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Certificate of Originality

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgments or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained within it has been submitted to this or any other institution for a degree.

................................................................. (Signed)

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Abstract


Key words: Early-Modern Body, Menstruation, Adolescence, Menopause, Life Writing, Death, Pregnancy.

This thesis builds upon the existing scholarship such as that by Patricia Crawford, Helen King, Alexandra Lord, and Michael Stolberg, to analyse the ways that all aspects of menstruation were accounted for in early-modern England. Broadly informed by cultural materialism, and starting with the wide-range of medical treatises that were published in the early modern period, which theorise the female body, the thesis incorporates a broad range of material from private journals, diaries, and letters to the more public conventionally literary texts such as poetry, prose fiction, and plays.

The thesis is structured according to the physiological order of vaginal bleeding as understood in the early-modern period. Starting with menarche the thesis argues that just as the medical texts broadly agree that the ideal age for menarche is fourteen, so social conventions also saw this as a significant age in a girl’s growth to maturity. Since fourteen was considered to be the optimum age for menarche any wide variation in this age was seen as problematic; the thesis includes analysis, therefore of early and late menarche.

The thesis next examines the surviving accounts of menstruation, arguing that menstruation was something that women were disinclined to write about, preferring to manage the condition privately. The chapter offers an account of how women might have managed the practical aspects of their cycle such as sanitary protection, theorising that the negative associations of menstrual blood in the Bible influence women’s position on the matter.

The other significant occasions of female bleeding were hymenal and lochial bleeding and the thesis argues that these were seen as analogous to menstrual bleeding, and theorised as such. The thesis demonstrates that hymenal blood was eroticised in the period because of the importance of virginity to this society. Like all occasions of bleeding, pregnancy and lochial bleeding was seen as a dangerous event. The thesis concludes with a review of the presentation of menopause in the period.
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Moreover the terms [menstrual periods] sometimes flow too soon, sometimes too late, they are too many or too few, or are quite stoppt that they flow not at all. Sometimes they fall by drops, and again sometimes they overflow; sometimes they cause pain, sometimes they are of an evil colour and not according to nature; sometimes they are voided not by the womb but some other way; sometimes strange things are sent forth by the womb, and sometimes they are troubled with flux of seed or the whites.

As Jane Sharp’s explanation above makes clear, regular, proportionate menstruation was regarded as an essential aspect of the well-being of the humoral female body in early-modern England. The impetus for this thesis, therefore, is to add to the developing body of understanding about the life of women in early-modern England a specific and focussed analysis of the various ways that different surviving accounts of menstruation suggest how this physiological function was understood in early-modern England. There has been a growing tranche of work on the historiography of the female body, but no thesis-length study exists which explores the experience of menstruation in England and analyses the extant material including social, private, and literary texts alongside and in comparison with the enormous body of medical treatises that examine women’s physiology in this period.

Menstruation is a key female physiological function, and it is therefore unsurprising that many historical accounts of perceptions of the female body touch upon this issue, though with differing degrees of factual accuracy. Many of these accounts cite as the authoritative source the seminal article on ‘Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth Century England’ by Patricia Crawford published in 1981. This article is a very thorough example of much needed scholarship on menstruation; however, being of article length, it is inevitably limited in its scope. Crawford’s article has been followed in recent years by one by Alexandra Lord

\[1\] Nicholas de Venette, The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d (London: [n. pub.], 1707), p. 32.
\[2\] Jane Sharp, The Midwives Book; or, the Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 192-93. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
\[3\] Past and Present, 91 (1981), 47-73; this essay has been recently republished in Patricia Crawford, Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), pp. 19-53.
on menstrual disorders in the eighteenth century, and by a new cultural history of menstruation from antiquity to the twentieth century, which includes an essay by Michael Stolberg on the early-modern period.\(^4\) A number of thematic articles concerned with pre-menstrual tension and with the menopause by Michael Stolberg further add to current knowledge of some of the ways that menstruation was theorised in the early-modern period.\(^5\) These sources, while including occasional cultural references, inevitably centre on the medical history, since this is the most abundantly available source of information on historical attitudes to menstruation. One of the aims of this thesis is to build upon, and challenge where necessary, this scholarship, in order to develop academic understandings of how menstruation was understood within early-modern society, whilst trying always to look beyond the prescriptive medical texts to gain insight into the ways that women made sense of their own menstrual cycles.

In undertaking this research it has become apparent that there are a number of different voices accounting for menstruation. The voice of the Latinate physician might seem to be discordant with that of the woman diarist, for example. The differences between public and private accounts of menstruation, and the levels of grey in between wholly public texts such as printed anatomy guides and private texts such as personal religious observance journals (which were intended to be a record of religious obedience, and might be passed down the family although not envisaged as something that would be published), also might, then, be expected to show different views about the cause and effects of the female cycle.\(^6\)

One of the enduring myths about the early-modern woman that this thesis is able to challenge is the idea women had few, if any menstrual periods. The myth suggests that early-modern women were married at menarche and then produced a child per year until death or menopause. Whilst this experience might


\(^6\) As I have indicated, the distinction between what is public and what is private is not a simple one and so this classification will be used advisedly.
indeed be the life of some women, for the majority of women there were a number of years between menarche and marriage in which they might menstruate regularly; and, as Adrian Wilson has pointed out, ‘a typical woman would expect to give birth only four or five times after getting married in her mid-twenties’. In other instances, a woman might be married to a man who was away dealing with matters of state and war, and therefore absent from the home for long periods of time, and in some cases, for years. That Lady Brilliana Harley’s husband, for example, spent months away from her during the civil war is the reason that there are so many of her letters extant. The women whose experiences are more likely to have survived to date are of the upper ranks and therefore too are more likely to be well-nourished and comfortable, and so normally menstruant. Added to this are the estimated ten to twenty per cent of women who never married for whatever reason, and there is no reason to think, then, that many women did not have years of uninterrupted menstrual cycles.

The key aim of this project was to undertake research to see if it is possible to recover examples of how early-modern English women related to their menstrual cycles. For example, how would a literate woman read about her body in the books which claimed to be guides for female health? How was menstruation presented to society in staged and printed works? In order to try to recover the ways that a woman in this period might have understood this aspect of her physiology, this thesis is ordered in accordance with the key times of change in her body and therefore the times that menstruation and related changes were at the forefront of her experience of living in a female body. The thesis, therefore, follows this pattern in its analysis. In writing about female adolescence Helen King has shown that the Hippocratic texts portrayed the process of growing from a girl into a woman to be a gradual one. King explains that On Generation indicates that as a girl grows, the channels in her body are gradually opened to

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make ‘a way through and a way outside’.\textsuperscript{9} Therefore, as part of the growth to maturity, all ‘three transitional bleedings – menarche, defloration and childbirth – cause further changes in the body’.\textsuperscript{10} This Hippocratic taxonomy, in which all of the blood from these processes was believed to come from the same source as the menses, was basic to early-modern understandings of the female body. Any thesis which analyses and considers accounts of menstruation must therefore encompass all of the aspects of female bleeding that the early-moderns understood to be analogous to menstruation.

**The Language of Menstruation**

The natural starting place for a literature-based research project which analyses accounts of menstruation in early-modern England is to decode the terminology that early-modern women both understood and used to describe their menstrual periods. This era used many increasingly well-known circumlocutions to describe this physiological function. As this introduction will show, there are some false assumptions, or general mistakes in the etymology of these terms that indicate that this research is necessary. Flowers, Courses, Terms, Those, Monthly sickness, Time common to women, Months, Gift or Benefit of nature, and Visits are all words or phrases that the early-modern woman would hear used, or see written in accounts which she would take to mean her menstrual cycle.

Crawford claims that the common term, ‘flowers’ is ‘apparently poetic’, but, as she later acknowledges, the euphemism seems to have derived from a horticultural metaphor.\textsuperscript{11} Throughout the seventeenth century ‘flowers’ was the most common alternative name for menstruation and it has a very old heritage. Jane Sharp, the seventeenth-century midwife, says it is used because ‘Fruit follows’ (p. 215), flowers, which is to say that it was believed that without menstruation, conception was impossible. The *Oxford English Dictionary* glosses the term ‘flowers’ as the menstrual discharge, the menses, after the French term fleurs, which, it says, is regarded by French scholars as a corruption of ‘flueurs’, or flow. However, Monica H. Green’s careful research in *The Trotula* shows that

\[\text{\textsuperscript{9} Hippocrates’ Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece} (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 72.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10} Hippocrates’ Woman, p. 72.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11} ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 49 and p. 51.}\]
flowers as a term for the menses had been in common vernacular use across Europe for hundreds of years. For example, German nun Hildegard of Bingen used the flowers and fruit metaphor in the twelfth century. So the term ‘flowers’ derives from the horticultural term, long before science tried to reclaim the term as a derivative of the Latin ‘fluor’ (or French ‘flueur’). As Green explains elsewhere:

Rather than a corruption or confusion of the Latin term fluor, the term ‘flowers’ was probably a colloquialism used by women who were descended from the Germanic ethnic groups that spread across western Europe in the early Middle Ages.

Crawford has alternatively suggested that the usage of the term ‘flowers’ came about because one of the early-modern theories of why a woman might menstruate was based around a ferment model, which was seen as analogous to production of alcohol. In this process, the fermentation process produces a scum on the surface of the liquor, also called flowers. Crawford and Laura Gowing state that ‘flowers’ relates directly to ‘the flowering or fermenting of beer’. Crawford speculates that, ‘although the term “flowers” may have its origin in the idea of the purification of a woman’s blood by fermentation, words take on meanings of their own, so that some thought menstruation was named “the flowers” because fruit followed’. However, this hypothesis is flawed, because whilst the idea of purification from menstruation was an ancient Hippocratic-founded one, its reinvention as the ferment theory did not take place until the mid-seventeenth century: the etymological relationship must have occurred the opposite way round to that which Crawford suggests. Indeed, it might be the case that this scientific understanding of menstruation was influenced by recognition of the events in brewing which extrapolated such observations into assumptions about women’s physiology.

The term ‘flowers’ also has a biblical resonance too: John 15:2 states, ‘Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he will take away: and every one that

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13 *The Trotula*, p. 21.
beareth fruit, he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit’. This was a well-known verse in the Bible and is quoted in spiritual diaries such as Lady Sarah Savage’s *Memoir* in which she reflects on its comfort: ‘this comforts me –that I am a branch in Christ, and all such he will purge that they may bring forth more fruit’. Savage is quoting this passage in a religious sense as she is in her sixties by this point, but its inclusion in her spiritual reflection does show that the sentiment is one which makes sense to the early-modern woman.

The next most common euphemisms, ‘courses’ and ‘terms’, both have their origins in the regular, timed nature of the menstrual flow. ‘Natural’ menstruation was supposed to follow its timely and regular course. The *OED* (28) glosses ‘course’ or ‘courses’ in such a way, and gives a note to suggest that by 1839 the term ‘course’ was still being used, but only ‘by the ignorant or vulgar’. The *OED* glosses ‘the terms’ in a similar way, and uses an example from Thomas Raynalde’s *The Birth of Mankind* which states that ‘In English they be named terms, because they return eftsoones [soon afterwards] at certain seasons, times, and terms’.

In various medical texts at this time all of the above terms and phrases can be found, but the more scholarly text might use the Latin ‘menses’ or ‘menstrua’, which derive from the Latin for monthly or ‘monthly’. As Raynalde explains, it is ‘so, because that once in a month they happen always to womankind after 14 or 15 years of age passed (being in their perfect health)’. From the term menstrua (monthlies), a corruption based on a false etymology was used which, as Jane Sharp glosses in her midwifery textbook, suggests that the term menstruous relates to monstrous, with the implication that women were monstrous being a commonplace early-modern insult. Sharp explains: ‘Menstrua: quasi Monstrua’ (p. 215), and this might have had overtones for the way that the early-modern woman related to her menstrual cycle. This supposed connection between monstrous and monstrous is made explicit in Katherine Sutton’s conversion narrative. Sutton modifies the sentiment of Isaiah 64.6 which uses the simile of man’s righteousness being as worthless as a menstrual cloth, and

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19 ‘Flowers, Poison and Men’, p. 52.
20 *The Birth of Mankind*, p. 57.
reworks it into her suggestion that ‘mans righteousness is as monstrous cloathes, and filthy raggs, that comes not from a heart sanctified where Christ dwels’. As I will argue in Chapter Two, in this period, no woman I have found would allude to this biblical verse using the term ‘menstruous’, but the subtle change to ‘monstruous’ highlights the usage that Sharp is referring to. Indeed, Sharp subverts the sentiment when she remarks that, ‘it is a Monstrous thing, that no creature but a woman hath them’ (p. 215), but that this does not make a woman monstrous. Clearly, the conflation of menstrua and monstrous was so well-known that Sharp feels that she must counter it. This refutation makes Crawford’s claim that Jane Sharp’s ‘ideas and attitudes’ about menstruation are ‘indistinguishable from those of male writers’ surprising. It is here significant, as Tiffany Potter has commented, that the first recorded use of ‘menstruous’ was in Miles Coverdale’s 1535 English Bible which states that ‘Menstruous wemen shal beare monsters’. Potter says, ‘Miles Coverdale’s manipulation of [menstruous’s] aural similarity to monstrous is significant’. Its significance, I would argue, can be further seen in the introduction of similar phrases in texts of various genres such as the English translation by Philemon Holland of Pliny’s *Natural History* book fifteen, ‘Of Women’s Monthly Sickness’, which states, ‘to come againe to women hardly can there be found a thing more monstrous than is that fluxe and course of theirs’. It is quite possible that the use of this phraseology in religious contexts from Coverdale onwards has also informed the subsequent translation of Pliny, as any translation is not an exact transliteration of the Greek, but a subjective, interpretive process. From this false etymology women could be

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22 ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 70.
24 ‘Reciprocal Regulation’, p. 97. Potter does not qualify her assertion, although she does note the usage of this phrase in translations of Pliny’s *Natural History* in the eighteenth century, and suggests that the phrase is Pliny’s in her endnote. But this is not certain, as other translators offer different interpretations of the original Greek, and so I would argue that the connection is an active cultural transmission rather than an incidental one.
accused of being monstrous in common jests and the like, such that many a ballad could be described as being sung to the tune of ‘Oh women, monstrous women’.\footnote{For examples see [Anon.], The Phantastick Age; or, The Anatomy of Englands Vanity in Wearing the Fashions of Severall Nations […] To the Tune of, O Women Monstrous &c. (London: Thomas Lambert, 1634); [Anon.], The Careless Curate and the Bloudy Butcher in a Narrative of Sad News from Chelmsford in Essex […]: To the Tune of Oh Women, Monstrous Women (London: William Gilbertson, 1662). Both make this claim in their titles.}

From the eighteenth century, scholarly texts start to prefer Greek terminology to Latin, and so from the end of the seventeenth century the term ‘catamenia’ begins to be seen regularly.\footnote{This is a general trend in gynaecology which sees ‘the whites’, a disease characterised by vaginal discharge, become known as leucorrhoea instead of the early term of fluor albus, both of which mean the same thing but simply mirrors the preferring of Greek to Latin.} This Greek phrase is used in 1688 in Randle Holme’s reference to ‘Catamenia, Womens courses or Monthly terms’.\footnote{The Academy of Armory; or, A Storehouse of Armory and Blazon Containing the Several Variety of Created Beings (Chester: [n. pub.], 1688), p. 440.} Benjamin Allen then uses this term routinely in his discourse on treating menstrual problems with healing waters.\footnote{The Natural History of the Chalybeat and Purging Waters of England with their Particular Essays and Uses (London: B. Smith and B. Walford, 1699).} The \textit{OED} credits the first English use of this term to William Smellie in his multi-volume \textit{Treatise on Midwifery} (1754-64); however, James Drake used the phrase ‘of the Catamenia or Menses’ as a chapter heading in his anatomy guide of 1707, suggesting that the term catamenia was reasonably well-known in English from the later seventeenth century.\footnote{Anthropologia Nova; or, A New System of Anatomy (London: Sam. Smith and Benj. Walford, 1707), p. 321. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.} As Paula Weideger has pointed out, the more technical and, perhaps, authoritative terms for menstruation, including not only this phrase, but also menses and menstrua, are themselves euphemisms which are based on the term for the moon, or a monthly lunar-like cycle, and are in themselves completely non-descriptive of the physiological function they label, other than that they describe the periodicity of menstruation.\footnote{Menstruation and Menopause (New York: Alfred A. Knopff, 1975), p. 4. Similarly, the term ‘menopause’, which began to be used in the later nineteenth century, is a Latinate version of ‘stopping of the months’, which was, in fact, how the early-modern physician wrote about this event.}

The names that are more common in modern times, such as ‘menstruation’ and ‘periods’, have a more complicated history. As Patricia Crawford has noted, ‘period’ as a time-value connected to menstruation is used consistently from ‘as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century’ as in the
phrase the ‘menstrual period’, meaning the time that a woman could expect to be bleeding for.\textsuperscript{32} John Sadler’s \textit{The Sick Woman’s Private Looking Glass} instructs that it is best in the case of suppressed periods to open a vein in the ‘middle of the menstrual period’, which is to say in the middle of the time that the woman would have ordinarily expected to menstruate had she been having a regular cycle.\textsuperscript{33} Thomas Gibson comments in \textit{The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomised} that a woman normally bleeds for three to four days after which ‘the flux stops till the next period’.\textsuperscript{34} William Salmon’s translation of Isbrand van Diemerbröeck’s anatomy guide similarly says that three or four days before the ‘time of the Period’ he opened a vein in a patient’s foot to draw down her menses.\textsuperscript{35} John Freind’s monograph on menstruation \textit{Emmenologia}, published in Latin in 1703, and in translation to English in 1729, similarly discusses a woman who had three periods of fourteen days’ duration.\textsuperscript{36} Archibald Pitcairn in his \textit{Works} (1715) remarks, ‘We observe, that in Women that have done growing, an \textit{Hæmorragy} is every Month excreted through the Vessels of the Womb, and they have a Flux of Blood out of their Body, during a Period known to every Body’.\textsuperscript{37} These examples seem to suggest that the term ‘period’ was used to refer to the time of menstruation specifically within the genre of early medical treatises, but they do not indicate whether women might talk about ‘having a period’ in the way they do now.

A political satire from the civil war era, however, might offer evidence that this term was used in a much wider context. A Royalist propaganda pamphlet, from the ‘Mistress Parliament’ genre, published at the height of the second civil war in November 1648, exactly two months before Charles I was beheaded, presents the marriage banns between Mr KING (Charles I) and Mrs Parliament in order that ‘they may become members of one Body, for the mutuall Society, helpe, ayde and assistance one of the other, for the comfort of all that are

\textsuperscript{32} ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{33} (London: Philemon Stephens and Christopher Meridith, 1636), p. 23.
\textsuperscript{34} (London: M. Flesher, 1682), p. 150.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{The Anatomy of Human Bodies} (London: W. Whitwood, 1694), p. 132.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Emmenologia}, trans. by Thomas Dale (London: T. Cox, 1729), p. 165. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
subject unto their *Power*. In an obvious evocation of the words of the marriage ceremony, the army in the persona of ‘Captain Army’ speaks out at the time that the congregation is invited to ‘speak, or for ever hereafter hold their peace’ (p.4). Captain Army enumerates his objections to the union, such as that the King has been delinquent in his duties to his people, and guilty of treason. In this scenario the parliament is feminized into ‘Mistress Parliament’ who is ‘a woman of light carriage, inconstant, and likely to be fruitlesse, by reason she is troubled with the consumption in her Members, the bloody issue, and falling sickness, about the time of our approach’ (p. 4). The members of parliament who were still loyal to the crown are likened in this document to menstrual blood, a bloody issue that appears if a woman has not conceived. The cure for Mrs Parliament’s condition is linked to her redundancy under the rule of the army, that is, her fruitlessness, or unproductiveness. She is to be committed to be treated by ‘Dr. Period’ in order ‘to be speedily cured of her infirmities, and to be thorough purg’d, till she become all Independent, and of the New Elect, the godly and well-affected party, with whom we intend she shall joyne Issue and beget a new sanctified brood of Kings and princes out of the Kingdom’s Army’ (p. 5). This example not only demonstrates the satirical feminization of the parliamentary faction in the civil war, but also the politicization of the female body in war propaganda. In order to cure the illness in the parliament caused by members, parliament needs to be purged of these men (the menstrual blood, well-known as corrupt matter) by Dr Period. Perhaps, then, the term ‘period’ was used as a euphemism for the menstrual period as early as the 1640s. There is no surviving material that I have been able to access that shows whether this is a term that women in private contexts would routinely use, however. The *OED* again records an example from William Smellie from 1762 as the first example of the usage of period on its own: *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* [1752–63], describing the need to treat excessive bleeding before the return of the next period. The use of the term ‘period’ in the satirical pamphlet of 1648 might represent an antedating of some 104 years.

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38 [Anon.], *A New Marriage, Between Mr. KING, and the PARLIAMENT* (London: [n. pub.], 1648), pp. 3-4. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
Menstruation is the normal, formal term for menstrual bleeding nowadays, but was one which was not thought to have been used until the mid- to late-eighteenth century before this research. The first use I have found of this term is in 1686 in Gideon Harvey’s The Conclave of Physicians, which presents an argument between physicians about whether a woman with menstrual problems should be prescribed a cordial or not. Harvey writes: ‘There was no occasion for one, and where Nature was employed in any beneficial Evacuation (as in our case of Menstruation) she was not to be molested by multiplicity of Medicines’. This reference antedates the OED by some sixty-eight years. Cathy McClive has noted that the term menstruation did not appear in French until 1761 when it was used by Jean Astruc. Since European medics shared many Latin-based medical texts, the use in English so much earlier than the French might suggest that the word is of English coinage much earlier than was previously assumed.

As I have shown, apart from the name ‘flowers’ all other normal euphemisms for menstruation are based upon the periodicity of the menstrual flow. Etienne van de Walle comments, ‘[t]he popular words used to refer to menstruation (“period” or “terms” in English, and règles in French) emphasize regularity, balance, periodicity’, and this is also true of ‘courses’, which was one of the most common euphemisms. This is similarly the case for the Latinate terms such as menses, and menopause, and the Greek catamenia, which all refer to the lunar month. All of this shows the importance given, from antiquity to more recent times, to regulating menstruation, which in early-modern times seems to have been a pressing concern. Menstrual periods were expected to appear in an orderly pattern and in an expected amount, or else were considered, as van de Walle says, to be pathological. The language of menstruation both emphasises and reinforces this position.

Just as this analysis has explained the etymology and history of some of the most common circumlocutions for menstruation, it is worth briefly

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40 The OED cites John Pringle in 1754 as the first recorded usage.
41 ‘Medical Knowledge and Medical Practice in Early Modern France, c. 1555-1761’, in Menstruation: a Cultural History, pp. 76-89 (p. 77).
43 ‘Flowers and Fruit’, p. 201.
commenting on terminology that this research has not found in use in the early-modern period. A common twentieth-century euphemism for menstruation is ‘the curse’, which links menstruation to the curse of Eve in the book of Genesis. Early-modern England was much more biblically literate than many modern English women, and ‘the curse’ was a phrase that women used, but in a more literally biblical sense. Just as God informed Eve that part of her punishment was to bring forth her children in increased sorrow, so the early-modern woman might speak about labour as her or Eve’s curse. For example, Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu writes to her friend Anne Thistlethwayte in January 1718 from her European trip, that the women in Constantinople appear to have much easier labours than their English counterparts and that ‘what is most wonderfull is the Exemption they seem to enjoy from the Curse entail’d upon the Sex’, because they deliver easily and do not have to be confined to their chamber for the period of between thirty and sixty days that English woman were supposed to adhere to in order to be cleansed from the apparent contamination incurred in delivering a child, following biblical law. However, a link to menstruation and Eve’s curse was discussed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by proponents of an emerging medical theory about menstruation, the ferment theory. Michael Stolberg explains that the texts that promoted ferment theory suggested that the ferment had ‘entered Eve’s body when she ate the forbidden apple in paradise and this was passed from mother to daughter, as a constant reminder of female sinfulness’. John Marten paraphrases Helmont’s theory in his sensationalist Treatise on the Venereal Disease (1711):

That if the first Woman Eve, had not sinned, she had never been exposed to the Pangs of Child-birth, nor to the Shame, nor Confusion of seeing herself defiled once a Month with her own impure Blood: But as soon as she had eat of the forbidden Fruit, she presently on a sudden, says Helmont, felt her Concupiscence roused within her, nor was she any longer Mistress of her own Desires; she ran to look for her Husband Adam: She solicited, she pressed the poor Man so much, that being thereby mov’d with her Weakness, and embracing her to Comfort her, the pleasure they reciprocally felt was the Cause of

44 The OED states that ‘the curse’ as a colloquial term for menstruation appeared from 1930.
46 ‘Menstruation and Sexual Difference in Early Modern Medicine’, p. 95.
Original Sin, which was afterwards entailed on all the Posterity of Adam.\(^{47}\)

In this reading, then, menstruation is clearly seen as part of the punishment entailed on Eve, in which she is to be ritually ‘defiled’ and shamed once a month. The ferment connection of menstruation to Eve was not new: in the twelfth century nun Hildegard of Bingen had linked ‘menstruation to Eve’s sin in Paradise’.\(^{48}\) A religious narrative by Jane Lead (1696) similarly claims that menstruation is sinful. In this text the ‘glory of Israel’ is metaphorically compared to being pregnant with the Holy Spirit.\(^{49}\) Lead writes that part of the symptoms of this occurrence would be ‘the natural course of the Bloody Issue of Sin also stopping’.\(^{50}\) However, despite this evidence, links between menstruation and Eve’s sin were quite rare, and Van Helmont’s texts were initially only published in Latin and therefore only available to the few rather than the majority of readers, at least until they were paraphrased by authors such as John Marten. It is, therefore, impossible to be sure how far his theory was widely accepted and how far it was rhetorical speculation. The fact that this explanation is not picked up by any other authors, many of whom quote Van Helmont widely, does, however, indicate that this was not a mainstream and widely-accepted view. Shuttle and Redgrove have alternatively suggested that the pejorative use of ‘the curse’ in this context might have ‘originally been “course”’.\(^{51}\) This theorem makes sense if it was the case that woman referred to the time of menstruation as having ‘the course’. If this is the case then the often applied etymology that this term came from the Bible, seems to have been tacked on retrospectively.

One of the reasons that it has proved so important to trace and analyse the history of the many and various euphemisms for menstruation in the early-modern period is because it shows the deeper significance of the fact, as will be analysed in detail in Chapter Two, that despite the numerous euphemisms and circumlocutions that women had recourse to, on the very rare occasions that they

\(^{48}\) The Trotula, p. 21.
\(^{50}\) A Fountain of Gardens, p. 440.
referred to their menses at all, women still struggled to find an acceptable expression to describe their menstrual cycle.

Menstruation and the Humoral Body

In the humoral system of bodily economy, the body was envisaged to be kept healthy by means of a finely balanced hydraulic fluid system, which physicians went to great lengths to keep in balance. Mirroring the four elements of the earth were the four main humours of the body: blood which was related to air and Spring, black bile (melancholy) which was related to the earth and Autumn, yellow bile (choler) which was related to fire and Summer, and phlegm which was related to water and Winter. A predominance of any one humour made the human body out of balance and consequently ill. Optimal humoral balance was the goal of all early-modern medicine. As Margaret Cavendish writes in her *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, ‘when some particular Humour in Man's Body superabounds, or there is a scarcity of some Humours, it causes such Irregularities, that do, many times, occasion his Destruction’.

A further aspect of humoral theory was, as Elaine Hobby notes in her introduction to *The Midwives Book*, that each organ or structure within the body had its own ‘natural quality or “faculty’’ (p. xxxiii). This was the reason, for example, that the breasts were thought to be able to turn menstrual blood into milk.

Gail Kern Paster argues that there is an inherent misogyny in this belief system because a key aspect of ‘humoralism’ was that it privileged heat, so automatically viewed the apparently colder, wetter female body as inferior. Paster writes, ‘the coldness and sponginess of female flesh, relative to the flesh of men, become traits of great ethical consequence by explaining the sex’s limited capacity for productive agency, individuality, and higher reasoning’. Unfortunately, Paster resorts to the same reductive essentialism in her analysis as she is suggesting the early-modern medic did. Andrew Wear takes a more positive stance and claims that ‘menstruation reinforced the belief that health

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consisted in the free flow of fluids through the body’, so menstruation in many ways can be said to prove the logic of humoral theory.\textsuperscript{55} Wear’s extrapolation that, in terms of protection from illness, menstruation ‘gave women an advantage over men: nature bled them regularly, kept their fluids flowing and evacuated noxious products’ is not a view which would have been professed by an early-modern physician, who almost always classified menstruation as a necessary disease or weakness.\textsuperscript{56} As Alexandra Lord has appositely observed, ‘[t]he onset and continuing presence of the catamenia marked the nadir of a woman’s physical well-being; only immediately after the expulsion of this plethora were women as healthy as men normally were’.\textsuperscript{57}

Humoral theory was not an abstract theory for the early-modern woman, but a fundamental part of how she perceived herself and her body. This is the reason that any analysis of menstruation in the early-modern period must be grounded in a firm understanding of this system. That humoral theory was central to the ways that women understood their bodies is the reason why the poet An Collins can be seen to be making oblique references to her lack of menstruation in her poem ‘Another Song’ (The Winter of my infancy being over-past).\textsuperscript{58} Collins links her infancy with winter, and then describes the procession of spring for others: ‘suddenly the spring would haste / Which useth everything to cheer’ (lines 2-3). Poignantly, Collins says that her winter did not end in menarche:

\begin{quote}
But in my spring it was not so, but contrary,
For no delightful flowers grew to please the eye,
No hopeful bud, nor fruitful bough,
No moderate showers which causeth flowers
To spring and grow. (lines 11-15)
\end{quote}

Her spring remained dry and she seems to be saying that her lack of menstruation made her ill: ‘My April was exceedingly dry, therefore unkind’ (line 16, meaning both ‘unkind’ and ‘unnatural’), which is completely in line with humoral medical

\textsuperscript{55} Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 141.

\textsuperscript{56} Knowledge and Practice, p. 141. Wear’s hypothesis is founded in the early-modern idea that women who had regular menstrual periods were less likely to suffer from illnesses than women who had irregular menstrual periods.

\textsuperscript{57} “The Great Arcana of the Deity”, p. 57. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{58} Divine Songs and Meditations (London: R. Bishop, 1653), pp. 56–58. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
thinking.\textsuperscript{59} For Collins her dryness is her way of describing the humoral cacochymy that has meant she has failed to achieve menarche.

**Theories of Menstruation**

Early-modern English society was one in which the womb could be described in medical texts as the most likely cause of any female illness. Several texts make use of a Hippocratic letter in which the womb is described as the ‘cause of six hundred miseries, and innumerable Calamities’.\textsuperscript{60} In early-modern England a debate raged in prescriptive medical texts about the causes of and the reasons for menstruation to happen as a physiological function. It is necessary to rehearse briefly the contemporary theories about menstruation in order to place what follows in this thesis into its medical context. Everyone who theorised in print about menstrual related disorders, or who practised therapeutic medicine, was drawing on one or more of these views; an understanding of the ways that early-modern medicine sought to explain menstruation is therefore vital to make sense of the position physicians and the women they treated took. For example, as Alice Thornton was ill with a fever and poor vision in pregnancy, which she believed was caused by an excess of blood in her body, her doctors debated whether or not she should be bled to ease her suffering.\textsuperscript{61} In this anecdote, not only do the medics explain their relative positions, but Thornton herself theorises about the validity of their views. The rationalisation of all parties in this incident is informed both by humoral theory and by the theory that Thornton’s body was plethoric, one of the theories about how menstruation could occur. Michael Stolberg summarises these theories as falling into three categories: ‘the cathartic, the plethoric, and the iactrochemical’.\textsuperscript{62} The first two models relate to the Hippocratic model of purification, and the Galenic model of a release of excess blood that a woman’s inefficient body had not been able to utilise, and the third relates to a new early-modern theory which claimed that menstruation was the result of a ferment of blood building in a woman’s body, as discussed above.

\textsuperscript{59} For further discussion see Sarah Skwire, ‘Women, Writers, Sufferers: Anne Conway and An Collins’, *Literature and Medicine*, 18 (1999), 1-23.
\textsuperscript{62} ‘Menstruation and Sexual Difference’, p. 91.
early-modern medics would not summarise these theories like Stolberg is able to, for his analysis is based on a historical chronology of theories of menstruation. The idea of purification or catharsis, which, Stolberg explains, had been dominant until around 1580, but was not normally promoted beyond the sixteenth century as a theory in its own right.\textsuperscript{63} It was the case that many theorists suggested that the menses might remove corruption from a woman’s body, especially if she was ill, but this was ancillary to the process of menstruation, rather than a cause of it. As John Freind explains, in ‘healthy persons, that blood which is ejected is not at all impure or tainted, but very good and fragrant’ (p. 4), but menstrual blood is ‘sometimes so vitiated as to be almost ranked among poisons, but this is not owing to any ill quality of its own, but the mixture of some Filth, or Contagion otherways contracted’ (p. 2).

From this early-modern perspective, John Freind argues that the two reasons for menstruation were in order to ‘render Women more apt for Conception, or to afford Nutriment to the Foetus’ (p. 4). Freind suggests that after this ‘final cause’ of menstruation has been decided, this debate needed complication and to be broken down to decide ‘efficient cause’ of menstruation, which is to say, how it happens. There were three theories as to the ‘efficient’ cause of menstruation: the lunar theory, the ferment, and the plethora (p. 9). This is the taxonomy that early-modern physicians would recognise while expounding on their preferred rationalisation.\textsuperscript{64} As Lord also notes, Crawford puts forward a differing model to explain attitudes to menstruation and claims that either it was understood ‘to purify the blood of females, or to remove from their bodies an excess of blood’, but this assertion is not supported by my analysis.\textsuperscript{65} Firstly, Freind describes the outdated lunar theory, which has still not completely died away even today, but which is almost always mentioned in early-modern texts in order to discount it. Freind argues that if the moon did influence menstruation then ‘all Women in the same Climate of the same Age and Constitution would have their Menses in the same turns, at the same Season’ (p. 9). It is, however, the case that the lunar theory was being reproduced occasionally in medical texts at

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Menstruation and Sexual Difference’, pp. 91-94.
\textsuperscript{64} ‘“The Great Arcana of the Deity”’, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{65} ‘“The Great Arcana of the Deity”’, p. 44, n. 20; ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 50. Crawford goes on to assert that ‘menstruation was precipitated by a fermentation in the blood’ (p. 50), which implies that she has not appreciated that the ferment theory was a distinct one that ran concurrently with the plethora and lunar theories.
this time. In 1730 John Cook’s *An Anatomical and Mechanical Essay On the Whole Animal Oeconomy*, argues that menstrual periods ‘go very much, as to the Time of Eruption, by the Moon’.66 Whilst the lunar theory was mainly considered to be outdated, there was a generalised acceptance by a number of authors, such as in the idea that a younger woman might be more likely to menstruate at the new moon and a more mature woman as the moon wanes.

Freind describes the two main basic beliefs about how women menstruated: the two theories were, firstly, the fairly new fermentation (iactrochemical) theory which suggested that at either some unknown site in a woman’s body, or indeed in the whole mass of the blood, a ferment occurred throughout the month. This reached a certain point which then triggered the body to expel the ferment and remove all manner of potential poisons or ‘filth or contagion’ (p. 2). This theory was promoted from the mid-seventeenth century, and in some ways can be viewed as a modernised version of the Hippocratic purification or cathartic model.67 Secondly, the ancient Galenist theory of menstruation being the result of a plethora, or an excess of blood, was discussed. A supporter of the plethora theory, despite, or perhaps because of, his becoming a professor of chemistry at Oxford in 1703, the year of publication of his monograph, Freind was against the ferment theory, which he deemed to be an ‘absurd Doctrine’ (p. 11). Freind supported the Galenic opinion that a plethora of blood built up in the womb during the month, according to Galen because women stayed indoors for much of the time causing them to ‘heap up a great quantity of Humours’ (p. 13), which, to maintain a humoral balance, they needed to expel from time to time. Men, who were assumed by medical theorists, following Galen, to be more active and vigorous than women, could expel through exertion any excess blood or sweat they manufactured. The more sedentary female, however, was thought to need to void an excess of blood each month, as one author eloquently explains:

If the Terms flow constantly once a Month, and in a due Quantity, they generally preserve Women in perfect health; but if they [menstrual periods] do not, or if there is any Disorder in this Flux, Women cannot

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67 ‘Menstruation and Sexual Difference’, pp. 91-94.
be well, because the natural Course of the Fluids is then changed, and
the admirable Order of the humane Machine broke.\(^68\)

Periodical voiding of blood restores the female humoral balance and maintains
her health. This, then, is the reason that physicians went to great lengths to
promote regular menstruation: not because, as Wear has argued, this gave women
the possibility of being healthier than men, but rather because, as Lord has
argued, this needed to happen for women to be as healthy as a male could
routinely expect to be. By the middle of the eighteenth century the ferment theory
was broadly discredited, because it ‘fell victim to the growing emphasis on
quantification and analysis’.\(^69\) Lord further explains that as empirical
experimentation found menstrual blood was not poisonous, so the idea of
removing toxicity from the blood in this way was similarly redundant.\(^70\) King
expands on Lord’s view and suggests that the plethora theory ‘was victorious
because it implied a whole set of beliefs about women as the weaker sex’.\(^71\)

However, the ferment theory implies a similar set of misogynistic assumptions,
and so, I would suggest, building on Lord’s hypothesis, that ferment theory also
fell out of favour because increasing anatomical experiments could not locate the
source of the ferment. In their private writings, women do not make explicit
reference to these theories, but given that women seem to have readily accepted
the treatment of phlebotomy for all manner of menstrual-related conditions, it is
probable that, either consciously or not, they accepted that they had too much, or
a plethora, of blood in their bodies at certain times. Certainly this was the case
when Alice Thornton fell ill during her pregnancy. So, whilst these theories might
not be discussed overtly in personal, private writings, they are discussed either
openly, or by inference, in every public medical treatise. Reference to these
theoretical assumptions therefore needs to be made to fully situate these writings
in their full context in the whole thesis.

This is also relevant to the assumed relation of conception to
menstruation, as Freind’s comments above show. Conception was considered

\(^68\) [Anon.], *The Ladies Physical Directory; or, A Treatise of all the Weaknesses, Indispositions
and Diseases Peculiar to the Female Sex from Eleven Years of Age to Fifty or Upwards*
(London: [n. pub.], 1727), p. 3.
\(^69\) “The Great Arcana of the Deity”, p. 44.
\(^70\) “The Great Arcana of the Deity”, p. 44.
\(^71\) *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis and the Problems of Puberty* (London:
most likely to occur immediately following a menstrual period, when the womb was newly cleaned. Whilst Galenists believed that women produced seed at orgasm similarly to a male, Aristotelian theorists thought that menstruation eliminated the impure part of the excess blood, ‘leaving a pure substance from which the embryo was made’, and that this purified menstrual blood was a woman’s contribution to the conception.\textsuperscript{72} Under this system, the menstrual blood was the matter that a woman brought to the conception, not a seed. Whether a physician agreed with the one-seed or two-seed models, after conception the foetus was, in most models, thought to feed off the menstrual blood. This explained the main reasons why a woman might still bleed in early pregnancy as the foetus could not ingest the excess blood that was flowing to the womb daily. Whereas, nowadays bleeding in pregnancy is generally taken to be a cause for concern, in Hippocratic theory, some bleeding in pregnancy was to be expected. Thomas Gibson explains that pregnant women seldom have periods, making reference to the competing plethora and fermentation theories:

\begin{quote}
In Women with Child they [menstrual periods] seldom flow, either because the redundant blood is then bestowed on the nourishment of the Foetus, according to the old Hypothesis; or according to the new, because it is defrauded of a considerable part of the Chyle (or nutritious juice) which is consumed by the Foetus, whereby it becomes diminished and depauperated, which is the reason why [wet] Nurses also seldom have them [periods].\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

If, in their private writings, men and women referred to menstruation at all, it was often in the context of reproduction. It is therefore important to be able to situate their comments in the appropriate humoral and menstrual context.

\textbf{Organisation}

The first chapter focuses on menarche examining the way that this aspect of puberty was accounted for. This chapter examines both the cultural perceptions surrounding female adolescence and individual experiences. Chapter Two examines accounts of menstruation itself which looks at various aspects of this physiological function ranging from accounts of the function and prejudice surrounding menstrual blood and sanitary protection, to accounts of

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{72} ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 51.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Anatomy of Human Bodies Epitomised} (1703), p. 188.
dysmenorrhoea, and seeks to analyse the ways that ‘normal’, routine menstruation was documented. This chapter encompasses writing by men and women in the period, in both public and private discourse, within medical and religious theoretical, rhetorical, and superstitious frameworks. I also develop the analysis of the way that menstruation was presented culturally as this is key to analysing the ways that menstruation was presented to society; it is both a reflection of cultural attitudes and a measure of the framework and context within which a woman might reflect on her menstruating body.

Chapter Three is then concerned with accounts of hymenal bleeding, which was thought to be part of a woman’s growth to maturity, signifying the transition from girl to wife. The blood expected to be lost upon first intercourse was sometimes thought to be a form of menstrual blood. In modern society the bleeding after pregnancy is not seen as menstrual, but in early-modern society both bleeding during labour and subsequent lochial flow was considered to be an exact variant on menstruation, because of a rationalisation which said that this blood was the menstrual blood which has been retained in the womb during pregnancy, and this aspect of women’s bleeding forms the topic of final chapter.

Sources

The main source texts for the research in this thesis come from published journals, letters, and diaries from the early-modern period. The majority of the medical texts have been sourced from the online databases of EEBO (Early English Books Online via <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>) and ECCO (Eighteenth Century Collections via <http://www.gale.cengage.com>). I make no distinction in the thesis between books consulted online this way and ones consulted in hard copy, since the databases constitute scanned versions of the originals.

This thesis aims to privilege the writings of women, and even to seek to recover female voices through their male mediators, such as in male-authored diaries. Felicity Nussbaum claims that one of the things that New Historicism as a methodological approach has done is to relate ‘the female body in medical tracts to women’s images of themselves’. 74 Whilst the approach of New Historicism, or

more particularly Cultural Materialism does inform this thesis as way of approaching literature of all types, I have specifically not linked the way that the female body is presented in all forms of prescriptive texts to the way that women might have related to their own body, unless there is a clear argument, formed from close reading, to do so.

Note on Spelling Conventions

In early-modern texts the letters i and j, and u and v have been consistently silently emended to their modern equivalents for ease of reading.
Chapter One: ‘Having the Benefit of Nature’: Menarche and Female Adolescence in Early-Modern England

Menarche is the occasion of a female’s first menstrual period and indicates that a girl has reached puberty. However, menarche is not a term that had any currency in this period and, indeed, is not one that is glossed in the Oxford English Dictionary until 1900. According to the widely privileged Hippocratic teachings, the end of male puberty was a sudden affair, as the production of semen proved that the boy was sexually mature, ‘but in girls a more gradual series of events is necessary to complete the process of becoming a woman’.

Helen King argues that the Hippocratic text indicates how as a girl grows, the channels in her body are opened to make ‘a way through and a way outside’. King explains that On Generation shows, therefore, that as part of the growth to maturity, ‘three transitional bleedings – menarche, defloration and childbirth – cause further changes in the body’. Menarche meant that the body is sexually mature and physically ready for what ancient medicine took to be the next stage of the transition to womanhood. This chapter will analyse the social and medical context in which a normal, timely menarche was written about in the early-modern period, and situate this within the accounts of female adolescence more broadly, since menarche is part of a series of physical and emotional changes. The chapter will then go on to offer a detailed analysis of the presentation, in a variety of literature, of menarche which was not timely because it occurred either too early or too late by the physiological assumptions of the time.

Puberty, the term used now to cover the range of developmental stages that the human body goes through as it begins the growth to adulthood, was a term in use in early-modern England. It was, however, also one which at the beginning of the period seems to be applied mainly to males. This impression could result from the number of extant texts, rather than a real bias, since the term becomes more unilaterally applied as the period progresses. The term is defined in Edward Phillip’s seventeenth-century dictionary as ‘Puberty, (lat.) youth, the

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2 Hippocrates’ Woman, p. 72.
3 Hippocrates’ Woman, p. 72.
age when hairs begin to grow about the privy members’. Meanwhile Thomas Blount’s contemporary dictionary defines the term: ‘Puberty (pubertas) the age of 14 years in men, and 12 in women; youth, or the blossoms of it’. In Will Greenwood’s book on love, the author responds to the question ‘At what age [do] we begin to be in Love?’ with this answer:

But the most received opinion is, that Men and Women are subject to this passion, as soon as they are entered into those years in which they come to their puberty; which appeareth in Men chiefly by their voice, which at that time growes great and harsh; it may be known also in Women by observing their breasts, which about this time begin to swell and grow bigger, and that for the most part about the age of 12 and 14; so likewise it is the justice of nature, that those creatures that soonest meet their period [of puberty], do as suddenly arrive at their perfection and maturity; as we may observe in Women, who as they are ripe sooner then Men, so they commonly fail before them.

This mildly humorous book, however, is relatively unusual in that it claims that it wishes to address the male and female reader on an equal basis. The preface states, ‘Whatsoever I speak in this Treatise of the one sex, may be also said of the other’, which might explain the author’s seemingly ungendered use of the term puberty. However, women are gently mocked in the preface. Greenwood hopes that if his female reader takes offence at his revealing some of the tricks that woman employ to make men fall in love, they react like they would if they had a shoe that pinched their foot and that they would ‘rather cut the shooe then burn the last’. This makes the idea that the text is offered to both sexes equally a somewhat disingenuous claim.

As King has commented, in Tudor and Stuart England there were ‘various models of the “ages of man” theory based on classical and medieval sources’. These theories have different numbers of ‘ages’ or phases of life that bodies go through and some include a time for adolescence, ‘but disagree on whether this

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5 Glossographia; or, A Dictionary Interpreting All Such Hard Words of Whatsoever Language Now Used in our Refined English Tongue with Etymologies (London: George Sawbridge, 1661), p. 261[?].
6 A Description of the Passion of Love Demonstrating its Original, Causes, Effects, Signes, and Remedies (London: William Place, 1657), pp. 81-82.
7 A Description of the Passions, p. 5.
8 A Description of the Passions, p. 5.
should be placed before, or after, “youth”. For women, youth ended with marriage’.\textsuperscript{10} John Carmi Parsons has noted of the medieval period that ‘the lack of an “ages of women” in literature similar to that of men raises many questions about medieval views on women’s life course’.\textsuperscript{11} However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the seven ages theory was one to which women related. In a text from the early-seventeenth century, clergyman George Hakewill explains in verse form the popular seven ages of man philosophy, which seems to have been a strong early-modern belief. Puberty is the third age:

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
When children once to seaven yeares have aspired,
The tale of all their teeth they have acquired.
By that the next seaven ended have their date
Pubertie comes and power to generate.
The third seaven perfect's growth, and then the chin
With youthly downe to blossom doth begin.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}
\end{center}

This excerpt aptly demonstrates that early in the period puberty is a somewhat gendered term. In this example, the neutral term ‘children’ is applied to demonstrate the seven age theory, but by the end of the stanza it is becomes apparent that the subject is male. Indeed, the author goes on to explicate his theory by commenting that in the first age the child gets their teeth, and in the second ‘the springing of the pubes’ happens, but in the third age the beard will appear. The language used for male puberty is similar to that of female puberty in that the pubic hair springs, which is how menstruation is often described as happening, and the downy beard growth is likened to flower blossom. This text does refer to female puberty but only indirectly when it comments that in ancient times when girls passed the age of fourteen they were given the title of ‘mistresses’.\textsuperscript{13} Despite the fact that the production of sperm has been shown to be the marker of the change from a boy to a man in medical texts, the beard has been argued to be the ultimate early-modern signification of being a grown man. Will Fisher cites Thomas Hall’s \textit{The Loathsomeness of Long Hair} (1653) which states that ‘a decent growth of the beard is a signe of manhood […] given by God to

\textsuperscript{10} The Disease of Virgins, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{11} ‘The Medieval Aristocratic Teenaged Female: Adolescent or Adult?’, in \textit{The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150-1650}, ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002), pp. 311-22 (p. 311).
\textsuperscript{13} An Apologie of the Power and Providence of God, p. 164
distinguish the Male from the Female sex’.  

Fisher goes on to argue that the distinction the beard makes between men and women is just as relevant between boys and men, with the beard distinguishing a grown man from a boy. This hypothesis complicates the medical notion that male puberty is more straightforward than female puberty as beard-growth is a gradual process, and whereas a male might be capable of ejaculation in early adolescence, he might not have a full beard for many years.

As Greenwood’s text suggests, girls were assumed to reach puberty sooner than males and this is explained in a translation of a French text Curiosité Naturelle which was itself based on the well-known text The Problems of Aristotle, and utilises the same question and answer format as its source text. This text claims to be designed for the general reader to be able to find answers to a myriad of natural problems, which it claims are not tackled in a ‘vulgar’ way. A question is posited about how it is that ‘Females are sooner perfect in their growth then Males?’ The answer is distinctly misogynistic and argues that the reason for this is that women are less perfect than men and therefore are completed sooner:

Because as in things Artificiall, those which are done in most haste, are the worst accomplished; so Nature imploseth lesse time to the increase of Females, as being lesse perfect then Males, which have much more of naturall heate, and are more vigorous, strong, and robust, then they are: It is also the cause wherefore Daughters are deemed by right of Law capable of Marriage at 12 yeares of age, and Males onely at 14, which age is called Pubertie, or Youth. (p. 2)

That the developmental stage of growing pubic hair happens at the same age as given above in males and females is the subject of the next question and is explained in terms of the natural heat that comes to the genitals in puberty. That women do not grow beards, however, is explained in terms of ‘their excessive humidity and coldnes’ (pp. 8-9). This is a normal humoral belief about the composition of the female body: it was colder and wetter than a male body. The

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15 ‘The Renaissance Beard’, p. 175.
next question and answer pair explains that females are capable of conceiving before males because of their physiological imperfections, and this is said to be the reason that females are unable to conceive after the age of fifty, for ‘it is no great marvaille though nature advanced women in the beginning, since shee sooner failes them, then men in the end’ (pp. 193-94).

The age of puberty was often explained to be in line with legal rather than biological reasoning. Laws stretching back to Roman times had ascribed legal adult status to girls from the age of twelve. In early-modern English medical texts it was more often believed, as Thomas Raynalde explains, that a woman will reach menarche ‘after 14 or 15 years of age passed (being in their perfect health)’. Over one hundred years later, in 1671, Jane Sharp agrees that menstrual periods ‘begin commonly at fourteen years old’. As Sharp explains, this is in accordance with the seven-ages theory in which every seven-year point was classed as a time of crisis, or a ‘climacterical’ year; Sharp makes this clear when she says that menarche happens ‘commonly in the Climacterical, or twice seven years they break forth’ (p. 69). This idea is built upon by John Freind, in the eighteenth century, who frames his explanation of the expected timing of menarche in more typically learned language, leaving no room for ambiguity: ‘The menstrual Purgation, or a flux of Blood issuing from the Uterus every Month, usually begins its Periods at the Second Septenary, and terminates at the Seventh, or the Square of the number seven’. In the 1960s and 70s there was much work done to determine the age of menarche in medieval times and early-modern periods. In a survey of medieval sources, both J. B. Post, and Amundsen and Diers show that the expected age of menarche in antiquity was around 13-14 years and that that was thought to have been fairly stable until the 1500s, when menarche was thought to occur at an increasingly later age, until it began to fall

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17 An example is seen in Edward Leigh’s *A Philologall Commentary; or, An Illustration of the Most Obvious and Useful Words in the Law with their Distinctions and Divers Acceptations* (London: Charles Adams, 1658), pp. 52-53: ‘Covenant, is an agreement made by Deed in writing, and sealed between two persons. An Infant (by the Common Law) is not of age to bind it self by Covenant, ante annos nubiles, which is twelve years in a woman, and fourteen years in a man-child’.

18 *The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman’s Book*, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 57. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

19 *The Midwives Book; or, The Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 215. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

back again to a similar age as formerly by a few months per decade from the 1830s. Monica H. Green has shown that there are some substantial variations in the estimates that texts give for the menarcheal range, with one fourteenth-century London cleric claiming that ‘In ancient times, the menses did not begin to flow until the fifteenth or fourteenth year, or certainly not before age twelve. But now they begin in certain girls in the eleventh or in the tenth year’; however, other texts gave a range of nine to sixteen, or even eighteen.

The work done by Peter Laslett to try to determine the average age of menarche uses the age of marriage, and of subsequent first birth, as an indicator of sexual maturity, because this was a criterion of the Christian church. Laslett explains that in his view

The one way to obtain figures would appear to be by working backward from marriage recordings. Since a marriage within the universal Christian Church could only be celebrated if both parties were sexually mature, figures for the age at first marriage for women can be taken as figures for the maximal age of menarche.

However, as Laslett admits, the age of marriage might be taken to show that a woman was sexually mature, but it does not show ‘how long she had been sexually mature’.

Laslett also qualifies his assertion by noting that ‘mean age at first marriage as an indication of the maximal age of menarche is of little use if it falls above 20’. Therefore, this hypothesis cannot be reliably used in early-modern England when the mean marital age in the later seventeenth century has been estimated at twenty six. However, women of the highest ranks of society would be the most likely to be married at a young age and so their marital ages might offer some corroboration of the age of menarche as stated in the medical

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24 *Family Life and Illicit Love*, p. 218.


texts. Amy Louise Erikson explains that ‘[b]etween the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth century the median age at first marriage for wealthy brides was 19-23 and for grooms 24-9, whereas for the whole population the median age at first marriage was 26-7 for women and 28 for men’. 27 Famously, for example, Lady Frances Howard was married, for political reasons, at thirteen to Robert Devereux, the third Earl of Essex, himself only fourteen. Immediately after their marriage Lady Frances was returned to her mother’s care and Essex continued his education, including taking a grand tour. 28 Despite the fact that in a Christian context this marriage should not have occurred if the parties were not sexually mature, for dynastic reasons it might have taken place but remained unconsummated if the bride had not reached menarche.

Despite the findings presented above, it remains the case that the early-modern medic advised the reader to expect menarche at around age fourteen. As well as this assumption, one further key aspect of the way that menarche was written about in this period is that it was the time of sexual awakening. This is both part of and adds to the early-modern stereotype that women were naturally more sexual than the cerebral male. As one late seventeenth-century conduct guide, The Whole Art of Converse, remarks, women ‘are generally an unthinking sort of creature, and scarce reflexive on what they say, being overruled by their passions’. 29 This belief is seen in Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy in his chapter on ‘Heroicall Melancholy’ (a variant of love sickness), where he states: ‘Generally women begin Pubescere as they call it, at 14 yeeres old, and then they begin to offer themselves, and some to rage”; Burton goes on to suggest that the problem of women’s unruly sexual desire is so great that, ‘Of womens unnaturall, unsatiable lust, what countrey, what village doth not complaine’. 30 The idea that a young woman might ‘offer herself’ is a very animalistic reading of the female body and links in with misogynistic ideas that women were not as highly developed spiritually and intellectually as men. The reason that menarche stimulstes sexual desire is explained in the pseudo-Aristotele’s Aristoteles

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27 Women and Property in Early Modern England (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 120.
Master–Piece, or the Secrets of Generation Displayed in all the Parts thereof (1684):

The propension and inclination of Maids to Marriage, is to be discovered by many Symptoms, as, when Nature fringes the obscure parts, and their Terms flow at the time appointed, which is usually in the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Year of their Age, when the Seed increaseth in some sooner, and in others later, according to their Habits or Constitutions: And the Blood, which is no longer taken to augment their Bodies, abounding, incites their Minds to Venery.\(^{31}\)

Whilst this is a sensationalist text, it does clearly imply a natural relationship between menstrual blood and sexual desire, mediated through the only culturally acceptable outlet for this desire: marriage. In 1703 when Thomas Gibson updated and reissued The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomised which had first appeared in the 1680s, he added a sentence to this effect to his previously published explanation of female puberty: ‘as soon as Girls come to puberty, and desire and become fit for coition, the menses begin to flow’.\(^{32}\) This quotation makes clear that menstruation was a visual representation of the fact that a girl has begun to feel sexual desire. So strong was the assumed link between menarche and sexual desire that, as Ursula Potter has noted, in William Shakespeare’s A Winter’s Tale, ‘Antigonus swears that if Hermione proves to be an adulteress he will geld his three daughters when they reach fourteen: “fourteen they will not see / To bring false generations”’.\(^{33}\)

That sexual thoughts begin first is seen in many texts which then see the menses as the driver for the other physiological changes a young woman will experience. There are many references to maids becoming fit for coition or venery, or even the pejorative claim that they are now ‘ripe for men’: the phrase from which it derives, ‘ripe for marriage’, comes directly from the Hippocratic

\(^{31}\) [Anon.], Aristoteles Master-Piece; or, The Secrets of Generation Display’d in all the Parts Thereof (London: J. How, 1684), pp. 5-6.

\(^{32}\) The Anatomy of Human Bodies Epitomised (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1703), p. 188.

\(^{33}\) ‘Greensickness in Romeo and Juliet: Considerations on a Sixteenth-Century Disease of Virgins’, in The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society, 1150-1650, ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance Studies, 2002), pp. 271-91 (p. 273). Potter erroneously states that the accepted normal age for menarche was twelve, and sees this quotation as a reference to the fact that at fourteen a girl could be considered legally mature (p. 273). Nicholas Culpeper and others think twelve is too young for menarche in this period: ‘In some they begin at twelve, and they are very lustful commonly, and of shorter lives’. See A Directory for Midwives; or, A Guide for Women, in their Conception, Bearing and Suckling their Children (London: Peter Cole, 1662), p. 67.
corpus.\textsuperscript{34} James Drake, too, sees the menses as the driver for the physiological
changes that occur in a young woman’s body when he describes the development
of breast tissue:

\begin{quote}
About the time of Puberty or Eruption of the \textit{Menses} the Breasts begin
to swell, and grow prominent probably from a greater Afflux of
Humours at that time, which not only fill the Vessels, but dilate the
Substance of them; which opinion is confirm’d by their Shrinking
when Age renders them unfit for Procreation, and their \textit{Menses} desert
them.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Drake died in March 1707, and his textbook was given publishing approval by the
censors the following month; the dedicatory address is signed by his widow, the
essayist and medical practitioner, Judith, who is believed to have edited the text
and brought the volumes to the presses.\textsuperscript{36} It is interesting to note that in Judith
Drake’s revisions, she did not seek to modify the essentialist language that her
husband had employed, which in the above passage refers to women as ‘them’ on
two occasions. Elsewhere in the treatise, however, Isobel Grundy suggests that
some evidence of possible editorial intervention can be seen in the section on the
apparent poisonous nature of menstrual blood. The text comments that great men
have been prevailed upon to believe these myths at which ‘the Women at all
times would laugh’.\textsuperscript{37} This perhaps shows that Judith Drake considered her
husband’s account of puberty as representative of this physiological process.

The stereotype of the pubescent girl being lascivious at the normal age for
menarche is played out to the extreme in William Wycherley’s Restoration
comedy \textit{The Gentleman Dancing-Master}. In this romantic comedy the protagonist
Hippolyta is a girl of fourteen who is railing against a parental edict banning her
from any social activity for a twelve month period until she is safely married. The
play opens with Hippolyta saying:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The Disease of Virgins}, p. 41.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Anthropologia Nova; or, A New System of Anatomy}, 2 vols (London: Sam. Smith and Benj. Walford, 1707), II, p. 354.
\textsuperscript{35} Judith Drake is believed to be the author of \textit{An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex} (1696),
which was for many years ascribed to Mary Astell. Drake was well-known for practising
medicine on ‘her own sex and little children’. Bridget Hill, ‘Drake, Judith (fl. 1696–1723),
Writer and Medical Practitioner’ in \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}
\textsuperscript{36} ‘Sarah Stone: Enlightenment Midwife’, in \textit{Medicine in the Enlightenment}, ed. by Roy Porter
(Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 148-44 (pp. 128-29). Grundy and others believe Judith to be
James Drake’s sister, rather than his widow. The \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography} entry
for Judith cites a publication by Edmund Curll in which Judith is described as ‘probably a sister
of Dr. James Drake’. Perhaps this is where the discrepancy stems from.
To confine a Woman just in her rambling age! Take away her liberty at the very time she should use it! Oh barbarous aunt! Oh unnatural father! To shut up a poor girl at fourteen, and hinder her budding; all things are ripened by the sun. To shut up a poor girl at fourteen!

Micheal Cordner suggests that the significance of Hippolyta being fourteen is that she was at ‘the age at which a woman could legally take control of her estate and fortune’ (p. 418). Whilst this is true, the legal change of status does not apply in this case because Hippolyta’s father is living, which means she would not have control of any inheritances she might have received from elsewhere. Further, I would argue that the references to ‘budding’ alludes to the sorts of language seen in the medical texts when discussing menstruation as ‘flowers’ making the link to menarche clear. Having set up the premise of the drama in terms that a Restoration audience would understand as highly charged, with terms such as ‘ramble’ being a highly loaded term for a walk in St. James’s Park which was popular, as Cordner notes, ‘for amatory adventures’ (p. 418) making it clear that Hippolyta is sexually aware, Wycherley then pushes the stereotype further. Hippolyta goads her aunt by claiming that she is not the innocent her aunt believes her to be. Hippolyta describes how she has been having sexual thoughts or ‘naughty dreams’ (I.1.285): ‘I have never lived so wicked a life, as I have done this twelvemonth, since I have not seen a man’ (I.1.261-62). She then recounts the fact that she has taken great delight in them: ‘Indeed Aunt, I did not only dream, but was pleased with my dream when I wak’d’ (I.1.282). In this period sexual thoughts were sufficient to compromise a girl’s chastity but, as the author of *Aristoteles Master-Piece* states, this is the time of life when it was expected that the excess blood in young women’s bodies would ‘incite their Minds to Venery’. In this play Hippolyta is portrayed as being at the stage of puberty that Gibson describes as desiring coition, and the opening sentiments that she still needed to ‘ripen’ in the sun suggest that she is on the point of menarche, and that the sexual desires she is describing will bring them down. As previously stated, ‘ripe’ is a common metaphor to describe the point of menarche, such as when Jane Sharp comments that when maids are ‘ripe, their courses begin to flow’ (p.

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39 [Anon.], *Aristoteles Master-Piece*, pp. 5-6.
195). In this play, then, Wycherley engages with the sorts of stereotypes that abound in the medical texts of the day about the nature and experience of female puberty and exploits them for dramatic effect.

Just as the humoral economic context of the body seeks to link the bodily composition of a woman to an apparently over-sexualised nature, so ideas about the toxicity of menstrual blood are also present in early-modern analysis of the nature of menarche. One example of this is seen in a text on smallpox, where an image of menstrual blood building up in a girl without doing her any harm is used as a way of explaining how the ‘French disease’ can lay dormant in a person for many years without presenting:

> And that it doth so lodge without impediment or hinderance to the naturall action of the person in whom it lodgeth, is manifest to sense in the menstruosity of women, which cast a venene-spot upon the speigle or looking-glasse and yet in health, and *sine actione laesa* in themselves: and as it is a venemous quality in their bloud, so hath it lodged in them untill their time of puberty without any such discovery.\(^{40}\)

This is a reference to the increasingly well-known myths about the poisonous nature of menstrual blood, which James Drake’s text had commented on above. The most famous account of this ancient belief is from Pliny in the first century BCE. An early-modern translation of his *Natural History* Book 7, chapter 15 is entitled ‘Of Women’s Monthly Sickness’ and states that menstrual periods are ‘monstrous’, because the touch of a menstruating woman can produce a range of externalized events such as causing wine to sour, trees and crops to die, and mirrors to cloud.\(^{41}\) The notion that a menstruating woman had the capacity to damage a mirror is a much older idea that can be found in Aristotle’s *On Dreams* circa 350 BCE, and was rationalised in the seventeenth century by Isbrand van Diemerbröeck:

> Nor does it signifie any thing, what Aristotle affirms, That Menstrous Women will infect a Looking-glass by looking upon it; because it is


credible that such an Infection happens through any Contagion issuing from the Eyes, but from certain corrupt Vapors which they send forth upon the Glass together with their Breath.  

So for Diemerbröeck, it is not the sentiment that is wrong, for menstruating women do appear to be able to damage a mirror, but this is explained by corrupt humours carried on their breath, rather than by their simply looking at it.

Lesley Ann Dean-Jones has suggested that Pliny’s extreme views, taken from oral folk traditions, may have been a response to the anxiety some men felt about the greater freedoms in society that Roman women enjoyed compared to their more subjugated Greek counterparts. This invective is not found in the same way in Greek medicine, she says. Indeed, Dean-Jones maintains that the evidence shows that the claim in Aristotle’s *On Dreams* (350 BCE), that the look of a menstruating woman could cloud a mirror, was not in the original text but was added in the form of marginal notes at a later date. After menarche, Whittaker implies, the ‘venom’ is discharged naturally along with the menstrual blood, without harming the woman herself.

The ability of menstrual blood to remove pathogens from the body at menarche is also seen in Thomas Willis’s treatise on nervous disorders. Menarche was considered to be a time of crisis in the body, coming, as it was ideally envisioned to, in a climacteric year. Willis explains that often female children grow out of childhood epilepsy at puberty when the ‘praeternatural Ferment’, which Willis believes can cause epilepsy, ‘first appears, oftentimes the natural following [menstruation], blots it out, hence the Epilepsie of young ones, often ends about the time of puberty or ripe age’. Willis describes the case of a brewer’s daughter from Oxford who began to have epileptic fits ‘about the 14th year of her age’ (p. 21). Willis’s main treatment was a vomit ‘to be renewed three days before every new, and full moon’ (p. 22). This timing of the treatment to the

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44 *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 248.
45 *An Elenchus of Opinions Concerning the Cure of the Small Pox*, p. 93.
46 *An Essay of the Pathology of the Brain and Nervous Stock in which Convulsive Diseases are Treated of Being the Work of Thomas Willis*, trans. by Samuel Pordage (London: D. Tring, 1681), p. 21. This is a scholarly text dedicated to Christ, in an attempt to avoid the censure of the Church, for at this time epilepsy was often considered to be a disease caused by supernatural forces and therefore under the Church’s jurisdiction rather than that of medicine. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
The lunar cycle shows that Willis had immediately assumed her impending menarche to be the underlying cause of her fits. He explains that this vomiting cure worked each time the fits returned, and then ‘the menstrual flux breaking forth, and observing its true periods, [meant] she remained for the future, free from that disease’ (p. 22). By this system Willis explains, an unnatural ferment can be removed from the body by the stronger, natural ferment that facilitates menstruation. The link between menarche and epilepsy is Hippocratic and as such was well-known throughout the period. On the Disease of Virgins lists ‘the sacred disease’ as the first disease to which virgins who do not marry, despite being ‘ripe’, were susceptible.47 King explains that the Hippocratic rationale for how this worked was that the excess blood that a girl on the point of menarche had produced was unable to leave the body, and so rose to eventually gather around the heart (then thought to be the seat of consciousness), thus provoking symptoms.48 Lady Grace Mildmay, who bequeathed a bundle of medical notes to her daughter consisting of ‘divers books and more than 2,000 loose papers’ of material, recorded a case of a woman who had had epilepsy since childhood, and had not yet experienced menarche.49 The account is entitled, ‘The first course experienced upon a maid of twenty-five years of age who had that disease from her childhood and was perfectly cured by the same’ (p. 112). It details how Lady Grace approached the case by making a purge to expel the ‘slime’ (p. 112) that she assumes must be blocking the young woman’s uterine veins. Along with the purge, the patient is made to sweat and fast according to a regime that Lady Grace sets out for her:

And this course she kept, until her courses break upon her, during which time, she did betake her to her ordinary diet. And 5 days after her natural courses were clean gone, then she began again with her purge and 3 days sweating, with the continuance of her diet, in manner as before is mentioned. And thus she began and ended and begun again, for a whole 12 months together. (pp. 112-13)

Significantly, this routine is maintained for three years, as Lady Grace is concerned not just with facilitating menarche but also with establishing a regular

47 The Disease of Virgins, p. 42.
48 The Disease of Virgins, p. 42.
49 Linda Pollock, With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552–1620 (New York: Collins and Brown, 1993), p. 110. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
cycle in her patient. Lady Grace explains how she assumes the treatment works, and how it had cured the woman’s epilepsy:

I take it that this course of physic aforesaid hath this operation: to mollify all Hardness, to moisten all dryness and to set the head, heart and spiritual parts free from all convulsions. For the balm oil and the parts working together in continuance of time, maketh nature strong to retain the good and to cast out evil, which else would overcome nature. (p. 113)

In the same way that Willis describes how a ferment will unblock the channels so, too, Lady Mildmay assumes that epilepsy will be cured when the passages of the blood are no longer blocked and humoral balance is restored. Lady Mildmay’s casebooks were written before the ferment theory was promulgated, and so she would be working from a cathartic model in which the menstrual period would cleanse the body.

An example from the Willis treatise, however, shows menarche causing epilepsy rather than providing a release from this condition. Willis’s case-history is one which aptly illustrates a humoral rationalisation of the crisis that menarche could promote in the body. As the text makes clear, if the condition was not cured as soon as possible, then the woman could remain a sufferer for the rest of her life. The entry begins:

A fair maid, sprung from parents indifferently healthfull, being her self very well, till about her coming to ripe age, about that time, she began to complain of her head being ill: And first of all, she felt neer the fore part of her head, by first, a Vertigo or giddinesse, whereby all things seemed to run round; and also whilst this Symptom continued, she was wont to talke iddlely, and to forget whatever she had but just done. (p. 21)

The doctor then goes on to describe how this poor girl on one occasion fell into the fire during a fit. She was so severely burned down to the bone of her face that she had suppurating blisters on her face for a long time. However, the effect of this discharge was that the girl became fit-free for the duration of this happening, but that as soon as she recovered the ‘falling evil’ returned.

This Disease began first to shew it self about the time of puberty, for this maid, presently after the begining of it, had her Courses, and afterwards they constantly observed their set times, though her distemper grew dayly worse: Various kinds of medicines being administrerd to this sick Creature. (p. 19)
Willis explains that the reason why the natural ferment is unable to remove the praeternatural one is that, ‘if that Ferment, or taint of the disease, comes after the menstruous flux, or together with it, and ceases not presently, it remains for the most part afterwards, during Life, of it self untameable, and not to be overcome by any Remedies’ (p. 19). The discharge from the blisters on this girl’s face had been able to remove the unnatural ferment from her body. The logic Willis ascribes to says that if the menstrual periods start after epilepsy, they should be strong enough to remove the unnatural ferment from the body, but if the periods start after or at the same time as epilepsy, then they will not be able to do this.

As the Willis treatise indicates, as well as detailing the correct time that a woman should become menstruant, the medical texts also offer advice to a woman about at what phase of the moon she should expect her period, depending upon which stage of her life she was in. A translation of Theodore Mayern’s *Rare Secrets Brought to Light* (1696), which was republished in an edition of John Pechey’s translation of *The Compleat Midwife’s Practice* (1698), explains when young women are most likely to experience their menstrual period once they have reached menarche:

Most commonly and ordinarily, women have their natural Purgations from the age of fourteen years to twenty one, at the new Moon; after that, from twenty one to thirty, in the first quarter; from thirty to thirty seven, or thirty eight, they have them at the full of the Moon; from thirty seven to the time that they begin to cease, in the last quarter.50

This statement is given in a chapter on childbirth, intended to help a woman anticipate her labour, on the premise that there is a direct correlation between the time in the month that she would menstruate and the time in the month that she would be most likely to go into labour. The assumption that a young woman would menstruate at the new moon was widespread in early-modern England. It is interesting to note that the date for the commencement of the menses is, in this text and following common practice, much more clearly defined than the cessation of the menses, for which this text allows a more natural ending.

Lady Elizabeth’s Delaval’s Adolescence

The presentations and arguments that I have outlined above demonstrate how the published medical texts accounted for a normal menarche, and that woman’s apparent lasciviousness was seen as a key element in her biological development. Given this context then, it is unsurprising that there is almost no surviving discussion of an unproblematic menarche in private writing of the time. However, that is not to say that women did not discuss their feelings about puberty and adolescence, but that overt references to menarche are as much subject to self-censorship as other potential accounts of menstruation. A revelatory account of the way that one woman thought about her experiences of living through the crucial years of puberty in seventeenth-century England is seen in *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delaval: Written Between 1662 and 1671*. It seems unlikely that Lady Elizabeth was writing for publication since these musings have more in common with the sorts of evidencing of one’s own private religious observance that so many seventeenth-century women saw as a useful practice. The Meditations, at one point, seem to blur the line between being a purely private self-reflexive document, and one intended for a wider readership, when Lady Elizabeth addresses a reader (‘you’), as her modern editor Douglas Green has noted.51 This may have been a slip in the style address, but it does occur in a section which seeks to explain her position with regard to finding a suitable husband, and to vindicate her behaviour as a young woman. This, coupled with the fact that the journal was leather-bound in her lifetime, suggests that Lady Elizabeth had a sense that she was preserving her life story for others’ eyes: this is corroborated by the textual evidence that some authorial revisions were made when the meditations were gathered together.

As an infant, Lady Elizabeth was left in the care of her aunt when her parents fled from Parliamentary forces during the Interregnum. Lady Elizabeth

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51 *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delaval: Written Between 1662 and 1671*, ed. by Douglas G. Green (Gateshead: Surtees, 1978), p. 18 and p. 166. Lady Elizabeth writes: ‘Only my aunt opposed it for the secret reason I have all ready told you’. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
remained in the joint care of her aunt and her grandmother after her mother died in exile and her father remarried. There is only one possible reference to her menarche in the meditations when she comments:

I was not a month past fourteen yeare old when my aunt settled upon me an allowance of a hunderd pound a yeare for my close which I had liberty to manage as I pleas’d. My governesse was gone and I had young people to waight upon me such as I chose my selfe, at which time I writ this folowing meditation. (p. 35)

As George Hakewill has observed in relation to female puberty (noted briefly above), at the age of fourteen a young woman would receive the courtesy title of mistress, and she come into certain legal rights. It is possible, however, that the motivation on the aunt’s part for this sudden elevation in Lady Elizabeth’s personal status in the household from a child to a young woman could be that Lady Elizabeth had reached menarche, or that she was perceived to be about to become menstruant and therefore a young woman, necessitating a change of status. What is particularly interesting about this comment is that it was written in later life. This suggests that Lady Elizabeth had an extraordinary memory if she could remember the month when her status altered, or it could be that, mindful of the women’s health guides that advocate menarche at fourteen, Lady Elizabeth was keen in her memoir to represent her body as normal within the cultural standards of the day. Later that same year Lady Elizabeth secured a place at court as a maid in the queen’s household, a mark that she was now grown up enough to live outside her aunt’s household.

In addition to her prose entries, one of the genres that Lady Elizabeth uses to work through her adolescent thoughts is poetry. One poem ‘Upon the Singing of a Lark’ expresses her thoughts in iambic verse:

The early lark wellcomes the breake of day,  
But I (alass) drouse many hour’s away.  
She to my God praises dos dayly sing  
Reproaching thus my slothfull idle sin;  
Whilst I do still neglect to worshipe him  
Till all the golden houer’s of morning light  
Past a recall are vanish’d out of sight.

52 An Apologie of the Power and Providence of God, p. 164
O thou, who only lasting joy’s canst give,
In mercy teach me a new life to live.
Thou, who unfadeing pleasures dost command,
Pleasures which ever are at thy right hand,
Give me thy grace each minute to improve
And fill my heart, O God, with Heavenly love.

Since time dos fly too fast
For me to call one moment mine
Great and good God, what’s thine
Let me no longer wast. (p. 44)

The poem’s main thematic concern is that whilst the early morning lark is singing God’s praises, she by sleeping too long each day is ‘neglect[ing] to worshipe him’. Lady Elizabeth feels that she should be up with the lark too. The melancholic tone of the first stanza gives way to an imploring of God to help her to stop wasting precious time in a paraphrase of Christian scripture; this sentiment is foregrounded in the poem’s epigram ‘Our Time is in God’s Hands’, which, as her modern editor notes, is taken from Psalm 31.15 ‘My times are in your hand’ (p. 44). The second stanza is a line shorter than the first as it seeks to demonstrate dwindling temporality through the verse form. It employs three consecutive trochaic first feet which helps the tone move from reproaching herself into demanding that her God helps her to improve. Lady Elizabeth uses parallelism to seek this help ‘Thou, who unfadeing pleasures dost command / Pleasures which are ever at they right hand’. The final verse paragraph is the shortest of the three at only four lines, and the line length drops from pentameter to trimeter with one tetrameter line. These variations again are the writer’s attempt to demonstrate formally how fleeting her time on earth is in God’s eyes. The rhyme scheme is similarly altered too, changing from couplets (with one triplet in the first verse paragraph) to enclosed rhymes. The effect of this together with the enjambed lines in this last verse paragraph is to place added emphasis again on time flying ‘too fast’ which she is imploring God to help her ‘no longer wast’.

This concern was first raised when she was ‘in my fifteenth year’, so fourteen. It is seen again in Lady Elizabeth’s meditations when she was eighteen, as she still remained that worried that amount of sleep she was taking was detracting from the time that she had available to achieve the piety that she felt was desirable. Lady Elizabeth writes that there is no time she begrudges as much
as that she spends asleep, and that, ‘Much I have to do before I leave this world and, for ought I know, but a short time to finish my course in. When I am in perfect health, I have found that 6 houer’s slepe in the 24 is sufficient for me’ (p. 118). Being in perfect health could mean when she is not menstruating for, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, many women euphemise their menstrual period as being ‘unwell’ or ‘sick’. But, just as relevantly, the concern that she needs to sleep more is a key physiological aspect of adolescence: ‘the average sleep requirement during adolescence increases to approximately 9.5 hours, with a tendency towards delayed sleep and awakening’.

In common with many seventeenth-century women diarists, Lady Elizabeth sees her natural bodily needs as a conflict between her body and her ability to worship as she would wish. Lady Elizabeth’s meditations provide an excellent account of how one seventeenth-century woman felt during her adolescence. These thoughts and feelings were edited and interpreted to an extent by her older self, but they do give a real sense of the tension that could be felt by a young woman living in a changing body. They highlight the pressure to conform to the idealised accounts of womanly behaviour which she would be aware of from her aunt’s instruction, religious teaching, and contemporary conduct manuals. Further adolescent concerns that Lady Elizabeth expresses are a troubled relationship with food, in which she feels that she is sinful by taking too much pleasure in food, and that she feels that she has urges to over-eat, and she explains this as that ‘the Devill [has] been ready to wisper in my ear’ (p. 52). As well as eating too many sweets and ‘danty’s’, Lady Elizabeth mentions that she has been tempted into eating too much fruit and this makes her ill. In humoral theory fruit is considered to be an agent for making the body wet and cold and so it is unsurprising that Lady Elizabeth feels that she is made ill by eating too much fruit. Indeed, roughly contemporaneously, Alice Thornton recorded in her *Book of Remembrances* that ‘My uncle Sir Edward Osbourne died at Kiverton of a surfeit of eating melons, being too cold for him’.

Richard Boulton comments on the assumed effects on the female body of eating fruit:


And I have another plain Observation, that will satisfie all Observing Women, that Acids cause Distempers; for nothing is more common, than that taking cold stops Womens Courses, the Acid Particles of the Air coagulating their Blood, and causing Obstructions, and nothing is more common, that that Children and young Women drive themselves into the Green-sickness, by eating Fruit.  

Boulton’s observations highlight that it was thought particularly dangerous for young, adolescent women to eat fruit. When she is eighteen Lady Elizabeth says:

Thus when I have set done to eat (which is a necessary and innocent action), has he [the devil] oft by my inadvertency turn’d my meale into a sin, since I have many more times consider’d the pleaseing of my tast more than the preservation of my health, and have reap’d the miserable fruit’s of that folly quickly after. (p. 84)

Lady Elizabeth comments that if she can stop responding to the devil’s temptations she will ‘be recon’d curtious and gaine the heart’s of some who perhaps wou’d elce be apt to sensure me as guilty of pride’ (p. 84). Lady Elizabeth feels that people disapprove of her taking too much pleasure from food ‘pleaseing of my tast’ as a sign of the sin of pride. She too sees it as a sin, but one which the devil has led her into. In early-modern period fasting was a normal way of expressing religious and social observance and piety, so it is unsurprising that Lady Elizabeth feels that her overeating is a sign of religious disobedience.

One other area that Lady Elizabeth remonstrates with herself about is that she feels she has wasted too much of her life reading romantic novels. Her rather unsympathetic modern editor feels that this is the reason that she has unrealistic ideas about her marriage prospects. Indeed, Douglas Greene’s informative critical introduction is often rather disparaging towards the subject, calling Lady Elizabeth self-centred and suggesting that she is more concerned for her own soul than the salvation of others (p. 5). Lady Elizabeth’s explanation of her own romantic feelings connects with the sorts of comments that are discussed above which suggest that the start of menstruation leads to women’s being filled with insatiable lust. Elizabeth writes of her own experiences of falling in love:

Though vertuous love in a vergins heart is no crime yet this new geust which is now come to mine, I find by experience is infinitely dangerous

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56 An Examination of Mr. John Colbatch His Books (London: A. and J. Churchill, 1698), p. 153. Boulton wrote a treatise because he felt that Colbatch’s publications on Acids and Alkalis was dangerous in that it promoted laws of science that had long been disproved of by Robert Boyle and should not be allowed to go unchallenged.
to be entertained, since that passion when once admitted does so increase that it soon banish’s all other thoughts but those which it is ready to present us with. (p. 109)

In another female-authored account of female adolescence novelist Jane Barker describes a growth to maturity which in ways resonates remarkably closely with Lady Elizabeth’s thoughts and feelings, but still shows a cultural influence of the prescriptive medical texts. Barker’s novella *Love Intrigues* has as its main thematic concern the issue of a young girl’s growth to sexual maturity and sexual awakening. In it Barker’s female narrator describes the changes in behaviours in a girl’s life at about the age of fifteen. The narrator begins by first reflecting on her childhood state:

I cannot but reflect on this Part of Life as the Happiest time we are born to know, when Youth and Innocence tune all things, and render them harmonious; our Days pass in Play and Health, and our Nights in sound Sleep; our Pillows are not stuffed with Cares, nor our waking Hours encumbered with Passions: We reflect not on what is past, nor take a Prospect of what is to come: we toss our Shuttlecock while weary, and then at our Tutor’s Beck cheerfully go to our Lecture.  

Barker’s narrator describes a change in state of mind that occurs at the end of childhood:

thus we pass our Days till Reason begins to bud in our Actions; then we no sooner know that we have a Being and rejoice that we are the noblest Part of Creation, but passion takes Root in our Hearts, and very often outgrows and smothers our Rational Faculties. This I experienced; for I was scarce arrived to those Years in which we begin to distinguish between Friendship and Affection.

This example narrates the thoughts of a young woman falling in love because she has reached the age of about fifteen, linking popular medical beliefs about women’s thoughts at puberty with folk beliefs such as the seven-ages of man theory. This shows that adolescence was considered by male and female writers to be a time when a girl’s thoughts turn to love and she might become obsessed with boys in much the same way that a modern teenager is written about. In the case of both the private, meditative writing and the female-authored public fiction this obsession is not portrayed in the reductive way of many of the male-authored

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58 ‘Love Intrigues’, p. 84.
prescriptive and entertainment forms which see menarche as a time when a woman becomes overtaken by an all encompassing lust.

**Early Onset Menarche**

As the above analysis shows, an allowance of a year or two either side of the normal expected age of menarche of fourteen, might not seen as problematic, but if a girl was to begin to menstruate at a much earlier age then this was considered to be a cause for concern. Nicholas Culpeper, in his chapter on menstrual flux, considers that a woman starting her periods at the age of twelve is a sign that she has a ‘hot womb’.  

In his summation of the times of life that a woman can expect to menstruate he says:

> In some they begin at twelve, and they are very lustful commonly, and of shorter lives: they continue till fifty; in some till sixty, and then stop. In some they begin at seventeen or eighteen. And in some they stop at fifty, according to the variety of Nature and diet.

Forty years later, John Freind states that menstrual periods should begin at age fourteen, and adds that there needs to be some flexibility in the reasoning ‘because there are some Women in whom this Flux begins later; a few to whom it invades much before the fourteenth Year’. Culpeper’s pejorative claim that early menarche will lead to a shorter and more lustful life is one that is seen in many early-modern publications. Jane Sharp concurs with this view and says: ‘We read of a child of but five years old, that had her monthly purgations: and John Fernelius writes of one that was but eight years old that had them; but certainly it must be a sign of lascivious disposition, and of a short life’ (p. 216).

Sharp’s modern editor notes that this passage echoes Daniel Sennert, one of Sharp’s key sources, which was also one of the texts that Nicholas Culpeper disseminated more widely by translating it into the vernacular. It is significant that whilst Sharp does pass on this received knowledge, from both Sennert and the sixteenth-century physician John Fernel, she clearly has no personal experience of a child who has begun to menstruate at such a young age. As Alexandra Lord has shown, in the mid-eighteenth century fears, such as those

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59 *A Directory for Midwives*, p. 21.
60 *A Directory for Midwives*, p. 67.
expressed by physician Jean Astruc that reading ‘obscene books’ or masturbation could cause a girl to ‘become a woman as it were before her time’, began to be seen. This is very much related to the changes in the models of ideal female behaviour and concerns about appropriate reading material for young women, but it does show that the idea of an early menarche and a lustful nature continued to be transmitted, if in a modified form, into the eighteenth century. This brings into question Lord’s assertion that it was not until the nineteenth century that ‘practitioners aggressively began to link an early menses [early menarche] with immorality’. These reinforcements of the stereotype discussed above - that menarche is linked with lasciviousness - does demonstrate that sexual arousal was seen as purely physiological in this era. The apocryphal link between early death and early menarche is not elaborated upon but is connected to the idea that a woman had a limited number of years to be menstruant for and that once they had passed she would enter menopause, and old age.

One case in the Old Bailey trial records for the early-eighteenth century highlights precisely that early onset menarche might be theoretically possible, but was not considered normal. In 1733 a rape case on a minor was brought before the Old Bailey. The abuse of Mary Faucet, described in legal terms as a ‘spinster, an Infant of nine Years of Age’, was brought to light when her mother first noticed that the child’s shift was in a ‘Disorder’. Mary’s shift was blood-stained but, as with most female public expression concerning menstruation or vaginal bleeding, her mother’s expression was necessarily heavily euphemised. Mary’s mother Susan reacted to her discovery by assuming that the child was ‘very Forward’. The neighbour, Mrs Bishop, asked her what she meant by this, and Mrs Faucet explained in her court testimony that, ‘I told her, and shew’d her the Linen’. Mrs Bishop was immediately suspicious: Mrs Faucet reports that Bishop commented that ‘that was no could be no natural Thing, and bad me examine the Child, and so I did’. Mrs Bishop’s own testimony corroborates this: ‘The Prosecutor told me her Daughter was very forward; How so? says I. Why,
come and see her Linen, says she. It can never be That, says I, at 9 Years of Age; it must be something else, and therefore I would have you ask others that know more than I do’. Mrs Bishop’s testimony for menarche and menstruation are as heavily euphemised as Faucet’s as she refers to menarche as ‘That’. Clearly Mrs Bishop did not countenance that this child could have reached menarche at such a young age, nor as the trial continued did it appear to be in the Court representative’s thoughts.

As was normal in cases involving intimate female matters a midwife was called to examine the child who pronounced that she was ‘torn as much as a Child could be’. Most unusually, the court asks if the child’s shift was ‘bloody’. This is remarkable in this context as any form of vaginal bleeding was normally euphemised. The midwife testifies that the extent of Mary’s injuries required the treatment of a physician, but, incredibly, that no one would attend to child because they would subsequently be called to give evidence. At the climax of the trial in a pathetic scene, there is confusion as Mary’s shift is brought before the court instead of the defendant’s, as the court had ordered. Despite the fact that Mrs Faucet cannot swear whether this shift is the one the child was wearing during the three attacks, or one she wore subsequently, the sight of this ‘foul’ garment appears to bring the trial to a close and John Cannon is found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Nazife Bashar has found that courts were much more likely to convict in the case of child rape because the child was a virgin. Bashar speculates that ‘perhaps the contemporary connection between virginity and property explains this phenomenon. […] Rape of a virgin, a young woman, was regarded as theft of her virginity, the property of her father to be used in procuring an advantageous marriage.’

However, this case shows that having such an early menarche was possible in the view of Mary Faucet’s mother, but that her neighbour Mrs Bishop did not countenance this possibility, and neither did the court appear to think it was an avenue worth pursuing. If the court officials and the attendees of Mary Faucet had thought that she had reached an early menarche then the outcome of the trial could have been very different if the prevailing

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medical view that this would make her excessively lascivious and lustful was one which was presented to the court.

**Late Onset Menarche and Greensickness**

Timely menarche was viewed as a time of sexual awakening, and therefore early menarche was thought to magnify this and indicate that a child was overly sexual. However, in early-modern England, there seems to have been a mass cultural concern about the implications of late onset menstruation, because this was thought to cause serious illness. Sharp explains that the reason a failure to become menstruant when the body is otherwise mature and ready will cause illness is because, ‘if the blood be stopt, in that it cannot break forth, it will corrupt’ (p. 195). The main cure for this disease was considered to be sexual intercourse and that, of course, could only be recommended within marriage. The cure for greensickness was therefore universally accepted to be marriage. As John Pechey writes, ‘When the Disease is small, and chiefly arises from Obstructions of the Veins of the Womb, it is easily cured by Marriage in Young Virgins’. If a girl could be married soon after contracting this disease she would be cured; if she then conceived a child, Culpeper says, she would have a permanent cure:

> It is probable, and agreeable to reason and experience that Venery is good. Hippocrates bids them presently marry, for if they conceive they are cured. Venery heats the womb and the parts adjacent, opens and loosens the passages, so that the terms may better flow to the womb.

Culpeper then explains that if a woman has had this disease for a long time and ‘there be a great Cacochymy, take that away before she be married, and then Venery may do more then Physick. But use it not in the vigor of the disease, nor in weakness’. Sharp, who takes her lead from Culpeper in this passage, and says that a build-up of corrupt humours must be removed prior to marriage, adds that this is vital because she has ‘known some that have been so far from being cured that, that they died by it; perhaps sooner than they would have done otherwise’ (p. 200).

Disease of Virgins. King shows that a collection of symptoms present in young girls, from strange eating patterns, lethargy to a failure to start their periods was known colloquially as white fever or greensickness, but that from 1554 a medical text by Johannes Lange sought to give this disease a Hippocratic authority by claiming that it is described in On the Disease of Virgins. King’s study has revealed that in fact, this disease was not that which was referred to in the Hippocratic corpus, and that Lange was seeking to validate his diagnosis by citing Hippocratic antecedents. Whilst not mentioning an absence of menstruation, the Hippocratic treatise does state that marriage is the answer to the numerous diseases that a woman who remains a virgin might contract, and so was suited to Lange’s purpose as he argued that the girl with a late menarche should be married as soon as possible. The formal naming of this disease as the Virgin’s Disease in Lange’s text marks, then, a starting point for a disease: it also is a disease which has an end date: from the 1920s several essays were published claiming it no longer existed, perhaps the most apposite being W. M. Fowler’s, ‘Chlorosis: An Obituary’ (1936). King claims that the rise of this disease during the simultaneous establishment of Protestantism is entirely appropriate, as the model of ideal female behaviour changed from the chaste celibate to the productive wife and mother. Therefore, a disease which described virginity as problematic is entirely relevant to this reappraisal of women’s social position. The purpose of this section is not to reiterate the definitive study by King, but build on it to examine the different ways that knowledge and understandings of this disease category – often referred to as greensickness - were disseminated in both public and private accounts. Further, this section will consider why it was the case that greensickness seems to have been exempt from the apparent taboo that made menstruation unspeakable in this period, and so be discussed so widely and in so many spheres.

As was indicated above, Lange’s ‘Disease of Virgins’ was also known colloquially as white fever, due to the pallor of the sufferer’s face, or green sickness, again because the disease presented in young women, and the green was

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68 The Disease of Virgins, p. 9. The Hippocratic text On the Disease of Virgins does not discuss the disease in the way that Lange claimed, making it clear, King explains, that the disease ‘was a construct’ (p. 9).

69 Annals of Medical History, 8 (1936), 168-77.

70 The Disease of Virgins, p. 120.
indicated of youth, or because the pallid complexion took on a green hue. Indeed, Nicholas Culpeper says that looking green was one of the symptoms of this disease. He comments: ‘The Virgins disease, is the changing of the natural colour into a pale and green with faintness’. White fever will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, for although it was synonymous with greensickness, in many accounts its associated symptoms are slightly different. Greensickness appears to be the name of choice amongst lay people, and as such it was that term that medical vernacular re-appropriated when it renamed the disease ‘Chlorosis’ from the early seventeenth century.

This disease was one that women themselves considered it possible to develop. King discusses the case of Margaret, Countess of Cumberland, mother of diarist Lady Anne Clifford. A biography of the Countess’s husband includes a transcript of a letter that Lady Margaret wrote to a Dr Leyfield. Lady Margaret comments that men usually divide their lives into a series of seven ages and so that is how she too will describe her life. She tells how her mother died and she was put out to nurse until she reached her second age and then returned home to live with her father and ‘mother-in-law’ (step-mother). Towards the end of this second age Lady Margaret writes that her beloved brother died and that the next brother, who subsequently inherited the title, behaved maliciously towards her, and caused her to fall into a ‘disease of the Green Sickness for two or three years after’. King estimates that this was between the ages of about thirteen to sixteen, which fits in with Lady Margaret’s claim that her greensickness only lasted two or three years, and this would fit the pattern of this disease as one cured by marriage. However, despite the fact that Lady Margaret says she had the disease for two or three years, her account suggests that she was exhibiting symptoms that were synonymous with greensickness for some years after this. Following her marriage, Lady Margaret moved from her paternal home with only one servant for company: she was always ill and says that ‘time made me haste, and I with

71 Directory for Midwives, p. 100.
72 Disease of Virgins, p. 19. King and others have shown that J. Varandal of Montpelier used this term from the Greek ‘chloros’ for green from 1615.
73 Disease of Virgins, p. 17.
74 G. C. Williamson, George, Third Earl of Cumberland (1558-1605): His Life and his Voyages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), p. 285. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
75 Disease of Virgins, p. 17.
thought grew almost continually sick, looking as a ghost that wanted the soul of comfort, and at last without hope of Life's often recovering, being forc'd to change the air’. Lady Margaret took a trip to Buxton Well spring in order to try to recover, but claims that it was only after she entered into her fourth seven-year-period that she recovered, when she was around the age of twenty one. This she ascribes to her husband having a change of heart towards her, following which they had their first child. This might suggest that she had a very late menarche and that her husband become friendlier towards her once he knew she might be capable of childbearing:

Thus with cross on cross I went with a barren desire for children which my Lords sister the Lady Wharton had who was married on the same day and place that I was, but my desires prevailed not then with the living God, so I linger'd in this, and other wants this third seventh. Now I come to the fourth seventh, where it seemed all would turn with a contrary note of joy. Time took and brought many things of trouble away. My Lords affections turn'd from a strange manner and carriage to much and very much love and kindness known to all and most comfortable found to mee. I had a son most strong as a seal of Gods blessing to us. (p. 285)

It would seem that the countess associated greensickness, and even late menarche, with the way that the men in her life behaved towards her, first her brother, then her husband. It is relevant here that it was a common belief that if a woman bore a child then she would recover from the disease permanently, but some connection between the disease and how one feels about treatment by others is also clear. This could connect to a reference about the idea of thinking oneself ill that is alluded to in a female-authored play from the eighteenth century. Here, Isabella rather flamboyantly announces that she would rather run away to a monastery than be forced to marry a man she does not wish to. Her maid replies: ‘Ah, Madam, these eyes tell me you have no Nuns flesh about you; a Monastery quotha! Where you’ll wish yourself in the Green-sickness in a month’.76 This suggests that it was a public perception of the way that greensickness worked that there was an element of self-determination in it.

In another case of a woman recording her greensickness Elizabeth Isham claims that it is her father who was concerned that she might have greensickness. Isham’s Booke of Rememenberance is similar, if a little earlier chronologically, to

Lady Elizabeth Delaval’s, in that it is a religiously mediated memoir, and demonstrates a similarly troubled relationship to food. Isham says while she was in her thirteenth year that ‘now in this yeere or 2 past a faintness tooke me as soone as I was up or a while after unlesse I proven ted it with eating somewhat but whether this be always a signe of eating too letle or too much I know not’ (p. 37). Citing St Augustine, Isham says that her ‘unhappy soule’ rejoices when she eats only a little, and that she fears that the ‘winde’ that she suffers from is a result of her overeating. Like Lady Elizabeth Delaval, Isham claims that ‘too often I yield to eat for my tooths when my stomacke doth not require it’ (p. 37), and she similarly prays to her God for the strength to overcome this temptation. Her modern editor comments that in the marginal notes of the original document, Isham has noted that she was thirteen at this point. Isham comfort-eats to cope with both the death of her grandmother to whom she was very close and the physical pains she has; she writes, ‘divers times (after my Granmothers death) I felt a faintnes or coldness of stomacke for which to cheereth myself I often eate warme spone meat’ (p. 37). It becomes clear, however, that in her memoirs Isham associates this apparent over-eating with her changing body when she notes that her stomach-ache ‘proceeded not from a defect of nourishment but from the abundance of ill humers nature being overburened with ill juice & moisture’ (p. 37). Isham says that these attacks of ‘collicke’ that she is subject to were so bad that ‘one which saw be said it might be as painfull as a womans travell’ (p. 37), and whilst this particular episode was the worst attack she had experienced, the fact that she had them repeatedly is significant. It is the case that many girls who are on the point of menarche have regular cycles of pain in the months leading up to menarche. Isham never married and so in her remembrances is unable to comment on whether this is a true representation of how labour pains might have compared, but the description of stomach-ache resonates of an amplified version of the quasi-dysmenorrhoea from which some pre-menarcheal girls suffer.

77 Isaac Stephens, ed., “My Booke of Rememenberance” [sic]: The Autobiograph y of Elizabeth Isham’, in Department of History: University of California Riverside <www.history.ucr.edu> [accessed 19 May 2007]. Written circa 1640, much like Lady Delaval’s Meditations, this memoir is styled as a spiritual journal in which the author will ‘confesse my sinnes unto thee O Lord’ (p. 5). It covers the first thirty-one years of her life, so is another invaluable account of female adolescence in the seventeenth century. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

78 Saint Augustine of Hippo is one of the people Calvinists recognise as a founder of their philosophy.
next entry, which has marginal annotation to suggest that she was now fourteen, she says ‘I still looked ill some thinking I had the green sicknes’ (p. 37). Her father then makes her run up and down the house stairs ‘twelfe timis & and to rest me once’ (p. 37) to try to cure this. This is an interesting response as other sufferers note particular weakness and palpitations upon climbing the stairs to be a symptom of greensickness. However, running up and down stairs as a way of helping labour is written about in Thomas Raynalde’s *The Birth of Mankind,* so in that context this cure is certainly logical (p. 106). Isham’s father was so keen on this cure that he frequently examined Elizabeth about whether she had been following his advice properly and had not given in to idleness. Exactly like Lady Delaval, Isham says that she needs to confess her ‘slauthfullnes in being sildome ready for which my mother would often chid me for my late riseing as also for my dulnes & loving to be alone’ (p. 38). Isham does not reproach herself for too much sleeping in the way that Lady Elizabeth did, but does try to engineer extra solitary time to devote to prayer. Feeling that she was a bookish young girl which would hinder her growth to maturity, her mother negotiated with her that if she kept a hen well, she would be rewarded with two books. When she is sixteen Isham notes that she was ‘growing out of the green sicknes [and so] was not so dull as before [. ] Therefore my mother was better pleased wt mee, though she was alwaies kind to mee still pitying me when I looked ill & now ever and anon giving me this item Doe well’ (p. 42). Isham’s mother died at only thirty-four, soon after this time, probably of a menstrual disorder, as Isham says her mother often suffered from ‘sum fitts of blething’ (p. 5). Isham records that she coped well with her mother’s death: ‘I suppose that I was the better able to bare it because I had overcome that dull desease of the green sicknes before she died’ (p. 38). Isham notes that while she was growing out of greensickness, her sister was beginning to show signs of it (p. 44). It is clear that Elizabeth believes that grief is the cause of this ailment, much like it was when she first became ill following her grandmother’s death. Her sister becomes very ill around four years later with an illness taken to be the fit of the mother, which was characterised by swooning and not eating or speaking, which are symptoms of greensickness too, but when the physician’s cures are to no avail Isham comments that ’she would confesse to me which was as much in her mind as in her body (or both upon) for her too much griefe for my mothers death had breed this illnesse upon her (besides other her
infermities)’ (p. 50). So for Elizabeth Isham, like the Countess of Cumberland, it is clear that there does seem to be an assumption that there was an emotional basis for this illness.

As well as being a disease that concerned women in their semi-private writings, such as letters and memoirs, the trope of greensickness is reproduced across plays, poems, and broadstreet ballads spanning the entire early-modern period. The case of Juliet Capulet has been used as a prime example of an account of a young woman apparently in the grip of this disease. Potter’s chapter ‘Greensickness in Romeo and Juliet’ cited above uses this depiction to write a cultural account of this portrayal. Juliet is presented as being almost fourteen in the play, but presumably not thought by her father to have reached menarche, for he famously asks Paris to wait two more years for the marriage to take place, before Juliet will be ‘ripe to be a bride’.79 Potter demonstrates how, although Capulet had just himself said that Juliet was a little too young to marry, he suddenly becomes convinced that his daughter has greensickness and that in this concern he demonstrates the ‘dual nature of [his] fears and for the onset of sexuality in her’.80 However, given the portrayal of how Juliet falls in passionate love with Romeo and has a sexual relationship with him before the end of the play it may be that the audience is left in no doubt that she is menstruant, only her father does not know it. Indeed, this is indicated in the dialogue between Juliet and her mother. Firstly Juliet’s mother tells her that she should now be thinking seriously about marriage and that she herself, like many of the women in Verona were ‘made already mothers’ (I.3.74) at Juliet’s age. This would fit in with contemporary beliefs that women in warmer climates matured faster than those in colder ones, and would imply that Lady Capulet assumes that her daughter is marriageable: that she has reached menarche. The play here, then, is between a father who believes his daughter ill from greensickness and the audience’s knowledge of the real causes of her ‘sickness’; indeed her passion for Romeo entirely fits the stereotype of a lustful, newly menstruant young woman. Against this background it is probably not the case that the audience may have seen Juliet’s ‘boldness’ after meeting Romeo as a ‘physiological disorder

79 William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, ed. by Jill L. Levenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), I. 2.10-11. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
80 ‘Greensickness in Romeo and Juliet’, p. 272.
[symptomatic of her greensickness] rather than a social disorder’, because she was obedient to her parents before she met Romeo. Potter cites various conduct books that teach that men should woo and women be passive, but as this chapter has shown, the stereotype of the newly menstruant young women being overcome with lust was one which was promulgated widely. Such behaviour so was not a disorder, but a natural stage of life. However, as Potter notes of Capulet’s concern for his daughter’s greensickness, ‘to the audience […] Capulet’s behaviour is comically naive, but also poignantly real’. Juliet could not have greensickness as she was no longer a virgin, so the father is shown to have misunderstood his daughter’s symptoms. This is the same level of paternal misreading that is shown by Potter in two further Renaissance plays. In The Wit of a Woman (1604), a naïve father is tricked by the lover of his greensick daughter, and in John Ford’s Jacobean play ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore (1633) the father once again thinks that the daughter might have greensickness, but the audience knows that she is pregnant. The public performance of the role of the father, then, is portrayed as a battle between well-intentioned motives and the duplicitous female body. The trope of greensickness is, therefore, used in dramas to show female disruption of patriarchal norms: Juliet’s refusal to marry Paris being rationalised by the father as being a symptom of her greensickness.

The relationship between father and daughter seen when Isham describes her experience of this disease, when it is her father’s intervention that she notes, is much closer to the model seen in medical texts than performative ones. Isham’s father, Sir John, may have had the chance to speak with the physicians who attended his wife for many years as she was repeatedly ill with gynaecological matters. It is significant to note that in both the drama that presents greensickness and the private accounts, this is often shown to be highlighted in the father/daughter relationship. When the disease was first theorised by Lange in the sixteenth century this was done on the basis of a worried father writing to the doctor about his sick daughter. In his epistolary restatement of the symptoms

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83 ‘Greensickness in Romeo and Juliet’, p. 288.
that Anna’s father has ‘complained bitterly’ to Lange about, which include a pale, bloodless face, heart palpitations, oedema, and an aversion to food ‘especially her meat’ does not mention an absence of menstruation. Lange explains to the father that this is in fact the underlying cause of all her other symptoms: ‘This disease often attacks virgins when, already ripe for a man, they have left behind their youth. For at this time, led by nature, the menstrual blood flows down from the liver to the pockets of the womb, and the veins’. Gail Kern Paster argues that the ‘virgin’s disease cannot be separated from the twinned social demands on fathers and daughters that underlie it: demands on the fathers to release their daughters to suitors, demands on the daughters to release themselves from a reluctance whose nature seems indeterminately physical and emotional’.

The image of the concerned father is seen again in the case notes of physician John Hall, which were published, translated into English, after his death in the early seventeenth century. As Potter also notes, John Hall recorded an entry in his observations in which the father of seventeen-year-old Editha Staughton sought the ‘counsel’ for his daughter’s symptoms. In this case Editha appears to be very disturbed, with paranoid episodes in which she believed her parents were trying to kill her. Hall records that Editha had terrible melancholy in her constitution, and for that reason he was not hopeful that she could be cured. Hall does not recommend the protestant cure of marriage in this girl’s case, which suggests he thought her disease was too advanced. However, after extensive treatment with medicines, leeches, and purges, ‘by the blessing of God she was delivered from her Distemper’. The pattern of physicians discussing greensickness with the fathers of affected girls was carried on to the eighteenth century when an anonymous physician published A Rational Account of the Natural Weaknesses of Women (1714). In such accounts the advice is not marriage but a course of medication. The author writes:

I shall conclude this Chapter with a letter I received while writing it, from a Gentleman in Hartford, whose Daughter, a young Gentlewoman, about seventeen Years of Age, had never had the Benefit of Nature, but was almost ruin’d by the Green-Sickness, being

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85 The Disease of Virgins, pp. 46-48.
87 ‘Greensickness in Romeo and Juliet’, pp. 278-79.
88 Select Observations, p. 176.
exceeding pale, short breath’d, and hardly able to move about, without any Appetite to Food, but desirous of eating Chalk, Cinders, Wall, &c. which she could scarcely be kept from; her affectionate Parents had taken the Advice of several Physicians, and the young Lady took a great many Medicines to no purpose, till she took my Purging Pills and Opening Pouder before mentioned, which happily cured her.  

In common with Hall’s notes, this girl is now seventeen but has already been in the hands of many doctors. Editha Staughton had similarly been ‘purged well’ before by ‘expert Physicians’ before Hall was asked to intervene. Again as with Hall, the father approached the physician and told him in person of his concerns for his daughter’s health. As Paster notes in relation to the Lange letter, ‘what immediately strikes the modern reader in Lange’s letter to the distressed father of a green sick maiden is the utterly conventional homosocial context out of which both the disease and its context emerge’, and this is equally true of the cases analysed here too. The meeting in A Rational Account for instance concludes with the doctor being called away, and the father subsequently returning home, whence he sees not only that his daughter is still just as ill, but that his wife is now ill from a suppression of her courses, caused by her catching a violent cold. A servant is immediately dispatched to London to acquire some of the physician’s patented medications. Having seen his wife cured and his daughter now blossoming having the full benefit of nature, the father writes to praise the physician whilst commenting that he has handed over the remaining tablets to a neighbour whose own daughter was similarly suffering from greensickness. A Rational Account reads in many ways like an early infomercial, and if it were to be believed it would suggest that there was something of an epidemic of greensickness in Hertfordshire. This fits in more with the sheer visibility of greensickness in early-modern media, than with the reality of the numbers of women who were thought to be suffering from this condition. Paster rightly observes that ‘a medical diagnosis of green sickness is rarer in drama than passing references to it might suggest’. Potter notes that John Hall has only three observations concerning greensickness sufferers in more than one hundred

90 Select Observations, p. 174.
91 Humoring the Body, p. 90.
92 Humoring the Body, p. 89.
cases concerning women.\textsuperscript{93} Similarly, the case notes of John Westover, an apothecary-cum-surgeon, in the later seventeenth century, records only a similar percentage of treatments administered for greensickness. On 9 May 1698, Westover notes: ‘Marey Westover of Poolbridge desiered me to cure her of her distemper being as I supose trubled with the Cloroia [Chlorosis]’.\textsuperscript{94} This record of this case is unusual in that it shows the patient contacts her medic herself and he sends the purges he prescribes via ‘Joane Roger’, her messenger. In this journal only one case is explicitly recorded as greensickness, but Westover probably sees three patients with a similar condition judging by the contents of his extant notes. The use of a purge does seem to be the first treatment for this disease, to try to remove the assumed blockage of the veins of the womb. A year earlier, Westover had treated another possible greensickness sufferer, again reported to him by a father. On 16 March 1697 ‘Robert Porch of Wedmore [became a] debtor for medicine for his daughter being lame and for want of her cosses. Sent for her one dose of jallop to purge and ordered her to cum to be bloded at the cuming of the moone’ (sig.179\textsuperscript{v}). The use of a purge and blood letting suggests an established disease, but the advice about when this should be performed suggests that the patient is a very young one for, as was discussed above, it was the case that a young woman was thought to menstruate naturally at the new moon, and therefore the desire of nature would aid the intervention.

The above has shown that the dynamic for greensickness in written accounts seems to have been dominated by fathers and daughters. Paster’s assertion about the homosocial nature of the way that this disease is presented in plays and medical texts is a key facet of the way that the disease was recorded, even in personal, private memoirs. A satirical poem by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, in contrast, depicts a mother discussing her daughter’s greensickness with an acquaintance at the Tunbridge Wells spa. This poem mocks the people who come to the spa hoping for cures of their many ailments. The speaker becomes bored of the company he is in and goes to listen to the conversation of a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[93] ‘Greensickness in Romeo and Juliet’, p. 278.
\end{footnotes}
group of three women, consisting of ‘two wives, with girl just fit for man’. The girl in the group is described as exhibiting the classical symptoms of greensickness, ‘Short-breathed, with pallid lips and visage wan’ (line 126) and that she ‘is grieved with headache, pangs, and throes’ (line 141). The two older women fall into a conversation about the various illnesses that have brought them to the spa, and the first woman explains that she was unable to conceive: “We have a good estate, but have no child, / And I’m informed these wells will make a barren / Woman as fruitful as a cony warren” (lines 134-36). The second woman responds that she too is there because of infertility problems that since giving birth to her now teenage daughter, she has failed to conceive the son her husband desires. She explains that she has also had to bring her teenage daughter along too because she is “full sixteen and never yet had those” (line 142). The girl, in common with most accounts of greensickness sufferers, is not given a voice, and is shown to be in the full grip of the disease. The first woman responds to the mother’s concerns with the sort of bawdy response that one would expect from a characterisation in a Rochester poem and advises the mother to:

> “Get her a husband, madam: 
> I married at that age, and ne’er had had ’em; 
> Was just like her. Steel waters let alone; 
> A back of steel will bring ’em better down”. (lines 143-46)

The speaker is, then, reinforcing the treatment of choice recommended by writers from Lange on, which is to have the woman married and having intercourse as the best hope of a cure; and of course if she were to conceive shortly upon marriage the disease would not return. Whilst subject to the usual bawdy Rochester refraction, the ways that the two women discuss menstruation is seen to be in oblique euphemisms even when in an apparently private conversation, which suggests that this was one which would be easily understood by his reader. In the course of ridiculing the tourists at the spa Rochester highlights and mocks the types of conversations that might have taken place between women. However, as in the cases of a father’s reporting greensickness to a physician, the voice of the young woman with this illness is omitted. The pattern of women gossiping about this illness is also portrayed in *A Rational Account* when the physician is

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introduced to his future correspondent. The physician claims that after dinner ‘among other Discourse, the Gentlewomen happen […] to talk of the respective Sicknesses they had suffer’d, and of the Indispositions several of their Friends laboured under’. These male-authored representations depict a pattern of women talking amongst themselves, but of fathers seeking medical assistance.

The treatment with ‘steel water’ that Rochester’s speaker is so dismissive about was a new one pioneered by Thomas Sydenham in the mid-seventeenth century, and was a treatment with an iron supplement. The success of this treatment would reinforce the view that that this disease was analogous to what is now understood to be iron-deficient anaemia. Anna, the subject of the Lange letter, famously lost her appetite for food, especially her meat, which would have been a major source of iron in her diet, explaining why she might have been anaemic; of course, this does not explain why she went off her meat in the first place. King explains that ‘Steel is made up of at least 98 per cent iron, meaning that iron therapy was used well before the discovery of iron in the blood gave a chemical basis for its use, or the need for iron in the formation of haemoglobin was understood’.

The use of steel as a tonic in sweetened wine or some other medium was well-known as a cure for many illnesses and often went under the common name of ‘chalybeate’. Thomas Sydenham (1662) explains that ‘as often as Steel is given in the Green-sickness, the Pulses are manifestly greater and quicker, the outward parts grow warm, and the Pale and dead Countenance is changed, and becomes fresh and lively’.

Rochester’s poem ‘Tunbridge Wells’ is far from the only poem depicting greensickness, but despite its satirical content, it is the most matter-of-fact. Other poems that depict women who have a late menarche with all the symptoms that were associated with it in the early-modern period include two by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, brother of the poet George Herbert. As Lesel Dawson has noted, these

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96 A Rational Account, p. 11.
98 Disease of Virgins, p. 127.
poems have much in common with the *carpe diem* traditions of amatory verse.\(^{100}\) However, as this section will demonstrate, the poems on greensickness take the image of time on earth being short and add to it the implication that intercourse will serve as a cure, adding to the pressure on the subject. The first of a pair of poems with the same name, ‘The Green-Sickness Beauty’, urges the subject to ‘be gathered, rather than to fall’, to imply that she should choose to have a sexual relationship, rather than to fall into this pernicious illness.\(^{101}\) Lord Herbert’s collection of prose, both political and autobiographical, was published in his lifetime, but his poems were only published in a collection by his son some time after his death. Apparently there is no mention of them in his autobiography, which might suggest that these verses were written for circulation in manuscript amongst his friends, who included John Donne, just as Rochester’s poems were some years later, rather than being intended for public consumption.\(^{102}\) Ronald E. McFarland has argued: ‘that a disease like the green-sickness should become the subject of several amatory lyrics is not especially surprising in an age of poetry that could discover lessons of romantic love in geography, religion, legal contracts, alchemy, and fleas’.\(^{103}\) He goes on to note the similarities between this disease and its contemporary, love sickness, arguing that ‘the courtly and Petrarchan conventions had long since identified the symptoms of lovesickness’, which were similar to those of the young woman with greensickness, but which usually affected the male adolescent. One way of looking at greensickness, then, is that it was the female counterpart of lovesickness.\(^{104}\) Both poems named ‘The Green-Sickness Beauty’ are fully analysed by McFarland, who notes that the first three stanzas constitute one syntactical unit and conceit describing the assumed symptoms of this condition, such as the ‘pale white’ of her complexion and the ‘short breath not from itself unloos’d’ (p. 99), and demonstrates that these are

\(^{100}\) *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 53.

\(^{101}\) Lord Edward Herbert, *The Poems of Lord Herbert of Cherbury*, ed. by John Churlton Collins (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881), pp. 99-100. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.


\(^{103}\) ‘Rhetoric of Medicine’, p. 251-52.

\(^{104}\) ‘Rhetoric of Medicine’, p. 252.
'signs of a latent beauty signifying a greater beauty yet undisclosed'.

The fifth stanza reads:

| So, if you want that blood which must succeed, | And give at last a tincture to your skin, |
| It is, because neither in outward deed, | Nor inward thought, you yet admit that sin, |
| For which your cheeks a guilty blush should need. (p. 100) |

McFarland comments: ‘in the fifth stanza, concerning the lack of proper blood flow, Herbert stresses the virginity of the woman’. This is true, for under the humoral system, a girl who was not a virgin would be unlikely to contract greensickness because the action of sexual intercourse upon her body would be assumed to stimulate her menses and thus cure her of the disease. However, the earlier line that a rose in bud smells far sweeter ‘than when it is more spread’ has already left the subject’s virginity in no doubt, as does the use of the verb ‘gathered’ which has horticultural implications being the usual term for picking flowers (OED 1,1b). Lesel Dawson notes that intercourse was thought necessary to cure this disease and bring colour to the girl’s cheek, but comments that ‘the sin she will not admit is clearly sexual intercourse, and the poet generously implies that he will do what he can to restore her “health”’. I would argue that the stress in the iambic line falls on ‘thought’ just as it does on ‘deed’, so that, significantly, an equal emphasis is placed on the fact that it was believed, as has been discussed above, that when the girl reached puberty her thoughts turn to sexual matters, and it is these thoughts that are a signifier of impending menarche. Clearly, then, the subject here is described as not guilty of the sin of lustful thoughts, because her greensickness means her menarche is late, rather than, as Dawson argues, she has ‘secret desires’. Had she had these thoughts the contemporaneous medical literature instructs that she would have begun to menstruate: ‘as soon as Girls come to puberty, and desire and become fit for coition, the menses begin to flow’. It can therefore be deduced that the addressee here has not reached menarche because her thoughts are as yet free from the sin of lustful thoughts. Although it is the case that the cure for the

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105 Rhetoric of Medicine’, pp. 253-54.
106 Rhetoric of Medicine’, p. 254.
107 Lovesickness and Gender, p. 60.
108 Lovesickness and Gender, p. 60.
109 The Anatomy of Human Bodies Epitomised, p. 188.
subject’s illness is what McFarland has aptly named ‘therapeutic seduction’, there is no suggestion, as Dawson claims that part of that therapy will work because intercourse will provide her with additional ‘refined blood in the form of sperm’.\textsuperscript{110} The cure for greensickness is quite specific in the medical texts: intercourse will allow her own blood to flow, as the blood in the body will be excited by intercourse; this is the blood she is thought to require rather than that which could be considered to result from any kind of coital blood transfusion.

McFarland notes that Herbert’s second poem is less indebted to medical rhetoric for its imagery, as it engages with the ideas of love spoiling the beauty of the green-sick woman: ‘From thy Pale look, while angry Love doth seem / With more imperiousness to give his Law’ (p. 91).\textsuperscript{111} The bravery of the woman in being uninterested in love causes love to retire from the battle and leaves the woman looking ‘like a Statue of yourself’ (p. 101). The speaker then says that love would cause a stain on her ‘native White’ (p. 101), which would be similar to the false ‘gilding of a silver coin’ (p. 101). This poem focuses on the beauty of the woman with greensickness, a pale beauty that would be spoiled with the blush of love. Whilst excessive paleness was a sign of greensickness, Edith Snook argues that ‘the healthy body was signified by fairness and the appropriate shade of white’.\textsuperscript{112} To achieve this skin tone many of the health manuals included treatments to refine the skin. Thomas Raynalde’s \textit{The Birth of Mankind} includes a section on ‘Diverse Bellifying [Beautifying] Receptes’ which includes treatments to clear freckles, to clarify the skin, and to remove heat from the skin (pp. 200-01). However, the idolization of a woman in this condition in poetry may have been a contributory factor in the look of greensickness becoming, according to John Maubray in the early eighteenth century, a fashion statement: ‘I have known many Women, in France, and Germany, who have been so far from thinking it an ugly Colour, that they have esteem’d it Beautiful; and have used very pernicious Things to gain an appropriate Colour to Themselves’.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} Lovesickness and Gender, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{111} ‘The Rhetoric of Medicine’, p. 253.
\textsuperscript{112} ‘The Beautifying Part of Physic”: Women’s Cosmetic Practices in Early Modern England’,\textit{ Journal of Women’s History}, 20 (2008), 10-33 (p. 24). Snook’s essay does much to redress the stereotypes about the sorts of women who might use beauty preparations, by demonstrating their widespread reproduction in health textbooks. Many recipes were published to prepare products to lighten and whiten the skin in concurrence with the norms of beauty at the time.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{The Female Physician Containing all the Diseases Incident to that Sex in Virgins, Wives and Widows} (London: James Holland, 1724), p. 43.
Written at approximately the same time was the poem on greensickness of Thomas Carew, which McFarland also publishes and analyses in his essay cited above. The connection between Carew and Lord Herbert is not discussed in McFarland’s commentary, but, in fact, Carew was in the service of Lord Herbert for a number of years, and his wider body of poetry displays much of the same influence. It is therefore feasible that he was in the circle of poets passing manuscript poems to one another at this time. Carew’s poem is dedicated to a real woman ‘Mistris N’, who has been identified as Katherine Neville. Carew’s language is similar to that of the cavalier carpe diem poet when he uses the language of battle:

Stay coward blood, and doe not yield  
To thy pale sister, beauties field,  
Who there displaying round her white  
Ensignes, hath usurp’d thy night;  
Invading thy peculiar throne,  
The lip, where thou shouldst rule alone;  
And on the cheek, where natures care,  
Allotted each an equall share.

The battle between the symbols of red and white is a well-known one in amatory verse, compared by McFarland to the ‘fire and ice’ symbolism typical of Petrarchan verse, and here the speaker alludes to the fact that red lips are natural and proper and calls the blood a ‘coward’, urging it not to yield, and therefore usurp nature. The speaker’s comment that the red and white should have an equal share of the colour of the cheek is a witty allusion to the classic English rose complexion, that was seen as the most desirable, connoting as it does the complex mix of purity with a hint of sexual desire in the red of the blush. An extended metaphor brings the poem to its conclusion:

Quit not the field faint blood, nor rush  
In the short salley of a blush  
Upon thy sister foe, but strive  
To keep an endless warre alive;

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115 ‘Rhetoric of Medicine’, p. 255.
117 ‘Rhetoric of Medicine’, p. 257.
Though peace doe petty States maintain,  
Here warre alone makes beauty raign.\textsuperscript{118}

This poem, then, is quite different from the Herbert poems as it does not seek to celebrate the pale, wan face of the girl with green-sickness in an idealised female form, but rather says that vibrancy and colour is what it needed to make a woman sexually alluring.

All carpe diem pursuit poems have a dark undertone in which the spectre of the woman’s ruin is never far behind. An early-eighteenth century anonymous poem demonstrates the natural extension of this idea. Published in 1703 a multi-volume poetry anthology ‘Written by the Greatest Wits of the Age’ entitled Poems on the Affairs of State includes a poem entitled ‘Cure for Greensickness’, dated 1702. The anthology unapologetically includes poems on all topics, ‘for therein the Publisher has shewn himself a faithful Collector’.\textsuperscript{119} Therefore the poem on greensickness follows an epigram on marriage. The poem reads:

As fair Orinda sat beneath a shady Tree  
Much Love I did profer to her, and she the like to me;  
But when I kiss’d her Lovely Lips, and press her to be kind,  
She cry’d O no, but I remember, Womens words are Wind.  
I hug’d her till her Breath grew short, then farther did intrude,  
She scratch’d and struggl’d modestly, and told me I was rude.  
I beg’d her pardon 20 times, and some Concern did feign,  
But like a bold presumptuous Sinner did the same again.  
At last I did by Dalliance raise the pretty Nymph’s Desire,  
Our inclinations equal were, and mutual was our Fire.  
Then in the height of Joy she cry’d, O I’m undone I fear,  
O kill me, stick me; stick me, kill me quite my Dear.\textsuperscript{120}

In this disturbing poem there is no explicit reference to greensickness apart from the title, yet the idea that women feign refusals is typical of the carpe diem tradition. Rather than continuing the impugning that the genre specialises in, though, the speaker forces himself on the woman, despite her protestations. The speaker justifies his actions by suggesting that his kissing and ‘dalliances’ had physically aroused her, thus disproving her refusals. This misogynistic lyric plays on stereotypes that women were lascivious, and that their desires could be aroused despite verbal rejection. The poem ends with a pun on orgasm as a form

\textsuperscript{118} Poems, with a Maske, p. 162.  
\textsuperscript{119} [Anon.], Poems on the Affairs of State from the Reign of K. James the First to this Present Year 1703, 2 vols ([n. p.]: [n. pub.], 1703), II, p. iv.  
\textsuperscript{120} Poems on the Affairs of State, p. 266.
of death, implying that the subject achieved orgasm, the excitation of her blood vessels providing the cure of her greensickness. However, it is equally significant that while the poem is styled as a cure for greensickness, the violated subject considers herself to be ruined and implores her attacker to murder her so that this is not discovered. ‘Stick’ is an alternative verb for ‘stab’, which suggests a macabre double entendre in the report of the subject’s pleas. This, of course, fits in with the cultural assumption that death is better than dishonour, demonstrated in an adage in John Marten’s bestselling *Treatise on Venereal Disease*: ‘When Honour’s lost ’tis a relief to die, / Death’s but a sure Retreat from Infamy’. This, then, is a very revealing lyric demonstrating the types of assumptions about women, and even ill women, that could be represented in public literature.

Dawson concludes her commentary on the Herbert poems by saying, ‘If green sickness reveals the peak of a woman’s sexual development, it also warns how quickly this ripeness will transform into rottenness if the sick virgin will not submit herself to her lover’s cure’. This analysis emphasises the link between the poems on greensickness and *carpe diem* literature which suggests that one’s time on earth is short and so the subject should make the most of her time. In the *carpe diem* tradition the subject’s reluctance is interpreted as disingenuous and part of a courtship ritual. In dramatic presentations, the motif of greensickness is used to show reluctance to submit to patriarchal authority; in poetry the reluctance is to submit to a lover’s exhortation. This apparent reluctance is at the centre of Paster’s analysis of greensickness as a motif in Renaissance texts, in which she emphasises that ‘the very symptoms that separate her [the greensick woman] from the happier, stronger girl that she used to be align her with a new and difficult cohort, the reluctant virgin’. Paster sees the illness as a representation of a tension between the social expectations concerning the relationship between fathers and their daughters. Much of the evidence in medical texts, too, sees a pattern of paternal concern for the daughter’s failure to menstruate, and that he is the instigator of treatments. This shows a complicated dynamic in the paternal relation to a daughter, as the father endeavours to ensure that his daughter is not necessarily being, but seen to be being a normal, dutiful

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122 *Lovesickness and Gender*, p. 60.
123 *Humoring the Body*, p. 91.
child in which her physiology must follow a set trajectory towards womanhood in order to comply with social expectations. It is clear that in many representations of the disease this is certainly is the case. In certain circumstances women lacking agency can use health as a way of resisting oppression, and as Susanna Centlivre’s *The Wonder* demonstrates, can think herself ill as a way to express her reluctance to conform. This is seen in the Countess of Cumberland’s account of her feelings, when she reports being dominated by a brother who treated her badly, and to which she responded by becoming ill. This evidence seems to confirm that the disease could be understood as having an emotional cause. However, it is not always the case that greensickness is presented as a response to patriarchal oppression: Isham describes her father as taking a genuine interest in her health, not from social pressure to marry her to someone she would have preferred not to marry. Rather, Isham’s emotional disturbance is a response to her mother’s long term illness and her grandmother’s death.

This section has shown that early-modern ideas concerning a disease category peculiar to this time correspond with contemporary early-modern ideas about the nature of menarche. All public, and some private writings tend to agree that medical attention for late menarche would be sought any time from the age of sixteen, so as to induce a girl’s menarche by means of steel waters, purges, and even bloodletting, such was the concern that a girl should become menstruant at the prescribed age of fourteen. The theme of greensickness is one that attracted playwrights, because it could be manipulated to depict the trope of the deceptive female body to comedic or dramatic effect. As a result, in dramatic presentations, the disease could be used as a motif of female resistance, rather than as a presentation of a genuine illness.

**Chapter Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, the actual mean age of menarche in early-modern England is conjectural at best, for the statistics have simply not survived. However, we do know that women authors like Sharp were not interested in giving weight to social norms if they conflicted with empirical evidence, so there is no reason to disbelieve that menarche had a mean age of somewhere around
age fourteen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, J. B. Post writes of the medieval period:

The strength at that time of received traditions as against observation must of course be borne in mind; but the diffusion of opinions and the free adaptation of them, on a point of information readily obtainable by a layman, may be allowed as an argument for accepting the statements as valid, approximately, for the period and experience of the author or compiler.124

Post concludes ‘It seems possible to hypothesize, for the period to which these sources relate, an age at menarche equivalent, and an age in menopause not dissimilar, to those apparent in the mid- twentieth century’.125 As Sharp’s many deviations from her source texts demonstrate, her propensity to correct the instructions and advice of male authorities for the benefit of her readers suggests that she would not reproduce this age if she did not believe it to be accurate. The fact that the seven ages of man theory did seem to be dominant over the other similar models might have influenced the medical texts to an extent, and this is corroborated by the decision of the Countess of Cumberland to delineate her epistolary biography in this way: the concept must surely have been popular precisely because it fitted, albeit reasonably loosely, the expectations and empirical evidence about the ways that early-modern people understood their life to have been ordered.

Whilst it is necessary to set any account of how a woman might relate to her adolescent body in a temporal frame, the main concern of this chapter has been to analyse the experience of menarche and adolescence in early-modern England, and to draw together the many forms of contemporary social commentary from the prescriptive medical books to the private and contemplative journals. My research has shown that being a fourteen-year-old early-modern girl was a significant moment in a young women’s life, one in which her whole life was expected to change, not just physically, as menarche saw a change in the way she was perceived in the household, but emotionally too in that she would be expected to experience whole new sets of feelings which, being female, would dominate her thoughts from then on. As Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have noted, ‘mothers may have seen age 14 or 15 as ending their daughters’

124 ‘Ages at Menarche’, p. 84.
125 ‘Ages at Menarche’, p. 87.
childhood’, and cite the case of Lady Ann Fanshawe whose mother ‘nearly died in childbirth, [and] longed like Hezekiah “that I may live 15 years to see my daughter a woman”’. In fact, Lady Ann records that her mother seems to have been well after the birth since she breastfed her daughter for three months until she contracted a near-fatal fever. Under the effects of the fever Lady Ann’s mother, Lady Margaret Harrison, had a vision of ghostly figures to whom she pleads for the fifteen years to see her daughter grow into a woman. How much of this memory was retrospectively amended is impossible to say, but it seems Lady Margaret’s wish was granted and she died when her daughter was fifteen. This seems to corroborate the assertion that menarche was very much seen as the first step of a girl’s transition to womanhood.

Menarche was also a time that made physicians fearful, lest the transition was not smooth and the humoral disturbance might result in diseases such as epilepsy presenting at this dangerous age. Alexandra Lord suggests that medical theorists viewed the onset of menarche in a negative sense because they ‘regarded menstruation as a fundamentally unclean process’, and they viewed the ‘transition from a healthy body to a plethoric one’ as negative too. The existence of so many records of problematic menarche in the form of greensickness also aptly demonstrates the significance of this physiological event to the way that society was ordered. A delayed menarche meant a delay in the start of the transition to womanhood. The fact that so few cases of greensickness appear in actual medical case notes when compared to its striking presence in the media of the day (the plays that use this trope that I have discussed form only a representative sample and this image is used in many more plays and texts such as broadside ballads, for example) compared with the high interest in this disease implies other reasons for the interest other than that it was a phenomenon. Interest must surely stem from the fact that failing to become menstruant at the approved time was seen at some levels as a threat to social stability ascribed to female duplicity, as acted out in the plays cited above.

In terms of normal menarche, I would further suggest that a lack of formal ritual to mark this event in early-modern England, as now, is one of the reasons, combined with the difficulty in finding extant material, that women’s accounts of menarche have been largely un-researched and rarely considered.\textsuperscript{129} It was the case that the sorts of celebratory rituals that were observed in other cultures were known at this time. As John Marten comments, ‘In Jucaia when the Maids find their Menstrua appear, the Parents invite the Neighbours to a Banquet, and use all Signs and Tokens of Joy for the same’.\textsuperscript{130} Such rituals were seen as foreign and as different from the ways that this event happened in early-modern England.

What has become clear in this study, however, is that there is very little correlation between the ways in which public male prescriptive texts present menarche and the ways in which women describe their adolescence experiences in the relative privacy of their autobiographical journals. Both genres deal with the contemporary theme that a young woman would be likely to develop an interest in the opposite sex at this time, but the male language is that of invasion, battle, and suffering while the female one is one of making sense of living in a new body in a cultural framework of religious and filial obedience, in the cases of Delaval and Isham. Lady Elizabeth annotated her teenage \textit{Meditations} as a mature woman, and thus oversaw the ways that they might be read in the future. Isham wrote her autobiography when she was around the age of forty. In the case of both women, it is pertinent that the dramatic life changes that they record as having taken place when they are fourteen either indicates that happenings at that age were so significant as to be accurately remembered, or that both women, consciously or not, reinforced the cultural norms of when menarche, or greensickness would occur when they came to review their writings. The case of Isham is particularly relevant when analysing the way that greensickness is recorded, for although it fits in with the dominant presentation of this disease as a problem between a father and daughter, Isham does voice her feelings about her experience of suffering from the disease. In a similar way, the Countess of Cumberland leaves a record of the impact of greensickness on her life. In her

\textsuperscript{129} B. J. Sokol makes a convincing argument that the masque \textit{Comus} by John Milton is in fact a celebration of menarche, but even if this is the case, it would be very much atypical. See “Tilted Lees”, Dragons, \textit{Haemony}, Menarche, Spirit, and Matter in \textit{Comus’}, \textit{Review of English Studies}, 163 (1990), 309-24.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{A Treatise on the Venereal Disease}, p. 172.
case, the disease does not seem to be characterised by her relationship with her father, but instead with her brother and then her husband, which still fits the pattern as both of these men were dominating facets of her life.
Chapter Two: Of Women’s Monthly Sickness: Accounting for Menstruation in Early-Modern England

A common reaction today to this research on early-modern menstruation is ‘But surely women did not menstruate many times then?’ Many people view history through assumptions made about there having been an extremely early age of marriage and perpetual pregnancies. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, in fact the mean age at first marriage between 1600 and 1724 varied between 25.5 and 26.1 years.\(^1\) It is the case that women of the highest rank could expect to be married upon menarche, but as E. A. Wrigley notes, ‘marriage began earlier for women [than for men], but under 2 per cent married before reaching their seventeenth birthday’.\(^2\) For women lower down the social scale who, even if they were betrothed or in a relationship, had to wait and save until they were well established enough to set up home, the age at marriage was therefore higher. This would mean that most young women could expect to menstruate regularly for a number of years before marriage and subsequent childbirth.

Similarly, two further points must be remembered: firstly, many women were not destined to have children and this infertility could have many causes that were not always connected to her menstrual history, including personal choice. Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick claims in her autobiography that she decided to stop at only two children both for financial reasons as she and her husband were worried about being able to support many children, and perhaps surprisingly, because she was worried about ruining her looks:

> When I was first married, and had my two children so fast, I feared much having so many, and was troubled when I found myself to be with child so soon; out of proud conceit I had, that if I childed so thick it would spoil what my great vanity then made me fancy was tolerable (at least in my person).\(^3\)

Secondly, many women simply did not marry and have children at all. Amy M. Froide notes that ‘at least one-fifth of men and women in early modern England

\(^2\) *English Population History*, p. 145.
did not marry': there is no reason to think that most of these women did not have regular cycles.  

Anne Laurence has also encountered the view that early-modern women did not have many periods and writes that the idea that women did not menstruate very often because of frequent pregnancies, illness, or malnutrition is ‘obviously nonsense’. Laurence supports her assertion by claiming, as this thesis does, that there was often around ten years between menarche and marriage, but also that lower class women spaced out their pregnancies to every two or three years. This is a simplistic reading because it is women of the lower ranks who would be most susceptible to malnutrition especially in the winter months. Alexandra Lord has found evidence from the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary suggesting that during the eighteenth century, poorly nourished, lower ranking Scottish women ‘not only missed their menses during the winter months when food resources were stretched tight, but also that these women expected to miss their menses during this season’. This shows that whilst it should be assumed that many women experienced regular menstrual cycles, the issue is somewhat complicated by environmental factors.

This chapter, then, is concerned with an analysis of how the people of early-modern England accounted for menstruation, before analysing written evidence about how the flow of a menstrual period and managing any related pain were written about. As I have outlined in the introduction, there were several competing medical models which sought to account for why and how menstruation should occur. Whilst there was a vibrant medical debate about the reasons for menstruation and how it happened, an analysis of how people other than medics experienced and recorded menstruation is necessary. Laura Gowing argues that ‘[l]iterate discourse did not necessarily represent the way that most early modern people thought about their bodies, and unpicking the cultural construction of sexual difference still leaves us with questions about the

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6 In this passage, Laurence asserts that the usual age for menarche was age seventeen.  
materiality of the body’; so, by setting the surviving private or more conventionally literary material in the context of the medical writing I hope to evaluate the likely impact of the theoretical posturing on understanding of this physiological function, wherever possible, and therefore provide answers to the issue Gowing raises. This analysis will, therefore, highlight the sorts of differences to be found between the very public medical debate and the more private accounts in diaries, journals, and letters, and also will consider the differences between the ways that men and women record this topic.

Perhaps most famously, the first entry of Samuel Pepys’s diary makes mention of his wife’s menstrual cycle. Pepys notes that his wife had not had ‘her terms’ for some seven weeks, which gave him hope that she might be pregnant, but that this hope was dashed on the last day of the year when ‘she hath them again’. In subsequent entries Pepys often made use of Latin terminology to record his wife’s menstrual cycle, but on this first occasion he uses the commonplace early-modern euphemisms of ‘terms’ and ‘them’. Pepys’s reflection upon his year immediately highlights a tension between the ideas presented in prescriptive medical texts and beliefs held more generally in society. Patricia Crawford has argued that if a woman was cohabiting with a man ‘then the absence of menstruation was first viewed as a sign of possible pregnancy’. In terms of the lay person I think Crawford’s comments are supportable, but in terms of the medical position, a pregnancy was diagnosed from many different symptoms, with a lack of menstruation often considered to be a minor indication. Nicholas Culpeper says that the main sign of pregnancy is ‘when there is at first loathing of meat, pewking Pica, or preternatural appetite and vomiting’. He suggests that a woman can feel her womb close up upon conception (p. 156). Jane Sharp lists fourteen signs of pregnancy and amenorrhoea is the sixth symptom on

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11 A Directory for Midwives; or, A Guide for Women, in their Conception, Bearing and Suckling their Children (London: Peter Cole, 1662), p. 156. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
that list, under upset stomach and ‘sowr belchings’. Lord asserts that ‘because women facing an unwanted pregnancy often distorted and misrepresented their symptoms, many practising men-midwives had difficulties making a direct link between pregnancy and an absence of the menses’. This implies that somehow women had been complicit in the reasons an absence of menses appeared so far down the list of signs of pregnancy. A lack of menstruation in women, that is to say in females who had married and therefore had had intercourse and so were no longer maids, was treated as a serious health issue. The concern was not that a woman might develop greensickness, for as Sharp comments, ‘[c]ourses stopt in maids, are not the same as they are in women, for the effects are very different’ (p. 218). It was thought, rather, that a woman who missed a menstrual period might develop many different diseases caused by the suppression, up to and including cancer. So seriously was it thought that the menses should be regular that, as Etienne van de Walle has discovered, amongst the 325 plants recommended in Culpeper’s *Complete Herbal* (1655), eighty were used to provoke menstruation and fifty-one to stop them. A telling example of the sceptical way in which early-modern doctors wrote about this issue is seen in the late sixteenth century, when physician Simon Forman noted that Lady Frances Howard (not the Countess of Essex discussed in Chapter One) ‘supposes herself with child […] she hath not had her course’. The qualifier that ‘she supposes’ highlights the common position. Sharp, whose midwifery guide tends to demonstrate her practice-based knowledge rather than an abstract theoretical view, says that a missed period would be a good indicator of pregnancy if women, especially younger women, could be relied on to keep track of their menstrual cycles:

Young women especially of their first Child, are so ignorant commonly, that they cannot tell whether they have conceived or not, and not one in twenty keeps a just account, else they would be better provided against the time of their lying in, and not so suddenly surprised as many of them are. (pp. 81-82)

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12 *The Midwives Book; or, The Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 218. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
15 *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 35.
Like with much of her writing, Sharp seeks to mediate the normative medical statements that a missed period is not a useful indicator of pregnancy. Usually, until a woman had felt the baby quicken in her womb, most medics were unhappy to countenance a pregnancy. However, as has been seen with Lady Frances Howard and Elizabeth Pepys, the missing of a menstrual period is the most tangible sign to a woman that she might have conceived. That this is the position of the non-medical person is further supported by a Restoration scandal-fiction, *The London Jilt* (1683), in which the protagonist, Cornelia, decides to trick a besotted client into believing that she is pregnant.\(^{16}\) She explains that ‘undoubtedly I was with Child: For, added I to that, this was just the week I was to have had my Courses; and yet I had them not, which however never failed me one day in my Life’.\(^{17}\) By this system the onset of the monthly period would be the first indication that a woman had not conceived, as Samuel Pepys noted, despite the fact that Culpeper and other medics insist that menstruation can continue at least for the first few months of a pregnancy: Culpeper writes, ‘[f]or some have their terms twice or thrice after they have conceived, and some have them all along without hurt’ (p. 156).

Lady Sarah Savage, who kept a diary throughout most of her life as part of her spiritual observance, seems to have viewed the onset of her menstrual periods as a sign that God had not granted her wish for a child. Crawford’s analysis of Savage’s diary shows a woman who expresses grief every few weeks when it appears that once again God is thwarting her desire to be a ‘fruitful vine’.\(^{18}\) The diary never mentions menstruation explicitly, but throughout 1687, following her marriage in March, Savage records her disappointment every six to seven weeks. If it is the case that these observations are the result of her menses, then clearly her cycle is a long one, but this is still plausible. As Crawford says, ‘[i]t is possible that she may have had a miscarriage after seven weeks, but it is also possible that the intervals may represent the pattern of her menstrual cycle, which was irregular, at six to eight weeks’.\(^{19}\) However, what suggests that her menstruation is what is dashing her hopes of pregnancy is the way that ‘her hopes

\(^{17}\) *The London Jilt*, p. 93.
\(^{18}\) *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 38.
\(^{19}\) *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 40.
do not surface for four or five weeks, and then obsess her for two or three weeks, until hope ceases'. This is indicative of a woman who expected to menstruate at four-weekly intervals, but who seems to be having extended cycles. Crawford speculates that perhaps the stress and upheaval of her marriage could be the cause of this, and this is certainly possible, but it could equally be the case that, if she was having regular intercourse, she was conceiving regularly but that the embryo failed to implant and therefore she experienced a series of very early miscarriages. Indeed, both possibilities indicate how a woman who expected to experience regular menstrual cycles would experience and therefore document this irregular pattern. Savage’s diary speaks of her ‘lawful desire’, and her hopes that the Lord ‘would fulfil her desire aboute a partic[ular] thing’, which demonstrates how difficult it was in early-modern England for a woman to be explicit about her menstrual cycle, even within her private diary.

The spiritual diary of Lady Margaret Hoby bears some similarities to the sorts of concerns of Lady Sarah Savage. Hoby, too, longs for a baby, which, despite her three marriages, never comes. As her modern editor, Joanna Moody, has noted, on 7 October 1603, Hoby records that she spent the day fasting in the hope that the Lord would grant ‘that blissnew which yet I want’. Hoby’s diary does not, however, contain a patterned concern through which it might be possible to trace her menstrual cycle, as is the case with Savage. She does, however, record regular attacks of being unwell. Hoby records sufferings from a series of illnesses from regular bouts of toothache to rheumatic types of pain, and she is mentioned in Simon Forman’s case notes for having consulted him about her gout. Forman records that Hoby went to consult him about ‘gout in her hands and feet and swelling in her joints; she is only thirty-four but the disease has long been upon her’. Hoby recorded her sore joints in the diary with comments such as one on 5 September 1599, about how she had to lay on her bed to converse with her husband because of ‘not being able well to goe for my foot that was sore’ (p. 15).

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20 Blood, Bodies and Families, p. 40.
21 Blood, Bodies and Families, p. 38
22 Joanna Moody, ed., The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605 (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. xlv and p. 194. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
To Forman, there would probably have been only one explanation for so young a woman having this condition: suppressed menstruation. Galen’s *On Bloodletting* describes how this was thought to be the case from Hippocratic times, quoting, ‘A woman does not suffer from gout, says Hippocrates, unless her menses fail’. The occasions on which Hoby documents the fact that she is unwell but does not give a specific reason for her illness falls into an extremely irregular pattern. If that pattern is indeed her menstrual cycle it is reasonable to assume that this would have led to her being treated for menstrual suppression as she had episodes of quite regular illness followed by some which were many months apart. Moody also suspects that Hoby had menstrual problems, commenting that, ‘significantly, the diary records that her stomach cramps and discomfort occur with some regularity in the third week of many months, and this might indicate that she had some problems with her monthly cycle’ (p. xlv). On the occasions there is a possibility that Hoby is speaking about her menses, she describes, and therefore we can assume, exhibits, behaviours such as those of Samuel Pepys’s wife, Elizabeth. Indeed, Hoby records that she either went to bed early or stayed in her rooms all day, such as, when, on 26 January 1600/1 she comments that, ‘I, beinge not well, praied and reed in mine owne chamber and had Mr Bettnam to diner’ (p. 138). Whilst not the exact term that Hoby uses, the euphemism ‘unwell’ to mean having a menstrual period is one which has remained in use until at least the mid-to late-twentieth century. In the early seventeenth-century physician Richard Napier describes a patient who has her ‘sickness’ or menstrual period for only one day: being sick is an alternative term for being unwell. Similarly, the early seventeenth-century translation of Pliny’s *Natural History* refers to menstruation

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25 The *OED* cites this euphemistic usage from 1844 until 1964 when Elizabeth Bowen uses it in her book *Little Girls*. The Dictionary further suggests that the euphemism of ‘unwellness’ to mean a menstrual period was first recorded in Dorothy Osborne’s love letters to Sir William Temple. In letter thirty-three, Osborne complains that Temple does not explain fashionable neologisms to her in his letters. She, therefore, asks him to explain what is now meant by ‘wellness and unwellnes’. However, despite the fact that Temple is corresponding from Epsom where he is taking the waters for his health, and where he would have encountered women there hoping to cure menstrual-related complaints, it is far from certain in this letter that this is his usage that Osborne now wants explaining. See Dorothy Osborne, *Letters to Sir William Temple*, ed. by Kenneth Parker (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 112.

as ‘Women’s Monthly Sickness’. Elisha P. Renne and Etienne van de Walle have identified a letter from a French woman, Madame de Sévigné, from 1671, to her daughter in which the use of wellness or sickness as euphemisms for menstruation in the French language is made clear: ‘Today is the sixth of March; I beg you to send word on how you are faring. If you are well, you are sick, but if you are sick, then you are well. I wish, my daughter, that you be sick, so that you will keep your health for some time’. As Renne and van de Walle explain, ‘the meaning of this cryptic exchange is that “if you have your period, it is good news, it means that you are not pregnant”’. This European usage might imply a similar usage in English. In Lady Hoby’s journal, it is significant that although she says she is ‘not well’ she still regularly receives visitors, which again suggests that this is a euphemism for menstruation rather than that she is feeling feverish, for example. On the 4 October following, which is the next time she has this non-specified illness, Hoby again notes, ‘This day I, beine not well, kept att home and was vesited by Mrs Thornborowe and others’ (p. 166). Hoby’s own rationale for her, possibly menstrual, disorders is described within the contextual understandings of her time. Her second diary entry says that she has been by God’s grace cured of ‘wanderings’ (p. 3). This condition ‘use to hurt me, so that I received much comfort [at their cessation]’ (p. 3). The wandering womb was the idea that the uterus could move within the body and cause other illnesses. This belief was still very much current in Lady Hoby’s lifetime, and as Helen King describes, even the discovery by anatomists of uterine ligaments did not stop the theorem of the wandering womb, but just caused it to be reinterpreted as the womb causing other organs problems by ‘sympathy’ rather than physical movements. This was a further aspect of the complex matrix of humoral theory which suggested that parts of the body worked through ‘familiar sympathy’, that

29 Regulating Menstruation, p. xx. Renne and van de Walle go on to show an example from the nineteenth century which suggests that women then used the euphemism of having a cold to mean their menstrual period. In the early-modern period, I will argue, this was not the case, for, in all the diaries I have seen, women seem to talk about ailments such as headaches, colds, and injuries in their references to the mysterious unnamed illnesses.
is, through an innate inclination to work with each other.\textsuperscript{31} Nicholas Culpeper, however, still believed in this old Hippocratic notion in the mid-seventeenth century, even though he allows for the fact that Galen had ‘disproved’ it. In his \textit{Directory for Midwives} Culpeper reminds his reader that the uterine ligaments are loosened by pregnancy and that the womb is not tied by these ligaments uniformly. He concludes that when:

women affirm, that they feel a body or ball moving about the navel, and a Physitian or Midwife may feel it. Therefore let us enquire what it is, if it be not a womb. That body which you may feel stir, is the stones [i.e. ovaries], and that blind vessel which \textit{Fallopius} found out, which he compared to the great end of a Trumpet, called \textit{Fallopius} his Trumpet. For the stones hang, and the body of the Trumpet is like a pipe loose and moving, and when they are full and swell with corrupt seed and vapours, they move to and fro, and ascend as high as the navel. And the stones with the Trumpet make this round tumor of the womb, which is felt in women. (p. 38)

One of the possible causes of a wandering womb was thought to be irritation which could itself be caused by irregular menstrual cycles. The second cause that Lady Hoby ascribes her, probably menstrual, problems to is divine will: just as she prays for children, so she thinks she has been punished with a lack of menstruation. On 27 June 1602 she remarks that ‘until this day I have continewed in bodily health, notwithstandinge satan hath not ceased to Cast his malice upon [me]’ (p. 181). That this is a reference to her menses returning after an absence of nearly eight months – she has been in good bodily health despite a lack of menses - is suggested by the fact that a month later on the 25 July she is again unwell. Lady Hoby tries several remedies often used to bring on her menses, such as the use of blood-letting and enemas. It is highly significant that the diary records unselfconsciously her having an enema, which today people may find uncomfortable to speak about whilst the diary consistently has no language for menses, an equally natural bodily function.

The letters of Lady Brilliana Harley to both her husband and her son during the early- to mid-seventeenth century also provide evidence of how a woman related to her, often problematic, menses. The way that she describes her episodic bouts of illness suggests that she had a problem with heavy, painful

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{31} ‘Familiar sympathy’ is how the pseudonymous author of \textit{Aristoteles Master-Piece; or, The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Part Therof} (London: J. How, 1684) expresses the function on p. 116.}\]
periods. Harley comes closer to finding a way of expressing the recurrent nature of her menstrual problems than is seen in any diaries of her contemporaries. As has been discussed, both Lady Margaret Hoby and Lady Sarah Savage allude to their menses in different ways, but even in the context of their own spiritual diaries they cannot be specific. At the times that Lady Harley makes significant comments that I would argue are about her menses, she is around forty years old, and it could be that her cycle has become problematic as she is approaching menopause, although her letters to her son do suggest that this was a long standing problem for her. In the first such letter, dated 22 March 1638, Lady Harley apologises for her tardiness in replying to her son’s latest letter:

The last weake being not well, I could not inioye this contentment of rwitiveing to you. You may remember, that when you weare at home, I was offten enforsed to keepe to my beed; it pleases God, it is so with me still, and when I have thos indispositions, it makes me ill for some time afterwards.32

The fact that she takes to her bed, or her chamber, as I have shown above, is not unusual at this time, but the fact that she appears to be suffering from extremely heavy periods that make her weak for some time afterwards is unusual to see expressed by a woman herself. Later, in an undated letter thought to be from 1639, she again tells her son that her letters will be written for her. She reassures him that although weakened and in ill health she is no worse than she routinely is, but ‘[s]ome indisposition enforces me to keepe my bed, wch is ye cause I make use on another’s penne. I thanke God I am not worser than when I was wont to keepe to my bed’ (p. 49). Understandably, this illness affects Lady Harley’s mood and she complains to her son of having to stay in the solitariness of her bed. This again suggests that she was really suffering, because, as is shown above, the other women who write about staying in their rooms when they are menstruating are still able to receive visitors. She says, for example, that she has been using her confinement well to read improving material: ‘Haveing bine offtin not well, and confined to so sollatary a place as my beed, I made choys of an entertainement for meself, which might be easy and of some benefit to meself ’ (p. 52), and how

32 The Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley of Brampton Bryan, Knight of the Bath, ed. by Thomas Taylor Lewis (London: Camden Society, 1853; Kessinger facsimile reprint, 2008), p. 33. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
she relishes her freedom when she is able to once again get up and about, not least because she can write her own correspondence: ‘but now, I thanke God, I have more liberty, in which I have this contentment, that I can tell my minde to you with my owne penn’ (p. 50). However, Lady Harley does admit to feelings of sadness at her illnesses, writing in November 1639, ‘I have not bine so well for above this weake as I use to be, and with it I have been trubled with much heaviness at my hart’ (p. 76), and she reports feeling weak and down for a month which shows how debilitating these episodes of illness could be. Lady Harley sometimes barely had time to recuperate before she was struck down again. As she tells Ned, her son, on 22 November that she has been unwell for some thirty days, but only a week later she tells him it was her week to be unwell yet again; ‘I thanke God your father is well, and I am now abell to be out of beed. I have not bine so well for above this weake as I use to be, and with it I have been trubled with much heaviness at my hart’ (p. 76). A theme that Ned is keen that his mother should receive medical help is recurrent throughout the letters, but as Lady Harley says, without knowing the exact day that she is to start her period, it is difficult to have a doctor on standby:

I thanke you, my deare Ned, for wishing I should take something of him [her physician]; but my illness comes at sartaine times, and without I should send for him just at that time, I can not have him then to give me any thing: for he would have me take something and be let blood two or three days before I am ill, as I used to be. If please God, when you are with me, I will send for doctor Rwite and take something. It pleases my gratious God, so to dispose of it, that this illness which I have, again makes me very weake, for as soune as I am pretty well I am ill againe. Doctor Deodate tells me he kowes many so, and he doos much pitty me; but my comfort is, that my God will not cast me off for ever. (p. 98)

Phlebotomy to remove some of the excess blood two or three days before an expected period was a conventional treatment for heavy periods, and one which is entirely logical within a humoral bodily economy. There is some textual evidence that after Harley received regular medical help she was sometimes somewhat less debilitated by her regular illnesses than she used to be. Indeed, she tells Ned in mid-June 1642, having recorded in letters a pattern of episodes of illness on a somewhat irregular but monthly basis (11 February, 12 March, 20 April, 17 June, 15 July), that ‘I have not bine very well this day, but it is as I use to be, and I
thanke God so much better, as I keepe not to my chamber’ (p. 169). And, three
days later, she writes ‘I thanke God I have bine very well, and so well, that I am
abell to goo abroode, when I am not well as I used to be’ (p. 171). In this case she
is using the early-modern euphemism of saying that she was feeling ‘well’ even
though she is ‘not well’, that is, menstruating. In July she says:

> It is true, as you apprehend it, that I have caus to blles God for His great
> mercy in giving me, now at this time, a fare more full measure of
> health then I have had, ever since I was ill; for now I thanke God, I can
go abrood at thos times that I was inforsed to keepe my beed, and this
> last weake I was abell, at that time, to keepe a privet fast, and the Lord
> has doun this for me, the unworthyest of all His servants. (pp. 177-78)

Lady Harley is now suffering much less at the time of her menses than she used
to do, and can even go out and about now, when formerly she was so ill with this
indisposition that she was confined to her bed. Even though this improvement in
health might be put down to the physic she is now taking, it is God who receives
the praise for restoring her to health, just as she had seen God’s will as the cause
of the illnesses. Lady Harley has much in common with Lady Hoby before her, as
both women invoke the message of Psalm 28.4, which states ‘Give them
according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours:
give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert’, to rationalise
their recurrent illnesses as a punishment from God. Lady Hoby expresses this as,
‘after, hard the Lector and then went to bed, god haveinge a Little afflected me with
sicknes for a great desart: the Loed grant me true repentance for all my sinnes,
amen, amen’ (p. 45), and Lady Harley remarks, ‘My Deare Ned, that it has
pleased the Lord to imbitter my life with many sorrowes (yet I must say it has
bine in mercy and not according to my desert) has bine caused by my owne
sinnes’ (p. 73). In this understanding, both women claim that God is only giving
them the illness that they deserve, as women, in an innately sinful existence.

The Harley letters between a mother and son are remarkably candid, if
encoded in the sort of euphemistic language that not only renders Lady Harley’s
illnesses unreadable to a casual observer of her letters, but also display a deep
connection between Brilliana and Edward Harley, all the more so if her illnesses
are, as I have argued, of a menstrual nature. The fact that Lady Harley is unafraid
to discuss intimate matters with her son is further highlighted at the end of
January 1639/40 when she reports having had a recent miscarriage. Since her last
episode of illness was at the end of the previous November, perhaps this records the loss of a very early pregnancy, of around eight weeks, a possibility that further suggests that Lady Harley expected her cycle to be regular. She tells Ned that she takes strength from his being in good health, but also that she is very much weakened:

> It hath pleased God that I have been ill ever since you went; but yet I rejoice in God's mercy to me, that you enjoy your health [...]. The Lord hath been pleased to shew His strength in my weakness, to enable me to undergo such a fit of weakness, which hath made stronger bodies than mine stoop. This day seven night it pleased God I did miscarry, wch I did desire to have prevented; but the Lord who brought His own work to pass, and I desired to submit to it [...] I hope that as the Lord hath strengthened me to bear my weakness in my bed, so I trust he will enable me to rise out of my bed. (pp. 78-79)

Ned seems to both express concern for his mother’s health and to wonder why she had not mentioned the possibility of her being pregnant when he was home, probably for Christmas as there is a break in the letters around this time. She replies: ‘I did not thinke I had bine with childe when you weare with me’ (p. 80), which she would not have done as she would have been expecting a period around Christmas time; a few days either way would not cause alarm. Lady Harley had seen a doctor at the time of her miscarriage, but told Ned she did not now need to see a physician as Ned desired, as she was not sick in the sense of someone who needs a doctor, further confirming the menstrual nature of her illnesses. She does, however, tell Ned that she has taken some restorative cordials that had previously been recommended by her doctors. The miscarriage takes a heavy toll on Lady Harley and even a month later on 20 February she tells Ned, ‘For meself, my deare Ned, I am still weake, and, I thinke, allmost as weake as afther lyeing in of any of my chillderen, but your sister Dorrity; yester I was up a littell’ (p. 82).

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the Princess, later Queen, Anne used a cipher of an invented character in a private letter of 28 July 1692, to tell her companion Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough that she had not yet had her period. The princess wrote in the letter: ‘I have not yet seen Lady Charlott, which I wonder very much at for I used to be very regular & cannot fancy she has taken her leave for nine months becaus since my first three children I have never bred
In this letter the princess is concerned about her late period, but is sure she cannot be pregnant as it is too soon after the birth of her son, George, on 17 April the same year, who sadly died the same day. This code endured in the family for a long time as Sarah had correspondence with her granddaughter Diana, whom she had raised, who was thought to be pregnant, ‘even though Diana reported that “Lady Charlotte” had visited her twice since she became sick’. In fact, Diana was ill with consumption from which she later died, aged twenty-five. Crawford and Gowing speculate that this euphemism could have started as a joke between the two women because it was the name of a courtier that neither woman liked. The idea of a ‘visit’ as a euphemism for menstruation is also used in correspondence between the Duchess of Marlborough and her husband. At the age of forty-two, and following the death of her only son, the duchess thought she might be pregnant again. Her husband John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough wrote to her after she told him of her belief that he hoped she had still not had ‘the visit I so much fear’. The duchess’s modern biographer Ophelia Field remarks that, ‘Sarah continued to believe throughout the spring of 1703 that she was pregnant. That she allowed herself to be bled in early June, however, suggests that some of her doctors had other ideas about her ‘cessation of flowers’. In fact, this deduction of Field’s is not in keeping with early-modern medical conventions. Doctors usually agreed that if the woman was plethoric then bleeding in early pregnancy could actually prevent abortion. John Freind in his monograph on menstruation, *Emmenologia*, published in Latin in this same year makes this point.

That there was a definite gender divide when it came to writing about menstruation in a private and personal context is shown by the fact that Lady Sarah Savage and Lady Margaret Hoby seem to be unable, even within the bounds of their private spiritual diaries, to find an explicit way of addressing the topic of their health when it concerns menstruation. Felicity Nussbaum notes a

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33 Edward Gregg, *Queen Anne* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 95. The euphemism is used in several other letters between the two women.
36 *The Favourite*, p. 121.
37 *The Favourite*, p. 128
long tradition, beginning in the seventeenth century, that the private self of the
diary is more authentic than the public self: if this is indeed the case, it suggests
that women did not want to be explicit about their menstruation, even within an
overtly private context. However, the journal of Lady Hoby may be more than a
private record. Lady Hoby records her religious observance in her journal and it
might be the case that she uses the journal in discussions with her spiritual
advisor. If that is the case, it might explain the lack of candidness on the topic of
her menstrual health problems. Yet, as I have observed, they, along with Lady
Brilliana Harley, do record bouts of colds, toothaches and headaches, as well as
episodes of kidney stones from which Lady Hoby and Lady Harley both suffer
and, Lady Hoby even records when she takes an enema for constipation. The
nearest women come to being explicit is in deploying the specific invented
persona that is used by certain members of the aristocracy in the form of visits
from ‘Lady Charlotte’. This strongly suggests the impact of a menstrual taboo
which men did not feel bound by in their private diaries.

William Whately’s conduct treatise A Bride-Bush suggests that a woman
might be reluctant to even explain to her husband that she was menstruating when
he wanted to have sex, and that her silence would lead them both to sin, and
perhaps even to condemn her husband to death in a strict observance of the
Levitical law. Whately says, ‘Let no woman grieve that the cause of her
fruitfulness is knowne’. Despite Whately’s concerns that a woman would
consider it too indecorous to even inform her husband that they should abstain
from intercourse because she was menstruating, men’s diaries from the period
record their wives’ menstrual cycles with a regularity which implies that
husbands were aware of when their wives were menstruating, and that they felt
able to record this event in ways that women did not. One of the keys to this
might be their ability to have recourse to Latin, a language which women were
seldom schooled in. Pepys regularly writes of his wife’s ‘menses’, the Latin term
for months favoured by medical writers as a proper noun for menstruation. John
Dee similarly uses Latin for the less decorous parts of his diary, but he further

39 The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England
40 (London: William Jaggard, 1617), p. 44.
41 A Bride-Bush, p. 44.
encodes many references to his wife’s menstruation in Greek characters.\textsuperscript{42} Dee not only notes when his wife, Jane, is menstruating, but also comments on the nature of her bleeding. Typical comments include, ‘Jane had them abundant’ (p. 105) followed a month later by ‘Jane had them a little’ (p. 105). These entries show that Jane Dee had a cycle which reflects the experiences of both Lady Sarah Savage and Lady Brilliana Harley in that she would have several menstrual periods at monthly intervals but some would be seven weeks apart and some months are missing entirely. As with Lady Sarah Savage, however, it is possible that Jane Dee suffered from a series of early miscarriages, such as when she menstruates on 29 September 1581 and then is not recorded as having bled again until 21 November following, when her husband notes, ‘Jane had them suddenly at half past seven after noon and so in the following night’ (p. 106). The missing months could, of course, be attributable to the vagaries of diary keeping and the fact that it is an event which might just slip one’s mind if other more comment-worthy events happened. Dee’s interest in his wife’s cycle also displays his interest in medical matters more generally, when he comments on 3 July 1581, ‘Jane had them plentifully and at almost 7 p.m. miscarried of a conception of eight days; but where [are] the [separate] limbs etc?’ (p. 106).

Dee might have recorded his wife’s cycle to keep track of her health and fertility, much like Pepys’s opening entry where he had hoped, because his wife had missed a period, that she might be pregnant. Women’s contact with their physicians is another way that a record might exist of how a woman thought about her cycle. However, women’s complaints in their doctor’s casebooks need to be treated with caution as the recorded remarks are, of course, those which her physician chose to note, and are his recollection of the significant aspects of the consultation. However, through such methods we know, for example, that the Stratford-upon-Avon physician and son-in-law to William Shakespeare, John Hall, was consulted by a Mrs Chandler aged either thirty-four or thirty-eight because she was ill from ‘a great Flux of her Courses’.\textsuperscript{43} Mrs Chandler had had a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{42} Ralph Houlbrooke, ed.,\textit{ English Family Life, 1576–1716: An Anthology from Diaries} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 105, n. 4. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} Harriet Joseph,\textit{ Shakespeare’s Son-in-Law: John Hall, Man and Physician} (New York: Joseph, 1964; repr. 1993), p. 52. This edition includes a facsimile of the 1679 posthumous publication of Hall’s case notes,\textit{ Select Observations upon English Bodies of Eminent Persons}}
similar problems of the ‘like Flux’ after her lying in three years before, Hall comments, thus making clear that menstrual blood and lochial bleeding were at that time considered as two incidents of the same physiological function.

The publishing of real names in case notes is interesting from a historical perspective as it provides a way of connecting with real women’s lives, but at the time it sits strangely in the context of the unspeakability of issues related to menstruation. The physician James Cooke claims to have translated into English these notes that Hall had been careful to keep in Latin, despite the fact that he notes that the Latin was ‘abbreviated or false’. The use of idiosyncratic Latinate notes, translatable only in conjunction with the help of Hall’s apothecary, strongly suggests that Hall had a system of note-taking which not only gave him patient notes to refer back to, but which simultaneously maintained a degree of doctor-patient confidentiality. Cooke is aware of the issues surrounding naming real patients and of the privileged position of the doctor-patient dynamic, but says that he has taken care to only name patients who have since died or those whose permission he has obtained. Unfortunately what we do not get a sense of, from Cooke’s translation of Hall’s notes, is how Mrs Chandler felt about her heavy bleeding and how this affected her life on a practical basis. Hall simply comments that she was cured through the use of a laxative purge and blood-letting.

Apothecary case notes are another source of information on women’s relationships with their cycle. John Westover an apothecary-cum-surgeon recorded in his casebook notes about the women who consulted him, as both a record of the treatments he provided and a reckoning of the amounts he charged and received for treatments. These include women such as Elizabeth Nicholls who, in April 1690, was both bled by Westover and given ‘a julep for the overflowing of her cosses’. The treatment of an antimony-based purge and bleeding suggests that Westover considered her case to be a difficult one. Around the same time, Westover treats ‘Elizabeth Trowbridge of Bleaden’ for the mirrored problem of having had an absence of menstruation. Westover’s case

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\footnote{Shakespeare’s Son-in-Law,} p. 105-06.
\footnote{William G. Hall, ed., ‘The Casebook of John Westover of Wedmore, Surgeon, 1686–1700’, in \textit{Wedmore Genealogy Pages} \texttt{<www.tutton.org>} [accessed 21 November 2008], sig. 97. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.}
notes say that she ‘hath a pane in her backe and allsoe the rest of her limbes and hath a cough. She is fallen away very leane or poore. About 24 years of age. She as I judg is drawing into a consumtion and is rhumatysmic. She hath not yet her cossess’ (p. 99). Significantly, Westover’s modern editor has noted that, in both of these cases Westover encodes the term ‘cosses’ into a cipher he devised in which he replaces all the vowels with numbers. Like many apothecaries of his time, Westover is influenced by astrology; when Ann Taner comes to see him in February 1694 for ‘want of her corses’, Westover gives her more gentle medicine than in the other cases, but advises her to return ‘to be bloded in the arme and at the change [of the moon] in the foot’ (p. 155). Often the woman’s identity is subsumed into her husband’s in this journal. So, for example, on 16 December 1694 ‘Richard Goold of Marke sent me for his wife being trubled with the overflowing of her cosses’ (sig.166v), and in April 1695, William Bowle became a ‘debtor for medicine to stope the overflowing of cosses’ (sig.170r).

What this survey of the way that menstruation was accounted for in private writings shows is a clear gender divide between the ways that men and women found to write about menstruation. Female writers usually wrote around the topic, and, like Lady Sarah Savage, plotted a discernible menstrual pattern while not referring directly to their menses. Lady Brilliana Harley perhaps comes closest to a direct reference when she talks about her regular ‘indisposition’, the same phrase that Samuel Pepys uses, and while Queen Anne is the only female writer to make a reference to menstruation, in a letter to a trusted friend, she uses an elaborate code to do so. For male writers the issue is more direct, in that they can nearly always name menstruation by its Latin or Greek names. John Westover as an apothecary/surgeon perhaps did not have sufficient Latin and so encoded the term courses in an alpha-numeric cipher. The key point, however, remains that early-modern male writers used the current proper nouns for menstruation in ways that the extant corpus of seventeenth-century female writings suggests that women did not. The reasons that men hid behind Latin and codes and women never referred to their menses must be many and various, but must be connected to social standards of what it was acceptable to document. One of the results of this gap in the record is that we now have very little idea not only about how the early-modern woman felt about her menstrual periods, but also about how she dealt with the practical aspects of managing her cycle.
Managing Menstrual Flow

Many commentators on early-modern women assume that women used linen pads to absorb their menstrual flow. Such claims are often based on early twentieth-century practice transposed into the early modern era, usually with no contemporary sources to support these assertions. Of the later seventeenth century, Liza Picard writes, ‘Sanitary towels were made of linen that had reached the end of the line; they were washed and reused, as they were well into the twentieth century’. Of course, this assumption is plausible and probably is the way some women managed their menstrual flow. Similarly, in her chapter ‘Civil Cleanliness’ about personal hygiene in the eighteenth century, Virginia Smith comments, ‘The normal method of dealing with the menstrual flow was to cut out and sew a pad of rag, which was then pinned onto the under petticoat and washed daily, a method which persisted well into the early twentieth century’. Patricia Crawford takes for granted that women wore ‘cloth pads’. Conversely, Edward Shorter poses and answers his own question: ‘What did peasant women use when they menstruated? The answer seems to be that women from the popular classes menstruated onto their clothes’.

The problem that all of the above accounts face is rooted in the dual nature of sanitary protection. This subject is both taboo and mundane, hence the apparent lack of early-modern sources. A commonplace issue for women the world over is that sanitary protection is a subject which is still loaded with a

48 Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 232. Smith’s source is not a contemporary one but is from Sharra Vostral’s essay ‘Masking Menstruation: The Emergence of Menstrual Hygiene Products in the United States’, in Menstruation: A Cultural History, ed. by Andrew Shail and Gillian Howie (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 243-50. Furthermore, any evidence on the washing of rags used for bodily functions does not support a daily washing theory. Rags were gathered in a bucket or tub and soaked and presumably when there was a sufficient quantity to justify the activity they would be washed together.
50 Women’s Bodies: A Social History of Women’s Encounter with Health, Ill-Health, and Medicine (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction, 1991), p. 261. Shorter has an, albeit late-medieval, contemporary source text at least, and cites an incident in which a woman who died in 1457 was discovered to have been menstruating at her death upon intimate examination; there were then some complaints that because the inspectors would have been able to tell that she was menstruating by the state of her clothing, she need not have been disrobed.
cultural assumption that it should be left unsaid. Consider, for example, the situation whereby sanitary products are now allowed to be advertised on mainstream television, but under strict compliance codes such as that the fluid depicted must be blue, as a portrayal of menstrual blood on the television is still considered to be beyond the pale for the British public.\(^{51}\) In the light of these contrasting and contradictory issues of taboo and familiarity, which still remain, this section will examine early-modern texts to analyse what evidence exists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to support any of the above claims.

For the purposes of this section I will, as above, refer to anything which is used specifically to absorb the menstrual flow as ‘sanitary protection’ because this is the normative modern terminology; this usage does, though, put forward deeply problematic assumptions about the nature of the role of these objects: does the term ‘sanitary’ imply that failure to use these objects is automatically to be ‘unsanitary’? And, what does the term ‘protection’ imply? Protection from contagion, from poison, from embarrassment, or for clothing from staining? Edward Shorter prefaces his question about the nature of early-modern sanitary protection with the claim that ‘women’s premodern sense of cleanliness shows itself most vividly in the area of menstrual hygiene’.\(^{52}\) This is a key facet of the contemporary context: the early-modern normal understandings of cleanliness are not the same as those in the modern age. This is not to say that early-modern women were not clean; it is just that cleanliness is culturally defined and interpreted, and at different points in history and location, different practices resulted.\(^{53}\) The almost-certainly male author of The Gentlewoman’s Companion, printed under the name of Hannah Woolley, claims that it is a generally held belief that women are only useful to the world for breeding.\(^{54}\) The pseudonymous author further claims that women are useful to the world in order ‘to keep its

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\(^{52}\) Women’s Bodies, p. 261.

\(^{53}\) See Virginia Smith cited above for a history of the changing ideals in personal hygiene throughout history.

humane inhabitants sweet and clean’. It is therefore important to try to recover this aspect of women’s lives in the early-modern era without imposing twenty-first century ideas (which include invisibility for the menstruant) about cleanliness upon a society for whom modern ideas had no equivalence, or relevance.

The evidence I have recovered suggests that an early-modern English woman who used folded cloths to absorb her menstrual flow would have known them as ‘clouts’ or ‘rags’. Pieces of cloth used in a variety of household ways were generally referred to as clouts. These clouts were usually made from old cloth, often linen, cut to size, sometimes hemmed, and then given a variety of uses around the home (dishcloths, bandages, sanitary uses such as wiping after using the toilet). The early-modern term of ‘clout’ with variations in its spelling means, according to the OED, ‘a piece of cloth, esp. one put to squalid uses’. It is possible that the choice of linen as the material for medical and sanitary uses resulted from the belief that clean linen could draw off moisture from the body.

In 1682, A. Marsh drolly commented on the subject of childbirth practices, that a midwife might offer ‘warmed beds and other Clouts, the number and names where of are without end’. These cloths could also be used to absorb menstrual blood, but there is no contemporary evidence that I have been able to recover that they were sewn into pads at all, although the cloth was undoubtedly folded over to make it more absorbent. It is possible that clouts were pinned or tucked into the girdle, which was a belt-like garment, sitting just below the waist, worn by men and women.

Lady Anne Clifford records in her diary that on 13 December 1619, ‘My Lord gave me three shirts to make Clouts of’. Despite the fact that Lady Anne was a wealthy aristocrat, it would appear that one of her housewifely duties was...
to run the house as frugally as possible, and it is interesting that this exchange
was considered noteworthy in her diary as the only entry for that date. This diary
entry confirms that household economy led to second-hand linen being made into
cloths. However, it also, to some degree, reinforces the seventeenth-century
stereotype that higher-ranking women spent their days sitting and sewing. This
stereotype appears in an account of why women are considered colder and
moister than men in the humoral system, and is ultimately thought to be the
reason women menstruate at all, as I outlined in the introduction; Helkiah
Crooke’s *Mikrokosmographia* cites Hippocratic authority:

> Men doe live a more laborious life, and eat more solide meates then
> women, that they may gather heate and become dryer, woemens foode
> is more moyste; and beside, they liue an idle and sedentarie life,
> pricking for the most part uppon a clout.\(^{61}\)

There is a caveat, though, explicated in a 1705 translation of Bernardino
Ramazzini’s *The Diseases of Tradesmen*, which suggests that, while a man’s old
shirt could be put to any use, because of the supposedly venomous nature of
menstrual blood, many ‘celebrated Surgeons’ believed that ‘Lint’ for dressing
wounds should not be made from ‘Women’s Linnen or Shifts, notwithstanding
they are frequently wash’d; and that by reason of the Virulency of the menstrual
Blood’.\(^{62}\)

Other primary evidence further suggests that only women of a
higher/aristocratic rank would take the precaution of wearing clouts to absorb
their menstrual flow. A seventeenth-century joke attributed to Nicholas Le
Strange reads, ‘There was a certaine thing dropt at a Masque, which Monstrous
woemen use to weare, but every one was ashamd to owne it at that time; a Madde
Knave findes it, comes and Askes among the Ladyes, which of them had lost their
Surcingle’.\(^{63}\) As Gordon Williams notes, Le Strange ‘probably uses the variant
spelling advisedly’. And, indeed, as I argued in the Introduction, the substitution

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\(^{61}\) *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (London: William Jaggard, 1615), p. 274. The colder female body is unable, according to this ancient system, to transform blood to the same extent that the male body can to create seed, sweat, and extra hair, therefore creating a surplus which needs to be eliminated from the body on a periodic basis.


of ‘monstrous’ as a pun on ‘menstruous’ was so well-known that Jane Sharp directly refutes this in *The Midwives Book* (p. 215). A ‘surcingle’ is a girdle placed around a horse’s girth when it is being trained, and so this further supports the idea that a woman of higher rank might tuck or pin a clout onto such a belt while menstruating. The idea of the danger of dropping one’s clout is alluded to in a manuscript source from the 1680s that Williams has identified which alludes to a Lord Eland’s sister, ‘who dares not put out her foot, for fear of dropping her double Clout’.

Not only are the dangers of wearing folds of linen in a pre-underwear era all too apparent, but this also corroborates the idea that it was women of a higher social rank, those who might dance at a masked ball, who wore sanitary protection. Given the common belief that exertion such as dancing could make the menstrual flow heavier or, as John Freind suggests, occur unexpectedly, it could be the case that women chose to wear sanitary protection on special occasions, such as a ball.

Mary Carleton’s disputed autobiography also shows her to have been living in the rank of women who would use clouts as sanitary protection. Carleton’s account of her marriage and its breakdown tacitly implies that she was menstruating at the time that her goods were seized by her marital family, which happened after they received a letter asserting she was not the wealthy German aristocrat that she had claimed to be. Carleton writes that a gang of women, at her marital family’s request, came into her rooms and took away all her clothing. Perhaps salaciously rather than factually, this account lists that ‘my jewels and my money, my very bodice and a pair of silk stockings being also pulled from me’, but, when she reiterates this scene later, she adds details designed to demonstrate both the intruders’ mercilessness, and the shocking intrusion of the raid: ‘In fine, they left me not a rag, rinsing every wet cloth out of the water, and carrying them away’.

To have her property taken to the extent that even her soaking undergarments and, possibly, even her menstrual rags were removed

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64 *Dictionary of Sexual Language*, p. 253. Williams cites in the same entry a further narrative in which a rake and a whore go back to the rake’s rooms to find a bloodied clout on the floor, and which he explains by saying that it was ‘a ragg of a woman Whose Tayle to me of Late was Common In short ’was nothing but her flowers’.

65 *Emmenologia*, p. 71.


might also suggest that such bits of linen had a commodious value, and, by implication, might be beyond the financial reach of some.

One surprising source of contemporary evidence for the possible practice of sanitary protection comes from the 1680 collection of poems which claims to be a posthumous publication of the notorious libertine, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Before his death, Rochester’s poetry was disseminated in manuscript form to aristocratic and like-minded friends. It is, however, deeply problematic as a source for the history of women’s bodies since most poetry in the anthology focuses on the female body as used for male sexual gratification. The first poem of interest here is ‘On Mistress Willis’, written in the style of a literary ballad, cross rhyming abab and in tetrameter/trimeter quatrains, which demonstrates an easy accomplishment at prosody, itself perhaps designed to make the irregularity of the subject more shocking. This ballad tells the story of a man who claims to be disgusted by a prostitute while he cannot resist being in her thrall. The speaking voice in this ballad invites the reader to share his position. The subject of this relationship is apparently so distasteful that the speaker suggests that he will ‘write upon a double clout, / And dip my pen in flowers’. So this speaker will write his salutary warning in the prostitute’s menstrual blood upon her sanitary protection, a play on the practice of writing love letters in one’s own blood, for added dramatic effect. The speaker is thus using deliberately shocking imagery, both linking menstruation to the prostitute’s enthralling body and as characteristically unsavoury aspects of female sexuality. This imagery further alludes to the magical and malicious properties that this blood was often believed to have, while never questioning the male voyeur who is using a female physiological event to publicize his feelings of entrapment by female sexuality. Williams has identified several similar examples of the ‘double clout’ to mean sanitary protection being used salaciously. A satirical verse features Charles II’s mistress Nell Gwyn and claims that she was ‘Fam’d for not wearing of the double Clout: Her Flowres of late have left their wonted Source And through her mouth have t’ane another course’.

In a similar vein, another ballad published in the same collection goes even further on the topic of sanitary protection. ‘Song’ (‘By all loves soft, yet

mighty Powers’) deals with the subject of sexual intercourse during menstruation, warning men of the dangers of ‘fuck[ing] in time of flowers’.70 Having sex in menses was a practice prohibited by both the Bible and cultural taboos, which threatened results ranging from the excoriation of the penile skin due to the vitiated nature of menstrual blood, to the conception of monstrous progeny. But, predictably, Rochester is not interested in reinforcing normative cultural or biblical prohibitions, but is perhaps using a taboo to increase the shock value of his already sensational topics. The poem suggests that a lack of personal hygiene is the norm for the woman he is having sexual relations with, despite her use of clouts: he says that if she were to always use paper when she uses the toilet, and a sponge to absorb her menstrual flow, then he would have more pleasure in coitus:

Fair nasty nymph, be clean and kind,
   And all my joys restore;
By using Paper still behind,
   And sponges for before. (lines 5-8)

The speaker does not fear the assumed dire consequences of sexual intercourse during menstrual periods, but he would prefer to leave the fray without his ‘prick’ suffering a ‘bloody nose’ (lines 11-12).71 This, he assures the reader, is considered repellent to such an extent that only a naïve, inexperienced lover would be able to achieve an erection: ‘None but fresh lovers’ pricks can rise / At Phillis in foul linen’ (lines 15- 16). The speaker implies that, to solve this problem, he would prefer a sponge to be placed inside the vagina and to remain in place during intercourse. This poem shows the way in which the prostitute, if she modified her behaviour according to the speaker’s concerns and managed her periods according to the codes that he outlines, would then seem even more sexually desirable, indeed irresistible.

The circulation of this manuscript material before its publication suggests that the use of a sponge by some prostitutes to enable them to continue working during their menstrual period was common knowledge. The use of a ‘pessary’ in medical contexts was also a familiar practice. However, the most common

70 ‘Song’, in Selected Works, p. 72-73, line 3. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
71 See the Thesis Introduction for examples of the supposed consequences of contact with menstrual blood.
medical use for a pessary was to support the uterus, or to deliver medicines to the uterus to provoke or stop overflowing menses, not to absorb blood:

Under the name of Pessaries, are comprehended all Medicines not liquid, which are put up into the Secret-parts of Women. But by the word Pessary, strictly tak'n, is to be understood a sort of solid Medicine, about a fingers length, sometimes somewhat bigger, which is put up into the Secret-parts with a Riband fasten'd to one end.  

The anonymous best-seller, Aristoteles Master-Piece, also describes using linen internally to help with a prolapsed uterus following a birth. Pseudo-Aristotle suggests that the midwife should anoint the abdomen of a woman with oil of St. John’s Wort and then swaddle her belly to keep it warm, and that the midwife should ‘raise up the Matrix with a linnen Cloath many times folded’.  

Similarly, William Sermon’s The Ladies Companion describes how one could manufacture a pessary to support a prolapsed womb, apparently a very common condition in women who have had multiple births.  

Crawford comments that ‘there was no unwillingness to advise married women to insert objects into the vagina’, and that, therefore, ‘it is possible that women might have used pessaries as well as cloth pads to cope with the practical problems of menstruation’.  

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72 Moses Charras, The Royal Pharmacopoea, Galenical and Chymical (London: John Starkey and Moses Pitt, 1678), p. 61. Charras says the purpose of pessaries is ‘provoke the menstruum’s, or to stop them: to hinder the falling down of the Matrix’ (p. 61).
73 Aristoteles Master-Piece, p. 157.
74 The Ladies Companion; or, The English Midwife (London: Edward Thomas, 1671), p. 150. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation. See also François Mauriceau, The Diseases of Women with Child, and in Child-bed (London: John Darby, 1672), p. 306, for some illustrations of pessaries.
75 ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 55. Interestingly, Crawford says in the notes to this assertion that, during the nineteenth century, some women did not use any pessaries or pads, for they ‘feared that any cloth might prevent the menses from flowing’ (p. 55). The evidence from Sermon and others demonstrates that the view that nothing should impede the course of the menses was indeed a seventeenth-century commonplace, too.
suggest that anything that stopped the menstrual blood from freely flowing could have severe health implications for a woman. It is possible, therefore, that use of sponges to retain blood within the body was only practised among prostitutes and would have been considered dangerous by the wider population.

Besides evidence for doubts about the use of pessaries for sanitary protection, there is some contemporary evidence that only women who bled heavily felt obliged to use protection to soak up the flow. A 1719 translation of Pierre Dionis’s midwifery guide seems to corroborate this idea explicitly: ‘The Quantity of Blood to be evacuated can’t be determined; some women lose very little, others are forc’d to use Linen-Cloths, otherwise they might be trac’d and exposed by the print of the menstrual Blood’.\(^{76}\) Dionis’s explanation distances him somewhat from the often rehearsed Hippocratic dictum that an average menstrual period yields between one and two pints of blood.\(^{77}\) John Freind conducted experiments which appeared to corroborate the Hippocratic findings:

The quantity of the evacuated Blood is different according to the variety of Constitutions, Diet, Age, or the Like; yet in healthy and adult Persons it commonly amounts to twenty Ounces, which agrees with the measure assigned by Hippocrates, namely two Hemina’s.\(^{78}\)

Lesley Ann Dean-Jones explains how the Hippocratic writers arrived at this measure: ‘The Hippocratic doctors […] estimated the amount of blood a healthy woman should lose by the amount of fluid they thought the average non-pregnant womb could hold’.\(^{79}\) Perhaps the reason for the widespread acceptance of this quantitative measure was that blood spreads alarmingly on cloth. As Dean-Jones comments, ‘it only takes a small amount of liquid to produce a large stain’, so


\(^{77}\) *Directory for Midwives*, states, ‘Hippocrates saith, They should bleed but a pint and a half, or two pints: this is not alike in all, but differs in respect of age and diet’ (p. 67). Sharp in *The Midwives Book* makes exactly the same comment (p. 216). The following quotation from the Hippocratic *On the Diseases of Women* is given by Lesley Ann Dean-Jones: ‘The average amount of menses for any healthy woman is about two Attic Kotyls, or a little more, or a little less’. See *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, Press, 1996), p. 88. Two kotyls equates to approximately one pint. It is unclear where the misinterpretation of a pint and a half to two pints first started but it is common to see this amount offered in early-modern texts.

\(^{78}\) *Emmenologia*, p. 1. A hemina is approximate to half an imperial pint measure, so Freind’s quotation from the Hippocratic text is more accurate than that normally seen.

\(^{79}\) *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 90.
estimating blood-loss based on soiled cloths or garments could lead to a higher assumption.\textsuperscript{80}

As part of his discursive comments on the cause of menstruation, which he believes to be a localised ferment in the gall bladder, James Drake, in 1707, offers the reason that he, unlike John Freind, does not support the idea of a Galenic/Hippocratic plethoric build-up to be the cause of menstrual bleedings: such a build-up, he argues, would produce symptoms, such as a generalized feeling of heaviness, alerting a woman to her impending period. He explains that many women who

\begin{quote}
\textit{have them} regularly and easily, have no warning, nor other Rule to prevent an indecent Surprize, than the Measure of Time; in which some that have slipt, tho’ otherwise modest and careful Women, have been put to such Confusions and Shifts, as would not consist with the Notice that a Plethoric Body would give.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

‘To shift’ in this period can mean to change one’s clothing. This comment speaks volumes about the contemporary ideas of proper female behaviour and is reinforced later in the eighteenth century when the physician Malcolm Flemyng also comments that some women have no symptoms to alert them to the start of a period, so that they ‘scarce have warning enough to provide for decency’.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite Drake’s and Flemyng’s comments, it would seem that for women who bled within the normal range by today’s assumptions (approximately 2 to 3 ounces), or had no access to spare linen, allowing menstrual blood to seep onto the shift was probably deemed perfectly normal. As Dionis makes clear, only ‘some women’ who bleed more heavily than the norm are ‘forc’d to use linnen-cloths’.\textsuperscript{83} This is corroborated in a comment by John Freind, who notes that sometimes women who think their period is over are surprised when the bleeding returns immediately, but he says that this is caused by women putting on their shifts when the material is ‘damper than usual’.\textsuperscript{84} The shift was a universal underskirt made from simple material, worn next to the body, underneath the stays (bodice or corset) with a petticoat over it, followed by an outer-dress. This

\begin{footnotes}
\item[80] Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science, p. 90. Dean-Jones also suggests that women have a tendency to over-estimate the amount of blood they have lost.
\item[83] A General Treatise of Midwifery, p. 53.
\item[84] Emmenologia, p. 74.
\end{footnotes}
statement seems to imply that Freind had developed a theory about this recurrent bleeding, perhaps by observing female practices, leading him to suggest that women bleed into their shifts and have to wash them out more frequently than normal, and that the shifts do not thoroughly dry before they must be worn again. It is worth noting that this does not necessarily suggest that no clouts were used. Clouts might leak, and so a woman using clouts would probably still find that her shift needed washing regularly, too. This might help to explain the sorts of observations that John Dee makes about the heaviness or otherwise of his wife’s menstrual symptoms, given the relative lack of privacy in an early-modern household.

In what might prove to be the only account of her menstrual practices by a woman in this period, the normality of bleeding into one’s shift is corroborated. In a notorious case in 1733, Sarah Malcolm was arrested for the murders of three women, one of whom had her neck slashed, the others having been strangled. Malcolm’s employer, John Kerrel, confronted her about the murders and testified:

The next Thing I took Notice of was a Bundle lying on the Ground; I asked her what it was, she said it was her Gown. And what’s in it? says I. Why Linen, says she, that is not proper for Men to see; and so I did not offer to open it.³⁵

A search of Kerrel’s house revealed that the handle of the ‘Close-stool’ door was covered in blood, and the room itself contained some dirty linen and a silver tankard. Malcolm claimed that the tankard was her own, inherited from her mother, and that it and the door handle had blood on them because she had cut her finger ‘and as for the Linen, she said, it was not Blood upon it, but a Disorder’. That this blood was menstrual was borne out by the testimony of a fellow prisoner, Roger Johnson, who claimed to have had orders to search Malcolm. He says that Malcolm asked him not to examine her: ‘she desir’d me to forbear searching under her Coats, because she was not in a Condition’, and, to prove that she was menstruating, Malcolm ‘shew’d me her Shift, upon which I desisted’.³⁶

³⁶ See Jane Magrath, ‘(Mis)Reading the Bloody Body: The Case of Sarah Malcolm’ Women’s Writing, 11 (2004), 223-36, for an analysis of this case.
Up until this point Malcolm has used the vague euphemistic terms to describe her menstrual blood as ‘disorder’ and ‘condition’, and this continues into her testimony at the trial where she still does not use the normative proper nouns for menstruation which one might expect to hear, of ‘flowers’ or ‘courses’.

However, in an extremely important and unusual account of menstruation through a woman’s voice, at the trial Malcolm argues in her own defence:

Modesty might compel a Woman to conceal her own Secrets if Necessity did not oblige her to the contrary; and ’tis Necessity that obliges me to say, that what has been taken for the Blood of the murdered Person is nothing but the free Gift of Nature.

This was all that appeared on my Shift, and it was the same on my Apron, for I wore the Apron under me next to my Shift. […] And Mr. Johnson who searched me in Newgate has sworn that he found my Linen in the like Condition. If it is supposed that I kill’d her with my Cloaths on, my Apron indeed might be bloody, but how should the Blood come upon my Shift? If I did it in my Shift, how should my Apron be bloody, or the back part of my Shift? And whether I did it dress’d or undress’ed, why was not the Neck and Sleeves of my Shift bloody as well as the lower Parts?

The language Malcolm uses is interesting because it implies that, despite the heavy use of circumlocutions like ‘Gift of Nature’ and the idea of menstruation as ‘women’s secrets’, she must have assumed that the watching audience would know just what she meant. Malcolm’s use of the phrase ‘free Gift of Nature’ is certainly of note due to the fact that it differs from the male-dominated medical vernacular, and is perhaps a reflection on the idea, which Mary E. Fissell identifies, that the womb was seen as analogous to a good housewife in that it always keeps a store, ready to receive a guest, and this ‘free Gift’ would have been used to nourish a baby had a conception occurred. As Jane Magrath has commented, Malcolm also suggests that another inventive solution to the issue of menstrual blood discharge may have been employed, when she describes turning her apron around to cover the lower half of the back of her body to add another absorbent layer to her dress, in order to protect the bedclothes from staining.

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87 Malcolm was reputed to be educated and literate. To her priest, Rev. Piddington, she apparently wrote an account of her part in the crime, admitting to the thefts, which was published as A True Copy of the Paper, Delivered the Night Before her Execution, by Sarah Malcom [sic.] to the Rev. Mr. Piddington (London: J. Wilford, 1732) and sold by him to a publisher within days of her death. Perhaps this accounts for the articulacy of her plea.


89 ‘(Mis)Reading the Bloody Body’, p. 227.
Kirsten T. Saxton has argued that by discussing her menses in public ‘Malcolm transgresses what was considered appropriate feminine behaviour by representing that which should, by virtue of her sex, be unnatural to modest feminine discourse’ and that this unfeminine behaviour helped to convict her.\(^90\)

**Sanitary Protection and Christian Doctrine**

As I have previously argued, menstruation at this time occupied a peculiar position in that it was both public and private, and it occupied a further contradictory status in being both mundane and taboo. These taboos are presented in the Bible in various books and settings and, I would argue, are the key factors in the development of women’s silence on the subject of menstruation, except under exceptional circumstances, such as Sarah Malcolm in the dock, or women’s health writers like Jane Sharp, who saw that by breaking cultural codes of femininity and publishing a midwifery guide, she might contribute to the ‘general good’ (p. 13) and in doing so she might save many lives.

The role of the Bible as the main cultural referent in the early-modern period cannot be overstated, and one of the activities that the new protestant religion encouraged was self-examination of one’s religious health. In such narratives women’s physiological experiences are expressed through scriptural teachings.

The process of reflection that the church encouraged led several women to write journals detailing their devotion and religious contemplations and presenting overcoming illness and childbirth as pious activities.\(^91\) The journal of Lady Margaret Hoby, examined in detail above, is one such reflection of religious health. In these journals, most women mention their menstrual cycle only obliquely, if at all, and yet many of them discuss other aspects of daily life at length. This omission could result not only from concern for their modesty in journals which were sometimes bequeathed to family members, but also from biblical comparisons of filthy or unworthy items to a cloth or clothing covered in menstrual blood. Isaiah 30.22 in the 1560 Geneva Bible reads: ‘And ye shall

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pollute covering of the images of silver, and the riche ornament of thine images of golde, & cast them away as a menstruous cloth, and thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence’. The marginal annotations explain to the reader that:

Ye shall cast away your idols, which you have made of golde and silver with all thatbelongeth unto them, as the moste filthy thing and polluted [. ] Shewing that there can be no true repentance except both in the heart and dede we shewe ourselves enemies to idolatrie.

The origin of this simile likening a false idol to a menstrual cloth is found in the translation of the feminine Hebrew noun ‘njdh’ which is transliterated as a feminine noun ‘niddah’ meaning ‘impurity’, ‘filthiness’, as well as ‘menstruous’ and ‘set apart’.  

When Sarah Davy reflects on her religious experiences, in her posthumously published conversion narrative, she recalls having an illness which was probably related to her menstrual cycle. Davy’s narrative follows the usual format of Baptist life-writing, a pattern which required the writer to ‘examine her experiences for signs that God had destined her for heaven, and to draw out broader lessons from things that happened to her’.

Davy died at thirty-two, but narrates in her memoir how, when she was at boarding school, she became ill from a ‘distemper’, for which she had taken many medications to no avail. She decided to pray for guidance and says that God directed her to the passage in Matthew 9.20-22. This passage is the one in which a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years waits for hours for the chance to touch Jesus’s cloak in the sure hope of finding a cure by this. Jesus tells her to arise as she is now healed: her faith in him has healed her. Davy asks, ‘from thence may not I come trembling that have received so many testimonies of his love & tryed so many medicines until I came unto the Lord’.

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94 Her Own Life, p. 165.

95 Heaven Realized, p. 17.

96 Heaven Realized, p. 17.
imply a great fear at menarche, a feeling that, like the woman in the biblical story, the bleeding might not stop, particularly for a girl with no maternal reassurance.

Davy then goes on to cite the passage from Matthew 8.2 in which a leper hopes that the Lord might make him clean.97 This particularly suggests that Davy’s illness is indeed menstrual, given the biblical conflation of menstruation and uncleanliness both in a spiritual and a physical sense.98 In a similar way, Elizabeth Isham recalls that her mother also refers to the same biblical story when she reflected on her years of suffering with heavy menstrual bleeding. Isham tells how her mother was often ill, and notes on one occasion that her illness was ‘sum fits of blething’.99 Isham recollects that her mother refused medical treatment for several years, and that her mother would say that ‘she had suffered many things of physitions & that her soul forget prosperity, yet was she willing to live for our Sakes, saying a sickly mother was better then no mother’ (p. 42). As Rebecca Laroche has noted, this is a reference to Mark 5.26.100 This passage ‘describes a woman whose problem with nonstop menstrual bleeding had left her not only weak and despairing but also financially bereft’.101 An intrinsic aspect of this story as told in all the gospels is how the bleeding woman was shunned by society because of her uncleanliness until Jesus saves her. This section will argue that the biblical teaching that menstruation was filthy was one which was regularly cited in sermons and other religious documents, reinforcing, I would suggest, the difficulty women seemed to have found in recording openly their menstrual histories.

A devotional poem by John Vicars demonstrates the idea that clouts and clothing were considered to be defiled by contact with menstrual blood:

O, double, treble happy were I, sure,  
If once I might put-off Sins rags impure,  
Those Menstruous cloathes wherewith I am disguised,

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97 *Heaven Realized*, p. 17.
98 Amongst the many examples cited below, see also Leviticus 15.19 states that women are unclean for seven days during a menstrual period, and Isaiah 64.4 compares man’s perceived ‘righteousness’ to a ‘filthy’ menstrual rag.
100 *Medical Authority and Englishwomen’s Herbal Texts, 1550-1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 124.
101 *Medical Authority and Englishwomen’s Herbal Texts*, p. 124.
Whereby thine Image in mee’s not agnized:
Whereby in thy pure sight I am but loathed.
O therefore that my Soule might once be cloathed
With thy most royall-Robes of righteousnesse,
Thy Seamelesse, spotlesse Coote of holiness.

The posthumous sermons of Edmund Calamy and others make the distinction even more explicit when he suggests that human righteousness ‘is no better than menstruous Cloaths and filthy Rags’. 102

In Isaiah 64.6 in the Geneva Bible, the image of a cloth with menstrual blood on it as disgusting is highlighted by the sixteenth-century marginal notes. The verse reads: ‘Our righteousnes and best vertues are before thee as vile cloutes’ and, as previously cited, the marginal comments explain ‘or, (as some read) like the menstruous clothes of a woman’. 104 This example highlights that the transition from ‘filthy’ to ‘menstruous’ was subjective and was clearly influenced by the cultural context of the translation, and was not necessarily the meaning ascribed by the author of the book of Isaiah. This point is demonstrated by a translation which appeared shortly after the Geneva Bible, the King James Bible, in which this passage becomes: ‘But we are all as an uncleane thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy ragges, and we all doe fade as a leafe, and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away’. An early Christian dictionary by Thomas Wilson (1661) examines the passage from Isaiah and says: ‘As filthy rags, Isa. 64. 6. Concerning the notion of the word here used, and not elsewhere read; as also concerning the notation of it, there is great variety of opinions, even among the Jewish Criticks themselves’. 105 After explaining the translations that this term can produce, such as ‘rags of old cloth, a patchwork coat, bandages on bloody sores, or cloths used in child birth’, Wilson says, it is ‘a cloth or cloth of separations, a menstruous cloth or clout, as coming from a word that signifies both in Hebrew’. 106 Wilson says that when this text was translated from Hebrew into Greek, the term became a ‘sitting woman’, but that this does not detract from the meaning of menstruous, because this reference is to Rachel (Genesis 31.35).

The author of this dictionary therefore concludes that this usage is in fact what

102 A Prospective Glasse to Looke into Heaven (London: John Smethwicke, 1618), sig. E8’ [?].
103 Saints Memorials; or, Words Filly Spoken, Like Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver Being a Collection of Divine Sentences (London: [n. pub.], 1674), p. 3.
104 ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 58.
Isaiah intended to be understood: ‘And to some such Loathsome and nasty stuffe [as menstrual blood] in all likelyhood, doth the Prophet compare the most righteous among the main multitude of his people’.

This understanding was challenged by Edward Nicholson in the early part of the following century, and it perhaps precipitated the decline in the usage of this simile in printed devotional texts. Nicholson rages against the fact that non-conformist preachers use this image in the pulpit. He says it is disgusting that Calvinists have substituted the term ‘menstruous’ for ‘filthy’ so that now even young boys recite the passages using this phrase and ask him what the meaning of this term is. He writes that his contemporaries should not disparage the beauty of those Vertues Christ has bestowed on us, and taught us by his own Example: By giving them such Vile Characters and Names, as if they were not to be touched without a pair of Tongs. Pannus Menstruatus, as you would word it, or the comparison of a Menstruous Cloth, the Prophet call’d it not so, but filthy Rags; and that he spoke not with Relation to Righteousness, quatenus [as] Righteousness: But he said, was of their condition that wanted Righteousness, and had none at all among them: Neither is the Word in that place altogether so Odious: Tho I have often heard that very Name you give it, in the Calvinists publick Pulpit Prayers, and some cou’d never pray in the Pulpit without it, to the great offence of many modest People to my knowledge[…]. But this Text the Calvinists assault it from, has not the Word they use, but a modester Word, only filthy Rags, and that [is] not spoken of true Righteousness, or good Life, but of the want of it. Yet they have made this monstrous reproachful Name, so unreasonably common upon this Occasion, that even their younger boys have it by heart, and often ask what the meaning of the Word is.  

This diatribe is exceptionally revealing about the anxieties that this word, and the simile it evokes, aroused in some parts of early-modern society. Nicholson calls menstrual cloths vile and immodest, but does not appear to be disputing the sense of the verses, but rather the translation and word choice.

These similes occur regularly, if not particularly frequently, in devotional and conduct writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A sample reading of such texts from 1582 to the eighteenth century suggests that the authors who used the term ‘filthy’ instead of ‘menstruous’ were slightly in the majority. However, when authors prefer ‘filthy’ they often added salacious adjectives to

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\[107\] The Death-Bed Repentance Fully Consider’d Proving That No Mere Death-Bed Repentance can be Effectual to Salvation (Dublin: Edward Nicholson, 1712), pp.126-27.
emphasize their point. For instance, in 1582, in the well-known Elizabethan book of prayers for women, *The Monument of Matrones*, Thomas Bentley writes in a ‘Psalm for the remission of sinnes’, ‘[f]or I am unclean and filthie: and all my righteousnesse is like a foule bloudie clowt’.\(^{108}\) Authors who do not wish to use menstruation overtly often alluded to it with the common alternatives of stained or polluted rags.\(^ {109}\) That menstrual blood pollutes is clear from the laws of Leviticus and in references to it such as in Barnaby Barnes’s play *The Devil*, where the devil says, “Thy soule foule beast is like a menstrous cloath, / Polluted with unpardonable sinnes”\(^ {110}\).

The simile of a menstrual cloth seems to be used by Protestants of all sects and affiliations, in various sub-genres of devotional publications, including books of religiously inspired verse like Nicholas Billingsley’s Presbyterian *Treasures of Divine Raptures*; verse 178, ‘On a Clout’, reads: ‘Self-right’ousness enwrapping us about, / Is as a rotten ragg, or menstrous Clout’\(^ {111}\). Phyllis Mack argues that this sort of language is so common because ‘When they [Protestants] spoke of the absolute nullity of human virtue in relation to divine love and judgement, that human nullity or spiritual nakedness was often seen as feminine.’\(^ {112}\) And, of course, menstruation is the greatest signifier for femininity because it was thought to be caused by the cold, moist, inactive nature of a woman’s body.

In addition to its use in decrying human righteousness and in highlighting man’s sinful nature, the term ‘menstrous clout’ is often used in anti-Catholic propaganda. An apparent fear of the growth of Catholicism was seen through the various Stuart reigns in the seventeenth century. For example, in a treatise warning against a supposed rise in ‘popery’, Anthony Gilby follows the teachings of Isaiah and challenges the loyal ‘to cast awaye the reliques of Idolatrie’ like a

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\(^ {110}\) ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 58.


‘menstrous clowte’ here using the imputation in Isaiah as a direct reference to Catholic religious practices.\textsuperscript{113}

There is some evidence that, while this phrase was well-known and appeared in print regularly throughout the period, it was also presented orally in sermons by Calvinist and other non-conformist preaching on a regular basis, as Edward Nicholson describes. Patricia Crawford therefore argues that, ‘People in seventeenth-century England were familiar with the use of the symbol of the menstruating woman to define profanity’.\textsuperscript{114} One printed funeral sermon for a woman, Joice Featly, by the Puritan minister Thomas Gataker, indicates that this simile was used and expanded upon: ‘Is there any man so vile, and void of shame, as that he dare presume solemnly to bequeath to some honourable person, some greasie dish-clout, or some durtie shoo-clout, or some filthie, menstruous, materie ragge?\textsuperscript{115} Here the ‘menstrous rag’ is set within a context of domesticity and other household cloths, presumably because it is being discussed at the funeral of a housewife.

Crawford noted in 1993 that evidence of women using ‘menstrual metaphors with such aversion has yet to be located’.\textsuperscript{116} My research seems partly to support this finding, for women do use this analogy, but not in the overt way that men do, despite attempts to ascribe this simile to a female voice, as in the Apocrypha of Esther, published in the Geneva Bible, for example. This part of the Apocrypha comprises a prayer in which the character of Esther as written offers:

\begin{quote}
Thou knowest all things, O Lord, Thou knowest, that I hate the Glory of the Unrighteous, and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised, and of all the heathen. Thou knowest my Necessity: for I abhor the sign of my high Estate in the Days, wherein I shew myself, and that I abhor it as a menstruous Rag, and that I wear it not when I am in private by myself.\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

This passage is cited in the published funeral sermon given by Johann Triibeko in tribute to Prince George of Denmark in 1708. Triibeko quotes selectively from this passage to make it more appropriate for an address at the interment of a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[113] To my Louyne Brethren that is Troublyd abowt the Popishe Aparrell (Emden: E. van der Erve, 1566), sig. B\textsuperscript{v}.
\item[114] ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 57.
\item[117] The Apocrypha at Large: with Notes Explanatory, Critical, and Practical, Selected from the Works of Several Eminent Divines, 5 vols (London: I. Moore, 1774-76), V, p. 236.
\end{footnotes}
prince, by omitting the comments about the bed of the uncircumcised. Because Prince George had borne a long illness bravely Tribbeko says, ‘Wherefore we may not improperly apply unto him, what Queen Esther spoke of her self in her Prayers to God’. There has been much debate throughout history as to the authenticity of the apocrypha and the ascription of this speech to Esther reinforces the sceptical position, in the light of the lack of evidence of other women using this passage in the explicit way that the Apocrypha suggests. If women do refer to this passage at all they usually follow the practice of Lady Elizabeth Delaval who uses this metaphor in a decorous way in her meditations, writing that ‘In thy sight (even) our vertu’s are so full of imperfections that they can scarce deserve the name of rags, much less of garments to clothe us in, fit in the least measure to appear before thee’.

There is another attempt to write women into the position of using the metaphor of the menstrual cloth as repellent in the classical story of ancient mathematician and martyr Hypatia. *The Ladies Dictionary* describes Hypatia as ‘the Daughter of Theon, the famous Geometrician of Alexandria’; another, earlier, encyclopaedia describes her as ‘A woman of Alexandria, excellently learned in Astronomie, and divers other sciences’. Hypatia was apparently a threat to the authorities of the time including the bishop Cyril who was later canonised by the Christian church. Cyril ordered her murder in a particularly brutal way, which is described by several early-modern authors. Puritan preacher Richard Baxter relates the story:

> At that time there was a Woman, Hypatia, so famous for learning, that she excelled in all Philosophy, and taught in the Schools (which *Plotinus continued:) so that she had Scholars out of many Countries, and was oft with Princes, and Rulers, and for her modesty and gravity was much esteemed. Orestes the Governour oft talking with her, the people said, It was long of her that he was not reconciled to Cyril: They laid hold of her; drew her into a Church, stript her stark naked; rase the skin, and tare the flesh off her body with sharp shells till she

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dyed: they quarter her body and burn them to ashes: which turned to the great dishonour of Cyril.\textsuperscript{122}

One incident in the story of Hypatia is expunged from Baxter’s account and many others, and when it is related the incident is often inserted in Latin, as with Robert Burton’s \textit{The Anatomy of Melancholy}, to protect female or easily shocked readers. Physician James Ferrand describes in his chapter on how to prevent love sickness, or ‘erotique melancholy’, how

It so fortuned, that a scholler of hers was so surprized with the beauty both of her body, & mind, that he grew almost mad for love. But at one day this young \textit{Inamorato} was very earnest in his suit to this faire Damosell, & importuning her to cure him of his disease by satisfying his desires: she (being, as it seemes, not ignorant of the Precepts of Physicke in this case,) \textit{Panno menstruos indidem prolato; ecce, inquit, adolescentule quod tantopere adamas, ubi nil nisi Immundicies habetur}. Which the young man had no sooner seen, but his heat was presently allayed, and himselfe cured of his Love-Melancholy.\textsuperscript{123}

Ferrand’s comments corroborate the remarks made by Ramanzzini above and demonstrate that the seventeenth century was still an era in which many authors and doctors ascribed toxicity to menstrual blood. The reference suggests Hypatia well knew the ‘evil’ nature of this substance, ‘not [being] ignorant of the Precepts of Physicke in this case’.\textsuperscript{124} So the threat to the lover was a physical one as well as a psychological one.

In a rare English account exactly how Hypatia’s invented and ingenious solution to her unwonted lover works, Gideon Harvey explains:

\begin{quote}
she muster'd a great bundle of her menstruous rags together [...] and spread them all open before him; saying, you men that do so admire at the Elegant shape, and Nitourous Complexion of Womens upper parts, behold now, O Scholar! the constitution of their lower, the object of all your Lascivious Loves; what a filthy, nasty, detestable sight is here? whereas the ingenuous Scholar took such a regret, having been hither to deluded, in crediting this dictate of Hermes, \textit{Quod est superius, est}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Erotomania; or, A Treatise Discoursing of the Essence, Causes, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Cure of Love, or Erotique Melancholy} (Oxford: Edward Forrest, 1640), pp. 235-36. The Latin reads: ‘Take a look, young man’, she said, ‘at what you so much desire, in which is contained nothing apart from filth’. My thanks to Dr Gillian Spraggs for her translation.

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Erotomania}, p. 236.
Hypatia, then, used her blood-stained cloths to repel her lover by revealing, according to some biographies, the true filthy and nasty nature of a woman, that no matter how beautiful and gifted she may appear there is ultimately no denying her corrupt physicality. The lover had, Gideon says, been previously deluded as to the true nature of the female sex. Elizabeth Tollet’s eponymous poem, first published anonymously in 1724, which celebrates Hypatia as an early feminist hero naturally leaves out this part of her history, which is used generally to diminish the thrall of Hypatia and by extension all women. As Tollet’s poem complains, Hypatia’s story was never as widely disseminated as those of male philosophers and physicians of the same era. Rather she was, as the poem states, ‘Deny’d that Fame, and rob’d of that Repose / Which Learning merits, Innocence bestows’. In the mid-eighteenth century a book-length biography of Hypatia appeared anonymously, subtitled The History of a Most Vertuous, Most learned, and Every Way Accomplished Lady. Chapter fifteen is devoted to ‘Hypatia’s Lovers, one of whom she cured of his Passion, in a very particular Manner’. This chapter suggests that a woman of Hypatia’s qualities may have had to overcome countless times the trials of unwonted addresses by men, before resorting to her plan. Her lover, a ‘Spark’,


\[ sicut inferius. \] That is, whatever is above is like to what is below; that ever after he abhorred the sight of a Woman.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{125}Morbus Anglicus; or, The Anatomy of Consumptions (London: Nathaniel Brook, 1666), pp. 54-56.

\textsuperscript{126}Poems on Several Occasions (London: John Clarke, 1724), pp. 60-65. Mathematician Michael Deakin, in Hypatia of Alexandria: Mathematician and Martyr (Loughton: Prometheus, 2007), has analysed Hypatia’s contribution to mathematical knowledge and argues that her achievements as a mathematician should not be overshadowed by her martyrdom; sentiments that Tollet would, no doubt, fully support.

\textsuperscript{127}Hypatia, p. 23.
What is particularly interesting about this late account is that the author explains that this action was designed to show the young suitor that real beauty from a neo-platonic philosophic perspective was found in ‘Goodness, Wisdom, [and] Virtue’ and not in the physical beauty. There was not an assumption from the author that the reader would realise the vileness and possibly noxious nature of menstrual blood and so find all women henceforth repulsive from the *prima facie* evidence that women menstruate. The underlying impetus here is that this normally unseen physiological function is part of the structure of the body just as much as the overt beauty which attracted the suitor. This is commensurate with the changes more generally in medical texts around this time which sought to rationalise the earlier myths about menstrual blood and to portray it as a normal fluid without the hysteria of earlier depictions. In an intriguing comment which alludes to the sexual licentiousness of parts of eighteenth-century society, which was at odds with the official doctrines of the day that aimed to order society within a protestant doctrine of companionate, quiet domesticity, the author says that the suitor understood this well, but that this trick would ‘never rebute a young Beau in St. James’s Park, nor perhaps some Batchelors of Divinity at our modern Universities’.  

Unlike these accounts which ascribe the use of this metaphor to women who have probably not used it, the poet An Collins does use the simile of a ‘Monstrous clout’ in her verse. Collins’s single published volume of poetry encompasses all that is known about her life, and her verse has been argued to be ‘nakedly’ autobiographical. Sidney Gottlieb concurs and says that Collins’ poetry is ‘personal and experiential, and invites us to read the poems autobiographically’. Collins’s identification in her verses as a Calvinist would mean that she was familiar with the simile of the menstruous rag in her religious worship. Much of Collins’s verse details not just her sense of faith but also her bodily ill health and, as discussed in the Introduction, in ‘Another Song’ (‘The

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130 *Hypatia*, p. 24.  
133 *Her Own Life*, p. 55.
Winter of my infancy being over-past’), she makes oblique references to her lack of menstruation.\(^\text{134}\)

In the poem ‘Another Song’ (‘Excessive worldly Grie v’), Collins alludes to the fact that she has suffered from some unpleasant bullying, ‘taunting’, perhaps by other women, about her physical state.\(^\text{135}\) But possibly some of the hurt is self-inflicted, because she describes her own difficulty in overcoming the sin of envy of other women in ‘Though Envy wait to blast the Blossoms green’. Sarah Skwire describes how in this poem Collins uses an extended simile to suggest that ‘to condemn a godly person, soul and all, because of an obvious physical defect is as senseless as preferring a perfect weed to a damaged rose’.\(^\text{136}\)

The simile is extended to:

Or else as if a Monstrous Clout should be
Prefer’d before the purest Lawn to see,
Because the Lawn hath spots and this the Clout
Is equally polluted throughout.

In terms of the substitution word ‘monstrous’ for ‘menstruous’, Gottlieb has suggested that this spelling might be a ‘pun on “menstruous,”’ or, arguably, a misprint or printer’s or editor’s substitution for the latter word’.\(^\text{137}\) However, as has been shown in the Introduction, ‘monstrous’ was used in an almost synonymous way to menstrual and, additionally, I have been unable to find any evidence of a woman using this piece of scripture in an unmodified way, so I would argue that this is the term Collins meant to use. In dealing with her complicated feelings about her amenorrhea, Collins taps into the familiar biblical image linking menstrual blood with pollution and filth. Her dress (metaphorically, her conscience and soul) may have a few marks on it, because man’s fallen state means that no one can be without sin, but this is in no way as bad as the pollution on a menstrual cloth. It is an indication of the contemporary cultural prejudice against menstrual blood that Collins chooses to defend herself in a way most usually heard in male voices. This is perhaps an insight into the way that Collins deals with this affliction. It is clear from the earlier poem that she is mourning her

\(^{134}\) *Divine Songs and Meditacions* (London: R. Bishop, 1653), pp. 56-58.

\(^{135}\) ‘Another Song’, in *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, pp. 61-62. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.


\(^{137}\) *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, ed. by Sidney Gottlieb, p. 110.
lack of menstruation, so perhaps by elevating herself above the filth of this blood, and by extension, the experiences of other women, Collins can take some comfort.

As stated earlier, conduct guides and housewifery manuals tell a woman how to manage her personal hygiene to the extent of cleaning her ears and nose, but remain silent on the topic of sanitary protection. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the implicit cultural link between menstrual blood and disease, and the social taboos of decency and shame, which are implied in the two early-eighteenth-century medical commentaries cited above. Dionis’s and Drake’s comments make it clear that to be exposed as menstruating by a stain is immodest and shameful. These factors, coupled with the biblical comparison of menstrual rags with spiritual corruption, make it hardly surprising that there is little extant reference to menstruation outside the medical texts. If the mere sight of a used menstrual cloth was supposed, apocryphally, to cure lovesickness in men, it is necessary to consider the consequential effects of defying the taboos and writing about sanitary protection in guides for young women. It might be the case, though, that in the course of everyday life using a method for absorbing menstrual flow was just not something that was considered necessary by many women because bleeding into layers of clothing was perfectly normal.

‘Flowing with Pain and Symptoms’: Painful Menstruation

As with his first diary entry, Samuel Pepys does not record his wife’s menstrual cycle systematically or superfluously, but rather makes a note of it when it is of some significance, either in the case above because it showed his dashed hopes for a child, or, more often, because Elizabeth suffered from what seems to be dysmenorrhoea and stays in bed. Despite the fact that this was an intensely private journal, Pepys still encoded any references to his wife’s menstrual periods in both Latin, and sometimes French (the euphemism ‘those’ appears as ceux-là, for example), as well as his cipher (a version of Shelton’s shorthand). Pepys tells of destroying his wife’s own journal in which might have been a record and account of how she related to her own cycle. The action of his recording of Elizabeth Pepys’s menstrual history is interesting because one of the aspects of menstruation which one would reasonably expect to find in early-
modern medical treatises is a detailed description of the pain associated with menstruation and how to deal with this illness. As Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove point out, ‘periods hurt, or are in other ways unpleasant, nearly every woman experiences some degree of discomfort. Many women are totally incapacitated by this natural function’. Medical tracts, especially the ones which claim to have been written for women about their own health, contain extended passages about what to do in the absence of menstrual periods, or the opposite condition of excessive bleeding, but do not consistently feature reference to dysmenorrhoea. Audrey Eccles has commented that since some of the treatments used for amenorrhoea are only occasionally recommended for dysmenorrhoea, then, therefore, ‘either painful menstruation was relatively rare, or seldom brought to the attention of medical men’.

Eccles’s view that dysmenorrhoea is only mentioned as a minor adjunct to amenorrhoea is based on the fact that the treatments for both conditions were often the same, and so painful periods might have been embedded within an exposition of the course and effects of amenorrhoea. Eccles is correct to note that this condition is not of prime importance to the authors of medical texts about menstruation and, in fact, only appears at all in approximately half of the medical treatises I have examined. This is, however, significantly more than Eccles identified and means that dysmenorrhoea was at least on the agenda in some treatises. The reason dysmenorrhoea might not have been deemed significant in many cases could be related to the fact that, as Roy Porter and Lesley Hall have identified, there may have been a link between concerns over the falling birth rate in the seventeenth century and the number of these gynaecological treatises that began to appear in print at this time. In their chapter on Aristotle’s Masterpiece Porter and Hall observe that ‘Aristotle’s advice may, however, resonate with the anxiety, expressed by social commentators towards 1700, that the nation was being weakened by under population’. This is certainly plausible since both the absence of menstruation and some of the underlying causes of heavy bleeding can

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have a significant effect on fertility, which is not usually the case with the condition of dysmenorrhoea.

However, the fact that severe dysmenorrhoea was considered to be an abnormality is indicated by the comments in Daniel Sennert’s *Book of Practical Physick*, which states that menstrual periods ‘must flow without any great Symptom’. This book goes on to offer a chapter called ‘Of the Terms flowing with Pain and Symptoms’ (p. 85), which states that the ‘Symptoms are pain in the Loyns or Thighs, Headache, biting in the Mouth of the Stomach, Pain in the Belly and Loyns, Fainting’ (p. 85). As Eccles has suggested is the medical convention, the cause of the pain for Sennert is the same as that which causes a suppression of the menses: that is, blood which is too thick and gross stretches the vessels so that the blood ‘flows not orderly’ (p. 85). And this is a constant theme across most of the texts that engage with dysmenorrhoea which offer a number of reasonably consistent explanations for why menstruation might be a painful experience. The reasons why the blood might have become too thick to flow in an ‘orderly’ manner are given in *The Compleat Midwifes Practice* in a chapter entitled ‘The Dropping of the Flowers, and the Difficulty of their Coming Down’, where difficulty is explained as ‘when they come down with pain and trouble’:

> It happens sometimes from a corruption of the blood, that is, from the drossiness [impurity] and thickness thereof, and then the blood clots together; and there is great pain long before the flowers begin to come down.\(^{142}\)

And relief may be found by the use of attenuating medicines. Sometimes from the sharpnesse and acrimony of the sharp humours with the body, and then the genital parts do itch. It is cured by those medicines that temper the sharpnesse of the humour, as the four greater seeds, violets, and flowers of Nenuphar [white or yellow water lily]. (p. 52)

*The Compleat Midwives Practice* also makes another typical observation about this illness that dysmenorrhoea is ‘a disease more incident to maids than married women, because the veins of the womb are lesse open in them then in women

\(^{141}\) trans. by Nicholas Culpeper and Abdiah Cole (London: Peter Cole, 1664), p. 67. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.  
\(^{142}\) [Anon.], *The Compleat Midwives Practice* (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1656), pp. 51-52. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
who have brought forth children’ (p. 52). This is a comment which is still widely believed today, albeit alternatively rationalised. Other treatments for this condition were laudanum-based ones such as that offered by the anonymous physician who wrote *The Ladies Physical Directory*. Indeed, the author devotes an entire chapter to ‘the exceeding Pain and Uneasiness Some Women endure, just upon the coming down of their Courses every time they flow’. He concludes that this condition is ‘very grievous and dangerous’, but this explanation is motivated by a desire to sell more of his ‘famous’ purging pills and his laudanum based ‘anti-hysterick cordial’, which are offered as a remarkable miracle cure-all for all manner of female ailments.

One of the printed expositions of dysmenorrhoea, however, stands out as being truly empathetic with sufferers of this condition. Helkiah Crooke’s *Mikrokosmographia* describes the effect of menstrual cramps on the sufferer in a chapter detailing the sympathy between the uterus and the other major organs of the female body:

> Between the Kidneyes and the wombe the consent is evident in the torments and pains in the Loines which women and maids have in or about the time of their courses. In so much as some have told me they had as leefe beare a child as endure that pain; and my selfe have seene some to my thinking by their deportment; in as great extremity in the one as in the other. (p. 253)

In describing how he has observed this condition being so painful Crooke also demonstrates that some women did indeed consult with their physicians for advice on this condition. Crooke goes on to say that the cause of this pain is the proximity of the spermatick veins which hold the menstrual blood to the kidney veins. He also comments that the pressure that an inflamed womb puts on the bladder and bowel means that ‘neither excrement nor the urine can be kept long’ (p. 253), which symptoms are recognised nowadays as being associated with dysmenorrhoea. It is significant that none of the casebooks of medical professionals in the period, whether published or in manuscript, that I have examined, have any record of women consulting for period pain; they do, however, have many cases of ‘overflowing’ or stopped courses, and so perhaps

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143 [Anon.], *The Ladies Physical Directory: or, A Treatise Of all the Weaknesses, Indispositions and Diseases Peculiar to the Female Sex from Eleven Years of Age, to Fifty or Upwards* (London: [n. pub.], 1727), pp. 19-20.

many women framed their consultations in this manner. This analysis shows that painful periods were theorised in this era, contrary to Eccles’s statement, but that discussions about menstrual pain are not consistently engaged with in medical texts across the period, therefore giving weight to the idea that one of the many subtexts of medical treatises might be population increase which requires healthy women, but not necessarily pain-free ones.

Elizabeth Pepys is the most well-known early-modern woman to be recorded as suffering from dysmenorrhoea. Pepys comments on one occasion that he went ‘To church leaving my wife sick of her menses at home’ on 27 January 1660/1. Further diary entries that Pepys makes concerning his wife’s menstrual health includes the comment, ‘So home to supper and to bed, my wife not being well, she having her months upon her’ (24 Dec 1662). On 21 January 1662/3, Pepys records being ‘Up leaving my wife very ill in bed de ses Mois’. Finally, and almost exactly two months later, on 20 March 1662/3, Pepys describes how he ‘walked home again, where I found my wife in great pain abed of her months’. Samuel Pepys was often sympathetic to his wife’s dysmenorrhoea, and Claire Tomalin notes that he hurried home from his office ‘to comfort her when she had sent a message to say she was “in great pain of those”’. David Widger, who prepared a version of Pepys’s diary, based on the late-nineteenth-century text edited by Henry Wheatley, for electronic publication in the Gutenberg project, notes that, ‘[n]early every month Pepys documents his wife’s menstrual cramps and every month Mr Wheatley delicately censors this out’. Guy de la Bédoyère comments that, in his opinion, Pepys had an unsettled home life in which one of the issues includes ‘what has been identified as dysmenorrhoea, characterised by uterine cramps during menstruation. This

148 The Diary of Samuel Pepys, IV, p. 80.
150 The Gutenberg free text forms the basis of a high quality, searchable Pepys website. I am grateful to the contributors to this site whose intelligent debates alerted me to many of the elided references to Elizabeth’s menses, which I could then research. See David Widger, ‘Annotation: 20 March 1662’, in The Diary of Samuel Pepys <http://www.pepysdiary.com> [accessed 10 Dec 2009].
contributed to their frequent quarrels, recorded throughout the diary’. This opinion is probably based on a misunderstanding of early-modern sexuality. It would be extremely unlikely that Pepys would want to have intercourse with his wife when she was menstruating, and so this would not be a source of marital tension as Bédoyère implies. Pepys relays an occasion in the diary when he sought sexual relief by masturbation because his wife was menstruating. On 26 February 1660, Pepys records that, ‘I left my wife in bed, being indisposed by reason of ceux-là’. Later that night when all his guests have left Pepys comments, ‘I to bed – where (God forgive me) did please myself by strength of fancy with the young Segnora that was at dinner with us today’, which confirms that he would not seek sexual intercourse with his wife, but prefers the still sinful, but perhaps less polluting act of masturbation, whilst, in this case, fantasying about a young dinner companion. Crawford notes a further three diary entries when Pepys recorded that he could not have sex with two of his lovers, Mrs Daniels and Mrs Lane, and a prostitute because they were menstruating; Crawford notes that in one 1669 entry he does record having sex with Mrs Martin, ‘though she had the ellos [them] upon her’. This, however, is exceptional as the many examples of Pepys refraining from intercourse at this time show; perhaps Mrs Martin’s menstrual period began unexpectedly during coition.

As was outlined in the introduction, and earlier in this chapter, not only was intercourse at the time of menstruation expressly forbidden in the Bible, but was also an act which the medical and conduct treatises issued dire warnings about. William Whately’s A Brides-Bush (1617) states that married couples, ‘nuptiall meetings must be seasonable, and at lawfull times’ before going on to explain that by this he means that sex is unlawful during times of menstrual and lochial bleeding. The more sensationalist tracts make bold claims about the nature of menstrual blood causing cancers and other terrible illnesses, such as

151 The Letters of Samuel Pepys (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 20. Bédoyère does not say by whom these entries were identified as dysmenorrhoea.
152 The Diary of Samuel Pepys, II, p. 44.
154 The King James Bible states in Leviticus 18.19 that ‘You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness as long as she is in her customary impurity’.
155 (London: William Jaggard, 1617), p. 44.
‘whenever men have sexual intercourse with them [menstruating women] they are made leprous and sometimes cancerous’, which claims were well-known into the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{156} As Patricia Crawford notes, ‘A child conceived during menstruation would either be deformed or a monster, for did not the text in Esdras, “and menstruous women bring forth monsters”, declare as much?’\textsuperscript{157} Taking their lead from this, medical books were full of stories of how, if a couple has intercourse during the menses and conceive at this time, the child could be born a monster. This was linked in the medical texts to the biblical imperative warning couples not to participate in intercourse at this time: the birth of a mole, or other monstrous conception would then be a just punishment for what John Sadler calls ‘filthie and corrupt affections which are let loose into wickedness, like brute beasts that have no understanding’.\textsuperscript{158} Five years into their marriage the Pepyses had not lost hope of having children as the comments of his diary show. Samuel Pepys, therefore, had many reasons to avoid sex at this time, so this avoidance would not be a source of marital conflict. Significantly, it would seem that, unlike with other routinely-ignored medical pronouncements such as that forbidding intercourse whilst breast feeding, this rule, having biblical authority behind it, perhaps, was more widely adhered to. Crawford has identified a ‘lengthy’ letter that John Evelyn wrote in 1680:

advising his son John about his marital sexual behaviour: he should avoid sexual intercourse during his wife’s monthly purgations, ‘not only for the indecency & pollution; but for that the conception (which yet then frequently happens) dispose to Leaprosie, & markes the Children with evident signes of the parents incontinency’.\textsuperscript{159}

John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys were not only contemporaries but good friends in later years, which might suggest that the sorts of morals that Evelyn was passing to his son would be familiar to Pepys too. This is a case in which the public prescriptive medical texts and private accounts and practice appear to have coincided.

\textsuperscript{157} ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Blood, Bodies and Families}, p. 114.
Rather than dysmenorrhoea, the source of sexual frustration in the Pepys’s marriage was probably Elizabeth’s recurrent illness of abscesses near the entrance to her vagina, Bartholin’s cysts.\textsuperscript{160} Pepys refers to these as ‘her old payne’ (9 May 1661).\textsuperscript{161} This condition would be extremely painful and, naturally, would limit sexual activity. In May 1661 her physician, Dr Williams, packed an abscessed cyst with a linen tent, to drain the infection, and taught Pepys to also do this for her. Three years later a surgeon, Hollier, had to be consulted as the cyst was three inches long, but Elizabeth refused surgery for fear that the servants might think she had a sexually transmitted disease.\textsuperscript{162} The couple were unable to have sexual relations for long periods when this disease reoccurred. Significantly, as with the male-authored medical case-notes, what is missing from Samuel Pepys’s account of his wife’s menstrual cramps, is any indication, other than that she took to her bed, of what steps Elizabeth took to ease her pains. There is no record of whether she managed the condition with the aid of medication, or if she did, what forms such treatments might have taken.

\textbf{Chapter Conclusion}

Crawford has claimed that ‘One recent taboo associated with menstruation is that of silence, but there was not the same taboo on public discussion of the subject in seventeenth-century England’.\textsuperscript{163} In response to this assertion Lord says, ‘evidence from lecture notes and medical journals indicates that frank discussions of menstruation were frowned upon during the eighteenth century’.\textsuperscript{164} Crawford’s assertion is based on the fact that the metaphor filthiness of the menstruous rag was so widely preached during this period. I have argued here, rather, that the preaching of these lessons has probably contributed to women’s silence in the era, for the public discussion Crawford refers to was almost universally male, and it encouraged a negative view of menstrual bleeding. This chapter has shown that even in their most private writing early-modern women were disinclined, or

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\textsuperscript{160} Pepys describes this illness as a ‘pain in the lip of her chose, which she had when we were first married’ (2 August 1660), cited in \textit{The Unequalled Self}, p. 399. Tomalin explains that this condition, today understood to be caused by a bacterial infection, often began at puberty, when the glands in the vagina become active. Elizabeth Pepys was married at fifteen.

\textsuperscript{161} \textit{The Diary of Samuel Pepys}, II, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{The Unequalled Self}, p. 202.

\textsuperscript{163} ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{164} ‘The Great Arcana of the Deity’, p. 49.
unable, to make explicit reference to their menses, and that except in extreme situations, such as that of Sarah Malcolm, early-modern women were largely silent about their menstrual blood loss. The evidence that is available about how early-modern women related to their menses is almost universally from men, and therefore, must be treated with some caution because the practices they describe, in medical texts, verse, and jests, and private journals are not their own.

However, just as the claims of Pliny about the poisonous nature of menstrual blood have not entirely left us today, so too there remains an inheritance from the early-modern woman in the assumption that both menstruation and sanitary protection are somewhat taboo and embarrassing. Similarly, the taboo surrounding writing about menstruation in anything but the vaguest euphemistic way is only now being overcome with references to menstruation in literature beginning to be seen from the mid-twentieth century, and becoming somewhat more commonplace now.
Chapter Three: ‘The Flower of Virginity’: Hymenal Bleeding and Becoming a Woman

After examining accounts of menarche, and the ways that menstruation more generally was written about in early-modern England, this thesis will move on to examine, in the context of its broader aims, the ways in which hymenal bleeding was also accounted for. This chapter will examine the link that was perceived to exist in the early-modern period between the blood that was sometimes lost upon first intercourse and menstrual blood. In order to do this, the chapter will outline early-modern anatomical assumptions about the physiology of the venous system of the womb and vagina, from where this blood was thought to emanate. Hymenal bleeding is, arguably, an even more personal, intimate event than menstruation, and this has meant that there are no surviving female accounts of their personal experiences to analyse. This means that it is revelatory to analyse and contrast the presentation of defloration and vaginal bleeding in literary texts by male and female authors. To achieve this, this chapter will include a close reading of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* which is in many ways a fictionalisation of some of the key assumptions about the nature of hymenal bleeding, and will compare the events in this novel with similar scenes in the contemporaneous amatory fiction of Eliza Haywood.

In this chapter the blood often lost upon first intercourse will be referred to as hymenal blood even though early-modern theories about the origins and nature of this blood, as will be examined in detail below, do not universally support the idea that this blood emanates from the hymen. Hymenal bleeding was a theoretically important occurrence in the early-modern period, for it marked a second occasion of bleeding as part of a woman’s growth to maturity. As has been shown in Chapters One and Two, following the lead of the ancient Greek physicians, in the early-modern period it was considered necessary for a girl to lose her virginity for her to become a woman. Helen King explains how in ancient Hippocratic medical thought female growth to maturity was a gradual process during which the channels of a woman’s body are opened by different events to make ‘a way through and a way outside’, and so as part of this process the ‘three transitional bleedings– menarche, defloration and childbirth’ were deemed to cause changes in the female body that led to her becoming a mature
woman. It is precisely for this reason that women who were unmarried were always referred to as maids in early-modern England: they were deemed never to have made the transition to full womanhood that marriage and subsequent childbirth demanded.

It is appropriate in an investigation into the ways that early-modern society accounted for and understood the process of menstruation to include this topic, because in this era, and indeed in all eras up until this, hymenal bleeding was sometimes believed to be discharged from the blood vessels in the vagina, as they become stretched during first intercourse. Some medical texts suggested that these vaginal vessels discharged a small proportion of the blood lost in a menstrual period, but also that there was a direct relationship between the disturbance to the vagina and the concurrent excitation of the blood, which intercourse could cause, and the sudden onset of an unexpected menstrual period.

Hymenal bleeding was often known by the circumlocution the ‘flower of virginity’ which further demonstrates the assumed connections between menstruation and this next occasion of transitional bleeding, because, as previously discussed, the euphemism ‘flowers’ was one of the most common ways of referring to menstruation. Like many of his contemporaries, physician Thomas Gibson makes reference to a story in Deuteronomy 22.13-21 which describes a bride being rejected because her husband thought she was not a virgin. Gibson says that this expected ‘Bloud is called the Flower of Virginity’. Gibson is probably following Thomas Bartholin in using this phrase as this is one of his source texts, but it is a phrase which had been used from at least as early as Helkiah Crooke in 1615. The phrase ‘flowers of virginity’ is not the one used in the biblical passage cited, as Patricia Crawford has noted; in fact the King James Bible at this point ‘refers to "tokens of the damsel’s virginity"’. This phrase is a cultural one, fusing the medieval usage with the biblical convention. OED.

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3 The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomised, p. 154.
4 Bartholinus Anatomy Made from the Precepts of his Father, and from the Observations of all Modern Anatomists, Together with his Own (London: John Streater, 1668), p. 72; Helkiah Crooke, Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man (London: William Jaggard, 1615), p. 223. Here the hymen is called the flower of virginity, rather than the blood lost.
5 ‘Attitudes to Menstruation’, Past and Present, 91 (1981), 47-73 (p. 51). The other main Bible in contemporary use, the Geneva Bible (1587) also uses the same phraseology.
definition 6c, notes that ‘flower’ was a euphemism for virginity in two texts in the fourteenth century. The fact that this phrase is reused in medical texts throughout the seventeenth century suggests that it had a resonance and was either a phrase in spoken usage, or made sense to authors as an allusion as they reworked each others’ phrasing throughout the period.

The poem ‘On Flowers in a Lady’s Bosom’, by Thomas Brown, further alludes to a wider usage of the phrase ‘flower of virginity’ for hymenal bleeding.6 This carpe diem poem utilises classical allusion to disguise its main thematic functions. Loose allusion to the classical story of Cytherea (or Aphrodite), whose tears of blood fell upon the ground from which flowers grew, frames a blazon in which the speaker describes a woman’s physical appearance. After commenting on the ‘Milk-white Hills’ of the woman’s chest, and the bouquet of flowers she is wearing, he comments ‘Behold the Valley spread with Flow’rs below! / Other Discoveries, Fate, let me not share; / If I find out, may I inhabit there’. This is an overt allusion to her bosom as in the title, but it has a double meaning in relation to her virginity. This is seen when in his exposition on the hymen, Helkiah Crooke refers to it as ‘Maidens bosome of modesty’.7 Furthermore, as will be discussed later, breasts were an important signifier of virginity at this time, and so for an early-modern reader the allusion would be a natural one. The poem’s engagement with the carpe diem tradition becomes apparent when the speaker asks: ‘Tell, tell me why, thou fruitful Virgin-Breast / Why should so good a Soil lie unpossess?’ The speaker refers to the early-modern idea that an attractive woman could not remain wholly chaste. As Harold Bloch has appositely pointed out, early-modern religious conventions suggested that a truly chaste women was one who had never known desire or, ‘since, according to the Patristic totalizing scheme of desire, there can be no difference between the state of desiring and of being desired, a virgin is a woman who has never been desired by a man’.8 Furthermore, the male speaker suggests that the subject has allowed other men to lie in her bosom, even this act did not necessarily culminate in full sexual

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6 The Fourth and Last Volume of the Works of Thomas Browne, Serious and Comical, 4 vols (London: Sam Briscoe, 1715), IV, pp. 110-11. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

7 Mikrokosmographia, p. 235

8 Cited by Tassie Gwilliam, ‘Female Fraud: Counterfeit Maidenheads in the Eighteenth Century’, Journal of the History of Sexuality, 6 (1996), 518-47 (pp. 523-24). This observation overlooks that a virgin would not be considered to be a woman in this period.
intercourse: ‘Surely some Champion in the Cause of Love / Has languish’d here -
more weary with the Sight / Than vanquish’d quite’. The speaker’s perceived
rivals had not won the complete victory over the subject’s virginity that he hopes
to gain. He ends his plea by noting that Cytherea has posy in her bosom (the top
of her dress) made from the flowers that grew from her tears, a classic trope. The
‘curious Posey’ representing the tears of blood that Cytherea had shed and the
hymenal blood she subsequently loses, falls to the ground, and Adonis blushes at
the sight while ‘in the Seat of Bliss’. The ‘seat of bliss’ or ‘pleasure’ is a phrase
which occurs in many medical texts when describing the clitoris, so the sexual
inference is clear, and this poem is appealing to the woman to allow the speaker
to vanquish her virginity, and let him, like Adonis, sit in the ‘seat of bliss’. 9

Because of the cultural linkage of virginity to flowers, the hymen is
described, rather beautifully, by some anatomists, including Crooke, as looking
like ‘the cup of a little rose halfe blowne when the bearded leaves are taken away’
or ‘the great Clove Gilly-flower when it is moderately blown’. 10 Jane Sharp
echoes this description almost word for word but elaborates to explain that
‘thence came the term deflowered’. 11 This etymological explanation is the
paradigmatic one, and it is interesting as the origin of the term differs in this
definition from that of ‘flowers’ for menstruation, which was thought to come
from a horticultural observation that without flowers, there could be no fruit;
either way, the use of the same word reinforces the contemporary early-modern
link between hymenal bleeding and menstruation.

The Anatomy of the Vagina

Bartholin’s chapter thirty, ‘Of the greater Neck of the Womb’ describes how ‘In
the Bottom of the Womb we have observed three things; the Bottom it self,
the lesser Neck, and the Orifice. In the greater Neck also, three things are to be

9 For an example of this usage see Johannes Riolanus, A Sure Guide; or, The Best and Nearest
Way to Physick and Chyrurgery, That is to Say, the Arts of Healing by Medicine and Manual
Operation, trans. by Nicholas Culpeper and W. R. (London: Peter Cole 1657) which states that
the ‘Clitoris being the seat of Lasciviousness and Lust in Women that delight in mutual
confrictions, is termed Tentigo, or the Womans Yard’ (p. 82).
10 Mikrokosmographia, p. 235.
11 The Midwives Book; or, The Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered, ed. by Elaine Hobby
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 43. Subsequent references are to this edition, and
are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
noted. The Neck [vagina] it self, the Hymen, and the Mouth of the Bladder’.\textsuperscript{12} Often anatomy guides would explain that menstrual blood emanated from three distinct sets of veins or branches of veins: those which supplied the uterus, those which supplied the cervix, and those which supplied the vagina. For Crooke, ‘there are two veines which disperse their branches through the wombe, some of which are carried to the inward cavity thereof by which the infant is nourished, others run to the outward part of the wombe even unto the necke and the lap it selfe’.\textsuperscript{13} This understanding of female anatomy is further exemplified in the mid-seventeenth century by the author of The Compleat Midwives Practice, who states that the reason that there are so many veins in the vagina is that ‘the flowers must not onely come out of the womb, but out of the necke of the womb also’.\textsuperscript{14} Thomas Gibson (1682) is reasonably unusual in that he thinks that menstrual blood comes from arteries not veins, but he implies that it is at least plausible that some of the menstrual blood might come from the vaginal blood supply. He describes that

by these [the spermatic and the hypogastrik] Arteries it is that the monthly Courses flow, in greatest quantity out of those that open into the Uterus itself, but in lesseer out of these branches that reach and open into the Cervix or neck of the Womb, and in least (if at all) out of the Vagina.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Aristoteles Master-Piece} (1684) typifies the alternative argument that was made that a percentage of the menstrual blood emanated from the vaginal vessels;

\textsuperscript{12}Bartholinus Anatomy, p. 72. As Elaine Hobby explains in the introduction to Jane Sharp’s \textit{The Midwives Book} the term womb often means the same in the seventeenth century as it does today, but is differentiated from its ‘neck’, the vagina, and ‘mouth’, the cervix. However, sometimes the womb is known as the ‘bottom’ and ‘womb’ means the vagina. See Elaine Hobby, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{The Midwives Book; or, The Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. xi-xxx (p. xxxi).

\textsuperscript{13}Mikrokosmographia, p. 315.

\textsuperscript{14}[Anon.], \textit{The Compleat Midwives Practice, in the Most Weighty and High Concernments of the Birth of Man} (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1656), p. 29. The vagina is often, as here, referred to in this era as the neck of the womb. As in the next quotation this phrase may refer to the cervix, so care is needed to unpick the exact reference. Occasionally the cervix will appear as the ‘lesser neck’ to eliminate any potential confusion, with the vagina being the greater neck. See [Anon.], \textit{Aristoteles Master-Piece; or, The Secrets of Generation Display’d in all the Parts Thereof} (London: J. How, 1684) which claims that the ‘secret’ places in women are called ‘the Neck of the Womb’ by the vulgar (p. 93).

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomised}, p. 149. Most medical texts concur with Thomas Raynalde who explains that the blood in menstruation comes from the veins of the uterus which ‘do attract from the great vena cava into this part’. See \textit{The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman’s Book}, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 57. Most authors concur that the blood flows from veins, so Thomas Gibson is unusual in believing the uterine arteries supply this blood.
pseudo-Aristotle states that the vessels in the ‘neck of the womb’ or vagina are necessarily long because ‘the monethly Courses have their way through them which often occasions Women with Child to continue their purgations, for although the Womb is shut up, yet the passage in the Neck of the Womb through which the Vessels pass, are open’.  

Following an often-cited passage from the Hippocratic Aphorisms, it was believed by most medics that the cervix was firmly shut upon conception and so if women lost blood while they were pregnant it was logical to conclude that the veins of the cervix and the vagina emitted a proportion of the menstrual blood.

This belief seems to have been one of the populist beliefs that endured despite the fact that Thomas Raynalde had refuted it over a century earlier when he argued that since menstruation was designed by nature as for the purpose of feeding a foetus there would be no point in having the menstrual blood flow, in part, from the veins of the vagina. Indeed, Raynalde explains in his section entitled ‘Which of the three Matrix-veins Contain the Terms, and How the Milk Cometh to the Woman’s Breasts’ that he does not believe that anyone is seriously suggesting that menstrual blood proceeds from the ‘neck-veins and at the bottom-veins also’, despite the fact that many of the accounts that followed his do state this, as I have shown above. Raynalde does not believe that the menstrual blood can possibly come from the veins in the vagina, because this would go against the logic to which he subscribes, that menstrual blood nourishes the foetus. Since, he argues, we know that a foetus cannot live in the vagina it would be redundant for nature to have these veins provide menstrual blood. That women still bleed in pregnancy, he says, is not because the vaginal veins provide some of the blood, but because the cervix still lets this blood seep through: ‘I say that the point of the Matrix is never so exactly close, but that such a liquid thing as blood is, may thrill and cool out of it’.

However, the fact that the assertion that the cervical and vaginal veins produced a proportion of the menstrual blood was being cited as a medical truth throughout the seventeenth century serves to suggest that this was a widely held view.

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16 *Aristoteles Master-Piece*, p. 108.
18 *The Birth of Mankind*, p. 67
19 *The Birth of Mankind*, p. 68.
Given this understanding of the venous system, the explanation, then, that some commentators gave for hymenal bleeding is first seen in Soranus of Ephesus’s first-century observations. Soranus argues that hymenal bleeding comes from the dilation of the vaginal vessels:

In Virgins the vagina is flattened and comparatively narrow, since it possesses furrows held together by vessels which take their origin from the uterus. And when the furrows are spread apart in defloration, these vessels burst and cause pain and the blood which is usually excreted follows.  

In early-modern physician Thomas Gibson’s anatomy guide, this becomes:

In Virgins its [the vagina’s] duct is so straight, that at their first congress with a Man they have commonly more pain than pleasure through the extension of it by the Penis, whereby some small Vessels break, out of which Bloud issues as out of a slain Victim […] unless we should rather think that the Bloud proceeds from the rupture of the Hymen.

The bleeding of vessels that were thought to carry a percentage of the menstrual blood to the vagina inexorably links hymenal bleeding with menstruation, for the blood is from the menstrual vessels. A second link to menstruation is the metaphor of ‘slain victim’; treatises aligned with the Hippocratic tradition, such as that of John Freind, describe the colour of healthy menstrual blood as being as ‘ruddy and florid resembling the Blood flowing out of the Veins of a Sacrifice newly slain’. Lazare Rivière, too, corroborates the assumed similarity between bleeding at first coitus and menstruation when he notes that ‘Experience teacheth, that sometimes these Women [with green-sickness] have their Terms the first night after marriage, and that others who are in good health have them before their accustomed time’.

This suggests that once the vaginal veins are opened during first coitus, they could go on to discharge a full menstrual period at that time. This event was therefore not without risk, and Isband van Diemerbrœck recalled the death of one of his patients on her wedding night from haemorrhage:

I remember, that I knew a young Bride in upper Batavia, to whom, by the violent immission of the Yard in the first Act of Coition, and

suddain dilatation of the Vagina, there happen'd such a prodigious Flux of Blood, that in three hours she lost her Life, together with her Virginity. And the like unfortunate Accident some years ago befell the Daughter of a certain Citizen of Utrecht, who was so wounded the first night, that before morning, the Flux of Blood not being to be stopp'd, she expir'd.  

The idea that a woman felt more pain than pleasure in her first coitus, as a result of the stretching of the vessels in her vagina was frequently discussed, despite the rational voice of Sharp who claims that ‘the pain puts maids to a squeek or two, but is soon over’ (p. 42). However, no early-modern author went as far as Pliny in his first century *Natural History* when he comments that ‘man is the only animal whose first experience of mating is accompanied by regret; this is indeed an augury for life derived from a regrettable origin [...] All other animals derive satisfaction from having mated; man gets almost none’.  

Although Pliny was not a Christian, it is interesting that the idea of sexual activity being a cause of regret and guilt was pervasive in Roman culture, too. The idea that first intercourse is painful and unpleasant for men as well as women is discussed by the author of *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d*, who claims that the narrowness of the vagina is the reason that men have pain on first intercourse. The author states:

> For ’tis not to be expressed, what pain and faintness a Man suffers in the first adventure, at least if the Maid be Streight. The Consequence of such Embraces is rather Grief and Hatred, then Love, and Complaisance; nay ’tis often one of the chief motives of dissolution of Marriages.

This might be an attempt to show homology between the sexes and to claim that the pain that female suffers is equalled in the male. This homology is seen, too, in several of the texts that claim that a man will experience an analogous physical change on first coitus in which the ‘bride’ of the penis might break, ‘as in men the Fraenum or bridle of the Yard is somtimes torn’.

That hymenal blood loss was considered to be menstrual was one of the reasons that greensickness, the disease of virgins, was cured by marriage, or

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26 [Nicolas de Venette], *The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Reveal’d*, trans. by Anon. (London: [n. pub.], 1707), pp. 30-31. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

27 *Bartholinus Anatomy*, p. 74.
specifically sexual intercourse: the physical effect of penetration would stretch and break open these veins, release the blocked blood, and restore normal functions. As discussed in Chapter One, Sharp in *The Midwives Book* (1671) explains the way that menarche was assumed to work, making it apparent the belief that green-sickness could be cured by defloration:

> So soon as Maids are ripe, their courses begin to flow, Nature sending the menstrual blood from the Liver to the veins about the womb, but those veins and vessels being very narrow, and not yet open, if the blood be stopt, in that it cannot break forth, it will corrupt. (p. 195)

This corrupted blood then would return to the major organs and induce a fever. This is the reason that green-sickness was often known as white fever, a disease which was cured by intercourse, which would forcibly stretch the vagina and cause the vessels to break open and bleed. A useful source here is the medico-erotic text *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d*, which works to promote sexual pleasure within marriage, explaining that there is a direct correlation between hymenal bleeding and the cure of white-fever. The author of this text suggests that the cure is in part emotional, and that a newly-sexually active woman will see her hymenal blood as proof of her recovery:

> A Young Woman, who formerly frighted People by her Yellow Looks, will soon be restored to the White and Red Complexion, which is a Sign of perfect Health. After the first amorous Combat she’ll perceive her Blood come from herself, as Proof of the Victory of Love, Peace and Plenty, which will soon follow. (pp. 262-63)

This implication here is quite clear: first intercourse will induce bleeding which will signify that menstruation will naturally follow and the cacochymical woman will be restored to health. Although white fever is an alternative name for greensickness, or chlorosis, it is also one which seems to have been specifically associated with older virgins, because the assumed long build up of the menstrual blood in the veins was thought to corrupt and cause the fever. Indeed, John Maubray notes that this disease is ‘Peculiar to Mature Virgins’.28 For older women the idea of marriage as a desirable cure for greensickness is treated with a little more circumspection. Nicholas Culpeper explains:

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28 The Female Physician Containing all the Diseases Incident to that Sex in Virgins, Wives and Widows (London: James Holland, 1724), p. 42.
It is probable, and agreeable to reason and experience that Venery is good.[.] *Hippocrates* bids them [women with greensickness or white fever] presently marry, for if they conceive they are cured. Venery heats the womb and the parts adjacent, opens and loosens the passages, so that the terms may better flow to the womb. But if there be a great Cacochymy, take that away before she be married, and then Venery may do more then Physick. But use it not in the vigor of the disease, nor in weakness.29

Sharp, who echoes Culpeper in her extrapolation of this passage, recommends the same caution but strengthens the warning against marriage (i.e. sexual intercourse) as a universal cure by agreeing with Culpeper that a build-up of corrupt humours must be removed prior to marriage. Crucially, she adds that she has ‘known some that have been so far from being cured that, that they died by it; perhaps sooner than they would have done otherwise’ (p. 200). The explanation here would be that the imbalance had built up over a long period, and that by releasing all of these fluids suddenly, the woman’s body would be effectively poisoned by the impact of too many corrupt humours at once.

Conversely, whilst it was the case that it was assumed that many women would experience a menstrual period upon first coitus, to marry whilst experiencing a menstrual period was seen by the published medical texts as a deviation from propriety. Crooke comments that if a woman is menstruating or has recently finished her period in the days preceding her marriage then coition will be easier:

For all virgins although they be never so mellow; yet have their first coition painfull, but some more some lesse; unlesse they then are menstruous, or have beene within three or foure dayes; for then they admit the yard with lesse trouble, because of the relaxation and lubricity of these moyst partes whereupon the Membranes are dilated with little or no paine. And this hath beene the cause why some men have unworthily suspected the uncorrupted chastity of their wives. Wherefore it were fit the mothers or women friends of such Virgins should have care of their Honor, by giving warning to their Bride-grooms of their Brides purgations, if at that time they be upon them; and very often they are when the Brides are growne women and well complexioned, because the joy and private pleasures of affianced young folkes, as also their dancings and frolicke diet with such like, do often by mooving the body accelerate and hasten such purgations, and being come do cause them longer to endure.30

30 *Mikrokosmographia*, p. 236.
Crooke not only urges the family of the bride to explain to the groom that she is menstruating so that he is not shocked by the ease of coition with a woman he thought a virgin, but also implies that the vagina could be stretched in the petting (‘private pleasures’) that he suggests engaged couples might indulge in prior to their marriage. Crooke explains that it is commonly the case that women menstruate at their weddings, not only because of the effect of being excited but also because of the assumed effect of activities associated with weddings such as dancing. Crooke is matter-of-fact about the likelihood of this event, but post-Restoration physician Thomas Gibson finds it difficult to accept:

if a Maid be so indiscreet as to become a Bride while her Courses flow or within a day after, then both the Hymen and the inner wrinkled Membrane of the Vagina are so flaggy and relaxed, that the Penis may enter glibly without any lett, and so give suspicion of Unchastity, when indeed she's unblameable saving for her imprudence to marry at that season.  

The ‘imprudence’ Gibson refers to is not just the Levitical imperatives of the consequences of intercourse at the time of menstruation, but also the very real early-modern fears that a child conceived when a woman was menstruating would be born with monstrous qualities, as the letter cited in Chapter Two from John Evelyn to his son in which he warned his son against intercourse at the time of his wife’s menstrual period demonstrates: he advises his son not to have sex at this time ‘not only for the indecency & pollution; but for that the conception (which yet then frequently happens) dispose to Leaprosie, & markes the Children with evident signes of the parents incontinency’.  

The Anatomy of the Hymen

As Gibson’s comments above allude to, the existence of the hymen, let alone the hymen rupturing as a source of blood was hotly disputed throughout the early-modern period. Commenting in particular on Nicolas Venette’s text The

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31 The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomised, p.155.
33 In addition to what follows below, see also Marie H. Loughlin, Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1997) for an analysis of the medical debate about the existence of the hymen in early-modern anatomy treatises.
Mysteries of Conjugal Love, Paul-Gabriel Boucé contends that ‘Venette devotes great care to examining the anatomical problem of the hymen’s presence or absence. This is doubtless an indication that the more or less diffuse myths about anatomical virginity were still very much alive and tenacious’. The hymen is described by physician Gibson as:

a thin Nervous membrane interwoven with carnous [fleshy] Fibres, and endowed with many little Arteries and Veins, spread across the duct of the Vagina, behind the insertion of the neck of the Bladder, with a hole in the midst that will admit the top of ones little finger, by which the Menses flow.

This description of the intact hymen being big enough to admit a man’s finger is fairly consistent throughout the period. The hymen was expected to be different in different people and Gibson describes some of the variations:

Sometimes in elderly Maids the Hymen grows so strong that a Man is glad to make many essays before he can penetrate it. Yea in some naturally it is quite closed up, and these by this means having their Menses stopt, are in great peril of their life if they be not relieved by Surgery, viz. opening it with some sharp Instrument.

The unpublished notes of Staffordshire physician Richard Wilkes from the 1730s offer an example of a woman who might have been said to have this condition. The records describe how ‘the wife of one Hickman’, who is ‘lusty’, has apparently no vaginal opening: ‘The Labia Vulvae are as in other women, but these being drawn aside she appears whole there being no Room for a menstrual flux which she never had, not can have as matters are’. Mrs Hickman was, understandably, unwilling to undergo surgery to create an opening, Wilkes notes, ‘she and her Husband were content, and therefore she was not willing to undergo that operation. She is now about 30 years of Age, Strong, Hearty and full of Flesh’. This record shows a woman who knows her own mind in matters pertaining to her health, and as a result was not persuaded by the ‘prevailing’ of her physician. Alexandra Lord goes so far as to suggest the fused hymen was a

34 Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 34.
35 Anatomy of Humane Bodies, p.154.
36 Anatomy of Humane Bodies, p.154.
37 The Journal of Richard Wilkes, December 1736 to December 1738 (Stafford Records Office, 5350), p. 79.
38 The Journal of Richard Wilkes, p. 79.
common condition in the eighteenth century, saying that it ‘was often the case’. Lord contends that surgeons and parents were reluctant to perform the surgery that Wilkes had proposed. She theorises that men-midwives were sensitive to claims that they operated needlessly during labours, and so would be reluctant to perform this operation, and parents might be similarly reluctant to have a daughter with a surgically compromised hymen.

Possibly the earliest account which denied the existence of the hymen was Soranus of Ephesus’s second century genealogical treatise. Soranus comments ‘it is a mistake to assume that a thin membrane grows across the vagina, dividing it, and that this membrane causes pain when it bursts in defloration or if menstruation occurs too quickly’. Crooke is one of the few medical practitioners to cite Soranus directly, and this following of Soranus could be why his text is often moderate in tone in relation to women. Crooke says that Soranus believed that the blood upon ‘devirgination’ came from the vagina being stretched rather than from a hymen. Ambrose Paré, also, does not believe in the existence of a hymen. Citing authorities such as Avicenna and Columbus, Paré says ‘in virgins, the passage or necke of the wombe is very wrinkled, or narrow and straight, and those wrinkles to be woaven or stayed together with many little veines and arteries, which are broken at the first time of copulation’. Even if the existence of a hymen was accepted, the fact that it might no longer be present was theorised. A popular explanation was that corruption found in the menstrual blood might have caused the hymen to have been destroyed: ‘For the Hymen may be corroded by acrimonious fretting humours flowing through it with the Menses’ and also by ‘the falling out or inversion of the Uterus or the Vagina at least, which sometimes happens even to Maids’.

Blood as a Token of Virginity

Normally the narrowness of the vagina was seen as a better indication of virginity than the contested hymen, but this too was ideally expected to produce an

40 Gynecology, p. 15.
41 Mikrokosmographia, p. 222.
43 Anatomy of Humane Bodies, p. 154.
occasion of bleeding to provide indisputable proof of virginity. The famous biblical story in Deuteronomy 22 shows the cultural significance of hymenal bleeding as a signifier of virginity for a culture in which the importance of the Bible cannot be overstated. In this story, as mentioned above, a bride is returned to her father’s house rejected by her husband because on their wedding night he ‘found her not a maid’ 22.14. The woman’s father has kept the wedding night sheets and is able to display them before the elders, showing clearly the ‘tokens’ of her virginity, or her hymenal blood. This evidence meant that the village elders found in favour of the girl and her father and told her husband that he had to keep her as his wife for life. The practice of bedding, in which a married couple were escorted to bed amid scenes of raucous humour, seems to have been kept up by the gentry throughout the period, but in a symbolic rather than a voyeuristic sense, for the idea of publicly displaying the bed-linen was seen as old-fashioned and foreign. Nicholas Culpeper explains this ‘foreign’ tradition:

The Africans had a custom to shut the Bridegroom and the Bride up in a Chamber, after they were married, till they prepared the Wedding dinner. And an old woman stood at the door, to receive a bloody sheet from the Bridegroom, that she might shew it in triumph to all the guests, and that then they might feast with joy. And if there was no blood to be seen, the Bride was to be sent home to her friends [family] with disgrace, and the guests went sadly home without their Dinners.44

Travelogues such as that of Denis Vairasse further allude to the foreignness of this practice. He cites the example of an indigenous Australian whom he watched coming out of a temple upon being newly married brandishing garlands ‘tied together with a white Clout stained with bloud, which were the marks of his Wives Virginity’.45 In the eighteenth century, the author of The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Reveal’d also suggests that this practice is still common in Spain, where, he says, ‘Linnen stained with Blood is hung out at the Window for a Show to Passengers, the Spaniards pronouncing these words Virgen la tenemos [we have a virgin]’ (p. 52). The idea of this practice as a Spanish one was perhaps helped by the kind of public story that as part of her attempt to stave off divorce Catherine of Aragon sent home to Spain for her wedding night sheets, which had

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44 A Directory for Midwives, pp. 97-98.
been returned to her parents, to prove that she had been a virgin upon her marriage to Henry VIII.  

Whether medical treatises support the theory of a torn hymen or the vaginal vessels as the source for the blood which follows defloration, many of the women’s health guides and anatomy texts cite the story from Deuteronomy. This shows the significance of Scripture in the era, but is somewhat curious given that almost all treatises are keen to stress that this bleed may or may not happen: if it occurs then that is proof positive of a woman’s virginity, but if there is no blood then the reverse is not necessarily shown. Culpeper says ‘Some say from experience, that some honest Virgins have lost their Maiden-heads without bleeding, and that it is a certain sign of Virginity when they bleed, and when they do not, they are not to be censured as unchast’. That Culpeper puts in this proviso suggests that this bleeding was an issue that still attracted attention. Culpeper offers reassurance to the female reader of his text and perhaps an argument that she could use were she to be similarly accused.

Several other reasons that a girl might not bleed on first intercourse are listed by Bartholin and include that a woman might have lost her hymen through ‘wantonness’ and the prevention of this, he writes, is why some peoples practise female genital mutilation: ‘Hence it is that some Nations, sow up the Privities of Girls new born, leaving a little way for the Urin to come forth; nor do they open it till the time of Marriage: and then the Bridegroom causes it to be opened, that he may be sure he hath a Virgin’. The masculinist language that is an undercurrent in all this discourse stresses the cultural importance of the female virginity. In this treatise this register is used to reassure husbands by claiming that if he ‘thrust in his Yard cleverly’ that is to say skilfully, then the women might not bleed.

For medical writers it is clear that the issue to be stressed was that lack of hymenal bleeding should not be taken as a marker or otherwise of a woman’s virginity. Crooke alludes to the many other ways that people claim that they can tell if a woman is a virgin or not: ‘yet some also have other quaint devices to try virginity with; as if a thred measured from the tip of the nose along the fore-heade to the end of the sagittal suture or seame, will also fitly encompasse the womans

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47 *Directory for Midwives*, p. 98.
48 *Bartholinus Anatomy*, p. 74.
49 *Bartholinus Anatomy*, p. 74.
One of these ‘quaint’ tests is referred to by several of the texts, again suggesting that this was a live issue in the early-modern period, which was whether a woman with milk in her breasts could ever be considered to be a virgin. In this period the assumption was that breast milk was menstrual blood that had gone through another stage of concoction in the body to turn it white: therefore theoretically it should only be possible for a woman to have milk in her breasts had she gone through the second stage transition and had the channels of her body further opened to allow the blood to flow there. This is a question that appears to have been debated since ancient times. Culpeper sums up the debate:

Some say that there can be no milk in the breasts, till a woman hath conceived: and Virgins have neither the cause nor the end why milk is made. And the terms stopt do rather corrupt then turn to milk. And though there be alwaies in the breasts a faculty to make milk, yet doth it not shew its power, but upon an object, and for some end. Some say that Virgins may have milk, and urge this Saying of Hippocrates, If any have milk when she is neither with child nor breeding their terms are stopt. Galen is of the same opinion, and though it be seldom, yet he saith it is possible And Alexander Benedictus and Christopher de Vega saw it.51

However, despite the other so-called virginity tests, the importance of the presence of blood at defloration as the ultimate proof of lost virginity is a recurring theme in early-modern literature. This is dramatised in the early seventeenth-century play The Changeling, which climaxes in the bloody, metaphoric defloration of the central character. That ‘virginity tests’ were something that the public knew about is indicated in the public performance of plays which have as one of their main thematic concerns the chastity of a bride-to-be. It has been suggested that, though a main source for the play was a similar text by John Reynold, published in 1621, one of the changes introduced by Middleton and Rowley, a virginity test, was perhaps inspired by the infamous case of Lady Essex.52 As discussed in very briefly Chapter One, Lady Frances Howard was married at the age of thirteen to Robert Devereux, the third Earl of Essex. The young couple did not initially live as husband and wife due to their ages, and during one of their long separations Lady Frances began a relationship

50 Mikrokosmographia, p. 235.
51 Directory for Midwives, p. 99.
with King James’s favourite courtier, Robert Carr. Extracting oneself from an unwanted marriage was extremely difficult, and Lady Frances’s only realistic option was to have her first marriage annulled. The grounds for this would be non-consummation of the marriage, and Lady Frances was prepared to go to court and claim that she was still in her virgin state due to her husband’s impotence, despite having been married for some eight years. Although Essex was as keen for the annulment of this marriage as Lady Frances, to protect his reputation he sought a clause in the annulment claiming that he was only impotent with her and was perfectly potent with numerous other women. As part of the process Lady Frances was examined by a panel of women whose remit was to discover ‘1. Whether the Lady Frances were a woman fit for carnal copulation, without any defect which might disable her for that purpose. 2. Whether she were a virgin carnally unknown by any man’. The panel of four gentlewoman and two midwives reported in the affirmative to both questions. Rumours abounded about how Lady Frances had passed this test since she was openly intimate with Carr, and one rumour claimed that she had asked the court for permission to veil her face to spare her embarrassment, but that this made it possible for a substitute to be presented for the examination. This incident is said to be alluded to in The Changeling when Beatrice-Joanna is too afraid to spend her wedding night with Alsemero because she is afraid he will realise that she is no longer a virgin. Beatrice-Joanna bribes her maid Diaphanta to take her place on the wedding night, but first subjects her to a virginity test to make sure the substitute will be a good choice. Diaphanta says in an aside ‘She will not search me, will she, / Like the forewoman of a female jury?’.

Such searching was standard practice in the case of suspected non-virginity, but had little credibility amongst physicians. The standard practice of having a matron or midwife perform a virginity test was very well-known amongst the public in the early-modern period, but it might have been seen as contentious, at least by some. It may be that such concerns about the existence of the hymen informs William Sermon’s comments that he doubts that midwives can in fact tell if a woman is a virgin by physical examination, for he writes that:

54 Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, The Changeling, ed. by N. W. Bawcutt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), IV.2.102-03. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
Some [midwives] have taken upon themselves to judge of the Virginity of Maids, though many ancient and modern Writers have rejected, and condemned the opinion of such Midwives, who affirm they can judge thereof. And I do believe, that it is impossible for any to know whether a Maid be a Virgin, or not? for all may boast they can; but have perhaps at last been much mistaken, yet contented therewith.\(^{55}\)

This comment in his description of the ideal characteristics of a midwife, does not simply suggest that it is the midwife who is unable to distinguish between a virgin and a woman, but that it is ‘impossible for any’ to do this, due to the doubts of many physicians about the existence of the hymen. However, *The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Reveall’d* concurs with Sermon’s view that although it is custom for matrons to test for virginity he thinks that they ‘have but weak insight into those Matters’ (p. 60); but unlike Sermon, this author does not think that this is because of a lack of a hymen to see, but rather because he feels that midwives are insufficiently trained in anatomy. This debate shows that this type of examination was well-known, and not unusual, if controversial. I would, therefore, argue that its is possible that Middleton and Rowley might have borne in mind a scandal that happened some ten years before they wrote this play, but I would concur with N. W. Bawcutt, that this is not to be seen as giving the play a wider political significance (p. 26). It is more probable that the playwrights were using the switch for its dramatic, rather than political potential. Rather than search Diaphanta like a midwife, Beatrice-Joanna subjects her to a mountebank-style chemical test. If Diaphanta was not a virgin this medicine would have no effect, but if she is intact the medicine would bring out a range of reactions, primarily sneezing. Later in the play Beatrice-Joanna too would be subjected to this test by her new husband, who has heard rumours that she is deflowered. Here Beatrice-Joanna is able to pass the test because she knows how to react.

The subject of who the changeling of the play is is disputed by critics, but if one applies the sorts of logic displayed in the medico-erotic texts to the play, then it is clear that the play is named after the switch of women on Beatrice-Joanna’s wedding night, when a maid changes places with woman of quality, but more significantly the changeling is Beatrice-Joanna who changes from the maid of quality to the status of a ruined woman. Alsemero explains this when he says that the last thing to change in the drama was ‘beautie chang’d / To ugly

whoredom’ (V.3.197-98). As I have shown, this is a play which centres on female virtue being analogous to female virginity. Notably, the evil protagonist, a gentleman fallen on hard times, is named De Flores, foregrounding his role in the drama. The climax of the plot is the metaphoric bloody defloration of Beatrice-Joanna, by De Flores, her father’s servant, to depict the actual defloration that occurred off stage. Beatrice-Joanna is blackmailed into having sex with De Flores after he carries out her request to kill her fiancé. Beatrice-Joanna realises that she will have to acquiesce, commenting, ‘Murder I see is followed by more sins’ (III. 4.164). When all the plot twists are revealed De Flores stabs Beatrice-Joanna, and she comes on to stage wounded and bleeding. This blood, although metaphorically her hymenal blood, can be staged precisely because it is in metaphor. As her shocked father approaches his wounded daughter, Beatrice-Joanna implores him to keep away, saying: ‘Oh come not near me, sir; I shall defile you / I am that of your blood was taken from you’ (V. 3. 149-50). This blood would defile her father because it is metaphorically virginal blood, analogous to menstrual blood. As she was his property to dispose of, her dramatic, staged defloration has taken from him his patriarchal right to decide his daughter’s future for his best political end, and, necessarily, who will spill her virginal blood. That the maidenhead belonged to the father is reinforced nearly a century later in an early eighteenth-century conduct treatise which pronounced to the female readers that ‘your Body is the Goods of your Father’.

Gail Kern Plaster reads this scene for its most obvious allegory, that Beatrice-Joanna’s blood represents blood taken from the father in bloodletting, and that, therefore, in death Beatrice-Joanna ‘will become blood “taken” from the patriarchal body in order to purge it, to relieve it from its plethoric disease’. This is to an extent compatible with the reading offered here for the blood taken in bloodletting was

56 It should be noted that this character was so named in the source text too, in which ‘Reynold’s De Flores […] is a nonentity, a handsome young man who willingly murders Alonzo but is satisfied with a kiss’ but who goes on to become Beatrice-Joanna’s lover in the future. N. W. Bawcutt, ‘Introduction’, in *The Changeling*, p. 3. It should be remembered that ‘a kiss’ is often used as a euphemism for sex in this period. See for example [Nicolas de Venette], *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d*, trans. by Anon. (London: [n. pub.], 1707), which consistently uses the term kiss for intercourse, and also that in this period it was considered possible to deflower a virgin with impure thoughts and actions, so I would suggest my reading is valid for both texts.


always thought to have similar properties to menstrual blood, in that it is excremental, excess blood which needs to be removed from the body in order to rebalance the humoral bodily economy. However, such argumentation stops short of seeing the precise nature of the blood in metaphor. Paster’s argument does go on to see this blood as linked to menstrual blood when she comments on the gendered nature of this blood and how:

Beatrice-Joanna’s self-abnegation is founded […] in the culturally sanctioned denigration of female blood in comparison to male blood. It is a function of the gendered properties of the discourse of blood that this image of the defiled heiress seeking extinction is an image of plethoric blood, blood in its lowest form, waste.⁵⁹

Beatrice-Joanna implores her father to look on her blood, her shame, no longer, but to let it run into ‘the common sewer’ to take it ‘from distinction’ (V. 3. 153). ‘Sewer’ is a common misogynistic metaphor for the womb, seen, for instance, in one the Earl of Rochester’s lyrics, ‘On Mistress Willis’, discussed in the previous Chapter, which calls a woman’s ‘cunt a common shore [sewer]’.⁶⁰ This term further alludes to the nature of her bleeding, just as the comment that it has fallen from distinction demonstrates her change of social position from high-ranking noble maid to ruined woman. In case this was not clear enough to the audience, as De Flores turns the knife upon himself to commit suicide rather than face torture, he shouts to Beatrice-Joanna: ‘Make haste, Joanna, by that token to thee: / Canst not forget, so lately put in mind / I would not go to leave thee far behind’ (V.3.173-75). Thus, De Flores makes the point that the results of the stabbings are tokens of her virginity that he has taken.

The Language of Hymenal Blood

Whilst it might not be unusual for the public to hear or read about virginity tests of the sorts dramatised in The Changeling, it was unusual for a defloration to be

⁵⁹ The Body Embarrassed, p. 89. Paster goes on to explain the link between plethora and menstruation, but sees this in terms of the ‘inefficient female body’ a condition ‘aggravated by conditions of social privilege’ (p. 89), which was indeed some medics reading of the nature of menstrual plethora, following Galen, but still focuses on this blood as a disease needing to be expelled, rather than as I have argued, blood representing the patriarchal line defiled outside the marriage bed.

dramatised in such a way. The gossip about virginity tests, however, might be something that the public would hear about and trials by midwives were similarly not particularly unusual. Court cases dealing with rapes are another way that hymenal bleeding would need to be discussed in public. In ways similar to those which were analysed in the case presented in Chapter One, in which an unfortunate little girl was sexually abused, but her mother initially mistook the signs, or ‘disorder’ on her clothing, of this attack for an early menarche, the language concerning hymenal bleeding was euphemised. A trial from 1675 of a man convicted of assault but found not guilty of rape was brought about because an unnamed girl’s aunt discovered some blood or ‘evident tokens’ that suggested that this crime had taken place. Although the judged determined that there was insufficient evidence to convict the defendant, Coker, of rape, he did order that he should be retried and convicted of assault in order that he did not get off without penalty.61 As stated earlier, ‘Tokens’ is the biblical term used in Deuteronomy, and so the jury would understand what was at issue on this child’s clothing.

In much the same way, an earlier trial of a man accused of raping a child under the age of ten years, Deborah Wise, used an alternative term for framing hymenal bleeding: ‘symptoms’. Whereas the rapist of Mary Faucet, discussed in Chapter One, had prevailed upon her to keep his secret by threats, in this case the perpetrator used the other mode of operation that paedophiles classically use. The child was induced into the toilet by an adult at her dancing classes. Once there he gave her sweets, and the promise of money and trinkets, on the three occasions that he raped her. The court record of the trial, on 13 December 1699, says that:

Being ask’d if she [Deborah Wise] knew the Man that did it, she replied Yes; then she was bad to point to him, upon which she pointed to the Prisoner two several times, he being set in two several places, and said that he was the Man, and that she saw him in the House of Office, and he called to her, and she came to him, and he bolted the Door upon her, and gave her a Penny to let him do what he would to her; and said he set her upon the Seat, and put something hard into her Belly; which made her cry out, and he stopped her Mouth with his Hand: When he had done, he made her promise not to tell any Body of it: She said, that the second time he beckoned her out, and she came down, and did as he had done before, promising her a Silver Box, and some Silver

Pennies, but gave her none; and said, that at the third time he gave her Sugar Candy and Oranges.  

The crime was, once again, noticed because a Jane Evans, the householder whose toilet had been the scene of the crime, saw ‘Symptoms’ on Deborah’s shirt on three separate occasions. This suggests that the child’s body was, unsurprisingly, traumatised by the rapes and bled on each occasion not only on the first occasion. Rather than suspecting early menarche, Evans was frightened by this evidence and sent for the child’s nurse to examine her. The nurse found that the child’s body was in ‘a disorder’ and the alarm was duly raised. An examining ‘Anatomical Doctor’ and a midwife ‘deposed, that the Child had been very much abused, and had lost her Virginity, and instanced divers reasons for it’. The subject of this trial was considered to be so indecorous and the women in the gallery were asked several times to leave, which they declined to do. The rapist was found guilty and convicted.

In the two preceding trials the accused was convicted, but a further case in the same records resulted in acquittal. Sir John Murry ‘was indicted for committing a Rape upon the Body of Mary Mackneal, a Girl above 10 Years of Age, on the 21st of January last’. Her attack was discovered when she returned home from several days of staying in his household, and ‘shifted herself’ or changed her underclothes the following day. When her mother came to launder this shift the following Thursday ‘she was very much surpriz’d, and took her to task, who told her that Sir John had done it’. Despite a surgeon testifying to the girl being bruised and lacerated internally, Sir John was able to offer sufficient doubt about timings, and witnesses to say that they had seen the girl looking well upon leaving his home, that he was acquitted. Again, the fact that there was something on the shift to cause the mother surprise was sufficient to intimate to the jury the possibility of a rape. 

One of the significant aspects of these cases is that they describe the rapes of these girls in ways which do not apportion blame to the victim. In early-modern literature, as Barbara J. Baines has noted, the convention was that ‘to be

raped is to be “whored”\textsuperscript{64}. Perhaps here the victims’ extreme youth protected them from any assumption of complicity with the crime. Nazife Bashar has found that courts were much more likely to convict in the case of child rape because the child was a virgin. Bashar speculates that

perhaps the contemporary connection between virginity and property explains this phenomenon. [...] Rape of a virgin, a young woman, was regarded as theft of her virginity, the property of her father to be used in procuring an advantageous marriage.\textsuperscript{65}

Since we only have snapshots of the event, it is not possible to know how the victims were treated in the rest of their lives, and in what ways the rapes affected their future lives. These trials also show that even in extremis it was not possible to describe vaginal blood in public in anything other than coded ways. In most of the depressingly frequent number of rape cases involving young women and girls in this period, the blood is not mentioned in court. Often the verbal evidence of a midwife or physician that there were physical signs of rape was sufficient and hymenal blood was therefore not mentioned. This perhaps suggests that this blood makes for very uncomfortable discussion and it was largely unmentionable in public discourse, except in a limited number of instances. Indeed, the man who transcribed the proceedings in William Pheasant’s trial says directly that he has censured from his account some of the language used in court, saying, ‘My Modesty causes me to forbear nominating all the filthy and obscene Discourse which was used upon the Tryal, which lasted very long, from between Nine and Ten in the Forenoon, till Five in the Evening’; as I noted earlier, the court reporter says that ‘all which time the Court was crowded by a Multitude of People, among whom was a great many Women; who, though ordered to depart, would not stir till the Tryal was over’.\textsuperscript{66} This confession does show that whoever transcribed the proceedings of this trial felt unable to record all the evidence on the grounds of his sensibility, which means it is impossible to know if more direct reference to hymenal bleeding than ‘symptoms’ was used, but that this was the case does seem to be unlikely given the pattern of euphemism deployed in other trials of the same

\textsuperscript{66} ‘William Pheasant: Sexual Offences, 13 December 1699’.
crime. It is perhaps the case that the ‘filthy and obscene Discourse’ related to the sexual acts performed upon the body of the child victim.

The public trials show that there was not an easy and decorous way of discussing hymenal blood. However, when it is described in medical treatises and more conventionally literary texts it is often done so in the language and register of war, conflict, and conquest. Culpeper, for example, frames his section on virgins’ bleeding with the question: ‘Whether do all Virgins at the first bout, or Copulation, bleed?’67 ‘Bout’ is an ambiguous term which can mean simply ‘occasion’, but equally can mean a ‘round of a fight’. This register extends back at least to the Hippocratic texts which describe healthy menstrual blood as being ‘ruddy and florid resembling the Blood flowing out of the Veins of a Sacrifice newly slain’, as I stated above, which is recited by John Freind in his menstruation monograph, *Emmenologia*.68 Similarly, Gibson uses this phrase to describe hymenal blood.69

The language of violent conquest is seen outside the boundaries of the medical texts and appears in the semi-public collection of poems by the Earl of Rochester. These poems were circulated in manuscript amongst Rochester’s coterie during his lifetime, before being published in a collection following his death. Rochester’s famous lyric ‘The Imperfect Enjoyment’ describes an impotent lover’s rage at his penis for letting him down by becoming impotent at an inconvenient moment. The speaker claims that his penis is metaphorically a ‘dart’ or arrow, which has deflowered numerous women: ‘This dart of love, whose piercing point, oft tried, / With virgin blood ten thousand maids has dyed’.70 The penis then bears witness to this by being stained ten thousand times over in hymenal blood. Further, ‘dyed’ is a metaphor for orgasm in this case which was often described as a type of death.71 The register of combat and conquest is in many ways a natural progression from the *carpe diem* genre of literature, in which the man courts the woman with the aim of her letting down her defences and giving into his demands for sex. As asserted in Chapter One, this genre has

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67 *Directory for Midwives*, p. 97.
68 *Emmenologia*, p. 2.
70 *Selected Works*, p. 16, lines 37-38.
71 *OED* 7d: ‘Most common as a poetical metaphor in the late 16th and 17th cent’.
dark undertones, for the woman is expected to resist: if she did not then she would face ruin.

*The Gentlewoman’s Companion* (1673) published under the name of Hannah Woolley contains narrative scenarios for the guidance of the eponymous gentlewoman. One topic of note in this conduct guide is advice for ‘Virgins to Suitors’. In this section the guide gives many examples from antiquity of women who have either died for their honour (virginity), or who have lost this and regretted it, becoming like the ‘two Maidens living in Leuctra, a Town in Boeotia’, who allowed two suitors to get them drunk on wine and who, in an allusion to their newly wretched state and lost hymenal blood, then ‘became resolute Actors in their own bloody Tragedy’. The advice manual goes on to narrate the story of a London girl who enacts an elaborate plot to attack the man who has acted as a suitor towards her in a way which compromises her honour. The couple agree to meet in the ‘country’ (a loaded allusion to ‘country matters’ a well-known allusion to sexual activity) and duly ride out to the meeting place. Once there, rather than succumbing to the man’s idea of a romantic tryst, she tells him that he must fulfil a condition before she could agree to his embraces:

(calling him aside) [she says] that she would never consent to any such thing with any man, unless she had first tried his valour in the field; and to that purpose she had furnished herself with a Sword, and therefore bid him draw, he smilingly refused, as thinking she was in jest, but seeing by her home-passes how earnestly she prosecuted his life, he was constrained to draw; but this *Virago*, which was metal to the back, disarm’d him in an instant, and had like to have made this a bloody combat, instead of an amorous conflict. Our amazed Gallant not knowing what to think, say, or do, was at last compell’d to beg his life of her; in granting which, she bestow’d on him plentifully her Kicks, advising him ever after to be more wary in the attempting a Maidens Honour.

This example of the way that virginity was accounted for in advice literature complies with the conventions that are seen in the medical literature and poetic accounts, in as far as the language of defloweration is consistently that of war and conflict. The author of *The Gentlewoman’s Companion* says that this meeting that turned into a duel became a ‘bloody combat’ rather than the ‘amorous conflict’

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73 *The Gentlewomans Companion*, p. 102.
that the lover was seeking. This register is indeed evidence of the fact that Hannah Woolley did not write the text published under her name, for the language in female accounts of lost virginity is not normally that of conflict and war.74

These anecdotal narratives, combined with the play discussed earlier, demonstrate the interest in virginity as a key facet of early-modern social structure from which the literary fascination with the topic of defloration develops.

Defloration and Menstruation in Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure

Following on from these precedents, this section will offer a close reading of Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, by John Cleland in order to show how hymenal bleeding becomes eroticised, and even fetishised, as an extension of the cultural concerns about hymenal blood as a marker of virginity. The section will argue further that events in this novel also demonstrate the assumed link between menstruation and hymenal bleeding. This novel uses the same register of language to discuss defloration and sexual intercourse as the medical texts. As well as illustrating what Ivan Bloch has termed the ‘defloration mania’ of the eighteenth century, this section will show how the text is concerned specifically with the representations of hymenal bleeding as an erotic motif.75 The fact that almost all the public medical texts state that bleeding is the only true signification of a virgin upon first intercourse, even if its absence does not disprove a woman’s virginity, shows the extent to which this symbolic event was looked for. This section will also contrast the depictions of defloration in medical and erotic texts with the same scenes in the female authored amatory fiction that it was contemporary with, to show how female authors respond to defloration.

Peter Sabor has commented on the verisimilitude of Cleland’s depictions of physical responses in the novel in relation to the ‘physiology of sexual reactions’, but in this section I will extend this argument further and show that a

75 Sexual Life in England Past and Present (Royston: Oracle, 1996), p.167. This text was first printed in 1938 and Bloch is credited with inventing this term.
range of female physiological functions are drawn with an accuracy that chimes completely with that of the mainstream - as well as the more salacious - contemporary medical treatises.\footnote{Peter Sabor, ‘Introduction’, in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. i-xxxiii (p. xxiii). Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.}

*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* is understood to have been drafted in about 1730, while its author John Cleland was in India working for the East India Company, making it approximately contemporaneous with texts such as John Maubray’s *Female Physician*, and the anonymous *A Rational Account of the Natural Weaknesses of the Female Sex*, despite the fact that the novel did not appear until after Cleland was imprisoned for debt in the late 1740s.\footnote{Elsewhere, Peter Sabor also states that Cleland claimed he had written the novel in Bombay in his early twenties ‘in order to show his colleague at the East India Company, Charles Carmichael, that it was possible to write about a prostitute without using vulgar language’. See Peter Sabor, ‘Cleland, John (bap. 1710, d. 1789)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <http://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 3April 2009].}

Indeed, it is probable that, had Cleland not been in financial need, he would not have published his titillation novel, and it would have remained in manuscript circulation, much like the Earl of Rochester’s erotic poetry did until after his death. The text appeared in print in 1748-49, and was received with a great deal of disapprobation, for its content is largely pornographic. While in prison it is understood that Cleland reworked the novel for publication and so it is possible to see the influence of later fiction; indeed, critics claim that novels such as Samuel Richardson’s conduct novels such as *Pamela* (1741) are ‘the most important models’ for this text.\footnote{Gaétan Brulotte and John Phillips, eds, *Encyclopaedia of Erotic Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 249.}

In many ways, however, the novel’s textual antecedents are, as Peter Sabor notes, Jacobean and Caroline erotic poetry such as that of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Ivan Bloch contends that, ‘[t]he history of English “erotic” literature, that is to say, publications dealing with sexual matters for their own sake begins with the Restoration period’.\footnote{Sexual Life in England Past and Present, pp. 502-03.} As I have shown both here, and in previous chapters, Rochester’s poetry is very similar to *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* in that it, too, contains graphic and frank depictions of female physiology. Julie Peakman further places this novel in a historical context which
describes its French and Italian antecedents.\textsuperscript{80} It is further possible to see earlier examples of the genre in English fiction, with the novella \textit{The London Jilt: or, The Politick Whore} which shares close thematic links with \textit{Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure}, as both depict the life of a woman who earns her living as a prostitute and a sometime mistress.\textsuperscript{81} Furthermore, both protagonists pretend to be virgins to earn more money from the sale of their ‘maidenheads’ at a premium. The main thematic concern of \textit{Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure} extends the theme of defloration seen in these antecedents, and presents a series of deflations, both from the protagonist selling of her faked virginity and from a number of other characters’ reports of their defloration. All these scenes are shown to be implausibly bloody, revealing an obsession with hymenal bleeding. Whilst the theme of defloration has been discussed critically, what has not been explored is the key way that this novel diverges from others in the genre, but connects to Restoration poetry: its graphic and repeated portrayal of hymenal blood. The novel’s portrayals of menstrual bleedings in conjunction with this have also escaped critical attention.

It was a common belief that in line with the Hippocratic assertion that if a woman’s menses were somehow blocked, either in a grown woman, or a greensick girl that the superfluous menstrual blood would seek egress from the body by any means possible. Women with menstrual suppression might therefore be expected to experience regular, monthly nosebleeds in lieu of their menstrual period, with the result that, commonly, nosebleeds were assumed to be menstrual, and encouraged for the sake of the woman’s health. Helen King explains that ‘[t]o understand what is happening here in Hippocratic terms we need to remember that menstrual blood was thought to be the excess from the diet. Outside acute fevers, nosebleeds in women were seen simply as menstruation by a longer and less orthodox route’.\textsuperscript{82} So, in Hippocratic teaching, a nosebleed in a young woman like Fanny Hill would be considered ‘particularly significant - and thus worth noting in a case history - because it should show that the dangerous areas

\textsuperscript{81} [Alexander Oldys], \textit{The London Jilt: or, The Politick Whore}, 2 vols (London: Hen. Rhodes, 1683), I. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
\textsuperscript{82} Hippocrates’ \textit{Woman}, p. 51.
of the body have been traversed [by the menstrual blood], and hence that a certain point of internal physical maturity has been reached'.

In the account of the first attempt at Fanny’s defloweration, an elderly man referred to by Fanny as an ‘old goat’ (p. 17) and a ‘monster’ (p. 21), pays Mrs Brown for this service. He suffers from premature ejaculation in his eagerness to achieve his goal of raping Fanny, but soon recovers himself and makes a second attempt. There is much tussling described as Fanny seeks to extricate herself from his groping, and when she calls the maid to come to her assistance she is seized with a massive nosebleed: ‘my hair all dishevell’d, my nose gushing out blood, which did not a little tragedize the scene’ (p. 20). At the sight of this blood, the maid assumes ‘that matters had gone greater lengths than they really had, and that the courtesy of the house had been actually consummated upon me’ (p. 20), and so believes that intercourse has taken place, advising the man to leave the room so that Fanny can compose herself. The blood at the most literal level can be taken as being seen by the maid as referent to the hymenal blood that Fanny would have lost had the rape proceeded. It is also, I would argue, a metaphor for menstrual blood which was often thought to begin flowing upon first coition since the hymenal blood was not always distinct from menstrual blood, and nosebleeds were taken to be menstrual. The Hippocratic text *On Generation* explains that sexual activity might bring on the menses not just by widening the vessels of the vagina (which in the case of Fanny Hill has not happened here since the sex act did not take place), but that ‘intercourse by heating the blood and rendering it more fluid gives an easier passage to the menses’: of course, it would not be necessary for full intercourse to occur to instigate the process of arousal that is alluded to here. This scene works to show that Fanny is now sexually mature, as in this cultural context sex before menarche was prohibited. In order to achieve this, Cleland offers a misogynistic inversion of the notion that thoughts of love and romance are mediators to start her menses.

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83 *Hippocrates’ Woman*, p. 73. The danger was that unable to escape the narrow vessels of an immature woman the blood might become lodged in the heart or other internal organs.

84 *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 17 and p. 21. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.


Although it cannot be the case here that sexual intercourse has brought on this bleeding, Fanny is shown to be a sexual entity, an event that is enough to produce a physiological response and menarche.

This scene contrasts entirely with the motif in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* in which Marina is sold into prostitution in much the same way as Fanny Hill. Marina, however, will not yield to the men who want to take her virginity and vows to remain chaste: ‘If fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters deep, / Untied I still my virgin knot will keep’.  

Marina makes it clear that she will kill herself rather than compromise her chastity, but this does not prove to be necessary, as she successfully talks two gentlemen out of taking her virginity. Indeed, both are reformed and vow not to use brothels again. The first gentleman comments: ‘Ile doe any thing now that is vertuous, but am out of the road of rutting for ever’ (Appendix A). The brothel keepers put part of her resistance down to ‘greensickness’ (19. 23), again highlighting how Renaissance drama uses the trope of greensickness to be a sign of female resistance rather than an illness per se. After Marina convinces another ‘maiden-hunter’, Lysimachus, the governor of Mytilene, not to rape her, the brothel owner agrees to a bargain: Marina will teach singing, weaving, sewing, and dance to local ‘honest women’ (19. 240) on the condition that if she is not successful, she will allow the brothel-keepers to sell her virginity to the ‘basest groom’ (19. 236). Cleland’s citation from *Romeo and Juliet* late in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* indicates that he was certainly aware of Shakespeare’s plays and so could have been aware of this scene about an idealised virgin who would rather die rather than be ruined. Fanny Hill stands in stark contrast, as her sexualisation at the hands of the other prostitutes means in early-modern terms, that her chastity is compromised long before she loses her virginity (p. 164).

Ruth Bernard Yeazell has argued that, rather than a being significant event, Fanny’s nosebleed is a parody of Clarissa’s in Samuel Richardson’s eponymous novel (1747). However, unlike Fanny’s spontaneous nosebleed, Clarissa’s happens in similar circumstances but as a result of a fall on a chair.

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However, the echoes of Clarissa can be seen not only in the bathetic comment Fanny makes about her bleeding serving to ‘tragedize the scene’ (p. 20), as Yeazell argues, but also in the significance of the bleeding. In Clarissa, Lovelace assumes that this blood must have come from a violent penetration, and that Clarissa must have stabbed herself with a concealed instrument, because he expects that she would, like Marina, rather die than be ruined. So in this text Clarissa’s nosebleed also acts as a portent for her imminent defloration.89

The significance of the nosebleed as a prediction of future defloration and male and female sexual desire is also used in Eliza Haywood’s Lasselia: or, The Self-Abandon’d (1723). In an inversion of the theme, Monsieur de l’Amye’s nose bleeds three drops of blood onto a white handkerchief that Lasselia ‘happen’d to have in her Hand’.90 ‘Handkerchief’ is a polite euphemism for a menstrual cloth in the eighteenth century and so the image of blood falling onto Lasselia’s virginal, white handkerchief is doubly significant.91 Before this incident the narrator makes a point of mentioning that until that day, the only pleasures Lasselia had known were ‘unmix’d and pure’ (p. 18). The implication of this event is not lost on the assembled crowd and ‘This Accident occasion’d a good deal of pleasant Raillery; Monsieur de Valier told him, that had he been unmarried, this would have pass’d for an Omen of a future Union between him and the young Lady’ (p. 18). Lasselia’s behaviour alters from that moment, and her friends worry that she might be becoming melancholic: she, meanwhile, is initially fearful of the significance of the ‘accident’. She cries out ‘Oh! it was not for nothing that those ominous Drops of Blood fell from him on my Handkerchief! It was not for nothing I was seiz’d with such an unusual Horror! Nor is it in vain, that my Soul shrinks, and seems to dread a second Interview!’ (p. 20). However, when Lasselia does see de l’Amye again she watches him until she becomes ‘quite ravish’d in Contemplation’ (p. 22). In this novel, then, as

90 Secret Histories, Novels and Poems, 4 vols (London: Dan. Browne and S. Chapman, 1742), IV, p. 18. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
91 John Toland, Hypatia; or, The History of a Most Vertuous, Most Learned, and Every Way Accomplished Lady (London: M. Cooper and others, 1753), p. 23, says that, ‘at a Time when she happened to be under an Indisposition ordinary to her Sex; she took a Handkerchief, of which she had been making some Use on that Occasion’. Fanny Hill, similarly, makes use of a handkerchief to wipe blood from herself after one sexual encounter (p. 76).
David Oakleaf correctly notes, ‘The drops of de l'Ameye's blood that stain Lasselia's handkerchief embody his passion but also anticipate her sexual initiation’.  

As I have shown, the quasi-menstrual nosebleed in Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure acts both as a portent for Fanny’s imminent defloration, but also serves as a trope for her menarche. That the theme of sexual activity stimulating the menses is indeed what is being alluded to in the nosebleed scene to is confirmed when this theme is replayed in what Fanny terms her second defloration (p. 76). In a development of the narrative, Fanny is a kept mistress who seeks revenge on her lover for sleeping with her maid. She decides to seduce Mr H’s servant, an unnamed country boy recently brought into Mr H’s employ to run errands between the lovers. Fanny discovers that the boy is very well endowed and that this makes sex difficult, and after a closely narrated act she is left bleeding:

the widen’d wounded passage refunded a stream of pearly liquids, which flowed down my thighs, mixed with streaks of blood, marks of the ravage of that monstrous machine of his, which had now triumph’d over a kind of second maiden-head. I stole, however, my handkerchief to those parts, and wip’d them dry as I could. (p. 76)

Again, this scene deploys one of Cleland’s standard inversions, for it was the man who was losing his virginity, but for the sake of the titillation of the ritual bleeding of the female, it is Fanny who suffers a second defloration. The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d describes the medical theory of how this type of sex could cause this bleeding, providing further evidence that Cleland was very familiar with the medico-erotic texts of the day. This text claims that it is unlikely that the wife of a man with an excessively long penis will conceive, for

the very approach […] puts her into a cruel torment. Indeed, the pain she suffers in being touch’d by it makes her lose her Senses, and quite stupefies her, the Man tearing her Nymphae murder her Caruncles, splitting the passage, forcing down to the very bottom of the Womb. For which Action ensues a great effusion of Blood, looseness, and other inconveniences that she is exposed to, after having been caress’d in such a manner. (p. 35)

This text goes so far as to suggest that a woman may go to court to argue assault if her husband has so large a penis that it inflicts damage on this scale, but further goes on to offer a solution, through the manufacturing of a device which stops the penis from penetrating so deeply.\footnote{The reader needs to cut a hole in a cork, one or two inches in length as required and cover it in cotton wadding and a linen cover, to which you attach a string to tie the device around the man’s legs having first placed the penis through the middle of the cork. This will serve to limit the depth of penetration, and the author advises the prudent housewife to make two of these so that she is never caught without one (p. 35).}

In common with the menarche scene, the blood lost at this defloration also proves to be an occasion of menstrual bleeding. Mr H. happens to visit Fanny shortly after her encounter with the servant. Fanny is saved from having to have sex with him - and thus having her recent sexual activity discovered - by her menstrual period, started by the ‘defloration’ in the manner which Lazare Rivière describes when he says that greensick women often ‘have their Terms the first night after marriage, and that others who are in good health have them before their accustomed time’.\footnote{The Practice of Physick in Sixteen Several Books, p. 403.} Fanny says ‘here the woman sav’d me: I pretended a violent disorder of my head, and a feverish heat, that indispos’d me too much to receive his embraces. He gave in to this and very good naturedly desisted’ (p. 78).

That Fanny is telling Mr H that she is indisposed because of her menstrual period, and Mr H understands the coded way in which she talks, is confirmed in a further encounter with the servant a month later during her next menstrual period, when she is surprised by a visit from a suspicious Mr H ‘[a]bout a month after our first intercourse, one fatal morning (the season Mr H rarely or never visited me in)’ (p. 84).\footnote{That ‘season’ is a euphemism for menstruation was demonstrated by William Whately’s \textit{A Bride-Bush; or, A Wedding Sermon} (London: William Jaggard, 1617), p. 44. Whately says of intercourse that ‘their nuptial meeting must be seasonable, and at lawful times. There is a season when God and Nature feloynes man and wife in this respect’ (p. 44). Whately goes on to explain that this season is during menstrual and lochial bleeding. Thomas Gibson, cited above, also uses this euphemism when describing a woman marrying during menstruation who might then cause her husband to doubt her virginity, saying, ‘she’s unblameable saving for her imprudence to marry at that season’. See \textit{The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomised}, p. 155.} This also confirms that Mr H would not normally visit his mistress for sex during her menstrual period, making Fanny feel safe to indulge in her affair, and further eroticises the deviant nature of the affair by suggesting that she would continue to be sexually active with the servant at this time.

In addition to the narrations of the several defloration Fanny considers herself to have received, and the elaborately described defloration of her peers,
the theme that defloration should produce copious amounts of blood is developed as Fanny describes selling a faked version of a maidenhead to a customer of the brothel she works at. In addition to the blood of her deflorations, Fanny narrates the practice of selling her faked virginity, which is similarly shown to be a very bloody event in this novel. This practice is briefly alluded to in *The London Jilt* when Cornelia refers to her maidenhead being ‘sold the first time’ and says ‘Be not amazed, O Reader, that I say the first time, for I have lost it several times after the manner of *Italy*, to which purpose I made use of a certain Water, which rendered me always the same’ (p. 62). Although an antecedent to *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, *The London Jilt* does not narrate bloody deflorations, but rather the special water Cornelia refers to is an allusion the practice of bathing with astringent herbs that John Marten describes in his *Treatise on the Venereal Disease*. Through the use of it, he says, ‘Hundreds of Harlots’ apparently impose upon men by ‘constringing their Genitals, and bringing them to their almost former straightness, and this they do by Baths and Formentations prepar’d of Astringent Medicines’.

Fanny Hill makes it clear in her narrative that she does not use such astringents because of her natural ‘narrowness of stricture in that part’ (p. 131) but also because the use of astringents is ‘easily discover’d by the test of a warm bath’ (p. 132). As Tassie Gwilliam notes, the directions for discovering a false virginity by means of a specially prepared bath are described in detail in *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d.* Gwilliam comments on the strangely triumphant tone of the medical text here, which jars somewhat in a text that plays down the falsification of maidenheads in later comments, if such techniques can result in a happy marriage (p. 73). Gwilliam notes that ‘the fractures here suggest the passage functions less as a source of information – recipes- than as a somewhat incongruous mix of admonition, warning, and titillating narrative’. This again shows the familiarity with which Cleland uses the contemporary erotico-medical texts. However, Cleland also had a vested interest in denouncing the use of astringents because his novel promotes the fetishization of hymenal bleeding.

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97 ‘Female Fraud’, p. 522.
98 ‘Female Fraud’, p. 523.
In this scenario, Fanny is shown by Mrs Cole a secret compartment on the bed which houses a tumbler of a pseudo-bloody fluid and a pre-soaked sponge that she can use to anoint herself, her shift, and bed clothes to make it appear as if she had indeed been a virgin to the man who has paid a premium for such an act. This act has to be performed carefully once the man is asleep. It is not, therefore, set-up as a ‘device’ that secretes fluid ‘at the crucial moment of penetration’ as Yeazell, has claimed.99 This scene is one which has attracted critical attention, but often, like with Yeazell, the comments upon it are not founded in close reading of the text. For example, Julie Peakman contends that the fluid used is ‘pig’s blood’, but the textual evidence only shows this to be an unknown ‘fluid blood’ (p. 135).100 Paul-Gabriel Boucé claims that the ‘trick’ Fanny employs is to make use of ‘pellets of dried lamb’s blood’ inserted into her vagina.101

Specifically, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure shows experienced ‘maiden-hunter’, Mr Norbert, examine Fanny’s body for signs that she was deceiving him. This concurs with John Marten’s suggestion that many women are duplicitous and dishonest and that these sorts of deceptions are well-known, not only in the use of astringents to make the vagina feel tighter and more virginal, but in the more inventive uses of props such as those which Fanny utilises. Marten says that, ‘when they come to Brides, the better to deceive their Husbands, [they] have either a little blooded their Shifts before-hand, or placed a little Fish bladder of Blood so as to be broke in the Encounter’ or else, Marten suggests, they indecorously resort to timing their marriages to coincide with their menses, a practice that Gibson deplored in his anatomy guide.102 In The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d the author muses that:

Might it not be allowable for a Woman, who has past some years of her Life in unlawful Pleasures, to secure her Husband’s good Opinion on the Wedding Night by taking up some Blood (which she treasured up before) and putting it into the Privities? May it not be allowable, I say, for the Preservation of Peace in her Family, to take all the pains imaginable to be thought a discreet Woman by her Husband? (p. 73)

99 Fictions of Modesty, p. 109.
100 ‘Initiation, Defloration, and Flagellation’, p. 162.
101 Sexuality in Eighteenth Century Britain, p. 34. Boucé is linking The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d to his erroneous claim that Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure uses pellets of dried lamb’s blood. Julie Peakman similarly suggests that Venette’s text calls for dried lamb’s blood. However, all the extant editions of The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d I have examined call for non-specific ‘foreign blood’.
102 A Treatise of the Venereal Disease, p. 177; The Anatomy of Humane Bodies, p.155.
This appeal contradicts the text’s earlier claim that men ‘do not trouble their Heads about some few drops of Blood that are shed in the first Nuptial Caresses’ (p. 71). The whole narrative impetus of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* as well as that of the comments in *The Pleasures of Conjugal Love Revea’d* seem to be designed to prove the falsity of this remark.

Linguistically as well as thematically, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* follows the received wisdom announced in the public medical and health treatises. Fanny comes to London to seek a new life, upon the death of her parents, aged fourteen, (she ‘was now entering my fifteenth year’ (p. 2)), when she is in ‘the flower of youth’ (p. 1), she is the age, as I showed in the previous section, that young women’s thoughts were assumed to turn to love and sex. Fanny is pubescent at the start of the narrative, and she notes that ‘my bosom was finely rais’d, and one might discern rather the promise, than the actual growth, of the round firm breasts, that in a little time made that promise good’ (p. 14), which suggesting that she is on the point of menarche. This is confirmed in the scene where she is fondled by Phoebe, causing her to fall into a sleep which ‘relieved me by one of those luscious dreams, the transports of which are scarce inferior to those of real, waking action’ (p. 13). This motif is explored in much the same way as Wycherley has portrayed it in the character of Hippolita in the *Gentleman Dancing Master* (1672), discussed in Chapter One. This section showed that that the famous scene in which Fanny is almost raped by the first client, whom the ‘procuress’ of the brothel arranges for her, acts as a trope for her menarche and, therefore, her subsequent readiness for sexual intercourse.

Similarly, female authored amatory novels which were contemporary with *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* use language and themes that would be familiar to readers of medico-erotic treatises. So, in terms of the contrast between the ways that male and female authors have written defloration scenes, it is useful to compare another of Eliza Haywood’s novellas, *Fantomina: or Love in a Maze* (1725), with *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* because both texts have several narrative similarities. Sabor has suggested that a useful comparison can be found in their unusual depiction of prostitutes in which, he asserts, Fantomina is just as

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103 In a narrative slip, a few pages later Fanny says that she ‘was barely turned of fifteen’ (p. 14).
successful as Fanny in her ‘dealings with men’. This definition of success is somewhat bizarre in a novella in which Fantomina is depicted as becoming increasingly desperate to retain her association with Beauplaisir regardless of the consequences, and it is because of this that she is eventually ruined. This relevance is established by the lead characters of both novels, girls who, although from different ranks, have moved to London from sheltered country backgrounds, both choosing to whom to lose their virginity; although it has to be noted that Fantomina is raped by Beauplaisir, while Fanny avoids rape by escaping with her lover of choice. However, whereas Fanny is sexually aware because of her time in the brothel, Fantomina, in engaging with Beauplaisir to come back to her apartments has naively started a process that she can no longer control. As Croskery comments, the novella briefly follows the pattern of the persecuted maiden, before returning to the trajectory it started with Fantomina being the one who is ordering the narrative. That Fantomina is going to be a defloration narrative is indicated to the reader in the epigram from Edmund Waller which reads: ‘In Love the Victors from the Vanquish’d fly / They fly that wound, and they pursue that dye’. Croskery asserts that ‘Waller’s pun on the word “dye,” equates the “little death” of sexual orgasm with death itself to complicate an ostensibly simple comparison between love and war’. While Croskery is correct to note this, she has missed the further complication that, as in the discussion of Rochester’s poem above, Waller is alluding to the ‘dye’ of the hymenal blood. This epigram therefore foregrounds the main narrative imperative which is that Beauplaisir, in the role of the ‘Victor’ and in the tradition of the rakehell will tire of his conquests, the ‘Vanquish’d’, and leave to seek new conquests, and relentlessly chase new maidenheads, becoming dyed like Rochester’s speaker in hymenal blood as a trophy of his triumphs.

Given this risqué epigrammatic opening, Haywood in many ways does not need to be as explicit as Cleland in order to elicit the kinds of shock that his novel did; the fact that this text was by a woman for women readers, made it shocking enough, so in this analysis it would be wrong to expect the themes of defloration

105 ‘Masquing Desire’, p. 74.
106 Eliza Haywood, Fantomina and Other Works, ed. by Alexander Petit, Margaret Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias (Plymouth: Broadview, 2004), p. 41. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
107 ‘Masquing Desire’, p. 75.
to be handled in the same manner. Indeed, if Jane Spencer’s assertion that ‘[w]omen were defined by their sexuality; and so were women writers. A woman’s writing and her life tended to be judged together on the same terms’ is true, then it is inconceivable that a woman would have written in the same explicit terms that Cleland did. There is a prefiguring of defloration in *Lasselia* by means of a blooded handkerchief, and this is an extreme in terms of a female author on this topic. On the night that Fantomina first has intercourse with Beauplaisir, she has allowed him to assume that she is being kept as a mistress. He is subsequently shocked to discover her virgin-state, in much the same way that Charles cannot believe that Fanny is also a virgin. Fanny describes the difficulty Charles has in deflowering her because ‘that my virgin-flower was yet uncrop’d never once entered into his head, and he would have thought it idling with time and words to have question’d me upon it’ (p. 40). A key contrast between the texts is that the language of the sexual act in *Fantomina* is not always of the same register as the medical texts and *Memoirs*. Fantomina notes ‘that nothing cou’d be more tender than the Manner in which he [Beauplaisir] accosted her’ (p. 45). After being allowed to go home with her, Beauplaisir makes it clear that he will not be ‘denied that Happiness the Freedoms she allow’d him had made him hope’ (p. 46). Fantomina has put herself in a dangerous situation, in which intercourse will take place by consent or otherwise. This is similar to the scene in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* in that although Fanny goes with Charles willingly, he expects that they will sleep together following her running away with him. Again, much like the ‘defloration’ narratives of some of the prostitutes that Fanny Hill resides with the narrator comments that ‘*He* was bold; - he was resolute: *She* fearful, - confus’d, altogether unprepar’d to resist in such Encounters’ (p. 46). Fantomina’s naivety adds to the narrative tensions as the reader knows that she is to lose her honour. Fantomina then divulges to Beauplaisir that she is a virgin in the hope that she can make him reconsider his determination to have sex with her. However the narrator informs the reader that it is too late for this to have any effect for nothing could have ‘curb’d the wild Exuberance of his luxurious Wishes’ (p. 46). Unlike Cleland’s long and imagery-filled depictions of defloration, here, like in *Lasselia*, the actual defloration is

elided, and the narrator tells the reader that ‘In fine she was undone; and he
gain’d a Victory, so highly rapturous, that had he known over whom, scarce could
he have triumphed more’ (p.46). In this description of the rape, Beauplaisir is
shown as a victor in a battle, rather than a tender lover. Fantomina is left in tears,
not from the pain and bleeding that affects the prostitutes in *Memoirs of a Woman
of Pleasure*, but from remorse and ‘Distraction’ (p. 47). However, there is an
implication that it is the physical effects of defloration that Beauplaisir thinks she
is upset about, as he wonders why she is crying with regret for a ‘Consequence
which she could not but expect’ (p. 47). He then makes the standard redress that
the men in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* make recourse to, and ‘To put her
out of that Pain, he pulled out of his Pocket a Purse of Gold, entreating her to
accept of that as an Earnest of what he intended to do for her’ (p. 47). The
narrator leaves us in no doubt that Beauplaisir has no respect for his latest
conquest, feeling sure that she will end up as the high-class prostitute, or mistress,
that she pretended to be to attract his attention: he ‘did not doubt that she would
be in Reality, the Thing she so artfully had counterfeited; and had good Nature
each to pity the Misfortunes he imagin’d would be her Lot’ (p. 48). The tone
becomes mildly sententious as the narrator tells the reader that Fantomina, in
giving up her virginity in this manner, has started on the trajectory to becoming a
prostitute, much as Fanny Hill began when she was tricked into entering the
brothel: a future which Fantomina, innocently blind ‘to the Ruin of her Virtue’(p.
49), is unaware of. The medical stereotype seen in *Conjugal Love* that ‘there are
few Women but what love those desperately that obtain the first Favours from
them. They are ty’d to their first Lover’ (p. 206) to which Fanny also conforms is
played out to the extreme in *Fantomina*. Fantomina is portrayed as being
hopelessly in love with the man to whom she lost her virginity. Just as Fanny had
commented that she was now ‘infinitely endear’d by his compleat triumph over a
maidenhead’ (p. 41), the narrator of *Fantomina* explains, ‘She loved *Beauplaisir*;
it was only he whose Solicitations could give her Pleasure’ (p. 51). In fact it is
this assumed female characteristic that becomes her downfall, whereas in
*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* it is the saving of Fanny Hill as she ends the
novel happily-married to Charles.

By the end of the narrative Fantomina has a pregnancy which is
discovered by her mother who, when she discovers the manner of the conception,
exonerates Beauplaisir of responsibility. Fantomina, like Lasselia, is sent to a convent. So, then, while the female novel is nowhere near as explicit as the male-authored titillation text, the key ideas are the same: women are shown as being lascivious and deceptive. Fantomina does not sell her maidenhead repeatedly as do the prostitutes in *The London Jilt* and *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, but she does trick Beauplaisir into sleeping with her repeatedly, in a number of increasingly bizarre reinventions of herself. Similarly, both women fall in love with the man who takes her virginity. Haywood, however, sets her novella apart from the male-authored titillation novel, in that she does not celebrate the fetishisation of defloration; rather Beauplaisir, a rake, is shown to be shocked rather than thrilled that a woman would choose to give up her virginity so easily.

**Chapter Conclusion**

My research for this chapter has not located any instances of private reflection on the nature and event of hymenal blood-loss on first intercourse. The only records I have found of women to alluding to hymenal bleeding are, once again, those in the dramatic setting of a high court trial. Even then, as with all other aspects of vaginal bleeding examined in this thesis, the blood of defloration is heavily euphemised as a ‘disorder’. The prosecution witness who claimed to have seen ‘tokens’ on the victim, was, however, being very explicit and unambiguous, as ‘tokens’ is the biblical term which most of the people in court would have been familiar with. However, this silence on the part of the deflowered woman is not a significant finding, because it is an event that is deeply intimate and private, and not one that people write about even today. Therefore, the various contrasts that I have analysed here are not those between public and private accounts of this event, but rather of differing public accounts and in accounts of defloration by male and female authors. The contrast between the ways that men wrote about hymenal bleeding in public texts and the ways that women depict the same event is exemplified in the early novels of Eliza Haywood, which were written contemporaneously with *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* though published before it. In the female-authored passionate novels, the moment of defloration is necessarily skimmed over, as a subject unfit for extended commentary, but is always described as enjoyable. However, commonly the girl will fall pregnant.
after these encounters and be ruined. This not only reinforced cultural norms and anxieties about the dangers of premarital sex, but also demonstrated that the woman had enjoyed the encounter, for it was a prevailing Galenic belief that a woman had enjoyed intercourse in order to emit the seed necessary for her contribution to the conception. None of these novels, then, describes pain or blood loss at first coitus, for that would undermine the authorial purposes of titillation and, consequently, the appeal to the readership.

Hymenal bleeding is argued to be an absolute proof of defloration in both medical and pseudo-medical texts. The similarity between the blood ideally lost upon first intercourse and that of a sacrificial victim, as described in the medical texts, might have broader cultural resonance too. Aphra Behn’s poem ‘The Disappointment’, for example, describes how when Lysander attempts to rape Cloris, his sudden impotence means that he is ‘unable to perform the sacrifice’.

However, most texts stress that a lack of bleeding does not signify that a woman was not a virgin. Cleland rather disingenuously nods to this convention when he has Fanny say that ‘as to the usual bloody symptoms of defloration, which, if not always, are generally attendant on it’ (p. 132). This points to the event having a greater significance as a cultural construct than as a real physiological event. This is borne out by the fact that hymenal bleeding is depicted in every medium from public plays to less public, but more explicit, manuscript poems, and their natural extension of published proto-pornographic novels. This cultural construct of the ideal virgin being one who bleeds copiously upon first intercourse is founded in the valuable nature of virginity. A marriage negotiation could succeed or fail on the basis of suspected unchastity, and women suspected of not being virgins were considered ruined. The idea of a fetishised element to the bleeding must, therefore, have grown from the high social value of virginity, with the forced defloration becoming a highly charged, deviant, eroticised act. This is reflected in the further contrast that has been analysed here between the ways that male and female authors narrate the loss of virginity. This analysis has demonstrated that the female author is both less graphic and apparently less interested in portraying

109 ‘The Disappointment’, in The Works of Aphra Behn, ed. by Janet Todd, 7 vols (London: William Pickering, 1992), I, pp. 65-69 (line 70). In common with the female authors discussed above, Behn avoids narrating the moment of defloration as Chloris runs away before Lysander has the chance to recover his erection.
a blood loss as a signifier of lost virginity, but that both types of literature engage, as do the medical texts, with the register of war and violence, and of a victor and vanquished, as metaphors for first intercourse.

Given the cultural linkage between the blood of defloration and menstruation, a key factor in the depiction of specifically virginal blood is the way that it escapes the sexual taboos that menstrual blood routinely incurs. James Drake’s anatomy guide states, following the often reproduced myths about the poisonous nature of menstrual blood that, ‘the Malignancy of them [menstrual periods] is so great, that they Excoriate [pull the skin off] the Parts of Men by the Meer contact’. 110 Drake claims to be reproducing these myths to show the ridiculous nature of them, but is in doing so exposing them to a wider audience. That claims about the dire effects of menstrual blood on the penis were being produced in medical treatises, the idea that contact with hymenal and menstrual blood must have been seen as a risk-prone event, further enhancing its erotic potential. The amount of blood-loss detailed in some of the medical texts and in the erotic literature of the period further alludes to this, for physicians expected only minimal stains of blood from a ruptured hymen, yet erotic texts narrate a large and flamboyant flowing. The eroticisation of hymenal blood also is at odds with the medical and biblical direction regarding sexual intercourse at the time of vaginal bleeding. After being reunited with Charles, Fanny holds his erect penis ‘feeling the stiff stake that had been adorn’d with the trophies of my despoil’d virginity’ (p. 182). In the same way, Rochester’s impotent speaker recalls how his now flagging penis has been adorned ‘With virgin blood ten thousand maids has dyed’. 111 When Fanny sells her fake maidenhead to Mr Norbert and he sees her thighs, shift, and sheets ‘stain’d with what he readily took for virgin gore’ (p. 136) in the morning, far from being repulsed or wary, he is aroused a further time: ‘nothing could equal his joy and exultation’ (p. 136), and he persuades her to let him have further intercourse while he was ‘triumphant and like a cock clapping his wings over a downtrodden mistress’ (p. 137). Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure is, as I have argued, a text which is explicit in its linking hymenal bleeding, the flower of virginity, to menstruation, the flowers, in line with early-

111 Selected Works, p. 16, lines 37-38.
modern cultural assumptions about the where this blood comes from and why it appears. Peakman argues that ‘The interest in defloration was dependent, in part, on the excitement aroused by blood’.\footnote{Initiation, Defloration, and Flagellation’, p. 160.} If menstruation and vaginal bleeding was something which women tried to be discrete about, even in an era in which personal bodily privacy was hard to achieve then it is natural that this could become eroticised as things which are forbidden, or even taboo often are.\footnote{The remarks by Pierre Dionis and James Drake that modest women tried to make sure that their menstrual blood was invisible on their clothing, discussed in Chapter Two, suggest that women tried to manage their menstrual flow with some discretion.} That virtually all the sexual contact in this novel involves blood, including the scenes of flagellation, further suggests an erotic link to a blood taboo.\footnote{‘Initiation, Defloration, and Flagellation’, p. 156.} The biblical and medical imputations about the dire consequences of contact with menstrual blood, discussed above and in Chapter Two, might further add an erotic thrill to this imagery. Peakman suggests that the reason for hymenal blood being such an erotic signifier in defloration texts was that

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\text{defloration and the conquering of virgins were prominent themes in both eighteenth-century erotica and everyday life. This was closely linked to the exposure of blood which itself was tied up with themes of family honor and masculine territorial rites. As such, writers recognized blood as a sexually exciting phenomenon, and the introduction of blood to the erotic material rendered the context more sexually arousing.} \footnote{‘Initiation, Defloration, and Flagellation’, p. 165-66. Peakman then argues that the flagellation scenes are a natural extension of this eroticization of blood.}
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While it is clearly true that family organised marriage contracts did depend heavily on the bride’s virginity as part of the negotiations, to say that this was an aspect of everyday life is overstating the case. I would, rather, argue that because in everyday life hymenal bleeding was actually quite a rare and unusual event, one which was often not present even in a true defloration, it has assumed erotic status as an elusive, yet culturally exciting event. The fact that the depiction of this event in early-modern medical treatises portrays the hymenal and vaginal bleeding as problematic and an unreliable signifier of virginity certainly support this reading. The medical texts, too, in their continuous arguments about the nature and source of this blood demonstrate further assumptions about female physiology as being problematic and impossible to properly identify. As Tassie
Gwilliam states, in these texts ‘[t]he simple system in which a bodily barrier or threshold literally and symbolically divides “maid from Wife” coexists awkwardly with anatomical uncertainty; the anatomical uncertainty opens up a threatening gap that must be filled with metaphor and ideology’. So many medical texts go to great lengths to explain an absence of vaginal bleeding on first intercourse, that it must be the case that this bleeding was part of the cultural construction of how an idealised female body should perform and react. Moreover, this social construction here shows that hymenal bleeding is still seen as being part of a woman’s growth to maturity, as a significant stage in her growth to full womanhood. For this reason, although the medical texts were keen to explain that this blood might not appear upon defloration, they were equally keen to theorise about its existence and not to avoid the issue, because it was seen as a culturally significant life event in a girl-to-woman life cycle.

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116 ‘Female Fraud’, p. 525.
Chapter Four: The ‘Cleansing of the Flowers after the Birth’: Post-Partum Bleeding

After marriage and the initiation into womanhood, the assumption in early-modern society was that an early birth was desirable to cement the relationship and secure the bloodline. Indeed, in their analysis of the best-selling Aristotle’s Masterpiece (in print from 1684 until the twentieth century), Roy Porter and Lesley Hall claim that ‘Aristotle’s advice may […] resonate with the anxiety, expressed by social commentators towards 1700, that the nation was being weakened by under population’. This level of population anxiety can be seen as one reason why women’s health manuals were published in such numbers. This reinforces the biblical and cultural view that already existed that procreation was necessary and a natural event following marriage.

As discussed in the previous chapters, Helen King has shown that the Hippocratic text On Generation indicates that as a girl grows the channels in her body are opened to make ‘a way through and a way outside’. Therefore, as part of the growth to maturity, all ‘three transitional bleedings – menarche, defloration and childbirth – cause further changes in the body’, and are part of what she describes as part of the ‘gradual series of events [that] is necessary to complete the process of becoming a woman’. This belief shows that lochial (post-delivery) bleeding was seen in the ancient texts as the final element, or rite of passage, in a woman’s growth to maturity, because it meant the channels of the body were now fully open. In ancient Greek medicine the bodies of females who had not given birth were thought to be denser than in those who had. However, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the early-modern medical and cultural distinction seems to privilege the change of status from a maid to a wife, with quite mature, unmarried women retaining their maid status despite their age, if they had not gone through the process of marriage and intercourse. In this teleology, then, the progression to womanhood is made implicit in the change of

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1 Thomas Raynalde, The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman’s Book, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 124. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
4 Hippocrates’ Woman, p. 72.
status from virgin to woman or wife, and the indisputable changes wrought by giving birth do not seem to have been imbued with any ritualistic sense of change in a woman’s development in the ways that it was by the ancient medical writers. This is not to say that the process of giving birth in early-modern England was not viewed as ritualistic. In fact, the whole event of a birthing was one of the most highly ritualistic occurrences in a woman’s life. The ways that birth was managed culturally will be examined in this chapter, as part of the chapter’s main thematic concern of analyzing lochial bleeding. The reason that this bleeding needs to be examined here is not because it was a form of bleeding that altered a woman’s social status, like menarche and hymenal bleeding can be seen to have been, but because this blood was considered in the early-modern period to be an occasion of menstrual bleeding. The term ‘lochia’ for post-partum discharge starts to appear from the early seventeenth century. The fact that the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites James Cooke’s *Mellificium Chirurgiae* (1685) as the first example of the term in print is misleading, both because Cooke’s text had been in print since 1648, and because the term can be antedated some years further. The first instances I have found of this term start to appear from 1612, where it is initially marked as a foreign term: etymologically, lochia is another euphemistic term for vaginal bleeding simply deriving from a Greek phrase ‘pertaining to birth’. In explaining the nature of post-partum bleeding, the 1612 translation of James Guillemeau’s midwifery guide states:

> As a Woman newly deliver’d is subject to many accidents, by the overmuch flowing of her naturall courses: So is she likewise subject to more dangerous and deadly chances, if they be suppressed and staid. *Galen* saith, that these after-purgings, (which he calleth *Lechia*) are purgings of ill humors, which have been gathered in the bodie all the time, that the woman went with child.

In doing this he not only offers a history for the term ‘lochia’, but provides explicit evidence of the perceived relationship between menstruation and post-partum bleeding. Following the Hippocratic text *On the Nature of the Child*,

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5 The linked-entry on this text has the date 1616 preceding 1685 in parenthesis, but this must be an inputting error for Cooke was born in 1614 (d. 1694). The 1685 edition claims to be the fourth edition, but in fact this text had been published in 1648, 1655, 1662, and 1676 before the 1685 edition, making this the fifth edition; it would go on to further printings from 1693 where the edition was revised by physician Thomas Gibson.

6 *Child-Birth; or, The Happy Deliverie of Women* (London: A. Hatfield, 1612), pp. 227-28. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
lochial bleeding in this culture is usually assumed to be a form of menstrual blood.\textsuperscript{7} In this theory women stop having menstrual periods while pregnant because the majority of the blood was thought to be consumed by the foetus, but the remainder, the part less fitting for the child to eat, is accumulated and expelled after delivery. Jane Sharp explains how before and after birth a baby was essentially assumed to be nourished by versions of menstrual blood, which is transformed in to breast milk after the delivery of the child in the womb is fed by its Navel, only they differ about the food it lives on, the Peripateticks [followers of Aristotle] say it is fed by menstrual blood which is the excrement of the last nutriment of the fleshy parts, which at certain times is purged forth by the womb in a moderate quantity, but primarily ordained for the generation and nutriment of the child.\textsuperscript{8}

From 1615 Helkiah Crooke is using the term lochia in a naturalised English way, albeit italicised in the way that many proper medical nouns are in vernacular texts. Crooke writes that ‘That also which is avoyd ed after the Infant is borne into the world called \textit{Lochia} doeth testifie to the heate of a Male childe’.\textsuperscript{9}

The term lochia, then, is one that is printed in English texts from the early seventeenth century, but remains relatively uncommon, and not a term, I would suggest, that the labouring woman or indeed her midwife would be familiar with. This might be evidenced by the fact that Sharp does not use the term lochia in her midwifery guide, despite its appearing in one of her main source texts, Nicholas Culpeper’s \textit{Directory for Midwives}.\textsuperscript{10} Sharp had claimed that she had purposely omitted ‘hard words’ (p. 12) from her book, which suggests that lochia was not a term she, as a practising midwife, would use. This remains the case into the eighteenth century. Lochia was also given as ‘Loches’ by Culpeper when he translated Jean Riolan’s Surgery and Chemistry guide from Latin. This text claims that ‘the Loches, or Child-bed Purgations […] is nothing but that blood

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{The Midwives Book; or, The Whole Art Of Midwifry Discovered}, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 110. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man} (London: William Jaggard, 1615), p. 274.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{A Directory for Midwives; or, A Guide for Women, in their Conception, Bearing and Suckling their Children} (London: Peter Cole, 1662), p. 198.
squeezed out, which had been shut up between the Spongy sides of the womb’, which again suggests that lochia and its synonyms are elite terms. Thomas Raynalde, in his influential *The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman’s Book*, in print for over one hundred years, calls the lochial flow ‘flowers’ (p. 124). Jane Sharp uses the term purgation and its plural regularly, which is another synonym for menstruation, but also has a whole section entitled ‘The Menstrual blood stopt’ which is concerned with the nature of lochial blood and its proper duration (p. 179). In the eighteenth century midwife Sarah Stone refers to normal lochial flow as ‘cleanings’, a term which, although of the same meaning as purgation, might imply a slight understanding of difference between lochia and menstruation. However, elsewhere in her book Stone routinely uses ‘menses’ as the term for both bleeding in pregnancy and afterwards.

Abnormally heavy lochial bleeding was often referred to as ‘flooding’, a term that survives to today for heavy menstrual periods. Physician Thomas Willis implies that women themselves use the word ‘flooding’ to refer to lochial flow, when he writes about headaches that are caused by suppressed menstrual periods or suppressed lochial flow:

And in the first place, as to the pains of the Head, that seem to arise from the Womb, there is nothing more frequent than that upon the suppression of the Monthly Flowers, or the *Lochia* after being brought to bed, or (as they call it) the flooding, for cruel Headaches to succeed.

This is interesting as the use of the term ‘flooding’ is presented as a report of women’s vernacular, but the evidence both from Alice Thornton’s autobiography and from Sarah Stone’s midwifery case notes, to be discussed in detail in the

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11 *A Sure Guide; or, The Best and Nearest Way to Physick and Chyrurgery*, trans. by Nicholas Culpeper and W. R. (London: Peter Cole, 1657), p. 89. This sentence makes it into Randle Holme’s dictionary, when he uses it to gloss loches: ‘*Loches*, are Child-bed purgations; which is the squeezing out of that blood, which was shut up in the spongy sides of the Womb’. Holmes includes in a separate entry for lochia: ‘*Lochia*, are those things that are *evacuated* by Women in Child-bed, after the birth of the *Faetus*, and the *Secundinæ Membranæ*’. See Randle Holme, *The Academy of Armory; or, A Storehouse of Armory and Blazon Containing the Several Variety of Created Beings, and How Born in Coats of Arms, Both Foreign and Domestick* (Chester: Randle Holmes, 1688), p. 443.

12 *A Complete Practice of Midwifery* (London: T. Cooper, 1737), p. 136. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

13 The last recorded use of this term in the *OED* is 1891, but it is a term which remains in conversational use today.

14 *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes which is that of the Vital and Sensitive of Man* (London: Thomas Dring, 1683), p. 124.
following, is that women saw a distinction between normal flow and flooding which was considered as abnormally heavy lochial bleeding. There is a brief piece of evidence from the seventeenth century to suggest that the term ‘flooding’ was also in common usage at this time to represent menorrhagia: Jan Groeneveldt pseudonymously published a rebuttal of a judgement from the Royal College which had accused him of malpractice on a female patient. Amongst his many claims in his defence he suggested that his accusers had not taken into account the nature of menstrual flow, commenting:

Had you but consider’d the Menstrua; how careful Nature is in the Evacuation of that, tho’ superfluous Blood; how gradually she doth it, in small quantities and several days; tho then of no use to the Body, because it was intended for another: What a small Excess is called Flood, and accompanied with Fainting.  

Similarly an early eighteenth-century English translation of Claude Quillet’s Callipaedia: or, The Art of Getting Beautiful Children (1710) refers to the belief that a conception during menstruation would result in a child with leprosy and contains the couplet: ‘For what’s more Pois’nous than this Female Flood? / The dregs of Life, and skimmings of the Blood’. However, it would seem that the term ‘flooding’ is mainly applied to excessive lochial flow. Like Sarah Stone, John Pechey’s women’s health manual uses this distinction as throughout the text he refers to ‘flooding’ for excessive lochia and ‘lochia’ for normal post-partum bleeding. By the late seventeenth century, chapters given over to a separate explanation of ‘flooding’ begin to be seen. François Mauriceau’s The Diseases of Women with Child, and in Childbed is one such text. ‘Flooding’ is used to describe heavy bleeding in pregnancy too, a rare condition that is caused by such events as placental abruption. Mauriceau’s chapter emphasises that there is a

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15 Lysiponius Celer, The Late Censors Deservedly Censured and their Spurious Litter of Libels Against Dr. Greenfield, and Others, Justly Expos’d to Contempt by the Following Answer to All (London: Jan Groenevelt, 1698), p. 19.
17 A General Treatise of the Diseases of Maids, Bigbellied Women, Child-Bed-Women, and Widows Together with the Best Methods of Preventing or Curing the Same (London: Henry Bonwick, 1696), p. 4 describes some of the illnesses that women might be subject to after giving birth such as ‘suppression of the Lochia, Floodings, Fevers’, etc.
18 trans. by Hugh Chamberlen (London: R. Clavel and others, 1672), p. 102. This book ran to many editions into the eighteenth century. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
fundamental difference between menstrual bleeding in pregnancy and flooding, which is that

The Courses come periodically at the times accustomed, without Pain, distilling little by little from the Neck of the Womb, during Pregnancy, after which it totally ceaseth: but much the contrary this loss of Blood comes from the Bottom of the Womb, with pain, and almost of a sudden, and in great abundance, and continues flooding daily, without intermission. (p. 100)\(^{19}\)

It would seem, however, that women were just as reluctant to refer to their lochial flow as they were to their menses, and so Alice Thornton, for example, talks about being ill in bed with 'those', meaning her post-partum bleeding, saying: ‘[a]ll the time of my poore child’s illness I my selfe was at death’s dore by the extreame excesse of those, uppon the fright and terror came uppon me, soe great floods that I was spent, and my breath lost, my strength departed from me, and I could not speake for faintings’.\(^{20}\)

The euphemistic approach to the subject of lochial flow is seen in the records of a case of infanticide tried at the Old Bailey. The trial of Sarah Hayes for infanticide on the 9 April 1746, was balanced upon whether she had miscarried a child, or whether she pushed a live baby into the communal privy where it suffocated.\(^{21}\) Hayes had been dismissed from her servant’s role when her mistress discovered that she was pregnant, and went to live in a boarding house and worked as a laundress. Her new landlady only discovered that Hayes had delivered after a young woman of the household, charged with changing the single mattress upon the bedstead for a larger one, and discovered that it was marked. A witness, Mary Pilchard, was asked by the prosecution ‘What do you know of this Affair?’ To which she replied:

Please you, my Lord, I know no more of it, than that I lay in the next Room to hers that Night, and the Night following she was to lie along with this Woman; and when they went to make her Bed, this Woman call’d to me, and shew’d me the Things that I thought was usual on

\(^{19}\) In the later editions, Chamberlen adds a marginal note saying ‘Sometimes’ to the idea of pain The Diseases of Women with Child, and in Childbed (London: Andrew Bell, 1710), p. 87.

\(^{20}\) The Autobiography of Alice Thornton, ed. by Charles Jackson (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1875), p. 92. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.

those Occasions; upon which I went down to call my Landlady: When she came up Stairs, she said there had been a Child born.

Pilchard was asked to elaborate on what exactly she had seen, but replied, ‘I don't know, Sir; Things as usual at such Times’. Even admitting that the stains were of a bloody nature seems to have been too indecorous to say in open court, and once again lochial flow, like menstruation, is euphemised as a vague, non-specific way as ‘Things’. Due to both the deteriorated state of the child’s corpse recovered from the vault, and uncertainties about whether Hayes had provided for the delivery in terms of preparing childbed linen, Hayes was acquitted.

Quantity of Blood Lost after a Delivery

Just as many medical books offer theories about the duration and quantity of the flow during menstruation, so lochial bleeding is similarly theorised. Most authors agree that it is impossible to determine a mean amount of blood-loss, as this varies from woman to woman, but this theoretical stance is undermined by the number of concerns raised about how best to cure both too light a flow and one that is too heavy. However, in terms of how long a woman should bleed for following a delivery, early-modern medical commentators had both religious and ancient medical doctrines to draw upon. James Guillemeau writes that:

> So that we may easily see how fit and necessary it is, that these purgings or courses should come away moderately, and in an indifferent quantity. This the Chirurgeon should know by observing the time, and the quantity, which is limited for them, set downe in divers places by the ancient writers. (pp. 221-22)

So under this regime the duration of the flow is shown to be the crucial diagnostic tool, and the prescribed quantities are similarly as large as the quantities that were presented as normal in a menstrual period. Guillemeau explains:

> As for the quantity and proportion of these purgings Hippocrates is of opinion, that the purgings which a woman should have every moneth, should bee a pint and a halfe, or thereabouts. And in his booke de natura Pueri, hee would have a woman in childbed at the beginning should purge about thirteene or fourteen ounces, or a pint, and so the whole space of thirty daies for a man child, and forty two daies for a maiden-childe, every day diminishing the quantity till it wholly leave her. (p. 222)
However, as with menstruation, there were grave concerns about what might happen if a woman bled too profusely. Sharp’s comments in her very brief section ‘Against the too great running down of the Menstrual blood’ (p. 180) that ‘This disease seldom troubles women after delivery’ (p. 180) represent a lone, reasonable voice in all the sensationalism that heavy lochial flow usually attracts in most printed gynaecological texts. For Sharp, as with most physicians, the concern with too light a lochial flow was equally pressing because it might cause a woman to suffer the same sorts of illnesses that she was prone to if her menses were stopped. Sharp says, if the woman is well purged she will be ‘well and lusty’ (p. 179), but if she is not then it might be appropriate to use the herbs which she has already listed in her section on the menses, to bring the ‘purgations down’ (p. 179). For too heavy a lochial flow, Sharp suggests that a mild non-invasive approach of some comfrey, knot-grass, or perhaps a drink made from powdered bramble leaves in a little wine should solve the problem. Sharp says that this ‘disease’ is often caused by poor midwifery, for when women are newly delivered, they often become constipated, due to the inactivity of lying-in and, to combat this, her midwife might give her some senna to open her bowels. Sharp considers people who suggest this to be ‘foolish’ because ‘many sad accidents have followed’ (p. 180), by which she means that the action of purging the woman might cause the body to purge blood, too, in sympathy, and that consequently this may cause excessive lochial bleeding.

The issue of heavy bleeding, or ‘flooding’, both in pregnancy and immediately afterwards, is one which attracted great excitement in most other texts, which almost universally warned of death following excessive bleeding, in pregnancy, labour, and post-delivery. A small amount of blood-loss is common in delivery, but in some cases there might be excessive bleeding in late pregnancy or labour. The two main reasons for this are firstly, placenta previa which occurs when the placenta presents in front of the cervix and hinders the birth, which is an extremely dangerous condition for mother and child. The other condition is placental abruption, mentioned above, in which the placenta suddenly becomes detached from the wall of the uterus, a very rare event, but again one which would have been life-threatening. Raynalde observes that violence such as a woman falling, or being beaten, would cause the vessels to open and an ‘inordinate flux of the flowers’ (p. 127) to follow, whereas nowadays it would be
understood that this action on the womb might have caused the placenta to become detached and so cause the bleeding. Later, Guillemeau describes the effects of a condition in which the placenta is delivered before the child which is characterised by fresh, heavy bleeding (p. 133). Guillemeau says that this is because the delivery of the placenta means that the vessels of the womb are open, but not specifically that this is the site of the abruption. Mauriceau does, however, recognise placental abruption, saying that violence to a pregnant woman might cause the secundine to detach wholly or partially and cause the bleeding by causing the uterine vessels to be opened at the point of detachment (p. 103). The danger therein was perceived to be that the child would not be able to breathe via his mother’s arteries and would smother in ‘the blood, which is contained in the wombe, and which issueth from the veynes that are open therein’ (p. 134).

In the course of his chapter on flooding Mauriceau relates a harrowing personal experience about his own sister, who died from flooding in labour. Although medical texts of the period are often interspersed with anecdotes as empirical proofs, this personal intervention into the text is somewhat atypical, in the sense that it does not cast the physician into the conventional role of saviour, but rather depicts the author as indecisive and flawed. In this episode Mauriceau is depicted as being overawed with the blood that he associated with his own mother’s blood, the nourishment that created him. In this story Mauriceau’s sister is described as not yet twenty-one and around eight and a half months pregnant when she has what seems to be a minor fall, but from which three days later she begins to bleed (p. 106). The midwife sends for a surgeon as is normal practice in these cases, but the surgeon declared that she was ‘a dead Woman, and that nothing was to be done to her, but to give all the Sacraments, and that absolutely she could not be delivered’ (p. 107). The narrative tension is compounded by Mauriceau being out of town for a number of hours, and so by the time he reaches his sister she has been given the last rites, and the room he describes is bloody and awful. Mauriceau says her blood has apparently filled above ‘twelve small Porengers, in the two hours after the Chirurgeon was returned’ (p. 109); the room also abounded with lots of ‘Napkins and other Clothes, which were all muck wet
Mauriceau’s first reaction is anger at the midwife and surgeon who have attended, and when he performs an internal examination he finds the cervix beginning to dilate, but still cannot persuade the midwife to deliver the child. The source of Mauriceau’s inability to intercede seems to be a complicated identification of the blood in the chamber with his own. Mauriceau explains that the sight of his sister’s blood which ‘proceeded from the same spring as mine own’ (p. 110) terrified him. An hour and a half elapses, in which various other surgeons are sent for but do not attend, before Mauriceau’s own ‘passions’ (p. 111) subside to the point where he is able to deliver the child. The child is then manually delivered in fewer than a hundred seconds. Mauriceau comments poignantly that the flooding did then cease, but only because his sister had evacuated all her blood and had none left to lose (p. 112). The narrative offers an indication of the power of vaginal bleeding, as the sight of blood, which is the same as his own, has the power to immobilise a prominent physician.

Sarah Stone’s midwifery guide highlights the drama that the bloody chamber can provide, and uses flooding as the theme for many of her ‘Observations’. Flooding is distinguished from normal lochial bleeding by Stone, who regularly uses the colloquial term ‘cleanings’ to mean lochia, but ‘flooding’ to mean excessive blood-loss. Her guide is also part of the heated debate about the rise of the man-midwife, whom she condemns not as Sharp does for being against biblical teaching, but because a man in the chamber compromises female modesty. Furthermore, she feels that females have a unique ‘natural’ sympathy with ‘those that have gone thro’ the Pangs of Childbearing; which, doubtless, occasion a compassion for those that labour under those circumstances, which no man can be a judge of’ (p. xv). Stone was a midwife who practised for many years at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as a midwife in the Bristol area. Almost all that is known about her comes from her only book, A Complete Practice of Midwifery (1737). Unlike most contemporary midwifery guides, A Complete Practice offers no teaching on reproduction, or, indeed, on the diseases of women, because, Stone argues, ‘all the Disorders of Teeming

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22 This amounts to three French quarts of blood, which the marginal note tells us are the equivalent of English pottles. The pottle is equivalent to around half a gallon, which means that she was thought to have lost one and a half gallons of blood, an astonishing twelve pints of blood. Later in the narrative it is said that she lost a total of twenty small porringers, which the marginal notes say is about 4 ounces each, meaning that in this revised estimate she was thought to have lost upwards of four pints of blood, plus the amount soaked into all the linen.
Women do not belong to Midwives; but they ought to commit themselves to the Care of a Physician’ (p. xviii). Similarly, Stone has little interest in offering advice to the midwife on normal delivery techniques; she says that ‘the occasion of my publishing this small Treatise is, in hopes it may prove instructive to some Woman Professors in the Art of Midwifery […] that they may be able to deliver in difficult Labours’ (p. ix).

Further differences between this text and others in the genre have been identified by Isobel Grundy who comments that this text demands literary analysis, not only because of the literary skill it displays, but because of the degree to which it was shaped by techniques borrowed from heroic romance and scriptural narrative. Stone fashions herself as a hero, whose labours, like those of Psyche rather than those of Hercules, involve a non-climactic series of patient, resolute cooperations.23

In portraying herself in a heroic role, Stone is positioning herself exactly as she claims the man-midwife does. Stone comments that if a man and woman midwife are both present at a birth during which a woman dies, the female midwife will be blamed: ‘then it is that our young and well-assur’d pretenders boast, had they been there soon, neither should have died’ (p. xii). However, throughout Stone’s case studies a similar narrative is rehearsed in which Stone decries the fact that she was not called in sooner and that a labouring woman has had to suffer unduly. A major theme of A Complete Practice is the potential fatality of excessive pre- and postnatal bleeding. While she declines to outline good midwifery practice for normal births, Stone does express disgust at country midwives who allow women to deliver standing up. In one case that she narrates this act meant that the umbilicus of a child snapped and caused the mother and child to bleed to death (p. 55).

When it comes to stopping floodings, which Stone says she does often, she casts herself as a somewhat mysterious, heroic figure. Typically, she describes in one anecdote a situation in which she was called in to see a gentlewoman, who, crucially, had a physician with her who had administered several medicaments, presumably of the type that Raynalde and Sharp advocate, to no avail. Stone says that:

’Twas about four of the clock in the morning. I found her Physician with her, who had order’d her several Medicines, but she continued flooding very violently. I Touch’d her, but found no symptoms of Labour. I soon stopp’d her Flooding for that time, and she went to sleep. I was call’d again, about eight the same morning, in great haste, her Flooding being return’d with violence. As soon as I Touch’d her, I stopp’d it again, as I have often done in my Practice, and always succeeded in ten minutes, or less, after Touching of a Woman; though it would often return again, as this Gentlewoman’s did. (pp. 145-46)

After the woman’s bleeding returns yet again, Stone argues successfully against the physician for an immediate delivery. Although the woman was not in labour, Stone finds, as other medics similarly note, that the effect of the blood on the cervix is to soften it, and make it easy to manually dilate by the midwife. Stone suggests that the gentlewoman was grateful and that she claimed to have become ‘stronger in one week, than she had been in three months of some of her former Children, in the same Circumstances’ (p. 147).

Stone accounts for her intervention by claiming never to have lost a flooding woman in her care: ‘I have been with many Women that have flooded prodigiously, some in Miscarriages, and some at their full time; but, thank God, I never lost any Life in that case, through all my Practice’ (p. 148). Typically of the time, Stone makes little or no distinction between menses and lochia, often describing, as in the woman above, that the patient was ‘a women with a violent Flooding before her time’ who ‘was about six months gone with Child, taken with a violent Flowing of the Menses’ (p. 145), in what would probably be understood today as another case of placental abruption. In a different case a miscarrying woman believing herself to be seven months pregnant was described: ‘I was sent for to a Serge-makers Wife; She told me she was in the Seventh Month of her Pregnancy. She was taken with a violent Flowing of the Menses’ (p. 105). A midwife and physician were called who administered medicine to retard the bleeding for a time. The bleeding returned after a fortnight, and ‘so continu’d every twelve or fourteen days, ’till her Life was despair’d of” (p. 105). The woman was cured of her bleeding by Stone clearing the miscarriage from the uterus.

In terms of the technique that Stone has developed to stem bleeding in women, shockingly, she is explicit that the reason that she has not elaborated on this in the stories is that, although she feels it is something that should be made
public, she has to protect her daughter who has also chosen midwifery as a profession:

> It is a secret I would willingly have made known, for the benefit of my Sisters in the Profession: But having a Daughter that has practised the same Art these ten years, with as good success as my self, I shall leave it in her power to make it known. (p. 148)

In many ways this sentiment corroborates a literary style that can be seen to be more closely aligned with the masculine midwifery texts which Stone is outwardly so against. Stone deplores the use of ‘instruments’, or forceps to deliver babies, reportedly having seen many children born with their brains coming out of their heads through imprudent or unskilful use of these instruments (p. xiii). When forceps were first used by the Chamberlen family in the early seventeenth century, they were used with utmost secrecy in order to keep their invention in the family in exactly the same way that Stone keeps her life-saving technique secret to protect her daughter’s interests. Stone is aware by the time she was practising there were versions of the Chamberlen forceps being routinely, but often disastrously, used by man-midwives. Indeed it has been argued that this invention did more for the progress of male influence in the birthing chamber than the work of embryologists like William Harvey, in which case Stone’s fears were prescient, and her protectionist response understandable, even if many more lives could have been saved if her technique really was as radical as she claims.24

Isobel Grundy comments that ‘with her humdrum yet sensational raw material, Sarah Stone weaves a series of tales which possess the complex, compelling series of shapes of narrative art, which succeed in realizing the experience of birth-attendance in a manner extremely rare in the literature’.25 This is to say that Stone makes public scenes of the birthing room and its associated blood that literature leaves out in much the same way that it leaves out any references to menstruation. In keeping her secret, and by being more interested in narrating her role as women’s saviour than in the women themselves she probably did little to move the care of women forward in the way she claims to want to. However, Stone’s authentic voice does give a female response to the threat of


male dominance of the birthing chamber, and it also offers insight into the language that early-modern women used and understood for lochial bleeding. It further confirms the cultural link between antenatal bleeding, lochia, and menstruation in the era, and aptly shows the terror that this blood had the power to invoke.

**For How Long Should a Woman Bleed?**

In terms of the time that a woman should bleed for following delivery, Guillemeau comments that, *Hippocrates*, doth proportion the time, in which a woman in child-bed should be purged, according to the time wherein the child is shaped or formed: which is 30 daies for a man-child, and 42 at most for a woman child* (p. 221). Guillemeau rationalises this time span in a rather idiosyncratic way that I have not seen repeated in other similar guides: he claims that this length of time is logical because it represents a similar time to the length of time that a woman would have bled for had she been experiencing her regular menstrual periods which were ‘omitted’ for the nine months of her pregnancy:

> the bloud should bee purged in every one of these nine moneths, as in every one of them, the space of three or foure daies (which put together amount to twenty seven or thirty sixe dayes) so in recompense heerof, when a woman is delivered, she must bee purged, 27. or 36. daies (p. 221).

The amount of blood thought to be retained was usually equated to the stopped menses, but nowhere else, that I have seen, offers a temporal explanation like this text does. This explanation is in two ways unconventional: firstly, it makes no distinction between whether the delivery had produced a male or female child, as do most standard accounts; secondly, more conventional thinking said that the menstrual blood nourishes the foetus, which is the reason that women seldom experience periods when they are pregnant, except in the early months when the foetus only requires a small amount of sustenance. Lochia is normally described as the remainder of the blood that the child did not need to live and grow on. Writing at the same time as Guillemeau, Crooke explains that a woman should bleed for a shorter time after being delivered of a male is because

> That also which is avoyded after the Infant is borne into the world called *Lochia* doeth testifie the heate of a Male childe: for the woman
which is delivered of a Female is longer in her purgations, of a Male shorter, because the Male being hotter spendeth more of the bloud gathered together in the womb.  

This explanation makes reference to the normal rules of humoral theory which assume that the male body is naturally hotter, and, therefore, uses more of the menstrual blood in its growth to term. 

As well as consulting Hippocratic wisdom, the early-modern medical writer had to make a judgement about religious doctrine concerning lochial bleeding. Guillemeau explains: ‘It is written in Leviticus, that when a woman hath brought forth a man child, shee shall continue in the bloud of her purifying three and thirty dayes, but if she beare a maid child, then shee shall continue in the bloud of her purifying 66. dayes’ (p. 221). Leviticus 12.2 expressly states that lochial bleeding is to be treated in the same way as menstrual blood: ‘If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean’. As Sharp has noted, Leviticus 12.4-5 then says that this timeframe is double for the birth of a girl (p. 179). There is a subtle distinction, however, in the biblical text between what seems to be a time of actual bleeding, a period of being unclean, and a period during which the bleeding might have stopped but in which the mother was considered still to be spiritually unclean. Leviticus states that after the initial period of seven days of being unclean the woman should ‘then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled’. Under this system the woman was considered to be capable of contaminating anyone who touched her when she was actually bleeding, and the toucher would stay unclean for the rest of the day, whereas for the remainder of the period she was simply in need of spiritual cleansing once the appropriate time had passed from the birth. This is often interpreted as a lying-in for a baby boy of a total of thirty-three days, but strict adherence to Leviticus meant a lying-in of forty days for a male or an astonishing eighty days for a woman who had delivered a female. This is explained in a marginal note in Matthew Poole’s Annotations upon the Holy Bible (1683):

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26 Mikrokosmographia, p. 274.
The Sum was, That if a Woman had brought forth a Male-Child, she should be unclean seven Days, and after that continue in the Blood of her Purifying thirty three Days. If she brought forth a Female, she was to be unclean fourteen days, and afterward to continue in the Blood of her Purifying, Sixty Six days. So that the time of the Womans Purification after the Birth of a Female, was fourscore Days, for a Male (which was the present case) forty.27

This strict theological hypothesis does not seem to have any cultural standing, and is not in any medical texts. Guillemeau simply rehearses the information from Leviticus and Hippocrates, as do many of his contemporaries, without analysing the doctrine. When Sharp writes about post-partum bleeding later in the century, however, she actively engages with these sources, and in doing so demonstrates a key distinction between received wisdom and cultural practice. In common with most accounts, Sharp keeps to the conventions concerning the Levitical rules of thirty-three and sixty-six days respectively, and thirty and forty-two days for the Hippocratics, but she then rationalises that ‘Hippocrates rules may be calculated chiefly for his own Country of Greece, and the Levitical Law most concerns the seed of Abraham [Jews]; but this is to be observed though not so precisely to a day by all women after delivery’ (p. 179). This engagement clearly shows how Sharp sought to modify received wisdom in a subtle way when it was at variance with her empirical experience. The fact that at this time a woman was spiritually unclean makes Simon Forman’s admission that he slept with one of his mistresses, Avisa Allen, twenty days after she had given birth and while she was still ‘sick’ (bleeding) quite subversive on their parts given the culture in which they lived, in which sexual intercourse whilst a woman was menstruating, and by extension still suffering from post-partum bleeding, was taboo.28 William Whately’s conduct treatise A Bride-Bush makes this point explicitly when he writes that married couples ‘nuptiall meetings must be seasonal’ and explains that by this he means they should abstain during menstruation, prolonged vaginal bleeding due to illness, and lochial bleeding, which he says is a ‘longer emptying,

27 (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1685), p. 600 [?].
28 Judith Cook, Dr Simon Forman: A Most Notorious Physician (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 90. Avisa gave birth on 26 June 1596 and Forman records having intercourse with her on 16 July. As Cook notes this behaviour is inexplicable by the contemporary standards in which a woman could expect to be left to recover from the birth for at least a month.
because of the former retention, which continueth commonly for four, five or six weeks’. 29 Intercourse during this time, Whately explains, is ‘simply unlawfull’. 30

That the rules governing lying-in were, as Sharp contends, ‘observed though not so precisely’ (p. 179) is seen in the private diaries that a number of married men kept throughout the seventeenth century. It would seem that most women observed the lying-in period to some degree, the first stage of which was for the new mother to lie in the bed in which she had delivered for a week before the sheets (or the straw) were changed. There are sound practical reasons for this restriction because being kept still would allow any tears or lacerations time to heal. The reason that so much private information survives as to the length of time women tended to lie-in was because of the ritual of churching that marked the end of the birthing process throughout the period. Many male diarists note that their wives were churched around three to four weeks after they delivered. John Greene twice notes the dates of his wife’s deliveries and subsequent churchings. On 3 April 1644 he notes, ‘my wife at lecture and churched’ after having given birth on the 8 March, and the next year she gives birth on 15 February, and is churched on 12 March. 31 Even if the child did not survive, the mother would still go through with churching; indeed, Nicholas Assheton notes in his journal that his wife was ‘presented’ by the local wives, in March 1618, three weeks after she had given birth to a child that only lived for an hour. 32

Churching was the colloquial name for a church ceremony that was thought of as either one of thanksgiving for a safe delivery or a process of purification from the pollution of birth. The event was deeply politicised in the early-modern period, banned altogether in the Interregnum and restored by Charles II. 33 Other political contradictions about churching abounded. For example, the new protestant religion banned the wearing of veils to the ceremony in the sixteenth century, yet after the Restoration, a woman would be turned from

29 (London: William Jaggard, 1617), p. 44.
30 A Bride-Bush, p. 44.
32 English Family Life, p. 108.
33 ‘Churching of Women’, p. 141. Cressy states that officially churching came to an end in 1645 when ‘the prayer-book was superseded by the Directory of Public Worship’ (p. 141).
the church if she failed to arrive wearing the veil. A woman would go for churching with her husband, her midwife, and her gossips when she was well after the birth, usually around a month after the delivery. This strongly suggests that even the church did not hold anyone to the prescribed doctrine of forty days for a boy and eighty for a girl. As contentious as the ceremony was in early-modern times, it is one which has caused much conjecture amongst scholars in the modern era. Patricia Crawford is sceptical about churching. She cites an anonymous woman from 1598 who claimed that churching was a demeaning practice, ‘like unto of a sow with pigs following her or like a bitch that went to salt’. Crawford also cites Katherine Chidley, who wrote opposing the practice, but Chidley was a separatist who was against many of the practices of the church, thinking of them as relics of the Catholic religion. From this evidence Crawford concludes that churching was a service that ‘probably the majority of women submitted to without protest’. We do know that the majority of women, certainly in the early part of the period, went through the ceremony; in one study Susan Wright has calculated that up to ninety-six per cent of women who had their baby baptised also went through a churching ceremony. I therefore incline to David Cressy’s assertion that the ceremony was probably one of joy and thanks giving, especially since it was followed by a meal or more rowdy celebration to mark a woman’s return to society, after her pregnancy and labour.

The title of the ceremony of ‘Purification or Thanksgiving’ suggests that the new Protestant church had not formed a position on whether women needed to be purified after the birth as the Jewish ceremony which is its antecedent demands, and it was an issue which was speculated upon at bishop level within the church. In practice, the women who went to be churched, often in large social parties, did not, as Adrian Wilson points out, behave as if they felt themselves to

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34 See David Cressy, ‘Churching of Women’ for a full account of churching and its implications.  
37 Blood, Bodies, and Families, p. 98.  
39 ‘Churching of Women’, p. 110.
be impure.\textsuperscript{40} This is not to suggest that all notion of impurity had left with the Reformation. Indeed, medically it was still being argued in the late seventeenth century that women should not breastfeed for the first three days post-delivery because, as Sharp argues, ‘It is not good for a woman presently [immediately] to suckle her child because those unclean purgations cannot make good milk, the first milk is naught’ (p. 179). Churching became a sign of conformity after the Restoration but Cressy suggests that as early as the 1680s bishops began to stop asking questions about the practice, and the matter could rest with women themselves.\textsuperscript{41}

For the purposes of this study, however, the key points are that people did not act as though the newly delivered woman was impure and that the times of churchings gives an approximation of how long women took to consider themselves recovered from the birth. I would suggest that a woman would not go to the church to offer her thanksgiving unless she had stopped bleeding, as the debate about whether a menstruating woman should go to church was still a live one. An example of this can be seen in the comment by Lady Mary Verney’s physician who noted that she ‘is churched and well, but looks ill enough’.\textsuperscript{42} That is to say she was ‘well’ in that she was no longer bleeding, and so could have been churched, but that he is still concerned for some aspects of her health.

Sarah Stone does not discuss churching in her midwifery treatise, but she does recount several instances of women returning to work after three weeks or so. As with the churching diaries, this gives a good indication of when these women should have stopped bleeding and considered themselves well enough to return to work. Stone’s observations nine and ten both tell of a woman who was well and ‘abroad’ after three weeks (p. 29) and a laundress was noted to do ‘exceeding well and was capable of washing in three weeks after’ (p. 32). In observation thirteen the subject is well enough to work her loom again after only a fortnight (p. 44). Although the evidence does seem to suggest that most women observed a lying-in of up to a month -with the lying-in being less and less restrictive as the month progressed - a woman might, nonetheless, be able to


\textsuperscript{41} ‘Churching of Women’, p. 144.

\textsuperscript{42} Cited in ‘Churching of Women’, p. 140.
potter in the house after the first fortnight. It is possible, as Stone’s case notes might demonstrate, that the ‘woman’s month’ was a luxury that was taken for granted by higher-ranking women and observed to a lesser degree by poorer people, who did not have the ability to forfeit a month’s income from the wife. This assertion is corroborated by a remark in the erotic novella *The London Jilt: or, The Politick Whore* in which the protagonist, Cornelia, is left an annuity by one of her lovers upon his unexpected death. Her lover had been petitioning her from three weeks after she had given birth for resumption in sexual activity, but following his subsequent death a matter of days later, Cornelia announces that she will resume her lying-in and ‘I followed the example of Persons of Condition and kept State for six Weeks’.

Lady Ann Fanshawe had numerous pregnancies during the civil war period and, even when it meant a lengthy separation from her husband as they travelled because of the war, she observed a full lying-in period. As she travelled in Spain with her husband who was ambassador to the king, she records with some surprise that

> On Thursday the 2[0]th in the afternoon, the Duchess of Alcala came to visit me, who had layn in but 3 weeks of a daughter. The day before she performed all the ceremonyes and civilies, which is the custome of this court, to me and mine.

Similarly, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was surprised that the women in Constantinople did not observe a long lying-in period when she wrote to Anne Thistlethwayte in January 1718 from Pera Constantinople

> ‘[w]hat is most wonderfull is the Exemption they seem to enjoy from the Curse entail’d upon the Sex. They see all Company the day of their Delivery and at the fortnight’s end return the Visits, set out in Jewells and new Cloaths.

Lady Mary thinks it might be the climate there that helps with easier deliveries, but says, ‘I fear I shall continue an English woman in that Affair as well as I do in my dread of fire and Plague, which are two things very little fear’d here’.

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46 *Selected Letters*, pp. 167-68.
The above cases, and the evidence from histories of churching, suggest that most women had stopped bleeding and considered themselves well within three to four weeks of the birth of their child.

**Alice Thornton’s ‘Soe Great Floods’**

Crawford has argued that ‘childbirth was the female rite of passage par excellence’.\(^{47}\) Certainly it is clear that giving birth is a life-changing event, but in early-modern English society, as I have argued, the delineation, the life-change, was between a woman’s virgin state and her married one. Becoming a mother, I would suggest, was the idealised outcome of wifehood and not, therefore, viewed in a social or medical context as a separate rite of passage leading to womanhood, for that state is achieved upon marriage. The autobiography of Alice Thornton, which offers many details about her life up to early-middle-age, provides some significant corroboration for this assertion. Thornton describes how she left her ‘youth and virgin estate’ to enter upon her ‘new condition’ (p. 83) of being a wife.

Thornton’s autobiography also offers what might prove to be a uniquely frank personal account of the bleeding associated with pregnancy. This section will, therefore, offer a close reading of Thornton’s autobiography, in order to provide a cultural analysis of one woman’s recorded thoughts and feelings about the blood associated with the processes of reproduction. Thornton describes her lochial flow euphemistically as ‘those’ (p. 92), and the excessive lochial flow that she experiences after some of her pregnancies as ‘flooding’. She also narrates, as will be discussed, her problems with bleeding haemorrhoids, and an intriguing dream of the bloody childbed, coupled with vivid accounts of a fright she received when she thought a penknife might harm her. She also describes how, through the power of the maternal imagination, this fright transposed itself onto the body of her unborn son in the form of a birthmark which looked like the wound she feared and which appeared to be dripping with blood.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{47}\) *Blood, Bodies and Families*, p. 95.

\(^{48}\) The power of the female imagination to affect the unborn baby was widely believed in the early-modern era. Jane Sharp describes how ‘Imagination can do much, as a woman that lookt on a Blackmore brought forth a child like to a Blackmore; and one that I knew, that seeing a boy with two thumbs on one hand, brought forth such another; but ordinarily the spirits and humours are disturbed by the passions of the mind, and so the forming faculty is hindered and overcome with too great plenty of humours that flow to the matrix’ (p. 92).
Thornton set down her memoirs in three volumes which covered the years from her birth in February 1627 to 1669, so we are left with an account of some of the key moments in her life, but sadly with nothing to describe the long life she led up to her death in 1707, at the age of eighty. Thornton wrote her memoir ‘chiefly to rebut slander and vindicate her own good name’ (p. xii), after her niece Danby and a friend Mary Breaks had been spreading rumours that she was sexually linked to a Mr Comber, whom she was in negotiations with to marry her young daughter. Also, despite the fact that Thornton came from a background of the minor gentry, it would seem that her husband did not have the means that she expected, and that for most of her life she lived in some degree of poverty; this was exacerbated by her husband’s poor business dealings which resulted in the loss of most of her inheritances.  

Her nineteenth-century editor comments that ‘She had also to contend with one or two cruel slanderers; and to shew her descendants that she had neither tarnished an honourable name, nor wasted her means by improvidence’ (p. xii). It is this desire for self-vindication that provoked Thornton to write, exposing more detail of the birthing room than is evident in any other of the extant diaries and memoirs so far discovered.

As is the case with many early-modern memoirs, such as the adolescent musings of Lady Elizabeth Delaval, discussed in Chapter One, for example, this text provides a life account that crosses the boundaries of the public and private text. The text was never intended for publication and so is not a public document as such, but was meant to be read by members of her family and immediate circle and to serve as a record for Thornton’s descendants and as such it is not a purely personal piece of writing.  

It, perhaps, occupies the same metaphorical, hybrid space as a letter in the period, insofar as it existed as a medium that was personal, but one which was often used to relay news, thoughts, and personal vindication, and so might be passed around a social circle, as was the intention for the memoirs discussed here.  


50 Her Own Life, p. 148.

51 Gary Schneider comments that ‘early modern notions of what constituted a public or private epistolary discourse were quite confused, even arbitrary’ sometimes containing a mixture of private news and political opinion and with private sometimes signifying a private circle of letter readers, for example. See The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter
written with the intended reader very much in mind. The fact that Thornton is fighting for her reputation comes across clearly in her literary tone as she is often quite angry and self-justifying. At one point in the manuscript but, notably, omitted from the printed edition, for example, Thornton appeals to God to deliver her from her slanders just as he had delivered Susanna in the Bible, who had similarly been falsely accused by the elders of having sexual relations with a younger man.\textsuperscript{52} It has been argued that Thornton’s creation of her self in the text is an extreme model of feminine passivity. Her apparently masochistic religiosity, her love of a husband who leads her into debt, her perpetual illness (which we may be tempted to think of as hypochondria), her emotional collapse, all contribute to a picture of her as a submissive woman, who has no outlet except in suffering and in jealously guarding her family name.\textsuperscript{53}

Further, it has been suggested that her ‘interest in her illnesses went far beyond that of any other woman autobiographer of her time’.\textsuperscript{54} This, I think, is at the heart of the unsympathetic critical comments the autobiography has attracted: it is the case that Thornton dwells a good deal on the episodes of illness both of herself and her family, often described in a highly dramatic way, but these illnesses give an account of life for a gentlewoman of lower rank in the late seventeenth century. Her children contracted smallpox, as she herself had done, and details of accidents and incidents populate the discourse, such as children falling into the fire, but these are, in fact, normal happenings in a seventeenth-century family life. I would suggest that rather than her being either a hypochondriac, or an obsessive, the difference between Thornton’s autobiography and those of her peers is the frankness with which she relates these incidents; her sense of beleaguerment and injustice perhaps being the key to the melodramatic and defensive tones she occasionally adopts. Other contemporary autobiographies, such as that of Elizabeth Isham, discussed in Chapter One, are

\textsuperscript{52} ‘Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Sources of Alice Thornton’s Life’, \textit{Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900}, 45 (2005), 135-55 (p. 149). Susanna’s story is one of the apocryphal stories.
often similar in scope.\textsuperscript{55} The style of religious passivity with phrases such as ‘But it is not a Christian’s part to chuse anything of this nature’ (p. 165) are indicative of the ways that the early-modern English women found to write an autobiography in order, to an extent, to protect herself from the idea that it was vain and unfeminine to give such an account of herself. Anne Lear goes so far as to suggest that ‘the general cultural belief in a woman’s natural tendency to physical weakness and illness ironically allowed Thornton the opportunity to make spiritual claims which otherwise may have seemed proud, presumptuous, and even contentious in a woman of her time’.\textsuperscript{56} I, rather, read the text with Ann Hughes who comments that:

Above all, Alice Thornton’s autobiography suggests the tensions between her strong-minded, independent personality and the allotted role of a seventeenth-century woman. While overtly and inevitably she accepts women’s subordinate position, there are strong undercurrents of resentment at the restrictions of marriage and at her lost prosperity.\textsuperscript{57}

Whichever way the text is read, the consequence of Thornton’s need to set down her memoirs is that we are left with a detailed account of life as a young wife in matters concerning her reproductive life, a matter which is often mentioned only very briefly by others who have commented on this text. The detail of her various confinements is astonishing by contemporary standards, and even more so when one considers that, according to Raymond A. Anselment, the published ‘edition […] cuts considerably the narratives of pregnancies and deliveries she describes in detail’.\textsuperscript{58}

Thornton’s blood in pregnancy becomes not only a battleground between different medics at times, but a recurrent and disturbing theme. Thornton is knowledgeable about the prevailing humoral medical system, and the ways that she talks about her illnesses offer a useful insight into the ways in which an early-modern woman engaged with the humoral system as it related to her own body. For example, Thornton sees an apparently innocent act of washing her feet the

\textsuperscript{55} Isaac Stephens, ed., “My Booke of Rememenberance” [sic]: The Autobiography of Elizabeth Isham’, in Department of History: University of California Riverside <www.history.ucr.edu> [accessed 19 May 2007]. This text, like that of Thornton and Lady Elizabeth Delaval, seeks to detail her life through a medium of religious observance. Isham details her own as well as her mother’s and sister’s frequent illnesses.
\textsuperscript{56} ‘Thank God for Haemorrhoids!’ , p. 339.
\textsuperscript{58} ‘Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Sources of Alice Thornton’s Life’, p. 139.
night before her wedding to be the cause of the illness she felt on the eve of her marriage. She says that she believes that she ‘might have brought it upon myself by cold taken the night before, when I sat up late in preparing for the next day, and washing my feete at theat time of yeare’ (p. 83). John Pechey writes that washing of the feet could cause vicarious menstruation such as that which came from the nose, discussed in Chapter Three. This, he suggests, ‘comes from some external Cause, as by drinking cold Water unseasonably, or by washing the Feet and Legs unseasonably’. The reason for this was that the cold would encourage the blood to rise up the body as far as the head before coming out of the nose. By the nineteenth century one medical text was claiming that women placed their feet in cold water deliberately to prevent or stop their menstrual period. Ira Warren writes:

Girls sometimes in their utter thoughtlessness or ignorance, dip their feet in cold water, when their courses are upon them, and bring on a suppression of the most dangerous character. The most lovely and innocent girls have done this for the purpose of attending a party; and, in some instances, the stoppage induced has ended in death within a few hours.

As Pechey shows, this apparent effect of cold water on menstruation was known in the early-modern period, and although I have found no explicit account that this practice was used in the seventeenth century, it is not impossible that women like Alice Thornton tried to prevent her menses from flowing on their wedding days in the manner described by Warren. However, for Thornton this event is narrated as a conflict between religious obedience and the body, much like Lady Elizabeth Delaval’s memoirs, discussed in Chapter One, similarly reveal.

Thornton writes that the incident of illness at her wedding ‘was the first entrance of my married life, which began in sickness, and continued in such afflictions, and ended in great sorrowes and mournings’ (p. 83). This tone of suffering continues throughout the autobiography, and is perhaps best exemplified in her accounts of her childbirths where, it has been observed, ‘the sections of autobiography where her identity as a suffering mother is fully

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developed’. Lear suggests that Thornton ‘had plenty of scope for the embellishment of this particular persona as out of nine live births only three children survived to adulthood’. This sort of judgemental approach to Thornton is quite uncomfortable, for it seems to diminish the suffering described as disingenuous, when in leaving such accounts Thornton has given us a useful insight into the ways that a seventeenth-century woman related to the undoubted trauma of several births in which her lochial flow was excessive, and weakened her considerably; it is also the case that after such difficult labours she was sometimes left without a baby to hold and compensate for the agony she had been through. Ann Hulton’s heart-rending cry after her child dies shortly after a birth, on 29 July 1689, the date on which she also nearly died, shows the extent to which the love for a baby was seen as mitigation for the trials of labour: ‘O Adam, Adam! What hast thou done! My comforts are taken away before I had well received them: was it all lost labour?’

Thornton describes how her first child was conceived ‘seaven weekes after I married’ (p. 84). The pregnancy was marred by ill-health and she suffered from nose bleeds, which she explains as occurring because she was ‘hotter than formerly, as is usuall in such cases from a naturall cause’ (p. 84). Medically, the increased heat would have been assumed to come from the extra blood circulating in the body due to a lack of menstrual purgation, and to experience a nosebleed instead of a period was thought to be a normal reaction inherited from Hippocratic notions, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The body would thus be cooled and rebalanced by this purge of the excess sanguine humour. A lack of menstruation indicated that a woman’s body was in a cacochymical state, that is to say, that her bodily humours were imbalanced. This was an ancient Hippocratic belief which stated bluntly that, ‘if the menses do not flow, women’s bodies become prone to sickness’. This even applied in early pregnancy when the foetus was thought not able to use up all of the menstrual blood for

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61 ‘Thank God for Haemorrhoids!’, p. 341.  
63 John Bickerton Williams, Memoirs of the Life and Character of Mrs. Sarah Savage to which are added Memoirs of her Sister, Mrs Hulton (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1829), p. 300. Hulton had noted that it was ‘A Day never to be forgotten; wherein I felt the bitter fruits of the sin of my grandmother Eve; that part of the sentence being fulfilled’ (p. 300). Also cited in Patricia Crawford, Blood, Bodies and Families, p. 96.  
nourishment and growth, and so the woman, as Thornton’s memoir describes, might become ill from the increased blood in her body, making it necessary for this blood to be voided in order to restore her to health. The Hippocratic Aphorisms which were widely accepted at this time, promoted the idea that a nose bleed was actual menstrual blood lost through the nose in cases where menstruation was suppressed.65

This heat and fever returns again to Thornton when she is over thirty weeks pregnant, when her two physicians debate whether to bleed her or not, for in later pregnancy the foetus was thought to need all the menstrual blood for growth and development. Mr Mahum, whom she describes as her ‘old doctor’ (p. 86), will not let blood, because of the advanced pregnancy, but after a further eleven days of her being ill with a fever, another physician, Dr Wittie, is called for, and he does think it would be useful. Thornton herself has thought all along that she should be bled and settles the argument to that effect, and the next day has ‘six or seven ounces taken which was turned very bad by my sicknesse, but I found a change immediately in my sight’ and she could see clearly again, which she had not been able to for the duration of her illness (p. 87). As the argument between the two physicians shows, bloodletting in pregnant women was a contentious issue, because of fears that it could induce abortion. In the ancient source texts, such as the Hippocratic Aphorisms and Galen for example, this practice was forbidden, but the later writer Celsus promoted it for anyone provided they were strong enough.66 Country physician Richard Wilkes’s unpublished practice journals offer a similar scenario to this when he records how one of his patients, Mrs Budworth, in 1736, had a stillbirth. He notes that Mrs Budworth is aged between thirty and forty, weak and thin, and has had several pregnancies that have ended the same way with a premature birth and a dead child.67 Wilkes theorises on the cause of these deaths:

67 The Journal of Richard Wilkes, December 1736 to December 1738 (Stafford Records Office, 5350), pp 23-24. Wilkes paginated his journal in order that he could go back and forth and cross reference cases. Subsequent references are to this manuscript, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
I am apt to impute the Death of these children to the want of Bleeding frequently during the time of Gravidations for I am apt to think that women of her constitution require to lose a small quantity of Blood, as often, if not more frequently than those which are more strong and hearty. (p. 24)

Wilkes admits that this is his own theory, and that he hopes its logics might be ‘discover’d even to Demonstration’, confessing that there are only ‘few Reasons for my opinion’ (p. 24). This shows that the issue of bleeding a pregnant woman was still contentious over eighty years later than the time that Thornton’s doctors were debating her cure. Unlike Mrs Budworth, Thornton’s child was not stillborn but died within minutes of her birth, and Thornton was left terribly ill after the delivery with a fever and ague that lasted over three months; it took a further six months before she felt fully recovered. Lear argues that Thornton’s documented response to the death of her child and her subsequent illness ‘conflate[s] the two events – the death of her baby and her own illness - and launches into an extended meditation’. 68 This is not conflation, however, but rather cause and effect: Thornton’s response to the death of her child is founded in early-modern conventions, based on the assumption that she had offended her God and has been punished, perhaps for her reluctance to marry:

O Lord, I have offended many waies […] I know also that it is through Thy dispensation that I am brought to the married estate of life, and that Thou in wisdome has ordered each change and accident about this my sicknesse, as to my danger and cure (pp. 88-89).

Whilst retrospective diagnosis is something to be wary of, that this illness is a form of what is now understood as post-natal depression is suggested heavily both in the symptoms that Thornton describes and in her responses to them. Her teeth blacken, which would be taken to mean that she had too much black bile, or melancholy, in her system (p. 88) and she becomes jaundiced, which in early-modern England could present as black as well as yellow jaundice. Black jaundice was thought to be caused by grief, as one contemporary astrologically-based health manual says:

Now to know what the Grief is, you must seek out the place in this Book intituled the Moon in Leo of Saturn oppressed, which argueth the Sick shall be troubled with unkindly heat in the Breast, and a violent

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68 ‘Thank God for Haemorrhoids!’, p. 342.
Feavour, with faintness at the heart, or swounding fits, and inclining to the Black jaundies occasioned from ill Melancholy blood.  

Melancholic blood is linked to lochial flow, because it was thought that if a woman was not properly purged then the blood would abound in her body, potentially causing a depression-like illness. As Sharp observes ‘You shall note if a woman be well cleansed by her health, for if she be not she cannot be well and lusty’ (p. 179). The grief Thornton feels, perhaps not just for the lost child, but also for the loss of personal autonomy that she experiences as a result of her social and legal position as a wife, scripturally bound to repeat this harrowing process, is highlighted when she begs for the Lord’s support throughout her ‘sadnesse, sorrowes, and sicknesses’ (p. 90).

Five years after her first delivery Thornton had another traumatic birth, this time of a longed for son, who was, sadly, stillborn; this was her fifth delivery in five years and her first son. The child presented feet first and this caused Thornton to experience excruciating pain, which she likened to ‘being on the racke in bearing my childe with such exquisitt torment’ (p. 95). After this birth Thornton had ‘hemords’ (p. 96) which she says caused her to bleed daily about ‘four or five ounces of blood’ (p. 97). The problems that she had with her anal bleeding took over from the weakening she was already prone to from having lost a lot of blood in child-bed. Thornton’s trouble with excessive lochial bleeding led her to go to the spa town of Scarborough following her fifth child’s birth, for she notes that she was weakened by ‘the excessive losse of blood and spiritts, in childebed, with the continuance of lameness above twenty weekes after, and the losse of blood and strength by the bleeding of the hemorides, which followed everyday by siege’ (p. 97). In this period, bleeding haemorrhoids were often considered, as Gianna Pomata has shown, to be the ‘functional equivalent’ of menstruation: a form of vicarious menstruation in common with nosebleeds.  

Thornton’s physician was concerned that if her excessive bleeding was allowed to

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70 This is a common early-modern metaphor, and one which Jane Sharp uses to describe the pain of carrying a mole. See *The Midwives Book*, p. 89.

continue much longer she might be left barren, presumably a problem since she had not yet produced a son and heir.

The water cure was a great success and Thornton conceived another child immediately upon her return home. It is significant that, despite the trauma of the bleeding both vaginally and anally, with which she was troubled for months, because she suffers from less morning sickness with her sons, Thornton repeats the early-modern truism, inherited from the Hippocratic corpus, that it is much easier to breed boys than girls:

For four months together I injoyed a great deale of comfort and health, beeing much stronger and lively when I was with my sons then daughters, having great cause to admire the goodness of God, which evere contrary unto hope caused me to recover of that sad distemper wherewith I was afflicted, and giveing me hopes to bring forth a son to be a comfort to my deare husband and us all. (p. 98)

This reflection shows that the privileging of the male child seen in medical textbooks from ancient times right through to the early-modern period, was a belief that was to some extent, at least, one that pervaded social consciousness. The pregnancy with her ninth child, Christopher, was one that gave her a ‘weake and sickly time in breeding’ (p. 164) yet when writing this autobiography, social convention overrides empirical evidence.

Whilst heavily pregnant with her sixth child Thornton had a bad dream which perhaps reveals her mindset in this pregnancy:

I, being great with child, dreamed one night that I was laid in childe-bed, had the white sheete spread, and all over it was sprinkled with smale drops of pure blood, as if it had bin dashed with one’s hand, which so frightened me that I tould my aunt of it in the morning. (p. 123)

Her aunt advised Thornton to put the dream out of her mind, but she could not and says that she ‘kept it in mind till my child died’ (p. 123). It is significant that the bloodied sheet should act as a kind of premonition of death, but it is hardly surprising that she should be having anxious thoughts about child-bed since her last pregnancy had ended with a child who lived only for an hour. The form of the anxiety, though, is presented in a bloodied sheet, and this might perhaps show the significance of blood in the delivery room as a figure for death if it is lost in the quantities required to splatter a clean sheet as she saw in her dream. This dream
clearly had an effect on Thornton for she remembered it vividly enough to place it as a matter of importance in her memoirs. After the birth of the sixth child, Thornton describes how she was able to nurse the child because ‘my good God had given me the blessing of the breast as well as the wombe’ (p. 124), which in early-modern thought meant that she had a reasonable, not too heavy, lochial flow; for whilst it was thought to be important to bleed sufficiently to cleanse the womb, within the humoral matrix, menstrual blood was also believed to flow to the breasts to be converted into milk, and this was only possible if the blood was not seeping out of the womb in too great an amount. This belief had been described by Thornton after the birth of her daughter Alice in January 1654 when she comments that ‘It was the pleasure of God to give me but a weak time after my daughter Alice her birth’ (p. 91). This child was then wet-nursed, perhaps because Thornton had lost such a large quantity of blood at the birth that it was felt advisable for her not to nurse her herself.

Sadly this son also died, at fourteen days old, being covered in a rash of ‘full red round spots like the small pox, being of the compass of a halfpenny, and all whealed white over’ (p. 124). Thornton is not explicit that the dream was a presentiment of the rash that the child had, but she does say that she had thoughts about the dream until the child was born, and such was the almost universal belief in the power of maternal imagination that it would seem as though this is what she is suggesting by making such clear reference to a dream of this nature. That Thornton herself believed in the idea of the maternal imagination influencing the child’s development in the womb is proven in the account of the next confinement. This was a difficult pregnancy during which she had several threatened miscarriages, and so, therefore, had many instances of antenatal bleeding. The second threatened miscarriage was caused by a fright Thornton had of seeing a penknife in a position to have caused her harm. She relates that:

I was pretty big of him [Robert, her seventh child] of a fright which came upon me by a surprize of the sight of a penknife which was nigh to have hurt me. The fear and dread apprehension thereof did cause a marke of deepe bloody couler upon the child’s heart, most pure and distinct, and of several shapes, continueing soe as no thing could washe them of. The first appearance like a stab or cutt with a penknife, with many pure, distinct drops of blood all about it, as if one should have sprinkled little drops with there hand on it. The second form it came into the direct forme of a Tea, with the like dropes about it of
pure blood. The third form it came into was exactly like the shape of a heart, with little drops of blood about it. (p. 140)

This explanation for the existence of a birthmark was typical in early-modern medical thought. Sharp explains that ‘sometimes the mother is frightened or conceives wonders, or longs strangely for things not to be had, and the child is markt accordingly by it’ (p. 92). That the fright could cause bleeding in pregnancy was similarly a well-known idea, working in the same way that a flooding patient of Sarah Stone was found to be bleeding heavily because of her unnatural longings (p. 73). Whilst this birthmark is explained away by the ‘fright’ that Thornton had whilst pregnant, the descriptions do resonate with the bloody dream once again, and might suggest that Thornton had an underlying, and entirely reasonable, anxiety about the blood of the birthing room. The birthmark began to fade by the time the child was a year old, in common with many such birthmarks, after much praying about the problem. Its existence was eventually ascribed to the ‘goodnesse of God to preserve him from death in my wombe’ (p. 140). The story of the effect of the maternal imagination on Robert Thornton’s body was of such significance that this is one of several key incidents that Thornton records more than once in her memoirs.

The stories of peril and deliverance that Thornton narrates in her autobiography surrounding the births of her children demonstrate the anxiety that the process of childbirth could engender. One of the remarkable aspects of these narratives is the way in which Thornton describes her bleeding in childbed, which is unique amongst her contemporaries. The structure of the story of her second child, Naly’s, birth, discussed above, becomes somewhat confused because, in order to understand one of the stories of Naly’s near death, it is necessary to know that Thornton delivered another daughter only thirteen months after Naly. This aspect of the narrative shows the inherent problems in trying to organise a chronological life history whilst simultaneously attempting to give space to the birth and potted history of each child's infancy. A daughter, Elizabeth, known as Betty in the family, was born in February 1655, and while Thornton was lying-in following Betty’s birth, Naly became seriously ill with convulsions, but her mother is unable to tend to her, being so weakened by the present lying-in. Naly does have her grandmother and maternal aunt to look after her, but Thornton
describes the effect of the anguish of hearing the commotion in the next room but being unable to help:

All the time of my poore child’s illness I my selfe was at death’s dore by the extreame excesse of those, upon the fright and terror came upon me, soe great floods that I was spent, and my breath lost, my strength departed from me, and I could not speake for faintings, and dispirited soe that my deare mother and aunt and friends did not expect my life, but overcome with sorrow for me. (p. 92)

Rather than positioning herself as a martyr and ‘suffering mother’ as Lear has argued, then, Thornton’s account resonates with the very real anxiety she faced knowing there was a problem with her daughter but also knowing that due to such heavy bleeding, which was well-understood to begin again had she risen, she was helpless to intervene. The guilt she obviously felt at not being able to tend to Naly seems to be a more reasonable explanation for the hyperbolic language she uses. In what must have been a very trying time for Thornton’s mother and family it is decided to try to keep from her just how ill Naly is, ‘least greife for her, addid to my owne extreamity, with losse of blood, might have extinguished my miserable life’ (p. 92).

Thornton mentions her lochial bleeding casually as ‘those’, which suggests that this term, which was a common euphemism for menstruation, was also a conventional way of talking about post-partum bleeding. This passage further highlights the ways in which the humoral bodily economy facilitated the understanding that physical reactions derived from emotional responses: the shock, therefore, of hearing how ill her daughter was could cause further blood loss, possibly to fatal levels. Similarly, relief at Naly’s subsequent recovery meant that Alice Thornton’s bodily humours could settle and she began to rebuild her strength to such an extent that ‘within a fortnight I recovred my milke, and was overjoyed to give my sweet Betty suck, which I did and began to recover a miracle’ (p. 92). Betty was not maternally nursed for long it would seem, because when she died aged eighteen months from rickets and consumption, her mother attributes this to being ‘caused by ill milke at two nurses’ (p. 94).

The link between menstrual (or post-partum) bleeding and breast milk has been touched on above. Thornton makes a correlation between her lochial bleeding and her ability to feed her children. After finally getting a healthy son, it would seem that Thornton was prepared to go to great lengths to enable him to
thrive, and she breastfed the child for almost three years. Sharp suggests that Thornton might not be particularly unusual in feeding for such a long time; while she recommends a year for breastfeeding, she notes that:

Avicenna saith two years is the time children should suck: I have seen some in England that have kept their children sucking near four years, who would carry their stool after their Nurses to sit down on to give them suck; but a year old is sufficient to most children; yet they are loth to leave the Dug till they be driven from it. (pp. 268-69)

Robin, as Robert was known in the Thornton family, was not weaned until his mother was eight-and-a-half months pregnant with her eighth child, Joyce. Becoming pregnant whilst lactating was something which early-modern medicine thought was unusual because, as Crooke explains, the menstrual blood was assumed to flow from the womb after a birth to be made into milk by the faculties of the breast: ‘Hence it is that a woman cannot well at the same time have her courses and give sucke, and Hippocrates sayth that milke is German Cousen to the menstruous blood’. 72 Sharp too says that nurses do not menstruate because ‘Nature spends the blood in Nurses that give suck for an other end’ (p. 217). However, some thought that resuming sexual activity could encourage the return of the menses, which might facilitate a pregnancy. It was considered dangerous to the nursing child for a woman to become menstruant again, and it seems that this idea had some social resonance, for a private letter, identified by Valerie Fildes, written on 17 May 1659, some five years before Thornton’s latest conception, from Lord Conway expresses concern that a wet-nurse whom he has employed to nurse his three month old son seems to be having her menstrual periods again:

The child is very well, and hath passed over the same danger which the nurse had before without any disturbances; but, however, my wife is informed that the suck of such a woman is dangerous and brings with it many diseases, and therefore I believe she will wean much sooner than she intended. 73

And one month later he wrote to his brother again:

We [...] are staying here ourselves somewhat longer than we thought of, to provide another nurse. This having injured the child three times,

72 Mikrokosmographia, p. 158.
we cannot think it permissible to be borne any longer, and so all my wife’s friends advise her.\textsuperscript{74}

There does seem to be some debate about whether the rule that the suckling child would be harmed by a nurse who either menstruated, or conceived another child applies just to nurses rather than mothers; a translation of Pliny’s \textit{Natural History} notes, ‘a womans milke, nourse to her owne child & giving it sucke, will not corrupt and be naught for the babe, if she conceive againe by the same man to whom she brought the former childe’.\textsuperscript{75} That this idea was one which society adhered to, making a clear distinction between bought-in wet-nurses having sex (even with their own husbands) as a dangerous thing and nursing mothers having intercourse, might be shown in the very contemporaneous diary of Ralph Josselin. Josselin notes on 9 May 1647 that his wife Jane has now decided to wean her older child, also Jane, because she is now pregnant again and is feeling very tired as a result of two competing demands on her body.\textsuperscript{76} Jane Josselin apparently weans very easily, and Ralph Josselin notes that, despite his wife’s fainting fit, she hopes to grow stronger now that Jane is weaned.

Another significant aspect of the relation of Joyce Thornton’s conception and birth is how much the thought of death played upon her mother’s mind. It is clear from her earlier entries that Thornton was anxious about giving birth and this expressed itself, for example, in the dream that she recounts of the bloodied sheet or the fear of the penknife, but in this account Thornton gives voice to her fears. Perhaps a desire to put off another conception was another explanation for why she breastfed Robin for so long. Crawford has noted that historians suggest that the actual percentage of mortality in childbirth was around six to seven per cent, perhaps lower than many people imagine, but ‘no pregnant woman could be sure that she would be among the fortunate survivors’.\textsuperscript{77} Furthermore, the perception of the risk of death was clearly greater, with the potential for many

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Breasts, Bottles and Babies}, p. 181.


\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Blood, Bodies and Families}, p. 96. It is often claimed that larger numbers of women died in childbirth than actually did. See for example, Woodruff D. Smith, \textit{Consumption and the Making of Respectability} (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 111, which comments upon the fact that intercourse was thought to be good for a woman’s health ‘despite the high frequency of death in childbirth’ (p. 111).
mothers-to-be knowing, or knowing of, a woman who had died in childbed.

Thornton is particularly frightened:

> often remembirng me of that sad estate I was to passe, and dangerous pirills my soule was to find, even by the gates of death. Soe that I being terrified with my last extremity, could have little hopes to be preserved in this, as to my own strength, if my strength were not in the Almighty. (p. 145)

The ‘estate’ she ‘was going to pass’ was the brush with death that she associated with labour. Her thoughts and her worries were about what should happen to her children if her husband should marry again in the event of her death. Thornton was under no illusion that her husband would not remarry with haste, for she had been advised that ‘it would be necessary for him [to remarry] for his health’ (p. 145), so the concern was a real one. This concern from a mother for her children is also seen in a love poem by Anne Bradstreet entitled ‘Before the Birth of One of Her Children’ (1678). In this poem Bradstreet comments that she might die in the forthcoming birth: ‘How soon, my Dear, death may my steps attend, / How soon't may be thy lot to lose thy friend’.78 Like Thornton, Bradstreet acknowledges that the ties that bind the married couple are undone on death, and, like Thornton, Bradstreet’s main concern is the welfare of her surviving children:

> And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains,
> Look to my little babes, my dear remains.
> And if thou love thy self, or loved'st me,
> These O protect from step-dame's injury. (lines 21-24)

Thornton relates that she is in labour for a day and a night with this birth and that she had an ‘exceeding sharpe and perillous time, beeing in the same condittion of weakenesse after I come to bed and of my son Robert, which I escaped very narrowly the blow of death’ (p. 148). Thornton, this time, took some medication that meant that she was beginning to recover within a fortnight and able to nurse this child. This would suggest that the ‘remedy’ she took was one of the preparations that a midwife would use to stem too much lochial flow.

> When Thornton found herself pregnant once again at the age of forty, she candidly admits that she would rather not have been pregnant: ‘if it had bin good

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in the eyes of my God I should rather (because of that [feeling unwell from an illness the previous September]) not to have bin in this condition. But it is not a Christian’s part to chuse anything of this nature’ (pp. 164-65). After another arduous delivery, Thornton begins to recover from this birth, and gradually begins to fall in love with her latest child. In another paradigmatic early-modern rationale, her love for this newborn is punished by God:

But, least I should too much sett my heart in the sattisfaction of any blessing under heaven, it seemed good to the most infinit wise God to take him from me, giveing me some apprehensions thereof, before any did see it as a change in him. (p. 166)

Crawford writes that ‘love for her children placed a woman in jeopardy […] the Lord might take that child because of too much creature love, the child that was the best a woman could offer both to her family and towards her salvation’.  

Thornton did not have to go through this ordeal again because her husband became ill and died in 1668. The language Thornton uses to describe her lochial flow, ‘flooding’ and ‘those’, offers insights into the ways that women would have spoken about these physiological functions to each other in private. Thornton’s understandings of how her body functioned, moreover, show that she and her community accepted to a large extent the prescribed medical information given in public texts. A clear example of this is the many times in the autobiography that Thornton fears that her flooding will diminish her breast-milk supply. The extent to which it is possible to see the process of child-birth as a bloody, and terrifying, ordeal is made all too graphically clear, as the theme of blood and peril, real and imaginary, is returned to again and again in the text.

As briefly mentioned above, and in common with the other women’s semi-private autobiographical writings analysed in this thesis, such as that of Lady Elizabeth Delaval’s Meditations, discussed in Chapter One, Thornton expresses tensions between the ways in which her body is affected by pregnancy and labour and her religious observations. Thornton gives eloquent and lengthy thanks to God for her safe deliveries in the form of meditations in her autobiography, and records the baptisms of her children, but is never recorded as

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79 Blood, Bodies and Families, p. 186. Crawford goes on to comment upon the fact that when Sarah Savage’s only son died of smallpox aged 21, she took comfort from the ‘reflection that she could not be blamed’, because neither she nor her husband had been over-fond of him despite the fact that he came after five daughters.
being formally churched despite being a keen adherent of the Church of England.\textsuperscript{80} When her first children were born, of course, churching was outlawed under the commonwealth, but her last child, Christopher, was born seven years after the Restoration had renewed a commitment to the practice. Indeed, in the Restoration, public churching became a required act of conformity, and one could be fined for not agreeing to participate. It might be the case that the regional variations in the uptake of churching meant that it was not so widely observed in Yorkshire where Thornton lived; it is, however, surprising that a woman who identified so strongly as ‘distinctly Anglican’ and whose ‘Anglican Restoration piety [is] expressed through the set forms of the Book of Common Prayer and the regular orderly celebration of the sacraments’ would miss the chance to record that she complied with the practice of churching as set out in the Book of Common Prayer.\textsuperscript{81} However, Kathryn R. McPherson has argued that far from omitting to record the churching ritual, the thanksgiving passages that Thornton includes after the birth of Robert, for example, mirror the sentiment of the churching service, and as such suggest that Thornton used her writing as a way of circumventing the ban on churching from 1645 to 1660.\textsuperscript{82} It might be, of course, that Thornton did not record her churchings, but that she did undergo this ritual, even during the ban, for her words are those of a woman familiar with the service. That illicit churching occurred during the interregnum is illustrated in John Evelyn’s diaries. He remembers that his wife

\begin{quote}
was regularly ‘churched at home’, during the 1650s, ‘by Mr Owen, whom I always made use of on these occasions, because the parish minister durst not (or perhaps would not) have officiated according to the form and usage of the Church of England, to which I always adhered’.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} Raymond A. Anselment states that in addition to the ones in the published edition there are many more in the manuscript. See ‘Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Sources of Alice Thornton’s Life’, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{81} ‘Thornton, Alice (1626–1707)’, in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.


\textsuperscript{83} ‘Churching of Women’, p. 140.
Chapter Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, in most of the medical texts lochial blood is treated in a prescriptive way that seems to suggest that the period of bleeding is a time of mortal danger to mother and to child. This fear was perhaps more cultural than factual as, as previously stated, the statistics point to a death rate of ‘roughly 1 per cent in any one pregnancy, and 6-7 per cent during an average procreative career’. The dramatic histories in the medical books perhaps reflect the fact as Ralph Houlbrooke argues that, ‘[t]he overwhelming majority of births were not dangerous, but abnormalities and complications were far more likely to be fatal than they are today’. As the early-modern period progresses the melodramatic presentations of the dangers of ‘flooding’ grow apathetic, and chapters dedicated to ‘flooding’ after childbirth as a distinct disease begin to appear. The hyperbolic language of John Pechey exemplifies this when he writes: ‘Flooding is a more dangerous accident than any other which may happen to a Woman newly laid, and which dispatches her so soon, if it be in a great quantity, that there is not often time to prevent it’. It is worth noting that despite his dramatic tone Pechey does not condemn a flood of lochia universally, reminding his reader that for a woman who does not wish to breastfeed her child ‘[t]he best way to drive away the Milk is the causing an ample Evacuation of the Lochia’. The idea of a suppression of lochial flow as dangerous is also illustrated by Pechey as it is in the texts that predate him. The language used, again, is designed to shock and disquiet even if it falls short of suggesting that this occurrence is mortal: ‘The Suppression of the Lochia is one of the worst Symptoms that can befall a Woman in Child-bed’. The power of lochial blood to disturb and frighten in this period is seen all too clearly in Thornton’s memoirs.

The pseudo-medical text, *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d* (1707), discourses upon the nature of this blood, using the sort of language familiar in medico-erotic texts that discuss hymenal bleeding. This text goes on to

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suggest that the end of lochial bleeding is a signal for woman to resume sexual relations with her husband, suggesting that:

After Travel and ChildBearing, the Woman forgets the Pains that she suffer’d, her Flood being no sooner stopp’d, but she attacks her Husband afresh, and gives him an amorous Battle, I do not doubt but she’ll come off as victoriously as before, and therefore ought to be crown’d with Myrrh, as were anciently those that had made Conquests in Love.  

This idea plays upon the stereotype of the over-sexed female, whose sole interest is sexual gratification. The literary antecedents for the motif of a symbolic return to her husband can be found in the poetry of Robert Herrick published a century before *Conjugal Love*, for example. In the poem ‘Julia’s Churching or Purification’ the speaker describes how Julia goes through a ritual of dressing, putting on her ‘Holy Fillitings’, her veil. The speaker suggests that Julia and her ‘sober’ (line 2) midwife go through a ‘solemn’ (line 3) Catholic or High Church style ceremony where incense is burned. Julia is to give her free and full thanks for her delivery: ‘With reverend Curtsies come, and to him bring / Thy free (and not decurted) offering’ (lines 7-8). The offering to which the speaker refers is from the Book of Common Prayer which required a woman to bring either ‘the chrisom-cloth in which her child was baptised, or the cash equivalent’ as an offering to the church, in place of the sacrificial lamb and pigeon that Leviticus states as canon law (12. 6). Here the point of view of the poem changes from the public to the private, as David Cressy explains, ‘the poem shifts, as the ritual shifted, from sacred to secular matters’. After the ceremony Julia is to return home to a symbolic coupling with her husband: ‘Where ceremonious Hymen shall for thee / Provide a second *Epithalamie*’ (lines 11-12). Due to the fact that this poem represents what Cressy has called ‘a patriarchal, possessive, and erotic vision of wifely obligations’, the idea of ending the churching ritual with a feminocentric party is omitted in favour of a ritualised return to the marital bed. The poem finishes, then, with the didactic moral that a woman who remains

90 Hesperides; or, The Works Both Humane & Divine of Robert Herrick, Esq. (London: Tho. Hunt, 1648), p. 339 (line 1). Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
91 ‘Churching of Women’, p. 140.
92 Birth, Marriage and Death, p. 224.
93 Birth, Marriage and Death, p. 222.
faithful to her husband is his perpetual bride, who ‘Brings him not one, but many a Maiden-Head’ (line 16; original italicisation). In the poem, the contemporary belief that the abstention from intercourse for the immediate post-partum period ends upon churching is employed. The significance of life change for a woman from maid to wife, rather than from a wife to mother, is reinforced in literature, such as in this example, as the churching ritual is manipulated to mark a renewed hymen for the husband to once again conquer, as *Conjugal Love* describes, albeit that *Conjugal Love* inverts the normal pattern of conqueror and vanquished, in its promotion of marital love.

Not only did male writers appropriate female bleeding for erotic imagery, but so too could the metaphor of a woman lying-in be used for political ends. A text complaining about the spiritual state of England in 1660 uses the metaphor of the green or newly lain woman for the affairs of state, in precisely the same way that Helen King has shown that greensickness was used as a political metaphor in the late sixteenth century. Thomas Fuller compares the state of England to a newly delivered woman, who, he says, is in mortal danger. Fuller describes the contemporary early-modern belief that post-partum bleeding was dangerous:

> A Woman, when newly delivered of a Childe, her paine is ended, her peril is but new begun; a little distemper in Dyet, or a small Cold taken may inflame her into a Feaver, and endanger her life. Wherefore when the welfare of such a person is enquired after This Answer-General is returned, She is well for one in her condition; The third, fifth, and ninth dayes, [all Criticall] must be expected, till which time Bene-male is all the health which the Latine Tongue will allow her.

A green or recovering woman is as well as can be expected for a woman in her condition, and, at any point, especially, Fuller implies, at key points her life may be placed in grave danger. The idea of a newly delivered woman being called green is an interesting semantic link between two occasions of apparent danger in a woman’s life, but in the case of a newly-lain woman the term derives from the early-modern idea of green as a person newly recovered from illness (*OED* 10b). This means that Cressy is quite wrong to suggest that the phrase ‘green woman’

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94 King shows that as a logical development of social fears about a potential invasion of the virgin state of England, the idea that a country that was left unconquered for too long could develop greensickness was formed. In this model Luke Gernon’s 1603 text *A Discourse on Ireland* could suggest that Ireland was like a sixteen year old greensick girl that was in need of conquest to cure her. See *The Disease of Virgins*, p. 81.

primarily derives from the similarity between a newly delivered woman and a woman with amenorrhoea or greensickness, because as I have shown in this chapter, the fact is that the early-modern person saw lochial bleeding as a variant on menstrual blood, often as the blood that had built up during the nine months of the pregnancy, being discharged as one extended menstrual period immediately after the birth. 96 This view is paradigmatic of the way that the early-modern person seems to have related to lochial flow, for Sharp and others warn against feeding the wrong diet to the newly-lain woman. Sharp says that one of the mistakes that is commonly made to the detriment of women is to feed them too rich food in the mistaken belief that they need to replenish all the blood they have lost as quickly as possible:

    Let her diet be hot, and eat but little at once; some Nurses perswade them to eat apace because they have lost much blood, but they are simple that say so, for the blood voided doth not weaken but unburden nature, for if it had not come away, long diseases, or death would have succeeded. (p. 176)

Having set up his metaphor Fuller goes on to explain the analogy:

    ENGLAND is this green Woman, lately brought to bed of a long-expected Childe LIBERTY. Many wise men suspected that she would have died in Travell, and both Childe and Mother miscarrie. But God be thanked for a good MIDWIFE, who would not prevent, but attend the Date of Nature. 97

This again shows the approbation of the female body for political ends linked to the body politic.

Thornton’s autobiography and the discussions regarding churching might suggest that lochial bleeding was one aspect of intimate bleeding which was somehow not included in the taboos surrounding vaginal bleeding, but I think this would be a misreading of the case. Raynalde had made it clear from the mid-sixteenth century that he thought women were reluctant to talk even to their own physician about their lochial flow, when he wrote:

    Now, seeing then that it ensueth by so manifold occasions and causes, it shall be meet that women in this case be nothing ashamed ne abashed to disclose their mind unto expert physicians, showing them everything in it, as they know whereupon it should soon come. (p. 128)

96 ‘Churching of Women’, p. 115; Birth, Marriage and Death, p. 203.
97 Mixt Contemplations, p. 58.
Thornton was an exceptional woman, writing in specific circumstances to vindicate her life. Her writing offers an insight into the ways that women might have routinely discussed their lochial flow with their midwife or their companions. This corroboration reinforces the claims by Willis that ‘they’, meaning women, used the term ‘flood’ to describe heavy lochial flow. So, despite the fact that birth is an important event in early-modern society and that maternal bleeding is part of the process of giving birth, outside the specialised world of the medical text, this blood is omitted from the public record in much the same way that menstrual blood is, and even in extreme circumstances like at a court trial the blood can only be referred to in the most euphemistic ways.
Thesis Conclusion: ‘But Ah No More, this Hath Beene Often Tolde, / And Women Grieve to Thinke they Must be Old’

The physiological function of menstruation ends at menopause. Menopause is not a topic analysed in the body of this thesis, which may be surprising to the modern reader, perhaps assuming that menopause would be a natural part of any account of female menstrual bleeding. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the thesis is concerned with analysis of what might be termed transitional bleedings, menarche, hymenal and lochial bleedings, all of which have been perceived as contributing to a woman’s growth to maturity; the end of bleeding was not part of this growth to maturity. Secondly, although menopause can be a time of disturbed patterns of bleeding - as one early-modern physician says, ‘Nature is always so kind to let [women] know’ by means of irregular or changed patterns of menstrual bleeding that these cycles are coming to an end - this does not seem to have been considered a time of female transition in the early-modern era, in quite the same way that it is now. According to the humoral hydraulic system, ageing is a process of drying out, so it would be natural that women would stop having excess blood to purge, as they became naturally less moist during the ageing process. As a result, as Lesley-Ann Dean-Jones says, ‘menopause signalled the reassimilation of the female body to the male (and hence more tractable) body’. It is also the case that current knowledge about early-modern menopause is limited, and this is an area of research which needs to be developed in the future. However, whilst menopause is not a necessary part of the analytic drive in this thesis, it is both logical and revelatory to briefly contextualise the ways that this physiological event was written about in the early-modern period.

1 Samuel Daniel, Delia: Contayning Certayne Sonnets, With the Complaint of Rosamond (London: I. C., 1592), sig. G1
3 Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 107. This assumption is the reason that Lady Macbeth appeals for her menses to be stopped to remove her femininity and make her more masculine, when she says ‘make thick my blood […] That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose’ (1.5.43-45). See Jenijoy Labelle, “‘A Strange Infirmity’: Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea”, Shakespeare Quarterly, 31 (1980), 381-86.
The first thing to note is that menopause is a term that was not seen in print until the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{4} References to this event tend instead to appear in early modern texts as ‘the cessation of the terms’.

The majority of early-modern medical treatises suggest that this happens at forty-nine, consistent with the Hippocratic seven-ages of man theory, in which the body undergoes a crisis at the change of every seven years. Fermentationist Joannes Groeneveld’s *The Grounds of Physick* claims that this takes place ordinarily from the fiftieth Year, partly from the Decay of Blood and Heat, and partly from the Streightness and Dryness of the Passages. They [Menstrual periods] sooner give over in such as are naturally hot than in colder Constitutions, because they sooner grow old, and the Activity of this Ferment is sooner abated.\textsuperscript{5}

For physician John Freind, a plethorist, the most likely age for menopause was also the climacteric age of forty-nine: ‘The menstruous Purgation, or a flux of Blood issuing from the Uterus every Month, usually begins its Periods at the *Second Septenary*, and terminates at the *Seventh*, or the Square of the number seven’.\textsuperscript{6} Once a woman has reached the proper age for the menopause the best-selling *Aristoteles Master-Piece* suggests that there is little one can do to restore her fertility:

> If the Woman be stricken in years, and it cease to be with her after the Custom of Women, that is her Courses are stayed, which in some happens sooner, and some later, and between 44 and 55 with them all unless strong preparatives, \textit{viz.} an Extraordinary diet, easie longing, and moderate exercise restore them, those Women must despair of further Generation: for as the learned in this Art frequently observe, where there is neither Buds nor Blossoms there can be no Fruit.\textsuperscript{7}

However, the processes of menopause were understood to be extremely gradual and the effects of slowly diminishing fertility were acknowledged by two of the women whose cases were discussed earlier. After the loss of her son and heir, Lady Mary Rich had hoped that she would be able to conceive again, she recalled:

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\textsuperscript{4} The *OED* cites ‘ménopause’ as being used as a French word from 1823, but as an English one only from 1872. I have not identified any earlier usage.
\textsuperscript{5} (London: J. Dover and others, 1715), p. 48.
\textsuperscript{6} *Enmenologia*, trans. by Thomas Dale (London: T. Cox, 1729), p. 1. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
\textsuperscript{7} [Anon.], *Aristoteles Master-Piece; or, The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Parts* (London: J. How, 1684), pp. 83-84.
at my son’s death I was not much more than thirty-eight years old, and therefore many, as well as my lord and myself, entertained some hopes of my having more children. But it pleased God to deny that great and desired blessing to us, and I cannot but acknowledge a just hand of God in not granting us our petition.  

And in her early forties, Sarah Duchess of Marlborough and her husband also hoped that she was still young enough to conceive another son, when their only son and heir died. The Duchess must have written to her husband informing him that she had reason to think that she might be pregnant as he wrote back saying that he hoped she had still not had her menstrual period, ‘the visit I so much fear’. As is to be expected, neither woman makes explicit reference to her approaching menopause. Lady Rich rationalises her failure to conceive as a direct result of her disobedience of God’s laws in limiting her family to just two children, because of financial concerns as well as worries about ruining her looks, when she was younger.

Although little specific research has yet been undertaken on early-modern menopause, some discussion of it does appear as part of the study of ageing. For instance Lynn Botelho has argued, in relation to poor, rural women at least, that old age should be viewed as starting at fifty for women, in an argument in which her ‘conclusions challenge the assumptions of many historians who place the onset of old age for all at age 60’. By contrast, in some popular, early-modern literature, like the play *A New Way to Please You; or, The Old Law*, women are deemed useless in society once they are ‘fruitless to the republic’ at the age of sixty. The Duke explains that ‘Our law is fourscore years because we judge / Dotage compleat then, as unfruitfulness / In women at threescore’ (p. 18). This remark might be very significant as a marker of attitudes to menopause, because it indicates that menopause might not have been trusted to be complete, and women safe from the risk of pregnancy until they reached sixty, for as John

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11 Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *A New Way to Please You; or, The Old Law* (London: Nick Hern, 2005), p. 6. Unless otherwise stated, subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in parenthesis immediately following the quotation.
Freind claimed, for menstruation to end when a woman was in her mid-fifties was not unheard of (pp. 84-85). Laura Gowing also cites the example of Anne Kenricke, who became pregnant after an affair with one of her lodgers in which the man concerned claimed that she had told him that ‘he might safely trust to her age’, and so not worry about the risk of her conceiving. He went on to claim that she had told him ‘her age would save him, she was past bearing children’, but when he went on to call her a whore Kenricke sued him for defamation. This case further shows that it might be the case that since menopause is a series of processes which culminate in the end of female fertility, the assumed absolute end was taken at the high age of sixty if people wanted to be beyond doubt, as the dark humour of A New Way to Please You implies. The records of the nonconformist Church of Christ for the mid-seventeenth century also corroborate that this might have been indicative of the wider contemporary belief. The entry for 4 January 1679 reads:

And this day the church chose four sisters of the church that were widows, each of above sixty years of age, to be deaconesses for the congregation, to look after the sick sisters; namely Sister Smith, the elder; sister Spurgeon; sister Webb, the elder; sister Walton. The reason that a woman deacon needed to be over sixty was because her duties included visiting ‘not only sick sisters, but sick brethren also; and therefore some conceive [this] may be the reason why they must be sixty years of age, that none occasion [of offence] may be given’. Historian J. B. Post’s analysis of medieval sources has found that the menopause figures cited in earlier reference books vary wildly from thirty-five to sixty plus, but, Post concludes ‘the suggestions of a very late menopause are unlikely to have been susceptible of demonstration, in view of the mediaeval trends of life expectancy’. Post concludes that in all probability, like with the mean age at menarche, the age at menopause in medieval times was quite similar to that in the twentieth century, or around the

13 Common Bodies, p. 78.
15 The Records of a Church of Christ, p. 398.
fiftieth year. However, what I have argued above is that there is some tentative
evidence which suggests that to be certain a woman was no longer fertile people
chose to take age sixty as a more reliable figure.

In the only in-depth essay on the topic of the menopause in history
Michael Stolberg points to both Patricia Crawford and Joel Wilbush, who
separately assert that there is no historical evidence that women were troubled or
disturbed by the menopause. However, as Stolberg further notes, one mid-
eighteenth-century physician, John Fothergill, wrote that ‘there is a period in the
life of females to which, for the most part, they are taught to look with some
degree of anxiety’. Fothergill goes on to comment that this time is ‘a period on
which depends their enjoying a good or bad state of health during the residue of
their lives’. This statement alone strongly suggests that early-modern women
were expected to have some negative associations with menopause and to
consider it with a degree of anxiety. This further suggests both a medical and a
social concern for the perceived physical and perhaps cultural effects of the
menopause; the reasons for this remain hidden. Stolberg argues that one reason
for the lack of engagement with the menopause in early-modern medical texts is
because, frequently, these texts largely consist of a commentary on the ancient
texts which are often silent on the subject of menopause, giving nothing to be
commented or elaborated upon. Stolberg observes that the most usually cited
ancient source for a comment on menopause is from the Hippocratic Aphorisms
6.29 which claims that women develop podagra (gout) only when their periods
disappear, so only post-menopausally. However, as was seen from Simon
Forman’s case notes, Lady Margaret Hoby consulted him about her gout at the
age of thirty-four, and he records that ‘the disease has long been upon her’. Gout
might therefore have been thought to be related to an absence of

17 ‘A Woman’s Hell? Medical Perceptions of Menopause in Preindustrial Europe’, Bulletin of
the History of Medicine, 73 (1999), 404-28 (p. 405).
18 ‘Of the Management Proper at the Cessation of the Menses’, in Medical Observations and
20 ‘A Woman’s Hell?’, p. 407.
Hippocratic Writings (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 229 which states, as noted in Chapter Two,
that ‘Gout does not occur in women except after the menopause’.
168.
menstruation, but it was a condition that could occur at any age, and amenorrhoea during a woman’s reproductive years was a source of much conjecture in the period. The comment in Aphorisms, therefore, cannot be taken as exclusively pertaining to menopause.

In the hitherto sparse literature that exists on the processes of menopause, the term ‘climacteric’ is often treated as synonymous with menopause, in essays such as Joel Wilbush’s ‘Climacteric Disorders: Historical Perspectives’ cited above. Lynn Botelho says explicitly that menopause was ‘known as “climacteric” to contemporaries’, but, in fact, the evidence I have analysed shows that this is not the way that this term was used. In the seven ages of man theory, every seven years heralded a time of crisis for the body, so that, as I have argued in Chapter One, the menses were assumed to start most naturally at the age of fourteen, the second of the climacteric ages. Midwife Jane Sharp, writing about the time of birth, makes this link clearer:

I told you before, that women are all ready to be brought a bed at seven moneths end, for that number of seven is the perfection of all numbers; Pythagoras saith, that seven is the knot that binds Mans life, and Hippocrates, lib. de Principis, saith, that the time of all men is determined by seven, every climatericall or seven years breeding a new alteration in the body of Man: Children cast their Teeth at seven, and Maids courses begin to flow at fourteen. Seven times seven is of great danger to Mans life; and the great Climaterical which few escape is seventimes nine, which makes sixty three.

It is easy from this to see why the term climacteric is taken retrospectively to be used critically as a synonym for menopause, since under this system menopause was often believed to occur in the climacteric cycle: as Freind says ‘the Square of the number seven’ was believed to be a dangerous time for the body (p.1). Sharp explains that the age of sixty-three was known as the great or grand climacteric, an apparently often fatal age. In her diaries, Lady Anne makes no reference to a time when she might be menopausal, but this is understandable in the context of female silences on the topic of conditions related to menstruation that this thesis

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23 ‘Old Age at Menopause’, p. 53.
25 Grand climacteric is glossed in the Oxford English Dictionary as: ‘grand climacteric: a year of life, often reckoned as the 63rd, supposed to be especially critical’.
has shown; she does, though, write celebrating the passing of her ‘Clymacterial yeare of sixtie three’, the year, she comments that ‘phisitians accounted so remarkable’. The great climacteric is a critical time for both sexes, just as dangerous for man or woman. The play *A New Way to Please You* demonstrates how the climacteric is used to indicate a dangerous time as the Lawyer tells Simonides, who is seeking clarification of the new law, worried that his elderly father will be put to death on his eightieth birthday. The lawyer replies that, ‘He cannot live out to morrow; this is / The most certain Climactericall year’ (I.1). Eighty not being a multiple of seven is not a climacteric year, but is being referred to here dramatically as one because the birthday now means almost certain death for Simonides’s elderly father.

Such confusion about the term climacteric might stem from the fact that this term, as the *OED* shows, does appear to have been used in the nineteenth century as a synonym for menopause. The earliest recorded use of the word in this sense from the *OED* (meaning 2) is from the epilogue in Elizabeth Griffith’s play *The Double Mistake* (1766) from which the following two lines are cited: ‘What weakness can the heart discover / More shameful than a climacteric lover’. However, reading the epilogue in context, it becomes clear that to include this example, the *OED* is in error. The epilogue is spoken by the actress playing Lady Louisa, and gives an overview of the play’s main events. She recalls her own lucky escape from an elopement with the duplicitous Harry Freeman, and proceeds:

Next, shift the scene – behold a virtuoso!
A old illiterate, feeble amoroso!
What weakness can the human heart discover,
More shameful, than a climacteric lover?
Men who have turn’d the period of threescore,
Become mere virtuoso’s – in amour.

Here ‘Mistress Wilford in the character of Lady Louisa’ is mocking her uncle Belmont, who has never married, but is well-known for repeated infatuations. In the play, Belmont has fallen in love and offered all manner of love tokens as

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27 Philip Massinger, Thomas Middleton, and William Rowley, *The Old Law; or, A New Way to Please You* (London: Edward Archer, 1656), p. 4. This line is omitted from the modern edition.

inducement to marriage to Emily Southerne little realising that she was his niece, under an assumed character, whom he had never met. The age of ‘over threescore’ shows that it is clear that this reference is to Belmont, and that he is assumed to be acting so impulsively or ‘shamefully’ because of the effects of his grand climacteric upon him. It is possible to say with confidence, then, that this is not a reference to the menopause, since the subject is both male and over sixty. Indeed, given the social values of decorum that increased throughout the eighteenth century and women’s silence on their menstrual patterns, it is difficult to imagine a woman on the stage in the 1760s claiming that she was menopausal.

Few vernacular early-modern medical treatises seem to view menopause as pathological but, rather, as a natural result of the ageing process, which is arguably why the event did not receive a common name until much later. As Ruth Formanek has noted, Freind sees the menopause as a good thing because ‘menopause preserves the health of the older woman – it was not an illness’. The only tracts that do see the menopause as symptomatic are, perhaps unsurprisingly, those seeking to sell analgesic medications. One such text is an anonymously-authored treatise on scurvy and the diseases of women which seems to be trying to scare women into believing that the menopause is a dangerous time, and suggests that:

Such Women therefore that have regard to their own welfare, will have recourse to this Electuary at such time as the Courses of Nature are about to leave them, and not as many do, take little or no care concerning it, notwithstanding Nature is always so kind to let them know, that she wants the help of Art at that Juncture, by their Courses dodging them, and their flowing but poorly, and sometimes not at all, ebbing and flowing untimely and irregular, sometimes paler and thinner, at other times in smaller quantity and foul, which is warning sufficient, that she stands in need of help, and that they ought at that time to be settled and disposed after a particular manner, and not be neglected as many Women to their Sorrow have done, who for want of such care, are now complaining of either Vapour, Flushings all over the Body, the Whites in abundance, pursiness at Stomach, loss of Appetite, Cholicks, Faintings, or other the like Weaknesses and Indispositions,

29 In ‘A Woman’s Hell?’, Michael Stolberg’s survey of Latin medical tracts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has produced a different result. In these texts many discussions of symptoms caused by the end of menstruation are seen. Further analysis is needed into the lack of transfer of these ideas into the more popular vernacular medical books.

which if not timely remedied, brings Ulcers or Cancers in the Womb, Dropsies, Consumptions or other fatal Distempers.\textsuperscript{31}

The anonymous \textit{A Rational Account of the Natural Weaknesses of Women}, a text with a similar aim of selling medication, also offers the possibility that menopause might be seen as dangerously symptomatic in the early eighteenth century:

And it will not be amiss to touch upon the Disorders that most Women labour under, when being between Forty or Fifty Years of Age, their Courses begin first to dodge, and at last to leave them; for then they are frequently troubled with a severe Pain in the Head and Back, and about the Loyns; sometimes also with Colick Pains, Gripes and Looseness; at other times, with Vapours to violent degree; likewise feverish Heats and wandering Rheumatick Pains, \&c.\textsuperscript{32}

Other than this, most texts that mention the menopause do so almost in passing and largely in relation to the onset of menstruation, rather than as a topic of theoretical debate.

Outside medical treatises, the only other context in which menopause might be seen as a topic for discourse is in the famous tract on witchcraft by Reginal Scot who ‘suggested in \textit{Discovery of Witchcraft} (1584) that post-menopausal women were particularly at risk of being accused of the crime “upon the stopping of their monthly melancholic flux or issue of blood” as this made them prone to the vain imagination that they could command the Devil’.\textsuperscript{33} Scot is in effect suggesting that if the melancholy which he supposes to be discharged in monthly bleeding builds up in an ageing woman, then she could have an excess of black bile, resulting in evil thoughts and influences. In the humoral system the mind and body are interconnected, and so an excess of any humour can affect thought patterns. The sorts of physical changes that a woman might expect after menopause, such as osteoporosis causing the ‘dowager’s hump’ and tooth-loss, which in turn causes the face to cave in and the nose to appear hooked, and the growth of facial hair, are all, as Laura Gowing has commented, stereotypical

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\textsuperscript{31} \textit{An Account of the Causes}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{A Rational Account of the Natural Weaknesses of Women} (London: A. Dodd, 1716 [?]), p. 31.
\end{flushleft}
characteristics of the witch. Gowing speculates that, ‘in part, the stereotypes of witchcraft were fuelled by fears and hostility about age’.

It is possible that the scaremongering seen in the books that sought to sell medication, along with the associating of stopped menstrual blood with witchcraft, and natural concerns about the end of life, led to John Fothergill’s writing, as discussed above, in the later eighteenth century, that:

There is a period in the life of females to which, for the most part, they are taught to look with some degree of anxiety; as a period on which depends their enjoying a good or bad state of health during the residue of their lives. These various and absurd opinions relative to the ceasing of the menstrual discharge, and its consequences, propagated through successive ages, have tended to embitter the hours of many sensible women. Nor have the mistaken notions been confined to them only; they have occupied the minds of such who ought to have been better informed.

My study of women’s extant letters, journals, and other writings so far suggests that women were as silent on the effects and implications of the menopause as they were about menstruation. It is too early to say with confidence, as Crawford does, that there is no evidence that women were troubled physically by their menopause, especially since the medical record does list symptoms such as ‘flashings’ which would now be called hot flushes. Nor is it possible yet to concur with Stolberg, whose reading of Latin medical texts, leads him to take the opposite view. In terms of the emotional effects of the end of fertility I have cited two women who were somewhat anxious about whether they have left it too late to have another child. In a letter home Lady Mary Montagu Wortley is scathing about European women’s cultural anxieties about the end of their fertility. Writing to her friend Anne Thistlethwayte in January 1718 from Constantinople, Lady Mary tells how the people there breed continuously and so are fearful of the menopause because it is shameful to be seen as a woman who is too old to bear children:

34 Common Bodies, p. 79. The list of physical changes is from Lynn Botelho, ‘Old Age’, pp. 54–55.

35 Common Bodies, p. 75.

36 ‘Cessation of the Menses’, p. 160.

37 ‘A Woman’s Hell?’ p. 405. Stolberg asserts that his view is formed by his reading of both Latin and vernacular gynaecological texts, but the pre-eighteenth century evidence he cites is exclusively from Latin treatises.
Ladys here so ready to make proofs of their Youth (which is necessary in order to be a receiv’d Beauty […] ) that they do not content themselves with using the natural means, but fly to all sort of Quackerys to avoid the Scandall of being past Child bearing and often kill themselves by ’em.38

This letter implies that the end of fertility might not have the associations for an English woman that it did for women in Constantinople. Such views work against the medical claims that women were taught to fear their menopause, and inform the immediate future for my research, beyond the scope of this thesis. I hope to build on work such Michael Stolberg’s to consider early medical writing and also other contemporaneous publications such as conduct books and religious treatises, and to compare these, where possible, with women’s own writings about the ageing and menopause processes, with the intention of discovering if, how, when, and why women were ‘taught’ to fear their menopauses.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis has offered a comprehensive analysis of the ways that early-modern people thought about the blood associated with the female reproductive cycle, with particular reference to what might be termed the three times of transitional bleeding. These stages were viewed as an essential part of female growth to maturity in antiquity, and this hypothesis has been tested to see if it remained an overriding part of how people viewed female adolescence and growth to maturity, in an era in which Hippocratic medicine was widely privileged. The thesis has shown that it was certainly the case that menarche was viewed as a determinate of female sexual maturity. A normative way of talking about female adolescence was to say that a woman was ripe, or ‘ripe for man’, that is to say marriageable, as in Elisha Cole’s *Dictionary* which defines puberty as ‘[the signs of] ripe age’. This phrase is directly Hippocratic. The case study of Lady Elizabeth Delaval has highlighted the ways that in the highly religious early-modern society, religious obedience or disobedience was often the way that bodily changes were expressed. Just as Lady Mary Rich saw her inability to have more children as a just punishment from God, Lady Elizabeth sees her natural adolescent need to sleep as a detriment to her proper supplication to God’s will.

The second chapter has shown that writing on menstruation indicates a clear gender divide, partially driven by the fact that men had recourse to Latin or Greek in which to encode their references to it. The chapter goes on to offer the first in-depth analysis of the practical aspects of managing menstruation with both accounts of menstrual pain and sanitary protection. Here it is apparent, again, that the perception of cloths and clothing with menstrual blood on them owes much to religious doctrines in which menstruation functions as a metaphor for religious impurity. Furthermore, many of the books of ‘women’s secrets’ that appeared throughout the period sought to inform women that to hide their menstrual-related illnesses was to ultimately risk death, which implies that women did seek to keep these problems secret if possible. Physician John Sadler writes that a woman often ‘conceals her grief and increaseth her sorrow’, because speaking to a doctor

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40 An English Dictionary (London: Peter Parker, 1677), p. 121 [?].
about menstruation was considered shameful.\(^{41}\) In a society in which it was thought improper to speak about menstruation, and in which the myths about the poisonous nature of this blood still abounded, and in which religion forms a cultural base, it is easy to see why women would be inclined to keep their menses and their management of this physiological function as secret as possible even, sometimes, to the detriment of their own health.

In examining the ways that early-modern couples related to menstruation within a relationship, this thesis can challenge the ways that menstruation in cultural histories is sometimes presented. For example, in her biography of Sir Walter Ralegh’s wife, Bess, Anna Beer comments that ‘Many husbands kept diaries of the wives’ menstrual cycles and insisted on having sex at what they believed to be the most appropriate time, the irony being that common knowledge had it that a woman was most fertile when she was menstruating’.\(^{42}\) As the research presented here has unequivocally shown, even if some people did think that the most fertile period for a woman was during her menses, both social and cultural convention suggests that they would not seek to conceive at this time.

It is undoubtedly the case that the next occasion of transitional bleeding, expected to happen upon first sexual intercourse, was viewed as a significant phase in a woman’s growth to maturity. This bleeding was seen as signifying a woman’s transition from a maid to a wife. Because this blood was caused by sexual penetration it would seem that it came, during this period, to be recognised as an erotic symbol, leading to the eighteenth-century publication of a novel which has the eroticisation of hymenal bleeding as its main thematic concern. That hymenal blood was perceived as a variant on menstrual blood is seen throughout the medical writing of the period. The belief that upon first intercourse the hymen would ideally rupture and bleed is linked to menstruation through the circumlocution ‘the flower of virginity’. The verb ‘to deflower’ as to take a woman’s virginity, is particularly apt when it is an act which can cause ‘the flowers’ to flow. The idea that first intercourse could tear open the vaginal vessels was the reason that intercourse was the primary cure for greensickness, for

\(^{41}\) *The Sicke Womans Private Looking-Glasse* (London: Philemon Stephens and Christopher Meridith, 1636), sig. A5\(^{\text{v}}\).

example. Samuel Pepys notes a story put out by the court in 1666 to provide a cover for one of the Duke of York’s many affairs. Pepys records that:

Sir Rd. Ford did this evening at Sir W. Batten’s tell us that upon opening the body of my Lady Denham, it is said that they found a vessel about her matrix, which had never been broke by her husband, that caused all pains in her body – which, if true, is excellent invention to clear both the Duchesse from poison and the Duke from lying with her.43

Lady Margaret Denham had been married the previous year at the age of twenty-three, to the fifty-year-old, apparently impotent, Lord John Denham. The ruse that she died a virgin of a complication caused by a blocked vessel, perhaps envisaged as a form of greensickness, was put about to remove the supposition that she had been poisoned for being a favourite mistress who held too much sway over the Duke of York.44 That this story could be spread plausibly succinctly demonstrates that there was a widespread acceptance in early-modern society that the vessels in the vagina contributed to menstrual bleeding and were indeed a source of hymenal bleeding.

The next occasion of transitional bleeding has been argued to be the flow of blood that is emitted after a birth. This blood demonstrated a woman’s growth to motherhood, but significantly did not seem to be taken in the early-modern period, unlike in ancient times, as a stage in a woman’s growth to maturity on a cultural level. There is no evidence that I have been able to find that wives who were not mothers were treated by society as a lower class of woman, even if, given motherhood’s cultural significance, a woman was normally regretful if she did not become a mother. The delineation was very much between an unmarried woman of any age and a wife or a woman. The estate of motherhood was not, then, necessary in order to be accepted as a woman in early-modern society: sexual penetration within the context of marriage was, however, necessary for a female to be classed as a mature woman. All the bleeding associated with a birth was normally classed as analogous to menstrual blood and, unlike the eroticisation of hymenal blood, this blood seems to have been viewed with some awe, possibly because of the risk of death that people associated with the birth

process. Indeed in poems such as Robert Herrick’s ‘Julia’s Churching’, the end of lochial bleeding is celebrated as a time for the possibility of the renewal of marital relations, and as such its cessation is celebrated in much the same way that in erotic accounts of hymenal bleeding, its flowing is celebrated.

Throughout this thesis the differences between public and private writings have been highlighted. What has been demonstrated repeatedly is that women seemed to be disinclined to speak or write about their experiences of menstruation unless it was in extremis such as in a court case. This cannot be because women were uninterested in their cycles, for their husbands often record their wives’ cycles, often in some detail. For example, John Dee records not only his wife’s menstrual periods but also how much blood she seems to have lost.

There are other factors which need to be taken into consideration besides women’s disinclination to speak about their cycles and that is that there is not as much female writing extant as there is male-authored material. Felicity Nussbaum has noted that even as late as the 1760s, only forty-four per cent of women were able to sign their own name, compared with seventy per cent of men, which, whilst only a crude indication of literacy levels, naturally means that there were fewer texts by women which could have survived to provide a record for study now.45 Furthermore, as Cinthia Gannett has asserted:

[W]e have seen repeatedly with regard to men’s and women’s discourse, not only have men written the majority of public discourses, they also have been the ones to decide which ones to save and why. Much of the work on diaries and journals to date is a product of the same oppositions between dominant and muted, public and private voices, and the same time-worn assumptions that the masculine case is generic in all discourse.46

It might be that, in the coming years, more women’s diaries, journals, and letters will be discovered. The analysis in this thesis will provide a framework for understanding documents such as these, should they appear, as we now have a clearer picture of the sorts of ways that women related their menstrual lives. The overriding concern of this thesis has been to analyse the ways that women might

have related to their menstruating bodies. By showing the social pressures both internal and external on women to keep silent on this topic (from religion codes, to myths which proliferated about the poisonous nature of this blood, and codes of propriety), this thesis has produced a thorough cultural analysis of the ways that menstruation was accounted for, for the whole reproductive cycle, in early-modern England.
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