The rules surrounding the nature and transmission of women’s property in early modern England were remarkably unclear, and mothers were often able, as a consequence, to pass along their wealth with real care, deliberation, and invisibility. Of course, we need to take tremendous pains to define this wealth—be it in terms of personal possessions, familial property including land and jewels, or goods and favors shared by the living. Such a calculus of gifts and debts and resources also reveals something about the economics of gender; that is, the ways that women’s (or men’s) status and influence might be measured in terms of things that are owned, produced, consumed, left to or shared with others. But my primary concern here is more basic. By studying the circulation of women’s wealth, I want to recover what it meant to mother in early modern England, because—aside from the often considerable physical demands mothering placed upon many women’s energies—mothering also had a significant economic component that women of all classes somehow recognized and aimed to supply, in the form of linens and cloth, jewels and religious objects, medicines, prayers, and advice.

The first part of this essay explores how many links between mothers and children were therefore conceived through—even created by—material goods. I take, as a particularly striking example, Elizabeth I’s use of her despised sister Mary’s coronation robes, and explain Elizabeth’s choice of
clothing as a way of simultaneously representing, interpreting, and disposing of Mary’s legacy. Such recycling of royal garments was commonplace, to be sure, but these robes had special significance for the childless and Catholic Mary, such that sharing them with a sister or daughter would have been unlikely, perhaps impossible: Elizabeth would have to borrow or steal them, instead. That the ties between them were tangled, even broken, is a common theme in Elizabeth’s letters to Mary, as when the princess admonishes her Queen to “remember your last promise and my last demand.” Promises and demands made between early modern women could take different shapes, however, and the second part of the essay considers other ways that women’s property circulated in early modern England, in terms of the rules and conventions mother’s advice books seek to uncover or establish. I argue here, though, that even these relatively uncomplicated exchanges—at least, ones less conflicted than that between Elizabeth and Mary Tudor—challenge us to look at women’s power anew, in terms of the influence they wielded over or objects they might transmit to each other.

There were two false pregnancies in the course of Mary Tudor’s five-year reign, and one illegitimate heir, Mary’s bastard sister Elizabeth. The devoutly Catholic Mary reluctantly and only obliquely acknowledged her heretical half-sister as her successor in a codicil to her will; for a brief time after the 1554 Wyatt rebellion, Elizabeth had even been placed under house arrest as a threat-in-waiting. But Mary was in many ways a mother to a sister seventeen years her junior, planning Elizabeth’s engagement, providing her with jewels and a sable hood, insisting on Elizabeth’s observance of Catholic ceremonies, and closely monitoring her sister’s whereabouts during her five years on the throne. Of course, the princess Elizabeth had been especially close to her always affectionate stepmother Katherine Parr (only four years older than Mary), but Parr died giving birth in 1548 when Elizabeth was fifteen years old; the relationship with Mary was more longstanding and demanding. Elizabeth’s letters, like the one I have quoted from, always reflect tensions between rivals and heirs bound by history, expectation, and mutual suspicion. If at one point Elizabeth commiserates...
with her sister about menstrual pains (Collected Works, 37), at another point such intimacies have been pushed aside, and Elizabeth demands a private audience with Mary so as to counteract “the evil persuasions [that] persuade . . . one sister against the other” (Collected Works, 42). Some of these “evil persuasions” were more widely felt. Mary’s awkward mothering was always more or less at issue during her short reign, with “Midwives, Rockers, Nurses, . . . the Cradle and all, . . . prepared and in a readiness” for its duration, as one pamphlet entitled Idem iterum, or, The history of Q. Mary’s big-belly suggests, elsewhere registering the Queen’s discomfiture in the gross terms of “‘Spanish Hearts being carried in English Bodies” and the Prophet Jonas “safely deliver[ed]” out of the Whale’s Belly. Mary’s mothering burdened Elizabeth, too, implicating her in a relationship that would continue beyond the grave. As Mary was dying, Carrolly Erickson reports, the Queen sent a servant to Hatfield to give Elizabeth her jewels in return for the promise of three things: “that she would uphold the Catholic faith, take care of Mary’s servants, and pay [Mary’s] debts.”

When Elizabeth was crowned a few months after Mary’s death in November 1558, she wore the very same robes Mary had worn for her own coronation. I argue that this unusual sartorial decision—especially given their troubled tie (and Elizabeth’s later reputation as a clotheshorse)—is a way for Elizabeth both to reify and obliterate her connection to Mary Tudor, making it crucial and empty all at once. Similar gestures towards mothers are reflected in—and may have shaped—a tradition of women’s writing in early modern England and, as I explore in the latter part of this essay, these writings are especially preoccupied with both the importance and fungibility of maternal ties.

Of course, Queen Elizabeth’s later extravagance was matched by an equally well-known penuriousness, and Mary’s regalia was state treasure, to be disposed of by the crown. But Elizabeth’s choice of clothing on such a formative day actually has a variety of meanings and supports a variety of values. For one thing, it can also help us understand what women’s wealth consisted of, and to whom it most properly belonged. At the outset, I would suggest that Elizabeth’s decision has something to do with controlling reproduction: the reproduction of cloth, most obviously, but through this activity the reproduction of power, relations, and influence: it
therefore reworks once more the ambiguous relationship between mothers and children in early modern England. Scholars like Betty S. Travitsky in her edition of mothers’ advice books, maintain that both Renaissance humanists and Protestant reformers accorded early modern mothers more intellectual and spiritual influence over their children than medieval mothers could claim, yet the real nature of this power—who really possesses it, how it’s wielded, what it shapes—is less clear, as the many manuals and treatises written by English women during this time indicate, again and again. Lady Macbeth’s evocation of the nursing child whose brains she would dash out (1.7.54–59) is an example of the cruel license early modern mothers could take or deep affections they might easily abandon; yet Elizabeth’s use of her sister’s coronation robes implies that children might reinterpret or relinquish these relations themselves, given the chance. If Mary’s robes illustrate the vaguely maternal authority she possessed and how it might continue after Mary’s death on the one hand, they also tell us how this authority might be reconstituted by Elizabeth herself in her very first act as monarch, on the other hand, with the help of a court tailor.

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Painted more than forty years after the fact, the 1600 “Coronation Portrait” of Queen Elizabeth I (figure 1) shows the queen wearing the same ermine trimmed robes at her 1559 coronation that Mary had worn five-and-a-half years earlier. Janet Arnold, who has produced an exhaustive inventory of Elizabeth’s clothing during the years of her long reign, briefly comments on this borrowing and the feelings it symbolizes, suggesting that “[t]he robes of ‘clothe of gold and silver tissue’ which [Elizabeth] had watched her sister wear in 1553, must have seemed like a triumphant and tangible symbol of safety and freedom” (“Coronation,” 728). Their symbolism is still more ambitious, however: identical dress would seem to untangle the complicated relationship between the sisters by making Mary’s ambiguous legacy appear ready-made for Elizabeth, something that she might appropriately recycle—or at least easily remake. Mary Tudor’s will was similarly equivocal, revealing a twinned discomfort with and confidence in her successor’s natural abilities: “my said heyre and Successour,” Mary writes, “will supplye the Imperfection of my said will and testament therein, & accomplishe and
Figure 1. The “Coronation Portrait” of Elizabeth I (1600) by an unknown artist. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.
fynishe the same accordyng to my true mynde and intente." The suggestion is that Elizabeth would not only adhere to but realize Mary’s best designs. And what better way to appropriate Mary’s own iconography than to wear it on one’s back?

Elizabeth had many mothers to “think back through,” as Virginia Woolf describes the work of daughters, and we might view her long career as organized, at least in part, by this rethinking of her history. Still, why risk the specter of Mary’s ghost at the coronation festivities—designed, at least in part, according to contemporary accounts, to exorcise that ghost? Elizabeth’s royal apparel conjures up other magical dresses, too. Whether early modern spectators were reminded of the transformed Cinderella and her evil stepmother (stories of whom were being codified in print at the time)—or even of the beloved Creusa and spurned Medea (whose stories are reflected in contemporary maternal legacies)—the effect of the dress is almost the same—that of a fairy tale gone awry, or unsettling bad dream. There are other drawbacks to imperial hoarding, as Shakespeare often notes, the widespread practice sometimes regarded as an example of bad taste: “Thrift, thrift, Horatio,” the sardonic Hamlet tells his friend, explaining why the “funeral bak’d meats” served after a burial “Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables” of his mother and uncle (1.2.180–81). Shakespeare’s reading of royal economy is rendered with less irony in Macbeth, where the king’s men complain that Macbeth’s stolen title hangs loosely about him, “like a giant’s robe / Upon a dwarfish thief” (5.2.21–22).

Women’s clothing—even that of a queen—belongs to a more complicated category, however, since their property was typically under a husband or father’s supervision. A more practical question, then, is why Mary’s robes were taken possession of by Elizabeth after Mary’s death rather than by Mary’s husband Philip, to whom were returned many of the jewels he had given her during their marriage. There were, however, an assortment of loopholes in the laws and practices governing women’s goods, and recent studies have not only helped us trace where these possessions might go, but also how extensive and significant were women’s goods at the time, their distribution not only informing coronation ceremonies but the very structure of society. Women’s material objects, scholars tell us, substanti-
ate families, underpin affections, and organize households; and that these treasures are so easily lost or traded or resewn makes them more rather than less valuable, more easy to circulate. Taking stock of the “houishold stuff” or “paraphernalia” that by rights belonged to women and was carefully recorded in wills and account books—“stuff” that includes candlesticks, jewels, furniture, pots, combs, stockings, ribbons, linens, chairs, pillows, glassware, gloves, masks, fans and baskets—can also help us grasp an emerging women’s literary culture shaped—and often preoccupied—by similar “vagaries of transmission.”

There are some telling iconographical, political, and religious motives and mechanisms behind Elizabeth’s borrowing, as I explore in the next section. But I will emphasize the economic practices this borrowing illustrates—especially, as the Greek term for household oikos indicates, those practices related to the circulation of women’s property or paraphernalia, their “houishold stuff.” Such a framework suggests what was markedly female about consumption in the early modern period, and what women in particular might share with or leave to each other at this time.

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Queens and kings often wore the clothing and jewels and gowns of predecessors for reasons of economy and tradition. Janet Arnold also points out that clothes were frequently left as bequests in wills because of the value of the material: many of Elizabeth’s gowns, Arnold reports, were “translated” into furnishings after her death or given to players, the pearls and spangles sold, other items given to her ladies-in-waiting. But the “translation” of royal regalia could have the public effect of killing off a predecessor, too. In adopting the livery of her older sister and thereby advertising her secure position in Mary’s royal household, Elizabeth officially buries her sister’s royal claims: if clothes make the queen, Mary has been royally divested. Of course, there were many reasons for Elizabeth to aggressively promote Mary’s image at the same time. Like Mary, Elizabeth assumed the throne as an unmarried queen regnant, not as a queen consort, and what little precedent existed for this unusual and uncomfortable state of affairs in England had to be followed to the letter: wearing something second-hand in this case made tremendous political sense. Yet in wearing...
the same dress, Elizabeth was also emulating a Mary herself constrained by precedent, deliberately dressed down for her own coronation, because the “clothe of gold and silver tissue” was actually that of a queen consort rather than that of a queen regnant. As Judith M. Richards argues, the unmarried Mary Tudor presented herself on that day as a “less than fully royal monarch,” with the loose hair of a bride, an open rather than closed crown, and a dress of white cloth of gold, not the purple robes of a king. 20 Such a circumscribed image of sovereignty later allows Elizabeth room to maneuver; but perhaps Elizabeth borrows the royal garment of a queenly virgin exactly because this was something the childless Mary could not bequeath a daughter. Elizabeth allows Mary a legacy, in other words, while underscoring its emptiness.

There was enormous religious motivation behind Elizabeth’s decision as well. Protestant reformers in England strategically made use of Catholic relics including priestly vestments and altar cloths to unveil or discharge those items’ ritual magic, turning them into furnishings for Protestant homes or costumes for professional players (Jones and Stallybrass, 192). The Catholic Mary Stuart allowed herself such iconoclastic impulses, too, when she recycled altar cloths confiscated from Aberdeen Chapel into a bedspread for her lover’s apartments. 21 What seems like a rough handling of weighty theological matter actually has a rationale. Protestants who rejected the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, whereby the eucharistic bread and wine were literally transformed into Christ’s body and blood, nonetheless exploited the magic and simply reversed the charm when they repackaged Catholic relics rather than disposing of them altogether. 22 The London of 1559 was still more Catholic than Protestant (see Frye, Elizabeth I, 45), and Elizabeth’s religious impulses ran along several lines, suppressing as many religious questions as possible: William P. Haugaard tells us, for instance, that the consecrated host was not elevated at the coronation mass, even though Elizabeth was crowned according to the rites of a Latin liturgy (Haugaard, 170). Similarly, instead of tearing up Mary’s Catholic costume for a queen, Elizabeth had a new bodice and pair of sleeves made for the kirtle (Arnold, Wardrobe, 52–7). What better way to retain the appearance of things (even queens) while neatly and quietly altering the substance underneath?
More than fifty years later, Mary Stuart’s niece Arbella will sell off the embroidered panels Mary had worked on in prison in order to finance her own escape from the Tower. That women’s belongings were meager and that their distribution frequently marked the rupture rather than the cementing of ties between them is explicitly taken up in Isabella Whitney’s “Wyll and Testament,” a poem that appears in a miscellany entitled A Sweet Nosgay, published by Whitney in 1573. Whitney’s literary career likely began when sickness forced her out of employment, most likely as a maid-servant; in this poem, she adopts the voice of the nearly-departed, “whole in body” “but very weake in Purse” (lines 1–2) to take her survivors on a tour of London, bustling and indifferent to Whitney’s defeats or to the economic losses which precipitate her departure. The poet’s pictures of clothing shops and poorhouses, churches, bookstalls, and prisons illustrate a growing economy of want, where a wealth of goods is disconnected from a glut of unhoused servants, authors, debtors, and “Maydens poore” (l. 201). In fact, the poem’s twinned subjects are alienation and authority, for Whitney distributes to her readers things she can neither own nor share, but more simply those things she “shal leave behinde” (l. 22). The poem is strangely reminiscent of the children’s game of hot potato, where the goal is to get rid of something in order to find oneself bereft: indeed, Whitney closes the poem by exorcising consumption, telling her readers: “may your wants exile” (l. 276). With a similar emphasis on the traps of consumption, Natasha Korda describes the responsibilities of women as housewives in the early-modern period, their moral duty and social standing increasingly centered on the preservation of “houishold stuff,” more and more of it consumer goods acquired through their husbands’ efforts, not their own. Many of Shakespeare’s plays, Korda notes, explore the complicated new economic rules that encouraged acquisition but faulted spending: new wives Kate and Desdemona are criticized by their husbands for being irresponsible consumers (careless with caps and handkerchiefs, for instance) rather than capable managers of households, much less as producers of important goods.
Now to the particular ties between mothers and daughters in the early-modern period, a connection Shakespeare does not represent in his plays—except for *The Winter’s Tale*, where the absent Hermione is recovered as a piece of “household stuff” herself after her daughter Perdita matures, a picture of consumption (one Leontes validates as “lawful as eating”) that makes a mother literally disappear into the home. Hermione’s magic is moral, her morality mostly aesthetic, and her powerlessness not unlike that of other early modern mothers, Mary Tudor among them, with confusions surrounding their possessions, authority, and the ability to transfer either one. These confusions allow Elizabeth to use her sister’s robes so readily, transforming what is state property into more private paraphernalia. We know that, with the exception of such paraphernalia, women’s property belonged to their husbands, and so advice books written by mothers often begin with an apology for their presumption of male duties or authority in drafting such documents. Such advice books, five of which appear in rapid succession after Elizabeth’s death, outline a specifically female world of caring, knowledge, and transmission. Many of them are self-deprecat- ing, like the pregnant Elizabeth Jocelin’s 1622 tract, her “little legacy,” as she calls it, consisting of “a few weake instructions cominge from a dead mother.” Elizabeth Grymeston’s epistle to her son similarly describes her imaginative limitations as bodily ones, even as she seeks to disown them: “And the spiders webbe is neither the better because wouen out of his own brest, nor the bees hony the woorse for that gathered out of many flowers: neither could I euer brooke to set down that haltingly in my broken stile, which I found better expressed by a grauer author.” Yet these advice books also often articulate another way of calculating and sharing female wealth: Dorothy Leigh, in *The Mothers Blessing* (1616), likens unheard advice to “many mens garments motheate in their chests, while their Christian bretheren quake with cold in the street for want of couering.”

Marked thus both by power and decay, Mary’s dress shares with these writings the riddle of maternal influence, presenting claims about women’s property and authority while detaching them from the mother. The next part of my argument looks at Mary’s dress in light of women’s work. I first briefly consider the nature of cloth and its status as female wealth, a
topic treated in some detail by anthropologists exploring the economics of small-scale societies; their accounts will help me then outline ways of reading early modern mothers’ advice books as both literature and as wealth in the early modern period.

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In *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf poses a question about the past that also centers on the faulty distribution of women’s property: “What had our mothers been doing then,” this impoverished child rudely wonders, “that they had no wealth to leave us?” (21). But Woolf’s focus on economics unfortunately omits the material world that wives and mothers inhabit and routinely recreate. Studying cloth bestowal and exchange in twentieth-century Oceania and the Trobriand Islands, recent anthropologists supply us with a more nuanced picture of women’s wealth. Many of their accounts focus on the ways that cloth is especially crucial to its accrual and exchange. In Oceania, for example, cloth mats woven by women are prized both for their sheer value and for their ability to link kin groups and obligations; indeed, as Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider argue, such items are so imbued with sacred and ancestral referents that they have “socially protective powers.”

Studying related practices in Madagascar, where clothing is demanded by the dead as part of a complicated and protracted series of burial rituals, Gillian Feeley-Harnik suggests that clothing is a “product of reciprocity,” a precious material that articulates otherwise unspoken relationships. Of course, we have to be careful in drawing connections between contemporary small-scale societies and the social world of early-modern England, but there are some useful similarities. Defining ancestors, maintaining lineages and identifying progeny, sumptuary codes regulating cloth distribution and display operate in small-scale societies much as they did in early modern England, where mourning robes were distributed by kin of the deceased at funerals as a way to “channel death into regeneration and political gain” (see Weiner and Schneider, 11). What anthropological accounts also tell us is that if, by definition, clothing is practical, superficial, and decorative, it is also always a rich and valuable tool precisely because of its exteriority, its ability to recreate the owner as part of its symbolism.

The connections between women and cloth are especially important in both worlds, as well. In her study of South Pacific societies, Weiner exam-
ines how women’s weaving holds kin groups together, transmitting material wealth and influence in ways that Woolf’s powerful account of a female tradition cannot register. After a death, Trobriand women bleach, dry, and fashion skirts from banana leaf fibers and distribute these bundles on behalf of the dead so as to ensure the continued stability of the deceased’s family. Weiner views this project as the “transformation of women’s reproductive capacity into an object.” Part of this wealth, however, continues to belong to the giver. Describing mats woven by Samoan women, Weiner points out that such objects can circulate and yet still be “inalienable,” identified as a treasure that reinforces the giver’s position.

For similar reasons, Lear tells his daughter Regan to “reason not the need” for his own fastidious requirements for sumptuous living: the garments of power in Shakespeare’s plays may be simply the clothes on a king’s back, but their obviousness makes them no less necessary, and no less gorgeous. In *King Lear*, as Margreta de Grazia writes: “Clothes rank as the play’s representative superfluous thing,” but Lear nonetheless “shakes the superflux by disrobing.” Yet there are still other interests—more communal than Lear’s private need to be recognized—created and protected by female cloth wealth that can be hoarded or banked, torn, shared, or left to rot. Used as tribute, displayed or worn in rituals of continuity or legitimation, “such treasure,” Weiner argues, “facilitates claims to the past—its names, legends, and events—that justify the transactions and extend the power of living actors” (Schneider and Weiner, 6). A matriarchal world of obligation and likeness is also created in the process, assuming shape by describing ties to female relatives or by incurring debts to them (see Feeley-Harnik, 73–74). Elizabeth capitalizes on this process of producing mothers and daughters, for her appropriation of a despised sister’s dress at once symbolizes Mary’s ancestry as well as Mary’s inability to reproduce such a relation.

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The existence of a female literary tradition in early modern England was likewise premised, Wendy Wall argues, on the language of legacy. This carefully crafted network of maternal ties helped female authors emerge and then explain themselves away, their wills and advice books and poetry “a strangely performative and self-constituting gesture dependent upon the
erasure of the subject.” If female authorship was legitimated through the process of making real women disappear, so was motherhood itself, not only reconstructed as a literary and social, rather than biological fact, but also codified, amplified, or sometimes reorganized, especially in mother’s advice books. Such works are various and extensive, treating pregnancy, prayer, courtship, childrearing, marriage, and household management. Reading them gives us a better idea of the manifold circumstances under which mothering was permitted or reproduced in early modern England.

For one thing, many of the immensely popular advice books written by women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England are premised on the death of the author. Upon learning of her pregnancy, for example, Elizabeth Jocelin (1596–1622) embarks on *The Mothers Legacie, to her unborne Childe* (1624) only after she buys her winding sheet. (Elsewhere, she undercuts her work not only because it derives from her, but because it is addressed to a child.) The always-looming fear that she might die in childbirth allowed a woman to write in a patriarchal culture that otherwise mandated female silence (Travitsky, *Mother’s Advice*, ix). Adhering to this harsh convention, what mothers often give their children in these works is permission—and sometimes, overt and precise instructions—to ignore them. If mothers’ advice books therefore ensure a maternal legacy otherwise unavailable, the weakened authority of mothers is thus contradictory at best and always immaterial, premised, as Teresa Feroli puts it, upon the “dissolution of the female body” (91) or upon the insistent renunciations of a mother’s language. These books offer other telling examples. Elizabeth Grymeston (1604), for instance, explains that she can best show her affection by sharing her experience, but then colors that knowledge in “The Epistle” to her son as sinful, describing a mother’s wrath rather than her wisdom.

Such conditions of debilitation or absence would appear to make the 1622 appearance of *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie* (published 1628) all that more unusual. Written by Elizabeth Clinton (1574–1630), the *Nurserie* is directed specifically at new mothers (not at Clinton’s children) and focuses on the importance of breast-feeding, a practice that had been nearly eclipsed for elite women by what Clinton’s publisher Thomas Lodge calls the “unnaturall practise” of wet nursing. Male writers like Erasmus in
“The New Mother” (1524) and William Gouge in Of Domesticall Duties (1622) had adopted a similar stance, so more interesting to me than why Clinton takes the position (after failing to nurse any of her own eighteen children) is the circumstance that, unlike other mothers’ advice books, Clinton’s argument emphasizes the regular, sustained, and physical presence of the mother. In Clinton’s eyes, the mother’s legacy is contingent upon her survival, not upon her death, her influence solely communicated and guaranteed by her body, not by its products or possessions.

The circulation of women’s wealth accomplished via the exchange of banana leaf skirts guarantees that giving away something of value ensures its magical influence without consuming the maker. Clinton’s outline of female influence transmitted through breast milk—whereby, publisher Thomas Lodge explains to the reader, the “stores” of mothers are drained so as to nourish the strength and continuity of their lines—shares this definition of female wealth by erasing any divisions between what a mother can give her children and what continues to be owned by her. At the same time, mother’s milk really issues from God’s grace, as the pious Clinton explains in her dedication: “I thinke it an honour vnto you, to doe that which hath proued you to be full of care to please God, and of naturall affection, and to bee well stored with humility, and patience.” Indeed, all of the maternal virtues she enumerates find their source in God’s bounty: “he is also All sufficient, & therefore infinitely able to blesse his owne ordinance, and to afford vs meanes in our selues” (Nurserie, 2). That women’s possessions really belong to or emanate from men is reiterated by Grymeston’s Miscelanea. Meditations. Memoratives, which consists of proverbs, prayers, quotations, and paraphrases from Catholic Church fathers (often in the original Latin or Greek). Like many male authors of the time, Grymeston describes her work as a conduit for wisdom that circulates elsewhere, not something that solely belongs to or originates in her, and elsewhere refers to her “broken style” as a way of characterizing her borrowings, obvious hand-me-downs in a literary world shaped by the coterie (and therefore, nearly closed) circulation of literary works rather than their (more open and unregulated) exchange and consumption in the marketplace.

Clinton’s vision could not be more different, however, since breastfeeding makes possible the transfer of specifically maternal wealth. The
uninterrupted tie and unmediated influence made possible via breast-feeding allow the mother—and only her—to become a crucial part of both the outer and inner world of the child, as a source of support, affection, nourishment, and discipline throughout her child’s life. Recalling the precept “which willeth the younger women” “to Beare [children] in the wombe,” Clinton explains that this sustenance also means mothers “Beare [children] on their knee, in their armes, and at their breasts” (Nurserie, 6). According to Clinton’s account, mothering is an ongoing event which utilizes all of a woman’s physical and moral powers, conflating “the various parts of the body—knee, arm, breast—in [a] continuing natural process of reproduction.” “The new mother,” Marilyn Luecke argues, “is not only redeemed by breastfeeding; she is also empowered” (Luecke, 244).

Clinton’s images of maternal ties involve at once a continuous experience and a remarkably closed one, seemingly impervious to outside influence, without even a wish for any other connection. Articulated through mother’s milk, such ties also shape the early modern home as the premier setting for inalienable goods and inalienable ties, a refuge from the marketplace and a site of worship, an antidote to unchecked consumption and an Eden without wetnurses.

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Despite Clinton’s convictions about breast-feeding, however, there also runs throughout her treatise a sad and profound skepticism about the definition or duration of maternal ties because of a deep uncertainty over what women might supply each other. One objection, “found by grieuous experience” is to the “dissembling in nurses” who pretend “sufficiency of milke, when indeed they had too much scarcitie” (Nurserie, 18). Even when so closely associated with a mother’s body, female wealth is not only unusually subject to decay—as Weiner and Feeley-Harnik also contend—but to counterfeiting and artifice, too. Also striking is the strange genealogy Clinton supplies of nursing mothers depicted in the Bible: citing the motherless fallen Eve, the long barren Sarah, and the Virgin Mary, Clinton summons up a world without daughters, a set of precedents without influence. The bonds between mothers and children can be endangered in other ways, particularly, Clinton notes, by money: she admonishes upper-class mothers not to trust “other women, whom wages hyres to doe it, better than
your selves, whom God, and nature ties to doe it” (17–18). Indeed, cosmic “disorder” ensues from the practice of wet-nursing, when the hired nurse is separated from her own offspring in order to care for the children of wealthy mothers. “Be not so unnatural to thrust away your own children” she admonishes these upper-class mothers: “Be not so hardy as to venture a tender baby to a less tender heart. Be not accessory to that disorder of causing a poorer woman to banish her owne infant for the entertaining of a richer woman’s child, as it were, bidding her unlove her owne to love yours” (Nurserie, 19). Elsewhere, the Nurserie imagines the practice of wetnursing in terms of a suffering explicitly unrelieved by substitution or exchange, a nightmarish fairy tale replete with “lukewarm” mothers (Nurserie, 19) and “orphans” (Nurserie, 4), “queens,” “princesses,” “Dragons,” and “Ostriches” (Nurserie, 8)—a setting where few mothers’ love is bestowed fully or correctly, and where sustenance is replaced—as it is in Whitney’s London—by crime (ll.157–60) and infection (l. 151; see also Luecke, 242).

The failure to breastfeed thus accounts for a host of political, cosmological, and economic problems; following Clinton’s guidelines creates, in contrast, what Irigaray calls an “economy of abundance” that endlessly renews both subjects and objects, and rewrites consumption as slaking desire. With this grand aim in mind, Clinton gives us a definition of mothering that centers on its powers and privileges, suggesting that “to be a noursing mother, is a Queens honour” (Nurserie, 17; see also Weiner, 36). Clinton’s summons was not powerful enough to counter the demands or satisfactions created by early modern commodity culture, however, where increasingly material things might shape both consumers and the way consumers related to each other, and some artifacts—like Mary’s dress recycled by Elizabeth—might ultimately come to lose their value altogether. Samplers produced during this period similarly attest to the fragile, implicit state of links between many early-modern women and to the collective anonymity now fostered between mothers and daughters in an increasingly isolated domestic sphere. As cloth-weaving was replaced by embroidery and households were supplanted by workshops, for example, the same few needlework patterns were reworked, the same few symbols transmitted in smaller and smaller circles. One pattern book of the period explains: “So Maids may (from their Mistresse, or their Mother)/ Learne
to leave one worke, and to learn another,” suggesting how maternal ties have at once become widespread and tenuous, easily replaced and finally abandoned.

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What kind of literary tradition might take shape from the daughters who chose to write in the early modern period? Whitney offers a good figure for their abilities and obstacles when she describes her “wylling minde” in the “Wyll and Testament” (ll. 21–24), the implication being that we learn about women’s ideas by knowing what they have taught themselves to relinquish. Elizabeth’s use of Mary’s robes should be understood in this light, too, as a way of seeing what she could claim and thereby make a mother forego, and more broadly in terms of the ambivalence about early modern maternal ties, their extent and meaning and power, the doubts whether they even exist or can continue. Elizabeth spent much of her youth trying to respond to these doubts and puzzle out her relation to her half-sister. At one point, the princess Elizabeth signs a 1554 letter to Mary, by then her queen, as “Your highness’ most faithful subject that hath been from the beginning and will be to my end” (Collected Works, 42). Later, she will refashion such loyalty—or self-abasement—and make her sister her mother by appropriating Mary’s costume as queen, acquiescence to tradition or the status quo now a most powerful tool of self-assertion (see Frye, Elizabeth I, 24–30). Family feeling likewise serves as a mechanism for public repudiation, as we see in Elizabeth’s first speech before Parliament (February 10, 1559), where she refuses to group Mary with enemies of the crown, explaining: “I will not now burden her therewith, because I will not charge the dead” (Collected Works, 57).

Mothers, even dead ones, were powerful figures in the early modern period precisely because their influence was so indirect, the ultimate source of their power so unclear. To be sure, in Elizabeth Clinton’s imagination, breast-feeding provides at once a profoundly regenerative physical, theological, emotional, and social connection, knitting together mothers and children, women with women, and believers to their God. It also envisions maternal love as infinite and rich, with a power to rival that of Shakespeare’s childless Cleopatra (also decked, Enobarbus tells us, in “cloth of gold” [2.2.199]), who “makes hungry / Where most she satisfies”
It is this image of dangerously draining female power which Elizabeth summons up when she puts on Mary’s robes, where a mother’s love is endlessly renewable, but also something an ungrateful child might override, reconstruct, or merely choose to put away.

Notes

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2. John Foxe, Idem iterum, or, The history of Q. Mary’s big-belly from Mr. Fox’s Acts and monuments and Dr. Heylin’s Hist. Res. (London, 1688).
3. For details about the succession and about the sisters’ relationship more generally, see David Loades, Mary Tudor: A Life (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 283–90.
5. See Foxe, Idem iterum.
7. See Arnold, 98.
9. Arnold, Wardrobe, tells us the tailor’s name was Walter Fyshe. Additional details about the coronation dress are provided in Janet Arnold, “The ‘Coronation Portrait’ of Queen Elizabeth I,” Burlington Magazine 120, no. 908 (1978): 727–30. See also William P. Haugaard’s account of the event in “The Coronation of Elizabeth I,” Journal of Ecclesiastical History 19, no. 2 (1968): 161–70. Elizabeth’s wardrobe’s connections to Mary Tudor’s have been, to my knowledge, considered only by historians of costume;
literary scholars have tended to focus on the young queen’s chastity or unmarried state, on her isolation from her subjects rather than links to her royal forebears. For an excellent discussion of Queen Mary I's wardrobe, see Alison J. Carter, “Mary Tudor’s Wardrobe,” *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society* 11 (1977): 9–28.

10. Loades, 382.


13. In the first version of “Cindirella or, the Little Glass Slipper” recorded in English, the degraded princess is given a “dress of cloth of gold and silver, all beset with jewels.” This version, translated by Robert Samber in his *Histories, or Tales of Past Times, by M. Perrault* (London, 1729), is reprinted by Iona and Peter Opie in *The Classic Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974), 125. The earliest published version of the tale appears in Italy in 1634, although it likely circulated much earlier in oral form: part of the 1540 *Complaynt of Scotland* includes the tale of Rashin Coatie, in which a coat of rushes (like the biblical Joseph’s coat) arouses the jealousy of a lovely girl’s stepmother. Clothes are at the center of both of these stories, although in the Grimm’s version, clothing plays a lesser part—a synecdoche of a synecdoche—when the heroine is identified by a missing slipper. Details of the Scottish story are provided by Opie and Opie (117–18). For the connection to Creusa, I am indebted to Teresa Feroli, who makes a persuasive case for Elizabeth Jocelin’s anxiety about such a maternal image in her 1624 text in “‘Infelix Simulacrum’: The Rewriting of Loss in Elizabeth Jocelin’s The Mothers Legacie,” *ELH* 61 (1994): 95, 97–99. Barbara Johnson explores how (and why) such monstrous images of mothers are shaped in “My Monster/ My Self,” *Diacritics* 12 (1982): 2–10.


15. Additional details about Philip’s gifts of jewelry to Mary are supplied by Joanna Woodall in “An Exemplary Consort: Antonis Mor’s Portrait of Mary Tudor,” *Art History* 14, no. 2 (1991): 223 n. 75.


18. See Arnold, *Wardrobe*, 98, xiv, 175; see also Carter, 17. Elsewhere Arnold comments: “The use of an earlier material is not unusual. There are hundreds of references to the remodeling of gowns for Queen Elizabeth’s personal use, as well as for her ladies-in-waiting, sometimes over ten years after they were first made.” See “Jane Lombard’s Mantle,” *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society* 14 (1980): 56–72. She adds: “Expensive materials were used over and over again, as long as they were in good condition” (72 n. 57).
Jones and Stallybrass explore such borrowing and make reference to Elizabeth’s recycling habits as well in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), 26; but they do not discuss Elizabeth’s use of Mary’s robes.

19. See Jones and Stallybrass on investiture robes (2); household livery (5); and how the medieval concept of the king’s ‘two bodies’ might be explained with reference to a queen or king subject to infirmity or death and the royal clothes that would outlast this figure (196).

20. See Judith M. Richards, “Mary Tudor as ‘Sole Quene’?: Gendering Tudor Monarchy,” *Historical Journal* 40, no. 4 (1997): 897, 900–901. Richards also explains that “it was during Mary’s reign that accommodations consequent upon the occupation of the traditionally male monarchy by the first female occupant were devised. Those strategies subsequently defined central symbolic forms of Elizabeth’s reign and shaped their readings” (895). Under different circumstances, however, Mary would insist upon her position as queen regnant. In a later study of Mary Tudor, Richards comments, “most remarkable was the path [Mary] followed in her marriage to a foreign prince while preserving her legal autonomy.” See “Mary Tudor: Renaissance Queen of England,” in “High and Mighty Queens” of Early Modern England, eds. Carole Levin, Debra Barrett-Graves, and Jo Eldridge Carney, 27–42 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 28. Margaret Scott of the Courtauld Institute made a similar point about the precedent of Mary as queen regnant in a personal communication.


25. See Korda for details about women’s household material.

26. Following Korda, we might ask whether increasing control over a relatively isolated household gave women more or less influence over each other (12).


34. Wall, 36, 38. In *Dress in the Age of Elizabeth* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), Jane Ashelford adds another wrinkle to Elizabeth’s fashion decision, suggesting how early-modern women in England might literally be lost in their clothes. The symmetry characteristic of clothes when Elizabeth ascended the throne—“the triangular shape of the skirt in perfect balance with the inverted triangular shape” of the bodice and extended hanging sleeves—ultimately would give way, by the end of her reign, to a “bizarre silhouette created by extensive stiffening and padding, and so encrusted with decoration that the natural female form entirely disappeared” (11).


39. See Marilyn Luecke’s valuable study, which suggests how Clinton not only naturalizes the mother’s role but also elevates it above the father’s. “The Reproduction of Culture and Culture of Reproduction in Elizabeth Clinton’s *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie*,” in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart*


42. Irigaray’s phrase is quoted by Donawerth (18). Such a community of women is typified, at least temporarily, by the one that takes shape during the period of childbirth and lying-in, when mothers and mother-in-laws, sisters, aunts, and neighbors surround and support the new mother and child. For additional details about this community, see Valerie Fildes, ed., Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England (New York: Routledge, 1990).

43. Susan Frye describes pattern books that themselves circulated as valuable commodities, treasured forms of female wealth: “the intergenerational ownership of books explains why so few pattern books are extant and why those that remain are so heavily cut up.” See “Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot, and Seventeenth Century Anonymous Needle Workers,” in Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England, eds. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, 176.

44. Cf. Paster’s description of Cleopatra suckling an asp: “Its suckling keeps the maternal body from paternal appropriation; it participates in a conspiracy that uses the nursing bond to defeat and embarrass father, to deny his disciplinary goals for the maternal body” (239–40). Perhaps Paster’s image of the nursing Cleopatra contrasts so sharply with my picture of the depriving mother because Paster never describes breast milk as a kind of female property or wealth passed down to descendants: like blood, breast milk leaks or flows, according to Paster: it is never shared or given.