EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Introduction

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Situating the Domestic

This special issue on early modern liminal domestic spaces participates in the relatively recent 'domestic turn' in early modern literary studies.[1] These studies have defined, examined and interrogated the domestic, drawing attention to the way early modern culture witnessed an increasing emphasis on the individual household as a nucleus of order, training ground for obedient and industrious subjects, and an index for an ordered State. This increased emphasis has been explained in various ways, perhaps most convincingly by Susan Dwyer Amussen, who saw it as 'the ultimate impact of the English Reformation [which] fatally weaken[ed] the role the church was able to play in the defence of order'.[2] That the household was conceived of as a touchstone for public order was, of course, not a novel idea in Post-Reformation England. The most influential works of advice literature and household manuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

[1] It should be noted that our modern idea of 'space', as opposed to 'place', was often alien to, and meant something very different to, early modern men and women. See Yair Mintzker, 'Between the Linguistic and the Spatial Turns: A Reconsideration of the Concept of Space and Its Role in the Early Modern Period', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, 35.3 (2009), 37-51 (p. 48). Nonetheless, to see the early modern domicile as a liminal 'space' is a useful descriptor which is deployed to address the various issues explored throughout this special issue.

[2] Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 23. See also Lena Cowan Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

drew heavily on Xenophon's work, which was, in turn, influenced by Aristotle's.[3] Here the idea that the household functioned as a microcosm of the State, and that order in the domestic sphere was essential for an ordered commonwealth, was articulated at length.

Besides speculating on the potential causes for the central role the household came to play in early modern ideas about order, scholars have productively examined the nature of the representations of domesticity in the cultural production of early modern England. In these studies, the household emerges more often than not as a space of conflict, danger and anxiety rather than as one of refuge and comfort. In her important study, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England*, Lena Cowen Orlin, for example, has drawn attention to the way dramatic representations of domesticity in the late sixteenth century seem to offer audiences access to the private home, addressing contemporary anxieties about the domestic and rendering the household transparent to inspection, scrutiny and surveillance.[4] Wendy Wall's study of domesticity has similarly drawn attention to the way domesticity featured in the cultural imagination of early modern England as a space stained with blood and littered with animal carcasses. Domesticity in this account is presided over by the frightening figure of the housewife who was frequently engaged in 'Emptying and dismembering [animal] bodies when they are almost cold, trafficking in warm blood, and ripping guts from live chickens'.[5] Frances E. Dolan has alerted us to representations of domesticity in both dramatic and more ephemeral print, such as pamphlets and ballads, that depict the domestic as a space where dangers lurk. Focusing on the threats within, Dolan has examined the figures of the petty traitor (a murderous wife or servant) and the petty tyrant (the violent and murderous husband), among others, arguing that households were not necessarily the havens of comfort and spaces of refuge that contemporary conduct literature so often constructed and prescribed them to be. Instead, Dolan maintains, 'in representations of domestic crime, the threat usually lies in the familiar rather than the strange, in the intimate rather than the invader'.[6] Similarly, Natasha Korda has drawn our attention to the anxieties provoked by women's managerial role within the early modern household as 'a keeper of

[3] See Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 25-6. The most influential works of domestic advice include Henry Smith, *A preparatiue to marriage* (London, 1591); John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A godlie forme of householde gouernment* (London, 1598); William Whately, *A bride-bush, or a wedding sermon* (London, 1617); William Gouge, *Of domesticall duties* (London, 1622).

[4] Orlin, pp. 7-9.

[5] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 193.

[6] Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 5.

household stuff' and supervisor of its goods.[7] More recently, Ariane M. Balizet has argued that early modern households were frequently depicted on the early modern stage as constituting sites of danger to their male heads. A man's association with the domestic, as a husband or father, Balizet has persuasively maintained, is shown on the stage as dangerous, effeminising and polluting.[8] Early modern domesticity, in all of these accounts, then, is found to be anything but comforting and reassuring.

In the wake of 'new materialism', the physical objects, decorative styles and functional roles of specific rooms within the early modern home has received renewed attention as well.[9] Studies by Catherine Richardson and Tara Hamling, to name only two scholars, have illuminated the way the early modern stage makes connections with audience's immediate experiences of their own households and calls upon them to make sense of the staged households in light of those experiences. Richardson and Hamling remind us that early modern English households witnessed a period of extensive building and re-building referred to by scholars, following W.G. Hoskins's coining of the term, as 'The Great Rebuilding'.[10] Rooms were becoming larger, more numerous and more specialised in this period. As a result, houses were featuring more thresholds, porches, screen passages, doors, windows and staircases than ever before. The impact of these ubiquitous liminal spaces for the way early modern men and women thought about, navigated and experienced their domestic spaces, however, has not been properly addressed in the existing scholarship. This special issue is an attempt to fill in the gap.

Contributors to this issue consider the domestic in its widest possible manifestations, taking into account the fact that early modern dwellings were not as rigidly separated from the public sphere as conduct literature imagined them to be, or as they would be in later periods.[11] Essays in this issue consider the semi-public nature of early modern dwellings, their permeability and fluidity, their openness to outside surveillance and intervention as well as the meanings and significances of their liminal nature.

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[7] Korda, p. 12.

[8] Ariane M. Balizet, 'Introduction', in *Blood and Home in Early Modern Drama: Domestic Identity on the Renaissance Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-20.

[9] See Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Catherine Richardson and Tara Hamling, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500-1700* (London, UK: Yale University Press, 2017).

[10] W.G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England 1570-1640', *Past and Present* 4 (1953), 44-59.

[11] See Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal* 36.2 (1993), 383-414; Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 27; Laura Gowing. *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 14, 26.

Definitions

The concept of 'domestic liminality' requires categorisation. It is deployed here in two senses. First, the word 'liminality' stems from anthropology referring to 'a transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life' often involving 'rituals' or 'rites of passage'.[12] Early modern homes were often a site, if not *the* site, of several key transitional moments of a person's mortality: being born or giving birth, undergoing infant baptism (in exceptional circumstances), experiencing sickness, plague quarantine, demonic possession or being bewitched, and approaching death. Second, the etymological meaning of the term 'liminal' is derived from the classical Latin, *limen*, denoting the threshold of a building or room – the piece of timber that lies below the level of the door.[13] If the early modern home was a beating heart, its demarcated boundaries (apertures and casements, stairways and alleyways, gates and gardens) were its arteries, serving as important conduits that circulated vital, and occasionally fatal, life-blood – via its inhabitants and lodgers, visitors and neighbours, strangers and intruders. This collection of essays explores these twin aspects of 'liminality' within domestic spaces, examining its architectural, religious, political and social manifestations and implications in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Old and New England.

Until the late 2000s, much scholarship focused on the 'rites' and 'rituals' that accompanied these transitional moments within the early modern home, whereby little has been said of how these interacted with the physical spaces that surrounded that home.[14] Some important strides in revisionist historiography are, however, taking place, whereby a particular focus on spatial geographies and materialist studies is beginning to re-map what we think we know about domestic spaces in the contexts of the people and places that surrounded them.[15]

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[12] *OED Online*, 'liminality, *n.*' <www.oed.com/view/Entry/248158> (accessed 11/07/19).

[13] *OED Online*, 'liminal, *adj.*' <www.oed.com/view/Entry/108471> (accessed 11/07/19).

[14] See David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977).

[15] See Hamling and Richardson, pp. 1-10; Hannah Shepherd, 'Women's Visibility and the "Vocal Gaze" at Windows, Doors and Gates in *Vitae* from the Thirteenth-Century Low Countries', in *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, ed. by Victoria Blud, Diane Heath and Einat Klafter (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2018), pp. 205-18; Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2nd edn, 2011), pp. 39-74; John Walter, 'Faces in the Crowd: Gender and

This research is teasing out just how much early modern households were socially and architecturally 'liminal' domains. As Sandra Clark has recently shown, in many urban areas people were 'living literally on top of each other'. Neighbours carried on conversations and disputes, or observed others do so, while 'remaining inside their own houses'. The fact that such housing made 'privacy difficult to obtain', and thus possibly suspicious, is part of a culture that encouraged 'neighbourly surveillance' to a much greater extent than today.[16] Domestic 'liminality' was thus experienced not just from within but from without the domicile. This makes the early modern home akin to Michel Foucault's concept of a *heterotopia* – a 'floating piece of space', itself both semi-public and semi-closed – that was reliant upon, even if it attempted to limit access to, other people and spaces in order to perform certain codified 'rituals' and 'rites'.[17] In this way, the notion of 'domestic liminality' conforms to, as it is confronted by, the later theorisations of Henri Lefebvre, who is credited with initiating the 'spatial turn' in the Humanities.[18] Lefebvre postulated that space was a conduit of human energies: 'Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products; rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder'. Domestic space, like any social space, has agency conferred by human activity: its nature is dynamic and not static to the point that physical space 'has no reality without the [ever-flowing] energy that is deployed within it' and through it.[19] Early modern houses were, thus, frenetic, in-between and ever-shifting spaces. This edited collection attempts to build on such research exploring, through several case studies, the complex relationship between the 'domestic' and the 'liminal' in provocative and arresting ways.

Age in the Early Modern English Crowd', in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. by Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 96-125.

[16] Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 46.

[17] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacrities* 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 27). This text, in its original entitled 'Des Espace Autres', was published by the French journal *Architecture Mouvement Continuité* in October 1984. It was the basis of a lecture given by Foucault in March 1967.

[18] Much of what follows on Lefebvre is indebted to David Gay, 'Walking the Streets with Bunyan from *Grace Abounding* to *The Holy War*', *Bunyan Studies* 23 (2019), 7-23.

[19] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p. 73. More recently, similar arguments can be found in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 2011), p. 117.

Sources and Structure

This special issue is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, moving from interiority to exteriority, from inside to outside, from notions of 'home' to 'abroad' (literal and figurative). This trajectory is not meant to be definitive, rather suggestive of how households navigated transitional spaces as part of their daily routines and life-cycle rituals. To do this, the contributors' sources include a rich and varied array of often under-explored works ranging from house plans, gardening manuals, court records, murder pamphlets and medical texts; to new perspectives on more familiar plays, paintings, diaries and treatises. Although this special issue does not address the liminality of households of the poor,[20] the subjects of it reflect a variety of social backgrounds which include the landed gentry, physicians, clergymen, landlords, housewives, shop owners and apprentices. In this way, readers are presented with an eclectic gamut of English society playing a variety of gendered roles within the household (father, son, mother, daughter, husband, wife, widow) who experienced domestic liminality in surprising, and sometimes surprisingly similar ways.

Overview

The phrase 'an Englishman's home is his castle', which originated in the seventeenth century, was aspirational at best in post-Reformation England.[21] Iman Sheeha's essay examines how the windows, gates and doors rendered the house permeable, open and thus vulnerable. Sheeha shows how anxieties over these liminal breach points were expressed in prescriptive literature, artwork as well as in contemporary plays such as the anonymous *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* (1592) and William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Othello* (1603). Sheeha reveals the existence of a nascent triangular relationship – between mistress, servant and liminal domestic space – which sought (but at times failed) to contain women from outside threats. This bring to the fore the practical and not just theoretical ways these spatial anxieties were played out from page to stage, as well as the ways women were able to deftly navigate them.

[20] For such studies see Angela Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England: Charitable Housing in the Mixed Economy of Welfare, 1550-1725* (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer 2017); Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998).

[21] See Amanda Vickery, 'An Englishman's Home is His Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House', *Past & Present* 199. 1 (2008), 147-73.

Helena Kaznowska's essay focuses on the staircase as a liminal space. She first examines the meanings of the increased ubiquity of stairs in early modern English dwellings, before exploring the 'narratives that were produced on, about, and as a result of the uses of domestic stairs – stories between storeys'. Focusing on working- and middle-class people who shared their homes, Kaznowska's essay demonstrates the way stairs 'became spaces where power was exercised by their multiple users, who sought to gain control over the home and its inhabitants'. Divided into sections that focus on the use of stairs by husbands and wives, families, lovers, landlords and neighbours, the essay evinces how 'the liminal space of stairs was used to gain domestic control'.

Up until very recently, much early modern historiography has explored the domestic spaces in which people died, but not those spaces in which they recovered.[22] Hannah Newton's essay explores how recovery from illness was a state of spatial liminality – between being 'in bed' and 'abroad' or outdoors. This experience from illness to convalescence within the home was marked by contrasting literary tropes: between confinement and liberty, darkness and light, and misery and mirth. By following the patient's gradual trajectory from the sickchamber, to downstairs, to the study and into the garden, Newton is able to contribute to historiographical territories normally debarred to medical historians, such as domestic architecture and literary stylistics. In doing so, Newton sheds new light on how the sick experienced their return to wellness as a distinct spatial pilgrimage within and beyond the home.

What is increasingly becoming clear is that the spatial boundaries of the early modern household were not defined or fixed by four walls and a roof. Ryan Roark's essay compares the representation of domestic gardens set against city parks in early modern London. Roark deploys a wealth of rich and under-explored sources that include house plans, gardening manuals, bespoke illustrations and Restoration plays, with a particular focus on Ariadne's *She Ventures, and He Wins* (1696). By building on Mary Thomas Crane's concept of '*outdooriority*', Roark reveals how the domestic garden was in art and life both the 'innermost' part of the home (architecturally) as well as the 'outermost' part of the home (socially) in sharing the porosity and susceptibility to surveillance that public parks were known for. This draws attention to the important role domestic green spaces

[22] See Robert W. Daniel, '"My sick-bed covenants": Scriptural Patterns and Model Piety in the Early Modern Sickchamber', in *People and Piety: Protestant Devotional Identities in Early Modern England*, ed. by Elizabeth Clarke and Robert W. Daniel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2020); Hannah Newton, *Misery to Mirth: Recovery from Illness in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 7-9, *passim*.

played in facilitating religious, romantic and social occasions in spite of, indeed because of, their liminal status.

Ann Christensen's essay on Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* offers a fresh interpretation of the play which focuses on the way 'men's absence from home *for business* [constitutes] an emerging socioeconomic reality shaping domestic life – a reality with both promise and problems'. Christensen argues that *Edward IV* engages with the ambiguities generated by the tension between business and home, locating this tension within the context of the shifting experiences of and cultural attitudes toward trade, travel and home life in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The essay explores the way the liminal spaces of the city gates (where the rebellion staged in the play is fought), and the shop window (where Jane Shore, a goldsmith's wife, works and is approached by the king), are 'sites where commercial, civic, and private life converge, liminal spaces that point to emotional and dramatic ambivalence and convey the uneasy interdependency between settled domesticity and unsettling mobility and unrest'. Christensen's reading of the play identifies men's absence as a site of danger to settled domesticity in a re-evaluation of previous critical readings that located women as distinct threats to, and potential distractions from, the male world of work and production.

Experiences of domestic liminality were not confined to England but shared with its colonies abroad. Sarah O'Malley's essay argues that the early modern experience in the New World was 'inherently liminal'. O'Malley's essay demonstrates that England's New World colonial project had the establishment of orderly domestic spaces at its centre. O'Malley shows how representations of the 1622 Jamestown Massacre 'fundamentally challenged the position of domestic space as an anchor for identity and social order', and in fact revealed 'the liminal nature of this space'. In its final section, the essay turns to the impact of this colonial project on early modern theatrical representation of the home, offering an analysis of Philip Massinger's *The City Madam* (1632). O'Malley's essay suggests that narratives of the Jamestown Massacre offer a new context for understanding this play and the way it depicts domestic space as a 'liminal and potentially threatening environment'. Together these essays explore with fresh eyes and findings how domestic spaces were fixed in principle, yet fluid in practice, constantly adopting to the series of 'rituals' and 'rites' that took place in and around them.