

A CONTESTED CHARACTER: THE FEMALE PUBLICAN IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND AND FRANCE

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In the Bordeaux parish of Saint André in 1712 the *maréchaussée* court heard a dispute between the *cabaretière* Izabeau Constantin and Jean David, a cobbler living opposite her shop. Constantin complained of David's dirty habits of throwing his bedroom chamber pots 'full of filth' into the street, which infected her customers and the entire neighbourhood. Crossing David's thirteen-year-old daughter in the street, Constantin allegedly called her a 'little bitch' exclaiming that her father was 'in the wrong to have thrown this pot of filth'. David, overhearing the words in a nearby cabaret, confronted Constantin who ran out of her establishment with a large bat and struck him twice over the head. The assault enticed David to loosen his tongue, shouting publicly on several occasions that Constantin was a 'rotten whore and a dirty poxed bitch' and that 'you put water in [your] wine without that you would not be so rich'. Moments later David's son launched an additional verbal assault on the cabaretière: 'look at this rotten wretched woman [...] this wretched bitch and this bawdy poxed woman. You have had the pox, [and] your ill husband gave it to you'. This public defamation forced Constantin to seek reparations against words, 'which had destroyed her honour and her reputation' and was consequently unable 'to make a living'; the charges against Jean David were dropped.¹ A year later in High Wycombe the excise officer John Cannon met with two of his former acquaintances to pass the night 'drinking hard' at The Antelope Inn run by Thomas Hunter and 'a wench then with child, but not publicly known by whom'. As the evening drew to a close, Cannon's companions requested somewhere to sleep for the night and 'the wench' accordingly escorted them to a bedchamber. The men took off their clothes and got into the same bed together, and 'being frolicksome [we]

pulled the wench into bed to us also, tumbling her about & pulling up her clothes'. While neither of the men took the jest any further, the female publican showed no signs of wanting to end it there; 'she fain would have had to do with us all', remarked Cannon. Waking then next morning, the men left the house being 'ashamed of our folly'.²

Women such as Izabeau Constantin and The Antelope's wanton 'wench' have, until more recent enquiry, long served to support conceptualisations of the female publican in early modern European communities. They were thought to be disorderly and irresponsible women that exhibited reputations for dishonest commercial practice, employed licentious sexual behaviour to tease money out of their customers' pockets, and gained very little positive social recognition for their services. Judith Bennett's examination of popular literature in *Ale, Beer and Brewsters* provides a telling historiographical case in point. Bennett describes a process whereby the commercial, industrial, political and regulatory advancement of the sixteenth-century English drink trade coincided with women's marginalisation from this sector, and their increasingly negative cultural representation in print.³ Beside two ambivalent cases, Bennett contended that popular literature offered no 'positive celebrations of alewives and their trade [...] they are not praised for the essential product they provide; they are not honoured for their good trade and fine ale; they are not held up as epitomes of good wives and neighbors', but were instead represented as 'nefarious traders, filthy people, and likely candidates for eternal damnation'.⁴ Marjorie McIntosh outlined a similar history of social and cultural change. Women's gradual exclusion from the drink trade accompanied intensified suspicions of their sexual

and economic malpractice, and the assumption that they were incapable of enforcing and maintaining good order in a male-dominated social milieu.⁵ As men were increasingly viewed as 'more responsible and better able' to operate a drinking house, women were no longer regarded as 'honest citizens' and received 'remarkably negative' portrayals in popular literature.⁶

The traditional narrative stands in marked contrast to the impressions that female publicans have left on the historical record of early modern France. James Collins' study of tax rolls in Nantes revealed that the period 1550 to 1700 witnessed a substantial increase in the numbers of women operating drinking houses independently, while the licences for almost 72% of the city's taverns were clearly listed in the names of both husband and wife.⁷ William Beik's examination of *Urban Protest* also suggested how the significant statistical presence of women in the drink trade might have extended into positions of community authority. Female publicans, alongside women more generally, 'exploited their advantage of speaking with impunity in many confrontations with authorities' and frequently acted as 'equal partners' in expressions of community anger.⁸ They directed verbal and physical threats towards detested local officials from their drinking houses, for example, excluded them from a seat and the services of their establishments, and joined forces with other women in the drink trade to stage protests against innovative wine taxes that jeopardised the security of their employment and the *privileges* of their wider communities.⁹ Nor, as Wendy Gibson argued, were women socially and culturally marginalised to the extent of their English female counterparts. The landlady was a character that completely overshadowed the landlord in the minds of her customers, and while she was occasionally viewed as a promiscuous woman with a rapacious tongue, she remained an authoritative woman who ensured bills were settled, and one who could win 'general esteem' from her profession.¹⁰

The latest revisions of the female publican in early modern England have interestingly come much closer to these interpretations forwarded by scholars of France. Amanda Flather's gendered and spatial focus on drinking houses in Essex revealed that women worked as alewives and servants in nearly 40% of the county's alehouses between 1580 and 1640, indicating their *de facto* governance of these establishments even if their names

did not officially feature among recognizance lists.¹¹ Flather also highlighted a female publican's significant and accepted 'social authority' to control access to her establishment and exclude disorderly male customers, thus fundamentally challenging the patriarchal conventions that presided over this social space.¹² Women also formed a substantial body of the official and unofficial work force within Southampton's *Landscape of Drink*, as James Brown has examined. Female publicans in this port city did not appear especially victimised in their trade and might have gained a route to 'social recognition' and an agency to 'renegotiate exile to the social margins'.¹³ Similarly, Bernard Capp's essay on late-Stuart drinking houses discovered that court records and popular ballads commonly expressed contempt of women's flirtatious and promiscuous characters, though in social practice the reputations of female proprietors varied as widely as the types of, and services provided by, drinking houses. Many alewives were able to achieve social and economic advancement through their work, and some were clearly 'respectable women' who resisted and informed on disorderly customers as the means 'to preserve and protect the respectability of their houses'.¹⁴

This essay re-examines the contested field of interpretations to which the female publican has been ascribed in early modern England and France. The rationale behind the Anglo-French examination is to engage with the growing number of comparative approaches conducted by historians into the drinking cultures of early modern Europe. Through the intensive study of archival and increasingly literary evidence, historians are continuing to develop a more comprehensive picture of the functions and activities of drinking houses, while at the same time identifying the particular social and cultural contexts to which they belonged.¹⁵ Comparative approaches have, for example, recently been used to suggest that the apparent 'North-South' divide in European drinking cultures may be partly attributable to religious factors. In southern, and nearly entirely Catholic, countries such as France, drink was perceived far more as a 'natural part of social life and community' than in fervently Protestant areas of Northern Europe, particularly England, where the stronger criticism of drink as a potential social evil transformed drinking patterns 'in significant ways'.¹⁶ The geographical focus of this essay, then, offers an opportunity to reflect upon the usefulness of such a model by analysing if and how one

aspect of this culture, the female publican, conformed to the suggested divide.

Beyond a broader theoretical question, however, England and France were chosen for the historiographical and methodological similarities that historians have employed in assessing the female publican. Scholars of both countries now perceive women as integral to the daily governance of these social spaces, and have drawn extensively upon depositional evidence to map out the various forms of confrontation - refusing entry and services to customers, resisting and informing on disorderly guests - by which women challenged a drinking house's patriarchal supremacy to defend their livelihoods, reputations and honour. A focus on this sort of legal evidence can, however, come with the unwanted effect of interpretive distortion, forcing historians to view female publicans through sources invariably tainted by elements of criminal deviancy. A problematic consequence of analysing this material in isolation, then, is that it limits a greater exploration of the ways in which female publicans achieved honour beyond instances where they were involved in hostile interactions with their clientele that necessitated legal intervention.

As I aim to contend in this essay, however, a fruitful source to navigate the problem and identify female publicans in less confrontational contexts is to examine popular literature. Although these pieces of cheap print, including ballads, *chansons*, *comédies*, pamphlets, plays, poems, and short stories, are increasingly being recognised as key to the exploration of early modern mentalities more broadly, and an important way of interrogating the positive and meaningful forms of sociability attached to European drinking cultures more specifically, these printed sources have rarely been viewed as offering anything positive to say on the subject of female publicans.¹⁷ This is undoubtedly due in part to previous assertions by historians of English ballads that these sources seldom, if ever at all, portrayed female publicans in a favourable light, while others seem to have largely endorsed and applied these negative appraisals of English literature to pan-European studies.¹⁸

As a comparative examination of England and France, the study is not restricted to a particular region or city, but freshly re-examines English and French popular literature, supported by a combination of personal diaries

and available legal records, to capture the widest possible range of literary and lived experiences on this important female community figure. This paper seeks primarily to question the assertion that popular literature rarely contained celebratory representations of female publicans by drawing upon many examples that depict such women in a positive light. In doing so, the analysis aims not only to offer a more balanced perspective on the cultural image of female publicans disseminated through print, but uses these same positive narratives to advance the boundaries of female honour beyond current 'confrontation' models. The evidence suggests that an important and largely overlooked avenue through which female publicans achieved honour rested in meeting and respecting a concept of 'provision' - both the provision of quality services and sociability, as well as the provision of hospitality, care and sustenance for their customers. Despite working within a dominantly masculine and sexually charged social space, female publicans that worked in accordance with this concept were able to complement, rather than jeopardise, their honour in more expansive ways than historians of the subject have hitherto described.

That the female publican has been so prominently characterised as a troubled and troublesome figure cannot be ignored, and the darker literary and legal depictions dedicated to these women generally centred around two main themes. The first was the fear that women were mentally and physically inferior to men, which rendered them unsuitable to carry out their jobs. Magistrates and authors portrayed female publicans as easy victims for roguish male customers that could dupe or overpower their female hosts with little effort, but also perceived them as incapable of enforcing statutory legislation that sought to keep disorder and these same undesirable customers out of their establishments.¹⁹

The *Kind Beleeving Hostesse*, for example, is an English ballad depicting the fate of a naive city female publican at the hands of her intellectually superior male customer. The male character was a very mindful drinker who advised people to steer clear of staggering and swearing, and particularly the drinking house's swindling wenches, Bess and Dolly, that used their womanly charms to get the upper hand over lusty men. While the male customer's wisdom won him no popularity contests, he remained content in the fact that:

I me sure [Bess and Dolly] shall not cheate me.
I care not though they hate me,
Like Crocodiles,
Their teares and smiles
Shall not a foole create me.

This seemingly prudent character was not, however, without his faults. As the ballad's story unfolds, the male customer boasts of his ability to rack up a large reckoning at the female publican's expense, with no intent of settling the ever-increasing bill. 'I owe my Hostesse money', the deceitful fellow admits,

Shee takes me for her debter:
and looks for the day
when her I should pay,
the more it is still the better.

Unlike her shrewd male customer, though, the female publican lacked his discernable perception for trickery, and had fallen for his charms and good looks, leaving her rational judgment to one side in the process. Whenever the day came for the hostess to settle her outstanding scores with her suppliers, he would continually 'screw her', revelling in his power to deploy '[p]hony words' and 'many a fine trick' to avoid paying his drinking house debts, while the hostess' soared.²⁰

These same stereotypes were levied at female publicans in French literature. An illustrative example is provided by a farcical story that pits two charlatans, 'Le Pardonneur' and 'Le Triacleur', against a *tavernière*. The two men in this tale are locally-known fraudsters that enter into a competition with each other to peddle a collection of counterfeit goods, miraculous healing potions, and religious relics that they claim to have acquired in the course of their worldly travels. As soon as one charlatan professed the superior magnificence and authenticity of his precious objects, though, the other seized the opportunity to publicly oust their spurious lies. In one example, Le Pardonneur alleges that he had 'one of God's seraphs' in his possession and invited his audience to come forward and gaze at this supposedly divine artefact. Upon closer inspection, however, Le Triacleur gladly revealed that this was merely 'the feather of a goose, / That [Le Pardonneur] has eaten for dinner'. The point to emphasise here, however, is that both of these cheating rogues were depicted as at least capable of employing the common sense to distinguish

a fabricated story from a genuine one.

As the men eventually tired of their deceptive gaming, they agreed to find some respite and refreshment at the female publican's tavern, carrying their counterfeit produce with them. After the hostess had warmly welcomed her guests, and served them her best wine and hospitality, Le Pardonneur suggested that she accept a chest containing a truly 'great treasure ... worth more than a million gold coins', a Holy Innocent's bonnet, in lieu of a cash payment. An additional caveat to the exchange, as Le Pardonneur insisted, was that she kept the chest, but never exposed its precious contents to the light of day. Naively consenting to the arrangement, the *tavernière* insisted she would 'rather die' than disrespect her customer's wishes, and bid the men a fond farewell. As the farce draws to a close, the female publican discovers to her perhaps unsurprising disappointment that the chest contained nothing more than a pair soiled pants.²¹ In both of these English and French literary representations, then, the female publican was portrayed as the source of ridicule. She was a character that personified the concerns that women were vulnerable and wholly incompetent figures to keep an orderly drinking house, and that working in such a profession could potentially lead to their ruin.²²

Female publicans did not always fit neatly, however, into these naive and vulnerable characterisations and the belief that women were instigators of drinking house disorder formed the second major theme of criticism. *All is Ours and Our Husbands*, for example, is an early seventeenth-century ballad in which a cunning alewife speaks proudly of her dishonest living, turning the classic stereotype of female vulnerability on its head. The publican would gladly serve cups of liquor for her customers, but at the same time fraudulently 'fill the Juggs with Froth' and hope to 'cheat [her customers] out of one or two' measures by scoring up unordered drinks to their bill. If these men were unable to detect her foul play, though, this was their fault; 'Tis nothing but what's my due', the alewife insisted. In a similar expression of contempt for a French female publican's underhand dealing, a mid-sixteenth-century popular *quaquet* described a crew of drinkers' wives objections to their local *tavernière*. The wives plainly identified this woman as 'full or usurp / of false weights and false measures', who sold meat and fish at twice the statutory price, and filled three cups of drink from measures

adequate only for two. Both of these literary depictions equally agreed that their female publicans were not only operating outside of the accepted boundaries of a moral economy, but that such behaviour could seriously jeopardise a family's livelihood. In the French *quaquet*, for instance, the wives complained that 'You [*tavernière*] are comfortable and we are thin' as she encouraged husbands to part with their household budgets for the short-term delights of drunkenness. The English alewife, too, knew that her customer's wives despised her and frequently used 'their glamorous tongues' at court to inform the authorities of the luxurious living she made from their drunken husbands' losses.²³

While the female publican's characterisation as a woman who openly disregarded the law, public order and her customer's family lives was a prominent one, the most common accusations levied at these women invoked their sexual honesty. During his seventeenth-century travels across Europe, for example, the young Francis Mortoft recorded an evening in his diary that he had spent at a Toulousian drinking house, the 'Pally Royal'. The establishment was 'a place much frequented', Mortoft explained, primarily because the female publican was a 'very young and a great Beauty, who gives her selfe up to the pleasures of those that give her gold or silver'. Mortoft went on to state that this woman had earned so much money by one particularly licentious 'old Bawd' that she now required 'noe [other] customers'.²⁴ An explicit association that questioned a publican's chaste reputation is also found among the 1609 Essex Quarter Session indictment list, where an alewife was prosecuted for receiving 'divers persons of ill fame' in her house. As the opening line of the prosecution reads, 'Indictment of Margaret Gryndlye alias Megge "Whore" of Moulsham'.²⁵

Beyond these typically short vignettes of evidence on women's scandalous lives, however, popular literature is instructive in allowing a more detailed insight into the attitudes of female publicans and their stereotypically promiscuous lifestyles. The archetypal English example came in the form of *Elynour Rummin, the famous ale-wife of England*, a ballad written by John Skelton and printed continuously between the 1520s and 1620s. This alleged 'famous alewife', though, did not base her reputation on a feminine appearance, nor on her honorable dress code. With a head of grey hair, a crooked nose, a wrinkled face like 'Like a roast Pigges eare, bris-

tled with haire', and skin 'loose and slacke, grain'd like a sacke', who dressed in dirty garments and a smutty 'paire of heeles, at broad as two wheelles', drinkers did not visit her alehouse to marvel at a perfect example of feminine respectability. As the ballad describes, the popularity of her drinking house rested instead on her role as a temptress, serving intoxicating nappy ale to loosen her customers' inhibitions, and allowing lewd wenches to socialise in her alehouse for the satisfaction of her clientele's sexual appetites. Elynour was an alewife who always 'begins the game', Skelton insisted, supplying strong drink to barelegged women such as 'Kate, Cisly and Sare' who were whorishly clad in ragged smocks with jagged kirtles. Equally welcome among Elynour's lewd alehouse rabble were foul, flea-bitten, scabby wenches that let their 'naked paps, their flips and flaps' fall out of their unbraced and unlaced apparel for all to see.²⁶

A collection of licentious eighteenth-century French popular songs offers a similar depiction of La Roquille,²⁷ a *cabaretière* working in the suburbs of Paris. One evening while a company of two men and two women were on the hunt for *eau-de-vie*, they settled at the house of this disreputable *cabaretière*; a woman who, like Elynour Rummin, had a 'rather roguish appearance', yet was renowned for the strength of her drink and for casually suffering bawdy men and women to 'act with ease' at night in her establishment. After poisoning the men with 'a mischievous glass of liquor', La Roquille insisted the men paid for beds, while she threatened to turn the hesitant girls out onto the streets unless they accompanied their male companions upstairs. Eventually accepting the offer, the couples entered private chambers where they practiced a 'joyous charivari' together in secret. The tale ends, however, with a night watchman who overhears the couple's clamorous noise, storms into the La Roquille's 'temple of debauchery', and arrests the female patrons, carrying them to the *châtelet* to be punished for their sins. The author's stated intention was to instruct young girls in the potential threats that drinking houses posed to their chaste reputations, symbolised in this instance by La Roquille's cabaret; a house where 'people run into misfortune at night' and where girls were coerced to 'say yes to a bed'.²⁸ These two pieces of English and French literature, then, did not simply present female publicans as the epitome of tainted womanhood. More emphatically, they singled out women such as Elynour Rummin

and La Roquette as the very engines from which sexual immorality was produced; they were ultimately deemed responsible for offering the sexual space and stimulants that enticed male and female guests into acts of immorality.

In sum, then, the negative literary appraisals of female publicans clustered around two rather contradictory stereotypes. At one end of the spectrum were depictions of the honest yet naive hostess whose reputation and economic success were perennially threatened by her lack of physical and mental competence. At the other, the commercially and sexually depraved hostess that refuted the law, unsettled family life, and deceptively guided customers into financial difficulty and carnal sin for personal gain. Collectively, the implied suggestion was that honourable women had no chance of succeeding in a trade so severely riddled by deceit and debauchery.

As explored in the introduction to this essay, however, historians of England and France have in more recent years increasingly sought to promote the view that these negative literary and legal depictions cannot be applied to female publicans as a whole, and that court records do occasionally offer evidence on women successfully running a drinking house without tarnishing their credible and honourable identities. A court case involving the forty-year old *cabaretière* Marie Nau, working in the bordelaise parish of Saint André in 1714, certainly provides an insightful example. Etienne Laroze, a shoemaker, and two porters surnamed Guinguetre and Acadence, entered Nau's cabaret in the late morning to 'drink red wine and play [cards] for a *quart d'écu*' around a table in a small room. Laroze, acting almost as the game's referee, was in charge of marking up his companions' scores, but also watching out for foul play, making sure to keep a particularly close eye on Guinguetre, a habitual unemployed gambler who 'dedicates every night to gaming'. When Laroze informed Acadence that his opponent had dealt himself six cards during one round, rather than the permitted five, Acadence accordingly served Guinguetre with a two-game penalty. Yet, outwardly refusing to accept the ruling, Guinguetre punched Acadence in the face, grabbed his hair and threw him to the ground, where the two men then wrestled in such a tumultuous manner that Laroze was physically incapable of separating them. In contrast to her male customer's lack of strength, however, the

experienced *cabaretière* was more than capable of maintaining order in her house. Nau grabbed a bucket of water and launched it over the quarrelling men's heads to prevent them from fighting, and then seized the 'dishonest man', Guinguetre, carrying him out of her house to face the jeering glares and laughs of her remaining customers from the windows.²⁹

A similar English example of a female publican resisting dishonest customers and respecting public order is offered by the indictment of three suspicious drinkers that visited Isabel Hunt's establishment, The Rising Sun, at East Smithfield in 1730. At midnight on a March evening, the three men walked into Hunt's shop professing that they were gentlemen of good estate working aboard a Man of War. The female publican was clearly unconvinced by their claims, however, having firstly refused to meet the men's request for a glass to drink their beer in, to which Hunt objected, 'saying, it was not usual to drink common Beer out of a Glass'. Whether she assumed that they had intentions to steal her expensive vessel, or flout established drinking etiquettes, the female publican was certainly questioning the alleged gentility of her guests. Following this initial rejection, Hunt also refused to entertain the men in the illegal act of drunkenness, denying them anymore alcohol from the point that one of the company had confessed to being 'very much disordered, and intoxicated'. Finally, Hunt refused to associate herself with the handling of a mysterious and potentially stolen 'pretty deal of money' that one of the fraudulent men had asked her to set aside for him. Hunt insisted, however, that 'She would not take charge of any Body's Money'.³⁰

Both of these legal cases, then, conform to two aspects of the latest historiography on female publicans in England and France. In contrast to the generalised stereotypes of women's vulnerability and dishonour in the drink trade, women such as Marie Nau and Isabel Hunt support, firstly, the assertion that some female publicans were clearly respectable characters who challenged dishonourable behaviour, confronted disorderly guests and ejected them from their houses in the name of law, order and, more importantly, their reputations. Yet at the same time, and secondly, both of these examples expose the limitations of exclusively examining court records. While we might legitimately consider Hunt and Nau as upstanding and honourable women, these legal descriptions only offers us the opportunity to

view them as honourable women in situations where they were involved in confrontational exchanges with their customers.

Instances where women might be honoured for the quality of their services and hospitality, for example, rather than their capacities to enforce disciplinary regimes, are not only few and far between in legal records, but often problematic and incomplete when they do present themselves. Though John Hall admitted in 1718, for example, that Ann Pool's 'Drink was so good' that he could not pass her establishment without calling for a pint, one questions Hall's sincerity when he later emptied the drink into a chamber pot and ran out of the house with the silver tankard in which the pint was served.³¹ Similarly, among the *Chambre du Châtelet* papers, the principal court for all civil and criminal cases for Paris and its surrounding *faubourgs*, the Protestant and Basle-born cabinetmaker surnamed Heck was imprisoned in 1699 for escorting fugitive *religionnaires* into Switzerland, Holland and England following the Edict of Nantes' revocation. Heck explained to the court that on his eighty-mile journey between Paris and Péronne, he would commonly lodge at a drinking house where the 'master and mistress [were] among his intimate friends'.³² This case informs us, then, that customers could establish harmonious relationships with their female publicans, yet withholds information on the hostess' former actions that had allowed this positive social bond to develop.

A source that can offer both a more detailed insight into the honourable identities of female publicans, and greatly assist historians in advancing beyond current 'confrontation' models, is popular literature. Despite suggestions that this source rarely honoured female publicans for their work, and merely served to reinforce the stereotypes that they possessed unbridled sexualities and operated scandalous businesses, a fresh examination of this material leads us to a rather different set of conclusions. Not only were some female publicans celebrated in popular literature as honourable figures that were valued by their communities, but also that these positive literary representations located a female publican's honour beyond her sexual reputation alone. The historiographical tendency among gender historians to reduce female honour to sexual honour has been consistently challenged by assessments that interpret chastity as a composite part, rather than the sole determinant, of

women's honourable identities. The construction of female honour also relied upon a woman's ability to skilfully manage a household, prove her capacities as an honest worker and diligent provider, as well as demonstrate her competence as a good wife and mother to her family, and hostess to her neighbours - activities and characteristics that, as we shall now explore, popular literature commonly emphasised in its celebratory narratives of female publicans.³³ In this sense, then, popular literature offers us not only the opportunity to access positive representations of female publicans in greater detail and in less confrontational contexts than court records, but also to appreciate the broader social and economic components that structured female honour in early modern England and France.

A mid-seventeenth century print, *The Merry Hoastess*, is a ballad that clearly praises a respectable female alehouse-keeper for the services she provided her customers. The alewife's drink, for example, came from a recipe that had been perfected since her childhood, and she was proud to promote it as the 'best in town' for its appealing brown colour, its 'nappe and stale³⁴ [...] strong and stout' taste, and its nutritional qualities which 'nourish the blood'. The alewife's assessment of her own produce, though, was certainly matched by those of her customers. The 'Smug the honest Blacksmith', for example, could not refute the calibre of her ale, and 'seldom [could] pass by' her alehouse without stopping to sample her produce. Equally, there was 'never a Tradesman in *England*' that could refuse a cup, and all weavers, tailors and glovers 'delights it for to buy'. The quality of her drink was also paralleled by her convivial service, and this ballad praised the female publican as a wholesome and merry contribution to alehouse sociability. As men and women from all social backgrounds had flocked to her establishment to experience the renowned produce and hospitality, the alewife positions herself at the centre of the evening's entertainment by initiating a series of healths: 'To all the merry jovial Blades, / that will sing for company', the alewife begins, and

to all brave English men
that loves this cup of Ale;
Let every man fill up his Can,
and see that none do fail.

Importantly, however, nowhere in this ballad was the appeal of a female publican's drink described in the con-

text of its intoxicating and sexually stimulating capacities. The celebratory connection emphasised repeatedly in this ballad was between the alewife's services and 'good company'.³⁵

A similarly respectable and enthusiastic commemoration of a female publican was included in a set of popular verses, published near the turn of the seventeenth century, which sought to steer French drinkers away from ill-company and disorder. In the hope of encouraging its readers to abandon the filthy sin of 'habitual drunkenness', the author advised them to substitute their visits to disreputable drinking houses for a tavern kept by an honourable woman named Sobriété. Her establishment provided customers with resplendent and beautiful furnishings, and a wide selection of quality food and drink, which maintained the 'all-happy lives' of her customers. In a similar way to the English merry alewife, Sobriété was also celebrated for promoting respectable sociability and a form of merriment that was absent of 'vilany, avarice and quarrels', but filled with joyful conversations and singing to the sound of musical instruments, provided no 'lewd songs' were on the bill. Before peacefully departing to their homes, every one of the female publican's customers paid their respects and 'thanked Madame Sobriété' for her valued service.³⁶

Both of these cultural representations, then, indicate the value of examining popular literature to capture the wider range of characteristics that accompanied the making of an honourable female publican. If court records give special importance to a woman's ability to enforce discipline and order within her establishment, popular literature emphasised that a female publican's honour was also dependent upon her ability to provide quality food and drink, as well as to provide the adequate ambience and hospitality that promoted honest merriment and sociability among her customers. Furthermore, if female publicans were occasionally typecast as the engines of social dislocation and disorder, the women described in these English and French literary representations were firmly portrayed as supportive, conducive, and, more importantly, appreciated, elements to drinking house sociability.

Two additional pieces of popular literature also suggest that a female publican's honour rested not only in her ability to provide the space and substances for suitable

recreation, but also to provide the essential care and sustenance that her customers required. *A Guide for Malt-Worms*, for example, was a pamphlet that offered thirsty good-fellows advice on the most enjoyable spots to find refreshment and lodging on their travels through London. One particularly noteworthy establishment was that belonging to Paul Griffin in Islington. The praise of Griffin's drinking house, though, had little in common with the male publican himself, who was a drunken wastrel that spent more time bragging to his customers that 'he was the first Man in England that made Constantinople' than attending to their needs. The celebration of this establishment came instead for the 'good Woman of this House', a hardworking and honest wife and publican whose compassionate service was a consistent source of rejuvenation to the physical and mental conditions of her customers. As the authors attested, the hostess was:

Unwearied in her Labours to restore,
To pristine Health sick Persons at Death's Door:
Whereof but few, that Lodge with her for Air,
Find her successful in her tender Care³⁷

In France, too, a verse dedicated to a *cabaretière* in 1612 described the great pride that a female publican achieved through preserving the health and social status of one of her male customers, acting almost as a broker for his respectable identity. When visiting cabarets other than her own, the man was unable to 'find a good meal', had to sit at cheap tables, dine on measly salads, toothpicks, or nothing at all, and foolishly wagered his sword in bets with drinking house patrons. When this 'ignorant courtier' came to her house, however, she kept him away from such uncivilised practices and made sure he lived the appropriate lifestyle, serving him pheasant with soup on a Sunday, fresh fish and peas on a Monday and an assortment of meats and vegetables - including of course 'good wine' - throughout the week. 'I provided for him', the *cabaretière* proudly insisted, 'I maintained him'.³⁸

In sum, then, a fresh examination of popular literature leads us to two overarching conclusions. The first is that popular literature can, contrary to former assessments, provide an important means of accessing positive representations on the female publican. Secondly, the way in which these positive representations were expressed serves to reinforce the utility of popular literature as an

additional and particularly insightful accompaniment to the traditional focus of court records. Rather than an insistence of publican-patron confrontation, popular literature reveals that a female publican's honour equally rested in the provision of good food, drink and hospitality, as well as supporting and contributing to the sociability and well-being of her customers. It might be tempting at this juncture, however, to dismiss these celebratory narratives as abstract literary inversions of everyday life. One might speculate, for instance, whether the author of *The Merry Hoastess* was attempting to entertain his readers by subjecting the drinking house to a 'world turned upside down' treatment, inviting humour at the fact that women were not the usual sexually and commercially suspect characters that drinkers commonly expected them to be.

Yet, in addition to popular literature, a further set of sources that are informative in supporting these conclusions are travel diaries. These personal accounts are particularly useful here for not only situating the same depictions of female publican's in print within instances of lived social exchange, but also for providing examples of female publicans achieving honour beyond the emphasis on confrontation within current historiographical assessments. In 1713, for instance, John Cannon described one of the many visits he made to The Catherine Wheel in High Wycombe, owned and governed by a maiden named Sarah Black. Often arriving at her establishment in the company of young officers and gentleman, Cannon would commonly pass the time playing cards 'over a glass of wine & a small collation', which the female publican 'always would provide & accommodate us with', Cannon remarked. Supporting the literary representation, then, that women were honoured for their services and produce, Sarah Black's consistent provision of adequate food, drink and recreation had clearly earned her a good reputation in Cannon's eyes. Sarah Black, as Cannon extolled, was 'a mighty civil young woman'.³⁹

The journal of Jacques-Louis de Ménétra, a Parisian glazier who socialised and lodged at many drinking houses on his eighteenth-century *tour de France*, also provided an account in which his female publican was celebrated for her hospitability and positive contribution to an evening's merriment. Arriving from Gascony with 'greatly diminished' funds, he stopped at a drinking house in Toulouse ordering simply 'a bed and two soft-

boiled eggs'. Hearing that Ménétra was a Parisian, however, the female publican 'wouldn't hear of [his] going to bed' since her son had stayed in Paris and would be 'very pleased to see a young man' from the city. Upon the arrival of her son, the female publican served the men supper with a pitcher of wine and sat among them, desiring to hear their tales of 'everything that was remarkable in Paris'. Enquiring about the cost of his reckoning the following morning, Ménétra was instructed by the hostess to pay 'Nothing but what you want to give'. Handing over four shillings, Ménétra congratulated himself for visiting her establishment and was evidently appreciative of his publican's attentive, sociable and generous service. 'I said my good-byes', Ménétra recorded, 'and thanked my wonderful hosts'.⁴⁰

Finally, Jean Marteilhe de Bergerac recalled an occasion where a gentleman from the Limousin region and his exasperated young cadet stopped at a cabaret in Lyon for some overdue refreshment. Observing the men's weary physical conditions, the *cabaretière* immediately came out of her house with some pots of beer, and insisted that they took a seat inside her establishment: 'My friends', the hostess declared, 'there's a bench in my vestibule, please help yourself to it'.⁴¹ After a few hours of rest, the gentlemen settled their score and left the hostess a large tip of near four *livres* for her kind service. Overwhelmed by their generous gesture, though, the *cabaretière* insisted they would be forever welcome to return to her house, which would in fact prove to be the case. As Marteilhe noted, the men would often return to drink 'at their mother's house', a nickname they had dutifully allocated their respected hostess, while she received them 'as if they were of her family'.⁴² Marteilhe's account is insightful not only for demonstrating a female publican's markedly skilled hospitality, but also for underlining the literary trope that a female publican's concern to provide care and sustenance for her customers was a valued commodity in both cultural representations and social reality.

The wide geographical and chronological coverage of this study admittedly prevents it from being a definitive and conclusive account, yet it is hoped that the fresh examination of popular literature employed here has revealed a more diverse range of female publican profiles, and, specifically, a range which is inclusive, rather than dismissive, of positive representations. In particular, this paper has argued that a more balanced overview

of popular literature is required. If some early modern authors depicted female publicans as vulnerable, licentious and deceitful women that negatively impinged upon society, an equally important core of representations praised them for their quality products, hospitality and the contributions they made to the sociability and welfare of a community. The ambivalence is less incoherent, however, than it might at first appear. In everyday social exchange, too, drinking houses harnessed these competing values, where merriment could easily flow alongside misery, and where a toast marked reconciliation at one table, yet signified subversive intent at another. This interplay between positive and negative cultural representations in print, then, demonstrates the historical value of popular literature as a source including a comprehensive spectrum of attitudes that were often in tune with social practice.

Yet, the identification of these positive literary appraisals has not only hopefully allowed us to correct the caricature of a female publican's cultural image, but also to advance the boundaries of honour for female publicans beyond the current historiographical emphasis. Though exercising discipline and authority would remain important factors in the defence of a female publican's professional and respectable identity, her access to honour was not exclusively mediated through these confrontational encounters, but also encompassed an ability to provide products, hospitality and sociability that harmoniously accompanied her customers' experience. Furthermore, while sexual reputation surely remained an essential source of honour for a female publican, as it did indeed for all women of the period, the celebratory narratives explored in this essay suggest that a female publican's honour also conformed to broader social - the assurance of merriment, care and order - and economic - the supplying of sufficient produce - qualities. As a woman who continually straddled the boundaries between public and private spheres, and was expected to adopt both masculine and feminine attributes to defend her reputation, the female publican may well, in fact, offer a particularly illuminating figure of study for historians examining the gendered construction of honour.

In its comparative approach to England and France, though, to what extent did the alleged 'North-South' divide in European drinking cultures shape the literary and lived experiences of female publicans. In short, the

answer would appear to be surprisingly little. The sources examined in this paper all situated their discussions of the female publican within the same range of negative stereotypes and positive appraisals. Furthermore, the suggested differences in the moral intensity with which Protestant and Catholic reformers perceived drinking houses did not culminate in a distinctively harsher critique of female publicans in England, nor a heightened tolerance of those working in France. This conclusion should not encourage us, however, to do away with the cultural divide altogether. Travel writers of the period, for example, were deeply conscious of the distinctions between English and French drinking cultures. In his *Mémoires et Observations* on the English, originally published in 1698, the Lyon-born Francis Misson found drinking rituals in England to be a notable source of bemusement. Particularly disturbing was the culture of health drinking, which was 'almost out of Date among People of any Distinction' and widely considered 'impertinent and ridiculous' by the French, as Misson observed, yet was commonly enjoyed and practiced by all sorts of Englishmen. Even more peculiar to Misson were the laws governing this practice:

The first is, that the Person whose Health is drank [...] must remain as still as a Statue while the *Drinker* is drinking [...], lay aside your Fork or Spoon, and wait without stirring any more than a Stone till the other has drank [...] After which, the second Grimace is to make him a low Bow, to the great Hazard of dipping your Peruke in the Sauce upon your Plate.

What this suggests, then, is that if the religious differences between Catholicism and Protestantism did not substantially alter the cultural perceptions and social experiences of women that worked in drinking houses, further research is certainly needed to establish if, and how, these factors contributed to the divergence of drinking behaviours that travellers encountered on their journeys into the drinking houses of early modern Europe.

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