In this essay, I would like to offer some preliminary thoughts about my efforts to link two well-known features of Western history, popular misogyny and women's historical experiences as workers. On the one hand, we know that misogyny has been an enduring part of Western civilization, that for many centuries European women have lived in cultural environments that at best belittle and at worst despise them. On the other hand, we also know that women's low status as workers has been a persistent feature of Western history, that for many centuries women have usually laboured in occupations of low skill, low status, and low remuneration. It seems self-evident that these two characteristics of the Western past might be connected, and I have set out to explore that possibility – to assess the extent to which misogyny (and especially popular misogyny) might have worked to limit, devalue, and marginalize the work of women.

I began this project with naive confidence in an apparently self-evident linkage. Like all women, I encounter expressions of misogyny on an almost daily basis, and my own experiences tell me that misogyny is not only a cultural matter but also a matter of real experience – affecting my work, my leisure, my relationships, my aspirations. To be sure, misogyny is not the defining factor in my life (what single factor would be?), but it is certainly one of many. I expected to find something similar for women in the past and to be able to show in a straightforward fashion how past misogyny worked to shape the lives of past women. My naiveté has disappeared. This project is proving to be about as unstraightforward as any project can be, and it has presented me with a growing list of problematic questions: What is popular
culture? What is misogyny? How should texts be read? How can we prove that a cultural idea affects human behaviour and experience? How can we trace changes over time and place in both popular cultural ideas (however they are defined) and human responses to them (however they are measured)?

These sorts of questions lend themselves more to debate than to resolution, and perhaps their uncertainties explain why most historians of women have thus far avoided explicit treatment of misogyny and its effects on women. As we have sought to explain the historical experiences of women, we have certainly recognized misogyny, but we have focused our main efforts on other factors that can be more readily isolated, defined, and analyzed. In the history of women's work, for example, we have mostly looked at structural matters — economic structures, demographic phenomena, household arrangements, political circumstances. We have considered cultural antipathy towards women in some specific work-centred instances — for example, the opposition of gildsmen (and later, trade union men) to women working alongside them — but we have seldom looked at the forces of woman-hating in a wider socio-cultural context. Misogyny as such — misogyny as a general cultural force — has had a very small part in women's history as it has been written over the past few decades.

Literary scholars have examined misogyny much more directly than have historians, but their studies, while prodigious and useful, have usually focused on elite misogyny found in major literary texts, rather than on manifestations of popular misogyny as found in ballads, plays, carvings, and the like. Their analyses have also, understandably, leaned more towards the cultural than the experiential. Some literary scholars have recognized that misogynistic ideas had, in the words of Linda Woodbridge, 'power to intimidate or to inspire', but they have seldom explored in detail the nature of that acknowledged influence. And perhaps the stronger literary tradition has been to treat misogyny as a literary topos, interesting as a cultural phenomenon but far removed from women's lives. Francis Utley, for example, considered medieval misogyny to be merely a 'courtly game', with no real social import. This argument for a distinction between literary misogyny and female experience has recently been strengthened, perhaps inadvertently, through an influential essay by Howard Bloch. In a study of medieval misogyny, he has portrayed it as a literary game far removed from women, arguing that 'the discourse of misogyny . . . becomes a plaint . . . against writing itself'. To Bloch, misogyny is less about hatred of women than about hatred of literature, rhetoric, and symbolic systems in general.

My project is motivated in part by a desire to critique this sort of esoteric treatment of misogyny and to reclaim misogyny as a real and horrible problem for women.

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At this preliminary stage, my efforts to see misogyny as a popular phenomenon influencing the lives of real women in past times focuses on a particular aspect of women’s history: the relatively high-status work of English women in brewing between c. 1300 and c. 1700, and the popular hatred of female brewers that contributed, I shall argue, to their slow withdrawal from this trade. Victuallers in preindustrial England were often subjected to ridicule, dislike, and suspicion, but alewives – a term I shall use to designate both female brewers and female tipplers – endured a particular opprobrium that reflected their sex as much as their trade. Although I have not yet been able to extend my examination to other trades, I suspect that popular dislike of female brewers had parallels for other women – one thinks at once of fishwives and midwives – who worked at trades that could offer good profits, social power, and some measure of independence from men.

Over the course of the late medieval and early modern centuries, women’s work in the brewing trade not only changed in content but also declined dramatically. In 1300, women were very active as commercial brewers in villages, towns, and cities, both brewing ale and selling it. Indeed, until the late fourteenth century, legal discussions of commercial brewing often treated producers of ale as exclusively female, using such sex-specific terms as *braciatrix*. For women, commercial brewing must have often seemed a crucial resource, especially since other economic opportunities were so limited. Land was hard to come by for women because inheritance customs discriminated against them in favour of their brothers. Wage work was problematic for women because such labour was usually divided according to sex, with the majority of jobs and certainly the best-paying jobs going to males. And skilled crafts and trades also eluded most women, since they required long apprenticeships that *ipso facto* trained mostly males. In such a hostile economic environment, women found that brewing was accessible, manageable, and marketable. As a result, many women – indeed, in many communities, most women – used their brewing skills to bring much needed cash or goods into their households.

Over the course of time, however, women began to lose their grip on the brewing industry. After the 1348–9 plague, the brewing trade slowly became more professionalized in response to a variety of factors, including better urban markets and rising standards of living. The myriad of brewers once found in many communities was increasingly replaced by a handful of ‘common brewers’, and increasingly these common brewers were males. In this same period, the brewing trade began in many places to divide into the brewers who produced ale (and in some cases continued to sell it retail) and the tipplers and tapsters who only marketed ale they had purchased wholesale from brewers. Where this distinction between producers and retailers took hold, it often became also a distinction of sex, with men more often controlling the more lucrative production of ale and women more often working as retailers (insofar as they were able to remain in the trade at all). By the fifteenth century, people in London and towns along the south and east coasts were acquiring a taste for a new beverage – brewed with hops.
and called beer to differentiate it from unhopped ale—that would eventually displace ale. Because beer kept longer and transported better than ale, the shift to beer encouraged capitalization of brewing; this trend towards larger brewhouses serving larger markets again advantaged males over females. And in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, stricter governmental regulation of brewing (via licensing of brewers and alehousekeepers, various monopoly schemes, and the levying of the excise) further encouraged control of the trade by responsible (i.e. male) citizens. All of these changes were very slow and uneven, proceeding over the course of several centuries and affecting different regions of the country at different times and in different ways. But their overall effect was clear; by 1700, brewing, which had been a home-based trade dominated by women four centuries earlier, was becoming a factory-based industry controlled by a steadily shrinking group of wealthy males.

This transformation of brewing between 1300 and 1700—and this loss for women of an important economic option—can be explained, as I have indeed just done, by demographic, economic, technical, and political forces. In this essay, however, I want to explore the possibility of another side to this neat story of women’s exclusion from brewing as an accidental byproduct of inexorable historical change—a side that suggests that the exclusion of women from this lucrative industry was less benign, less unintentional, and less based inadvertently on major structural changes. For in the popular culture of medieval and early modern England, female brewers and tipplers were represented as unpleasant, unrespectable, and untrustworthy women. Negative attitudes towards women in brewing appear in such a wide variety of literary and artistic forms—prose, poetry, ballads, drama, carvings, sculpture, and drawings—that public ridicule of such women seems to have been both acceptable and commonplace. It seems quite possible that this antipathy towards alewives, an antipathy based heavily upon misogynistic ideas and traditions, undermined not only the desire of women to pursue commercial brewing but also their ability to compete with men for the customers, capital, and official approbation that were crucial ingredients for a successful career in commercial brewing.

The best known depiction of an alewife is John Skelton’s Elynour Rummyng described in The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng, a poem probably written before 1520. This is a well-received poem (then as well as now) written by a poet-priest renowned for the satiric temper of his verse. Skelton’s social world was broad, running from the royal court and various noble households, through the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, to the lanes and fields of his parish at Diss, in Norfolk. Literary critics laud the descriptive power, wittiness, and irony of The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng, yet its misogyny is blatant, vicious, and terrifying.

Satirically twisting the traditional literary commendation of a woman
through a detailed catalogue of her appealing features, Skelton describes Elynour Rummyng in careful detail as a grotesquely ugly woman. Beginning by telling us that she is ‘Droopy and drowsy/Scurvy and lousy’, Skelton then details her features: her face bristles with hair; her lips drool ‘like a ropy rain’; her crooked and hooked nose constantly drips; her skin is loose, her back bent, her eyes bleary, her hair grey, her joints swollen, her skin greasy. She is, of course, old and fat. She is also ridiculous, wearing elaborate and bright clothes on holy days and cavorting lasciviously with her husband like—as she proudly tells it in Skelton’s poem—‘two pigs in a sty’.  

Skelton depicts Elynour Rummyng as much more than merely a grotesque old woman; throughout the poem, he also impugns her religious reliability. Sometimes he is subtle on this score, leaving his audience to judge for itself the significance of her acceptance of rosaries as payment for ale, of her readiness to swear profanely, of her having learned brewing secrets from a Jew, of her entertaining a customer who ‘seemed to be a witch’, of her dressing up on holy days ‘after the Saracen’s guise’ and ‘like an Egyptian’. Sometimes he is more straightforward, telling us, for example, that ‘the devil and she be sib’. Indeed, the poem is rife with allusions to not only witchcraft but also inverted religious rites—including a blasphemous mock communion celebrated with ale.

Yet Elynour Rummyng is more to Skelton than merely an amusingly absurd old woman of doubtful Christian faith—she is also depicted (and this is crucial to my argument) as a highly unscrupulous tradeswoman. Skelton tells us that she adulterates her ale: she drools into it; she sticks her filthy hands in it; she allows her hens to roost over it (using their droppings for added potency). Skelton implies that Elynour Rummyng cruelly exploits her customers’ enthusiastic need for her ale: she bargains hard; she accepts as payment inappropriate goods (wedding rings and cradles, as well as rosaries); she encourages indebtedness. And Skelton describes her establishment as roughly run and wholly unappealing: pigs run farting and shitting through the house; fights break out; embarrassed customers slink in through the back door.

As described by Skelton, Elynour Rummyng’s establishment is exceptional not only in its grossness, but also in its clientele: all her customers are women. Drawing satirically upon the literary tradition of good gossip tales that describe the behaviour of drinking, gossiping women, Skelton describes Elynour Rummyng’s customers in most unflattering terms:

Some wenches come unlaced,
Some housewives come unbraced,
With their naked paps
That flips and flaps,
It wigs and it wags
Like tawny saffron bags—
A sort of foul drabs
All scurvy with scabs.
Throughout the poem, Elynour Rummyng’s female customers serve as mirrors of her own failings; like her, they are physically gross, uncontrolled, unchristian, and unscrupulous. *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng*, then, draws upon literary traditions to create a central character who is almost a stock figure in misogynistic literature: a grotesque, old witch-like woman. Yet Elynour Rummyng is something more as well: she is a corrupt tradeswoman who sells her customers adulterated drink at hard-driven prices in a disgusting atmosphere.

It is, then, possible to read *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* as a slanderous attack on female brewers and their trade. Skelton’s poem is fast-paced and humorous, it draws heavily upon literary conventions, and it strongly reflects his satiric temper. Yet it also maligns the reputation of alewives, possibly discouraging women from pursuing the trade and possibly encouraging customers to frequent the premises of male brewers and male tipplers. This sort of slander was not new in Skelton’s time, and it did not end with *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng*; Skelton’s audience easily laughed and responded to his jibes because it was, in a sense, familiar with the text. Skelton’s savaging of Elynour Rummyng was neither the first nor the last attack on women in the brewing trade.

Without reviewing these other attacks in full detail, let me briefly summarize a few points. First, many texts parallel the complaints of Skelton about the unworthy trading practices of alewives. About a century and a half before Skelton’s poem, for example, William Langland described alewives as cheating their customers and enticing them into drunkenness in order to reap higher profits. In a lengthy description of the seven deadly sins (that includes numerous depictions of sinful males), Langland depicts the wife of Covetousness as cheating in two trades – clothmaking and brewing. In just a few lines, this woman is described (by her husband) as breaking almost every possible rule for the production and sale of ale:

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I bought her barley malt she brewed it to sell.
Penny ale and pudding ale she poured together
For laborers and for low folk that was kept by itself.
The best ale lay in my bower or in my bedchamber,
And whoso tasted thereof bought it thereafter
A gallon for a groat no less, God knows:
And 'twas measured in cupfulls this craft my wife used.
Rose the Regrater was her right name;
She hath holden huckstering for these past eleven winters\textsuperscript{24}
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In violation of rules designed to ensure the quality of various types of ale, Rose the Regrater mixes together two types of cheap ale to serve to the poor. In violation of standards that sought to ensure a good, but cheap ale for the poor, she mingles the poor's normal fare (penny ale) with the dregs of
the brewing process (pudding ale), thereby ensuring that the poor received an ale of exceeding poor quality. In violation of ordinances against private sales and secret sales, she hides her best ale out of the way and sells it only to preferred customers. In violation of proclamations that usually allowed 1d or at most 2d to be charged for a gallon of ale, she charges an exorbitant price of 4d. And in violation of orders that sought to limit ale measures to the standard of quart, pottle, and gallon, she sells her best ale in nonstandard cup measures.

Just a few lines later, Langland rounds out his attack on the nefarious trading practices of alewives with a brief description of Betoun the Brewster. She runs an alehouse that foreshadows in its rowdiness and grossness the establishment of Elynour Rummyng: But she also is distinguished by her skills as a temptress, skills that recall the sin of Eve. As Gluttony is heading piously to church to 'be shriven & to synne no more', Betoun the Brewster waylays him and entices him into her house. She does this systematically, beginning with merely a friendly greeting and then tempting innocent Gluttony with, first, ale and then, food. And she also does this in full knowledge that she is drawing poor Gluttony away from religious worship. Betoun the Brewster, like Elynour Rummyng, is a wicked woman, an unchristian encourager of vice, and a profiteer at the expense of others. Rose the Regrater and Betoun the Brewster exemplify a common feature of most representations of alewives: the recurring complaint that alewives perpetrate numerous trading offences:

Second, many attacks also match Skelton's tense ambivalence about the appearance and sexuality of Elynour Rummyng. On the one hand, some dwell on the disgusting physical appearance of alewives. A seventeenth-century storybook Pasquil's Jests depicts a latter-day Elynour Rummyng, a fat, old, gross London alewife named Mother Bunch, whose dancing supposedly shook all of London like an earthquake and from whom supposedly are descended 'all our great greasie Tapsters and fat swelling Ale-wives'. On the other hand, some attacks dwell on the opposite side of this ambivalence about the sexuality of women, on the dangerous attractiveness of alewives. A series of ballads, including one by the fifteenth-century poet John Lydgate about the teasing alewives of Canterbury, bemoan the inconstancy of alewives – how they will flirt with customers with no consummation and cheat on their foolish husbands. These complaints reflect a basic tension in the trade of alewives; they needed to be pleasant and amusing without being lascivious and whorish. As one ballad put it,

A man that hathe a signe at his doore,  
and keeps good Ale to sell,  
A comely wife to please his guests,  
may thrive exceeding well;

Yet an alewife who was too comely and too friendly ran into trouble. She
offended male customers who misconstrued commercial friendliness for love; she risked adultery (or the appearance of adultery); she suffered the ire of local authorities seeking to root out disorderly houses. The above verse ended,

But he that hath a Whore to his wife,  
were better be without her.  

Third, many attacks malign, as does Skelton, the souls of alewives. In the Chester mystery cycle, an alewife is the only person left behind by Christ after he cleans out hell. She sings a sad tale, explaining:

Sometyme I was a taverner,  
a gentle gossippe and a tapster,  
of wyne and ale a trustie bruer,  
which woe hath me wrought.  
Of kannes I kept no trewe measure.  
My cuppes I sould at my pleasure,  
deceavinge manye a creature,  
thoe my ale were nought.  

As the play closes, Satan welcomes her, one devil rejoices in her addition to their entourage, and another promises gleefully to marry her. The hellish fate of alewives is a widespread medieval image – repeated in midsummer revels at Chester, depicted on misericords in churches at Castle Hedington (Essex) and Ludlow (Shropshire), shown on a boss at Norwich Cathedral, and drawn in the final frame of the Holkham Bible Picture Book. It seems to be the logical, but horrific culmination of popular suspicion about the honesty, neighbourliness, and faithfulness of alewives.

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Evidence for dislike of alewives in late medieval and early modern England, then, is both abundant and varied – found in poems, ballads, drawings, carvings, and drama. Yet it is easier to collect this evidence than it is to reach acceptable interpretations of it. I have struggled (and am struggling) with the extent to which I can interpret these manifestations as an aspect of popular culture in traditional England. Skelton, for example, wrote often for courtly audiences, yet The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng seems to be very much a popular poem, as suggested by its vocabulary, syntax, and meter, and by its particular suitability for oral presentation. It was reprinted on numerous occasions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, included in the libraries of humble people like the mason of Coventry whose books were catalogued by Robert Laneham in 1575, and sufficiently well-known to merit allusion in later popular texts, such as Ben Jonson’s A
Tale of a Tub.$^{31}$ Facts such as these are reassuring, but they cannot prove what I would most like to prove: they cannot prove that *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* was recited and read with frequency in the houses and alehouses of traditional England. This is, of course, the great challenge of studying popular culture, the 'elusive quarry' of Peter Burke.$^{32}$

In seeking this quarry, I have one strong asset: the multitudinous representations of antipathy towards alewives found in many different media – some of which (like misericords and mystery plays) are demonstrably popular – over many centuries. Moreover, these representations of alewives contain few countervailing positive images. To my knowledge, alewives are never praised for the essential product they provide; they are never honoured for their good trade and nappy ale; they are never held up as epitomes of goodwives and good neighbors. The uniformity of negative representations of alewives is especially striking in comparison with contemporary treatment of male victuallers and male brewers. Although often maligned in popular cultural forms, male victuallers and brewers endured milder and less frequent attacks and also benefited from outrightly positive representations. One playful song was devoted exclusively to ‘The Praise of Brewers’. It began:

There's many a clinking verse was made
In honor of the Black-smiths trade,
But more of the Brewers may be said
Which no body can deny.

Rife with punning brewing imagery, the song describes one brewer’s martial triumphs over the Scots and Irish and bemoans his death (and the loss of his strong beer).$^{33}$ I have found nothing in a similarly positive vein for alewives. Given the uniformity of attacks upon alewives and their diverse representations, I think it is reasonable to surmise that Rose the Regrater, Elynour Rummyng, Mother Bunch, the Gentle Gossip of the Chester cycle, and others of their ilk are only the sparse remains of a once widespread and popular dislike of women in the brewing trade.

I have also struggled (and continue to struggle) with another problem. How should these texts be read? I am quite certain that I cannot read them chronologically or regionally; there are not enough of them and their survival is too idiosyncratic for me to trace change over time and place. But should I read them as separate representations or as a collective figuration of a single persona that somehow represents a general cultural attitude? And of course, I cannot read them – either separately or collectively – in only one way. I see *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* as a savage misogynistic attack. Others might read it as a satire on the lifestyle of the popular classes or as a lesson on the evils of drunkenness; some might argue that Skelton’s excessively negative representation actually undercuts the force of his
attack; and still others might think that Skelton’s portrait of Elynour Rummyng includes mitigating elements of humour and affection. These other readings, however, do not belie my own. Indeed, they often add to the negative possibilities of the text. In the case of *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng*, other readings can actually highlight the pernicious intensity of Skelton’s attack on Elynour Rummyng, achieved in part by associating her with popular vulgarity, or by attributing to her the special sin of encouraging drunkenness, or by hiding the attack upon her behind a veil of affectionate familiarity.

Hence, I think it is feasible to read these texts as representing not only a popular cultural attitude but also an attitude thatmaligned and ridiculed alewives (however they are read). This conclusion has lead me to two further questions. First, what encouraged this popular hatred of alewives? And second, can I link this hatred to women’s work in the trade (and especially to women’s declining work in brewing over the centuries)?

* * *

Popular dislike of alewives sprang from several sources, but its most crucial source was misogyny. Attacks on alewives drew primarily upon three complementary traditions: dislike of all victuallers; fears about the sins of drunkenness and gluttony encouraged by brewers; and hatred of women. Although all three traditions explain aspects of the opprobrium heaped upon alewives, only the third — misogyny — fully explains the intensity and ubiquity of popular dislike of women in the brewing trade.

In late medieval and early modern England, victuallers were tolerated because they did essential work, but they were constantly suspected of abusing their power — adulterating their products, selling poor-quality foods, using false measures to cheat their customers, and charging unfairly high prices. Hence, William Langland not only attacked alewives but also advised king and commons to enforce vigorously laws against victuallers,

To punish on pillories and punishment stools
Brewers and bakers butchers and cooks,
For these are this world’s men that work the most harm
To the poor people that must buy piece-meal.

Aside from brewing and dairying, most victualling trades — baking, butchering, fishmongering, milling — were largely male professions from as early as the fourteenth century. Male victuallers were attacked in popular culture, but less commonly and less virulently than were alewives. Consider, for example, Chaucer’s depiction of the Cook in *The Canterbury Tales*; the Cook is a slightly unsavoury, drunken fellow whose foodstuffs are of dubious cleanliness and quality, but he is also competent in his trade, skilled at preparing meat, judging ales, making stews, and baking pies.
consider, for another example, Robert Greene's attack on male victuallers in *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592). In this tale, the protagonist rejects as jurymen a butcher, a brewer, a baker, and a victualler-tapster (all males, of course) because of their deceitful trading practices. Many of the specific complaints levelled against the brewer and victualler-tapster parallel those raised in other works against alewives. The brewer is said to adulterate his beer, and the victualler-tapster uses deficient measures, mixes types of beer together, entices customers to evil, cheats on customers' debts, and charges excessive prices. Yet Greene's complaints differ from attacks on alewives in their comparative mildness and impersonality. Only the business practices of these men are maligned; no slighting mention is made of their physical appearance, their establishments, their religiosity, their sexuality, their very salvation.37

The vulnerability of alewives to particular criticism was also enhanced by the disorderly byproducts of their trade. Ale and beer were essential foodstuffs, consumed as basic liquid refreshment by persons of all ages and all classes, and used in both cooking and healing. Yet ale and beer differed fundamentally from other foodstuffs - bread, meat, cake, fish, and the like - in their inebriating effects. These effects might have been desired and sought by customers, but they were vigorously opposed by civic authorities who wanted orderly houses and quiet lanes and by church authorities who equated drunkenness with the sin of gluttony. Sermons depicted alehouses as 'deadly rivals' to the Church, a rivalry clearly emphasized by Langland in his description of Betoun the Brewster enticing Gluttony away from confession and holy mass. Proverbial teachings maintained that 'the tavern is the devil's schoolhouse', an idea echoed not only in the many depictions of alewives in Hell but also in Skelton's comment of Elynour Rummyng that 'the devil and she be sib'.38 And civic authorities attempted to control alehouse behaviour by prohibiting games, drunkenness, and prostitution, just the sorts of behaviour maligned by Langland, Skelton, and the authors of various ballads. Alewives, in short, suffered special opprobrium because they were suspect not only as victuallers but also as victuallers of a potentially sinful food.

Attacks upon alewives, then, drew partly upon suspicion of all victuallers and concerns about drunkenness. Neither of these traditions, however, sufficiently explains the particular intensity of popular attacks upon alewives. Male brewers encountered similar suspicions about victuallers and similar concerns about drunkenness, yet their popular cultural representations were relatively mild (as in Robert Greene's description) or even downright positive (as in the song 'The Praise of Brewers'). Hence, the sex of alewives was central to attacks upon them. Because of enduring traditions suggesting the natural unfaithfulness, wickedness, and unreliability of women, alewives were singled out for suspicion and attack. Western misogyny found an ideal field for expression in popular antipathy towards alewives.
Of all the attacks levied against women by misogynists in this period, perhaps the most common was the charge of insubordination; women failed to maintain proper deference to authority, they disobeyed their husbands, they confounded the proper order of male dominance and female submission. Walter Map wrote that ‘Disobedience . . . will never cease to stimulate women’; Chaucer dwelt repeatedly on the disobedient and disruptive power of the Wife of Bath over her husbands; and a popular proverb taught simply that ‘a woman will have her will’. More than many other women, alewives threatened the proper patriarchal order: in flirting with customers, they undermined the authority of their husbands; in handling money, goods, and debts, they challenged the economic power of men; in bargaining with male customers, they achieved a seemingly unnatural power over men; in avoiding effective regulation of their trade, they insulted the power of male officers and magistrates; and perhaps most importantly, in simply pursuing their trade, they often worked independently of men. A ‘good’ alewife flirted and managed and bargained and traded in the interests of her husband and household, maintaining all due deference and subordination. But even a ‘good’ alewife had the potential power, through her trade, to subvert the ‘natural’ patriarchal order.

It is no wonder, then, that attacks on alewives dwelt upon their insubordination. Alewives fail to obey statutory rules and regulations (Elynour Rummyng, Rose the Regrater, the Gentle Gossip of the Chester Cycle). Alewives lack respect for God and his Church (Betoun the Brewster, all the depictions of alewives abandoned in Hell). Alewives cheat their customers and encourage them, in an Eve-like fashion, to misbehave and lose control (Elynour Rummyng, Betoun the Brewster, the alewives of Lydgate’s Canterbury). And alewives make complete fools of their husbands – as seen most emphatically in the ballad of ‘The Industrious Smith’ which describes a husband cuckolded by his wife who constantly and falsely reassures him ‘Sweet hart, do not rayl,/These things must be if we sell Ale’. The entirely female world of The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng suggests where an alewife’s power can lead: a chaotic world without men in which women are in control.

Other misogynistic themes also resonated strongly in popular attacks on alewives: the fickleness of women (the alewives of Lydgate’s Canterbury), their natural propensity towards evil (alewives in hell), their role as temptresses (Betoun the Brewster); their dishonesty in all dealings (Rose the Regrater); their lack of true Christian faith (Elynour Rummyng and Betoun the Brewster); their bodies as either frustrating objects of desire (alewives of Canterbury) or gross horrors (Elynour Rummyng). Alewives were disliked because, like all victuallers, they were suspected of cheating in their trade, and they were especially disliked because their trade could foment disorder, drunkenness and sin. But these two concerns were exacerbated by the sex of alewives; because alewives were women they – not male brewers – bore the brunt of popular anxiety about cheating and
disorder in their trade. Western misogyny was an essential component of popular antipathy towards alewives in traditional England.

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Now, my other question. What effect did this sort of popular hatred have upon real alewives who sought – in decreasing numbers through the centuries – to support themselves and their families through the brewing trade? Let me begin to answer this question with two caveats. First, the longstanding endurance and seeming invariability of popular antipathy towards women in the brewing industry suggest that its effects were secondary. I have found popular manifestations of dislike of alewives that run throughout these centuries – from the early thirteenth-century drawing of an alewife in hell in the *Holkham Bible Picture Book* to the mid-seventeenth-century depiction (in drawing and poem) of an Oxfordshire alewife, Mother Louse – and I have not been able to trace substantive changes in these manifestations over time. To be sure, changes probably occurred. My sources suggest, for example, that early modern depictions of alewives relied more upon gross physical characterizations than was common in the late middle ages. Yet it is difficult, given the paucity of sources, to give firm weight to such variations, and it is even more difficult to explain them. A stronger reliance on physical caricature after 1500 might reflect, for example, cultural influences (especially the effect of *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* on later depictions of alewives), sexual anxieties (especially about single women or widows in the trade), social conventions (especially about depictions of witches and other undesirable women), or a combination of these (and other) factors.

It is certainly discouraging to have trapped the quarry (historical antipathy towards alewives) but to have its changes over time and place elude firm grasp. Yet the quarry itself is still worth holding, for it tells us that women who worked in brewing between 1300 and 1700 always worked in a popular environment that ridiculed them and maligned their trade. Since we know that the brewing trade changed significantly over these centuries and that women slowly lost basic control over it, we can surmise that popular antipathy towards alewives – whether constant in content or not – had different meanings in different contexts. In the early fourteenth century when the trade was modest and home-based, it might have served mostly as a safety valve to release social tension caused by women’s control of such a crucial trade. In the early sixteenth century when brewing was more profitable and attractive to men, it might have more directly discouraged women from working in the trade. In both instances, the influence of antipathy towards alewives was secondary; it complemented and reflected other social and economic changes in the trade, rather than immediately effecting change.

As my second caveat, I want to emphasize that it is unreasonable to expect firm linkages between popular ideas and real experiences. Some-
times I can draw links that are strongly probable. Skelton’s poem, for example, might have dramatically affected the trade of an alewife who worked in Leatherhead (the locale of his poem) in the 1520s, an Alianora Romyng who whether she served as his model or not was possibly touched in clear ways by the notoriety of The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng. Or, for another example, it might not be sheer coincidence that the play in the Chester Cycle that depicted Christ’s abandonment of an alewife in hell was performed by the Cooks and Innkeepers of the city, groups who often struggled with alewives over control of the ale and beer trade. And it also might not be sheer coincidence that the play’s performance was contemporaneous with severe restrictions in Chester on women’s ability to sell ale and beer; in 1540–41, the mayor, noting that alewives promoted ‘wantonny and braules frays and other inconvenyents’, causing ‘grete slaunders and dishonest report of this citie’, ordered that no woman between 14 and 40 years of age could keep an alehouse. Even in these cases, however, the links between manifestations of popular antipathy towards alewives and women’s work in the trade are tenuous. I cannot prove that the Cooks and Innkeepers of Chester hoped by their play to undermine the competitiveness of women in the brewing trade, and I cannot prove that the restrictive Chester ordinances were prompted in any way by a dramatic depiction of an alewife’s abandonment in hell.

Yet, despite these two caveats, I think we can surmise that there was some sort of relationship between popular cultural depictions of alewives and the work of women in the trade – with popular cultural images both reflecting reality (such as the real cheating of real alewives) and affecting reality (such as encouraging customers to suspect their local alewives of cheating). And I think we can also surmise that these representations, in certain times and circumstances, might have presented real alewives with a considerable challenge to their trade. To be sure, there is a benevolent side to these images. Poems like The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng were good entertainment, and while they were read or recited or discussed, customers would drink and laugh and stay to drink again. But such poems or ballads, although amusing entertainment for customers, had the potential to undermine seriously an alewife’s trade.

These representations could hurt the business of an alewife in a variety of ways: they socially marginalized the alehouses run by alewives; they implied that alewives were prostitutes or harboured prostitutes; and they dangerously associated alewives with disorder, heresy, and satanism. But let me focus specially on the particularly harmful effects of representations of alewives as cheating tradeswomen. Cheating was an accusation that haunted the brewing trade throughout the late medieval and early modern centuries, and a theme that was perhaps the most constant and common in representations of alewives. Depictions of alewives as cheating tradeswomen were particularly dangerous because they were very true to life: they malign alewives for the very offences that were most common and most worrisome
to customers of brewers (male brewers as well as female brewers). Brewers often cheated with impunity; they diluted their ale, altered their measures, demanded higher prices, and on most such occasions, neither customers nor officers were any the wiser. Indeed, given contemporary imprecisions of coinage, measures, and quality control, some level of fraud by brewers was probably unavoidable. All communities tried to regulate their brewers and force them to conform to specified standards of price, quality, and measure, but full conformity by brewers was, in fact, quite rare. In the end, most communities seemed to have become resigned to a certain level of non-conformity, making brewers pay licensing fees and tolerating a little bit of fiddling by them behind the scenes.46

Hence, descriptions of the false trading practices of Elynour Rummyng or Rose the Regrater or the Gentle Gossip of Chester directly aroused the anxieties of ordinary people about their reliance for a crucial foodstuff upon a trade that could only be minimally regulated. Customers worried that brewers and tipplers would cheat them, and Elynour Rummyng and the rest did just that: they sold grossly adulterated ale; they charged completely unregulated prices; and they used cups and pots, not the required measures of quart, pottle, and gallon. For the real Alianora Romyng and her fellow alewives, this sort of arousal of customer anxiety could only be harmful. Breeding suspicion, distrust, and dislike, it inhibited an alewife's ability to fiddle in customary ways, and it discouraged customers from frequenting their premises.

I do not mean to imply that alewives were innocent tradeswomen, falsely accused of cheating when they were only trying to make reasonable profits in roughly honest ways. Some alewives, of course, did cheat, and some cheated egregiously. I do mean, however, to suggest that popular cultural representations exaggerated the problem of cheating and labelled it as a female problem. Although some alewives cheated excessively, all alewives were not guilty of such offences, and these offences were not peculiar to women. Male brewers and male tipplers also cheated by altering quality, measures, and prices, and they also profited from the drunkenness and wickedness of their customers. Cheating was an endemic feature of the brewing trade, found in the establishments of both men and women. Yet the popular culture of traditional England depicted most cheating brewers as female brewers, implying that the trade would be well regulated and justly pursued if confined to men. And since most popular cultural depictions of alewives included accusations of cheating, they also implied that cheating was a universal fault of female brewers. These representations suggested, in short, that cheating was rife in establishments run by women and that a more honest deal could be had in establishments run by men.

Representations such as these, of course, reflected public prejudice, but they also, I think, reinforced it. Hence, popular cultural representations of alewives as cheating tradeswomen – and as tradeswomen who ran undesir-
able, rowdy, sinful establishments – explain, in part, the very real antipathy directed against alewives in these centuries. This antipathy, in turn, must have hurt the trade of many alewives. William Harrison, the well-known author of a sixteenth-century description of England, almost directly echoes popular cultural representations in his discussion of men and women in the brewing trade. In his description of brewing, he speaks well of males in the trade, how they ‘observe very diligently’ the water used in brewing and how a ‘skillful workman’ can alter his proportions to make better beer. In contrast, his remarks about alewives are dismissive, describing how they encourage excessive drinking by adding salt or rosin to ale and advising how to determine such cheating. Margaret Fiske of Norfolk apparently shared a similar prejudice; in 1578 she was arraigned for claiming that ‘there cannot be any alewife thrive without she be a whore or have a whore in her house’. And the citizens of Nottingham also shared this antipathy, noting in 1614 that ‘never an alewyfe dothe as hir husband is bownd to’ (i.e. as promised by her husband, probably via a bonded recognizance). Attitudes like these – reinforced and expressed in popular art and literature – might well have influenced people in subtle ways, particularly in later centuries, when male brewers, tipplers, and alehousekeepers presented a real alternative to alewives. They might, quite simply, have discouraged women from entering the trade and encouraged customers to avoid their premises.

Similar attitudes, fostered in popular culture, might have influenced the place of women within trading associations formed by brewers. Brewers’ gilds formed late in many towns and often faced hard struggles for power and recognition within the urban hierarchy. Such gilds sometimes began with unusually high numbers of female members, but they eventually became almost exclusively male organizations. Did public antipathy towards alewives encourage gilds to purge or suppress their female membership? In 1544, Richard Pickering, a member of the Brewers’ Company of London, responded to an inquiry about brewing yields by claiming that ‘he commytteth the hole charge therof to this wyfe and what she draweth of a quarter he knoweth not’. His wife was not a member of the Company. In the early fifteenth century, women had joined the Brewers’ Company in great numbers, constituting as much as one-third of the membership, but by the Pickering’s time the gild had very few female members. This declining female membership fiscally hurt the Company, since it had once collected two quarterage (or dues) payments from most married couples (one from the husband and another from the wife), whereas by the sixteenth century it usually collected from each couple only one. But perhaps the fiscal loss was offset by perceptual gain; the virtually all-male Brewers’ Company was ranked fourteenth of London’s 46 crafts at the coronation of Henry VIII in 1509. Brewers in Oxford might have been motivated by similar impulses when, in 1511, they paid Johanna Dodicott 13s to give up brewing; the remaining brewers were all male.
Negative ideas about alewives as dishonest and disorderly tradeswomen also influenced those with the power to determine who could profit from brewing and who could not. Even in 1300, local authorities were attempting to license—via a variety of schemes—both brewing and its retail trade. By the early modern centuries, licensing—particularly of alehousekeepers—was regularly required. As a general rule, the power of licensing rested firmly in the hands of local officers and magistrates. Were they inclined to frown upon brewing and tippling by women? I have already mentioned the Chester ordinance of 1540–41 that clearly associated disorder in the trade with the involvement of women. The Earl of Bridgewater entertained similar prejudices when he wrote his constable at Ludlow castle in 1641 worried about rumours that beer was being sold by a ‘wench’; he was assured that the supposed wench was actually an elderly widow but that, in any case, the constable would ‘finde out a man to doe it’ in the future. It is rare to find such clear statements of antipathy towards alewives on the part of those empowered to license brewers, and certainly other factors (such as the easier access of males to investment capital and the greater legal personality of males) favoured men in licensing decisions. But dislike of alewives might have further contributed to the disadvantages faced by a woman—especially an unattached woman—who sought a licence to brew or keep an alehouse. In the long run, all licensing schemes (whether administered nationally through magistrates or monopoly commissions, whether managed by civic authorities or gilds, or whether imposed by seigneurial right) resulted in male domination of the trade. The assumption of those authorized to regulate the brewing trade seems to have been that the market would be better run if run by men.

* * *

I wish to emphasize, in concluding, that women and men could co-operate as well as compete in the brewing trade. Many alewives were married to men who were, to some extent, also involved in the production or sale of ale (this was particularly true later in the period). For such couples, household economics would largely determine the balance of responsibility between wife and husband. But other factors must also have played into this essentially private decision: Who could best attract customers? Who would obtain the bonded licence? Who would join the gild? Anti-alewife sentiment encouraged married couples to place more and more public responsibility for the brewing trade upon the husband: he could be the jolly taverner welcoming guests, the substantial citizen seeking an alehouse licence, the gildsman. This shift altered the economic balance within marriages, as wives slowly lost effective control over this source of familial income. This shift also affected unmarried women in the ale and beer trade; they became less and less able to compete with men or married couples for customers, licences, and economic legitimation. In towns like Chester, they were legally eliminated from the trade. Women left the brewing trade for many
practical reasons, yet their exit was encouraged and occasionally outrightly forced by a virulent popular suspicion of female brewers and tipplers.

In the final analysis, the crucial element in this popular antipathy towards alewives is misogyny. The force of popular dislike of victuallers fell upon many traders, and all brewers and tipplers (of whatever sex) suffered from the association of their trade with revelry and drunkenness. Misogyny, however, singled out alewives as the main culprits, implying that all ale and beer would be good quality, well measured, properly priced, and soberly consumed if only women were removed from the trade. The provable links between misogynistic ideas about women, popular cultural representations of alewives, and the real activities of women in the brewing trade are necessarily tenuous because, as I have tried to show, such linkages cannot be traced in perfectly clear and straightforward ways. But sufficient evidence exists, I think, to conclude that misogyny effectively contributed to the slow masculinization of the brewing trade. The experiences of alewives remind us that misogyny — so often seen as an esoteric matter of high literature and high culture — was a very real and powerful constraint upon women in medieval and early modern England.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

I have talked about this subject to three groups: the North Carolina Research Group on Women in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, the History and Politics group of North Carolina, and the Women's History Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research (University of London). I would like to thank everyone who offered comments, suggestions, and criticisms at these occasions. I also want to thank Barbara Bowen, Cynthia Herrup, Claire Kirch, Maryanne Kowaleski, Janet Nelson, Helen Solterer, and Tess Tavormina for their especially careful readings of drafts of this essay.

1 Let me offer at the outset my working definitions of some problematic terms. First, the standard definition of misogyny as 'hatred of women' encourages us to underestimate both misogynists and their effects. It is the assumption of this essay, and indeed the implication of much feminist research, that misogyny is not the ideology of an extreme few, but rather a pervasive feature of Western culture. In other words, although only a few people might hate women outright, all Westerners share a culture that expresses hatred of women through such means as ridicule, belittlement, and marginalization, and all Western women experience the negative effects of this hatred. For a historical study of misogyny in the West, see Katharine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*, Seattle, 1966. For a series of essays that examine the subtle workings of misogyny in a variety of modern contexts, see Joan Smith, *Misogynes*, London, 1989. For a chilling story of academic misogyny, see Patricia Crawford and Myrna Tonkinson, *The Missing Chapters: Women Staff at the University of Western Australia 1963–1987*, Nedlands, 1988.

Second, I shall use popular in this essay to denote the cultures and values of ordinary people. Although both the diversity of popular cultures and the paucity of adequate sources make any discussion of popular attitudes in the past only an approximation at best, I wish especially to distinguish popular cultures from the elite cultures of clerical and aristocratic Europeans.

Third, by culture I wish to denote figurative or representational forms that express normative ideas and values. Needless to say, any culture constitutes an ongoing discourse of varied and changing voices, and none of the cultures of medieval and early modern England — popular, aristocratic, clerical, or otherwise — was entirely autonomous. As a result, the sources I use in these essay to study popular culture — ballads, poems, carvings, drawings, and the like — reflect both changing popular norms and clerical and aristocratic influences. But they are,
nevertheless, our best approximations of popular cultural ideas. For a recent discussion of some of the pitfalls of this sort of work, see Ruth B. Bottigheimer, 'Folk tales, folk narrative research and history', *Social History* 14, 1989, pp. 343–357.


3 See, for example, Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family*, New York, 1978. In their introduction to the second edition of this pathbreaking study (New York, 1987), Tilly and Scott acknowledge that their work insufficiently considers cultural and ideological influences on women's work.

4 For examples of male opposition to women in the workplace, see Merry E. Wiesner, 'Guilds, Male Bonding and Women's Work in Early Modern Germany', *Gender and History* 1, 1989, pp. 125–137; Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change*, London, 1983.


8 It is not always possible to distinguish between brewers (i.e. those who brewed ale or beer for sale) on the one hand and tipplers or tapsters (i.e. those who marketed ale or beer produced by brewers) on the other. Sometimes producers and sellers are distinguished in historical or literary texts, but they often are not. Hence, in this essay, alewife = a Middle English word found in late medieval manuscripts refers generically to women in the brewing trade, whether they worked as producers, sellers, or both. This generic definition reflects traditional use of the term. See the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Readers should note that Rosell Hope Robbins refers to a corpus of so-called 'alewife poems', some of which are about drunken women, not women working in the ale and beer trade. See Rosell Hope Robbins, 'Poems Dealing with Contemporary Conditions', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, ed. Albert E. Hartung, New Haven, 1975, pp. 1463–4, and 'John Crophill's Ale-Pots', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 20, 1969, pp. 182–189.

9 I am currently completing a book on English brewing over these centuries, examining both chronological shifts in women's involvement in the industry and causal explanations for those shifts. What follows is a general summary of my conclusions to date. Alice Clark included brewing in her pathbreaking study *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919: reprt London, 1982); my work suggests a much earlier date for the decline of female activity in the industry than that posited by Clark.

10 This practice occurs in many early records, of which the following are only examples: in one version of the early-twelfth-century customs of Newcastle, the term *femina* is used to describe any brewer or baker; in a 1286 charter for Bakewell, the feminine term *pandoxatrix* describes any aleseller; and even the thirteenth-century royal proclamations about the trade (the Assize of Bread and Ale, and the Judgment of the Pillory) on several occasions use the exclusively female term *braciatrix*. For Newcastle, see Adolphus Ballard, ed., *British Borough Charters, 1042–1216*, Cambridge, 1913, pp. 157–158. For Bakewell, see Adolphus Ballard and James Tait, eds, *British Borough Charters, 1216–1307*, Cambridge, 1923, p. 223. For the royal proclamations, see *The Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 1, London, 1810, pp. 199–202.

11 Inheritance customs variously favoured the eldest son, the youngest son, or all sons, but daughters invariably only inherited in the absence of sons. Parents could, of course, provide for non-inheriting children through gifts before they died or testamentary bequests.


15 Oxford provides a good illustration of some of these trends. In the early fourteenth century, over 100 households – constituting perhaps as much as one-half of the households in the town – sold ale on a commercial basis. By 1380–81, poll-tax evidence suggests that only a few dozen households were relying on brewing, and by the late fifteenth century, the town was served by a regular rotation of about two dozen brewers. At the same time, female influence in the trade was declining – the number of independent women in the trade steadily fell, and women began to predominate amongst tapsters and others who only retailed ale brewed by others. See the ale presentments printed in H. E. Salter, *Medieval Archives of the University of Oxford*, Oxford, 1921, pp. 129–265; the poll tax for 1380–81 printed in J. E. Thorold Rogers, *Oxford City Documents 1268–1665*, Oxford, 1891, pp. 3–45; the 1501 rotation of brewers specified in W. T. Mitchell, ed., *Registrum Cancellarii 1498–1506*, Oxford Historical Society, n.s. 27, Oxford, 1980, pp. 249–251; and the later lists of brewers in the Chancellor’s Registers in the Oxford University Archives.

16 With remarkably few exceptions, beer brewing from its earliest days in England was an almost exclusively male occupation. Many foreigners, especially Dutchmen, were also involved in the trade. For example, the first beer brewer (a male and probably an alien) appeared in the York’s Register of Freedom Admissions in 1402–3. Thereafter, brewers (i.e. alebrewers) and beerbrewers were carefully distinguished in the Register. Dozens of men entered as beerbrewers, but no women (although 4 women did enter as brewers). In 1550, a complaint about ‘the berebruers and other common brewsters of the Citie’ suggested the persistence of a clear sexual division of labor. Francis Collins, ed., *Register of the Freemen of the City of York*, vol. 1:1272–1558, Surtees Society, 96, Durham, 1897. Angelo Raine, ed., *York Civic Records*, vol. 5, Yorks. Arch. Soc, 110, Wakefield, 1946, p. 41.

17 York again provides a good example. In York, women predominated amongst those paying brewing fines in 1559; but a licensing scheme, introduced in 1562, promoted male responsibility for the trade: most brewers licensed in 1562 were males (many were husbands of women cited in 1559) and most brewers paying fines in an extant 1565 listing were also male. In many cases, this shift probably only resulted in the husband taking a civic role (as holder of the brewer’s licences and payer of brewing fines) that the wife had previously held, but the change is nevertheless significant. First, it might have altered the balance of economic and civic power within brewing households, giving the husband a public authority once held by the wife. Second, it discouraged independent women – spinsters or widows – from pursuing the trade. See York City Archives: Chamberlains’ Book of Account for 1559–1585 (CCS), fo. 20 ff. (1559) and fo. 37 ff. (1565); House Book 23, fo. 50b ff. (1562).

18 By the eighteenth century, brewing was at the forefront of many of the industrial, technical, and managerial changes that preceded the industrial revolution. See Peter Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England 1700–1830*, Cambridge, 1959.


20 I have used the slightly modernized edition of *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* by Gerald Hammond, ed., *John Skelton, Selected Poems*, Manchester, 1980. For the main description, see lines 12–90. For Elynour’s comment about sex, see lines 229–234.


23 Lines 133–140.


26 *Pasquils Jests With the Merriments of Mother Bunch*, London, 1629. STC #19452. For another example, see the depiction of Ursula in Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614).


33 ‘The Praise of Brevviers: Or, the Brevviers Bravery’, Bodleian Library, Wood E.25, item 63. I would like to thank Sara Mendelson for suggesting that I look at this collection. For other examples of more positive treatments of male victuallers and brewers, see discussions below of comments by Robert Greene and William Harrison.

34 The possibility of a didactic intent on Skelton’s part is suggested by the latin colophon that follows the poem, exhorting women fond of drinking to take heed of his satire. For an example of an interpretation of *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* that denies any unfriendly intent or effect, see A. R. Heiserman, *Skelton and Satire* (Chicago, 1961), who suggests (p. 297)
that the poem attacks neither Elynour Rummyng nor her customers, but is instead merely
funny.
35 I have again used the Attwater translation, p. 21. For original texts, see editions cited
above: A Version, Passus III, lines 67–70; B Version, Passus III, lines 78–81; C Version, Passus
III, lines 79–83.
36 The introduction of the Cook in the General Prologue (lines 376–385) focuses positively
upon his trade skills with only one negative comment (that he had a sore on his shin) probably
intended to imply adulteration of food. Chaucer’s comment of the Cook that ‘Wel koude he
knowe a draughte of Londoun ale’ has a double meaning, suggesting not only the Cook’s
competence in one aspect of his trade but also his excessive fondness for drink. In the prologue
to the Cook’s Tale, the Host accuses the Cook (in a good humoured fashion) of poor service to
his customers. And in the prologue to the Manciple’s Tale, the Cook is depicted as an amusing
drunk.
37 Robert Greene, A Quip for an Upstart Courtier, 1592. STC 12301.
38 Bartlett Jere Whiting, Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English
Writings mainly before 1500, Cambridge, MA, 1968, item T4B. See also G. R. Owst, Literature
39 Rogers, Troublesome Helpmate, esp. pp. 74–6 and 93; Walter Map, De Nugis
Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Wife of Bath’s ‘Prologue’ in The Canterbury Tales; Whiting, Proverbs,
item WS19.
40 The particular economic independence of alewives is suggested by a variety of sources,
including the poll tax returns of the late fourteenth century. In these returns, brewing features
not only as a major female occupation but also as the most lucrative of female occupations. See,
for example, the roll for Howdenshire printed in Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical
Journal 9, 1886, pp. 129–162. See also the Mayors Court Bills for London, temp. Henry VI: of
the eight femmes soles (i.e. wives working independently of their husbands) noted in these bills
with stated occupations, six were brewers or hucksters (Corporation of London Record Office,
MC 1/3).
41 ‘The Industrious Smith’, in Roxburgh Ballads, ed. Chappell, pp. 468–474. See also
42 The depiction of Mother Louse is partially reproduced at the head of this article; it is
fully reproduced in Peter Clark, The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200–1830, London,
1983, between pages 176 and 177.
43 I hope that further work, especially on popular attitudes towards women in other
occupations, might help to clarify changes over times and place.
45 This ordinance is printed in Rupert H. Morris, Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor
Reigns, Chester, 1893, p. 425. The anti-woman intent of this ordinance is particularly indicated
by two other regulations of the same mayoralty: one that tried to restrict women’s churching
celebrations and the other that sought to regulate women’s wearing of hats and other headgear.
These are printed in Historical Manuscripts Commission, Appendix to the Eighth Report,
p. 363.
46 For a brief discussion of medieval regulation of brewers, see Bennett, ‘The Village
Alewife’. I plan to investigate attempts to regulate the trade more fully in a later article.
47 See edition edited by George Edelen, The Description of England by William Harrison,
48 Norfolk Record Office, ANW/6/1. I am grateful to Susan Amussen for bringing this
document to my attention. As far as I have been able to ascertain, defamations rarely mention
alewives and their trade. Because a successful charge of defamation usually required the
imputation of a crime, the use of ‘alewife’ as a slanderous epithet is unlikely to appear in such
cases. For two cases involving brewers (one male, one female) who sued persons who slandered
their ale as unfit, see cases 3 and 45 in R. H. Helmholtz, Select Cases on Defamation to 1600,
Selden Society, 101, London, 1985. Most defamations of women focus upon matters of
sexuality, especially accusations that a woman is a whore or adulterer. See also J. A. Sharpe,
Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York,
Borthwick Paper 58, York, nd.
50 For Pickering’s statement, see Corporation of London Record Office, Repertory 11, fo.
120–121. After Richard Pickering’s death, his widow paid quarterage for one year (Guildhall
Library, Ms. 5445/1. For details about gild membership in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see Guildhall Library, Mss. 5440/1 and 5445/1. For the Company’s ranking at the coronation of Henry VIII, see Corporation of London Record Office, Journal 10, fo. 370v.

51 Oxford University Archives, Chancellor’s Register for 1506–1514, fo. 138v. This attempt by Oxford’s brewers to force Johanna Dodicott to cease brewing is highly unusual and is only known because it failed (she was reinstated by University officers). The motivation for the attempted proscription is not explained in the text. See fo. 135 for a contemporary listing of the all-male association of brewers. Only a few years before 1511, some women were formally involved in the trade: see the 1501 rotation of brewers in Mitchell, ed., Registrum Cancellarii 1498-1506, pp. 249–251. Jean H. Quataert’s work suggests a parallel in central Europe where gildsmen considered only work that was disassociated from the household economy and women to be honorable work. See her ‘The Shaping of Women’s Work in Manufacturing: Guilds, Households, and the State in Central Europe, 1648–1870’, American History Review, 90, 1985, pp. 1122–1148.

52 Huntington Library, Ellesmere Mss 7342 and 7343. I would like to thank Cynthia Herrup for this reference.

53 See note 17 for an example of a licensing scheme that favored males over females (in York in the 1560s).

54 The Chester ordinance was directed against all women between 14 and 40, but wives probably evaded its effect by sheltering their brewing under the authority of their husbands. For another example of the effective prohibition of single women from brewing, see the 1561 order in Carlisle that only freemen and their wives could brew, printed in R. S. Ferguson and W. Nanson, Some Municipal Records of the City of Carlisle, Carlisle, 1887, p. 69. As I will discuss more fully in my book on the brewing industry, the involvement of single women in brewing declined steadily from the late fourteenth century.