

***‘Knowledge of Good and Evil’ – Redefining Early Modern Knowledge of
Pregnancy and Childbirth and its Gendered and Generic Patterns in Personal
and Medical Discourse from 17th-Century England***

Pregnancy and childbirth are highly discussed topics and have been defined by a hegemonic discourse in both religious and secular works, especially in the early modern period. Many scholars (mostly historians) have focussed on a variety of early modern perceptions of reproduction by integrating a vast array of women’s writing into the long male-dominated canon of early modern works, ranging from pamphlets, diaries and letters to medical manuals and recipe books. However, literary and cultural scholarship on which types of knowledge surrounding pregnancy and childbirth were discussed and how they were constructed by early modern writers has been neglected so far. I argue that the topicalisation of different types of knowledge surrounding pregnancy and childbirth by early modern writers and the construction of knowledge differ according to gender and genre, which not only reveals but also challenges gendered and genre-bound notions of reproduction in 17th-century England. The study thus aims to illuminate and refine the deeply gender- and genre-bound perceptions of early modern pregnancy and childbirth by examining two aspects: first, the types of knowledge discussed by early modern writers, and second, how certain kinds of knowledge are constructed by contemplating both gender and genre. Based on a theoretical framework which combines various strands of feminist literary criticism, narratology, and new historicism, the textual data shall be coded within the software MAXQDA, a programme for computer-assisted mixed methods and qualitative data analysis. Due to the large corpus of texts, the methodology can be defined as quantitative with a qualitative interpretation. This project ultimately seeks to reveal and challenge gendered and genre-bound perspectives on early modern pregnancy and childbirth by examining knowledge in personal and medical discourse.