

Staging Domesticity

*Household Work and English Identity
in Early Modern Drama*

Wendy Wall



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1 Familiarity and pleasure in the English household guide, 1500–1700

I. Canning and the uncanny

In his 1919 paper, “The Uncanny,” Freud famously undertakes a semantic analysis of the German word “heimlich,” tracing its transformation from one set of related meanings – as intimate, familiar, comfortable, and belonging to the home – into superficially opposite definitions. First denoting a private chamber, “heimlich” wandered linguistically so as to signify those mystical things dangerously concealed from sight. Freud’s exercise wonderfully demonstrates how the comfort secured by a home’s privacy could shade into the threat of something sinister precisely because of its recessivity; that is, the assurance of inhabiting an exclusive terrain could give way to the perspective of the outsider wistfully peering into that domain.¹ Freud’s commentary assumes a modern division of public and private that does not obtain in the early modern world, yet his linguistic analysis corresponds to the historical claim that I outlined in the introduction: that domestic life was represented as accessible but also forcefully estranged from its practitioners, and this instability was given meaning, in part, by the early modern struggle to define domesticity’s role in shaping national and social identifications.

In this chapter I outline the history of the first English published cookbooks and domestic manuals in order to investigate how household advice defined the publics they addressed. In representing “back” in written form supposedly everyday activities, these manuals necessarily made readers self-conscious about the already potentially peculiar nature of daily tasks as well as the radically different frameworks through which those tasks might be experienced. Less predictably, we discover that books labored precisely (and out of particular political interests) to fashion the conception of “everyday domesticity” that Freud so blithely assumes. In part these books shaped domestic information as part of their appeal to various audiences: newly urbanized wives who wanted to mask country practices; citizens interested in European novelties; daughters of cashpoor aristocratic families in need of positions; yeomen and country gentry interested in efficient agrarian work; men who delighted in viewing tasks designated as female. The cumulative effect was that guidebook writers represented

household practices in two different ways: familiarized as native culture and the ur-basis for identity; and defamiliarized as a curiously desirable but inaccessible zone – from the point of view of men who wrote about domesticity, women who sought to emulate the “everydayness” of another social class, and general practitioners who witnessed their behaviors in highly mediated form. While seeking to attract a wide range of readers, writers implicitly or explicitly classified domesticity in ways that positioned it differently in relation to English identity.

Before turning to printed guides themselves I want to outline the contours of the historical reality to which they refer. Recent work by Patricia Fumerton in particular helps to illuminate some of the circumstantial oddities of domestic life, for she describes how members of great households might savor a live goose as it slowly dies at the dinner table, or engage in elaborate and violent banqueting rituals. Though the intricately crafted sugar sculptures and tortured animals that Fumerton mentions were not common fare in most English homes, they have affinities with the practices that did constitute everyday life, for housewifery did include unassuming acts of brutality and creativity.² Preindustrial European housewifery ranged beyond the practices of modern housework to include medical service, distillation, water purification, dairying, confectionery, brewing, butchery, slaughter, textile-making, veterinary care, and the production of simple goods. To understand the conception of domesticity underpinning this work, a modern reader has to dispense with now common assumptions and taxonomies. What were the daily activities of a housewife from the middling sort in early seventeenth-century London?

You rise early in the morning to fix breakfast for the journeymen, apprentice, servants, children, and spouse who constitute your family. Sometime this week you will need to starch linens in preparation for the Lord Mayor’s procession, supervise laundering at the river, instruct the children, buy goods from the peddler and grocer, fetch water from the conduit (and get the latest gossip), weed the kitchen garden, and work in the shoemaking shop in your house. For now, however, you’ve arranged objects on the kitchen dresser as reminders of specific chores that must be done today.

The first is a vial filled with breastmilk. You discovered yesterday that one of your children has an infected eye, so you set out to make a milk-based eyewash. While you usually buy cow’s, ass’s or mare’s milk from peddling women, you were fortunate enough to have a neighbor, Mistress Henney, nursing her third child. Happy to spare her excess, she availed herself of the glass tube for drawing milk that you used to help suck out the colostrum, or beestings, after she gave birth. While your mother made eyewashes with milk freshly drawn from the cow in the countryside, here in town you rely on cow’s milk to make cheeses and pies (some of which you sell for extra pin money). But you’ve been able to improve your recipes with access to local wetnurses and nursing neighbors.

The second object on the dresser is a glister-pipe, used to administer enemas to servants, guests, and family. You have promised to make a senna emetic to give to your neighbor Ison's servant, so you will use a limbeck for distilling and then loan her a spare glister-pipe. You make a mental note to ask tomorrow for a full report on its effectiveness, since you are thinking of altering the amounts of fennel and linseeds used. Beside the glister-pipe is a bowl filled with squirming snails and slugs that you brought in from the garden yesterday. You need to pound them with a mortar and pestle to make a hemorrhoid salve. And next to the snails is a tiny fragment of a human jawbone. At the funeral of your uncle James last week, the gravedigger exposed a few bones from a previous inhabitant, so you neatly pocketed one of the pieces; Mistress Evans' cure for the falling sickness recommends that you dry a bone fragment in the oven slowly for a few days and then grind it into distilled water.

But now you must attend to tonight's dinner and so you turn to the next items: a live capon penned in a wire cage and a freshly slaughtered rabbit bought from the butcher. You wrestle the screeching capon to the table in order to pluck its feathers. The gore and noise from this denuding is intensified when you slit its throat in preparation for making a delicious stew. After dressing the capon, you decapitate and disembowel the rabbit in preparation for roasting. This work brings a stench to the kitchen which you try to combat with a perfumed pomander that you made from home-grown lavender. But you only make matters worse by inadvertently tipping over the capon's blood when reaching for the pomander, so you spend the next half hour strewing rushes on the floor and trying to clean the stains with a home-made urine-based astringent. While scouring the floor, you remember to tell your maid to empty the chamberpot into the street.

Glancing at the next item, a paste of sugar, gum, and almonds, you realize that this is the task you have anticipated eagerly for days. You carefully get your banqueting ingredients from a locked closet and prepare the cinnamon, goldleaf, conserved quinces, comfits, and spices so as to fashion and decorate your marzipan, which you mold into the shape of two strips of bacon. You use home-made dyes to create red and white variegations on the collops and you plop an egg-shaped bit of saffron-yellow marzipan on top. While delicious fake bacon and eggs are a certain delight, you'd like to try your hand later at making a confectionery walnut that will contain the poem that you and Mistress Rawlinson composed while making lemon conserves. You'll use one dish for a banquet and save the other for a few months. In the interim, it can serve as a room decoration.

You then consult an almanac to find out if it's a good month for blood-letting. While the barber-surgeon usually does phlebotomy, your serving woman Susan needs a minor purge. This morning you had to punish her for oversleeping by uncovering her naked in bed in front of the other workers (and they made up a

jingle teasing her about it) but your reprimand didn't rid her of her sluggishness. Your husband thinks that a sound beating is in order, but you insist that cleansing her tardy spirits is a sure-fire remedy.

Other kitchen items remind you of future tasks: a glass tube for brewing Dr. Steven's water (the equivalent of aspirin) and hippocras (spiced wine); fresh dog dung and the lungs of a fox used to make plasters; lye to give to the laundry maid for cleaning soiled linens; urine for concocting a pungent ague water (not your husband's favorite drink); pears for canning preserves; tallow to make candles; and a piece of shoe-thread that the maids created for the shop.³

Of course, a housewife would have undertaken tasks, such as sweeping and cooking that fall more readily within the domain of modern housework. Yet some of her chores required the public exchange of now intimate materials (such as urine and breastmilk) and the use of now taboo items such as human bones and umbilical cords. Violating modern expectations of propriety and privacy, premodern housework established only loose boundaries around the body and the household; for it included activities subsequently taken over by professionals. Some aspects of housewifery, now unrecognizable to later readers, involved aggression, inventiveness, strength, specialized knowledges (chemical, mathematical, philosophical, and anatomical) and skill in manipulating people.

Early modern women of even high rank attended to domestic chores. "All the afternone I was busie about some Huswiffrie tell night," Lady Margaret Hoby records in her diary. "Huswiffrie," her diary indicates, included distilling aqua vitae, pulling hemp, preserving quinces, overseeing candle-making, making sweetmeats, gardening, dying fabrics, mending linens, keeping accounts, dressing meat, performing surgery, designing buildings, and administering purgatives.⁴ Lady Ann Clifford similarly comments on her housework and her interaction with local working women: she visits "Goodwife Syslies" to eat cheese, has Mistress Frances Pate make preserves of apples and lemons, gathers cherries, oversees laundry maids, whips up pancakes with her servants, and describes her daughter and granddaughter taking turns breastfeeding her great-grandchild. Maria Thynne, mistress of Longleat estate, sent letters to her husband anxiously pleading that he keep on hand home-made dragon water as a plague preventive. And Elinor Fettiplace, part of an old but impoverished Berkshire family, scribbled recipes for concocting beer, flea powder, rat poison, weed killer, soap, and toothpaste.⁵ Ladies of high station concerned themselves with fattening chickens and making cheese despite their other more refined interests.⁶ Bolstered by the post-Reformation glorification of the household, women of status took interest in the details of domestic labor.

Women of the lower ranks and middling sort, such as the wives of farmers, artisans, husbandman, yeomen, and lower gentry, played more than a supervisory

role in these duties. They sold surplus eggs, dairy, and cheeses at local markets, and, despite their limited resources, worked with medical and culinary recipes that differed little from those used by upper-class ladies or doctors.⁷ If Hannah Woolley's experience was representative, many girls refined the domestic arts they learned from mothers and housekeepers when placed in households in their early teens (the wealthier as a finishing school or transitional stage toward adulthood, and others as the starting point for lifelong service). Servants apparently learned from both hands-on tutorials and published advice books.⁸ Versions of these practices – including herbal knowledge and physic – were undertaken by poor wage laborers who, along with farmer's and yeomen's wives, combined domestic industry with work-for-sale in agricultural and retail trades.⁹ And housewifery, despite its coding as "feminine," involved a cadre of workers of both sexes.

In rolling up their sleeves for work, women sought to follow the model of the "good wife," the woman who was not hesitant, as Solomon prescribed, to "put her hand to the wheel" (Figs. 1–2). Though often not literally spinning, the wife could live up to this biblical injunction by being productive. In *A Godly Forme of Houshold Government*, John Dod and Robert Cleaver write:

And though nice Dames think it an unseemely thing for them to soyl their hands about any houshold matters, . . . yet the vertuous woman (As Proverbs 31.17) girdeth her loines with strength and strengthenth her armes . . . She seeketh wooll and flax &c. She putteth her hand to the wheele . . . The meaning is: that she getteth some matter to worke on, that she may exercise her selfe and her family in, and it is not some idle toy, to make the world gay withall, but some matter of good use.¹⁰

Common appeals to "women" as a group that bridged social ranks were routinely made: "the virtuous woman" labored, if only in a supervisory position, to display a commitment to utility or "good use." The newly popularized post-Reformation ideal of femininity, so clearly indebted to medieval and classical elaborations, attempted to counter aristocrat investment in leisure and instead rest female virtue firmly on diligence and industry.

As Margaret Ezell documents, the ideology of the "good wife" pervaded conduct manuals, character books, plays, sermons, and proverbs, even if that ideology only imperfectly restricted actual female practice.¹¹ While attempting to instill meek obedience as a by-product of work, these texts necessarily emphasized the fundamental role domestic labor played in England's socioeconomic system. Character books accused ladies who were feeble, dainty, and indulgent (or "nice," in Dod and Cleaver's terms) of draining resources from Christian households, and writers designated labor as indispensable to a healthy moral and national economy.¹² Building on the slogan, "To thrive ye must wive," these texts portrayed marriage as a combined economic and spiritual partnership. Nicholas Breton thus could idealize the Renaissance wife as:



Fig. 1 Kitchen scene of women preparing pastries, vegetables and broths. From Nicholas de Bonnefons, *The French Gardiner*, trans. John Evelyn (London, 1658).



Fig. 2 Hannah Woolley's domestic guide shows the housewife busy in the art of distilling, baking, cooking and preserving. From *The Queene-like Closet or Rich Cabinet* (London, 1675).

the kitchin physician, the chamber comfort, the hall's care, and the parlour's grace. She is the dairie's neatnesse, the brue-house wholsomness, the garner's provision, and the garden's plantation. She is Povertie's praier and Charities praise . . . a course of thrift; a booke of huswifery and a mirror of modestie. In summe, she is God's blessing and man's happinesse.¹³

Spirituality and profit emanate even within the lowly chores of milking and brewing, Breton suggests. Deigning even to oversee the dairy's cleaning, the housewife became eligible to bestow grace on her family.

The attempt to rehabilitate domestic work was part of a broader movement in which people of rank took new interest in the cultivation of land and commercial trade. Old gentry found their wealth threatened by an encroaching yeomanry who exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit about land management.¹⁴ Due to changes in labor population, namely the shift from feudal to wage labor and the shrinkage of large households, elite property owners were forced to develop more efficient methods in order to keep their lands. In the wake of increased urbanization, specialized production, and the rise of service centers, the economy enlarged to include, in part, the infamous rise of a middling sort of the population as well as mounting profits among the yeomanry.¹⁵ Guides concerned with household production flooded the book market in sixteenth-century England. Charging that aristocratic consumption was a moral and national flaw, husbandry books sought to instill a work ethic in country gentry and thus champion England's anti-courtly character. The first English *cook-books* that subsequently appeared tellingly distinguished themselves from their continental counterparts by addressing non-courtly and female readers.¹⁶ Early French printed domestic guides, by contrast, were medieval manuscripts directed toward aristocratic male chefs. In her study of French cuisine, Barbara Ketcham Wheaton ponders the significance of this fact: "Apart from collections of recipes for confectionary, preserving, and distillation . . . there apparently were no new French cookbooks in the entire sixteenth century. Why, indeed, should there have been any? Who would have written them, and for whom?"¹⁷ In producing cookbooks for a prosperous household managed by the housewife, English writers made domesticity a public concern. Specifically, they transferred the work of specialists to an imagined heterogeneous male and female population unified in their shared interest in up-to-date household work. Domesticity was placed at the fore of economic and status issues, and "housewifery" (as the labor of male and female servants in households of many ranks) was used to debate and mark "proper" definitions for social groups.

In the two sections that follow, I trace the history of guidebook publication as an oscillation between two conceptual poles epitomized by Hugh Plat's *Delightes for Ladies* and Gervase Markham's *English Housewife*. Plat's manual offers women advice on "the art of preserving" (candyng fruits,

pastries, jellies); “secrets in distillation” (wines, syrups); “cookery and housewifery” (brewing, candle-making, baking); and “sweete powders and ointments” (lotions, toothpaste, cosmetics). Plat is concerned with the pleasures of inventiveness and with proper “taste” rather than frugal household management. Stunningly popular, this tiny and crafted book object (small enough to fit into the pocket of a gown) went through thirteen editions in fifty years. Housewifery, defined as the making of domestic objects, became one of several skills necessary for social advancement, including the crafting of expensive conserves and banqueting dishes that displayed conspicuous consumption and marked social status. Plat assumes a “lady” not overly preoccupied with thrift (one who likes to shop and throw parties), but who still invested enough in the home economy to make her own cheese and worry over the family health. What Plat does is to offer formerly aristocratic and medical confectionery to a larger populace – particularly to the urban citizenry, country gentry, and yeomanry with leisure time and recourse to markets. In this way he contributes to the wave of self-fashioning books offering social climbers tools for achieving “inherited” class status. Chatty and flirtatious, Plat’s narrator embodies the coyness that he imagines clever readers to possess; he discloses the admirable mysteries that “ladies” know. To buy the book is to engage in the luxurious delights that he takes pleasure in imagining women performing.

Markham’s *English House-wife* couldn’t be more different. This encyclopedic tome, published first as part of a gentlemen’s recreational guide called *Countray Contentments*, places housewifery within a labor-intensive agrarian production (Fig. 3). Covering a full range of tasks except for the controversial art of cosmetic-making, the book forays beyond cooking, preserving, and distilling to include chapters on physic and surgery, spinning, woolmaking and dyeing, maltmaking, brewing, wine-making, and dairying. Also popular, this text went through six editions in relatively cheap form between 1615 and 1637. Markham’s unprecedented orderly format makes the book available as a handy reference guide. In fact, his central goal is to promote efficiency and thrift so that the English home can remain as insulated as possible from professionalization and the market economy. Pointedly at odds with Plat’s urban-female consumer, Markham’s housewife exemplifies a country frugality that he touts as modeling national character. Rather than the delights that housewifery affords, this text emphasizes the order, morals, and intelligence required in highly technical procedures. Echoing post-Reformation celebrations of household life, the book presents a non-elite narrator and wife who are sober, active, and busy with protecting home-grown values. While Plat’s narrator delights in performing home’s pleasures, Markham’s narrator thriftily embodies good housewifery by conserving, in textual form, the age-old habits constituting sound English practice.

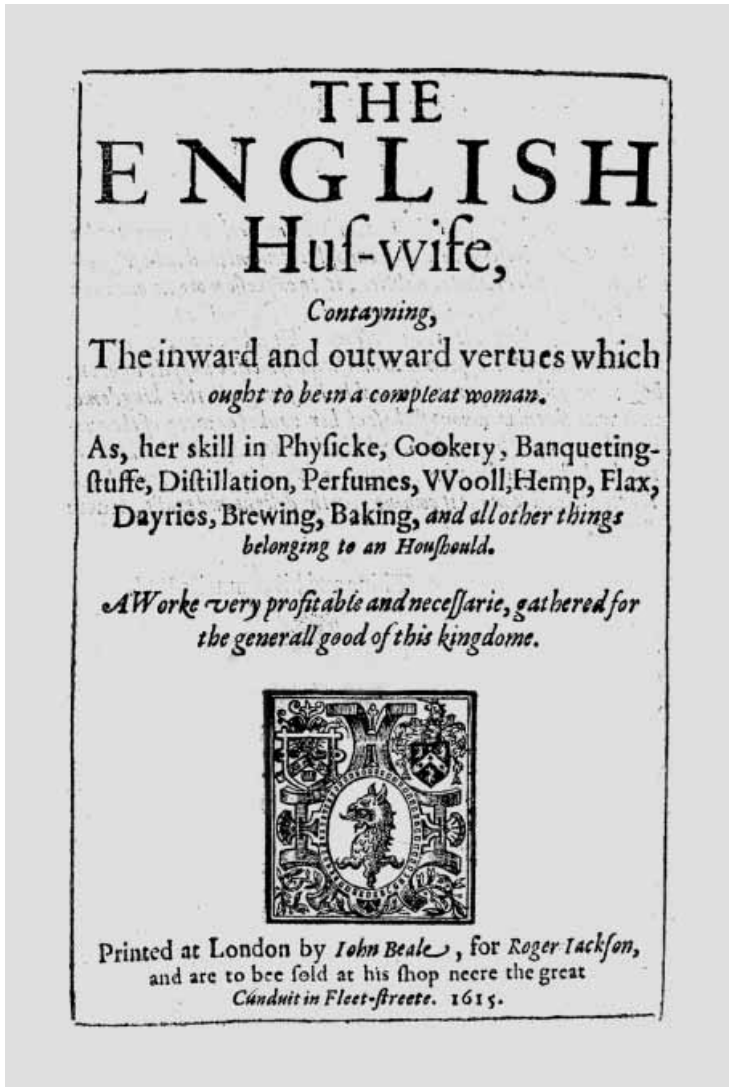


Fig. 3 Gervase Markham, title page to *The English Hus-wife* (London, 1615). This encyclopedic book describes the virtues of the ideal wife in terms of her labors.

The history of domestic guides can be simplified to the following story: housewifery was first published as a subset of husbandry and therefore necessarily defined within the goals of estate management. Emerging out of the discourse of husbandry in the late sixteenth century, cookbooks began to promote specialized work, address female readers, and cater to an urban population. Between 1570 and 1650, two importantly different domestic discourses, exemplified nicely by the works of Markham and Plat, evidenced a lively debate about the definition and scope of household labor. When women and elite chefs took over authorship of cookbooks in the late seventeenth century, some of the issues raised by this debate were resolved. Increased specialization segmented husbandry and housewifery into distinct knowledges and separated men's from women's domestic "space" more thoroughly. Portraying domesticity as less tied to a closed home and national, later books participated explicitly in the "civilizing process," as well as the domestic ideologies it supported, by emphasizing the social negotiations and self-regulation that underwrote household work.

The relationship between manners and domesticity is a story taken up by other critics.¹⁸ This chapter attends to a period when the household *economy* was central to its meaning and when domestic order was said to legitimate monarchy. In patriarchy, as I have described, the state's "natural" roots rest in a fixed domestic hierarchy. Yet sixteenth- and seventeenth-century guides sometimes ignore or confuse the tenets of patriarchy. Guides offer contrasting ideological frames through which their readers could experience domesticity and community; for these books make the everyday available for a reader's consumption and scrutiny in multiple ways. Clinging to old-fashioned methods, Markham makes the productive household the place in which the middling sort could rescue the national rhythms of days past. Plat, on the other hand, places the household at the forefront of a malleable social order dependent on innovation and the market. And while Markham disciplines his readers to duplicate the most familiar habits of life, Plat advertises exotic novelties for the home. Both offer "delights" for domestic practitioners – fantasies of recovery or of infinite alterability – that unsettle aristocratic claims to an inherent national culture.

When domestic guides encourage people to inhabit a realm that was "properly" their own (but has mysteriously slipped away) or, conversely, when they render the everyday the province of some other group, they shape domesticity as a paradoxically self-alienating but fundamental core knowledge. In the sections that follow I trace this dynamic as it emerges within the two main frameworks structuring domestic guides, and I note how tension between the familiar and unfamiliar provides the material and conditions of a domestic, and sometimes national, fantasy.

II. Memory and home-born knowledge

All you who are knowing already, and vers'd in such things, I beseech you to take it only as Memorandum. Woolley, *The Queen-like Closet* (1675)¹⁹

In the first English estate manual, Fitzherbert's 1523 *Boke of Husbandry*, housewifery formed a subset of household management, which included animal care, agriculture, grafting, gaming, timber production, accounting, surveying, distillation, gardening, and physic.²⁰ With his intended readership as country gentlemen slowly beginning to farm their own land, Fitzherbert offers a calendar for organizing the rural estate. Not content to speak of Christian stewardship generally, Fitzherbert explains specific practices by which households could be run efficiently. In his account, domestic work both allegorizes spiritual processes and earns a divine blessing. Opening with the maxim that man is born to labor, Fitzherbert inaugurates a spate of vernacular manuals celebrating economic individualism and private property. In his vision, agriculture embodies a newly important georgic ethic.

Fitzherbert's text is sober and pragmatic, stripped of what we might identify as rhetorical density or playfulness. Yet even this utilitarian text reveals the tremendous rhetorical energy required to resolve a key problem in representing domestic experience. For when Fitzherbert attempts to authorize his advice, particularly, as we shall see, his recommendations on housewifery, he runs into a dilemma. While peppering his text with biblical citation, Latin maxims, and classical sententiae, Fitzherbert claims that experience trumps philosophical advice. To this end, he translates Latin citations into English and assures his reader that written advice must always be verified by hands-on farming. "It is better the practice or knowledge of an husband-man well proued, than the science or connyng of a philosopher not proued," Fitzherbert writes when questioning some bit of wisdom, "for there is nothyng touching husbandry, and other profytes conteyned in this presente booke, but I haue hadde the experyence therof, and proued the same" (91).

We might notice as well that "Englishing" a text and documenting "experyence" begin to collapse into each other in Fitzherbert's account. Busily testing authoritative sayings against his knowledge, Fitzherbert pauses to consider his reader's access to such authorities. Citing Paul's injunction – "Make thyne expenses . . . after thy faculty" – he offers this gloss:

This texte toucheth euery manne, from the hiest degree to the loweste; wherefore it is necessary to euerye manne and womanne to remembre and take good hede therevnto . . . to . . . kepe, and folowe the same; but bycause this texte of sayncte Paule is in latyn, and husbandes commonly can but lyttell laten, I fere leaste they can-not vnderstande it. And though it were declared ones or twyse to theym, theat they wolde

forgette it: Wherefore I shall shewe to theym a texte in englysshe, and that they maye well vnderstande, and that is this, Eate within thy tედure [tether]. (99)

In replacing the Latin biblical text with an English proverb, Fitzherbert instances the conservation required by good husbandry. While claiming to offer a stay against forgetting, he observes that householders may not have ever really known the adage that he enjoins them to remember, and thus he affirms the importance of translating practices into vernacular speech. Fitzherbert's double translation – from experience to print commodity and from Latin to proverbial English – did, as later writers testify, establish an English tradition of husbandry, with “English” referring to both the content and medium.²¹

Yet throughout his book, Fitzherbert engages with Latin texts, verifying them wholesale as they pertain to spiritual matters and conditionally recommending them as practical technique. In doing so, he classifies “old sayings” as either authorized (attributable) or part of oral culture. In three passages, Fitzherbert refutes tenets of “common wisdom,” while in three other instances, he accepts the wisdom of an old saying since it accords with his knowledge.²² But only once does he run into the problem of having to rely on an “olde common seyenge” without being able to verify its information. This problem tellingly occurs when Fitzherbert turns, after 142 chapters, to his 6 chapters on housewifery. Here he is forced to contradict his entire rationale for publishing since he must present something other than personal experience to justify his advice. “There is an old common sayenge,” he begins, “Seldom doth the housbande thryue, withoute the leue of his wyfe” (93). In this unprecedented moment, unanchored sayings substitute for hands-on knowledge. The careful taxonomy of citation set up by the text collapses as the book merges into the unverified world of oral culture, the world of women. The male writer finds himself unable to explain the grounds for a knowledge that, by his own definition, he cannot know, except by authorizing a brand of knowledge that the book has disavowed. Fitzherbert's departure from convention was noteworthy enough for the publisher of the 1598 edition to amend the text so that the “old common saying” authorizing housewifery became “an olde prooffe-made true saying.”²³

As his object of study opens onto the common world of orality to which *he* nevertheless is not fully privy, it magnifies the tension between axiom and experience latent in the book. He glosses his proverb:

By this sayenge it shoulde seme, that there be other occupations and labours, that be moste conuenient for the wyues to do. And howe be it that I haue not experyence of al theyr occupations and warkes, as I haue of husbandry, yet a lyttell wyl I speke what they ought to do, though I tel them nat howe they shulde doo and exercyse theyr labours. (93)

While speaking “a lyttell” about essential domestic work, the author nervously explains that he won't tell wives “how” to perform their mysterious labors. The

experience that Fitzherbert has lauded now becomes the province of female orality and practice. This leads him, in one instance, to reassure the female reader of her “lyberty” in choosing to heed his advice or not (94). At another point, he teasingly “leue[s] the wyues” to their own discretion rather than giving them ammunition in the arts of marital deception, for he refuses to tell how some wives cheat husbands out of pin money (98). He later labels his instruction as a form of cultural hearsay: “For I haue harde olde houswyues saye, that better is Marche hurdes than Apryll flaxe . . . but howe [linens] Shulde be sowen, weded, pulled, repeyled, watred, wasshen, dried, beaten, braked, tawed, hecheled, spon, wounden, wrapped, and wouen, it nedeth not for me to shew, for [old housewives] be wise ynough” (96). How is the husband to understand his purchase of unnecessary instruction? We can imagine the embarrassing scenario when the householder reads the book aloud only to find that he must defer to the experience of his domestic pupils. Coming across the adage – “Seldom doth the housbande thryue, withoute the leue of his wyfe” – the householder is required to give “leue” to domestic workers to do their jobs so that they may give him “leue” to prosper.

Fitzherbert’s section on housewifery functions in the way that Derrida suggests the supplement works: while flaunting its secondary nature, the text exposes what is lacking in husbandry (what it cannot do) and in the published text (what it cannot know). Just as the husband cannot thrive without the leave (i.e., help, abandonment, permission) of the wife, so the writer can know generally but not particularly his subject matter. In this sense, the book commodity reveals a fissure that perhaps mirrors a practical problem posed by the division of household labor. The writer’s recourse is to defer to a seemingly inaccessible but foundational world of proverbial lore and everydayness. The housewife thus marks the site of the vernacular broadly defined – something so familiar that it can’t be grasped within the realm of (here, masculinized) print. Fitzherbert’s construction of a profoundly alien but utterly familiar domesticity is significant, since his book, appearing in twelve editions before 1600, had a strong impact on how agrarian and domestic work was conceived in the period.

When writers of later guides abruptly offer disclaimers or flounder in their attempt to footnote knowledge about women’s labor, they underscore this same predicament. In his translated agricultural guide, *The Countrie Farme*, Richard Surflet admits his reliance on country housewives: “You must not doubt but that I my self have learned many remedies from the experiments and observation of those sorts of women.” “It shall not be thought strange,” he says at another point, “if we touch in a word the dressing and tilling of some few [physic herbs], such as are most usuall and familiar amongst women.” John Partridge’s 1573 *Treasurie of Commodious Conceites* includes a recipe for an elaborate glazed cake which is amazingly guaranteed to last several years. The icing,

Partridge notes, “will make it shine like Ice, as Ladies report.” The sudden distancing effected by the phrase “as Ladies report,” unwittingly raises the possibility that the neighboring recipes remain unverified, or that the icing might not be guaranteed, indeed, to shine at all.²⁴ The odd intensifiers and disclaimers that these writers use (e.g., “you must not doubt,” “it must not be thought strange”) signal apprehension: if merely acknowledging a source, why mark it so uneasily? In each case, the text veers unsteadily when citing a source, crossing back on itself so as to suggest the problem of knowing, or not knowing, women’s work. And in turn, this quandary leads to the problem of truly apprehending domesticity, despite its reputed status as something almost inbred.

In one sense, this rhetorical confusion mimics the practical problem of how a man could rule over a domain defined as outside his domain. Post-Reformation marital guides present this puzzle when they insist on the symbiosis of the husband’s and wife’s work but then strictly divide tasks in terms of gender. In *Christian Oeconomie* (1609), William Perkins writes that while the “father and chief head of the family” has all rights of governance, he “ought not in modesty to challenge the privilege of preserving and advertising his wife in all matters domestical, but in some to leave her to her own will and judgment.” In *A Godly Forme of Houshold Government* (1630), Dod and Cleaver establish areas of household responsibility “in which the husband giveth over his right unto his wife: as to rule and governe her maidens: to see to those things that belong unto the kitchin, and to huswiferie, and to their household stuffe; other mean things.” And William Whately writes that the husband might compromise his superior position were he to assume total control of the home. The husband “should permit his wife to rule under him,” Whately declares, “and give her leave to know more than himself, who hath weightier matters.”²⁵ As such, these writers confirm Fitzherbert’s anxious decision to “leue” the wife to her own, more informed though less momentous, resources. Compelled to explain the simultaneous importance *and* inferiority of housewifery, they fall back on the default existence of “mean” knowledges that the husband can’t allow himself to know. If claims about the material importance of housewifery came into conflict with prescriptions about marital hierarchy, a similar tension was registered rhetorically when writers attempted to codify housewifery in print. Many writers end up positing a fraught domestic culture lodged somewhere beyond the purview of the book commodity or husbandly sovereignty.

In part, domestic how-to books run into the problem that “femininity” historically represented the place of non-knowledge itself. It was common for writers, that is, to label non-elite populations or non-authoritative knowledges as “feminine,” a gendering enhanced by the fact that Latin, taught primarily to boys, traditionally marked intellectual competency. As the print industry

and educational reform facilitated a market of English readers in the sixteenth century, however, they challenged the linguistic faultline separating learned and barbarous people. The increasing affordability of books spawned debates about who should have access to particular kinds of knowledge. This controversy was especially heated in the field of medicine, given that Latin was often the skill that distinguished doctor from amateur. While some writers argued for disseminating information “downward” in the vernacular, others protested that translations encouraged amateur practitioners. William Turner offers this justification for his English herbal:

Dyd Dioscorides and Galene gyve occasion for every old wyfe to take in hand the practice of Phisick? Dyd they gyve any just occasyon of murther? . . . If they gave no occasyon unto every old wyfe to practyse physike, then gyve I none . . . then am I no hyundrer wryting unto the English my countremen, an Englysh herball.²⁶

Esteemed Greek and Latin writers, Turner argues, were not frightened of audiences who spoke their language.²⁷ In his account “every old wyf” figures the dangerous denizen of popular culture whose misuse of information threatens the stability of the realm. Turner evokes this figure in hopes of creating a third category of reader, the learned man or “anti-wife” who nevertheless cannot speak Latin. In his argument, the English tongue becomes valid currency for exchanging wisdom, and readers are *de facto* inhabitants of a linguistic community. But the “old wife” figuratively haunts the process of disseminating knowledge in the print-vernacular, for she is positioned beyond the national borders of erudition. Husbandry books that address female labor, such as Fitzherbert’s, obviously cannot use stereotypical methods for distinguishing oral culture from professional expertise. In fact, their use of the vernacular tongue, a language insistently defined as female, proverbial, and *domestic* (because taught in the home) intensifies this predicament. In debates about the validity of specific knowledges, domesticity emerges as a heuristically handy term, but one always verging on deconstructing the categories it cements. It is no wonder that when domesticity becomes the subject of the printed guide, it produces a set of epistemological, ideological, and rhetorical quandaries for English readers and writers.

A cow is being milked

When Bartholomew Dowe authored a 1588 book on cheesemaking, he put his own expertise about housewifery on trial and justified his book as based on knowledge gleaned in childhood. *A Dairie Booke for Good Huswives* was written as a dialogue in which a female character begins by explicitly challenging the male writer’s competence to dispense advice:

THE WOMAN. I heard of late, you have had much . . . talk . . . concerning the making of . . . Cheese. I pray you show me, if ever you used to make Cheese your self?

THE MAN. Never in my life, good wife, I have made any, but I have in my youth in the Country where I was borne, seen much made: for in the very house . . . that I was borne in, my Mother and her maids made all the Whitemeate of sevenscore kine.²⁸

As Juliet Fleming has demonstrated, published domestic instructions raised the specific question of how the male-authored book commodity “framed” information previously transmitted in oral culture.²⁹ The writer answers this challenge by evoking the domestic-making suffused in childhood memory, a world of yore now lost to him. The image of mother and maids fashioning cheese floats into the conversation to prove the writer’s competency, one predicated on being a native and intimate eyewitness rather than a practitioner. Downplaying personal experience, Dowe banks on memory as the hallmark of expertise.

But the issue is not then put to rest, for after offering practical advice Dowe nervously implores his female readers to speak of him kindly:

I praie you reporte that I have not taken upon me to teache you or others, how ye should make whitemeate, for it were unseemely that a Man that never made anie, (but hath seene and behelde others in dooing thereof) should take upon him to teache women that hath most knowledge and experience in that arte. I have but onlie made unto you rehearsall of the order and fashion how it is used in the Countreie where I was borne, to the ende that you and others, understanding bothe, may use your owne mindes and discretions therein, for sure I am, olde custome and usages of things bee not easie to bee broken. (B4^r)

Attempting to appear less presumptuous in educating women about their experience, Dowe ends up evoking the staying power of “olde custome” as at odds with printed advice. Leaving women to their own minds liberated them from male expertise precisely by tying them to the past custom that the printed object both disavowed and furiously imitated. As Dowe’s memory of his mother’s practice is pit against custom we see a subtle redefinition of domesticity. Transforming mother’s cheesemaking into print, Dowe reinhabits the past to model the “efficient manner” that he hopes to inspire in workers, who, he says, might use the text as a distraction from their “sullen fantasies.”

Or perhaps this is merely his own escapist fantasy. For he publishes his book, as he admits sadly, to “avoid idleness” “[b]ecause . . . I am unapt to doo any good labour or worke, and nowe none other thing in effect can doe but onely write” (A2^r). Having become the housewife that he remembers from childhood, Dowe translates household industry into observation, memory, then the commodity. As such, women are invited to “read” rather than remember the everyday, itself

now implicated in a web of longing and desire and packaged in a form that can be distributed widely and preserved.

Dowe's manual was appended to a translation of Torquato Tasso's *The Householders Philosophie*, a humanist work outlining the universal principles of cosmic ordering underlying metaphysical and material worlds rather than detailing pragmatic tasks. Tasso suggests that good housekeeping is governed by the codes of stewardship and hospitality documented in the most authoritative texts of Western tradition – the Bible, Petrarch, Virgil. More specifically, he imagines stewardship as transmitted through the father's catechism of his son, a process that his book supplements and imitates. Committing instructions to memory, the good son not only learns wisdom but demonstrates the grand memory-system evidenced in the housewife's ordering of goods or the poet's proportioning of art. Appearing as an appendix to Tasso's work, Dowe's text turns to mother rather than classical maxims and thus lodges domesticity squarely in her purview. Concluding with jingles that his mother sang as she worked, Dowe offers a vernacular counterpart to the classical guide to which his work is bound; his reader thus encounters competing fantasies about domesticity, familiarity, and memory. Refusing to credit humanist charges that cross-gendered domesticity damaged the young boy's character (a theory expounded by Erasmus and Elyot),³⁰ Dowe imagines an instructive domestic experience in which children fruitfully absorb the rhythms and habits of home. Dowe's homey pamphlet appears definitively English when paired with Tasso's text. Women's work emerges as the most basic source of a native knowledge lodged deep in the recesses of memory, and domesticity becomes instrumental in fantasies about national identity.

Comparing Suffolk and "South-Hamshire" cheesemaking, Dowe's text also engages print's potential to forge uniform practices out of regional variety, while piecing together a reading public from local communities. In differentiating practices by region, Dowe fractures Tasso's universalism, yet he establishes local custom as the basis for a widespread, indeed national, dairy practice. Regional variation fades, for dairying is presented as a seemingly naturalized activity that everyone experienced in their youth, *where they were born*. Of course, Dowe implies that one only finds access to the memory of English domesticity by buying a book. As the book forges a vernacular community, it names household work as the feminized signifier for the "us" who speak and practice Englishness. The process of establishing national commonality may begin with the phantom of domestic memory but it is to be completed in the circulation of the book commodity.

We find hints of Dowe's Englished "everydayness" in Thomas Tusser's *Hundredth Goode Points of Husbandrie* (1557), which was expanded into a Tudor and seventeenth-century bestseller called *Fiue Hundreth Points of Good Husbandry*.³¹ First organized as a calendar for the husbandman and then

enlarged to include housewifery, cross-seasonal tasks, and moral advice, this book became the single most popular book of poetry published in sixteenth-century England and one of the fifteen most popular books on any subject in the Elizabethan era.³² Tusser describes dairying, baking, distilling, gardening, cheesemaking, childraising, and religious meditation, yet he almost always circles back to thrift as the centerpiece of sound domestic practice. He recommends using table scraps, parings, and stubble to feed chickens; urges the wife to regulate the diet of workers so as to insure their best output; scorns using too many spices in baking; and argues for using human sewage to create compost. Explicitly writing to help tenant farmers and landowners make a profit, Tusser produces a miscellany of household tips whose appeal rests partly in their lack of sophistication and memorable quality. Writing in rhymed anapestic jingles, he creates a book commodity designed to resemble the “sayings” of oral culture.³³ Unlike the sober Fitzherbert, Tusser playfully delves into the banal details and mistakes of housework. Framing his advice with confessions about his school beatings, illnesses, and wife’s death, Tusser implies a “can-do” mentality that accords with his unadorned speech. While increasing the individualist tenor of agrarian “thriving,” Tusser also enhances the wife’s economic role, with the result that housewifery helped to articulate what McRae terms “the newly radical potential of a language of improvement” (*God Speed*, 151).

Yet while building the basis for an agricultural reformation, the book also had cultural effects. When enlarged in 1573, *Fiue Hundreth Points* bordered on old-fashioned, but in subsequent reprintings over the next one hundred years, it appeared increasingly quaint in its outworn assumption that most everything could be produced at home. Charmingly outmoded as well was its representation of agrarian folk as tied to the “natural” rhythms of the seasons. Detailing the rituals of feastdays, Tusser mythologizes the countryside – the wafers and cakes devoured at sheepshearing rituals in Northamptonshire; the harvest home goose eaten in Leicestershire; and seedcake banquets celebrated at wheat sowing in Essex and Suffolk. The result is a reading public fully acquainted with the regional domestic practices cherished because of their historical longevity. Mixing spiritual precepts with a georgic ethic, Tusser produces English lore about everyday life. The book also begins to function as a dictionary preserving a delightfully antique and colloquial country lexicon. He mentions “creekes” (servants); “beene” (wealth); “filbellie” (culinary extravagance); “laggoose” (lazy servant); “gove” (laid up in the barn in a stack); and “aumbrie” (cupboard). Undoubtedly consulted by readers for useful advice, the book begins to speak to antiquarian interest in the preservation of English custom as well as to general nostalgia for a pastoral life always feared to be in jeopardy. As Tusser’s book commodity illustrates a universally familiar and imperiled “slice of life,” domestic hominess, the work of country husband and housewife, comes to represent the heart of English living.

Marketing Englishness

'Twill much enrich the Company of Stationers,
 'Tis thought 'twill prove a lasting Benefit,
 Like the *Wise Masters*, and the *Almanacks*,
 The hundred *Novels*, and the Book of *Cookery*.

Lapet, in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Nice Valour*³⁴

Finally we come to Markham, whose particular vision of domestic Englishness now has a history. When he writes his *English House-wife*, Markham constructs a national grid for the ideas latent in works by Fitzherbert, Dowe, and Tusser. By choosing to accentuate the wife's nationality (rather than presenting the "moral" or "good" housewife), Markham brings to the fore the faint associations found in earlier works – namely by nominating industrious domestic labor, especially the more historically continuous work of the housewife, as the backbone of indigenous culture. Seeking to reach the "general and gentle reader," Markham writes for the wife of a large landed estate, but assumes her to have yeoman's values. He includes both lavish and plain fare in his recipes; and by suppressing class and regional differences, Markham hails a group united in the national imaginary. Though his publisher displays, in one edition, nervousness about a man's intimacy with female chores, Markham's appeal to the nation generally cuts across his focus on gendered labor.³⁵ In this way, the home becomes a fantasized foundational site of commonality.

Markham was such a prolific author of books of horsemanship, veterinary medicine, and husbandry that agricultural historian G. E. Fussell labels the period between 1600 and 1640 as the "age of Markham."³⁶ In fact, Markham had the dubious privilege of being one of the few individuals explicitly prohibited by the Stationers Company from publishing books on a specific topic. In 1617 the Company made him forswear writing books on veterinary medicine since they considered the market oversaturated with his advice on the subject. Author of *The English Arcadia* (1607) and *The English Husbandman*, Markham also was a key player in the rampant Englishing of print commodities. He consistently compared the numerous husbandry books he published to continental guides such as *The Countrie Farme*. Originally a Latin treatise by Charles Estienne that Jean Liébault adapted into French as *The Maison Rustique* in 1564, *The Countrie Farme* appeared in England in Richard Surflet's translation in 1600. Complaining about the inadequacy of Virgil's *Georgics* (which only bespeaks the "Italian Climbe") and *The Countrie Farme* ("a worke of infinit excellency, yet only proper and naturall to the French, and not to us"), Markham sought to rescue the English way of life suppressed in outlandish, foreign manuals and to outline a genuinely profitable and native tradition.³⁷ As he explains in his 1613 *English Husbandman*: