Chapter Title: Gender and English Identity on the Eve of Colonial Settlement

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Book Author(s): KATHLEEN M. BROWN
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PART ONE

Gender Frontiers

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CHAPTER ONE

Gender and English Identity on the Eve of Colonial Settlement

If this [women in masculine attire] be not barbarous, make the rude Scythian, the untamed Moor, the naked Indian, or the wild Irish, Lords and Rulers of well-governed Cities.—Hic Mulier, 1620

The English settlers who crossed the Atlantic to Virginia in 1607 hailed from a society committed to patriarchal social relations but unsure of the nature of sexual difference. England's initial voyages to the Chesapeake as well as its earlier forays to Ireland and West Africa occurred in a period of social and economic turmoil, marked by energetic discussions of gender relations and heightened community concern for the order of households. With the accession of Elizabeth I, English writers revived an ancient debate about woman's essential nature and predisposition toward good or evil. Beliefs that female subordination was part of a natural order and a prerequisite for female virtue ran headlong into others in which women, like nature "herself," were powerful, hence dangerous, because of their ability to elude precise definition by human beings. The dialogue intensified periodically as the political stakes changed, peaking during the religious conflicts and economic difficulties at the end of the century and again during James I's subsequent efforts to revive patriarchal absolutism.

The debates about gender were of political as well as social significance. The alleged physical and moral weakness of women provided authors with a useful metaphor for explaining other relations of dominance and submission. Marital, familial, and communal order all hinged on God's sanction of male superiority; so, too, did concepts of political authority and the strength of a nation newly embarked on mercantile and imperial ventures overseas. As economic depression and social upheaval wracked England at the end of

the sixteenth century, parliamentary legislation and local officials exploited traditions of gender difference in the interest of restoring order. Fundamental contradictions in contemporary definitions of sexual difference, however, placed a heavy burden on legal and religious institutions to explain and maintain distinctions between men and women. Carefully scrutinized by court and church alike, gender became an important technology of state power—both at home and abroad—and was basic to the very assertion of political authority.[1]

Women's natural and proper subordination to men was not simply a subject for elite pamphlet debates. It also touched ordinary English people's lives locally through the law, the church, and the culture of village life. The rising incidence of slander cases, the division of labor, and the persecution of witches all testified to the salience of a gendered social order for ordinary women and men. As demographic pressures and economic difficulties increased the size of the poor and vagrant populations, English propertyowners actively pursued beliefs that the subordination of women, especially the impoverished, would contain chaos and restore social harmony. Like the authors, lawmakers, and clerics of the period, these propertied individuals attempted to enforce the "natural" order, expanding the reach of state authority into the lives of poor people. Villagers, meanwhile, often had their own customs for punishing unruly women and shaming couples who deviated from ideals for household harmony. Although they appear to have shared in elite ideals for wifely submission, their intervention into disorderly households was inspired, not by philosophy or political theory, but by longstanding traditions of community self-regulation.

England was not alone in the coincidence of rising imperial enthusiasms and conflict over the true nature of women. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, and the Italian principalities were all similarly engaged in state-building projects that strengthened royal authority, making national honor and bulging state coffers contingent upon successful overseas trade.[2] Each aspiring nation also witnessed the rise of spirited printed debates about women's nature—*querelles des femmes*—in which writers discussed differences between men and women and, more obliquely, questions of nature, power, and national identity. The essence of sexual difference thus became a pressing question throughout Europe at the same moment that questions about what it meant to be European—and, more specifically, English, Dutch, or Spanish—came to the fore.

England's first American colony, Virginia, was steeped in these debates from the moment of its inception. Its name evoked the sexual virtue Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, was believed to embody. Associations of the land with virgin innocence reinforced the notion that Virginia had been saved from the Spaniard's lust to be conquered by the chaste English. Symbolizing unful-

filled male desire, female virtue, and the promise of a land not yet possessed, "Virginia" signified the ease with which English gender discourses could be adapted to the purpose of claiming a New World territory.[3]

Significantly, Virginia was claimed by England and settled by English men and women at the same historical moment in which the English state, merchants, and adventurers had intensified their commitment to patriarchal households and female domesticity as the defining characteristics of Englishness. The discourses of gender that infused English discussions of social order and political authority gradually infiltrated the language of colonialism, permeating English efforts to distinguish themselves from such non-English peoples as the Gaelic Irish and West Africans. When English explorers eventually reached the shores of the North American continent, their concepts of political authority, their representations of native inhabitants, and their depictions of themselves as civilized conquerors reflected a history of imperial activity in which the language and performance of gender differences had played a prominent part.

Gender and Political Authority

For most of the sixteenth century, English writers described all of God's creation as existing in an Aristotelian chain of being in which every creature was linked to others immediately above and below it. Each creature also belonged to larger groups consisting of elements, plants, animals, humans, or angels. Like the flora and fauna below them and the celestial beings above them, humans assumed places defined by relations to social superiors and inferiors. Women, however, had no direct relationship to other individuals in the chain but rather existed in subordinate positions to men of their rank.[4]

Relying on ancient texts, sixteenth-century writers drew analogies from this universal female subordination to establish and explain the naturalness of the political order. As the head of a household, a man constituted one of many concentric political circles that extended from the humblest cottage to the king's palace. Most commonly, writers compared this patriarchal authority within families to religious or state power. The Christian humanist Desiderius Erasmus, for example, explicitly compared the kingdom to a great family and likened the king to a father. The archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, similarly compared wifely obedience to a husband with a subject's obedience to a magistrate. Orderly households were, in these discussions, the fundamental building blocks of a divinely sanctioned social order, providing political and social stability through their model of patriarchal authority.[5]

During the tumultuous years between 1560 and 1640, writers relied in-

creasingly upon the metaphor of the well-run household to communicate their vision for social order. By the early seventeenth century, defenders of monarchical authority articulated political obligation in openly patriarchal terms derived from models of household authority. Prominent advice book author Richard Brathwait called the family "a domestic kingdom, a monarchy" over which the father ruled. Sir Robert Filmer, author of *Patriarcha* (1642) and kin to many of Virginia's gentry, similarly explained that "as the Father over one family, so the king, as Father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth." Infusing these commonplace analogies with an explicit political content, seventeenth-century political and religious writers exploited the apparent naturalness of the father's authority to defend royal absolutism.[6]

The need to maintain patriarchal households and orderly communities became both an obligation of and justification for state power. By criminalizing witchcraft and certain sexual acts that had previously been punished by communities, the state intervened in local definitions of social order to bolster its own authority. Henrician statutes declaring sodomy and bestiality capital offenses, for example, criminalized nonheterosexual behavior. Parliament's decision to criminalize witchcraft in 1542, moreover, tightened the connections between gender ideologies and state power by reiterating categories of deviance and encouraging community efforts to enforce conformity.[7]

The positive reevaluation of marriage by Protestants and Counter Reformation Catholics during the late sixteenth century also reinvigorated patriarchal analogies to political authority. English Protestants rejected celibacy, allowing clergymen to form legal unions. Catholics at the Council of Trent (1563), meanwhile, instructed adherents to embrace marriage as a sacrament rather than as a last-ditch attempt to avoid the sin of fornication. When Tudor monarchs confiscated monastic properties that had formerly provided a celibate alternative for some English women and men, England joined the rest of Europe in making marriage a more likely and worthy destiny. Both Catholic and Protestant churches attempted to make good on the new importance of marriage by claiming exclusive rights to act as conjugal gatekeepers, declaring when the unmarried might be considered legally wed.[8]

Although Protestant reevaluations of marriage stressed ideals of spiritual equality between husband and wife, the spiritual power of each man over his own household may actually have been enhanced. The clergy's modest success in convincing couples to adopt church marriage rituals increased opportunities for ministers to instruct brides in the divine decree of wifely obedience to husbands. Depictions of "good" women, described as hardworking, pious, quiet, and submissive wives, accompanied discussions of the reconfigured conjugal relationship. Some women undoubtedly benefited from the

growing emphasis on individual relationships with God and direct contact with the Word through reading the vernacular Bible. But the diminished role of priests and the patriarchal emphasis of Protestant familial religion may have made female subordination to husbands more strictly normative, infusing female deviance and insubordination with a potentially more significant religious meaning.[9]

While lawmakers and clergymen redefined sexuality, marriage, and female conduct at home, Tudor monarchs contemplated ambitious colonial projects abroad. Attempts to achieve dominance in Ireland culminated in 1541 with the Henrician declaration of sovereignty over the island. No longer content with the powers of feudal lordship, Henry attempted to incorporate Ireland into his realm by declaring himself its king. England's subsequent attempts to enforce this theoretical political dominance with military might only increased the need for an absolute state.[10]

The English state ultimately gained strength from the conjunction of domestic interventions and imperial projects. Discourses about female subordination, which explained and justified the expansion of royal authority at home, also proved highly useful abroad, allowing the English to depict indigenous peoples, whose lands they wished to claim, as conquerable "others." The key to the versatility of such a discourse lay in its ability to naturalize power. Described with gendered language, acts of dispossession and imperial appropriation became comprehensible as part of the natural order.

Nature's Power

Even without overt challenges to the naturalness of women's subordination to men, the theoretical connections between the chain of being, patriarchal power, and social order were fragile because of the difficulty of defining "woman." Many Renaissance thinkers agreed that woman's nature was highly changeable, dangerous, and unstable. Writing in the early seventeenth century, Joseph Swetnam, for example, expressed Renaissance traditions about female changeability when he complained that "women have more contrary sorts of behaviour then there be women." It was "impossible for a man to know all, no nor one part of women's quallities," he concluded. Such characterizations of women derived from classical literature, Galenic concepts of sexual difference, Biblical creation accounts, and contemporary interpretations of women's intertwined economic and reproductive roles.[11]

At the root of discussions of female nature and marriage lay profound ambivalence about the meaning of "nature" itself. Sixteenth-century English writers used the term in dozens of ways, ranging from the pejorative to the

adulatory. In the great majority of its meanings, a female-personified nature signified a power, purpose, or force beyond human control, as in this popular proverb about the folly of trying to wash the blackamoor white:

> Leave off with paine, the blackamoor to skowre,
> With washinge ofte, and wipinge more then due:
> For thou shalt finde, that Nature is of powre,
> Do what thou canste, to keepe his former hue:
> Thoughe with a forke, wee Nature thruste awaie,
> Shee turnes againe, if wee withdrawe our hande:
> And thoughe, wee ofte to conquer her assaie,
> Yet all in vaine, shee turnes if still wee stande:
> Then evermore, in what thou doest assaie,
> Let reason rule, and doe the thinges thou maie.

Such inexplicable and uncontrollable forces as time, weather, and creation were considered akin to God's own powers and necessary for cosmic order.[12]

Nature could also refer to the primitive—that which had not been altered by Christianity or culture—in both a positive and negative sense. In the former usage, it connoted a prelapsarian naked innocence, an earthly paradise from which man had been expelled. But primitive nature could also mean unenlightened heathenism, with nudity and long hair symbolizing bestiality and lust. During the sixteenth century, images of the primitive drew upon both of these meanings, with representations of forest-dwelling wild men or Diana, classical goddess of the hunt, signifying the dualism of unfallen nature as both threatening to and less corrupted than civilized society.[13]

When writers argued that social hierarchies were part of the divinely created natural order, they invoked nature to explain the dominance of one group by another. Such interpretations echoed Aristotelian arguments that some groups of people had been specially created to fulfill subordinate social roles, a position that saw some revival in sixteenth-century Spanish debates about whether American Indians were natural slaves or natural children. Simultaneously omnipotent and primitive, nature became a powerful justification for European conquest in the Americas.[14]

Human accomplishments could also be construed as natural when they brought allegedly bestial elements of creation into harmony with God's plan for cosmic order. Women, wild men, gypsies, non-European peoples, children, the vagrant poor, and animals appeared in sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century English texts and accounts of festivals as creatures in need of taming. The transformation of wild forests and swamps into parks, farms, and gardens also reflected this vision of nature, appropriately subdued.[15]

Male dominion over women was but one of many relationships explained and legitimated through references to a divinely sanctioned nature. Most

sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century pamphlets written about women reminded readers that Eve's punishment for listening to the serpent had resulted in female suffering during childbirth, the reproductive function for which women were created. Women who denied their own weakness and imperfection and encroached on male privileges were often described as foolishly trying to "thrust away" nature. Playwrights and wits of the period often compared the necessity of women's subordination to the relationship between horse and rider. One early-seventeenth-century pamphlet reminded readers of the similarities between controlling a woman and taming a horse: "As a sharp bit curbs a froward horse, even so a cursed woman must be roughly used." Jokes of the period also employed this equestrian metaphor to refer to sexual intercourse.[16]

Like the wild men of English folktales and court entertainments, women were represented as having an intimate and powerful connection to natural phenomena. Writers symbolized the alleged changeability of female nature with the moon, whereas the moist and cool tendencies of female humors inspired comparisons to water. Drawing upon Galenic concepts of sexual difference, many pamphleteers described women as lustier than men and given to sensuality as a result of poorly developed reason and imperfect physical constitutions. In most of these discussions, manhood, reason, Christianity, and civilization stood in opposition to women, sensuality, heathenism, and nature.[17]

By the late sixteenth century, as the English contemplated the creation of mercantile outposts overseas, nature signified less the threat of wildness than an opportunity for elite male self-definition and validation. Elite men commonly depicted themselves as being well suited to the divinely appointed task of taming nature as a consequence of their superior reason. The tangible signs of their success—gardens, land under cultivation, and, most important, cities—testified to their identity as English men living during a golden age of English achievement.[18]

Nature's ability to encompass many different meanings made it useful for justifying English imperial and mercantile ambitions in Ireland, West Africa, and the Americas; but this same multivalent quality undermined its usefulness as a foundation for English identity. Uncertainties about what it meant to be English multiplied, especially when indigenous peoples rejected visions of a natural order in which English adventurers dominated grateful heathens. It is perhaps not surprising that, with growing poverty and social unrest at home and a female monarch ruling the realm, male pamphleteers sought to rescue the "natural" social order by defining the essential nature of woman.

Ruling Women

The English pamphlet debate about women made available a highly charged vocabulary of gender differences that had implications for the meaning of nature, power, and English society more generally. Following its initial appearance during the 1540s, the debate blossomed into a heated war of words between 1558 and 1570, as Elizabeth's Protestant defenders attempted to shield her from misogynist attacks like those made on the previous queen, her Catholic half-sister Mary. The debate erupted intermittently thereafter, resurfacing during the 1580s and again between 1615 and 1640.[19]

Most pamphlet writers did not dispute the existence of a distinct female essence but argued for a particular interpretation of it. Writers summoned evidence from such irreproachable sources as the Bible, classical literature, and nature itself. Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women* (1545), for example, a dialogue that argued both women's ability to rule and the appropriateness of female subordination to husbands, interpreted men's and women's physical differences as complementary and divinely sanctioned. Elyot represented women as weak and slippery like "softe and clammy" clay. Although the "hard and consolidate" stone of which men were constituted made for stronger walls, according to Elyot, both clay and stone had their own special use and "perfection."[20]

Most other sixteenth-century authors would have agreed with Elyot's portrait, although they were sharply divided about how to interpret female attributes. Whereas some listed shrewishness, insatiable lustiness, irrationality, and fickleness as natural female character traits, other writers, such as Cornelius Agrippa, insisted that modesty, a desire to nurture, and piety more accurately described most women. Agrippa also contended that women's inferiority could be explained as a consequence of "custome, education, fortune, and a certayne tyrannicall occasion," rather than of divine or natural law. Both misogynists and defenders of women concurred on the qualities defining a good woman but disagreed about whether most women had those qualities.[21]

With Edward VI's death in 1553 and the succession of his sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, pamphleteers expounded on questions of female character and nature in more explicitly political terms. The most extreme attack on female rulers as "unnatural monsters" came from Calvinist John Knox, who wrote *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) with Catholic Mary Tudor in mind. "Nature," declared Knox, "doth paint them to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish, and experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment." When Elizabeth assumed power in 1558, Protestant adherents rushed to diffuse the potential damage of Knox's misogynist attacks. John Aylmer, author of *Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes agaynst the*

Late Blowne Blast (1559), defended Elizabeth's right to rule by casting doubt upon the soundness of natural law. Arguing that nature's tendency to variation made it an inappropriate foundation for truth claims, he urged a more historical and flexible view of scriptural authority.[22]

Defenses of and satirical attacks upon women continued throughout Elizabeth's reign. Pamphleteers used dialogues to present both sides of the argument with nearly equal weight, creating sharply caricatured characters to serve as mouthpieces for the most controversial points. Although most authors allowed female defenders to win the debate, misogynist arguments received such a full hearing that the net effect may have been to perpetuate dualistic images of women's nature as well as of nature itself. Ambivalent and contradictory portraits of women also communicated to readers that women were unstable and dangerous to men unless contained and controlled.[23]

Although she did not silence patriarchal definitions of power, Elizabeth appears to have temporarily disrupted them. She presented writers with a continuing challenge to reconcile her femaleness with traditional symbols of power. Some limited their use of patriarchal metaphors for communicating her power, emphasizing instead her exceptional and androgynous qualities, while others abandoned the project of arguing her fatherly right to her subjects' fealty altogether. Overt claims that monarchs deserved absolute obedience as fathers emerged in full force only after Elizabeth's successor, James I, took the throne in 1603.[24]

Elizabeth supplemented her tenuous patriarchal claims with a powerful public persona as chaste virgin and mother, images that would have been recognizable to most inhabitants of her newly Protestant realm. The popular association of the queen with the Virgin Mary began during the mid-1570s as Elizabeth entered her forties and appeared to be past her childbearing years. Comparisons with the Virgin Mary, who embodied wisdom and purity rather than the natural world, allowed Elizabeth to overcome images of changeable female nature, a transcendence of gender reflected in her conservative motto *semper eadam* (always the same). Elizabeth thus presented the antithesis of the lusty daughter of Eve popular in the misogynist literature of the time.[25]

But Elizabeth's acclaimed celibacy also defied the literature celebrating marriage and extolling virtuous and obedient wives. Through her refusal to grant any man official sexual access to her body, Elizabeth could powerfully present herself as a suitable spouse for the realm. In a speech delivered by proxy to Parliament in 1558, she announced: "I have long since made choice of a husband, the kingdom of England . . . charge me not with the want of children, forasmuch as everyone of you, and every Englishman besides, are my children." Reversing monarchical gender imagery, Elizabeth became mother to all English subjects. Like the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth's identity and authority were both virtuous and maternal.[26]

Elizabeth also used her virginity as a metaphor for England's military inviolability. As Louis Montrose has shown, Elizabeth occasionally identified her female person with the English realm, likening her maidenhood to England's successful defense of its coast from the Spanish threat. Adopting the tone of a virgin outraged by an assault upon her chastity, she presented herself as an energetic female defender of the realm's virtue, a role complementary to that of chaste spouse and mother.[27]

Throughout her thirties and forties, Elizabeth continued to navigate a treacherous course of entertaining marriage proposals from foreign princes and presenting herself as a sexually inactive vessel of authority. Her manuevers prompted several public discussions of marriage, in which inegalitarian relations between husband and wife were often touted as the distinguishing characteristic of a civilized people. Painting egalitarian marital relations with the brush of heathenism, the main female character in Edmund A. Tilney's *Brief and Pleasant Discourse of Duties in Mariage* (1568) declared her belief that equality in marriage was a "Barbarian custom . . . to be disanulled, and contemned of Christians." Tilney's Erasmian character similarly abhorred marital equality, remarking that "both divine and humaine lawes, in our religion giveth the man absolute authoritie, over the woman in all places."[28]

As long as she remained unmarried, Elizabeth could redeem the violation of nature incurred by ruling women with a public image of virginity. Ruling through a unique authority constructed from the male right of kings, a female personification of the realm, and the virtue of chaste wife and mother to the commonwealth, Elizabeth claimed divine sanction for her potentially subversive role.[29] With the backing of God, a nod to nature, and an invocation of virginity and maternity, Elizabeth appropriated the symbols of virtuous womanhood and used them to forge her authority. When she designated England's new possession in America "Virginia," she rather significantly inscribed the territory with the symbol of her own power and popularity.

Economic Woes

Elizabeth's motto, *semper eadam,* represented a tactically erected façade of political stability at a time when the English economy was anything but stable. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, rapid population growth, rising prices, changing concepts of propertyownership, and declining wages acted as solvents upon households and communities, prompting women and men to leave the villages and towns of their birth to seek employment in London, Bristol, or overseas in the West Indies or the Chesapeake. The concurrent rise of local and regional markets eroded feudal forms of authority and economy and cleared the way for legal definitions of land as a

commodity owned exclusively by an individual (usually male). Spurred by the profits to be garnered by supplying these markets, substantial landholders defined their property with hedges and ditches and considered themselves land "owners." This trend contributed to the transformation of poor people into vagrants and facilitated subsequent English land claims in North America.[30]

With their traditional rights of grazing, hunting, and gleaning on common land undermined by noble and gentry enforcement of exclusive definitions of property, husbandmen, laborers, and lesser yeomen were compelled to supplement incomes with wage labor or face certain poverty. Some migrated to towns, became vagrants, or remained in their villages to join the ranks of the poor exempted from parish rates and eligible for relief. This growing number of masterless men heightened the anxieties of landed yeomen, Puritans, local gentry, and crown authorities. Landless and often lacking both families and masters, these men inspired Sir John Smith to compare the England of 1589 to ancient Rome and warn of the dangers of a "slave" rebellion by the lower orders.[31]

Lawmakers heeded the danger and took steps to blunt the most obvious forms of social disorder by regulating the supply and distribution of labor. Following a period of high mortality and labor shortage, lawmakers passed the Statute of Artificers (1563) in an attempt to control wages and apprenticeship contracts. The statute assigned occupations according to social position, allowing certain higher-status men and women to enter apprenticeships to learn crafts and steering others toward agriculture and domestic service. The statute also reflected concern about female idleness, requiring that all unmarried English women between the ages of twelve and forty occupy themselves with spinning. The Poor Law of 1572 subsequently mandated the apprenticeship of poor children in husbandry.[32]

Other laws attacked vagrancy by punishing those on the move. A 1531 statute officially sanctioned the custom of whipping able-bodied masterless men and women and sending them back to their places of birth or former residences. In 1547, one short-lived statute even threatened vagrants with slavery, which consisted of two years of coerced labor. Repealed three years later, this drastic proposal was revived in 1598 although apparently never enforced. Some vagrants did receive severe corporal punishments after 1572, however, when Parliament distinguished between those who willfully avoided steady work and those who could not find it. Capping a century of increasingly stringent measures and rigorous definitions of vagrancy, the 1598 act for the "suppressing of rogues, vagabounds and sturdy beggars" created the overseers of the poor to administer punishments, employment, and relief locally.[33]

County justices tried to facilitate the transformation of masterless men into employed masters of families by creating wage regulations that favored male laborers. Throughout the sixteenth century, justices established priorities for

assisting the unemployed. Wage rates for men were usually higher than those for women, and employers were encouraged to hire married men over the unmarried. These wage regulations were intended to reduce the number of individuals on poor relief by providing potential fathers and husbands with work. Many of the masterless were not men, however, but women who had migrated to find work and had been ordered "into service" by county court justices. The presence of single women living on their own appears to have made community fathers uneasy. In 1597, for example, a Southampton resident complained about the "dyvers young women and maidens w[h]ich kepe themselves out of s[er]vice and worcke for themselves in dyv[ers] mens houses." Women were generally viewed as a greater threat to the parish poor rates, in part because they could potentially become unable to work or move on should they become pregnant, but also because of the gendered distinctions in wages that rendered them more susceptible to poverty than higher-paid men.[34]

The rising number of masterless men was not, however, simply a sign that men had fallen out of their places in the social order. Rather, it reflected the destabilization of household economies and significant changes in the importance of women's work.

Good Wives

Women's work was central to agricultural production, textile manufacture, and craft industries at the turn of the seventeenth century, but it had undergone many changes as a result of the economic transformations of the previous century. Rising agricultural prices encouraged specialization, drawing rural households into commercial cattle raising, dairying, grain production, and market gardening, all of which created opportunities for women. Successful farm households thus became more dependent on both local and distant markets and, in some regions, on the producing and marketing activities of wives. Especially in the dairying counties of England's Southwest, from which many Chesapeake immigrants hailed, the growth of large markets wrought sweeping changes in community life, household economies, and women's work.[35]

Throughout this period of change, advice books and folk wisdom touted marriage as an economic partnership. Sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century authors reminded readers that a man's prosperity depended upon the economic contributions of his wife. One noted writer, Thomas Becon, observed that a man without a wife, "be he never so rich, hath almost nothing that is his."[36]

Although women performed vital labor in this partnership, work remained roughly divided by sex. Advice book authors of the period described a flexible division of labor in which women's work took place "within" the household,

men's work "without." Despite local variations, many English women would have found these maxims to ring true. Women of almost all social positions engaged in some manner of domestic production.[37] In contrast, men performed work that gained them public roles and political recognition, whether or not they actually labored out-of-doors. Thomas Tusser explained the marital partnership as one of relative activity and passivity:

> Good husbands abroad, seeketh all well to have:
> Good housewives at home, seeketh all well to save.
> This having and saving, in place where they meet,
> make profit with pleasure such couples to greet.[38]

Eager to distinguish clearly between work that often overlapped, Tusser may have overstated his case. The seasonal demands of an agricultural economy required that labor be flexible and neighborhoods interdependent. Especially in poorer households, "within" individuals needed to interact with the outside world in fields and at markets, taverns, and neighbors' doorsteps. The division of labor described by Tusser and other authors was a predominantly yeoman ideal that seems deliberately to have downplayed the market strategies of the poor, the activities of urban dwellers, and the varied work regimes of even yeoman women.[39]

Within this flexible division of labor, the domestic focus of women's duties distinguished their work from that of men. While men plowed, planted, and tended crops, women processed agricultural products: they made butter and cheese from cow's milk, they brewed and baked with grain products, and they manufactured linens and clothes from flax, hemp, and wool. Frequently, women were responsible for bringing these home manufactures to market or grain and malt to the miller. Women also maintained and reproduced the household labor force. Assuming primary care of young children, mothers trained daughters to perform household tasks. They also fed hungry family members and farm laborers in addition to washing, mending, and sewing. Women were expected to have a basic knowledge of "physic" so that they could tend to the day-to-day ailments of family and servants. In all but the smallest households, wives assigned tasks to servants, whom they were responsible for feeding, clothing, educating, and disciplining.[40]

In an economy in which men's work with the plow signified status, mastery, and political identity, women who performed agricultural labor were associated with the hoe, a pattern that was to have important ramifications for the hoe-dominated tobacco economy of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake. During harvesttime and other periods of intensive agricultural labor, women assisted men in reaping and storing crops. Rural women might hire themselves out during the growing season to perform many of the same tasks as men, although often for less money and, in the case of married women,

with the understanding that they were to be paid at day rates as temporary help. Although women as well as men performed agricultural labor, they did so more sporadically than men and with hoes rather than with plows.[41]

Seizing upon these differences between men's and women's work, advice book authors emblematized female virtue with the clothing, demeanor, and tools of an idealized yeoman housewife. With body and head modestly covered, an English good wife was supposed to maintain a chaste and quiet demeanor, especially with strangers and when outside her home. Her apron reflected her activities within the kitchen and dairy. The tools commonly used in this labor—the skimming ladle of the dairy, the distaff of the spinning wheel, butter churns, brewing equipment, and kitchen pots and pans—all came to symbolize women and their position in the household economy. In contrast, advice book authors described men's natural domain as one of primary economic responsibility. Mirrored in his authority over wife, servant, and child, a man's economic assertiveness and control might be symbolized by the plow's penetration of the earth, the master craftsman's ability to shape his raw materials, or the rider's ability to control and subdue the spirit of his horse.

Whether concerned about changes in women's work or simply eager to please a female readership that believed household management could be learned from books, advice book authors linked this vision of female domesticity with social order in their texts. The popularity of books such as Gervase Markham's *English Housewife,* which saw six editions, suggests a growing need, perhaps even a growing anxiety, among female readers for information that might previously have been transmitted orally from mother to daughter or mistress to servant. Like Markham's text, many manuals presumed little prior knowledge of housewifery. In addition to advising women about household management, however, books about women's work urged upon women pious attention to domestic duties and a more rigid boundary between work "within" and "without." Denouncing domineering wives and scolds, advice manuals thus participated in a discourse linking domesticity and femininity, in which orderly households and harmonious communities resulted from the labors of industrious good wives.[42]

The efforts of men in several occupations to restrict female participation testify to anxiety about women's work and male employment during this period. By the early seventeenth century, it was becoming more difficult for women to participate professionally and commercially in weaving, brewing, and midwifery—three traditional areas of women's work. Although attempts to limit female access to certain trades did not always cross the Atlantic—only the restrictions on female weavers appear to have affected the division of labor in colonial America—the professionalizaton of trades formerly plied by women reinforced the discourse of female domesticity that subsequently became a mainstay of English identity in the colonies.[43]

With these exceptions, English women participated in most other trades and crafts without restriction, although often in smaller numbers than their male counterparts. Increased commercial activity and larger urban markets meant that some industries, for example hemp and flax processing, silk weaving, and malt production, actually showed an increase in women's participation. Women appeared in a variety of seventeenth-century apprenticeship records, working as brewer-maltsters, grocers, clothiers, knitter-spinners, silk-stocking makers, weavers, locksmiths, and wheelwrights. Girls' apprenticeships appear to have been contracted under terms nearly identical to those of boys', with the exception that girls' terms could be ended by marriage as well as by attaining the age of majority (twenty-one).[44]

Most seventeenth-century girls learned housewifery, however, remaining generalists during their adult lives. Although some women earned wages as field laborers, most did not assume primary responsibility for work in the fields in an economy dominated by plow agriculture. With the expansion of the dairy industry, local and family economies became increasingly dependent on the traditional activities of women, the primary producers and purveyors of butter and cheese. The growth of the clothmaking industry likewise allowed women a greater measure of social and economic opportunity. In suburban market-garden regions, women also produced vegetables for sale in urban markets. Women's traditional activities thus took on a new significance because of larger economic and demographic changes.[45]

Highly adaptable and developing an increasingly commercial focus, women's labor predictably became the subject of debate and legal regulation, provoking a sharp response from social critics, ministers, and community residents alike. The seasonal demands of the harvest and the life-cycle demands of childbearing and child rearing made women's domestic production and occupational participation extremely susceptible to change. As a flexible and vulnerable labor force that could respond to commercial expansion by taking up new industries or, if necessary, by being restricted from certain occupations to protect male opportunities, women embodied in their work lives a sense of the shifting, unstable identity that made them appear dangerous to neighbors, justices, and social commentators.

Witches, Whores, and Scolds

Although many English migrants to Virginia probably never read the growing literature on good wives and domestic management, many would have been familiar with folkloric accounts of the good wife's antithesis—the witch, whore, or scold—and well acquainted with the community response to such individuals. Punishments of disorderly women escalated rapidly be-

tween 1560 and 1640—especially in England's southwestern counties where economic changes were most dramatic—accompanied by intensified rhetoric about female domesticity.[46]

The archetypes of good and bad women invoked by pamphlet writers and manipulated so successfully by Elizabeth derived much of their power from community folklore and traditions for punishment. When Elizabeth represented herself as a chaste maiden, wife, and mother, she tapped into a rich vein of popular culture in which women threatened their communities with disorder unless they could be contained in the household economy as God-fearing and hardworking wives. Women who marketed butter and cheese, gossiped maliciously, requested poor relief, bore illegitimate children, or quarreled violently with husbands became the targets of community attempts to salvage moral and fiscal order during one of England's most tumultuous periods of economic, religious, and demographic change.

The perpetrators of community actions that enforced female domesticity and subordination to husbands—Poor Law officials, Puritan ministers, and interventionist neighbors—gave the pamphlet discourse about good and bad women vivid local, daily meaning. People from different ranks appear to have shared the view that the systems of authority that promised to contain women—marriage and patriarchal households—might also be used effectively to restore community order and control disorderly poor people. Often with the approval of local gentlemen, officials and community residents intervened in the lives of neighbors when household disturbances threatened to spill out into the community at large. Worshipers who heard sermons about the organic connections among households, communities, and the state may have pragmatically applied these theories to their communities to justify both official and informal intervention into disorderly households. Patriarchal social relations thus became the means not only for reconciling conflicting images of female nature but for solving the problems of the growing number of impoverished people in England.[47]

In contrast to the complex literary representations of female nature, community rituals for punishing disorderly individuals and restoring order ultimately relied upon stark distinctions between good and bad women. Disorderly women needed to be under the authority of a husband, father, or master to protect the community from the costs of illegitimacy or poor relief. Shrewish, scolding, lusty, drunken, or domineering women (potentially all women) needed correction to curb their worst excesses. These women threatened natural gender hierarchies by overstepping their authority and attempting to dominate their husbands. Quiet, pious, hardworking wives, in contrast, might actually facilitate community order, compelling men to fulfill their patriarchal responsibilities.

As difficult economic times undermined men's abilities to perform economic duties, women's participation in the market became more significant, potentially creating new problems for male authority in households. Traveling beyond the jurisdiction of husbands to public markets where they met neighbors and strangers, women bought and sold beer, grain, dairy products, and vegetables. In counties suffering from grain shortages, inflation, and enclosure, women were also prominent among the protesters demanding food, lower rents, and access to land.[48]

Female marketing was not new, but it may have appeared more threatening during the turmoil of the late sixteenth century. In dairy and market-garden regions, where households were most reliant upon women's marketing, neighbors resorted to skimmingtons, or charivaris—carnivalesque processions featuring cross-dressed men who ritually reenacted the beating or cuckolding of a husband—to punish aggressive wives and their weak spouses. Named for the skimming ladles used by women in the making of butter and cheese, skimmingtons suggested both the importance of women's marketing of dairy goods to household economies in southwest England and the degree to which neighbors viewed these activities as potentially threatening to household and community order.[49]

Whether or not women were actually threatening social order (and there is some evidence to suggest they were), communities had a clear disposition to define them as the problem and to punish a range of offenders, including scolds, witches, whores, and adulterous wives. The victims of these punishments varied. Poor, socially isolated, or widowed women were most often accused as scolds and witches. The absence of men who would assume responsibility for their misconduct made them targets of community suspicion and vulnerable to sanctions. Adulterous wives and husband-beaters, meanwhile, were less likely to be so marginal. Their subversion of male authority exposed husbands' failures to maintain natural dominance in marriage and subjected unwitting men to the shame of the skimmington.[50]

Certain punishments were reserved exclusively for women. Such was the case with ducking, in which the offender sat astride a wooden seesaw and was repeatedly submerged in a pond or river until she submitted to the will of the court. In neighborhood variations of this ordeal, adulterous wives or other unruly women were ritually "cleansed" of their offense by being dragged through puddles. Ducking became more widespread after 1560 in towns and woodpasture regions where disputes involving scolds often appeared in court.[51]

When secular and ecclesiastical courts did not take action, community residents instigated their own justice, both in England's counties and in the new settlements of England's colonies across the Atlantic. Neighbors punished female transgressions by publicizing shameful behavior, ordering women to

wear placards bearing details of their offense and apology, or carting whores through town streets. Members of the community who had not initiated the action soon became involved as audiences to the theater of shaming.[52]

The most feared unruly woman in British communities on both sides of the Atlantic was the witch, whom sixteenth-century writers described as existing in a skimmington-like world where all relationships, power, and authority were inverted. The belief that witches did everything "backwards" and could invert at will the moral order of the universe reverberated with meaning for rural and urban folk accustomed to rituals where transvestism and upside-down imagery prevailed. Family order was believed to be particularly vulnerable to witches' inverting powers; witches could allegedly disrupt the authority of the head of household and ruin marriages by preventing their consummation. Witches were also popularly believed to bring about otherwise inexplicable bouts of bad weather, crop failure, death, sickness, or injury through *maleficium,* the ability to cause harm by supernatural means. The substitution of foul for fair, black for white, female for male, and subjection for authority was often interpreted as the work of witches eager to reverse traditional social hierarchies. Ever watchful for signs of incipient social decay, contemporaries framed their own fears of anarchy in terms of these reversals.[53]

Between 1560 and 1640, accusations of witchcraft reached a peak in many English counties. Minister William Perkins's comment, "The more women, the more witches," reflected the basic similarities between the profiles of transgressive women and ordinary women, who were believed to have a natural tendency toward evil. Perkins might well have attributed England's social ills to the growing number of poor women, as it was this group that provoked the most anxiety among local officials and Parliament.[54]

Fearful of Satan's influence upon godly communities and concerned to protect property and social position, Puritan commentators such as Perkins were outspoken on the subjects of both witches and women. Although many Puritan ministers rejected folk wisdom about women's inherently evil, sensual nature, most remained firmly committed to patriarchal ideals for family order and glorified the industrious yeoman wife's obligation to be companion and helpmeet to her husband.[55]

Puritan ministers and other advice manual authors also stressed the connections between domestic authority, propertyownership, and harmonious households. According to many authors, the authority of men over women rested above all on male ownership of property. The relationship between gender and authority was reflected in the Latin word for property, *dominium,* which also meant "authority" and in English translated roughly as "to tame or subdue." Advocating that wives be securely ensconced in households, pamphlet writers celebrated women's economic and political subordination as a virtue. Even as intensified commercial activities expanded some women's

economic opportunities to sell produce, cheese, and butter, moralists urged women to be submissive, a quality that conflicted with the skills needed in the marketplace.[56]

Seventeenth-century writers also emphasized male responsibility for wives, urging husbands to provide spouses with adequate shelter, food, and clothing to give them no just cause for complaint. Under the weight of this responsibility, a married man could not indulge in the idleness that pamphleteer Richard Brathwait warned "maketh of men, women, or women beasts, and of beasts, monsters." Good wives, in turn, were duty-bound to perform their husbands' authority publicly through submissive demeanor and modest apparel. By wearing clothing that was modest in both a class and sexual sense, wives were to avoid arousing the discontent of neighbors with smaller estates.[57]

Modest dress and submissive demeanor were also commendable qualities because they communicated female chastity, an increasingly important part of women's prescribed roles as passive conservers of male property. Addressing the presumably female readership of *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), Brathwait explained the importance of this female quality with a popular image of tamed nature: "Chastity is an inclosed garden, it should not be so assaulted, lest the report of her spotlesse beauty become soyled." By maintaining a safe distance from the world of men, a single woman fulfilled her "domestical duty" by preserving her greatest treasure for the man who would become her husband; once married, she performed her wifely duty by preserving the "treasure" he earned.[58]

The order envisioned by Puritan clergy and other reformers reemphasized marriage, women's economic dependence, and male authority with a new vehemence. For some, motherhood itself created the conditions for female economic dependence. "Is she not sickly, is she not weak?" asked Puritan William Whately about wives with children. "Has she not breeding and bearing and looking to thy children to employ her? . . . Must she over and above earn her own living?" Other Puritan authors enjoined women to silence and solitude, while William Gouge cautioned women not to entertain, sell goods, or travel without the express consent of their husbands.[59]

Most social commentators, Puritan and non-Puritan alike, agreed that unruly women and disorderly houses lay at the root of social ills and that domestically employed wives represented the key to restoring social order. Enforcing community standards for sexual behavior was thus an important issue for propertyowners of all religious persuasions, for they would be liable to pay for the support of illegitimate children and poor women. Along with justices of local courts, Puritans and their clergy instigated prosecutions for whoredom, bastardy, and adultery. It was this concern for potential increases in poor rates, moreover, that motivated some parish officers to discourage the marriage of poor people who seemed likely to end up needing parish support.[60]

In England's villages and towns, ordinary people participated in public spectacles of punishment that reflected popular beliefs in the need for patriarchal households. In the accusation of witches, as in the ducking of scolds, carting of whores, and riding of adulterous women, community residents revealed their image of womanhood: unless tamed, subdued, and mastered, women tended toward promiscuity and evil, both of which destabilized marriages, households, and communities. Although Puritans explicitly rejected many of these community traditions for shaming and punishing women, they encouraged the prosecution of sexual misconduct and witchcraft. Most important, however, they articulated a widely held vision of the good woman as good wife, whose performance of her subordination—through her silence, her clothing, and her chastity—was crucial to the social order.[61]

Training for Virginia: Ireland

As the sixteenth century drew to a close, English gentlemen found new applications for discussions of nature and women. Provoked by political and economic exigencies to seek new opportunities beyond England's borders, many became involved in imperial and mercantile activities. Such enterprises were especially appealing for male aristocrats, who sought to advance themselves and their family name in a manner consistent with time-honored masculine military achievements. Describing strange new lands and new peoples with feminine language, advocates of colonial trade and settlement portrayed themselves as virile yet ethical conquerors whose bold efforts could win England territories overseas and respect from European rivals. Virgin lands and the taming of changeable nature by manly English explorers became pervasive subtexts of promotional tracts written to arouse the interest of potential investors in overseas voyages.

Changes in Elizabeth's court during its final years encouraged the aggressive, outward focus of elite male ambitions. As the queen aged, the royal court became increasingly contemplative and female-dominated, leaving male favorites to seek glory and opportunities for profit overseas. By the end of the century, many noblemen were pursuing new avenues of advancement, especially out of concern for younger sons who would not inherit land. Although strategic intermarriages offered some security, sons of the aristocracy increasingly looked to Ireland and the Americas as outlets for their ambition. Such ventures provided opportunities for affirming masculinity and conferring honor upon family and nation. Men such as Sir Walter Raleigh brought glory to queen and country—and, at least temporarily, to themselves—through conquest and lucrative trade. English activity in Ireland, along the west coast of Africa, and in the Americas enabled ambitious male aristocrats to link their

own achievement to that of the nation, even as it allowed aspiring merchants and their gentry sponsors to develop new lines of trade.[62]

Voyages of exploration and trade to new territories proved irresistible to prominent gentlemen and merchants. In 1566, Sir Humphrey Gilbert proposed settlement in Ireland as an alternative career to law, the ministry, or the military for younger gentry sons who were not likely to inherit enough to ensure a genteel standard of living. Leading Virginia Company advocate Sir Edwin Sandys echoed Gilbert's concerns in a speech before Parliament in 1604 about the fate of younger sons. A lesser concern was the potential for overseas ventures to provide solutions for the problem of England's growing number of poor by creating sites for English settlement.[63]

Spurred by competition from other European countries and eager to defend England's reputation on the high seas, gentlemen and merchants financed voyages to Russia, the west coast of Africa, the Levant, and the Americas during the sixteenth century. Most of these voyages resulted in meetings with cultures and groups of people whom English chroniclers described as savage and outlandish. In their observations of these indigenous peoples, English voyagers fashioned new masculine identities for themselves as civilized masters of the seas and tamers of nature.[64]

The English encounter with the Gaelic Irish (and, as will be discussed later, the inhabitants of the West African coast) is an example of a "gender frontier," the meeting of two or more culturally specific systems of knowledge about gender and nature. The creative and destructive processes unleashed along this frontier ultimately had a great impact upon the English settlement of Virginia. During this encounter, the English incorporated gender discourses about patriarchal authority and female domesticity into a distinctive national identity, separating themselves from the Gaelic Irish they met. The emerging conceptualization of Gaels as "others" drew upon plastic concepts of nature as well as upon English ideals for male and female behavior.[65]

Aristocratic English men who wrote about Ireland near the end of the sixteenth century echoed contemporary discussions of primitive nature, describing the island as a vast wilderness waiting to be tamed and civilized through the cultivation of land. Despite an English presence dating back nearly four hundred years, little had been accomplished from the perspective of the recently arrived "new" English. Indeed, old English families appeared to have gone native, incorporating Gaelic language and customs into their practices. The new English also saw few of the towns and markets that signified English-style civility, reading their absence as evidence of Gaelic Irish barbarism. Sir John Davies thus justified the English presence in 1610:

> If themselves [Gaelic Irish] were suffered to possess the whole country as their septs [clans] have done for many hundred of years past, they would

> never (to the end of the world) build houses, make townships or villages or manure or improve the land as it ought to be; therefore it stands neither with Christian policy nor conscience to suffer so good and fruitful a country to lie waste like a wilderness.[66]

Davies described Irish lands as potentially fruitful and inviting but represented the Gaelic Irish themselves as an incompetent and irresponsible people ripe for conquest.

The English, moreover, viewed the Gaelic Irish as lacking the civility and male identity provided by property. Transhumance, the nomadic use of grazing land whereby shepherds moved animals seasonally to new lands, stood in stark contrast to the trend in England toward more fixed, exclusive definitions of property. The convention of partible inheritance in Ireland, although not unheard of in England, ran counter to the contemporary preference for strict settlement with its provision for maintaining the integrity of estates. The irrelevance of English concepts of legitimacy for Irish inheritance practices also diverged sharply from English law. To members of the English gentry for whom propertyownership was becoming a more important feature of manhood and status, Gaelic Irishmen appeared to be both unmanly and dangerously free from ties to land.[67]

English aristocrats believed the Gaelic Irish to be inherently strange, but many of the economic and social differences they observed also characterized England's own poor. Not only did nomadism and the lack of landed property resonate with English fears of vagrancy in their own country, but the poverty of Irish dwellings struck more than one observer as worse than what civilized people would tolerate. Most English commentators believed, as did Edmund Tremayne, that Gaelic Irish men did not live up to standards of civility: "Thei regarde no o[a]the, thei blaspheme, they murder, commit whoredome, hold no wedlocke, ravish, steal and commit all abomination without scruple of conscience."[68] Tremayne's litany of abuses echoed the complaints of English contemporaries about the faults of the English poor.

English commentators also attributed the "barbarism" of the Gaelic Irish to their syncretic form of Catholicism and failure to adhere to Protestant doctrines that had become central to English identity during the last half of the sixteenth century. In 1567, Sir Henry Sidney, student of the Spanish colonial project, traced the numerous wrongdoings of the Irish to an absence of Christian instruction and example:

> Matrimonie emongs them is no more regarded in effect than conjunction betwene unreasonable beasts, perjurie, robberie and murder counted alloweable, finallie I cannot finde that they make anny conscience of synne and doubtless I doubte whether they christen there children or no,

> for neither finde I place where it should be don, nor any person able to enstruct them in the rules of a Christian, or if they were taught I cannot see they make any accompte of the woorlde to com.

The vestiges of pre-Christian marriage, divorce, and funeral practices and the popularity of baptismal and naming traditions that diverged considerably from those of the English contributed to Sidney's skepticism about whether the Irish were Christian. Indeed, they were not Christian in the manner of the English, leading many English observers to conclude that they were, therefore, "heathen."[69]

Gaelic Irish patterns of labor and concepts of property were not conducive to the female domestic focus that many English social commentators saw as crucial to social order and civility. Although they produced dairy products and cloth like their English counterparts, Irish women occupied a considerably different position in the division of labor and the organization of inheritance. Nomadism was simply not compatible with a domesticity rooted in permanent settlement and landed family estates. The Irish focus upon clans rather than conjugal couple households and paternity rather than English-style legitimacy similarly vitiated the need for female chastity to preserve family estates and lineage. Irish women's role in production, reproduction, and inheritance appeared to the English, therefore, to be fundamentally irreconcilable with English domestic ideals.[70]

Irish deviance from English prescriptions for sexual behavior particularly shocked the English gentry, who associated Irish sexuality with the allegedly unbridled lust of the English poor. English observers claimed that Irish men were licentious and similarly perceived the intimacy of Irish social customs, such as kissing a stranger in greeting, as evidence of Irish women's sexual forwardness. The English also read Irish marriage and sexual customs, including divorce, remarriage, and concubinage, the tolerance of illegitimacy, and closer degrees of consanguineous marriage as sexual deviance. The English believed, moreover, that Irish women suffered less during childbirth than English women as a result of their supposedly hardy constitutions, animal natures, and tendency to produce large families. In most aspects of sexual behavior and customs, the English compared the Irish unfavorably to English men and women and found them wanting the social refinements that indicated gentility and civility.[71]

Reports of cannibalism and other wartime atrocities merely compounded English impressions of the Gaelic Irish as uncivilized based on their patterns of land use, religious worship, and sexual deviance. As early as 1545, the Gaelic reputation for fierceness led Henry VIII to order two thousand "of the most wild and savage sort of them" to fight in Scotland. The vile treatment of the bodies of English soldiers lent credence to the notion that the Gaelic Irish

were capable of any barbarism. The earl of Essex reported that his men were found with their heads and genitals removed and the latter stuffed inside their mouths. Combining an insult to English manhood, disrespect for the dead, and sexual mutilation, this act simultaneously violated English gender, social, and military mores. Essex neglected to inform his readers, however, that this Gaelic act was a response to atrocities he and his men had perpetrated against Irish men, women, and children.[72]

Sir Humphrey Gilbert and the earl of Essex used reports of Irish barbarism to rationalize the extreme measures taken by the English to secure their compounds and settlements. Along with advocates of new English political dominance—William Herbert and Edmund Spenser among them—Gilbert and Essex constructed a category of savage who lacked the essentials of human civility and could thus be conquered without restraint. Gaelic savagery thus justified the belief that Gaelic people could be subdued only by force, a policy to which England turned with increasing frequency as aristocratic desires for military glory discouraged more peaceful methods.[73]

Once English colonists decided that Gaelic culture was inherently uncivilized and not to be tolerated, native performance of submission to the English became a very important means of determining who among the Irish were dangerous. In 1571, Sir John Perrot, the English-appointed president of Munster, prohibited the wearing of Gaelic dress in the aftermath of a bloody repression of an Irish uprising. English leaders also viewed the cutting of glybbes, the hair braid Gaelic men traditionally wore on the front of their heads, as an important sign of obedience. In both instances, the English attempted to wring outward displays of submission from Irish men by compelling them to renounce symbols of Irish manhood. Political interpretations of clothing and hairstyle may ironically have contributed to the coalescence of Gaelic Irish resistance after 1560; when Gaels rebelled in 1572, the symbol of their solidarity against the English was the abandonment of English clothing.[74]

The English also politicized Gaelic cultural expressions by reinforcing certain of the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366), laws that had traditionally defined the ways in which the Irish differed legally from English subjects. The statutes forbade native marrying practices, child fostering, and other visible signs of Gaelic identity. The Irish were prohibited from sitting on juries, holding office, purchasing land, witnessing legal acts, or serving as apprentices to any art or science. Most significant in light of English notions of independent manhood was the refusal to let the "word" of Irish people have any legal significance and the prohibition on carrying or owning any weapon or armor. Although these strictures often could not be enforced, they targeted the legal and military potential of Gaelic men—the only Irish people who would have been eligible for political recognition—for subordination.[75]

Colonists' visions of an Ireland peopled with happy, hardworking husbandmen were difficult to reconcile with the vivid savage image. The English tended to assimilate them by categorizing the Irish into two basic types: the evil native whom they feared and the simple, meek, agrarian-minded laborer whom they could control. Using terms that echoed contemporary descriptions of the idle poor and witches, the poet Edmund Spenser delineated these different kinds of Irish, "the one called the kerne, the other the chorle." "The kerne bredd up in idleness and naturally inclined to mischiefs and wickednesse," according to Spenser, whereas the chorle was "willing to labour and take pains if he might peaceably enjoy the fruites thereof." By the late 1570s, English colonization plans depicted chorles as an unarmed population dressed in English clothing and farming for elite English landowners.[76]

During the early years of the seventeenth century, English adventurers took from their Irish encounter a moral pairing—uncontrollable savage and submissive laborer—that shaped future colonization efforts among "barbaric" peoples. With the language for distinguishing between English and barbarians in place, writers such as Thomas Hariot easily made comparisons between the Gaelic Irish and Indians living in Virginia. Not surprisingly, the concept of barbarism provided a justification for subjugating Indians similar to that used by Gilbert and Essex in Ireland. Descriptions of native submission, moreover, communicated English progress in "civilizing" savage others. This latter discourse was especially powerful when it included accounts of transformations in native gender ways.[77]

Training for Virginia: Africa

In addition to their plans to secure Tudor political dominion in Ireland and run plantations with Gaelic labor, English aristocrats and adventurers sought out other overseas opportunities. Several enterprising London merchants had already begun to explore trade opportunities along the West African coast earlier in the century but had met stiff European competition. The Portuguese had been trading in commodities and slaves in Africa for nearly ninety years before the English first ventured into waters off the Guinea coast in 1530. By granting the Portuguese a monopoly of trade and possessions on Africa's Atlantic coast in 1455, Pope Nicholas V effectively prohibited English expeditions to the area, severely retarding English efforts to establish trade outposts. It was not until 1530 that Plymouth merchant William Hawkins undertook the first successful English voyage to Guinea. According to Richard Hakluyt, whose compendium of English maritime narratives was intended to demonstrate and encourage English prowess on the high seas, Hawkins sailed three

triangular voyages to Guinea and Brazil. He returned to England with an Indian king and a hold full of African elephant tusks and brazilwood from which he must have profited handsomely. The risks of conflict with Portugal remained great, however, and few other merchants attempted the Guinea trade until the 1550s.[78]

Backed for the first time by London as well as by West Country merchants, voyages to the Guinea coast recommenced in earnest in 1553 with Thomas Wyndham's venture. After trading for spices and gold in Guinea and at Mina, Wyndham continued east to Benin. Wyndham's original chronicler, Richard Eden, who had never actually set foot in Africa, described the king of Benin in subdued language as a "blacke Moore, (although not so blacke as the rest)" who spoke Portuguese fluently, having learned the language as a child. Apparently very experienced in trading with Europeans, the king insisted that Wyndham's crew unload their wares for inspection before he agreed to supply them with pepper. Having decided the deal was a good one, the king then "sent the country round about to gather pepper," collecting eighty tons in a month's time. Wyndham and his crew were clearly dealing with a leader of vast regional power and trade connections who was capable of setting the terms of each exchange.[79]

In comparison to his chronicle of Wyndham's voyage, with its muted interest in the appearance of West Africans, Eden's account of John Lok's 1554 voyage to West Africa crackled with judgments about the inferiority of native people. In it, Eden described the people of Africa as "of beastly living, without a God, lawe, religion, or commonwealth, and so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne." He also commented upon the women of "Garamantes," who he claimed "contract no matrimonie, neither have respect to chastitie." Including humans in his account of the "wonderfull and strange workes of nature," Eden described the strange tattoos and jewelry decorating the people of Guinea. He admitted, however, that, far from being innocents, the native peoples were "very wary . . . in their bargaining." Borrowing heavily from ancient Greek accounts of fantastic races of humans in Africa, Eden wove together old tales with new details he may actually have heard from Lok's men.[80]

The context of English goals and West Africans' abilities to assert their own trade interests appears to have had a significant impact on the way Eden described West African peoples. During Eden's earlier account of Benin, the English lacked specific aims, and the king of Benin dictated the terms of the trade. Eden's subsequent pejorative account was written only after Lok returned to London with five semicaptive Africans. Anticipating future voyages and a prolonged English presence in the region, Lok hoped to teach English to the captured Africans so they could act as interpreters.[81]

Eden's shift in tone did not infect his entire narrative, however. About the mystery of divergent human appearances, he could only speculate:

> Throughout all Africke . . . the regions are extreeme hote and the people very blacke. Whereas, contrarily, such regions of the West Indies as are under the same line are very temperate, and the people neither blacke nor with curlde and short wooll on their heads, as many of Africke have, but of the colour of an olive, with long and blacke heare on their heads.[82]

Upon Lok's return to England with Africans and a full cargo of gold, ivory, and pepper, English conflicts with the Portuguese began in earnest. In this context of intense national rivalry, William Towerson made the first of three voyages to Guinea. Stopping first at the river Sesto, Towerson observed that "men and women goe so alike that one cannot know a man from a woman but by their breastes, which for the most part be very foule and long, hanging downe low like the udder of a goate." At a second stop, he noted huge plant stalks, lush foliage, and women with "such exceedingly long breasts that some of them wil lay the same upon the ground and lie downe by them." Towerson's description effaced gender differences between Guinea residents and compared women to animals. Only breasts, the part of the female anatomy that respectable English women kept covered, distinguished women from men, yet Guinea women's breasts were less a human feature than a gigantic natural phenomenon. Associations of West Africans with nature similarly underscored Towerson's judgment that another group of Africans were "wild" because they were not accustomed to trade with Europeans.[83]

In the remainder of his accounts, however, Towerson, like Eden before him, depicted men who clearly were not "naturals," or dupes of the Europeans. At Samma Bay near the river Pra, Towerson met a Portuguese-speaker who told him the "Portugales were bad men, and that they made them slaves if they could take them, and would put irons upon their legges." And at other locations, aloof chiefs demanded gifts before they would even consider haggling over merchandise. At one stop, Towerson discovered the residents "bent against us" because the previous year an English man had taken away the captain's son and three others. "This was the cause that they became friends with the Portugales," he reported, "whome before they hated." Clearly, Africans could and did choose among European rivals.[84]

Before Towerson could launch a second trip, however, Elizabeth entered into deeper conflict with Portugal and the pope, scuttling future English plans. When Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570, England could have challenged the restriction on the African trade with impunity. The unpredictable nature of English contacts and trade agreements with Africans, however, made it difficult for them to compete with other Europeans and to maintain

trade relationships. England did not enter the slave trade again until after 1650, relying instead on Portuguese and Dutch imports when labor was needed in New World colonies.[85]

As a consequence of the sporadic English trade along the West African coast, a small number of Africans came to English port cities as slaves during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. During the early decades of the seventeenth century, English emigrants bound for New World destinations might well have seen Africans in the streets of London or Bristol. Despite the small number of Africans in England before 1620, Elizabeth twice ordered them to leave the country, claiming that "blackamoors" took employment from English people. Elizabeth's declarations in 1596 and 1601 reveal how seemingly insignificant demographic trends could have great impact upon the rhetoric of poverty, Englishness, and race.[86]

Africans did, meanwhile, become part of the discourse of difference, nature, and English identity. The popularity of sayings in which "blackamoor" signified immutable nature suggests that Africans assumed the mantle of Towerson's wild nature in the popular imagination rather than the shrewdness in trade that he and several other English men had witnessed. West Africans were thus often depicted as existing in a prepolitical, or uncivilized, state.[87]

Sixteenth-century English narratives about Africans also commented on skin color and appearance. Robert Baker used rhyme to describe his first meetings with Guinea residents in 1562 and 1563:

> And entring in, we see
> a number of blacke soules
> Whose likeliness seem'd men to be,
> but all as blacke as coles.
> Their Captaine comes to me
> as naked as my naile,
> Not having witte or honestie
> to cover once his taile.
> By which I doe here gesse
> and gather by the way,
> That he from man and manlinesse
> was voide and cleane astray.[88]

Significantly, in this particular section of Baker's poem, the Guinea men departed from manliness, not as a consequence of blackness, but because of their innocence of their own nudity. Baker himself and several other English writers began to equate blackness with a more threatening meaning, however, especially when the West Africans they described were military foes or unwilling economic partners. The specter of African unions with English women also raised English fears. Mariner George Best reported with some anxiety

in 1578: "I myself have seene an Ethiopian as blacke as cole brought into england, who taking a faire English woman to wife, begat a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father."[89] In Best's text, the blackness of African men obliterated the fairness of English women, leaving English men to contemplate racial and sexual interactions that appeared to result in ethnic effacement.

Meanwhile, the presence of Africans in the streets of London and Bristol was not without impact on English popular culture. In 1584, Reginald Scot remembered how

> in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we heare one crie Bough.[90]

Even without a large population in England, Africans had entered the English popular imagination, appearing in this particular instance as a referent for the skin color of a devilish bogeyman.

By the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603, discourses about gender, nature, and indigenous peoples had already become intertwined. References to Gaelic savagery and African wildness peppered English travel accounts, reinforcing the proximity of native peoples to untamed nature and denying them the rights of civilized peoples. Idealized depictions of domestic good wives and property-holding patriarchs, meanwhile, were fast becoming the mainstays of English imperial identity. Deployed by advice book authors to instill order at home, these discourses also found a use abroad, reassuring the English of their own civility and superiority. When English writers described native populations as feminine and lands as virgin, domestic and imperial interests fused to create a powerful justification for English domination.

Despite the usefulness of gender discourses for describing English ambitions overseas as natural, gender remained a fundamentally unstable category. The meaning of female nature, like nature itself, simply could not be precisely fixed. The differences between men and women—as reflected by their work, clothing, and manners—occasionally blurred dangerously, moreover, threatening to confuse not only the divinely inspired natural order but the entire human construction of society and government that rested upon it. Such fundamentally ambiguous categories required diligent reinforcement and provoked monarchs, advice book authors, and ordinary people to insist that female domesticity and male propertyownership were the natural basis for an orderly and civilized society.