] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, pp. 12–13.
[94] Milton, 'The doctrine and discipline of divorce', pp. 186, 191.
[95] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 13.
[96] BIHR CHP 3497, 1681, Jane Mabson c. William Richardson and Ann Saltmarsh.

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the Magistrates thereof from the scandal cast upon them'. And parish constables were ordered to 'give notice to the several masters of family within their several precincts that they take all care of and admonish their children and servants not to give any trouble or disturbance by walking or otherwise upon any Sabbath Day in the cathedral church'.[97] Likewise, it was as household representatives that freemen and citizens held office – be they deliberative places like common councillor, or more onerous positions like the city watch that continued to be delegated by 'houserow', or lottery, well into the later seventeenth century. Nor was the *polis* spatially excluded from the sanctum of domesticity. Common councils, committees, and courts could be held in domestic locations: in York in 1654, even the mayoral swearing was held in the parlour of the incoming mayor.[98] Assessments were collected in the house – it was, after all, in the Ballard's parlour that Henry Penrose had his eyes scratched and his periwig dislodged while collecting the hearth tax in 1685. Likewise, subscriptions for petitions and local elections were collected in the street, at the doorstead, in the alehouse, or in the house itself. Householders in the York parish of St Michael le Belfrey testified in 1666 that it was customary for persons seeking the post of parish clerk to 'go along . . . from house to house through the parish and [get] the subscriptions of the Inhabitants thereof'.[99] The custom, asserted as a plea for parochial democracy rather than the closed elections run by the Dean and Chapter, became a template for contested parliamentary elections soon after.[100]

These overlaps in political space and function were matched by the interpenetration of civic and domestic morality. At the outbreak of civil war, for example, parliamentary propagandist Henry Parker compared a husband leaving his wife to a king leaving his parliament. He argued that there were certain circumstances in which the behaviour of a wife or parliament justified desertion: adultery by the former, tyranny by the latter. In other circumstances, however, desertion was unjustifiable: 'if the husband will causelessly reject [his wife]' or 'if ill Counsaile have withdrawn [the king], for this wicked end merely, that they might defeat this Parliament, and derogate from the fundamental rights of all Parliaments'.[101] Framed in these terms, the judgement that Parker invited from the public rested on social conventions rather than constitutional niceties. He invoked, in effect, the household morality of the *polis*. Conversely, Daniel Awtry's account of his separation from his wife, Elizabeth, in 1682 was laced with the language of commonwealth: a sad narrative of conjugal betrayal that was punctuated with notions of 'will', 'duty', 'trust', 'submission', and 'common fame'. Things came to a head when, 'contrary to [his] express will and prohibition', Elizabeth spent 'two nights at a reputed bawdyhouse'. There she

[97] YCA, B38, f. 84. [98] YCA, B37, f. 53.
[99] BIHR, CPH 2811, 1666, Robert Hutchinson c. Peter Wright, deposition of James Shorswood.
[100] BL Add MSS 28051, f. 26. [101] Parker, *Observations*, p. 10.

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'notoriously committed the crime of fornication or Adultery' despite his 'fair and civil attempts to bring her to sense . . . of her duty'. With Elizabeth showing no signs of penitence, he 'gave her a box on the ear and a kick on the britch and turned her out of doors'. For 'his own security and to prevent her running him into debt' he also 'caused the Bellman of the City of York to give Notice publicly that he disowned her and that none should trust her for anything whatsoever but at their own peril'. Excluded from the 'conjugal society' that materially and morally sustained her, but still refusing to make 'any submission . . . for her former faults', Elizabeth was 'now publicly reputed a drunken arrant whore'.[102] Unfortunately, Elizabeth's own account of the separation does not survive. However, the fact it was she who brought the case against her husband – witnesses describing her 'a person of good life and conversation' who 'behaved herself obediently [and] respectfully . . . as a good wife ought to do' – suggests a more complicated narrative than that described by the husband. Awtry's desertion, like the king's, was indubitable. The legitimacy of either was not.

Even as Elizabeth Awtry was attempting to salvage her household place and public reputation, John Locke and the editors of Robert Filmer were engaged in their own famous 'discourse' concerning both the nature of house and *polis*, and the relationship between them. It is an argument that suggests that, even as late as the 1680s, the household was not simply analogous to the *polis* but also, in important respects, equivalent: an equivalence that was conceived by the authors in sharply divergent ways. As is well known, Filmer's *Patriarcha* collapsed the boundaries between family and state in order to construct an absolute system of obedience and subjugation around the figures of the kingly father and fatherly king.[103] Locke echoed Smith and the whole Aristotelian tradition in his rebuttal of the model. Although 'a *Master of a Family* with all these subordinate Relations of *Wife, Children, Servants and Slaves* united under the Domestic Rule of a Family' might resemble 'in its Order, Offices, and Number too . . . a little Common-wealth, yet it is very far from it'.[104] Unknotting the threads connecting household and state with one hand, Locke nevertheless retied them with the other. He replaced the conceit that the family was 'a Monarchy, and the *Paterfamilias* the absolute Monarch in it' with the assumption that '*Conjugal Society*' was predicated on 'Community of Goods, and the Power over them, mutual Assistance, and Maintenance' – a community that was 'varied and regulated' by contract. As such, the '*Power of the Husband*' was the very antithesis of 'an absolute Monarch'. Wives had 'in many cases, a Liberty to separate from him; where natural Right, or their Contract allows it, whether that Contract be made by themselves in the state of Nature, or by the Customs or Laws of the Country

[102] BIHR, D/C 1685/8, Elizabeth Awtry c. Daniel Awtry, response of Daniel Awtry.
[103] Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha: or the natural power of kings* (1680).
[104] John Locke, *Two treatises of government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988), p. 323.

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they live in'. Likewise, the '*Father's Power* of commanding extends no farther than the Minority of his Children, and to a degree only fit for the Discipline and Government of that Age'.[105] Although the family was 'far different from a Politick Society' in terms of its 'ends' and powers, both were constituted by right, custom, and contract rather than unmediated and absolute will.

The household envisaged by Locke was hardly a blueprint for female equality or emancipation. There was nothing to suggest, for example, that Awtry was acting illegitimately if, as he claimed, Elizabeth posed a genuine threat to the 'common concern' of their household. Moreover if (as inevitably they did) the 'different wills' of husband and wife clashed, 'the last Determination, *i.e.* the Rule . . . naturally falls to the man's share, as the abler and the stronger'.[106] What Locke did idealise was a household that, in its opposition to absolute monarchy, had its genealogy within commonwealth discourse and practice. Although the husband's will ultimately ruled, it was a will that was nevertheless mediated – not least by daily and civil participation in the household's 'community of goods'. Locke's position reflected, at least for certain households, the realities of social practice. In the forty years after 1640, for example, twenty-five apprentices to the Barber Surgeons in Newcastle-upon-Tyne had their calling interrupted by the death of their master. Of these, five elected to finish their apprenticeship with their 'Dame' or 'Mistress' rather than move to another household. Although none of these dames ever attended a civic meeting, they were clearly fully involved in the shops and partnerships on which urban freedom rested as well as the sociable events, such as feasts and dinners, which punctuated the civic calendar.[107] The last will and testament of York citizen John Brice, written in 1671, suggests the affective implications of this. He bequeathed to his 'Dear and loving wife Jane who hath been my fellow worker' not only the customary 'third part of all my estate' but also his house and rented watermill 'to the end that my said dear wife may be enabled to educate my said children'.[108] The Brices' neighbour Rebecca Harland likewise regarded the 'house', 'shop', and 'business' of her husband, cordwainer Anthony Harland, as the materials of 'their trade'.[109] The Bristol merchant Thomas White likewise asked in his last will and testament 'to lie by my wife who was to me a most comfortable yoke fellow'.[110] Adopting a more discursive idiom – but also one that was naturally implied by the emphasis on community – Locke's patron Shaftesbury echoed Milton when he remembered his wife Margaret as 'in discourse and counsel far beyond any woman'.[111]

[105] Ibid., pp. 322, 321, 316. [106] Ibid., p. 321. [107] TWA, GU/BS/2/1, list of apprentices.
[108] BIHR, York Wills, January 1671/2, James Brice.
[109] BIHR, CPH 3023, 1673, deposition of Rebecca Harland.
[110] TNA Probate 91/99, 1600, Thomas White.
[111] Ralph Houlbrooke, ed., *English Family Life 1576–1716: an anthology from diaries* (Oxford, 1989), p. 111.

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This is not to suggest that householders achieved or necessarily wanted Milton's 'sweet and gladsome society'. What the household did constitute, however, was a place of daily negotiation in which, as in any commonwealth, the clash of 'wills' and 'dispositions' was determined as much by contingency and personality as patriarchal platitudes.[112] This politics, and the strategies and factions that characterised them, was as variegated as households themselves. Pepys appropriated the stratagems of political economy to prevent his wife 'running on in her liberty before I have brought her to the right temper again'.[113] Elizabeth could remonstrate, in turn, about 'her want of money and liberty' and threaten to 'not live with me but would shame me all over the City and Court'.[114] Remembering his time as an apprentice to a large and productive household in Salisbury, the astrologer Simon Foreman evoked a veritable state of nature: mistress fighting against master; apprentices, servants, and journeymen dividing into male and female factions; authority residing as much in physical strength as rightful position.[115] Relations reached a crisis for Foreman when he pinned his mistress behind a door after she tried to blame him for a mistake she had made in the workplace and she called on her husband, 'Master Comins', to beat the apprentice as punishment. According to Foreman, his master knew the request to be inequitable, as it was obvious who had spoilt the cloth; moreover, while master and apprentice had an affectionate relationship, that of husband and wife was (as described by Foreman) spiteful. Foreman was beaten nonetheless, prompting him to cancel his indenture and return to 'school'.[116] The astrologer William Lilly recalled joining a citizen-household in London that, while similarly fractious, was not a place of economic production and consisted only of husband and wife.[117] Unlike Foreman, Lilly successfully squared the expectations of his master with those of his dame, exploiting to his own profit the conjugal unhappiness of both.[118] York alderman Sir Henry Thompson, friend of Marvell and probable associate of Locke, implied similar levels of conflict in his will of 1683. Making his 'dear wife' and 'their most dear and loving mother' guardian of his children, he ordered them 'to pay unto her all filial and faithful duty and obedience'. His two elder sons in particular were 'to pay and exact obedience to their mother my dear and affectionate wife and be assisting and helpful to her in all their services she requires'. Their 'love and respect' were also to extend to sisters, brothers, and wider kin: obligations that clearly needed reiterating.[119]

[112] Wrightson, *English society*, pp. 95–7. [113] *The diary of Samuel Pepys*, *Vol. III*, p. 150
[114] *The diary of Samuel Pepys, Vol. IX*, pp. 20–1.
[115] *The autobiography and personal diary of Dr Simon Foreman the celebrated astrologer 1552–1602*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London, 1849), pp. 6–8.
[116] Ibid., pp. 9–10. [117] Lilly, *Last of the astrologers*, p. 8. [118] Ibid., pp. 11–12.
[119] BIHR, York wills, July 1683, Sir Henry Thompson.

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The daily round of household politics need not imply a 'crisis' in gender relations during the seventeenth century. Locke appreciated, for example, that 'Husband and Wife, though they have but one common concern, yet having different understandings, will unavoidably sometimes have different wills too'.[120] Much more worrying was the absence of conflict, as this implied that wives and other household members were 'subjected to the Absolute Dominion and Arbitrary Power of their Masters'. Indeed, subjection 'to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man' was 'the *state of Slavery*' and only rightfully endured by 'Captives taken in a just war'.[121] Slaves were 'not capable of any Property' and 'cannot in that state be considered as any part of *Civil Society*': a state within which, as contemporaries well knew, women were especially vulnerable. Slavery in Massinger's *The city madam*, for example, was a social relationship defined by economic dependence on the one hand and subjection to an arbitrary power, or will, on the other. At the beginning of the play Lady Frugal and her two daughters are quintessential tyrants. This is reflected in their attitude towards their paternal uncle, Luke, who, due to his own profligacy, is financially dependant on Frugal and his household: as Lady Frugal tells her daughters Mary and Anne at the outset of the play, 'He is your slave, and as such use him' (1. 1. 103). It is a trope that re-emerges during marital negotiations between the daughters and their suitors. Encouraged by her mother, who has been assured by an astrologer of the 'rule, pre-eminence and absolute sovereignty in women', Anne explains that:

> I require first
> (And that since 'tis in fashion with kind husbands,
> In civil manners you must grant), my will
> In all things whatsoever, and that will
> To be obey'd, not argued.
> (2. 2. 85–7; 2. 2. 105–9)

This sets the tone for a stream of 'articles' that lead the suitors to conclude that they 'will not take us / For their husbands, but their slaves' (2. 3. 31).

Like *The parliament of women*, *The city madam* inverts gender roles in order to both critique the excesses of male behaviour – in this instance, the creation of tyrannous households – and satirise female foibles and vices. When the tables are turned and Luke replaces Frugal as master of the house, there is much hope that the wilful pride of the women will be curtailed. Lord Lacey explains to them that 'he that was your slave' is now 'by fate appointed / Your governor' and hopes this will instil the degree of order and decorum requisite of the 'wife and daughters of a knighted citizen' (3. 2. 96, 150). However, Luke's conception of freedom is that of Filmer's: what Locke mocks as '*A Liberty for every one*

[120] Locke, *Two treatises of government*, p. 321. [121] Ibid., pp. 322–3, 284.

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to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to tied by any Laws'. The result is a vindictive and arbitrary government that quickly dispels any notions of reform and the establishment of '*Freedom of Men under Government*': rules 'common to every one of that Society'.[122] As the play reaches a denouement, the new tyrant happily agrees to sell mother and her virginal daughters for human sacrifice in Virginia. In a surprisingly powerful conclusion, the New World provides a startling context for understanding the slavery of English women. At one end of the social spectrum they can be sold as commodities, either for human sacrifice or marriage to Amerindian kings against their wills. At the other, they figure among the 'condemn'd wretches / Forfeited to the law' – the 'Strumpets and bawds, / For the abomination of their life, / Spew'd out of their own country' – who 'are sent as slaves to labour there' (5. 1. 105–9, 112).

The problem of slavery was not confined to political treatises and dramatic satires. The slavery endured by Grace Allenson in Yorkshire after the Restoration likewise consisted of economic dependency and subjection to a will at once uncivil and tyrannous. Grace finally initiated a cause for marital separation after her husband, Charles, 'turned her out of doors' in York in 1676; at least three female witnesses, all of them 'spinsters' and ex- servants to the household, testified that the life of Grace had been one of 'slavery' and 'misery'.[123] In describing Grace's slavery they also articulated what they understood to be ideal, normal, or at least acceptable in terms of household governance. For both male and female witnesses this rested on the reciprocal benefits of civility, authority, and civil society. Spinster Sarah Dawson, a servant in the household in the later 1660s, was typical in describing the 'base currish ill-conditioned and snarling carriage' of Charles and his 'base language and opprobrious terms': attributes that merely reflected a 'cross furious passionate and strange disposition'. Lacking either affection or self-control, he was 'continually scolding, brawling, quarrelling . . . beating and kicking [Grace] . . . without any occasion given but merely upon words or fancies which he was pleased to make occasions himself'.[124] In contrast, Grace continually strove for what Maria Sparling, a twenty-nine-year-old servant, described as the 'civility and respect that behoves a wife to a husband'. No doubt striking the poses necessary to impress the court, Grace was invariably described as 'discreet respectful dutiful', of 'modest strict civil conversation', and given to 'as much obliging care, kindness, circumspection as any would well doe to a husband'.[125] John Goldborough, a vintner in York and until recently Allenson's steward, commented on her 'virtuous and modest behaviour and conversation'; her reputation as a 'submissive' and

[122] Locke, *Two treatises of government*, p. 284.
[123] BIHR, CPH 3264, 1676, depositions of Frances Turner, Sarah Dawson, Margaret Green, Maria Sparling.
[124] Ibid., deposition of Sarah Dawson. [125] Ibid., deposition of Maria Sparling.

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'good wife'; her 'industrious' attempts and 'constant endeavours' 'to please [Allenson]'. He also noted that in return she generally received 'brawling and chiding', 'ugly names', and a 'black face': 'notwithstanding she had meat and clothes and all things of that nature yet she wanted content quiet and satisfaction'.[126] Only Margaret Redmaine, who described herself as friend rather than servant, suggested a more robust and less ideal response on the part of Grace. As she put it, 'when her husband hath been chiding with her Grace gave bad language and tart replies as when he hath bid damn her she hath bid damn him and hath called her queen she hath replied and called him rogue'.[127]

Allenson's incivility excluded Grace from the wifely duties and rituals that ideally placed her at the civil centre of the house – in particular, the provision and consumption of food. It was recalled by a number of witnesses that 'many times [Grace] has lived privately with the children in the nursery not daring to go to dine with her said husband'. Similarly:

> if she had ventured up to sit beside him, if he had wanted anything as a glass of beer or the like he would have knocked the maid up and upon such occasions she has heard her mistress very kindly say 'Honey I could have given you that' and he would reply 'God damn her he would have nought of her giving' . . . and then she came crying and sit by the kitchen fire.[128]

Allenson further encroached on her role by interfering during pregnancy – hauling her from bed, depriving her of rest, and placing her in physical danger – and transferring his affections from wife to maid. Margaret Green recalled Allenson shouting at Grace 'why did she stay God damn her he loved his maid (meaning Frances Hardy then a servant in the house) better than her'. It was noted that 'when her mistress had gone to supper with her master he would not let her cut him any meat but would make the said Frances Hardy help him'.[129] As a servant to the house, Richard Thackwray remembered hearing Allenson 'quarrel with his present maid Frances Hardy and she hath replied and wished him hanged whereof he hath taken no notice'. Now living as a linen weaver in the suburbs of the city, Thackwray suggested 'that in case his [Allenson's] wife had at any time when he was abusing her given him such a word he would have been past guiding'.[130] Usurpation of place was accompanied by a systematic campaign to undermine the authority of Grace with other household members. Margaret Green remembered that 'Mrs Allenson for some misdemeanours took her son Marmaduke a small box on the ears for which Mr Allenson in a very furious manner beat her and abused her most sadly.' She recalled how Allenson would 'stand in the door when the children came from school and if they wanted a button he never called any of the servants but fell a-beating her about it'. She

[126] Ibid., deposition of John Goldborough.
[127] Ibid., deposition of Margaret Redmaine.
[128] Ibid., deposition of Margaret Green.
[129] Ibid., deposition of Margaret Green.
[130] Ibid., deposition of Richard Thackwray.

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also deposed that when Allenson and Hardy locked Grace out of his bedchamber 'she durst not for her life go into bed in any other room without his order'. As a result, she was 'forced to sit up two nights in the nursery . . . and this examinant sit up with her those two nights'.[131] Grace was not simply excluded from the civil society of dinner table and bedroom; she was reduced to the place of a child or servant.

The predicament of Grace confirms that the household was not a metaphor for commonwealth so much as its crucible. It was in the house that a person's awareness of – and participation in – place, conversation, civility, governance, and community were expected; and it was here that, as part of that process, freedom or slavery was experienced. The quality of that experience related, in turn, to whether the house was urban or rural. In *The city madam*, Mary Frugal described the uncivil ignominy of rural slavery and her plans to avoid it herself. She would not:

> Sit like a fool at home and eye your thrashers
> Then make provision for your slavering hounds
> When you come drunk from an alehouse after hunting,
> With your clowns and comrades as if all were yours,
> You the lord paramount, and I the drudge.
> (2. 2. 155–9)

It is an image that eerily anticipated William Poppleton's description of the Allenson house when the family lived in the North Riding village of Crake. He described how Allenson

> would come home late at nights and bring . . . raggeyley fellows in his company such as were not fit company for his servants and would at such times Notwithstanding he had servants enough for that purpose would call and cause his wife to rise out of bed and come and give the said fellows meat.[132]

Neighbour Lucas Mawburne had also heard the stories. In Crake it was 'generally reported by many of the neighbours' that Allenson was 'a very ill conditioned and cruel husband' who 'called in country fellows who had been drinking with him to see what an obedient wife he had'. Even then, though, Allenson's tyranny was not admired: 'those fellows [would] have dissuaded him from making her come to them and told him that in case they should do so with their wives it would be past living for them'. It was also recognised, however, that if Grace 'had not submitted and complied to all his ill humours that he would have done her some mischief'.[133]

The exhibitionist role of 'lord paramount' adopted by Allenson in his country manor was different to, if not the antithesis of, his tyranny in York. His main

[131] Ibid., deposition of Margaret Green.
[132] Ibid., deposition of William Poppleton.
[133] Ibid., deposition of Lucas Mawburne.

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concern in the city was to regulate and curtail the interaction of his wife with civil society, reducing Grace to a state that observers perceived to be no less servile and slavish than public and ritualised subjugation. Sarah Dawson testified that when Grace 'at any time went abroad she usually asked his leave as those she had been a servant and if she had gone otherwise he was angry'. If this was unusual enough, then 'when she did ask leave he has many times denied her, in such manner that . . . her mistresses life was a continual slavery and misery and this examinant extremely wonders that a woman was able to endure what her mistress did'.[134] Goldborough noted that 'because Mrs Allenson had as [Allenson] pretended talked with Mr Hodgson about some business or other in his absence', Allenson 'was very angry with Mrs Allenson and did beat her'. Having beaten her, he then 'asked her what she had to do to discourse with him in his absence'.[135] Thackwray deposed that as a servant to Allenson he was 'discharged . . . for coming into the house at any time but meal times or when he had necessary business . . . to prevent him from observing or taking notice of his base carriage to his wife'.[136] Grace was equally concerned to prevent her problems becoming public knowledge. Frances Turner was one of several female witnesses to note that Grace 'did use all her endeavours to suppress conceal and hide his ill condition and aversion to her and could not endure that anybody should know thereof'.[137] Enforced segregation and secrecy explained, in turn, the absence of any 'common fame' in York against Allenson. Excluded from the civil society of either her husband or the wider public networks that characterised female company, Grace's only consolation was to 'privately [declare]' to her servants and friend 'the sadness of her condition and [lament] and [bewail] her misfortune'.[138]

'As private as they could'

At about the same time as Grace sought relief from her tyrannous husband, Mary Marvell also 'did bewail the condition'. Her problem was twofold. First, her marriage to Andrew Marvell was secret. Mary explained to the Court of Chancery in 1681 that she 'in private did live with [Marvell] as his wife, But the said Andrew Marvell her husband had reasons best known to himself to keep the marriage secret and not to call herself his wife'. As a result, 'she went by the name of Mrs Palmer which was her name when the said Marvell married her . . . and [she] at his request and desire did on all occasions conceal the said marriage and keep it as private as they could'.[139] Second, Marvell died suddenly in October 1678, leaving a negligible estate and no will and testament.

[134] Ibid., deposition of Sarah Dawson.
[135] Ibid., deposition of John Goldborough.
[136] Ibid., deposition of William Thackwray.
[137] Ibid., deposition of Frances Turner.
[138] Ibid., deposition of Margaret Redmaine.
[139] TNA, C6/242/13, statement of Mary Marvell.

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One set of papers that Mary succeeded in salvaging from his private closet on Maiden Lane were the poems that formed the *Miscellaneous poems* of 1681. A bond of Marvell's for £500 proved more elusive. John Farrington – one of the co-partners of the ill-fated bank of Woollchurch Market – successfully argued in Chancery that, although the bond was in Marvell's name, it had belonged to Edward Nelthorpe, another partner of the bank and Marvell's closest friend. The subterfuge had been necessary because Nelthorpe was on the run from his creditors: with Nelthorpe also dead (Marvell and Nelthorpe died within a month of each other) the bond now rightfully belonged to the remaining partners of the bank and their creditors. The doubts cast by Farrington about whether or not the Marvells were legally married proved a useful tactic that discredited Mary in the eyes of both the court and posterity. As Farrington put it: 'nor is it probable that the said Andrew Marvell who was a Member of the house of Commons for many years together and very learned man would undervalue himself to intermarry with so mean a person'. At the time of their marriage, Mary was 'the widow of a Tennis Court Keeper in or near the City of Westminster who died in a mean condition'. Moreover, 'Andrew Marvell did not at any time in his lifetime own or confess that he was married to the said Mary or any other person nor did he cohabit with the said Mary at any time as a man and wife use to do.'[140] Mary conceded that 'the difference in their conditions might be (as the defendant believes it was) one reason why the said Mr Marvell was pleased to have the marriage kept private'. She also convincingly refuted the charge. Providing time and place of the marriage, she declared that 'although it be true that her former husband Palmer was a Tennis Court Keeper and did die in a mean condition . . . and though it be likewise true that the said Andrew Marvell was a Parliament man and a learned man, yet it doth not follow but he might marry this defendant as in truth he did, and so it appears in the register aforesaid'.[141] The issue was never again raised in court.

Mary's robust rebuttal of Farrington's insinuations has not prevented Annabel Patterson authoritatively observing that one of the two 'most important facts about Andrew Marvell' was that '(despite the misleading testimony of the *Miscellaneous poems*) he never married'.[142] The orthodoxy that this reflects stems in large part from Fred Tupper's initial interpretation of the Court of Chancery material. Tupper took the allegations of Farrington against Mary at face value and then hypothesised wildly about how a 'mean' housekeeper could come to pretend to be Marvell's wife.[143] It is an orthodoxy consistent with an older tradition of Whig hagiography that, in eulogising the 'dignity, honour, sense, genius, fortitude, virtue and religion' of Marvell, dismissed Mary as a mercenary

[140] Ibid., statement of John Farrington. [141] Ibid., statement of Mary Marvell.
[142] Annabel Patterson, *Marvell: the writer in public life* (Harlow, 1999), p. 8.
[143] Tupper, 'Mary Palmer, alias Mrs Andrew Marvell', pp. 386–8.

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housekeeper. In putting her name to the *Miscellaneous poems*, she was merely profiteering in a dishonest fashion from her dead master's reputation.[144] The social and patriarchal assumptions that constitute the Marvellian myth were, of course, the very ones that entailed the marriage should remain secret in the first place: assumptions with which Marvell, through his insistence on secrecy, was complicit even as he subverted them. In fact, the question of whether or not Mary and Andrew were legally married is unanswerable given that the register to which Mary refers in her deposition no longer exists. More importantly, it is a question that obscures the fact that the household on Great Russell Street was not a familial or conjugal institution. Formed as a hiding place following the bankruptcy of Nelthorpe, Farrington, and Thompson in 1675, it was a locus for kinship and friendship.[145] Far from enshrining the values of conjugal society it was expressly designed as a safe house for citizens. Farrington claimed to be a regular visitor to the house; Nelthorpe and Richard and Dorothy Thompson were itinerant lodgers; and Mary performed the role of housekeeper when others were present. It was on these grounds that, as Mary explained, she sometimes attended on her husband 'more like a servant than wife (which was the better to conceal their being man and wife)'. One consequence of this was that, as Farrington testified, 'the said Mr Marvell and [Mary] did not . . . diet together'. Mary 'did not sit at meals with the said Andrew Marvell and the complainant but eat her meals after they had done as servants use to do as this defendant hath seen'.[146] Even then, though, her public manner within the house was not always servile: certainly when only Marvell and Nelthorpe were at home for dinner 'she did very often and so often as she pleased set down with them at meals and eat her meal with them'. At other times, however, 'she not always set down with them at meals'.[147]

As a secret nexus for civil sociability, the house on Great Russell Street nicely illustrates the essential diversity of household forms during the period. Rather than economic production, its main function was the preservation of a community of 'friends': it was the means by which, even in trying circumstances, a 'sympathy of affections [could be] firmly united together'.[148] At its heart was the relationship between Marvell and Nelthorpe, Farrington describing 'a more than ordinary kindness and friendship between them' and Mary concurring that 'Mr Marvell was very intimate with Mr Nelthorpe and might be a relation to him though she cannot tell what'.[149] The motif of friendship that characterised

[144] Edward Thompson, *The life of that most excellent citizen and uncorrupted Member of Parliament, Andrew Marvell* (London, 1776), pp. 447, 489.
[145] TNA, C6/242/13, statement of Mary Marvell
[146] TNA C8/252/9, statement of John Farrington.
[147] TNA, C6/242/13, statement of Mary Marvell.
[148] Daye, *The second part of the English secretorie*, p. 408.
[149] Ibid., statement of John Farrington, Mary Marvell.

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the house can be placed within a well-established tradition of civil sociability that Angel Daye described as the 'original of love' that 'grows by a sympathy of affections, of which affections virtue is said to be the whole and simple ground'. The correspondence of its householders was ripe with this particular friendship's conceits.[150] Just as Richard Thompson explained his desire to live 'the exquisite life', so his kinsman Sir Henry Thompson of York could ask Marvell to forgive 'my barbarous incivility' in 'leaving the town without my taking solemn leave of you' (the reason being an ill daughter).[151] Likewise the letters of Dorothy Thompson to the Braman household in Chichester – where Richard, her husband, hid during the spring of 1678 – insinuated the obligations of kinship, civility, and citizenship. In a letter dated 30th March 1678 she was 'infinitely sorry that I am so unfortunate as to want a habitation to bid you welcome to', especially after her sister and brother-in-law had fulfilled their duty as kin 'by doing a courtesy to these in affliction'. She was meticulous in presenting her 'service' to the extended network of 'brothers' and 'sisters' who constituted the community – not least 'Mr Farrington and his lady' and 'my sister Popple', wife of another of Marvell's close correspondents. She also apologised for having 'no news since Sunday last for I am remote from town so hear but as friends come and visit', although she did feel her husband should not return to London 'by reason it is hard to judge what will become of the parliament'.[152] In another letter she acknowledged 'my obligations both to you ['dear Brother'] and her sister ['your dearest'] for your kind cheering of my dear [her husband]' and commiserated that 'you have not received the satisfaction you desired from the Duke of Buckingham'. She added 'but we are not now to learn that noblemens' promises are oftener broken than kept'.[153]

Excluded from this community of friends and kin, Mary was inevitably isolated within a household in large part constituted by it. Just as the enforced privacy of Grace Allenson was tantamount to slavery, so the secrecy imposed on Mary condemned her to public effacement and servility. Although she rented and ran the house – Farrington conceding that there was 'reposed great trust in the honesty of the said Mary' – she did so as a servant rather than a social equal. Exclusion need not have precluded conjugal intimacy, however. Certainly, a marriage that traversed social distinctions was rare and ran the risk of antagonising friends.[154] Just as friends of Martha Thornton prevented her marrying her true love, Robert Calsey, so Catherine Chattey of Truro was torn between her engagement to Isaac Bennett and the knowledge that she 'would never marry without [my] friends consent'. Keeping the 'matter private' for as long as possible, she eventually reneged on her promise, prompting Isaac to call

[150] Ibid., p. 408. [151] BJL, DDFA/39/26. [152] TNA, SP29/402/166.
[153] TNA, SP29/401/232. [154] Wrightson, *English society*, pp. 87, 77.

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her a 'fool' and take her to court for breach of contract.[155] Marriages without the consent of friends nevertheless took place. The prospect of 'a voyage to sea' encouraged the London citizen Thomas Armeshouse to reveal in his will that, 'contrary to all my friends expectations', he was 'married to one Katherine Hughes a fellow servant with me in the house'. The 'great good affection I both now do and ever since I have known her have born unto her', plus 'the discharge of my own soul and conscience in the day of Judgement', led him to guarantee Katherine a third of his estate no matter his friends' opinion.[156]

The careful preparations of Armeshouse only highlight Marvell's lack of foresight and the subsequent vulnerability of Mary following his death. She recalled that 'whilst [she] was in great sorrow for her husband John Farrington prevailed with her to let him have the keys of the said lodgings and thereupon . . . Farrington and his agents abusing [her] too easy credulity and great trust' – and pretending 'great love and friendship' – 'did remove all the said trunks etc'. It was only going afterwards 'to look for her husband's estate and she finding no estate of her husband but a few books and pounds and papers of a small value' that she 'became sensible how greatly she had been injured or imposed upon by John Farrington'.[157] However, it was not only Mary Marvell but also Elizabeth, the wife of Edward Nelthorpe, who was excluded from the affairs of her husband at this crucial juncture. Elizabeth was an alderman's daughter, ward of the court of aldermen, and wealthy in her own right when she married Nelthorpe. Her impeccable civic credentials were no help in the vicious household politics that followed the deaths of Marvell and Nelthorpe. In a deposition that is unfortunately damaged, she described how, following the bankruptcy and the threat of commission against her husband, the Nelthorpe household was broken up and the location of the safe house kept secret from her. Even when Nelthorpe 'fell sick', Dorothy Thompson thought it 'not convenient to let her know where her husband lodged for that she might be compelled by the commissioners to discover them'. It was only twenty-four hours before his eventual death that Dorothy Thompson wrote a letter to her 'Dear cousin' explaining a sickness had come and abated, and even on the day he died Dorothy visited Elizabeth and assured her it was best she stayed away. Later that day she sent two letters in two hours of each other: one giving directions to the house, another saying Nelthorpe was dead. Elizabeth was convinced that the Thompsons 'falsely informed her of her husband's recovery and kept her ignorant of the place of his abode'. Friends or not, their motives were clear enough. 'If she had been with him he would have left his money and estate in her custody and management and not trusted the Thompsons therewith.'[158]

[155] DCRO, Chanter 11036 (Bundle), Bennett vs Bennett, 1662.
[156] TNA, Probate 91/99 1600, Thomas Armeshouse.
[157] TNA, C7/587/95, complaint of Mary Marvell.
[158] TNA, C10/216/74.

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Although both Mary and Elizabeth were thoroughly outwitted in this domestic politics, their vulnerability was not simply the product of gendered or, indeed, social inequalities. On the contrary, it was Dorothy Thompson who, out of all the friends in the house on Great Russell Street, emerged as the person most politically adept: in the household itself; her friendship and kin-networks; and affairs of state. If Dorothy Thompson was, perhaps, exceptional in her political dexterity, she nevertheless indicates the kind of agency female citizens were capable of. The experiences of Mary Marvell and Grace Allenson suggest, in turn, the ever-present dangers of slavery and servility. Somewhere between the two lay a more conventional and recognised medium. In both prescription and practice female agency was public rather than private; communal rather than separate; and fully implicated in the practice of city commonwealth. The public conversations and associations of everyday sociability were defined by a powerful feminine presence. While the household was fully integrated into this society, it was also a political entity in which concepts and processes associated with commonwealth had not simply metaphorical but also practical purchase. Certainly the house was no refuge from the public exigencies of sociability and politics: indeed, women were most vulnerable socially when an undue privacy or secrecy was imposed upon them. The publicness of women, and their participation in and control over certain kinds of civil company and conversation, gave them direct and indirect influence over civic politics. This power emanated from their brokerage of reputation and opinion, especially of the honesty – sexual, religious, and economic – of family, friends, and neighbours; and through the translation of that influence, through networks of kin, friends, and communicants, into places and networks of civic authority. It also rested on the fact that men could be, in certain situations, as concerned about their sexual reputations as women. All of which suggests that female agency – or, as importantly, agency regarded by contemporaries as feminine – was a normal if sometimes problematic feature of patriarchal and political relations. The point is never better demonstrated than the predicaments and contradictions of Andrew Marvell. Attuned to the moral decrepitude of court, he nevertheless used libel, satire and scandal to expose its degradation of public and domestic virtue. A citizen fully reflective of his civility and honesty, he was nevertheless implicated in a relationship that was potentially scandalous in the eyes of both enemies and friends – one that entailed for his wife a damaging secrecy. With circles like these to square, it was hardly surprising that he only drank at home.

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