

RESURRECTING MARY FRITH: CREATING IDENTITY IN RESTORATION LONDON

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ABSTRACT

Mary Frith was immortalized as Moll Cutpurse in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's play *The Roaring Girl* in 1611. Over the next half century, she appeared in a handful of other works, primarily plays, as a minor comedic character. In 1662, however, another major work centered around her life appeared: *The Life and Death of Mrs Mary Frith, Commonly Called Mal Cutpurse*. In this supposed autobiography, Frith is transformed into a royalist hero, using her roguish skills to support the cause of Charles II.

What this thesis seeks to examine is the rationale behind this overtly political representation of Frith, who is never presented as having a great stake in politics in any of her many other appearances. Initially, it grounds the discussion of *The Life and Death* in an examination of the earlier texts, primarily *The Roaring Girl*, and current critical commentary on Frith and her fictional representations. Frith's notoriety makes it necessary to question exactly what shape such fame (or infamy) would have taken during Frith's lifetime. Next, this thesis looks at the literary and political milieu that spawned *The Life and Death* through a close examination of other contemporary publications concerning royalist highwaymen-heroes. Finally, this work explores the societal changes that allowed Frith and other criminals to be celebrated as royalist heroes and, perhaps, model citizens of a rapidly changing English nation.

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Introduction

Mary Frith, perhaps better known as Moll Cutpurse, has gained a significant amount of critical study, primarily because of Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's 1611 play *The Roaring Girl*. This play, though likely the most popular story concerning Frith, was far from the only tale of her exploits written during her lifetime. Frith inspired numerous other works ranging from ballads to biographies over the same fifty year period that saw the English civil war and the restoration of its monarchy. Her life was also recorded in the Bridewell correctional books and the letters of John Chamberlain. As a commoner, she was surprisingly present in the popular culture of her time.

The details of the historical Mary Frith's life are largely unknown. Aside from various court records, what we know about her is mostly speculation drawn from her literary appearances in her guise as Moll Cutpurse.¹ As with many historical figures, however, the stories only grow more fanciful in the telling. The fictional Moll is adapted through myriad works and genres and appropriated by numerous causes being debated in London throughout her life.

Moll's earliest literary appearance seems to have been in a ballad entitled *The Madde Pranckes of Mery Mall of the Bankside*. Though no copies of this ballad are known to be in existence, the stationers' register entry for the ballad dates it to 1610 and attributes authorship to the playwright John Day. A year later, she made her most famous appearance in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*. The play must have been successful, for Moll became a frequent

¹ This essay is primarily concerned with the fictional representations of Mary Frith and the legendary status this persona attained during and just after her lifetime. It should be assumed for the purposes of this essay that all references to Frith or Moll are meant to indicate this fictional personage rather than the historical woman.

cameo player in various city comedies, including three more plays by Dekker.² She appears briefly in the 1639 publication of Nathan Field's *Amends for Ladies*;³ after this appearance, however, she vanished from the public record until she was resurrected in 1662 in *The Life and Death of Mrs Mary Frith, Commonly Called Mal Cutpurse*, a supposed autobiography⁴ published three years after her death. Here, she is transformed into a royalist heroine through the lens of criminal biography.

Though these many works offer disparate and incomplete views of Mary/Moll, several common themes occur throughout her literary existence. Due to the historical Frith's penchant for wearing male clothing in public, all of these works in some way explore ideas of gender and sexuality. Many push this social exploration further by using Moll as a means of interrogating other aspects of London city life, such as politics, economics, and criminality. These works belonged to popular genres of literature and utilized many of the common literary tropes of their era.

² *If This Be Not a Good Play* (5.4.105-7), *Match Me in London* (1.2.85-86), and *The Witch of Edmonton* (5.1.159-161)

³ Todd and Spearing, the modern editors of *The Life and Death*, note in their introduction that "for the second edition the title was expanded to: *Amends for Ladies. With the merry pranks of Moll Cut-Purse: Or, the humour of roaring....*" They also note that it seems Moll's name is "good box office or good for the publisher's receipts" since her role in the play is minimal at best (xv-xvi). It seems, then, that by 1618 when the play was first published that the fictionalized Moll (opposed to the historical Mary) was a popular enough figure to be used as advertising.

⁴ Geraldine Wagner argues that *The Life and Death* is exactly what it claims to be, Frith's own diary: "unlike most other seventeenth-century criminal 'autobiographies', the majority of which are actually anonymously authored, strictly conventional accounts of sinfully criminal subjects converted to pious devotion, Frith's autobiography exhibits no alienation of the narrator from the narrated self; Frith does not speak from the distanced position of the convert reflecting new-found wisdom on her former exploits" (377). However, Frith *does* demonstrate this kind of piety, especially as *The Life and Death* draws to a close. Similarly, Todd and Spearing believe that *The Life and Death* is a "told-to" biography, written with the help of an amanuensis. I find both arguments unlikely, given the selectiveness with which *The Life and Death* presents the known historical facts of Frith's life, and the extreme politicization of the work.

This essay seeks to explain the reason for Frith's popularity in the literature of her time. Though she was known to be a criminal, her crimes were not severe enough to explain the level of fame she achieved. The more popular works *The Roaring Girl* and *The Life and Death* restructure her known criminal behaviors into unlikely virtues in order to present her as a heroic figure. This literary rehabilitation seems to be a direct product of the societal changes that occurred throughout Frith's life, which included not only the urbanization of London, but also the English civil war and Restoration and the popularization of the criminal biography.

The prefatory material to *The Roaring Girl* insists that the writers' goal is to rehabilitate Moll's public image: "Worse things I must needs confess the world has taxed her for, than has been written of her; but 'tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than he finds 'em" (19-20). By qualifying their choice of Moll as their central figure, Dekker and Middleton pose a question that becomes just as crucial when looking at *The Life and Death*: why does Moll need to be rehabilitated at all? Or, rather, what about her real-life persona makes her worthy of such an exercise, when it is clear that great effort must be made to redeem her to the writers' audience? Perhaps more importantly is this question: which "Moll" are they trying to rehabilitate—the living woman whose appearance onstage is advertised in the epilogue to *The Roaring Girl*, or the fictional creation who was already well established enough in London's popular culture to merit such a play?

Lisa Jardine is careful to remind us that "Moll is not Mary Frith in the sense of documenting a contemporary figure's notorious career; she is appropriated as a figure representative of all society's nervousnesses where the relations between men and women are concerned" (Jardine 161). Frith occupied a unique position within London's social system. In

many respects, she was an outsider: a woman who dressed as a man⁵ and participated in masculine activities; a criminal; a businesswoman; a public figure. She was likely a highly recognizable figure, as her popularity in literature attests. As Bryan Reynolds and Janna Segal note, “Her social deviance and appealing personality made her a newsworthy subject for mythmaking discourse” (77). While Todd and Spearing’s theory that some of her appearances in literature may simply have been meant to cash in on her popularity in other works, both *The Roaring Girl* and *The Life and Death* seem to appropriate the legends for the purpose of commenting on London’s changing social climate. The historical Frith’s celebrity allowed writers to capitalize on her status as both an outsider and a notable London personage in order to critique the society in which she operated and offer new possible configurations of English urban identity.

In order to ground an explanation of *The Life and Death* within its critical context, this essay will first examine existing scholarship on Mary Frith, the majority of which focuses on her appearance in *The Roaring Girl*. From there, it is necessary to determine why Frith became such a popular and widely recognized figure in order to understand why publishers would resurrect her in *The Life and Death* as a royalist heroine, and do so almost half a century after *The Roaring Girl*. The third section explains the criminal biography genre to which *The Life and Death* belongs and its significance in the culture of Restoration-era London. Finally, I present the version of Mary Frith portrayed in *The Life and Death* as a configuration of a particular kind of

⁵ The exact details of the extent of her cross-dressing are still heavily debated. Though it is certain that she did wear men’s clothing at times, it is impossible to determine her reasons for doing so, or exactly how much of her life she spent in men’s clothing. Various possible explanations appear in the fictions written about her, but many of them seem uniquely adapted to the individual story being told.

national hero necessitated by both the urbanized London environment and the political turmoil of the Restoration.

Representation of Mary Frith/Moll Cutpurse in the Early Texts

Of the early representations of Frith, Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* is by far the best known, both today and likely within its own era. It is also the most coherent fictionalization of Moll, and the one that has attracted the most scholarly study. In *The Roaring Girl*, Moll appears as an energetic and outspoken woman whose cross-dressing is a pointed response to prescribed gender norms, though these reactions can, and have been, read in a multitude of ways. Her true nature remains mercurial throughout the play: her fellow characters cannot agree on how best to classify her, and Moll offers deliberately evasive comments on the questions of gender and sexuality that lie at the heart of the play. Indeed, *The Roaring Girl*'s prologue sets up this exploration of gender roles by offering multiple readings of "roaring girls," from "one...that roars at midnight in deep tavern bowls" to "a civil city-roaring girl, whose pride, feasting, and riding, shakes her husband's state, and leaves him roaring through an iron gate," only to conclude by introducing "Mad Moll," who "flies with wings more lofty" (Prologue, 16-30). Moll, as we will learn, encompasses all these other roaring girls.

She is not an easily defined character; she does not belong to a singular "type" as the other roaring girls do. Mistress Gallipot, one of the play's lecherous city wives, emphasizes the difficulty in classifying Moll early in the play, and she, like most who take an interest in Moll, focuses on her gender: "Some will not stick to say she's a man and some both man and woman" (II.i. 194-195). Here, her masculinity is emphasized, but even it seems uncertain. Later, Sir

Alexander calls her “a monster with two trinkets” (II.ii.76-77). Depictions of Moll as a hermaphrodite persist throughout the literature written about her, though often they are a point of contention and debate when they appear. Though the Moll of *The Life and Death* vehemently denies such a classification—as evinced below in the description of her encounter with a true hermaphrodite named Aniseed-Water Robin—in *The Roaring Girl*, her response is somewhat more ambiguous. Her lines are filled with puns on male genitalia; Moll’s tailor tells her that she “change[s] the fashion” and that her “breeches...will take up a yard more,” to which Moll replies, “Well, pray look it be put in then” (II.ii.81-85). The implication seems to be that Moll is asking to have a “yard”—a euphemism for the male genitals—added into her clothing, achieving by artifice what she cannot achieve naturally. Moll also tells Sebastian, the masculine half of the comedy’s obligatory pair of young lovers, that she “love[s] to lie o’both sides o’th’bed [herself], and again o’th’other side” (II.ii.36-37). Considering Laxton’s earlier speculation that “she might first cuckold the husband and then make him do as much for the wife” (II.i.194-195), it seems that Moll is well aware of the common perceptions held about her, and she plays with them throughout the play. Her adoption of male guise enables her to indulge in specifically male pastimes, such as smoking tobacco and carrying a sword, and it also allows her to move freely throughout London.

At the same time, however, Moll retains a measure of femininity in *The Roaring Girl*. When she first enters, she is dressed in a frieze jerkin—a close-fitting woolen jacket worn by men—and a woman’s safeguard. Though she later appears in all-male clothing and, perhaps unintentionally, passes for a man, she refers to herself as decidedly female throughout the play. When her fellow thief Trapdoor praises her “heroic spirit and masculine womanhood” (II.i.331-

332), Moll asks him, “what parts are there in you for a gentlewoman’s service?”⁶ (II.i.333-33). Moll most frequently uses masculine dress and behaviors as a means of freeing herself from the constraints of womanhood. As she tells Sebastian, “I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman; marriage is but a chopping and a changing, where a maiden loses one head and has a worse i’th’place” (II.ii.42-45). Moll’s feminine rhetoric focuses on her chastity,⁷ which, combined with her masculine spirit, allows her to both defend and rebuke other women. Chastity is treated here as a kind of honor code to which all women are bound. Though this is not an uncommon sentiment in popular thought of the period, Moll extends this code of chastity beyond its practical applications and presents herself as a female knight, not too far removed from Spenser’s Britomart, who also shares Moll’s penchant for cross-dressing.

Much of the existing research on Frith focuses on her representation in *The Roaring Girl*. This research is primarily concerned with portrayals of gender and sexuality within the play and frequently approaches the play from one of several perspectives: that of feminist empowerment, in which Moll’s actions are viewed as proto-feminist; that of gender studies, which focus on Moll’s sexuality and her potential roles as transvestite, transsexual, lesbian, or hermaphrodite; and that of gender and power, which examine the extent to which Moll endorses, utilizes, or rebels against the gendered and political power structures of Jacobean London. For the purposes of this essay, the final of these realms of inquiry proves most useful, but it is vital to understand these other perceptions of Moll in *The Roaring Girl* in order to examine the very different portrayal of her in *The Life and Death*.

⁶ Aside from the obvious sexual pun, Moll’s words echo a familiar trope that appears in later writings: the idea that Moll is of gentle birth.

⁷ Though most scholars seem to take Moll’s chastity as an absolute in *The Roaring Girl*, Lloyd Edward Kermode presents the possibility of a more sexualized Moll in “Destination Domsday: Desires for Change and Changeable Desires in *The Roaring Girl*.”

Those who choose to present Moll as a social reformer offer two distinct lines of thought. Many scholars, especially those working in the 1980s when *The Roaring Girl* saw much of its initial academic discourse, portray Moll as a proto-feminist championing the cause of women, especially those who belong to the lower classes. Her monologue in III.i, in which she berates the lecherous Laxton for his treatment of women, is often cited as evidence for this. In these articles, Moll is often configured as an urban, modernized Britomart, outperforming men in her gallantry and adopting the qualities of a chivalric knight. As Mary Beth Rose notes, “Serious opposition to Moll is represented in the play as mindless conformity. Not only do the playwrights decline to link Moll’s freewheeling, immodest habits and appearance with perverse or dishonest behavior, they also give her ample opportunity to acquit herself from her reputation as a criminal” (85). Jean Howard’s claim that Moll’s “resistance to patriarchy and its marriage customs is clear and sweeping” is echoed, if somewhat less forcefully, by writing even earlier, including that of T.S. Eliot, whose praise of Moll is emphatic: “the Girl herself is always real. She may rant, she may behave preposterously, but she remains a type of the sort of woman who has renounced all happiness for herself and who lives only for a principle” (Eliot 192). His interest in the play seems to have inspired the relatively recent wealth of Moll scholarship (Howard 128).

Other scholars, however, view Moll as a much more conventional figure whose ideologies support rather than seek to dismantle accepted gender roles. Jo E. Miller’s essay “Women and the Market in *The Roaring Girl*” brilliantly summarizes the datedness of such arguments, noting that such readings of Moll are typically more concerned with suiting the character to modern ideals of feminism than they are to a full reading of the character. Like Paul Mulholland and Mark Hutchings, Miller emphasizes Moll’s complicities in the marriage plot

between Sebastian and Mary, citing that she “opts out of” the social construction of marriage “only for herself” (12). While she does defy many of the expectations for her gender, it is clear that she sees herself as an exception to the otherwise sound social constructions of her time.

More important for some scholars is the question of Moll’s sexual identity. Though arguments abound concerning the validity and historical accuracy of such explorations, Moll’s atypically gendered behavior invites such questions for many, both within the context of the play and in academic study at large. While the majority of these inquiries focus primarily on Moll’s disregard for acceptable feminine behaviors, some choose to explore alternate gender identities and sexualities. In *The Roaring Girl*, Moll is frequently attributed hermaphroditic characteristics, and though her own words and actions suggest that she identifies as a woman, there is enough ambivalence in her language that neither the audience nor her fellow characters can ever be certain of her biological sex.⁸ Phyllis Rackin notes that the Renaissance image of the androgyne is at times an “image of transcendence” and at others “an object of ridicule or an image of monstrous deformity, of social and physical abnormality” (29). The angelic androgyne and the monstrous hermaphrodite exist on some kind of continuum, and various writers and scholars view Frith as inhabiting various spaces along the spectrum throughout the play. Similarly, Jennifer Higginbotham’s work *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Sisters* explores the spectrum of possibilities available within the female gender, with girlhood and womanhood existing as

⁸ This ambiguity is somewhat unusual in that it does not persist throughout either *The Life and Death* or the historical records of Frith’s life. It seems to have been a popular perception of her that was entirely based in her habit of wearing men’s clothing. At her appearance on stage in connection to *The Roaring Girl*, Frith is alleged to have refuted such rumors by telling her audience “that she thought many of them were of opinion that she was a man, but if any of them would come to her lodging they should finde that she is a woman” (Quoted in Hutchings’ “Mary Frith at the Fortune”, from the Consistory of London Correction Book).

contradictory expressions of femininity. For Higginbotham, womanhood includes the traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother, whereas girlhood allows for space to explore social change or social disruption. About “girlish” characters in drama, she notes that “the characters deploy the discourse of girlhood less to mark specific sets of behaviours and more to identify female transgression itself” (79-80). Her primary area of focus is early modern English drama, and she uses Moll as one of her primary case studies, claiming that

The failure of gender categories to account for Moll typifies her particular form of girlishness. The ‘girling’ of Moll within the play depends not on age or dependency but on her exhibition of a particular kind of gendered behaviour, one inextricably linked to the world of Jacobean city comedy, a world of urban youth culture where Moll is specifically a roaring girl and not a roaring woman. Moll shows us ‘girlishness’ as resistance to fixed gender categories; that is, girlhood in this play is not associated with a set of behaviours, so much as transgression and transformation itself (Higginbotham 89).

Higginbotham also notes that “Moll’s particular brand of masculine femininity or feminine masculinity encompasses female solidarity, and the play suggests that multiple kinds of gender identities can and should be socially viable.” (Higginbotham 91). This same kind of female solidarity reappears in *The Life and Death*, in which Moll is able to easily manipulate expectations of feminine behavior.

Such transformative abilities fit well with Stephen Chakravorty’s portrayal of *The Roaring Girl* as a response to Puritan attacks against the theatre: “Moll...[is] associated with every slander brought against players—theft, prostitution, sodomy, vagrancy, levity, shape-shifting, cross-dressing. In the end, mirth is decriminalized, and the charge of theatre’s ungendering influence is countered with a model of spiritual freedom embodied in the virago.” (94).

Indeed, tales of Moll Cutpurse, both in *The Roaring Girl* and beyond are deeply rooted in the theatre. All of her early appearances in literature were written by playwrights, and most of

these writers included her as a character in their plays. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* also notes that Frith's real-life husband, Lewknor Markham, was likely the son of playwright Gervase Markham. It is also known that Frith performed on the stage in some capacity following at least one performance of *The Roaring Girl*.⁹ These connections to the theatre seem to lend some credence to Gustave Ungerer's postulation that Frith's cross-dressing was pointedly designed to create celebrity. There is certainly a performative aspect to her cross-dressing implied in both *The Roaring Girl* and *The Life and Death*, and the few documents regarding the historical Frith also hint at a kind of theatricality in her actions.

The version of Moll presented in *The Roaring Girl* is deeply rooted in the conventions of Jacobean city comedy. As Susan Wells explains, "The city comedy is an attempt to recover, by stating in new terms, that harmony between the commercial and the communal organization of the city which chroniclers...imaginatively portrayed as part of its recent past, but which was being compromised by the rapid growth, commercial development, and royal domination of the city during the Jacobean period" (38). In *The Roaring Girl*, Moll acts as a guide for both the characters and the audience through the intensely urbanized London that is her home. Moll's ability to manipulate social expectations becomes clear as she moves easily between social strata, demonstrating that she is equally comfortable bartering with shopkeepers as she is fending off rogues like Laxton, escorting Lord Noland to Pimlico, or canting with Tearcat. Because she does not conform to any familiar and easily defined social roles, she is able to recreate herself for each new audience. Just as no one quite knows how to react to her in terms of gender, neither do they know exactly where she exists along the economic spectrum, since many of her masculine

⁹ The exact nature of this performance is highly disputed and has been the subject of several scholarly inquiries. Mark Hutchings' "Mary Frith at The Fortune" is probably the most comprehensive of these, as he explores many possible interpretations of Middleton and Dekker's epilogue and the court case that followed Frith's appearance on stage.

attributes—the possession of a sword, her manner of dress, and her love of tobacco—are also associated with wealth, despite her common classification as a cutpurse. Moll uses her ability to navigate through different gender roles and social strata to do jobs that others cannot. As she tells Lord Noland, her nickname “Moll Cutpurse” is not accurate, for “must you have an black ill name, because ill things you know?” (V.i.325-326). Her ability to navigate between a variety of social constructions, both in terms of interpersonal and economic interaction, allows her to be the audience’s guide to the complexities of London city life as presented in Jacobean city comedy.

This capacity for social metamorphosis becomes even more pronounced in the later *Life and Death*, and it does seem to have some factual basis since the historical Frith did work as a go-between for thieves and their victims.¹⁰ Moll’s mercurial nature certainly works to her benefit on most occasions, yet many scholars also note its alienating influence; though Moll is capable of moving freely between social strata, she is entirely incapable of *belonging* to any of them. Mary Beth Rose comments that “While the dramatists assure us confidently that their Moll is neither criminal, brawler, whore, nor city wife, the question of her actual social status is left unanswered” (79). Scholars exploring the life of the historical Mary Frith often place her within the ranks of the lower middle class, yet her fictional counterpart seems to have had very few social restrictions placed upon her. All of her extant iterations feature her interactions with a variety of social classes. Most commonly, she is shown interacting with shopkeepers and their citizen wives, the backbone of London’s economy. As her sobriquet suggests, her exploits often bring her into association with thieves, though *The Roaring Girl* and *The Life and Death* are unique in that they both attempt to distance Moll from or justify her criminal associations. Moll

¹⁰ Margaret Dowling’s essay “A Note on Moll Cutpurse-‘The Roaring Girl’” is a detailed examination of Frith’s activities as a broker of stolen goods.

also frequently comes into contact members of the upper class, and even meets King Charles II in *The Life and Death*.

Ultimately, it is questionable whether Middleton and Dekker's play succeeded in redeeming Moll's reputation. For the historical Mary Frith, the play seems to have done some harm, for her appearance on the Fortune's stage was used as evidence against her in her morality trial, where she was cited as having "sat there uppon the stage in the publique viewe of all the people there presente in mans apparrell and playd uppon her lute and sange a songe" (Mulholland 31, citing the Consistory of London Correction Book). Without an extant copy of the preceding work written about Moll, the missing ballad *The Madde Pranke of Mery Mall of the Bankside*, it is impossible to know exactly what state her literary reputation was in at the time of *The Roaring Girl*'s production, and thus whether it was in need of "rescuing" by Middleton and Dekker. Still, it is certain that *The Roaring Girl* not only fully cemented Moll's place in early modern English popular culture, but also deeply influenced future writings about Frith, particularly her supposed autobiography: *The Life and Death*.

Moll Cutpurse: Early Modern Celebrity

What most scholars can agree on is that something about Mary Frith made her the perfect candidate for mythologizing by early modern writers. Raphael Seligman writes that Moll's "swashbuckling image was ideal material for pamphlet-writers and dramatists alert to the shock-value of her masculine attire, her combativeness, and her ability to mix socially with gentles and commoners alike" (229). Though much of the historical Mary Frith's life is now only accessible through court records or speculation, it seems clear that something about her public persona made her irresistible to the dramatists and pamphleteers of her time.

Linda Charnes' theory of notorious identity is helpful in understanding Mary Frith's evolution into Moll Cutpurse. In the introduction to her book *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*, Charnes writes that "A legend is a cultural product which depends upon the naturalizing or 'forgetting' of its own history as a manufactured thing" (2). In *The Roaring Girl*, we are given a pre-legendary Moll, one who is still uniquely tied to her historical counterpart, not only through direct references to her in both the prologue and epilogue to the play, but also through references within the play that distinctively mark it as a product of its time.¹¹ Fifty years later, in the supposedly auto-biographical *The Life and Death*, Moll (here operating under her historical name) has evolved into a legendary figure. Most of the known facts of Frith's historical biography, such as her marriage to Lewknor Markham, her arrests, her

¹¹ For more on these references, see Mark Hutchings' "The Date of *The Roaring Girl*."

participation in *The Roaring Girl*, are ignored in favor of more thematically evocative events, such as Moll's failed romance with a shoemaker and her subsequent vow of chastity (*Life and Death* 15). This iteration of Moll is an amalgamation of her earlier fictional identities that has evolved into pure myth.

Charnes goes on to clarify that "In order for a figure to have notorious identity, he or she would have to be significantly dis-figured by fame, or... would have to be displaced by a notoriety that subrogates figuration with citation" (2). Charnes' term "dis-figured" is somewhat misleading due to its negative connotations. While the reputations of her primary examples—Shakespeare's Richard III, Troilus and Cressida, and Antony and Cleopatra—largely seem to have been mangled by historiographic reimaginings of their characters in Shakespeare's plays, in the case of Mary Frith/Moll Cutpurse, the reconfiguration of her historical identity into legend seems to have mostly involved positive changes, at least in the better known works.¹² Most notably, the historical Frith's criminality is presented as an admirable quality that supplements her role as defender of women (in *The Roaring Girl*) or a cunning royalist (in *The Life and Death*). However, the publishers of *The Life and Death* do keep her criminal reputation intact, and Frith the character notes "To be excellent and happy in Villany, that been alwayes reputed equal with a good Fame" (17).

Unlike Charnes' examples, the historic Frith and the fictional Moll exist within the same timeframe. Frith died sometime in 1658 or 1659, and *The Life and Death* was published in 1662, while the public's memory of Frith was still fresh. Indeed, it is possible that her recent death gave *The Life and Death* added social currency, as it plays into many of the common tropes of

¹² Though her minor appearances in early seventeenth century dramatic works seems to have presented her primarily as a transvestite boogeyman, these works also seem to have included Moll simply for the sake of drawing an audience. She rarely adds anything of substance to such works.

forgiveness and absolution that occupied not only criminal biographies of the time, but also concerned early Restoration politics on a broader scale. However, much of the biography focuses on events that are already receding into their own legendary forms. *The Life and Death* is centered around the events of the English Civil War, told from a strongly royalist perspective, and yet its efficacy is questionable, since it adopts a political stance after victory has already been assured. Most of the political figures Frith names in *The Life and Death*, notably the Earl of Essex and the Earl of Stradfordshire, are already long dead. As a political text, it takes remarkably few risks in endorsing what has already come to pass. Charnes speaks to this phenomenon as well, noting that

To be ‘a legend in one’s own time’ is to be the ‘neurotic individual’ *whose own life* is the ‘era left behind.’ In this symptomology, the notorious name—and not what it designates—becomes the thing ‘itself,’ and the subject of notorious identity becomes his or her own belated ‘other’: the effect of what notorious identity both produces and represses, a haunting and haunted symptom of his or her own notorious name (4).

The historical Frith does seem to have become this sort of haunted figure, for her only cultural significance lies in her connection to her fictional self. Even Gustave Ungerer’s account of the historical Frith, the most complete endeavor of its kind, is primarily concerned with the relationship between the fictional Frith and her historical inspiration.

Ungerer argues that Mary Frith’s notorious identity was not just a production of her publishers, but that the historic Mary Frith consciously used male dress to create a public persona for herself. His article, “Mary Frith, Alias Moll Cutpurse, in Life and Literature” approaches the figure of Mary from the notion that

contemporary studies have invariably focused on the representation of Moll Cutpurse’s sexuality and gender and have thereby turned a blind eye to the fact that the real-life Mary Frith was creating, for gain, her own public persona as a cross-dressing performer. Cross-dressing was her professional signature...[and] she was a liminal figure striving to carve a niche for herself,

however marginal, in the entertainment business of Southwark and the City of London (45-46).

He provides comprehensive documentation of the historical Frith's known actions, and his assessment of Moll Cutpurse's literary reputation fits well with Charnes' theory of notorious identity: "Moll Cutpurse, as she has come down to us in the text published in 1662, is a mythic construct made up of invented facts and conditioned by absences and displacements...the historical figure, who already in her lifetime had gone through a mythologizing process, was reduced to a depersonalized entity" (46). While Ungerer's work on the historical Frith as an early configuration of popular celebrity is immensely helpful for understanding Frith's cultural currency, his overall view of *The Life and Death* is condemnatory. He claims that the text deconstructs itself as factual fiction by transmuting the historical Mary Frith into the conventional figure of the sinner turned penitent who commits her crimes to paper as a warning to future generations. She adopts the popular Restoration trope of the criminal who has espoused the royalist cause, and is transformed into the highway robber who besides performing her own deeds is glorified as the plotter of Hind's and Hannam's raids on Cromwell's money convoys (64-68). She takes on the Robin Hood-like role of the popular outcast defending the poor and the oppressed against rapacious lawyers and other authorities. Worst of all, she is simultaneously represented as a sexual monster (Ungerer 46).

Despite the brilliance of Ungerer's historical research, it is easy to agree with Geraldine Wagner's conclusion that Ungerer's essay is "misguided" (Footnote 11). His primary concern seems to be in explaining how Frith's biographers, along with their dramatist predecessors, appropriated the celebrity status he claims Frith formed for herself, but he gives little regard to *why* she is a suitable candidate for such mythologizing. Ungerer presents a Frith that "became a Bankside personality whose showmanship caught the attention of [her dramatists]" and who

“was fully aware of the crucial importance of her solo performance in [The Fortune Theatre]” (56-57). However, his evidence involves speculation and misplaced quotations, which undermine his presentation of Frith as a notable early modern celebrity. Still, something about her must have been intriguing enough to draw her repeatedly into public discourse.

It seems unlikely that her notoriety for cross-dressing, though frequently emphasized in modern scholarship, was the sole driving force behind Frith’s popularity. In discussing the roles that cross-dressing women played in society, Dekker and van de Pol note that “substantial number of...disguised civilian women...cannot be said to have had any regular profession, living instead on the margins of society, begging, stealing, and cheating. Their cross-dressing often was discovered when they were apprehended for their criminal activities” (10). These generalities do not translate well to Mary Frith, however. Though her nickname attests to her criminal associations, her pervasive presence in literature seems to suggest that though she may not have been an incorporated member of mainstream society, she certainly did not live a marginalized existence. She seems to have been somewhat unique in that she openly lived as a woman in men’s clothing who adopted some behaviors socially constructed as masculine, such as frequenting taverns and smoking tobacco, traits which are consistent throughout her fictional representations.

Stephen Orgel notes that Frith is “the most famous instance in the period...[of] a woman who presented herself, defined her identity, as a transvestite, and was accepted as such—accepted, that is, as a transvestite, not as a man.” Her cross-dressing, then, “is no disguise, but at most an open secret.” Cross-dressing, as such, was not illegal, even under sumptuary laws,¹³ but

¹³ Christine Varholy notes that though sumptuary laws were meant to preserve the social order, “the very need for such legislation revealed that clothing as a sign was unreliable” (6). Also see Orgel (98).

it was a serious violation of social and moral norms—a violation almost exclusively committed by women (Orgel 107). This sentiment is echoed in *The Life and Death*, which claims that Frith’s garments “served properly as a fit Covering, not any disguise of her, (according to the Primitive invention of apparel) wherein every man might see the true dimensions and proportions of the body, onely her shewed the mind too” (14). During the Jacobean period, clothing that blurred distinctions between genders became increasingly popular: “Male dress became ornate, elaborate, contrived, and was openly called ‘effeminate’ by those of more modest tastes. Its attractiveness proved irresistible to women also, who in any case followed a French vogue for female dress, hairstyles, and manners which emulated those of young boys” (Jardine 155). Even this sort of partial cross-dressing was still seen as threatening to the social order.¹⁴ In 1620, an anonymous pamphleteer published a work titled *Hic Mulier; or The Man-Woman* which addressed the supposed horrors of women adopting masculine dress. This pamphlet was quickly followed by a rebuttal, *Haec Vir; or, The Womanish Man*, which characterized both the *Hic Mulier* and the *Haec Vir* and presented a dialogue between them in which the *Hic Mulier* denounces the fickleness of custom. Here, the *Hic Mulier* “nostalgically evokes chivalric gallantry, recalling the bygone days when men were men” (Rose 76). As this suggests, the man-woman as portrayed in *Haec Vir* seems to be a byproduct of the foppish womanish-man, whom many scholars have read as representing homosexuality within the Jacobean court.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cross-class dressing, or dressing above one’s social order, was a more problematic endeavor. Though it was specifically outlawed by sumptuary laws, many women—and men—wore clothing beyond the constraints of their class. Christine Varholy’s article “‘Rich Like a Lady’: Cross-Class Dressing in the Brothels and Theatres of Early Modern London” offers a comprehensive view of the most common occurrences of cross-class dressing: theatrical performance and erotic role-play.

¹⁵ See Rose, Todd and Spearing, Orgel, and Hentschell.

These two characters became familiar figures in the discourse over proper clothing and gender roles. What was important, and what both characters emphasized, was that cross-dressing was, if not socially acceptable, permissible as long as the woman did not seek to usurp traditionally masculine roles. Even in such instances, Orgel notes, “no actual boundary is crossed...the women do not represent themselves as anything but women, even if they are attacked as being mannish” (107). Yet the women aren’t necessarily viewed as women by others. Plays, medical texts, and popular ballads all look skeptically at “mannish” women, and suggestions of hermaphroditism, tribadism, and even physical gender transformation abound in popular Renaissance discourse. This, perhaps, offers some explanation for Frith’s popularity. In all of the surviving woodcuts of Frith’s image, she is depicted as wearing clothing that combines elements of male and female clothing. Todd and Spearing note that this may have been seen as more threatening than more direct cross-dressing (xxiii). Because she also disobeyed the cultural injunction against masculine behavior, her cross-dressing enables, and perhaps even invites, early modern audiences to view her as something dangerously—or alluringly—apart and in-between.

Despite its heavy fictionalization, the popularity of Frith’s story lends some credence to Ungerer’s presentation of Frith as an early prototype of what we now classify as celebrity. The juxtaposition of Frith’s historical figure and her fictional representations is of particular interest in exploring potential models of celebrity. Mark Hutchings’ article, “Mary Frith at the Fortune,” explores a number of possible readings of Frith’s celebrity in connection with her post-*Roaring Girl* appearance on the Fortune’s stage. In this article, we can see the beginnings of scholarly interest in the division between the historical woman and the character that she later becomes. Hutchings writes, “While the printed text both appropriates Mary Frith as a celebrity and

incorporates her appearance at the Fortune, she may well have been a much less willing collaborator in Middleton and Dekker's version of her life than the quarto's closing advertisement suggests." (Hutchings 90). Throughout the article, Hutchings offers a number of possible scenarios that might explain Frith's involvement in Middleton and Dekker's play, and to what extent she was actively involved. Scholars have often attempted to make the argument that Frith was intimately involved with the performance itself, and that she either performed briefly before or after the play, or that she took the place of the actor playing Moll during scene 4.1. Hutchings explores each of these possibilities, along with the interesting proposition that Frith may have sat on the stage in one of the gallants' seats, a position which would allow her to both view the play and be seen as the early modern celebrity that Ungerer attempts to fashion her as.

Hutchings also explores the idea that Frith may not have been as willing a conspirator in the fashioning of *The Roaring Girl* as many scholars would like to believe. "The promise that Frith herself 'shall on this stage give larger recompense' is a hostage to fortune," he explains, "an act of appropriation that may already have backfired; indeed, if the actor playing Moll spoke these lines, as editors believe, the Epilogue is a finely ironic conceit that underscores the play's ambiguous relationship to its subject" (Hutchings 91). Hutchings demonstrates that though *The Roaring Girl* is somewhat dependent on Frith's notoriety, it also makes, perhaps out of necessity, significant changes to Frith's character in creating Moll. On-stage, Moll is endorsing normative behavior, even if it is through unorthodox means. Hutchings, like Ungerer, argues that the real Mary Frith was far more deserving of her reputation as a notable cutpurse and cross-dresser than her mythologizing in *The Roaring Girl* would suggest. He cites her frequent attendance at the Fortune—which, like most playhouses of the period, was notorious for having trouble with pickpockets—along with the account of her criminal activities found in the Consistory of

London Correction book, where she is not only accused of “immoral” behavior such as visiting alehouses and tobacco shops, but where she is also accused of playing her lute on the Fortune’s stage dressed as a man and making lascivious speeches to her audience concerning her true gender. Frith’s known involvement in *The Roaring Girl*, then, presents us with a figure very little like the play’s Moll Cutpurse, and very much concerned with showcasing her own talent and enhancing her reputation through scandal.

It seems obvious that Moll Cutpurse’s popularity as a fictional character owes much to the notoriety of Mary Frith, even if the fictional representations rarely portrayed the historical figure very faithfully. By appropriating the figure of Mary Frith, her publishers likely drew larger audiences; her name seems to be a selling point in Fields’ *Amends for Ladies*, and her brief appearances in other plays often portray her as a devilish boogeyman as in *If This Be Not a Good Play*, or as a quick joke as she becomes in *Match Me in London*. Regardless of how she is portrayed, however, her name has become associated with the idea of a “roaring girl,” a socially disruptive woman who behaves in a masculine manner. Frith’s compounded outsider status as both cross-dresser and criminal made her a compelling lens through which authors could view and question the changing societal constructs of Jacobean London. Fifty years later, *The Life and Death* creates a comprehensive view of the legends that evolved around Mary Frith. Though it seems that her “biographers” knew little of her personal history, their familiarity with her fictional representations is augmented by older legends of independent women such as Long Meg of Westminster, the evolving socioeconomic atmosphere of an increasingly urbanized London, and the political turmoil of the English Civil War and the Restoration.

Rise of the Criminal Biography and *The Life and Death*

Only one copy of the 1662 pamphlet entitled *The Life and Death of Mrs Mary Frith, Commonly Called Mal Cutpurse* remains in existence.¹⁶ This would seem to suggest that this text was less popular than *The Roaring Girl*; this certainly has been the judgment of critics. *The Life and Death* is less polished, occasionally contradictory, and presents a vivid portrait of a Mary Frith in many ways at odds with her earlier incarnations. Though her most remarkable qualities—her penchant for wearing men’s clothing and flouting societal gender norms—remain basically unaltered, this version of Frith is very much a product of the societal shifts that occurred around the time of the English civil war.

In the introduction to his article “Mary Frith, Alias Moll Cutpurse, in Life and Literature,” Gustav Ungerer notes that “any argument based on the published biography is bound to be fallacious considering that the biographers were committed to adjusting their subject in conformance to the stereotyped criminal of fictional biography” (42). I argue, however, that it is this connection to criminal biography that makes *The Life and Death* worth exploring, despite its flaws and inconsistencies. Ungerer, like a handful of other critics, seeks to identify the “real” Mary Frith within *The Life and Death*, but this seems to be a fruitless task. As Ungerer himself points out, there is little of the historical Mary Frith to be found within her supposed

¹⁶ This copy is held in the British Library and is otherwise unavailable except through an edited edition. Two of these exist, one by Janet Todd and Elizabeth Spearing (1994), and the other by Randal S. Nakayama (1993). Citations for this essay are from the Todd and Spearing edition.

autobiography. Instead, Frith's biographers William Gilbertson and George Horton present a fictionalized version of Frith who can easily trace her lineage not only to her earlier incarnation in *The Roaring Girl*, but also to other tales of outlaw heroes, such as James Hind (whose biographies were also published by Horton) and Robin Hood.

Before examining the specifics of *The Life and Death*, however, it is important to explore the evolution of the genre to which it belonged, that of the criminal biography. These texts, often published in pamphlet form, detailed the life of a criminal or criminals and manufactured elaborate fictions concerning a highly structured underworld in which networks of thieves' guilds conspired with one another. Possibly because of these highly romanticized portrayals of criminality, the genre developed lasting cultural power, existing in a similar form even in modern popular culture. Gāmini Salgādo's 1977 publication, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, is an early study of portrayals of criminality in early modern English fiction, and though he frequently makes inaccurate claims about the link between these fictions and reality, his work is still remarkably useful for studying perceptions of criminality during the late Tudor and early Stuart monarchies.

Criminal biographies trace their roots to cony-catching pamphlets, a genre of tales that seem to have originated, or at least become popular, during the last decade of Elizabeth's reign. They seem to be descended from the Tudor fascination with gallows speeches, as nearly all of them end with the criminal giving his own dying confession, usually alongside a plea to his or her audience to avoid a similar fate, all while "exposing" a perceived criminal underworld that represented many of the dangers of urban society. As Craig Dionne writes, these pamphlets "helped reshape the image of the hapless vagabond into the covert member of a vast criminal underground of organized guilds, complete with their own internally coherent barter economy,

master-apprentice relations, secret languages, and patrons” (Dionne 33). Early modern English rogues¹⁷ were viewed as “harbingers of emerging economic and social changes” who “created a trope for mobility, change, and social adaptation” (Dionne and Mentz 1). Their appearances onstage as characters in city comedy were crucial in shaping public perceptions of rogues as an archetype; their appearances in popular print seem to have been responsible for much of the cultural mythology surrounding them. Though there certainly were criminals who fit the definition of *rogue* provided by Dionne and Mentz, many of the tropes associated with roguery in early modern London were, like Moll Cutpurse’s name, “good box office.” There is little historical evidence to support the existence of extensive, ritualized thieves’ guilds and the specialized canting language popularized in criminal biographies. These tales served as the basis for numerous stories, and they are responsible for creating a mythology of criminality that still persists today.

One of the earliest, if not the founder of the genre of criminal narratives, Robert Greene’s *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage. Now daily practised by sundry lewd persons, called Connie-catchers, and Crosse-byters* was published in 1591 and professed to offer an insider’s view of “knaveries” and “villainies” which the author had spied upon. It was, apparently, popular enough to spawn two sequels and a few associated works over the next two years, the last of which became an early version of the criminal biography entitled *The Black Book’s Messenger*,¹⁸ which offers a first person “autobiographical” account of Ned Browne’s life preceded by a brief

¹⁷ Dionne and Mentz trace the etymology of the word *rogue* to Thomas Harman, a contemporary of Greene, in the 1560s; however, the *OED* cites Caxton’s 1489 *C. de Pisan’s Book Fayttes of Armes* as the first known occurrence of the word. Given Harman’s influence in shaping the archetype of the city rogue, however, it seems likely that, while he did not create the word, he played a considerable role in creating its connotations.

¹⁸ These works are printed, along with their original woodcuts, in A.V. Judges’ *The Elizabethan Underworld* (1930).

prologue attributed to Greene and a lexicon of thieves' cant. Browne's crimes are then detailed in the form of brief stories, with subtitles such as "A merry tale how Ned Browne used a priest" and "A pleasant tale how Ned Browne kissed a gentlewoman and cut her purse." Throughout, the pamphlet comments on the Londoners that Browne encounters, describing both the virtues of his victims and the wrongdoing of his fellow criminals. Of all the genres popular in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the criminal biography arguably is most focused on London, and many scholars suggest that these works reflected growing concerns with urbanization, population-growth, and all their related perils.

Little redemption is to be found in Browne's life. His exploits serve purely as a cautionary tale, for he is hanged without absolution for his sins. This element in particular marks Browne's story as an early example of the criminal biography. As Ungerer notes, most criminal biographies involve the criminal-as-sinner trope, which is certainly the case with the 1662 *The Life and Death*, which closes with a dying Frith seeks solace in religion, painting her fatal disease as penance for her sins. About her newfound faith, she states, "I will not boast of my Conversion, least I encourage other vile people to persist in their sins to the last; but I dare assure the world, I never lived happy minute in it, till I was leaving of it" (72). As in *The Life and Death*, this sort of repentance is usually saved for the end of such tales, which otherwise present a moral ambivalence which, as Ungerer notes "also manifests itself in the criminal's stereotyped role as protector of the poor against injustice and social discrimination" ("Mary Frith" 51). The criminal biography, then, is designed to entertain its readers through eliciting sympathy for the criminals by portraying them as less-than-monstrous, while also catering to stricter moral sensibilities through the rogues' repentance at the end.

Moving toward the English Civil War, criminal biographies become less focused on warning London citizens away from a life of crime and more interested in exploring the political and religious connotations that criminality might contain. Vagrancy problems plagued Tudor and Stuart England, due in large part to economic change.¹⁹ Tudor legislation against vagrants was harsh, since as A. L. Beier notes “the crime... was taken so seriously because to the dominant classes vagabonds appeared to threaten the established order. They were ‘masterless’ in a period when the able-bodied poor were supposed to have masters” (xix). Despite the fact that enclosure schemes which sought to capitalize on the growing wool market displaced many otherwise capable workers, vagrancy was viewed as “the social crime *par excellence*” because such displaced persons existed beyond the established manorial system (Beier xxii). Though many of these vagrants spent their lives traveling between towns, many of them ended up in London, either permanently or as temporary citizens. Vagrants became a common fixture not only in political discourse, but in public spectacle as well. In Dionne and Mentz’s *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, Patricia Fumerton and Steve Mentz both discuss the differences between historical records of vagrancy and the less than sympathetic portrayal of the “sturdy vagabond” in early modern popular culture. Though the historical beggar was heavily stigmatized in Tudor society, his literary cousin became increasingly cunning. Whereas the vagrant was demonized for idleness, the rogue of the cony-catching pamphlet was noted for his resourcefulness and strong work ethic. This shift in emphasis is important for understanding the interest in rogue literature as a specifically urban construction. Bix argues that “in celebrating the cony-catchers’ mastery of marketplace skills and contingencies, the pamphlets seem to endorse

¹⁹ For more on the role of vagrants in early modern England, see A. L. Beier’s *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* and Paul A. Slack’s “Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598-1664.”

the egalitarian notion that economic talents are randomly dispersed. At other times, they more subversively suggest that the *superior* endowments of cony-catchers somehow level the playing field” between the wealthy and the poor (177). Dionne perhaps summarizes this emphasis on the rogue’s economic savvy best when he notes that these pamphlets “helped reshape the image of the hapless vagabond into the covert member of a vast criminal underground of organized guilds, complete with their own internally coherent barter economy, master-apprentice relations, secret languages, and patrons” (Dionne 33). By reimagining the role of the vagabond in early modern London, rogue literature served as an important means of examining changing socioeconomic strata.

Many scholars have argued that one of the most important functions of rogue literature was its ability to serve as a “domestic handbooks enacted on a grander scale...where being ‘master of mine own’ meant reading the subtle signs of deception that veil the true commotions of daily life” (Dionne 46). In these readings, the illegal business ventures and carefully ordered society of rogue culture are transposed onto the increasingly complex market economy of early modern London, presenting the marketplace as both “a catalyst for unwholesome appetites and compromised ethics” and “an unfettered market [that] rewards individual talents,” commentary that could explore the complexities of economic exchanges without the necessary moralizing of other genres (Bix 172). Over time, the dangers posed by the rogues became “part of the predictable wandering phase of literary romance, which is always followed by recovery. In other words, the city’s dangers become formulaic and part of a new stable order” (Mentz 241). Criminal biographies, then, become a vehicle through which increasingly literate Londoners can explore their changing society. Initially, these criminal narratives focus on shifting socioeconomic roles and strategies, but during the English Civil War, they become increasingly

politicized, and during the war, many of these biographies begin to present their protagonists less as condemnable criminals and more as unorthodox heroes.

Many criminals during this era, Mary Frith included, take on Robin Hood-like qualities and appear in tales where their criminal behavior serves some greater good. Geraldine Walker explains that “During the tumultuous years of the mid-seventeenth century, which experienced civil war, regicide...and restoration of the monarchy, the legitimate extent of responses to the abuse of authority were central issues in political rhetorics of all persuasions” (67). For many pamphleteers, criminal biographies became a convenient means of expressing political dissent—after all, they were portraying *criminals* as political rebels, not average citizens.

The publications of William Gilbertson and George Horton helped establish criminal biographies as royalist propaganda. In 1651, George Horton published a series of pamphlets on James Hind, a notorious highwayman.²⁰ These texts portray Hind as both a notable criminal and a staunch royalist with a personal relationship with the deposed king.²¹ Hind is charismatic, and is notably concerned with the welfare of the common folk, especially his fellow royalists.²² In the tradition of gallows speeches, each of these pamphlets includes a farewell address from Hind to an audience of a seemingly sympathetic public who often seems to share Hind’s political affiliations. In these addresses, Hind becomes a vibrant, pious, noble figure, a characterization that is a common trope throughout criminal biographies in this era. Civil war and Restoration-era literature often romanticized highwaymen by attributing the manners and characteristics

²⁰ Hind was also the subject of a more lengthy criminal biography published in 1651 called *Hind’s Ramble*, but it is unclear which text was published first.

²¹ In *Hind’s Ramble*, he acts as something of an intelligence officer. Gillian Spraggs dedicates most of a chapter of her *Outlaws and Highwaymen* to discussing Hind’s appearances in literature and history.

²² In one story that is repeated throughout his biographies, Hind is shown as giving money—likely earned through his endeavors as a highwayman—to royalist beggars.

associated with upper-class gentlemen to them, and in royalist literature this is commonly expanded into some form of personal contact with King Charles, which allowed them to be associated with “not only royalist politics, but also with Stuart glamour. The nonchalant power associated with the image of the cavalier could be shared by the charismatic transgressor” (Todd and Spearing vii). In “The Trial of James Hind,” Horton demonstrates Hind’s noble bearing by noting that “he deported himself with undanted courage, yet with a civill behaviour, and smiling countenance” (5). Horton’s works also grant Hind a number of personal audiences with the king, who seems to deeply value his company. Royalist highwaymen such as Hind were often portrayed as valiant Robin Hood-like characters,²³ though there is usually some ambivalence in their morality.

Occasionally, the ties between the genre of criminal biography and Robin Hood mythology were made explicit.²⁴ In 1662, the same year as the publication of *The Life and Death*, Gilbertson published a long pamphlet entitled *The Noble Birth and Gallant Atchievements Of that Remarkable Out-Law Robin Hood*. Though this pamphlet primarily seems to be presenting well-established Robin Hood stories, it adds the unusual twist of setting this Robin Hood in Henry VIII’s England, and having him pardoned at Queen Katherine’s request. Despite the oddity of the setting, this version of Robin Hood still behaves in a way that would be familiar to both modern readers and those of Frith’s era. This version of Robin is clearly identified as a highwayman, who “fill[s] his pockets” by taking money from farmers and traveling merchants “that with their Goods and Cattel, they might pass by unmollected”. At the

²⁴ There is some disagreement among scholars about the extent to which Robin Hood was used in Civil War and Restoration propaganda. Evidence suggests that both royalist and anti-royalist writers attempted to make use of Robin Hood legends, altering existing stories to fit their own needs. For my purposes, only Robin Hood’s royalist affiliations are significantly valuable.

same time, however, he is depicted as being greatly respected by his companions (when not feared by them), valiant in combat (most of the time), and, of course, “the great Archer of England”. Though Gilbertson’s early anti-royalist sentiment is suggested early on in this work,²⁵ many of the more favorably royalist qualities possessed by this Robin Hood are echoed throughout Gilbertson’s contemporaneous work, *The Life and Death*. As we will see with Frith, Gilbertson’s Robin Hood, like Hind, experiences personal contact with royalty through both Henry VIII and Queen Katherine, enforces decisive loyalty and camaraderie amongst his band of criminals, earns the respect (and occasionally fear) of the common man, and rebels against corrupt authority. Interestingly, and somewhat unusually among criminal narratives, he also seems to share Charles II’s Catholic sympathies. His tale ends with all of his crimes being pardoned by Queen Katherine, after which Robin “dismissed all his... Companions, and betaking himself to a civil course of life, he did keep a gallant House; and had over all the Countrey, the Love of the Rich, and the Prayers of the Poor.” Though this is, again, somewhat unusual within the genre of criminal biography, it fits well with the mythic structure of the Robin Hood narratives, which often portray Robin’s now familiar policy of “steal from the rich to give to the poor” as the ultimate outcome of his life.

²⁵ In the passage in question, Robin Hood aids the English forces in their fight against Scotland. Though this initially seems to be a means of further placing this particular Robin Hood within a very specific historical moment, this might also be alluding to more recent entanglements between English and Scottish troops during the Civil War. The passage follows: “Not long afterwards [Robin Hood] travelled into the North, where a bonny bold Scot offering him his service, he refused to entertain him, alledging that he was never true either to father or kinsman, much lesse would he prove true to himself. At that time the: “Battel grew hot betwixt the Scots and the English, and Robin Hood turning to the English, Fight on, said he, my merry men all, our Cause is good, we shall not be beaten; and though I am compassed about, with my sword I will cut my way through the midst of my enemies.” Considering the Scottish role in Charles’s return to the throne, an anti-royalist reading of this passage does not seem to be too difficult; however, the rest of the pamphlet follows the more traditional tropes of a royalist criminal narrative.

In 1662, the same year as the publication of his Robin Hood pamphlet, Gilbertson published *The Life and Death*, and Frith superseded Hind as the royalist hero of choice. In *The Life and Death*, Frith emphasizes her “constant intimacy” with Hind, calling him a “daring adventurer” (65). She also claims to be the mastermind behind his criminal exploits: “there was no...hazard in his pranks for most of the chief of them I set; both of us concurring to be revenged of Committee Men and Parliament People, by those private assaults [highway robbery], since publique combating of them would not prevaile” (65). Another highwayman, Richard Hannam, is also supposed to have been directed by Frith, though she emphasizes that their connection ended when Hannam robbed the king (67).²⁶ Though Gilbertson never presents Frith herself as a highwayman hero, he does set her up as a key figure in the London criminal underworld. Much as Robin Hood traditionally heads his own band of outlaws, so does Frith take on the role of a proverbial prince of thieves for whom “money [is] a portable and as partable Commodity,” and who is capable of directing not only famous highwaymen such as Hind and Hannam, but also operating a gang of unnamed, lesser thieves and cutpurses within the city (*Life and Death* 22). As Mowry notes, “Frith’s biographers celebrate her entrepreneurial success and validate her alternative legal authority in terms of her commitment to the status quo distribution of wealth and goods...As the narrative continues, the notorious rogue becomes increasingly prince-like” (35). It is likely that these quasi-royal qualities primarily stem from the Robin Hood tradition; however, Frith, like Hind, is also granted a personal royal tie. Though the real Frith died two years before Charles II reclaimed the English throne, the authors of her biography do grant her a brief meeting with the future king during his return to London in 1638:

²⁶ Gilbertson also published a criminal biography of Hannam entitled *Hannam’s Last farewell to the world* in 1656. Here, Gilbertson defends Hannam against accusations of robbing the king. His commentary in *The Life and Death* appears to be a recanting of his earlier pamphlet.

As the *King* passed by me, I put out my Hand and caught Him by His, and grasped it very hard, saying *Welcome Home CHARLES!* His *Majesty* smiled, and I beleeve took me for some Mad Bold *Beatrice* or other, while the people shouted and made a noyse, in part at my Confidence and presumption, and in part for joy of the *Kings* Return... This celebrated Action of mine it being the Town talk, make people look upon me at another rate than formerly. 'Twas no more *Mal Cutpurse* but Mrs. *Mary Thrift*, my neighbours using me with new respect and civility (44).

This encounter shapes Frith's character for the remainder of her life. Here, she receives a new name, Mary Thrift, a folk tale name that holds its meaning within itself and grants her a status beyond that of a criminal broker. Now, for her boldness and patriotism, she is a symbol of the royalist cause.

The Life and Death, like its cony-catching predecessors, is concerned with more than simply expressing Gilbertson's Royalist sympathies. Especially in the first half of the supposed autobiography, there is a clear social commentary on the lives of women in early modern England. Early on, Frith goes to great lengths in order to distance herself from traditionally feminine behaviors, noting that there is "nothing womanly" in her grief (19), claiming that she is the first woman to smoke tobacco (23), and providing the work's only explicit example of her cross-dressing, which otherwise seems to simply be an assumed part of her character (26). Here, *The Life and Death* distinguishes itself from earlier representations of Moll in that it does not focus on her cross-dressing as a means of exploring traditional gender roles. The focus of such social exploration lies instead in her interactions with other characters and her economic and political adventures.

One of the most compelling scenes in *The Life and Death* occurs when Frith seeks to shake off the label of hermaphrodite that has plagued her throughout her fictional incarnations, though her success in this is mixed. When "a fellow contemporary of [hers] as remarkable as [her] self" named Anniseed-water Robin arrives in London, she immediately attempts to distance

herself from him. Though she notes that he is “clothed very near my Antick Mode, being an Hermaphrodite,” she also claims “him I could by no means endure, being the very derision of natures impotency, whose redundancy in making him Man and Woman, had in effect made him neither having not the strength of the Male, nore the fineness nor subtely of the female” (35-36). Frith takes great pains to define this open hermaphrodite as something different from herself, citing that she is “Counted for an Artificial one,” despite the fact that both existing literary tradition *and* the second introduction to her diary emphasize her hermaphroditic qualities, in “Manners as well as in Habit,” if not in body (36; 7). Even so, the method through which Frith defines Robin seems to echo the way that she presents herself in the text. It seems clear that she possesses both masculine strength, of character and personality if not of body, and feminine subtlety as she demonstrates in her manipulation of gender roles. The authors of *The Life and Death* present Frith’s ability to act according to popular perceptions of gender early on. When her “friends” attempt to send her to Virginia in order to cure her of her masculine behavior (likely through finding her a husband in the new world), Frith approaches the captain of the ship and “very observantly and with a submissive gesture present[s herself] before him, and with many a briny tear [tells] him of this injury done [to her]” (19). Though she earlier claims that “in my grief there was nothing womanly,” here she clearly manipulates the captain’s expectations of feminine behavior in order to escape captivity (19). Such episodes are scattered elsewhere throughout the diary, and they suggest that Frith attempts to express that while Robin is redundantly “Man *and* Woman,” that she is productively Man *or* Woman, adopting whichever characteristics are best suited to the moment.

Dekker and van de Pol’s study on historical transvestites addresses this sort of gender fluidity: “In the early modern era passing oneself off as a man was a real and viable option for

women who had fallen into bad times and were struggling to overcome their difficult circumstances” (1-2). Though their study focuses primarily on transvestite women in the Netherlands, their research also notes commonalities between the stories of these women and occurrences of similar cross-dressers in early modern Germany and England. Their research uncovered 119 cases of women dressing as and passing themselves off as men, most of whom did so in order to become soldiers or sailors. Many of the women in Dekker and van de Pol’s study emphasized patriotism and a desire to enter military service as their primary reasons for cross-dressing. While Frith does not appear to begin cross-dressing for these reasons—in *The Life and Death* no justification for her dress is given at all—her activism throughout the civil war and her staunch Royalism seem to point toward a common trope. By dressing as men and adopting many masculine behaviors, these women, Frith included, are able to see themselves as important figures in their countries’ political spheres.

Unlike in *The Roaring Girl*, the Frith of *The Life and Death* holds a less-than-flattering view of women. As seen through her manipulation of feminine rhetoric and mannerisms, it is clear that she sees women—or at least believes that the men she encounters see women—as weaker and in need of protection. Wagner expands this notion, claiming that “the vulnerability Frith associates with the female form bespeaks itself not only in her choice of clothing (the defensive sword and protective breeches we see in her portraits), but also in the many contradictions and omissions that make her autography as difficult to interpret as Frith herself wished to be” (376). As Todd and Spearing note, “The character of Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl* may be sympathetic to other women...but it would be difficult to see Mary Frith as a proto-feminist on the evidence of her *Life and Death*, unless some of the remarks ascribed to her are in fact interpolations of an ‘editor’ . If this were so, it might support a reading of the final

text...as an attempt to subordinate female rebellion to male authority” (xxv). Their reading assumes, as mentioned above, that *The Life and Death* is an actual representation of the historical Frith, and not a mythological amalgamation of earlier stories. In some senses, reading *The Life and Death*’s version of Frith as this sort of real but silenced historical woman seems overly simplistic, for the figure presented in the biography pointedly distances herself from feminine activities, in order to more fully conform to the conventions of the royalist criminal narrative. In one example of this, Frith is caught by a constable walking alone at night in her masculine apparel. Attempting to escape punishment, Frith attempts to excuse herself by claiming that she is needed to attend to a woman in labor; however, as an aside Frith notes “at which indeed nor no other, I was ever present,” pointedly removing herself from association from an explicitly female experience (27). Melissa Mowry provides an excellent analysis of the language used to describe Frith’s position in relation to other women: she must show “an early antipathy for conventional life,” likely because she “craves the freedom of association that public life enables” (34). These traits set her up as a highly public figure who disdains to be confined by limitations of gender or class. For example, early in the biography, Frith begins smoking tobacco, claiming that she “was mightily taken with this vanity, because of its affected singularity; and no Woman before me ever smoakt any, though I had a great many to follow my example” (23). Frith is not so much anti-feminist, to adopt an anachronistic phrase, as she is deeply dependent on individuality for her sense of self. Though she is uninterested in traditional feminine activities, she does understand both how to manipulate expectations of feminine behavior and how to effectively work alongside other women in exclusively feminine endeavors.

Likewise, Frith’s attitude toward marriage in *The Life and Death* is much less optimistic than it is in *The Roaring Girl*. In the second introduction of *The Life and Death*, the narrator

explains that her aversion to marriage stems from a failed relationship to a shoemaker who “made an absolute prey of her Friendship, and squandered away [her] money” (15). Frith’s attitude toward sexual activity, likewise, is quite altered in *The Life and Death*: whereas much of her self-definition and credibility in *The Roaring Girl* stems from protecting her virginity, in *The Life and Death*, she presents her celibacy as an unfortunate side-effect of her lifestyle,²⁷ though she still goes to great lengths to publicly establish her virginity (40). The agency she possesses in *The Roaring Girl* is diminished here; instead of a willful choice to remain unmarried and chaste, her solitude is a source of bitterness. It is easier, in both fictions, for Moll to operate as a single woman, since as such she can operate outside normative gender roles, but the implications of such solitude are very different in *The Roaring Girl* and *The Life and Death*.

Despite her distance from *The Roaring Girl*’s portrayal of her feminine solidarity, Frith’s royalist behavior does represent a particular kind of femininity that she wholeheartedly embraces later in the biography. In support of King Charles, Frith joins a makeshift militia of women, who “with Drums, Mattocks, Shovels and Baskets, went Rank and File to cast up the line and make the Fortifications round the City” (59). Frith is, “for Honours sake” asked to carry their flag, announcing their cause (59). There is a strong implication here, as in the earlier *Haec Vir* pamphlet, that the women are acting because their men have not. Significantly, though, here Frith is repeatedly and decisively labeling the women as women, and women of all kinds. Likewise, she joins “those Honest Matrons, that went down and Petitioned at *Westminster* for Peace,” and though these women are eventually disbanded by (presumably) male guards, Frith

²⁷ “alike hating *Virginia*...and my Virginity” (18). Dekker and van de Pol note that “Taking on a male role and being accepted as a man is linked to the maintenance of virginity...in the European tradition of transvestism... The state of virginity...implies a kind of sexlessness” (44-45). Here, however, Frith seems, despite her celibacy, much more feminine through her association with early modern medicine’s portrayal of women as being sexually voracious.

continues to support their cause through her hatred of the Earl of Essex, who “was no Womans Man, and therefore very obnoxious to me” (60). This sort of feminine behavior Frith finds easy, perhaps even necessary, to endorse. In writing about women’s roles in the Civil War, Hughes notes that “they were involved in military affairs; they had political influence, as individuals and collectively” (156). Frith’s military involvement, which even extends to her creation of her own band of loyal rebel soldiers, “a hundred of as stout fellowes to assist the Enterprize, as any were in the City” also has literary precedent (60). Walker notes that there were “positive models of feminine force” in early modern England, citing that “a virtuous virago figure based on scriptural, classical, or historical tradition was reinforced in popular song, poetry, dramatic works, and prose of all kinds” (86). Likewise, this again echoes back to Robin Hood’s band of merry men. Frith’s biographers seem to be positioning Frith within this tradition in their introductions, though the figures with which Frith is linked are not always models of traditional virtues. Both introductions attempt to portray Frith as belonging to a classical tradition through linking her with the Sybills and by loosely attributing goddess-like qualities to her, granting her “dominion over all Whores, Bauds, Pimps, etc. and joyned with Mercury over all Trapanners and Hectors” (11). Her classical positioning borders on a bawdy joke, yet it does seek to grant her the same status as more traditional heroines, albeit over a vastly different, more worldly field.

Though Frith is no longer configured as a defender of feminine virtue, she does take on knight-like qualities of another kind: the cavalier royalist. Throughout the biography, Frith consistently fights against the injustices she sees as embodied in the Commonwealth, and inverts expectations of criminality by painting Cromwell’s regime as greedy and inept criminals, which culminates in her hosting a satirical dog fight in order to “to make [the Earl of Strafford’s] Enemies appear equally Cruel and Ridiculous to that sort of people I conversed with”, for which

she is nearly arrested (50). As discussed above, she acts directly in support of the king at numerous points, either through directing the actions of fellow criminals or through protesting alongside other women. Even in her more peaceful moments, her rhetoric is filled with disparaging remarks about the competency and virility of the rump parliament and its various members, in one case angrily remarking that while a friend of hers “*was adjudged to die but for Counterfeiting of a half Crown, but those that Usurped the whole Crown and stole away its Revenue, and had Counterfeited its Seal, were above justice and escap’d unpunished*” (25). At the same time, however, Frith is notably indebted to both the Robin Hood tradition and to the tales of the male picaresque heroes she compares herself to throughout the work. On several occasions, she likens herself to Don Quixote or Sancho Panza, noting that “in my own thought I was quite another thing: that I was Squiresse to *Dulcinea* of *Tobosso* the most incomparably beloved Lady of *Don Quixot*, and was sent of a Message to him from my Mistress in the Formalities of *Knight Errantry*, that I might not offend against any *punctilio* thereof” (37). Even so, her aspirations to a Britomart-like knighthood are constantly overshadowed by her roguish proclivities, for the initial introduction notes that, Frith loved to fight, drink, and curse, and she hated all feminine tasks (11-12). Though this last point is presented as a point of major contention throughout the diary, the others seem to universally hold true. Just as in Gilbertson’s portrayal of Robin Hood, here we are presented with a version of Frith who engages in combative behavior for both entertainment (through her love of dog fighting) and for profit (as when she drives away the offending hermaphrodite); who shares a personal connection with her king; and who earns the respect of her fellow citizens through her brave and clever deeds.

Because of the ambivalent presentation of her gender, *The Life and Death* offers us a far less sexualized version of Frith than do other of her literary incarnations. Here, Frith’s

interactions are almost exclusively with men, but they are businesslike in nature. There is little in the diary to mark her as specifically female, and thus her sexuality can largely fade into the background. Todd and Spearing read this as an adoption of a male persona, stating that “Frith can perceive having a voice and personal autonomy only in terms of becoming a male; she appears to be transgressing the homosocial system rather than rejecting it—moving over and redefining herself as (asexually) male” (xxv). Unfortunately, as Mowry notes, “The paradigm for the 1662 Gilbertson biography of Mary Frith was never successfully exported to other cavalier women” (44).²⁸ As in her other fictional representations, Frith is unique. The lack of other successful female royalist heroes might be explained by the de-emphasis of Frith’s gender throughout the biography. Rather than behaving in patterns typically associated with female criminality, and thus altering the genre to allow for similar female figures, she gradually adopts the role of highwayman, a crime which was almost exclusively committed by men.²⁹ As a royalist hero, Frith endorses the deeply patriarchal English monarchy. In order to do so, she largely refrains from commenting on her own gender or sexuality, preferring instead to elaborate on the much less subversive topic of her career as both a criminal and a royalist heroine.

²⁸ This is a debatable point. In *Counterfeit Ladies*, the book in which the most recent edition of *The Life and Death* is published, Todd and Spearing also present a biography of Mary Carleton, another infamous female rogue operating around the time of the Restoration. Her story does not follow the same intensely-royalist trajectory as Frith’s, though the introduction to *Counterfeit Ladies* seems to be presenting her as a similarly royalist figure.

²⁹ For more on this, see Garthine Walker’s *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England*.

A Model Citizen

The fictional representations of Mary Frith, when unified, explore many of the most crucial aspects of early modern urban identity: gender, class, loyalty, and economic savvy. Though many scholars have suggested a link between criminal biography and new ideas of citizenship, especially in an urban society, Frith's mythology, culminated in *The Life and Death*, ultimately creates one of the more compelling prototypes of early modern London identity. Again, Charnes' work on lends some credibility to the theory that this mythology shaped national cultural identity: "In early modern England, the use of 'legendary' figures and materials was inseparable from how England's cultural identity was formed by writers in every mode of literary and historiographic production. Put to the service of a deeply self-conscious cultural mythography, the matter of legend provided a body of usable fictions from which historiographers could cull the associations and values deemed 'appropriate' to England's desired identity" (5). What is interesting here, and perhaps most relevant, is Charnes' emphasis on the appropriateness of the writers' subject matter. The Mary Frith of *The Life and Death* is deliberately shaped into an icon of royalist urban life through her associations with both notable figures of her own time and English national heroes. Her publishers emphasized her already considerable reputation as a public figure in their quest to create a national, royalist heroine that was still very much "of the people."

Stephanie L. Barczewski notes that many historians point to the Tudor period as the point in time at which national identity developed as a concept in England (3-4). Her primary focus is

on the development of national identity around the figures of King Arthur³⁰ and Robin Hood, though it seems reasonable to extend that development to characters directly linked to them, as Moll and her fellow highwaymen royalists are.

Robin Hood is not as noble of an English hero as King Arthur. Initially, the two existed in opposition to one another in terms of political signification. King Arthur represented the power and majesty of the English (and Welsh) monarchy and served to tie it to the greatness of Rome, while Robin Hood acted as an anti-monarchical figure, encompassing the complaints of ordinary citizens. Had the medieval traditions continued unchanged, Robin Hood would certainly have been more strongly connected with anti-royalist sentiment during the civil war. During the Tudor period, however, even as King Arthur became a crucial figure in political propaganda, Robin Hood underwent a dramatic transformation from trickster outlaw to respectable nobleman. In 1598-99, Anthony Munday created a pair of plays entitled *The Downfall of Robert Earle of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert Earle of Huntington*, which portrayed Robin Hood as “a faithful servant of true authority...[who] is newly remembered in a specific historical context, the period when King Richard was on Crusade and Prince John allegedly mishandled the country” (Knight 153). Knight sees this version as a rehearsal for the Tudor vilification of Richard III, and he remarks that “For the Elizabethan power elite, loyal to the crown and well rewarded for it, Earl Robin helped to provide a retrospective validation of their own positions and possessions” (153). This same validation was exceedingly important in the early years of the Restoration, when disputes over power, reparations, and allegiance were still central to English

³⁰ In discussing royalism and the English Civil War, Barczewski primarily focuses on King Arthur myths, which were utilized as propaganda by the Stuarts throughout the Civil War. While arguments could be made for an Arthurian associate for Frith through her similarities with Spenser’s Britomart and her portrayal of herself as a female knight, that is, alas, a discussion for another time.

political discussions. Though the Stuarts continued to use King Arthur in their pageantry through the civil war, Robin Hood became a far more compelling figure for popular writers.

In *The Life and Death*, Frith undergoes a similar, if not as dramatic, process of gentrification as part of her transformation into a royalist heroine. The second introduction claims that Frith was born on Aldersgate Street, located in a wealthier part of London, which offers her ties to the gentry (14). The biography itself claims that she had a “Noble Lord” for a neighbor, whose home she could see from her own, and during the course of *The Life and Death*, this noble lord returns from his supposed exile, a sign that the Restoration is drawing near (62). Beyond this, the royal associations granted her by her encounter with King Charles II give her a credibility similar to that possessed by Charles’s loyal cavalier troops and supporters. Frith fights in his defense, not only masterminding the royalist highway robberies of Hind and Hannam, but also through rallying a band of female protesters. Her role in these combats is not unlike Robin Hood’s position at the head of his band of merry men. She demonstrates distinctive leadership qualities, and even if they are used toward criminal ends, those ends ultimately support the “one true king” in the face of a corrupt and villainous government. Though she does not live to see her king’s return, her portrayal of herself as a repentant and reflective sinner echoes many of the political concerns of the early Restoration, particularly regarding forgiveness and restitution. Hints of this appear early in the work, where she says, “For my part I profess I held it lawfuller to take a Pound by the Old than a Pin by the New way, and the *guilty persons* concerned therein to stand in need of a *Pardon*, and to make *ample restitution*, more than any *Newgate-Bird*.” (25). By ending *The Life and Death* with a plea for redemption, Frith’s biographers allow her to speak to the need for peace between the still-divided factions of the early Restoration.

At the same time, *The Life and Death*'s presentation as a criminal biography offers readers a method of navigating their new society. Just after Frith escapes the ship her friends have hired to take her to the New World, she explains her introduction into London's criminal underworld:

I had but very little choice, so I listed my self of another Colony or Plantation (but who neither sow nor reap)...A cunning Nation being a kind of Land *Pyrats*, trading altogether in other mens *Bottoms*, for no other Merchandizes than *Bullion* and ready Coine, and keep most of the great Fairs and Marts of the world. They are very expert Mathematicians, but excellently good at Dyalling; as also they are rare Figure Flingers, and most dexterous at the Tacticks; they had been long incorporated, and had their Governours and Assistants as other Worshipful Companies; and had a good stock for the maintenance of their Trade (20).

This first presentation of London's criminal organizations possesses a wealth of information that serves to guard its readership against the dangers associate with the "Fairs and Marts of the world" (20). Though the criminals identify themselves as being an independent society, it is only by their interaction with the general citizenry that they are able to survive. If one is to beat them at their own game, then he, too, must excel in mathematics, at noticing suspicious loiterers, and at avoiding their con games. Following this passage, Frith's diary explains some of the criminals' rituals and tactics, describing her initiation into their ranks, the skills needed for various kinds of thieves and cutpurses, and some of the language used in their thieves' cant (20-21). Frith also warns against following her example in becoming a criminal, noting the dangers faced by many of her companions, and explaining, less than two pages after her criminal journey begins, how she left her life as a thief. She does, however, note that she remained on good terms with her fellow thieves, and her continued ties with them become crucial later on as she builds her own criminal network (23-25). In contrast to her early encounters with such organizations, however, her band of thieves and highwaymen do little harm to the common citizen—whatever is stolen, Frith returns, for a fee—and strongly support the royalist cause. Frith, here, becomes a Robin

Hood-like figure who is meant to serve as an exemplary model of citizenry, at least among thieves. Through her story, Londoners are introduced to some of the dangers of city life, urged to be cautious, and compelled toward loyalty toward their king.

The initial introduction proclaims that even Frith's detractors "shall yet give us liberty to take her for a *Prodigy* of those *Times* she lived in, and to be altogether as presagious in her Habit and Manners, as [the Sybills] were in their ambiguous and doubtfull sentences" (3). From the beginning, her biographers seek to portray her as a pre-configuration of post-Restoration London society. Even Todd and Spearing, the latest editors of *The Life and Death*, note the emphasis placed on portraying Frith as a behavioral model, though their definition is somewhat more narrow than the one I present here: "The address ['To the Reader']...written in a tone of somewhat ostentatiously learned and sprightly irony, as though marking the distance between the writer and what is being presented, offers us Frith as a remarkable phenomenon: she is not actually condemned; rather, a new generation of thieves and bawds is to modify its behaviour by her example" (Todd and Spearing xi). In a world with few Robin Hoods, Frith and her fellow criminals become exemplary figures through their ties with the common man. In their activism against Parliamentary injustice, they represent the increasingly vocal popular voice in not only politics, but in economic practices as well. Using Frith, specifically, as an exemplar of national heroism is particularly damning to the English Commonwealth, and her adoption of masculine behaviors aligns masculinity with Charles II, the old forms of government, and patriarchal societal norms.

Rogue literature first gained popularity during the Tudor reign, and plays like *The Roaring Girl* transformed public perceptions of criminality by making rogues vibrant, identifiable characters who stood at the heart of early modern English popular culture.

Because they were portrayed as existing at the edges of society, but still were critically involved in it, rogues allowed pamphlet authors and playwrights to critically examine changing societal and economic constructs while also warning London citizens against potential dangers. During the English Civil war, rogues became increasingly politicized in support of the royalist cause. It was safer for authors to present criminal figures acting in support of the exiled king than to openly express royalist sentiment. *The Life and Death* recreates Mary Frith as a royalist highwayman hero, who encourages a new formation of national identity, one that bears a strong connection to England's national hero Robin Hood and expresses a strong love of the newly-returned king. In this way, *The Life and Death* seeks to dispel the complexities of post-Restoration London by uniting it with centuries of heroism and nostalgic popular culture.

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