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# Writing for Certainty: Women's Reformist Exegesis in Early Modern England

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WRITING FOR CERTAINTY:  
WOMEN'S REFORMIST EXEGESIS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Although ontology has permeated discussions of early modern literature in recent decades, the related philosophical branch epistemology has received little critical attention in literary scholarship. However, epistemic foundations such as knowledge acquisition, confirmation, and conference, continuously influence the generation of ideas and textual production. This thesis locates the relationship between biblical exegesis and epistemology as crucial to the analysis of early modern English texts, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and before the rise of modern philosophy. Additionally, this thesis addresses ways that epistemic questions, especially as related to the idea of certainty, both fueled and troubled reformist efforts in England. Rather than a cohesive and monolithic Reformation with a distinct beginning and end, England experienced a series of reformations, both religious and political, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, throughout which various factions sought to gain control of a Reformation narrative to direct future continuations of reform. Within this time of ideological change, women recognized an unprecedented chance both to participate in and shape this conversation through their devotional writings, personal narratives, private correspondence, and poetry. Their strategy was twofold: to contribute to the Protestant reaction against the centralized authority of the church and to react in a broader sense against the exclusive authority of men to engage in epistemic discourse.

I argue that attention to epistemology clarifies literary, historical, and theological intersections with profound results for the study of early modern women, who found in the intangible space between knowledge and belief a powerful opportunity to reinstate female authority in religious discourse and knowledge production. Consequently, my thesis will include a wide array of early modern women writers, including Anne Askew, Katherine Parr, Anne Dowriche, Elizabeth Joceline, Elizabeth Isham, Aemilia Lanyer, and Rachel Speght, to support my argument for their engagement of epistemology against and along with male discourse and within an evolving English Reformation. Additionally, my thesis will demonstrate how a critical framework that attends to epistemology can avoid the conflation of contemporary ideas with overly broad application to primary texts, as well as avoid the privileging of contemporary presuppositions over historical ones.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Erik

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## CHAPTER 1

### WOMEN, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND REFORM

My argument necessitates an approach to history that views “The English Reformation” not as a fixed historical moment with a distinct beginning and end but as “English reformations,” ongoing and evolving attempts to rewrite, clarify, and direct the theological basis for England’s social structures. Henry VIII, sensing the potential for reformist exegetical practice to result in dramatic social changes, included in An Act for the Advancement of True Religion (1543) severe restrictions on Bible reading. The events of the century following his reign confirm the validity of his concerns. In *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, Ethan H. Shagan explains that as early as the 1530s, “evangelicals had suggested that the liberation of the Gospel and the overthrow of papal tyranny would lead directly to economic prosperity and social harmony. This was, in most cases, not a political strategy so much as a hopeful *naïveté* typical of first-generation Protestants not yet jaded by harsh political realities” (274). Idealistic theories regarding the construction of a commonwealth persisted until English Puritans successfully instated one in 1649. Arguably, the widespread efforts to employ Protestant theology to effect social change fizzled with the demise of England’s Puritan-led Commonwealth in 1660. During these various social and political changes, England’s reformist writers wrote texts whose multiple dialogues signified the wrestling over the precise implications of reformist doctrines for familial, ecclesiastical, and political arrangements. I am particularly interested in how women influenced these dialogues.

Of course, England’s reformations can likewise be situated within an even more varied European context in which numerous theologians, united primarily by perceived Catholic abuses, created a persuasive yet largely negative identity, the exact nature of which they continued to

debate. (Such identities tend to articulate more clearly what they are not than what they are.) The oppositional nature of Protestantism is synecdochically represented by the explosive personality of Martin Luther, known as a leading originator of the reformations in Europe. His demands that the Church reform its clerical abuses, as well as many of his theological clarifications, met with the approval of the notable Catholic scholar Desiderus Erasmus. Yet in *De Servo Arbitrio*, Luther spurned Erasmus's call for peace for the sake of maintaining the unity of Christendom with insistence "that tumult is a sign of the gospel. . . . the tumult and fury of the times were part of the wrath of God" (Marius 458). This refusal to unify through compromise continued to characterize leading European reformers during the early decades of the sixteenth century. At the Colloquy of Marburg (1529), Luther and Ulrich Zwingli could not resolve their opposing positions on the nature of the Eucharist: while Luther insisted on the literal presence of Christ in the bread and wine, Zwingli insisted on their solely symbolic function. Later John Calvin would posit a third stance in which the Eucharist involves "a close connection between the sacramental symbol and the spiritual gift which it symbolizes that we can 'easily pass from one to the other'. The sign is visible and physical, whereas the thing signified is invisible and spiritual – yet the connection between the sign and the thing signified is so intimate that it is permissible to apply the one to the other" (McGrath 172-73). A failure to resolve the precise form and function of the Eucharist even led to its temporary suspension in Silesia under the influence of Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig. This inability (or refusal) of Europe's leading Protestant theologians to come to any sense of conclusion regarding the Eucharist resulted in Protestantism's first great schism, which occurred less than twenty years after its beginnings. This lack of resolution makes the vehement controversies that later erupt over the Eucharist in England unsurprising.

However, my thesis will address the development of reformations that occurred specifically within England. Viewing England's Protestant history as a non-linear and non-predetermined series of conflicts with varied outcomes contradicts a good deal of religious and historical scholarship, beginning with the original reformist narratives. In *Writing, gender and state in early modern England: Identity formation and the female subject*, Megan Matchinske refers to this style of telling Protestant history as "analytical predestination." She explains,

Indeed, from its earliest moments, the Reformation began to narrate itself as linear history. Reformers, motivated at first by a pressing need to separate themselves from all things novel and new – to establish in Protestant doctrine a consistent and long-lived religious presence – repeatedly asserted their own historical and spiritual foundations, their own connections to the past. (25)

Matchinske's idea of analytical predestination is particularly useful because it succinctly represents the direct incorporation of reformist theology into the narratives that rhetorically justify the radical political break from Rome, subordinating even the most violent of repercussions to providential will. Analytical predestination offered reformists assurance of their ultimate victory since that victory could be measured either eventually through the large-scale English conversion that they sought or immediately through the spread of the new doctrines in the midst of persecution. These assurances were in place long before England's formal transition to Protestantism occurred, and their confidence in their divine predestination, as communicated through their analytical predestination, has influenced generations of writers of history.

Christopher Haigh's significant revisionist work *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* has accomplished a great deal in unraveling such problematically teleological views of history. One of the primary misassumptions Haigh

addresses is the view of “Mary’s reign as an aberration, an inconvenient disruption of the natural process of Reformation” that was “doomed from the beginning and disintegrating at the end.” As Haigh counters, by 1558, “the demand for religious change had been weak, and loyalty to old ways was not destroyed by political diktat; the Protestants had become a significant minority movement, but they had not broken through to mass support” (235). The women writers I feature in my thesis are Protestant, and their writings intentionally contribute to varying stages of reformist endeavors. I use the word “reformist” as a descriptor (rather than “Reformation,” “Reformers,” and “Reformed”) here and throughout my thesis as a means of detaching various Protestant convictions and motivations from the teleological idea of a unified and linear Reformation. Although these writers share with other reformers an ideology seeking to eliminate error from Church doctrine and practice, the specific nuances of that ideology varies by historical location and perspective. As I have mentioned, even those individuals commonly noted as “leading Reformers” did not share the exact same vision for reform, and these differences would, over time, lead to public disputation, fractures within localized Church groups, and the creation of new sects. I also want to clarify that these women’s reformist contributions do not necessarily reflect the popular religious, philosophical, and political thinking of their time. Instead, they use the uncertainty regarding the future permissibility of their religious convictions as justification for their literary intervention in the development and articulation of reformist ideology. Although in many cases their writing fortifies a providentialist narrative of divine will unfolding through reformation, consciousness of this uncertainty results variant tones ranging from the unabashedly aggressive in Anne Askew, the diplomatic in Katherine Parr, the confrontational in Dowriche, the defensive in Lanyer, and the righteous indignation in Speght. Each case, however, exposes

the urgency of preserving not only the English Reformation(s) but also a particular reformist vision, which in the case of the writers in my thesis, relies on female contribution.

Even though my thesis focuses specifically on the unfolding of reformations in England and women writers' contribution to them, the simultaneity of the English Renaissance requires attention. Joan Kelly's familiar question "Did women have a renaissance?" still prompts critical responses in literary scholarship that prove useful in discussions of reformist writing. In *Reason's Disciples*, Hilda Smith criticizes the idea of a women's renaissance, articulating her skepticism that Elizabethan women had a renaissance at all. Smith bases this argument primarily on a numerical lack of early modern female scholars: "The case for women's scholarly advances during the Renaissance rests on the achievements of no more than fifteen learned English women ranging from royal figures like Frances Brandon, Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Mary to daughters of aristocrats with a scholarly bent such as those of Sir Thomas More, Protector Somerset, or Sir Anthony Cooke" (40), as well as "the fact that no woman wrote significantly about women's proper role, that the job of discussing what females should do and learn was left to men" (41). While I do not deny that Elizabethan educational values and practices were articulated and dictated primarily by men, I do wonder whether Smith's failure to find the female models that would have for her signified the existence of a women's renaissance occurs because of the limitations of her framework for inquiry. Is there really a dearth of Elizabethan women who wrote about women's proper role? Or were Elizabethan women generally less concerned about "women's proper role" as Smith might have anticipated? The written accomplishments of the earliest women in my thesis include a theological debate with Catholic elite, a devotional conversion narrative published for the widespread exhortation of an English audience, and open disagreement with public policy with recommendations for political action. In action, rather than

theory, Parr, Askew, and Dowriche, among others, demonstrate their conviction regarding the appropriateness and necessity of female authority. Smith can certainly choose to cite the shortcomings of Juan Luis Vives's tracts on female education, including the "more positive attitudes toward education for women in his *Duty of Husbands* . . . absolute ignorance was not good, but women's education should not go beyond basic literacy and homilies" (43) as indicative of a general attitude towards female education that excluded women from social influence. However, I will cite the presence of women's written contributions to reformist movements as indicative of an existing attitude towards education that suggests women did have something of a Renaissance, albeit one reserved almost exclusively for the educated elite. Smith later acknowledges, somewhat dismissively, the existence of factions that "support[ed] women's equality within a religious but not a political context . . . Yet such views did not necessarily lead to an attack on, much less the overthrow of, the dominant-subordinate relationship dictated in Genesis" (55). I disagree with Smith's conclusion that these kinds of religious egalitarianism effected little political and social change. More importantly, I believe Smith fails to acknowledge that much of the religious egalitarianism that she notes exists precisely because of the efforts of women in the early Renaissance to influence doctrinal dialogue. By inadvertently judging Elizabethan women by contemporary standards of egalitarianism, Smith fails to see that these women prioritized faith and doctrinal inquiry above political and social function and that this prioritization protects their social and political radicalism by grounding it in theological rhetoric.

Scholarship that attempts separation between the religious and the socio-political frequently misses this kind of crucial relationship. Reflecting on recent scholarship, Kimberly Ann Coles posits in *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England*, "This recognition – that if women did not have a renaissance, they at least had a Reformation – not

only asserts the proper historical chronology for England (acknowledging that the Reformation affected England before and arguably more deeply than the Renaissance did) but also identifies religion itself as the most pervasive idiom of early modern England” (6). This recent scholarship has demonstrated the problem of treating the English Renaissance separately from the English reformations. That these two movements, often distinguished as secular and religious respectively, occurred in tandem bears analysis because of the relationship between merging social ideologies and religion.

The past four decades of early modern scholarship have brought to light the complexities of understanding the relationship between gender and religion, a necessary foundation for addressing women’s contributions to the English reformations. By this point, few would deny women’s influence in the religious movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In “Religion and the Construction of the Feminine,” Diane Willen concludes, “Historians of gender recognize that religion played a prominent part in women’s lives and culture; that women in turn must be part of the narrative of religious change (here explicitly integrating women into the ranks of the laity); and that religion was it self gender, that is, experienced differently by men and women and expressed through gendered images or language” (23). While I wholeheartedly agree with Willen that women actively joined the narrative of religious change, I see the remainder of her statement as significantly controversial. Did men and women truly experience, as well as express, religion differently? Are these differences in experience explained by essential difference or constructed difference?

In her summative work “Early Feminist Theory and the ‘Querelle des Femmes’, 1400-1789,” Joan Kelly argues, “In their [dialectical] opposition [to misogyny], the early feminists focused on what we would now call gender. That is, they had a sure sense that the sexes are

culturally, and not just biologically, formed. Women were a social group, in the view of early feminists” (7). For Kelly, the basis for women’s categorization as a social group appears to be their shared social disadvantages created by patriarchal gender constructions. Although Barbara Lewalski positions herself within a series of scholars who address “gender and the social construction of identity” (792), she avoids Kelly’s encompassing categorization of women as a social group. While Kelly’s analysis covers nearly four centuries of women’s writing, Lewalski’s “Writing Women and Reading the Renaissance” focuses specifically on seventeenth century women, about whom she notes, “Jacobean women did not see themselves as a cohesive group defined by gender, and those I mean to discuss are hardly representative of women in other or even the same ranks of society” (794-95). Although Kelly and Lewalski both address the lack of appropriate contextualization of women’s literary production and emphasize their skillful literary maneuvers in the face of social bias, a key difference between their projects is the question of whether early modern women viewed themselves as a social group distinct from men, a question absolutely relevant to any project that discusses the relationship between gender and religion. In her article “Beyond Women and Family: Towards a Gender Analysis of the Reformation,” Merry E. Wiesner alternately poses a related question with significant import: did men view women as a distinct social category? She writes,

The reformers addressed many books of printed sermons to towns and groups within towns, but never specifically to a group of women. Does this mean they viewed women as part of male groups, never thought of women as sharing common concerns, or recognized that, after the closing of the convents, all-female groups would never gather to hear a sermon? . . . when Martin Bucer described the

church as a 'brotherhood' was he choosing to exclude women? Did women feel excluded? (319)

Later in her article, Wiesner acknowledges a then-present impossibility of finding direct answers to these (and other gender-related) questions in reformation studies, despite their relevance to the analysis of reformist writings. Her work points me to a question relevant to my thesis: during England's reformations, did religious women write motivated by feelings of exclusion or assumptions of inclusion?

More recently scholars have begun to address the early modern religious experience as inclusive as well as universal. For example, in "Assistances and Encouragements in the Ways of Piety: Conceptions of Private Devotion in Early Modern England" Kate Narveson explains,

The common sense in modern secular society of religion as primarily subjective and individual may lead us to neglect the ways in which early modern religious experience was at once personal and communal, alert to the motions of the heart yet also vocally and visibly shared. Even more significant, the nature of the heart's motions were understood to be typical of all Christians: even when praying alone, a woman saw the contours of her spiritual experiences as like those of any person at prayer. (2)

Narveson's article touches on the problems of consistently distinguishing male from female religious practices. Perhaps feminist scholars have too ardently insisted on differences in the religious experiences and motivations of men and women, when in actuality corporate devotion and community piety, for the laity, had actually invited spiritual egalitarianism, which women writers then leveraged for widespread recognition of women as social equals worthy of intellectual and political respect.

At the heart of much of the reformist dialogue lay the inherent equality of human souls before God, regardless of gender, rank, or identity, and my thesis will argue that women actively nuanced this dialogue to ensure that conceptual spiritual equality would result in practical social equalities. I acknowledge, of course, that perceptions of equalities can change over time. Yet perhaps a general conception of humanity, rather than one constructed around essential differences between men and women, is more pervasive in early modern history than scholarship has recognized because scholars have inadvertently and retroactively inscribed problematic cultural assumptions onto the past. Even so, the range of writers in my thesis will show that shifts or developments do appear in the relationship between women and reform, specifically through the public representation of women's writing, beginning with apparently necessary, mediatory male-authored approbations to female writing, which are eventually joined by carefully worded self-representations and finally rather bold self-assertions.

George Puttenham titled the final chapter of his 1569 treatise *The Art of English Poesy* as follows: "That the good poet or maker ought to dissemble his art, and in what cases the artificial is more commended than the natural, and contrariwise." Within the chapter, Puttenham only briefly concedes that nature has its virtues and can on occasion achieve what art cannot. Using feminine pronouns to refer to nature, Puttenham metaphorically connects nature to a female body with defects and weaknesses: "In some cases we say art is an aid and coadjutor to nature, and a furtherer of her actions to a good effect, or peradventure a mean to supply her wants by reinforcing the causes wherein she is impotent and defective, as doth the art of physic by helping the natural concoction, retention, distribution expulsion, and other virtues in a weak and unhealthy body" (382). This language overtly constructs the familiar problematic of binaric associations between mind and culture with masculinity and body and nature with femininity.

Coming as the climax to Puttenham's lengthy exposition of the grandeur of English poesy and its future potential, this chapter reveals one of the many biases inherent in early modern thought that required the skillful navigation of his monarch Elizabeth I.

Rather than employing deconstructive strategies to combat binaries, the Elizabethans were in many ways reinstituting binary-influenced Platonic language into their culture thanks to the influence of the humanist admiration for the classics. Subsequently, Elizabeth fought for semiotic control of language rather than for the choice of language itself. In the same decade that Puttenham wrote and published his work, Elizabeth made concessions before Parliament with complexity and wit; for example, she admits to "being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides" ("Speech to Commons, 1563" 690). However, her concessions increased rather than detracted from her power, partially by underscoring the absurdity of the assumption of the inferior intelligence of her female mind. Additionally, Elizabeth manipulated the range of iconic female typology to her advantage, positing herself as mother and spouse of England and daughter of the great Henry VIII as well as controlling the tropes of courtly love. The body of Elizabeth's writings combined with her formidable legacy positively reveals that, at least for her, overcoming binaric language does not require its elimination, rather its strategic (and often ironic) use. The advantage of wielding the highest of political powers did set Elizabeth apart from her contemporary women. However, her rhetoric that consistently attributed both her personal and political power to divine aid was frequently personalized by other early modern women who found in biblical texts such as II Corinthians 12:9 a biblical justification for the presence of their own abilities.

I have referenced these brief passages from Puttenham and Elizabeth I to introduce a critical problem that has caused some trouble in scholarship of the early modern period,

particularly scholarship involving women. Elizabeth skillfully leveraged the language available to her in her time, but does her strategic use of metaphysical binaries justify their continued use by scholars? While binaries indisputably influenced the language of the early moderns, can contemporary scholarship effectively address patriarchal language in analyses of early modern writings without reinforcing and perpetuating that same patriarchal language? In the process of recovering the intentions and motivations of early modern writers, can scholarship overemphasize binaries to the detriment of representing the complexities of early modern writings? In my observation, some feminist projects, in their accusations of patriarchy, have inadvertently prolonged the use of essentializing language, often constructing arguments in support of women using words that have repeatedly restricted women. The definition of the descriptor *feminine*, for example, relies on culturally constructed ideas of sex or gender; subsequently, without great care to nuance its use, the word inevitably reinforces problematic notions of women. In *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi clarifies,

it has long been an established practice among most feminists to use ‘feminine’ (and ‘masculine’) to represent social constructs (patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms), and to reserve ‘female’ and ‘male’ for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. Thus ‘feminine’ represents nurture and ‘female’ nature in this usage. ‘Femininity’ is a cultural construct: one isn’t born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for ‘femininity’ are natural. (64)

Unfortunately, some feminist scholars continue to normalize such standards for “femininity” by consistently employing the language to refer to imposed patriarchal social standards. In *Redeeming Eve*, for instance, Elaine Beilin frequently uses the phrase “feminine virtue” to imply a set of cultural values, such as “chastity, piety, humility, constancy, and obedience” (xv) expected of women in early modern England with application to a number of early modern women writers such as Grace Mildmay, whose diary Beilin describes as “reveal[ing] how thoroughly a woman might internalize and acknowledge the doctrine of domestic feminine virtue” (xix). In her use of “feminine,” Beilin does not clarify that the virtue of which she speaks is drawn contextually from early modern ideas; as a result, she seems to indicate the existence of a universal understanding of *feminine virtue*. Even if Beilin intends to use the phrase sarcastically, which I cannot imagine given the frequency of its appearance in her book, her language is drawn from relatively recent socio-political contexts rather than from the early modern period itself, when the English word *feminine* more commonly denoted an association with what we now call the female sex or femaleness rather than behaviors socially associated with women. In fact, *Penelope’s Web*, written by Robert Green around 1587, is the only early modern English text that I could locate that clearly joins “feminine” with “virtue” in close proximity. I believe that the real problem with Beilin’s uncritical use of *feminine virtue* is its contribution to continuing normalization of problematic associations with femaleness. If scholars rely on versions of the word *feminine* to suggest “chastity, piety, humility, constancy, and obedience,” they ironically reinforce those meanings within a context that often rather diligently seeks to deconstruct those very ideas. Further caution is necessary to avoid this perpetuation via the connotations surrounding ideas of femininity and masculinity even when the terminology is not stated explicitly.

The repetition of *feminine virtue* suggests stability in femininity's connotations from early modern England to the present. And indeed, elements associated with "the feminine" as a counterpart to "the masculine" have not necessarily changed dramatically over the past five centuries precisely because of the metaphysical control of binaries. As Elizabeth Anderson has observed in "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense,"

Feminist epistemologists note that there is hardly any conceptual dichotomy that has not been modeled after and in turn used to model the masculine/feminine dichotomy: mind/body, culture/nature, reason/emotion, objective/subjective, tough-minded/soft-hearted, and so forth. These scandalous metaphorical unions generate conceptions of knowledge, science, and rational inquiry, as well as conceptions of the objects of these inquiries, that are shaped in part by sexist views about the proper relations between men and women. (63)

Feminist literary scholarship reflects the prevalence of these conceptual dichotomies, known as gender symbolism, quite clearly in discussions of genre, and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in this passage from *Redeeming Eve*:

Such conservatism almost guaranteed that most women would not participate in the literary experimentation or secularization carried on by men of the period; yet, they would embrace the image of the learned and virtuous women and make it their own by creating a distinctively feminine persona and eventually feminine genres. Ultimately, there learning would provide the means to glorify feminine virtue on their own terms by the creation of female heroes. (xxii)

Dismissing women writers' lack of literary experimentation and secularization as a result of patriarchal bias, Elaine Beilin's scholarly project appears offers validation of the literary merit of

women writers by arguing their contributions to a “feminine” literary tradition distinct from a masculine one. In her discussion of Ester Sowernam and other early seventeenth century female pamphleteers, Beilin writes, “*because* of their Christian beliefs, these women argue seriously about feminine virtue; and to discredit their opponents’ style and views, they do not participate in the joshing, but concentrate on rhetorical response . . . to inflict damage on the methods of the masculine debaters” (250). Through this contrast, I believe Beilin reveals a way in which early modern women might redefine and reappropriate societal restrictions on female behavior. This type of analysis has value, and my thesis includes some similar arguments. However, Beilin’s masculine/feminine language confuses her point by beginning with traditional connotations of femininity and then switching to a new idea of “feminine virtue” that privileges rhetoric and logic, redeems women, and damages the “masculine” style traditionally associated with logic within a book that frequently uses both *feminine* and *masculine* in their most traditional forms.

This language not only adds confusion to her project but also creates an unstable basis for Beilin’s discussion of genre. She cites Speght’s *Mouzell for Melastomus*, for example, as a “largely *ad hominem* attack on Swetnam” that “is characterized by the new feminine literary mode of sharp language and name-calling. She calls him the ‘pestiferous enemy,’ a ‘monster,’ his work an ‘illeterate Pamphlet,’ and she fortifies her aggressive tone with descriptions like ‘your mingle mangle invective,’ bolstering her own authority with learned phrases like ‘contagious obtreaction’ and ‘this is my Chirograph’” (254). Beilin does not, however, offer any support for labeling this “new” literary form as “feminine.” Rachel Speght’s language is undeniably more creative, witty, and concise than Swetnam’s language in *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women*; however, I fail to see how her language has inducted name-calling as a new mode. Instead, her retorts tear apart Swetnam’s arguments and

serve him superior versions of his own strategies, a task Speght outright declares a challenge because Swetnam's logic is so muddled. Perhaps Beilin's idea of a new feminine genre comes not from comparing women's writing to men's, however, but from comparison within the body of early modern women's writing. Later in the book, Beilin reflects, "Torpedoing an old masculine genre and creating a new uniquely feminine one are tasks requiring radically different approaches; and the defenders of women indeed diverge widely in style and tone from the authors of mother's advice books" (266). However, if major differences among writing styles produced solely by women are grounds for declaring new genres, then Beilin has made the mistake of locating a genre's characteristics in essential qualities of the sex that produced it rather than in the literary characteristics of the written work itself.

Elaine Beilin is not alone in gendering genre for the sake of a feminist scholarly argument. In "Women's Devotional Poetry in Seventeenth-Century England," Helen Wilcox asserts, "First, as we have already observed, [seventeenth-century English women] worked in the biblical tradition, particularly of the Psalms, lyricizing and generalizing their experience (as Cook did, for instance) in the masculine Davidic voice" (455). Wilcox does not clarify what qualities make the Davidic voice masculine; perhaps she refers to the singular, first-person narrative voice of the (male) David, an Israelite king who wrote many of the biblical psalms. A greater problem than Wilcox's lack of critical foundation for her terminology, however, is the instability of the metaphysical assumptions that provide her language. In her conclusion, Wilcox acknowledges the limitations of these stereotypes, though not to the extent of the deconstruction of the *feminine/masculine* binary. While Wilcox represents the Davidic voice as masculine, Michele Osherow dedicates an entire chapter of her book *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* to her argument for the feminization of early modern representations of David,

particularly in the early Elizabethan age. Her support rests largely on John Aylmer's *An Harborovve for Faithfull and True Subjects* (1559), which defends Elizabeth's monarchical leadership partially through an association of Elizabeth with David. Osherow writes, "Thus, this biblical hero, thrust into the heart of the woman's controversy, is feminized as a result of his appearance in these contexts" (112), and later she reiterates, "Instead of relying on David's masculinity to confer power onto Elizabeth, Aylmer relies on feminine authorization to ratify the young Queen" (118). For Osherow, David's reputation as a songwriter contributes to the early modern "feminization" of his identity, whereas for Wilcox, David represents a biblical prototype of "masculine" writing. The juxtaposition of these obviously disparate scholarly positions reveals the dangerous arbitrariness of masculine/feminine descriptors, which inevitably rely on the contrast of two overly simplified halves of a binary based on shifting cultural values. The inconsistencies in the employment and interpretation of these words makes them all at once too relative, too reductive, and too convoluted for use in scholarly writing.

In the study of early modern women writers, the feminine/masculine binary has prominently influenced discussions of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, particularly in regards to the "feminization" of Christ. John Rogers, for example, in "The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition: Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,'" represents Christ's "feminization" as a rhetorical strategy designed by Lanyer to distance herself from passivity: "Shedding any affiliation with the resigned femininity of her text's Christ . . . Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* works to enact, by means of the alchemy of a loosely typological paradigm of literary history, her appointment as a poet" (446). Rogers's uncritical reference to Christ's "femininity" refers to an earlier passage, in which he describes Christ as utterly devoid of agency: "Lanyer strips her Christ of the capacity for even the passive agency exerted in the

willed consent to follow the word of God. He wordlessly, will-lessly submits to the actions performed upon him . . . he never acts in any way other than as a passive victim of his father's wrath" (440). Presumably, Rogers intended his article to be something of a feminist project that ultimately validates Lanyer's poetic voice through her skillful rhetoric. However, Rogers's language rather insidiously subverts his thesis not only by perpetuating the metaphysical construction of feminine/passive but also by dramatically amplifying it to an extent that would have shocked even very conservative early moderns. In Rogers, feminine passivity lacks agency to the point of resembling "a drugged stupor." This kind of construction within a scholarly framework is inexcusable and must be rejected in projects that value social justice.

Rogers's language is quite extreme in its carelessness and does not reflect the typical rhetoric of the numbers of other scholars who also discuss the "feminization" of Christ in Aemilia Lanyer's poetry. In "Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," Susanne Woods reiterates Janel Mueller's reversal of gender binaries: "Lanyer's Christ is a silent, feminized man who understands and is understood by women throughout the poem (Mueller 1994). His physical beauty, portrayed in language drawn from the Psalms and the Song of Songs, is subject to the desiring female gaze:" (131). For Woods and Mueller, the portrayal of Christ in "feminized" language establishes empathy and solidarity among Christ, Lanyer, and the contemporary and biblical women included throughout the poem. This strategy reflects attention to the devotional nature of religious poetry by establishing spiritual authority for women through their proximity to the divine. Tina Krontiris has gone further with this idea, pushing it towards poetic militancy in *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance*. After reflecting on female bodily imagery appropriated by medieval female mystics to describe Christ, Krontiris returns to her discussion of Lanyer's poetry: "What becomes

interesting therefore is not the originality of the posture of a feminized Christ but the fact that Lanyer deploys such a posture. Like medieval women, Lanyer appropriates a powerful religious symbol, turning it into an uncontroversial vehicle for expressing her own anger and opposition to tyrannical authority” (117). Despite the force of Krontiris’s language, however, she emphasizes only that Lanyer connects the violence done to women with the violence done to Christ without much explanation of how Lanyer might leverage this acknowledgement of violence to effect change.

Woods, Mueller, Krontiris, represent a number of other scholars who have represented the significance of Aemilia Lanyer’s sexual politics through the gendering of language, particularly of Christ as portrayed through the language of female sexuality. These ranks also include Audrey Tinkham, Michael Schoenfeldt, and Constance Furey, to name a few. I would like to point out that I do not dispute the scholarship that pinpoints Lanyer’s clever reversals of expectations that appear in her narrative plot, in her poetic form, and in her representations of men and women. However, I do want to suggest the dangers of uncritical language constructed on unstable metaphysical territory and the pitfall of reversing binaries rather than deconstructing them. Within scholarship on Aemilia Lanyer alone, the repetition of the term “feminization” has proven the potency of the metaphysical binary to self-propagate. As a correction to this language, I draw from Julia Kristeva’s widely recognized article “Women’s Time,” which observes from the perspective of 1981 an emerging problem in feminism and other social justice efforts,

It has, therefore, become clear, because of the particular radicalization of the second generation, that these protest movements, including feminism, are not “initially libertarian” movements which only later, through internal deviations or external chance manipulations fall back into the old ruts of the initially combated

archetypes. Rather, the very logic of counterpower and of countersociety necessarily generates, by its very structure, its essence as a simulacrum of the combated society or of power. (28)

Because I am applying Kristeva's ideas to feminist scholarship rather than an entire social movement, I might go too far in saying that Roberts, Woods, and others advocate a countersociety, although I see the logic of counterpower communicated throughout Tina Krontiris's *Oppositional Voices*. The fact is that many of the scholars that I have referenced have not done enough to clarify their critical framework, and consequently, whether or not they rely on binaric logic, their language certainly falls into the archetypal metaphysical patterns that feminists have so earnestly opposed. And because these archetypes are known to be false stereotypes, scholars can trap themselves into inconsistencies and misinterpretations in the pendulum swing of the logic of counterpower. Toril Moi's summary of Hélène Cixous's deconstructive theory explains this self-defeat:

If [Cixous's] analysis is correct, for a feminist to continue advocating binary thought, implicitly or explicitly, would seem to be tantamount to remaining inside patriarchal metaphysics. The idea of a unified *female* opposition pitting itself against a *male* front would thus not be a possible feminist strategy for the defeat of patriarchy: on the contrary, it would shore up the very system it seeks to undo. (125-26)

For these reasons, I have carefully avoided invoking *feminine/masculine* descriptors in my thesis. Instead, when an indication of the biological sex of a writer or group of writers is necessary for clarification or distinction, I will use the descriptor *female*. Yet metaphysical logic extends

beyond mere terminology into more complex ideas that require careful nuance in order to avoid the perpetuation of false logic and the retroactive stereotyping of the past.

Because my thesis encompasses a number of early modern women writers over a century, and particularly because my chapter on anthology and apology deals with female communities and heritage, I must explicitly address a constructed binary that has emerged in feminist scholarship: male individualism/female community. In her pedagogical article “Changing Our Originary Stories: Renaissance Women on Education, and Conversation as a Model for Our Classrooms,” Jane Donawerth refers to writings by Margaret Cavendish, Madeleine de Scudéry, and Mary Astell that advocate female education as a model for the contemporary classroom. She argues, “These women centered their vision of education on conversation, rather than on lecture or debate,” citing first Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Conversations*. Donawerth then continues,

Mary Astell proposes that conversation about religion, rather than listening to sermons, will better teach religion: ‘Hence . . . will appear the great usefulness of judicious Catechizing, which is necessary to form clear Ideas in the mind, without which it can receive but little benefit from the Discourses of the Pulpit.’ Rather than competition, these women who claimed education for women emphasized collaboration. (264)

While this idea of women writers in community, fostering conversations and collaboration, provides an appealing contrast to male dominance and debate, this contrast is critically dangerous. In this passage alone, it has caused Donawerth to liberally reinterpret the idea of catechism as a multi-directional educational exchange. But catechisms, like sermons, are written by religious authorities and highly structured. Despite the verbal interchange involved in its question and response rehearsal, a catechism lacks the individual production associated with the

kinds of collaborative “conversation about religion” that Donawerth has advocated since it heavily relies on rote memory. Subsequently, I believe Donawerth’s reading of Mary Astell’s *A Serious Proposal* to be clouded by essentialism. That is not to say that early modern women did not form and participate in highly productive, conversant communities. Micheline White and Melissa Harkrider have written about immensely influential reformist communities of women in the sixteenth century. The critical problem in Donawerth is the language that implies inherent collaboration in women as opposed to inherent individualism in men. In “The Emergence of a Feminine Spirituality in the Book of Martyrs,” Ellen Macek appropriately contextualizes sixteenth century female spiritual communities, as well as spiritual communities that involve both men and women. However, her argument for an essential “feminine spirituality” problematizes her argument. Citing Madonna Kolbenschlag’s *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye*, Macek suggests a specifically female religious experience, which involves various kinds of crises for the attainment of “the highest state of spiritual maturation, that of self-transcendence” (75). However, Macek’s conclusion reveals a logical problem in this reference to an essential female quality. She writes of female martyrs represented in Foxe,

Death in defense of their faith was the third and final process in liberation and spiritual maturation. By it, they transcended even their autonomous selves; without losing their personal identity, they became one with a higher transforming power. In freely uniting themselves with the redemptive act of sacrifice and the power of Jesus, they participated in what some modern scholars have seen as an essentially androgynous act. (77-78)

Macek’s article argues for the presence of a “feminine spiritual growth” apparent in sixteenth century narratives of female martyrs, but she addresses neither the possibility that male martyrs

might traverse similar stages of spiritual growth nor the possibility that, if these women do enter a process markedly different from men's spiritual processes, this narrative of "feminine spiritual growth" has been staged by John Foxe, who Macek takes, for the most part, to be an objective historical source. Most relevant to my point, however, is that Macek stages female spirituality in opposition to male spirituality only to conclude that the ultimate end of female spirituality was to participate in spiritual activity shared by men and women, thus an androgynous activity. If, in the beginning, any spiritual equality among men and women is acknowledged at all, as reformist principles tended towards, Macek's point unravels.

If, as I argue, essentialisms and metaphysical binaries must be avoided in the critical language of feminist scholarship, the most logical next question is, perhaps, whether the sex or gender of the writer discussed matters at all. The eagerness to identify the sex of an author has, according to Janel Mueller, prohibited adequate scholarship on the translations of Katherine Parr. In response, Edith Snook in *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England* claims, "If Mueller is right that Parr's work lacks autobiographical referents, it is not necessary to conclude that her gender is consequently invisible. I agree with Andrew Hiscock that it is misguided to seek 'subjectivity configured-on-the-page' in Parr's *Lamentacion*, but the title page and its naming of the author still present the work to the public as the production of a female writer" (31). In other cases, such as the pamphlets written by Ester Sowernam and Constantia Munda, the inability to conclude with certainty that the female pseudonyms represent female authors has significantly complicated scholarship on their work, a complication I will address in my thesis. In summary, my scholarship will emphasize the relevance of the early modern writer's sex, not because of some inherent female quality, but because of the specific kinds of socio-political context inscribed upon women in the early modern period. Much, but not

all, of early modern women's writing manifests self-consciousness of femaleness; therefore, we should attend to ways that women address their sex, as well as reasons they do not. Helen Wilcox aptly reminds us of the necessity of acknowledging historical specificities in relation to an author's sexual identity, particularly within the context of devotional poetry:

if a manuscript miscellany bears the name of a woman, for example, how can we begin to identify which of the poems in it are by her and which were copied from the work of her favorite authors? Such problems, however, probably arise from our misconceptions of early modern authorship and the possible functions of devotional poetry. . . . Most of the women did not seem to be troubled by questions of authorship; few of them, as we shall see, made claims for their poetic status or acknowledged a formal vocation. This could have been a defense mechanism against criticism of the very idea of women writing, but it seems more likely to have been part of an inherently functional attitude to devotional writing. (450)

The frequency of copied, uncited sources, the presence of anonymously published work, and the unidentifiable biographies behind pseudonyms are only a few of the commonplaces in early modern English writing that complicate current scholarship, and in particular, that kind of feminist scholarship that tries to reverse, rather than unravel, the metaphysical binary that subordinates women and their textual production. This kind of project requires an expansion and even revision of ideas of authorship. As my discussion of women and exegesis will show, early modern authorship can mean the acquisition, internalization, and reproduction of a text, a process that produces new meaning in a scope outside the tradition ideas of original authorship.

Early modern scholarship could benefit from a limitation of the term "feminist," a word fraught with potential anachronism, or perhaps even the avoidance of its use in favor of

specificity. In my own use of the term, I echo Jo Carruthers's annotation in "Neither Maide, Wife or Widow": Ester Sowernam and the Book of Esther," "The term 'feminist' is used here reflecting other critics' use of the term. However, I find the term problematic, not least because it is too unspecific. As the editors outline: 'there is no unchanging feminist orthodoxy, no settled feminist conventions, no static feminist analyses,' 'Introduction,' in Sandra Kemp [sic] and Judith Squires, eds, *Feminisms*" (341 n7). In this vague sense, Elaine Beilin, Joan Kelly and Tina Kroutiris, for example, refer to early modern women as feminists without a framework that supports the anachronistic use of the term. Alternately, in *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness*, Gerda Lerner does more to clarify a pan-historical emergence of feminism over nine centuries of women's writing. Yet she alternates her uses of the term *feminism* between a description of a particular historical moment, namely that "European intellectual women at the beginning of the 18th century . . . had reached the first three stages of feminist consciousness" (209), and loose descriptions of female intellectual production from the middle ages to the present. In reality, feminism, despite being a fairly recent historical phenomenon, even in its development within the past two hundred years has been so revolutionized and reimagined as to result in this history's subdivision into waves, as well as critical subdivisions such as anti-patriarchal discourses that intersect with other critical discourses on race, class, and sexuality.

The problematic tendency to assume shared values across wide expanses of time and situation has resulted in other anachronistic language appropriations. Beilin, for example, employs religious terminology without historical and critical framing in *Redeeming Eve*, particularly in her discussion of Katherine Parr. She writes, "Katherine Parr had a vocation for preaching, and also chose the genre of confession" (73), and "Jane Grey's vocation for preaching is clear" (80). However, Beilin does not clarify whether in her own estimation Parr and Grey

demonstrated the qualities necessary for preaching or these sixteenth century women viewed themselves as preachers (or both). *Preaching* itself is a problematic foundational word in Beilin's arguments about these women, whose piety and religious instruction has been preserved specifically through their writing in forms distinctly different from the sermons and sermon delivery of their time. The writings of Parr and Grey certainly do not seem to claim the right to speak publicly before congregations in any kind of formal or ecclesiastical ritual. Subsequently, Beilin's argument that "preaching and teaching were important steps in the establishment of a feminine literary presence" (75) obscures rather than enlightens the ways in which these women contributed to the literary presence of early modern women. Regarding Grey, Beilin explains, "The significance of Grey's 'Epistle'—a letter written in 1550 to the apostate, John Harding, 'late falne from the truth of gods moste holy word for feare of the world'—lies not only in her assumption of the role of preacher and teacher, but also in her attendant certainty that she was Harding's spiritual equal and could convince him through her written argument to return to the Reformed church" (76). If Beilin had demonstrated Grey's appropriation of the rhetorical strategies prevalent in the sermons of her day, a different kind of productive scholarship might have emerged. In the letter from Gray to Harding that Beilin references, Jane Grey does, after all, personally wield an immense rhetorical power over the forces of evil, reminiscent of Luther's invectives against devilish machinations. However, Beilin instead seems to vest authority in Jane Grey by rhetorically forcing her into the male-dominated preaching vocation as a credit to her talent rather than crediting her for the skill she demonstrates outside the preaching vocation.

In contrast to the kinds of self-destructive critical language that appear in Elaine Beilin, Tina Krontiris, and John Rogers, the nuancing of Barbara J. Harris in matters related to gender offers a useful program for the analysis of early modern women's writing. In her introduction to

*English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, Harris offers an alternative method for recovering the influential space that elite women occupied in early modern England. Her work specifically addresses the artificial distinctions between public and private spaces and functions that historians have retroactively written onto the early modern past. In actuality, Harris points out,

there is no evidence that as a group they imagined an essential difference between their interests and those of their male kin or that they articulated ambitions for themselves that were incompatible with their duties in the family. Instead, they contributed to the social reproduction of their families and class by executing a wide range of tasks that perpetuated the existing patriarchal regime. In return, they accumulated considerable power, resources, and personal prestige. The exchange is an example of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ that Denise Kandiyoti has identified as the conscious and unconscious strategy that women adopt for dealing with the structures of male dominance that define their lives. (9)

Within this mutual exchange, Harris locates the paradox between women’s subordination to patriarchy and the empowerment they obtain through patriarchy that her work seeks to understand and articulate. My thesis contributes an additional paradoxical layer to this kind of project by showing how early modern women appropriate the empowerment they have obtained through patriarchy to dismantle elements of that patriarchy. But first, I want to reiterate Harris’s point that early modern women did not view themselves as a group with agendas distinct from male agendas. Instead, their idea of advancement and accomplishment was linked more to the familial unit, not because of their confinement to domestic duty, but because families shared both their successes and their failures. Kate Narveson reminds us of the relevance of this familial mindset in regards to religious and devotional practices, a context in which the extent of female

influence may never be fully recovered. She points out, “Many early modern women . . . wrote for a readership of family or acquaintances . . . their prayers, poems, and letters spoke not only for the author but for or to the particular members of the circle she addressed” (8). This kind of corporate representation, mediated through female writing, occurred largely because of the social nature of worship. Narveson corrects contemporary ideas of individual privacy in faith by asserting, “a believer cultivated a self formed by the interaction among inner and outer forces: inward experience; the company in which devotion was practiced; and the shared patterns of godliness by which one framed thought, desire, and deed. There was no purely private, individual piety in early modern England” (7). Through scholarship such as this, we are reminded of the cultural extensiveness of female influence in early modern England, not as the political or philosophical figureheads that historical records have tended to preserve, though the political and philosophical contributions of several women speak for themselves, but as approximately half of the population that formed the communities in which social, religious, and political change emerged.

Even more significantly, my thesis contributes to the framework of Barbara J. Harris and Kate Narveson an extended critical nuance in philosophy, specifically epistemology, attention to which I believe can offer solutions to the problem of retroactively inscribing cultural assumptions on the past. I see this kind of theoretical dilemma occurring within feminist scholarship primarily in two ways: 1) Nuanced historical realities inferred from primary and secondary texts are conflated within contemporary scholarship and then appropriated broadly in the interpretation of other primary texts. 2) Contemporary presuppositions and value judgments subtly take precedence over historical presuppositions and value judgments in scholarly conversations. In my discussion of the intersections between reformation studies and feminism, I

will expand on the contradictions and counterproductivity that results from a lack of transparency regarding contemporary epistemology and a lack of attention to historical epistemology. But first, I want to clarify that I do not offer these solutions in effort to reconstruct a positivist or objective historical inquiry, a task postmodern scholarship has effectively proven impossible. Limited in time and access, scholars are left to interpret fragments of the past, and, according to Heidegger, “An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us . . . In every case interpretation is grounded in *something we see in advance* – in a *fore-sight*” (qtd in Katz xiv). This kind of transparency about framing research has resulted in inquiries with profound insights into the past, as well as our present. While disassociation from presuppositions is veritably impossible, we can prevent our presuppositions from obscuring the presuppositions of the writers whose motivations and contributions we seek to recover, a goal I see as a primary reason to incorporate epistemology into literary analysis.

And given the revolutionary effects of epistemic inquiry even within the past century, I am frequently surprised that epistemology does not receive more attention in early modern studies. For example, Thomas Kuhn’s influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) called into question the idea of objectivity by arguing that the scientific inquiry of any given time period is confined by epistemic notions of validity unique to that period. Only when a “paradigm shift” occurs can the limitations of the previous paradigm be contextualized and understood. Kuhn’s work broke down the divide between the “hard” natural sciences and the “soft” social sciences by demonstrating bias in all forms of inquiry. Although Kuhn does not directly address historical and literary analysis, his paradigm shifts, which Joyce Nielsen describes as “a social-historical process” in *Feminist Research Methods*, would naturally illuminate the social-historical climates in which texts are produced. Michel Foucault also deals

extensively in his book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966). His attention to psychology, sociology, and linguistics has led to some references to his theory in recent early modern scholarship, including Katherine Acheson's *Visual Rhetoric and Early Modern English Literature* and Joshua Scodel's *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature*.

Despite Foucault's longstanding theoretical influence in the humanities, however, little extended work on epistemic inquiry in early modern literature has been written. Current contributions include Maria Isabel Calderon Lopez's 2002 dissertation *Elizabeth Cary's life and work rediscovered: Scepticism and epistemology in "The Lady Falkland: Her Life" and "The Tragedy of Mariam"* and Megan Matchinske's *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (2009), which I will address in further detail. In addition, Alice Eardley's work "'like hewn stone': Augustine, Audience, and Revision in Elizabeth Isham's 'Booke of Remembrance' (c. 1639)" offers repeated insights into Isham's self-fashioning of her own biographical materials, including ways Isham emulated theologians like Augustine; however, Eardley only indirectly addresses the epistemology motivating Isham's textual decisions. One of the most direct cases of incorporating epistemology into the literary analysis of early modern women's texts is Edith Snook's *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England*. In particular, Snook discusses Askew's radical identity as a reader who lets the biblical text speak for itself, as well as Katherine Parr's participation in an epistemic shift that circumnavigates sanctioned scholarship and relies on the personal faith and consciousness of the individual reader. These scholarly works contribute necessary epistemic emphases, some extensive and some minor, to early modern literary scholarship; yet greater attention is needed.

One overt reason for the oversight of epistemology's inclusion in early modern scholarship occurs because "modern philosophy" as a mode of inquiry is not thought to begin until the mid-seventeenth century; as a result, discussing sixteenth century English epistemologies, for example, might initially seem anachronistic. After all, the word *epistemology* did not enter the English vernacular until the eighteenth century. However, its Greek and Latin equivalents appeared in many classical texts available to Renaissance scholars, most significantly those of Plato and Aristotle. And even before epistemology's definition as a particular study within English academia, theories of knowledge abounded in religious scholarship. This particular point clarifies a key critical difference between the pre-modern philosophy of the Renaissance and the modern philosophy that emerged at the latter end of the seventeenth century. While the field of epistemology has traditionally defined epistemology as the study of how a belief becomes knowledge, or what justifies knowledge, this particular distinction can be confusing in the context of sixteenth century knowledge theories that relied so heavily on doctrine. Although modern philosophers might locate epistemology in the transition from belief to knowledge, privileging (confirmed) knowledge over (unconfirmed) belief, pre-modern philosophers and theologians during the reformations sometimes located their epistemology in the transition from (unconfirmed) knowledge to (confirmed) belief. John Calvin, one of the most notable theologian-philosophers of his time, defined faith as "a firm and certain knowledge" (qtd. in Muller 19). And the intertwining of faith and knowledge certainly complicates sixteenth century epistemology with the unpredictable element of the supernatural. For clarity's sake, I will continue to use the term *epistemology* throughout my thesis to indicate pre-modern knowledge theory.

As my chapter on women and exegesis will show, knowledge theory was fully in existence and use throughout the sixteenth century, and arguably performed a crucial role in both the English Renaissance and England's reformations. However, a modern rational bias has somewhat impaired the study of sixteenth century knowledge theory, which cannot be extricated from doctrinal approaches to scriptural exegesis. In "Early Modern Women Philosophers and the History of Philosophy," O'Neill references the omissions of Mary Warnock's 1996 anthology *Women philosophers* as representative of similar problematic censorship due to modern bias: "In Warnock's zeal to separate religion from philosophy proper, she eliminates genuine philosophical writings—at least, relative to her own criteria—simply because they deal with religious issues" (191). Of course, this bias has not affected solely philosophical inquiry. In their introduction to *Strong Voices, Weak History*, Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham identify this rational bias at work in Italian literary anthologies: "Literary historians of the modern secular state are partly responsible for the weakened voices of the Italian female mystics because, according to Armando Maggi in his essay, they relegated spiritual writers to a separate canon, of interest only to students of religion" (7). What other early modern literary voices might be suppressed because of religious content? And what in the history of epistemic inquiry has not yet been recovered?

In the development of my own critical framework to analyze the transference of knowledge, I am indebted to Megan Matchinske, particularly her book *Women Writing History in Early Modern England*, in which she establishes a broad view of history as a series of intergenerational exchanges, an ongoing chain of bequeathing and inheriting. As a correction to the kinds of modern secular biases that have in the past diminished attention to religious and mystical early modern texts, Matchinske emphasizes the specifically moral and moralizing

impetus for these ideological transferences by “choos[ing] to reanimate female appropriations of the past, the legacies that women have left to posterity, by thinking about written history in its less explicit forms – as advice, counsel and memory” (1). She builds this recovery approach to history on the often unwritten reality of female participation in and administration of the early modern rituals that make up the structure of heritage, including the tangible inheritance and succession of primogeniture and the less tangible intergenerational exchanges surrounding birth and death. I concur with Matchinske’s criticism of the kinds of scholarship that has

precipitated more recent historical forgettings. Unable or unwilling to accept a documented past that locates its truth in a desire for a better tomorrow, we as modern practitioners of history forget as well the scores of early modern women writers who were history’s keepers, who saw their work as deeply involved with the past, and who often announced those connections both explicitly and with confidence. This book seeks to recover such historical encounters and to recover as well the instructional charge that might have impelled them. (6)

Each of the women writers included in my thesis clearly links her authority as a purveyor of truth with scriptural mandates. Although these women’s lives span a century of early modern history and represent variant female experiences in the middle class, upper class, and nobility, their shared sense of connectedness with biblical texts as a means of self-definition and a justification for their instruction sheds light on the inseparable relationship between faith and epistemology.

Touching on epistemology, Matchinske reminds us,

Historical method offers us a way of passing on what we know. That it might simultaneously and variously have been shaped by what it means to be a woman, and what role that identity might play in the future, seems a question very much

worth interrogating. To the extent that we continue to anticipate what is yet to come by looking backward at the past, we would do well to examine that making, both formally, in the patterns we choose, and in the way that gender concerns may influence and direct such imaginings (10).

My thesis adds to Matchinske's provocative approach to an epistemic foundation, which offers us a way of understanding what we know and how we know it, as well as a way of recovering what knowledge acquisition, confirmation, and conference meant for early modern women. This kind of clarification is necessary to overcome the ambiguity of "what it means to be a woman," a question broadly contested throughout the history of feminist epistemology to the present. This nuance frames my discussion of early modern women writers by addressing what womanhood meant to those women themselves. Their self-definition must not be confused with contemporary definitions of woman or femaleness, especially within a literary thesis such as mine, although there is a need for research that contributes to a framework that synthesizes pivotal revolutions in the definition of womanhood into a useful framework for critical analysis.

This reality demands a reworking of scholarly representations of philosophical development in the early modern period. In *Women, Imagination and the Search for Truth in Early Modern France*, Rebecca M. Wilkin criticizes Carolyn Merchant's influential work *The Death of Nature* for its perpetuation of reductionist binaries,

the story of how masculine science subdued 'disorderly, active nature' couched historical change in terms of an eternal war of the sexes, reinforcing gender stereotypes rather than breaking them down. Merchant mourned a prescientific golden age when nature was understood to be both alive and female paradoxically

validating an essentialist view of nature that, as Merchant showed, lent itself so well to construing science as a masculine enterprise. (3)

Merchant's project, among others, falls short of adequately considering the relationship between exegesis and epistemology that directly shaped the origins of modern Western philosophy, which emerged alongside what arguably became the climactic and fractured conclusion of reformist efforts in mid-seventeenth century England. Literary scholarship has also not done enough to explore the religio-philosophical intersections of exegesis and epistemology despite a great deal of emphasis on the Word of God. In *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women As Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, Margaret Hannay has done a great deal to explore the relationship between women and the Word. She observes,

Although the Reformation has traditionally been hailed as a liberating force for women, the Protestant emphasis on the Word of God encouraged education for women so that they could read the Bible and the appropriate commentaries, not so they could speak or write their own ideas. The court replaced the convent as the milieu most likely to encourage scholarship for aristocratic women, but the enforced rhetorical ignorance of women was maintained. (7-8)

However, Hannay's last sentence is somewhat vague. Who was enforcing rhetorical ignorance, and how? The court? or men in general? Hannay writes off the Protestant emphasis too quickly as coming solely from male exclusionists and subsequently limits the scope of what women could accomplish not only through their interactions with Scripture but also through their writing. She simply does not address the reality that educated elite women could use exegesis and epistemology to influence the formation of reformist doctrine and practice as a means of avoiding and even revoking social limitations on women.

In contrast, in her article “The ‘Parrhesiastic Game’: Textual Self-Justification in Spiritual Narratives of Early Modern Women,” Gae Lyn Henderson has usefully applied Foucault’s idea of *parrhesia* or fearless speech to the resistance employed by early modern women in a systemic attempt to challenge orthodox discourse, or in some cases, actually participate in its rewriting. Of the spiritual narratives of female Quakers like Margaret Fell, for example, Henderson points out, “What I want to examine here are the (sub)culturally sanctioned textual strategies that such narratives strategically employ to validate their own existence. Female spiritual narratives . . . record personal revelation, and they reinterpret scripture” (424). What I find particularly useful in Henderson’s framework is her articulation of the relationship between the interpretive process (exegesis) and the written articulation of exegesis that validates its own existence. As an externalization of epistemology, exegesis functions simultaneously as acquisition, confirmation, and articulation of truth. Henderson later touches on this multi-layered effect as it appears in early modern women’s spiritual narratives:

Female spiritual narratives in many ways embody a pattern similar to this Foucauldean drift [toward the will to truth]; they transgress forbidden textual territory, continually veer toward and away from madness, but finally assert a concluding testimony (knowledge/truth) . . . these claims are finally limited by their founding authority. Such narratives always function to transmit *God’s* will and word, rather than to assert authoritative personal voice. (425)

In this portion of her analysis, Henderson almost imperceptibly switches the rhetorical perspective of her argument’s structure. By the “textual territory” Henderson describes as “forbidden” I assume she refers to that exegetical relationship to biblical texts that early modern (and earlier) church authorities had often formally withheld from women through their exclusion

from clerical authority. Henderson may also refer to interpretations outside established orthodoxy. Either way, or both ways, when Henderson references the “forbidden” nature of this territory, she writes from the perspective of past historical values. I find that the remainder of this point, though, is centered around more modern values of authoritativeness that prefer to distinguish individual agency from divine will.

As I have already demonstrated, the separation between the religious and the philosophical has created significant holes in early modern scholarship. In this case, I think Henderson creates too much a divide between the spiritual empowerment and individual agency. While Henderson elsewhere acknowledges a tension between women’s drawing from divine authority as a means of developing *some* agency, her conclusion that they have no authoritative personal voice aside from transmission of divine will seems rather bleak. It certainly overlooks the exegetical foundations of epistemology in reformist England, which embraced a supernatural element in enlightenment through the favor found in divine election. The women which Henderson refers to, as well as the women I include in my thesis, lived and wrote in religious communities in which agency for any believer (male or female) apart from divine will was actually a sin of human arrogance based on false assumptions about God, a feeble exercise of human will in the face of divine sovereignty. Consequently, I argue that scholarship should not underestimate the potency of early modern women writers’ apologetics for their authority precisely because of their epistemic involvement in shaping the reformist movements that affected England’s social and political outcomes.

While I have criticized Elaine Beilin’s metaphysical language as contradictory to the aims of her project, her attention to women’s knowledge acquisition through exegesis has positively influenced my formulation of an approach to early modern women’s texts that

specifically highlights epistemological shifts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Beilin's work has alerted me to the underlying rhetoric of devotional writing in passages such as the following: "Like Anne Askew and other Reformers, they think Biblically, and their writing modulates, often imperceptibly, between Biblical quotations or references and their own words. Almost without exception, they write in the 'Protestant plain style,' an unornamented, Biblical English aimed at a universal audience" (51). Although some scholarship has identified this tendency in early modern women's writing to incorporate extensive biblical material as evidence of an inhibited subjectivity, instead, I see it as powerful evidence of a new and radical formulation of exegesis as a process of internalization and recontextualization. Additionally, I see exegesis employed by early modern women to create experiential epistemologies based on catalogues of women and their godly actions. Beilin references Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* as a pivotal anthology in this regard, leading to a widespread demand for female narratives and texts by the 1540s (50). She later elaborates on Aemilia Lanyer's related strategy, "While she refers to misogynist tracts and knew their traditional rhetorical devices, as well as those of women's defenders, the core of her argument evolves not from repeating and reversing the old terms of the woman question, but from her admiring portraits of living women praised as the descendants of a redeemed Eve, the daughters of Jerusalem, and the Virgin" (182). By incorporating stories of biblical, classical, and contemporary women into *Salve Deus*, Lanyer maximizes the epistemic role of female exempla by recontextualizing the experiences of women across history to form a basis for female knowledge confirmation and acquisition through new approaches to biblical stories.

In my theoretical framework for my thesis, I have taken to heart Merry E. Wiesner's 1987 challenge to scholars of the reformations, "We need to develop a methodology of gender

analysis now, before the whole story is in, to help structure future research and avoid research shaped solely by the availability of sources. We must overcome our resistance to theory, even though being more bold and addressing larger issues results in harsher criticism” (317). More recently, scholars who have contributed this kind of methodology with attention to the religious context that surrounds early modern women writing include Megan Matchinske, Kimberly Anne Coles, and Susan Felch. These scholars have each, in various ways, discussed the relevance of epistemology and exegesis to the analysis of early modern women’s texts, and my thesis draws on their contributions in support of a more sustained look at reformist women’s devotional texts. I use “devotional texts” in a broader sense discussed by Susan Felch in “English Women’s Devotional Writing: Surveying the Scene.” Felch writes,

Although in contemporary parlance we often limit the term ‘devotional’ to more private moments—times of individual contemplation and prayer—for many early modern women acts of devotion would have extended not only to household and common worship but also to all those activities that fostered devotion to God, including offering advice, prophesying, discussing sermons and theological matters, recording God’s providence in one’s own life, and the like. (119)

This inclusionary definition of early modern women’s devotional writing seeks to contextualize historically the intentionality behind this kind of textual production. Felch continues, “Genres that are not inherently ‘devotional,’ such as life writing or exegesis, may well be framed by or interpolated with prayers or meditations.” I am uncertain why Felch would question the inherent devotional nature of exegesis (or life writing) given her previous conclusions other than to point to a habit of literary scholars of devotional literature to avoid discussions of biblical interpretation.

Regardless, Felch's article points to positive directions in scholarship on early modern women's devotional and religious writing, which well deserve the continued rethinking of the boundaries of form. She imagines a "continuum of women's religious writing" that "might be read as proceeding from internal to interventionist texts, from private forms to the more public, from devotional to political writings, or from the religious to the ethical" (118). My thesis includes representatives from this range of stances, which have produced a wide range of genres. While I acknowledge that writers select genres for varying purposes to varying effects, this approach to devotional writing demands the engagement of multiple forms alongside one another to address the scope of what women's devotional writing accomplished during the English reformations. Similarly, the evolutionary discourse about the English reformations justifies the range of authors in my thesis. I also argue for a scholarship that distinguishes contemporary epistemologies from historical epistemologies in order to clarify the relationship between original intention and reception and current usefulness of women's literary production.

Despite scholarly awareness of ontological relevance, one relevant branch of ontology, epistemology, is often overlooked. Epistemology is always at work in textual production; it shapes the process of inquiry as well as communication because it is the theory that distinguishes between belief and fact. Every propositional statement preserved in a literary text represents an underlying theory of knowledge. The recovery of what a writer has chosen to believe about knowledge in order to justify statements of fact can provide for scholars a significant way to understand the past. In my thesis, attention to epistemology will illuminate the relationship between faith and knowledge within the context of a philosophical shift in England. I argue that the "English Reformation" was less a static historical period than an evolution that spanned over a century. Reformation theology shook the foundational epistemologies of the Catholic Church

that had anchored England's political and social structures for centuries. Recognizing the ramifications of the reshaping of England's philosophical underpinnings, the educated elite immediately engaged in public conversation in efforts to guide the reformations to philosophically, politically, and religiously stable ground. Educated women recognized an unprecedented chance both to participate in and shape this conversation through their devotional writings, personal narratives, private correspondence, and poetry. Their strategy was twofold: to contribute to the Protestant reaction against the centralized authority of the church and to react in a broader sense against the exclusive authority of men to engage in epistemic discourse.

In my introductory first chapter, I have reviewed existing scholarship on early modern women writers while illustrating how attention to epistemology can correct theoretical problems in the interpretation of women's texts with positive examples from Harris and Narveson. I have also established my theoretical relationship to Megan Matchinske, who seamlessly weaves together material, historical, epistemic approaches to women's literature. I have also distinguished myself from Elaine Beilin, Tina Krontiris, and other scholars whose feminist approaches to women's texts sometimes re-inscribe the same problematic binaries they seek to address back onto women and their literary production. In the following chapters, as I address various intersections of history, epistemology, and theology to frame my analysis of early modern women's literary production, the contextualization of each women's work is complexly multifaceted. To organize material from a broad range of writers and their situations, I have divided chapter content in a way that reflects the macrocosmic epistemic process of acquiring, internalizing, and transmitting knowledge. Within each chapter, I will trace individual encounters with these epistemic functions, as well as the ways in which they are used to contribute to particular reformist efforts.

My second chapter expands on the idea of evolving English reformations and discusses the relationship between epistemic questions regarding certainty and reformist efforts to articulate and employ revised exegetical (interpretive) methods. The gradual increase in lay access to biblical texts in English, as well as the dissemination of reformist treatises in England, ensured that centralized clerical authority would not maintain its exclusive grip on the interpretive process. If, as reformists so adamantly insisted, the Catholic Church was fraught with error and corruption, then who could be trusted with the task of confirming truth with certainty in the midst of concerns over eternal destiny, not to mention more immediate political peril? And, if the centralized authority of the Church is proven erroneous, who could control the definitions and functions of authority for a devout English people? This examination of women and exegesis, the religious demonstration of the knowledge acquisition as obtained through Scripture as both model and authority, clarifies the epistemic crux between belief and knowledge.

I will address ways that women's approaches to knowledge are necessitated by their exclusion from traditional means of accessing knowledge through universities and clerical training, beginning with the epistemic achievements of Anne Askew. Her *Latter Examination* and concluding materials differ significantly in strategy and tone from *The First Examinations*, and in this shift I identify an emergent exegetical force that blends some previously established reformist exegetical methods with experiential knowledge acquisition that results in new knowledge production, as well as a radical public invitation for a corporate confirmation of knowledge via consent. I will then continue with Katherine Parr, who joined Askew as one of the first English women to incorporate her personal exegesis with translation of biblical texts. My analysis retrieves Katherine Parr's literary production from some scholarly accusations of her

passivity as a conformist to social mores, instead arguing that Parr quite powerfully advocates individual authority within submission to the Word, as well as education and participation in theological training for all believers, including women such as she. Parr intertwines her reformist and female identities, positioning women to benefit from the social change that she believes will result from religious change. This chapter demonstrates how questions of theology and epistemology, particularly the desire to reconcile faith and certainty, intersect with historiography through Anne Dowriche's *The French Historie*. Writing several decades after Askew and Parr, Dowriche reveals increased liberty in her appropriation of exegesis, establishing her belief that appropriate and necessary exegetical commentary can be provided through the moral nature of the poet's function. Finally, I transition from women's contributions to the developing reformations through their written attempts to delineate the nature of faith and certainty to the process of internalizing this relationship with the texts using "My Booke of Rememberance" by Elizabeth Isham, who extensively and exegetically reframes scripture in terms of her life experience.

In my third chapter I focus on interiority and identity as a reflection of the epistemic act of internalizing the knowledge produced through exegesis. In Scripture, female exegetes were (re)locating female exempla of identities that not only reflected conventional, often maternal social functions but also greatly expanded the possibilities for biblically based female identities that strained and problematized social conventions that demanded women's public silence. To gain a public audience, early modern women frequently circumvented or exploited the undisputed family-centered identities of mother, wife, sister, and daughter as platforms to aid their reshaping of cultural expectations as Elizabeth Joceline does in *The Mother's Legacie*. She uses her maternal authority to carve out a space in which she can redefine maternal authority

through legal and ministerial language and in doing so represents herself as a source for her husband's instruction as well as her child's emulation. Elizabeth Isham also draws on the construction of spiritual legacy as a means of preserving instruction for a wider audience. Furthermore, she reconstructs the epistemic process within her narrative to frame her spiritual conclusions and vindicate her unusual choice to avoid marriage. Confident in her exegetical abilities, Isham first imitates then challenges male authority, offering instead what she believes to be practices more consistent with her interpretation of Scripture. I conclude this portion by demonstrating how prevalent mystical marriage metaphors, in which metaphorical gender reversals were common, creates a space for early modern women to value exegesis that comes from a specifically female perspective. Aemilia Lanyer draws heavily from the language of mystical marriage to create a reformist cultural position for female authority; her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is characterized by epistemic irony that restores the biblical authority of women.

Finally, my fourth chapter focuses on the externalization of female identity, both in articulation and defense through apologetic forms, namely written public debate. Anthologies or catalogues of notable achievement originated long before the early modern period and were popularized by Boccaccio, who wrote separate chronicles of historical male and female achievement. The rhetorical employment of female exempla for the sake of categorically defending women against false accusation, however, seems to have originated with Christine de Pisan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, which some cite as the instigator of the *querelle des femmes*. I argue that women writers, like Christine de Pisan, recognized the power of positioning themselves within a longstanding tradition of women writers to validate the reproduction of female-authorized knowledge. In contrast, men writing during the early English reformations tended to obscure the history of female accomplishment in favor of representing their

achievements as fleeting abnormalities, albeit extremely useful ones when leveraged as reformist propaganda as in the case of John Bale's printing of the writings of Anne Askew and Elizabeth Tudor. I include the inflammatory *First Blast of the Trumpet* by John Knox and John Aylmer's response *An Harbrowe for the Faithful* to represent the intersection of Protestantism with debates over the biblical, historical, and rational justification for female authority. Knox and Aylmer each support their opposing positions with female exempla chosen from Scripture and history. Despite Knox's antagonism towards female leadership, his use of exempla contradicts his argument, possibly even to the later benefit of Elizabeth upon her assumption of the throne. And despite Aylmer's stated support for Elizabeth's authority, the structure of his argument and deployment of exempla reflects a personal opposition to female authority in general.

My analysis of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum* demonstrates the relevance of female exempla to the continuing clarification of Protestant ideology through exegesis in the early seventeenth century. Lanyer incorporates epistemic irony throughout the work to highlight the ample ability of women to perceive and confirm truth in ways that men have failed to acknowledge. I also demonstrate how some feminist scholarship has overlooked the egalitarian nature of Lanyer's exegesis in focusing solely on her community of women when, in actuality, Lanyer has emphasized women's affinity for spiritual perception as a means of restoring them to spiritual genealogies of both men and women. Furthermore, I address the ways that Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam, and Constantia Munda counter Joseph Swetnam by developing contemporary communities of female exempla that trace their heritage back through their female biblical and historical predecessors.

These familiar women writers have each received critical attention, especially within the recent past. However, there have been few attempts to analyze their participation within broader

and ongoing English reformations. Kimberly Anne Coles exemplifies this kind of synthesis in her recent work *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England*. However, her work does not address epistemology as the foundational level where women's greatest influence during the reformations took place. Because of the demand for self-authorization through scriptural interpretation during the religious tumult of the reformations, I will begin my discussion at a hermeneutical level, specifically addressing the epistemic space that lies between reading, interpreting, and applying texts. I will then show how this hermeneutical process is internalized by women in a conscious reshaping of identity and then externalized in a conscious reshaping of history through the acquisition and conference of knowledge. My work will reveal how this multifaceted approach to early modern women's epistemology contributes to a better understanding of the intersections between women and faith in early modern writings by showing that women located lasting power for influence in the intangible space between knowledge and belief.

## CHAPTER 2

### WOMEN AND EXEGESIS

Inherited from continental reformers, the cataclysmic doctrinal shifts within Christendom increased the Catholic Church's determination to solidify social, political, and theological authority within early sixteenth-century England. Historian Christopher Haigh stresses in his work *English Reformations* that the phrase "English Reformation" has frequently misled scholars. In actuality, he argues, there were many reformations that occurred in small regions throughout England over a period of time, often reversing what previous reformations had accomplished. While traditional reformed history might teleologically insist that England was ripe for reform by the sixteenth century, such a view tends to overlook the fact that the entire history of the Church is a history of reform, reformulation, and re-articulation of Church doctrine. Apart from the widespread and popular European rejection of the term *Catholicism* as reflective of the universal Church, what distinguishes the English reformation(s) from other stages of Church history is the particular set of political circumstances that divided secular and religious authority and the subsequent anxiety over England's identity as a nation independent from Rome. This anxiety led to what Haigh identifies as England's three sixteenth legislative reformations, occurring between 1530-1538 under Henry, between 1547 and 1553 under Edward, and in 1559 under Elizabeth. These three reformations are largely political, instigated by monarchs desiring to create a necessary national unity by stabilizing monarchical power; however, the rhetoric fueling these political changes relied heavily on the language of religious reform to validate the drastic measures required to achieve these political ends. Borrowing the language of the reformers, however, did come with a price. Namely, these political reformations invited at a foundational philosophical level the widespread participation of lay people in the

development of the underlying religious theory that would ensure the success of the political reforms. As a result, analyses of the religious shifts in the period cannot divorce the theological from the political. The evolutionary nature of the English reformation first appears with its three politicized starts and restarts and continues throughout the seventeenth century as splintered Protestant groups fight to gain complete control of reformation rhetoric by representing themselves as the inheritors and progenitors of the “true” Reformation.

What did not change during the ongoing reformation was England’s seemingly impermeable identification with faith, requiring that any social or political change be justified theologically. Consequently, religious discourse naturally informs scholarly inquiry into the textual production of early modern England. However, certain elements of the philosophical foundation that produced literary, historical, and theological texts during the early modern period have received surprisingly little scholarly attention. In particular, I argue that attention to epistemology clarifies literary, historical, and theological intersections with profound results for the study of early modern women, who found in the intangible space between knowledge and belief a powerful opportunity to reinstate female authority in religious discourse and knowledge production.

Of course, this assertion naturally results in the questioning of why epistemology, the study of knowledge and belief, is so critical in early modern scholarship. Epistemology seeks to understand what constitutes knowledge, or in other words, how a belief is justified or confirmed as knowledge. While philosophy has identified several categories of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with propositional knowledge, the type of knowledge expressed through written or verbal assertions. Without intentional metacognition, the space between belief and knowledge is often traversed quickly and subconsciously. For scholars separated from the subjects of their

inquiry by hundreds of years, literary studies can easily become a chain of subconscious assumptions. Consequently, the attempt to concretize and articulate the process of a writer's justification of knowledge stabilizes the inquiry at a foundational level. For writers during the English reformations, the justification of knowledge is tied directly to exegesis, or textual interpretation.

Sixteenth century scholars drew heavily from both biblical texts and classical texts, but philosophical problems arose in the attempt to synthesize the two. According to the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*,

The main stream of academic philosophy up to the end of the sixteenth century was, of course, scholastic Aristotelianism, accepting pretty much without question Aristotle's explanation of how knowledge is attained through sensory activity, when the sense organ is functioning properly, in its proper medium, for its proper objects. Then, the form of the object known is abstracted by the intellect, and is known conceptually. The primary difficulty for scholars surrounded the discussion of whether God's existence and nature can be known by natural means and through natural evidence. (669)

Before the reformations began, this theoretical problem plagued only the academic and clerical elite, who could internally theorize solutions for the problem of uncertainty while externally prescribing the practical outworking of faith for the laypeople. However, when the reformations began, a disintegration of centralized spiritual authority disseminated authority, in part, to the individual conscience.

Unfortunately, trusting that each individual conscience would come to the same conclusions about faith proved impossible. In his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, Thomas More

articulated the reasonable concern that eventually some interpreter of scripture would interpret a passage of Scripture differently than the rest of the Church, resulting in confusion: “As for your white and black, never shall it be that ye shall see the thing black that all other shall see white. But ye may be sure that if all other see it white, and ye take it for black, your eyen be sore deceived” (624). The potential for multiplicity and fracture within the Church caused leading reformers like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin to labor over the epistemic question of certainty: how to *know* truth and distinguish from erroneous belief. And their solutions each privileged the authority of the Word of God over human authority with confidence that submission to the Word and the literal interpretation thereof would reform and reunite Christendom.

But emphasis on the Scriptures was certainly not new within the Church, nor was a literal hermeneutic. Theologians over many centuries had devoted great energy to refining exegetical strategies, which throughout the Middle Ages and even into the early sixteenth century occurred in some form of the *quadriga*, a method that utilized four layers of meaning, or senses: literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. As Richard A. Muller explains, this method “asks that the exegete move past the rather bare grammatical meaning of the text to doctrine, morality, and hope—in short, from *littera* to *credenda*, *agenda*, and *sperenda*” (“Biblical Interpretation” 11). This series of layers appears significantly more complex and subjective than the reformers’ emphasis on a single, unifying, literal interpretation of Scripture. In fact, in *Obedience of a Christian Man*, William Tyndale accuses the pope of hiding the truth of the literal sense:

They devyde the Scrypture into iiii senses, the literall, the tropologycall, allegorycall anagogical. The literall sence is become nothyng at all. For the pope hath taken yt cleane awaie, and hath made it his possession He hath partly locked

it up with the false and counterfaieted keyes of his tradicions cerimonies . . .

Tropological and anagogicall are termes of theyr owne faynyng and altogether unnecessary. . . . Thou shalt understode therefore that the Scripture hath but one sence which is the lyterall sence. And that litterall sence is the rote and grounde of all. (106-7)

For Tyndale, all biblical meaning resides within the literal sense. If a scriptural passage uses figurative language, the meaning behind the figure of speech is the literal sense. Tyndale and other reformers proceeded optimistically, assuming that a solely literal interpretation would result in the unification of Christendom without the errors they associated with the papacy. However, if a solely literal interpretation seems impossible, so it was. The four senses of scripture did not entirely disappear from reformed hermeneutics; rather they were somewhat reformulated and renamed as the reformations continued, a refining process that had actually begun centuries before with the theologians of the early Church.

Despite these echoes of the past, a course-altering shift did occur within the English reformations. In differentiating reformist exegesis from the exegesis of the Middle Ages, Richard A. Muller explains, “It was also a transition from a precritical approach that could distinguish (but seldom separated) scriptural meaning from a traditional significance to an equally precritical approach that could identify, on occasion, wide diastasis between Scripture and tradition while remaining within the traditionary exegetical conversation” (14). The gaps between Scripture and tradition that reformists identified did not lead to the rejection of the entirety of traditional Church authority, but they did lead to the insistence on individual priesthood, a role that includes self-mediation for sin and personal access to the Scriptures. Martin Luther, arguably the most influential of the European reformers, reasons in his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the*

*German Nation*, “Thus we are all consecrated as priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: “Ye are a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter ii. 9); and in the book of Revelations: “and hast made us unto our God (by Thy blood) kings and priests” (Rev. v. 10). . . . A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man, has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops” (n. pag.). Luther’s original articulation of the doctrine later referred to as the “priesthood of the believer” contains both religious and subtle socio-political implications of an unprecedented egalitarian view of souls. In England, Henry VIII’s 1538 injunction requiring parishes to obtain English Bibles politically reinforced the reformist ideal of public access to the Scriptures. Although the 1543 Act for the Advancement of True Religion, eventually repealed by Edward, limited Bible reading to the wealthy and educated, it significantly allowed for the private reading of scripture by noblewomen.

The democratization of scriptural exegesis brought epistemic questions to the forefront of theological debate: what is knowledge? how is knowledge acquired? what confirms knowledge? These questions, freed from the confines of academies and brought into discussion among England’s privately educated elite, required new protestant articulations of what the interpretive process would involve. The *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* posits the neo-Platonic theory of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) as the most influential of knowledge theories that circulated during the sixteenth century:

Our souls have two tendencies, one towards the corporeal world and the senses, and the other towards God. The second represents the rational part of the soul.

The mind seeks to go beyond temporal change and tries to find its end and good in eternity. Knowing God would involve knowing infinite truth and goodness. By use of the intellect we can rise towards this end, which we could not do by use of

our senses. But as long as we have our bodily existence, we are limited in our ability to know. (674)

According to this theory, the pursuit of spiritual truth is tied directly to the intellect, and the senses prove futile, if not hindering, to the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. Reformers conceded the impossibility of acquiring full and complete knowledge of God during humanity's earthly existence yet insisted to varying degrees in the availability of certainty, or a confirmation of knowledge, for believers.

This particular point clarifies a key critical difference between the pre-modern philosophy of the Renaissance and the modern philosophy that emerged at the latter end of the seventeenth century. While philosophers have traditionally defined epistemology as the study of how a belief becomes knowledge, or what justifies knowledge, this particular distinction can be confusing in the context of sixteenth century knowledge theories that relied so heavily on doctrine. In her comparative study of the doctrinal positions of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, Susan E. Schreiner identifies two epistemic quandaries that emerge in Reformation epistemologies:

“the certainty of salvation and the certainty of authority. The former involves the claim to an inward, experiential, and subjective certainty of salvation. The latter concerns the attempt to legitimate this experience exegetically. To ground experiential certainty on the Bible necessitated the concomitant claim for the authoritative interpretation of Scripture; the experience justified by scriptural authority demanded a hermeneutical certitude. (189-90)

Of course, certainty over one's eternal destiny held the utmost importance for truth seekers, particularly as religious conflict in England grew increasingly embroiled in politics and carried

life-altering and often deadly consequences for misalignment. But having rejected the authority associated with Church tradition, reformists realized the necessity of a reliable authority accessible to individual believers, thus the emphasis on the consistent, unifying power of the literal interpretation of Scripture. Schreiner's work, however, points out the problematic circularity of the reasoning: a believer locates certainty inward and justifies the certainty through exegesis. The believer's authority to successfully exegete rests on the inner certainty of salvation. The nuanced differences in the works of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin demonstrate the difficulty of grounding certainty outside this cycle. In fact, the lack of single solution to the epistemic question of certainty from early reformists would eventually lead to the Renaissance skepticism of the late sixteenth century.

Under these conditions, the reformist emphasis on a literal hermeneutic provided individuals with agency, if not the utmost certainty, and adherents of reformist theology eagerly engaged biblical exegesis with confidence that this agency, a newfound privilege for many, would result in confidence, a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because the eventual outcomes of the English reformations were still uncertain by the middle of the sixteenth century, these new agents joined an increasingly public conversation about piety, theology, and faith in increasing numbers. Many influential new voices belonged to women, eager to contribute to the conversation both theoretically and practically. These women, operating in the intangible space between knowledge and belief, used their faith's emerging search for certainty as a powerful opportunity to exercise their authority in religious literary discourse and knowledge production, beginning with exegesis: the newly personal encounter between the believer and the text.

The value that attention to epistemology offers to literary studies centers on two primary questions: what do writers write about epistemology, or knowledge acquisition and conference?

and what epistemology do writers actually employ in the process of acquiring and conferring knowledge? Within the context of the sixteenth century, the second question necessitates careful attention to exegesis because of reformists' determination to privilege spiritual epistemology and to locate it directly in the Word of God. Although pre-reformation exegesis might be associated with clerical scholars, my thesis will emphasize the exegesis of the laity, especially the female laity. This chapter, as well as the chapters to follow, will include women writers of disparate historical moments, social constraints, political inclinations, and even theological positions. What unifies these writers is the search for epistemic certainty, which consistently draws them into personal exegesis of Scripture. While their individual motivations for the preservation and publication of their texts might vary somewhat, each writer demonstrates an internalization of the reformist ideals of *sola scriptura* and the priesthood of the believer by positioning their individual convictions against institutional error. In private spaces where knowledge and belief become one, early modern women writers found motivation and obligation to lend their consciences to the reformist efforts to ensure their integrity and success.

As their exegesis often differed in its form and audience from academic lectures and clerical sermons, women were reformulating devotional and spiritual genres before anyone could develop rules to restrict them. In a recent survey of scholarship on women's devotional writing, Susan Felch identifies the fluid nature of these genres:

not only is it difficult to categorize what is and what is not "devotional" literature, but in addition the linearity of such a continuum masks the incompatibility of the binaries it suggests: prayers and paraphrased psalms, for instance, might well be written for common, public use, while some prophetic texts, written as defensive statements of orthodoxy, might have in view a limited circulation. Genres that are

not inherently “devotional,” such as life writing or exegesis, may well be framed by or interpolated with prayers and meditations. The difficulty, or even the desirability, of distinguishing “devotional” from “religious” writing, the problematic categories highlighted by a linear continuum, and the vexed question of understanding “public” and “private” in the early modern period are only some of the theoretical issues that currently occupy scholars of women’s devotional writing (119)

In this article, Felch does not clarify the genre standards that determine a text’s “devotional” status while implying that exegesis, at least traditionally, would not qualify. However, as my work will demonstrate, the word-centered epistemology of the reformation turned exegesis into a specifically devotional act whereby women could demonstrate their piety with their submission to and interaction with Scripture. These women specifically and strategically utilized the complicated nature of defining religious genres to enter the public and private exegetical spheres from which they had before been formally excluded. And because England’s politics had dramatically heightened the stakes for Protestant adherents, outspoken male Protestants could not afford to silence women like Anne Askew, whose public writings challenged the limitations confining female voices to private spheres, when those voices so effectively garnered support for the Protestant cause.

Anne Askew likely would have lived as a gentlewoman at her husband’s Lincolnshire estate had she not held such fervent religious and social convictions. That her husband Thomas Kyme ejected her from his household suggests that Anne Askew broke from conventional expectations of wives simultaneously by voicing opinions distinct from her husband’s and by insisting on a distinct identity. In her writing, she avoids taking her husband’s last name,

choosing to be known publicly as Anne Askew. In fact, the strength of Askew's convictions cause her to risk protections afforded her as a gentlewoman apparently by appealing her case before more than one court. Elaine Beilin notes, "Askew's own behavior was confrontational, for by her later account, when she heard that the priests of Lincoln would 'put me to great trouble,' she went to Lincoln for six days to hear what they might say to her" ("Introduction" xix). These actions bespeak a confidence in the rightness of her cause and her ability to defend it before legal and religious authorities. Likely recognizing the unlikelihood of her public influence should she represent herself with such confidence, Askew significantly tempers her tone in *The first examinacyon* to establish a common ground of assent on the sympathetic plight of an innocent woman able to meet the intellectual and physical rigors of torture only with divine aid. While Askew initially relies primarily on a strategic deference to the Word of God, she later draws on the full rhetorical scope of reformist exegesis, models her behavior as an imitation of Christ, and even radically re-contextualizes Scripture through the lens of her life as a demonstration of the personal potency of exegesis.

My discussion of the exegetical influence of early modern women begins, somewhat ironically, with Anne Askew, since previous scholarship has emphasized Askew's avoidance of exegesis. Edith Snook posits, "As within the scene in the church, silence is a significant feature of Askew's identity as a reader. Even as she grounds her testimony in the authority of the Bible, she refuses to interpret that text for her accusers. She will not translate her reading of Scripture into her own words but insists that the Bible can speak for her" (*Women, Reading* 36). In fact, Askew communicates her beliefs with such straightforward succinctness that John Bale, who publishes her dialogues in 1546 and 1547, glosses her texts with his own extensive elucidations in the same manner that theologians such as Martin Bucer and Heinrich Bullinger used for their

extensive commentaries on the Scriptures. John Bale, in effect, exegetes Anne Askew's *Examinations*, signifying their potency and implying that like Scripture, the *Examinations* contain enough of the unbridled Word of God to wreak havoc on the forces of evil that reformers saw within the Catholic Church. On the one hand, Bale's exegesis might support Oliver Wort's position in "The Double Life of Anne" that the *Examinations* hides Askew's authentic voice behind Bale's authoritative voice. On the other hand, Bale's commentary reveals the independence of Askew's voice from Bale's through his caution to ensure that Askew's words be interpreted correctly by an audience that needed careful guidance into a proper view of Protestant martyrdom and theology. In my analysis, I seek to uncover Askew's exegetical position to reveal her relationship to the reformation, namely her vision for her own influence in its development. I also disagree with Snook that Askew's direct quotations of Scripture, as opposed to paraphrases in her own words, suggest her avoidance of exegesis. Instead, she employs a reformist exegetical approach, "Luther's own hermeneutical assumption that Scripture is its own interpreter" (Hagen 87). This approach allows Askew to state a text she believes to be relevant to the conversation at hand and then imply, rather than directly state, the interpretation by creating context around the text with additional scriptural texts. In this way, Askew positions herself rhetorically as a better interpreter of scripture than her interrogators. By demonstrating her understanding of the Word of God, she draws on its authority by association.

As other scholars have noted, *The Examinations* contain a great deal of radical agency and subjectivity. Elaine Beilin argues that in an autobiographical effort, Askew represents herself boldly as a model for emulation, an undeniably significant member of a growing movement:

To write about the crisis of her life suggests that Askew possessed a reasonably developed sense of self; however, we must see this self motivated not by the

individualism of modern autobiography, but by the desire to participate in a larger community, the Reformed church. By showing herself to be not a weak woman, but a vanquisher of the papist foe, a learned, honest, God-fearing, Scripture-loving comrade in the faith, Askew was seeking to disclose her true identity. (“Askew’s Self-Portrait” 79).

These identifying qualities appear throughout the *Examinations*, usually implicitly from Askew herself, although John Bale’s highly explicit elucidations eliminate the subtlety of Askew’s self-fashioning. One of the profoundest moments of Askew’s own portrayal of herself appears in this brief statement: “Then he asked me, whye I had so fewe wordes? And I answered. God hath geven me the gyfte of knowledge, but not of utteraunce. And Salomon sayth, that a woman of fewe wordes, is a gyfte of God, Prover. 19” (51). For a brief moment, Askew boldly sidesteps her deferential female language to assert that her knowledge comes directly from God. She carefully cloaks this bold assertion in the silencing pronouncement of Solomon, yet ironically her gesture thoroughly emphasizes again that her employment of her knowledge is as much a gift of God as the knowledge itself. Even Bale seems to respect and reinforce this strategy by subsequently comparing Askew’s testimony before Catholic interrogators with Christ’s testimony before Caiaphus and the Sanhedrin. The comparison heightens effects of both Askew’s silence and her speech by suggesting that each is motivated by a divine wisdom that overcomes religious error.

Anne Askew appears to have carefully managed the experiences contained in *The First Examinations* to offer to the English public an exemplary figure with an unmistakable message of the superiority of Protestantism. However, she also carefully avoids reproach by rhetorically minimizing her exegetical authority, “And then doctor Standish desyered my lorde, to byd me

saye my mynde, concernynge that same text of S. Paule. I answered, that it was agaynst saynt Paules lernynge, that I beyng a woman, shuld interprete the scriptures, specyallye where so manye wyse lerned men were” (54). Strategically, this statement removes the possibility of self-incrimination. It also reveals that Askew chooses to associate the act of interpretation with acts of public exhortation within the congregation, from which she disassociates herself in an earlier passage. Askew’s dialogic narrative emphasizes her wit and maneuvers in interrogation to the diminishment of a systematic scriptural foundation for her arguments; Bale provides most of the interpretive biblical references in *The First Examination*.

Arguably, however, *The Latter Examination* contains more exegetical force. Perhaps her second interrogation emboldened Askew as she predicted her impending execution. From the beginning, Askew’s tone is urgently apologetic and exhortative; she addresses her “dere frynde in the lorde” who is “not yet persuaded throughlye in the truthe concernynge the lordes supper” (88). She immediately proceeds to a concise exegesis of Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

Take, eate. Thys is my bodye which is geven for yow. In gevyng forth the breade as an outward sygne or token to be receyved at the mouthe, he mynded them in a perfyght beleve to receyve that bodye of hys which shuld dye for the people, or to thynke the deathe therof, the onlye helthe and salvacyon of their sowles. The breade and the wyne were left us, for a sacramentall communion, or a mutuall pertycypacyon of the inestimable benefyghtes of hys most precyouse deathe and bloude shedyng. And that we shuld in the ende therof, be thankfull togyther for that most necessarye grace of our redempcyon. For in the closynge up therof, he sayd thus. Thys do ye, in remembraunce of me. Yea, so oft as ye shall eate it or drynke it, Luce 22. and 1. Corinth. 11. Els shuld we have bene forgetfull of that we

ought to have in daylye remembraunce, and also bene altogyther unthankfull for it. (88-89)

In this portion of her work, Askew briefly utilizes three exegetical strategies frequently found in the commentaries of reformers. By combining two passages that address the Lord's Supper, Askew uses *metaphrasis*, a paraphrase of the text. But by her third sentence, she has already extended her interpretive authority past paraphrase and into *enarratio*, a narrative exposition of the text, by explaining Christ's actions in dispersing the bread. By the end of this passage, she has clearly emphasized and re-emphasized her *interpretation* of the text, that the original bread and wine were imbued with symbolism directly by Christ with the intention that the ceremony be a perpetual reminder of the grace that otherwise might so easily be forgotten. Of course, this interpretation of these two texts did not originate with Askew; she had likely heard several others exegete them. But Askew's own version, delivered from her own mind, reveals that she has internalized the exegetical process and can reproduce it at will. Remarkably, John Bale's elucidation leaves that exegetical authority to Askew, rather than attributes it elsewhere, by testifying his own adherence to "thys womannis doctryne" (89). An unmistakable shift in authoritative tone has occurred since *The First Examination*, in which Askew, mediated by Bale, demonstrates her piety as a kind of creative and strategic repetition of scriptures and rhetorical devices she has learned from others. In *The Latter Examination*, Askew authoritatively and emblematically opens her second narrative with internally motivated exegesis.

After John Bale's interlude, Askew follows up her exegesis with a continuing passage that emphasizes the divine origins of certainty regarding spiritual truth:

Therfor it is mete, that in prayers we call unto God, to grafte in our forehades, the true meanyng of the holye Ghost concernynge thys communion. For S. Paule doth

saye that the letter slayeth. The sprete is it onlye that geveth lyfe. 2 Cor. 3. Marke wele the vi. chapter of Johan, where all is applyed unto faythe. Note also the fort chapter of S. Paules first epistle to the Corynthes, and in the ende therof ye shall fynde playnelye, that the thynges which are seane are temporall, but they that are not seane are everlastyng. Yea, loke in the third chapter to the Hebrues, and ye shall fynd that Christ as a sonne and no servaunt, ruleth over hys howse (whose howse are we, and not the dead temple) if we holde fast the confidence and rejoyсынge of that hope to the ende. Wherfor as syth the holye Ghost. To daye if yow shall heare hys voice, harden not your hartes, &c, Psalm. 94. (90-91)

Whereas in the previous passage Askew exegetes the narrative texts using layers of elaboration and application, in this passage her strategy differs. Her argument here is topical. How can a believer arrive at a certain conclusion regarding the meaning of communion? According to Askew, certainty comes only as a result of prayer and the confirming presence of the Holy Spirit. However, lest her audience arrive at a conclusion other than the one she has already dictated, Askew employs the Lutheran method of interpreting scripture with scripture, re-contextualizing the question of communion within a series of principles from both epistles to the Corinthians, John, Hebrews, and the Psalms. Her argument concludes with an exhortation that reinforces her certainty in the correctness of her own interpretation, implying that failure to hear the work of the Spirit on this matter would betray hearts already hardened toward truth.

The process of her selecting relevant scriptural texts and reproducing them in a rhetorically persuasive form throughout *The Latter Examinations* demonstrates Askew's adeptness and confidence in her ability to use her own exegesis to influence a developing reformation. The scope of Askew's success appears not only in the frequent and consistent

republications of the *Examinations* but also in the citations of other writers. Her legacy appears in a well-known passage of “An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen” (1673), in which Bathusa Makin claims, “Our very reformation of Religion, seems to be begun and carried on by Women. Mrs. *Ann Askue*, a Person famous for Learning and Piety, so seasoned the Queen, and Ladies at Court, by her Precepts and Examples, and after sealed her Profession with her Blood, that the Seed of Reformation seemed to be sowed by her hand” (28). As other scholars such as Edith Snook and Elaine Beilin have discussed, Askew navigates the particularly difficult scenario of a young, individual female reformer confronting established, institutional male clergy by rhetorically playing on her gender and her knowledge of scripture simultaneously. Sometimes she directly contrasts her femaleness with her interrogators’ maleness to heighten an ironic effect. Sometimes she strategically withholds her knowledge to frustrate her accusers, building her grounds for silence on traditional teachings on women.

Yet sometimes she strategically withholds the full force of her exegetical skill to establish common, unspoken ground between herself and her audience. For example, when the Bishop asks why she rejects his request for a private conversation with her, she responds, “I sayd, that in the mouthe of two or thre witnesses everye matter shuld stande, after Christes and Paules doctryne. Math. 18. and 2. Cor. 13” (97). Askew does not explain to the Bishop or to her readership what relevance these passages have to the point she makes. Instead, she heightens the effect of her knowledge of scripture by implicating the Bishop for not having guessed her reasons to begin with and by trusting that her Protestant audience is as familiar with the powerful words of scripture as she in order to strengthen an advantageous sense of community among her readers. Through her exegesis, introduced with her exposition on the significance of communion, Askew invites her readers to join her as witnesses to truth through the shared experience of

reading her *Examination*. As Matchinske argues, her “legitimacy acquires its privatized shape *via the very institutional restrictions and gender hierarchies that are already in place*. The resistant interiority that Askew’s text proclaims, an interiority that will, in fact, become synonymous with later Reformation paradigms for *both men and women*, finds at least one of its early voices in an institutionally framed definition of acceptable, reformist, *female exegesis*” (*Writing, gender and state* 43). Both implicitly and explicitly, Askew establishes herself as a reputable exegete worthy of emulation while also emphasizing her femaleness in the process. Additionally, she confirms her own subjectivity with her use of first-person pronouns, even as she adds her voice to a community of faith that she builds by pluralizing the first person. For example, to ground her authority as the author of *The Examinations* and defender of her faith, Askew includes in her confession a statement that summarizes her exegetical foundation:

Yea, and as S. Paule sayth, those scriptures are suffycyent for our lernynge and salvacyon, that Christ hath lefte here with us. So that I beleve, we need no unwritten verytees to rule hys churche with. Therfor loke what he hath layed unto me with hys owne mouthe, in hys holye Gospell, that have I with Gods grace, closed up in my harte. And my full trust is (as David sayth) that it shall be a lantern to my fote stepes, Psalme 118. (142-43)

Not only does this passage ground her practice of letting scripture speak for itself, it also categorically denies the institutional authority of the Church insofar as it adds law to praxis without basis in Scripture. Askew purposefully replaces that authority with a community of voices that features her own conscience and experience in its testaments to divine truth accessed through the Word of God. Subsequently, Askew claims that her words have been imparted to her directly from the mouth of Christ; such divine illumination will clearly guide her.

The climactic exegetical force with which Anne Askew ends her *Examinations* appears on the title pages of Bale's editions of *The First Examination* and *The Latter Examination*. Each contains the same saintly illustration of Anne, yet more prominently featured is the large text she holds before her with the inscription BIBLIA. Her lips are closed, an indication of her quiet submission to the divine power of the Word. Perhaps most significantly, she holds the Word, previously withheld from the laity, close to her person in the palm of her hand. Yet while Bale features the same art for both title pages, he alters the biblical inscription. *The First Examinations* features text commonly used in addresses to women: "Savoure is disceytfull/and bewtye is a vayne thyng. But a woman that fearest the lorde/is worthye to be prayesd. She openeth her mouthe to wysdome/and in her language is the lawe of grace. Proverb. IIIi" (1). This passage predictably emphasizes female piety, a natural addition to Bale's frequent vouching for Askew's spiritual character. However, text below the image on *The Latter Examinations* is much more provocative: "I wyll poure out my sprete upon all flesh (sayth God) your sonnes and your doughters shall prophecye. And who so ever call on the name of the lorde/shall be saved. Johel.ii." (73). The illustration reflects the increased boldness of Askew's exegesis in *The Latter Examinations*. More than simply opening her mouth and emitting wisdom, Askew now represents the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy, that God will pour out his spirit on sons and daughters alike. Indeed, Askew emphasizes the active role of the Spirit in guiding her to truth throughout *The Examinations*.

Askew's own words, as well as her emboldened exegesis of the words of God, suggest that she saw in her affliction an unprecedented opportunity to model female authority for the coming Protestant generations. In her edition of the *Examinations*, Elaine Beilin has compiled evidence that subsequent generations of Protestant readers did, in fact, look to Askew as a model

of female piety and strength. She cites examples such as John Strype's inclusion of the entire Askew narrative in *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (1721), Maria Webb's chapter about Anne Askew in the biographical *The Fells of Swarthmore Hall* (1865), and Askew's appearance in multiple other genres, including sermon, pamphlet, and novel ("Introduction" xxxvii-xlii). Although we can only speculate the extent to which Askew envisioned her influence's reach, we can with certainty see her strategic representation of herself as a model of Christ and a harbinger of the coming victory of (Protestant) truth. Her concluding prayer in *The lattr examinacyon* expands upon Christ's prayer in Luke 23:34. Beginning with the borrowed idea of forgiveness for ignorant persecutors, Askew continues to emphasize the possibility for enlightenment: "Open also thu their blynde hartes, that they maye herafter do that thyng in thy syght, whych is only acceptable before the. And to sett fourth thy veryte aryght, without all vayne fantasyes of synnefull men. So be it. O lorde, so be it. By me Anne Askewe" (148). In this conclusion, Askew positions herself as a crux in the development of a reformation. Her insistence on truth has brought her to the moment of execution; by fashioning her final words as an intercessory prayer for the continuation of truth in England, she aligns her life story with the truth that she believes will live forever and offers it to her audience as transmissible instruction.

Another of Anne Askew's texts belongs in a discussion of her exegesis, though its brevity has sometimes caused it to be overlooked. At the end of Bale's 1546 edition of *The First Examination* appears "The voice of Anne Askew out of the 54 Psalme of David, called. Deus in nomine tuo." So many sixteenth century writers published versions of the Psalms collections that this single passage by Askew seems unusually isolated. However, Askew's public identification with Psalm 54 reveals two significant dynamics of biblical translation. First, re-contextualization creates new meaning. The Great Bible clearly contextualizes the original Psalm 54, "<To the

caunter in melodyes, an instruccyon of David, when the Zephites came and sayde unto Saull: Hath not David hyd hym selfe amongst us?>” (*TheBibleCorner.com*). Before the text itself begins, this brief gloss ensures that readers will associate the prayer with David’s innocence amidst the jealous wrath of King Saul. However, the title of Askew’s version ensures that its readers will interpret each line in relation to Askew’s betrayal, imprisonment, and interrogation. In large, bold type, “The voyce of Anne” aggressively draws attention to the text’s new narrator. This reframing of the following verses prepares the way for the second dynamic: a highly personalized version of *metaphrasis*, which is itself a significant part of exegesis rather than a passive reproduction of an original text, which appears as follows in *The Great Bible*:

<To the chaunter in melodyes, an instruccyon of Daud, when the Zephites came and sayde vnto Saull: Hath not Daud hyd hym selfe amongst vs?> Saue me, O God, for thy names sake, and auenge me in thy strength Heare my prayer, O God, & herken vnto þe wordes of my mouth. For straungers are rysen vp against me, and tyrauntes (whych haue not God before their eyes) seke after my soule. Sela. Beholde, God is my helper, the Lorde is with them that vpholde my soule. He shall rewarde euell vnto myne enemyes: destroye thou them in thy treuth. An offeryng of a fre hert will I geue the, and prayse thy name (O Lord) because it is so comfortable. For he hath delyuered me out of all my trouble, and myne eye hat sene his desyre vpon myne enemyes. (Ps. 54)

In this case, Askew’s re-contextualization of Psalm 54 results in permissible liberties in translation. While the first line of the original requests God’s saving strength, Askew’s version instead requests justice: “And in thy truthe, my quarell judge” (72). Her recasting of the prayer that follows quite significantly shifts the implied audience. The original text requests that God

listen to the “wordes of my mouth” in a private audience. Askew’s text publicizes the request, instead asking to be heard “before the (lorde),” a play on an oath of truth taken before an audience. She changes “wordes of my mouth” to a “tale,” drawing attention to the entire narrative of her betrayal, arrest, imprisonment, torture, and defense of her faith. Her enemies are “faythlesse men” who seek her *life* rather than “straungers” who seek the *soul*. Askew’s translation insistently inserts her own life’s narrative into a biblical text, wrestling it into a forceful testimony of her stalwart faith and indisputable innocence.

Anne Askew’s rewriting of Psalm 54 highlights the variability of meanings surrounding the idea of *translation*. As Helen Wilcox notes in her essay on gender in religious poetry, a current synonym for translator is interpreter. Wilcox argues that women writers such as Mary Sidney have gone beyond the publicly acceptable role of translator as a passive role to actually translate or reinterpret meaning for their readership (189-90). But the activity contained within the sixteenth-century idea of translation is even more dynamic than Wilcox acknowledges. Even more common than its association with reproducing a text in a different language are its more general denotations involving transference, translocation, and transformation (*OED*). For many years, feminist scholarship on early modern women has referenced a foundational privileging of authorship over translation to the effect that women writers could permissibly access public audiences for their writing by representing themselves as translators rather than authors. Tina Krontiris explains,

Translation offered women an involvement in literary culture, as both producer and consumer, that did not directly challenge male control of that culture. It provided a camouflage for involvement in text production and an opportunity for some degree of creativity. Investigation into this translation work provides a means

of getting at some of the possible discrepancies between the public image of women and the oppressive social regulations, and their culturally productive activities. (qtd in Simon 44)

Sherry Simon and Tina Krontiris both address translation as a process of converting a text from one language into another. However, I want to point out the similarities between that type of translation and Anne Askew's translation of Psalm 54. While Askew's English rendering reflects the original English of the text, the process of her internalizing it before reproducing it results in the production of new knowledge associated with the text, knowledge that is concretely represented in new language that reflects a new relationship between the original author (assumed to be David) and the new author (Askew herself), as well as distinguishes the new author in her own right.

As I continue my efforts to unpack the exegetical and epistemic underpinnings of sixteenth-century women's writings through my analysis of the writings of Katherine Parr, I will also demonstrate how the act of translation is a transformative process imbued with authority. As contemporaries, Askew and Parr share the distinction of being some of the first women of the English reformations to imbue their translations with personal exegesis. Katherine Parr, however, consistently demonstrated the diplomatic skills that Anne Askew did not, perhaps because her vision for her own scope of influence as ranking nobility differed. While Parr's second marriage to John Neville, 3rd Baron Latimer, increased her influence through entrance into England's nobility, it also held potential for religious conflict with her husband. Despite Latimer's Catholic loyalties, however, the unusually generous portion left to Katherine in his will suggests that despite their differences, he and Katherine negotiated a favorable relationship. Records do not indicate whether she demonstrated towards Latimer the same drastic submission that she later

demonstrated towards Henry VIII, her third husband. Henry's manifestations of power, notably in regards to his previous wives, made Katherine's extremely deferential tones undeniably necessary for her own self-preservation. Yet while Askew finds powerful influence in her oppositional stances, Katherine tends to wield her influence more subtly, through utmost deference to God and careful alignment with reformed theologians.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes feminist scholarship tends to overcorrect the inequalities of the past, resulting in a perpetuation of problematic thinking, or at least confusion. Elaine Beilin daringly claims, "Katherine Parr had a vocation for preaching, and also chose the genre of confession" but later tempers her imagery with "Rather than draw attention to herself or exploit her womanhood like Askew or Marguerite de Navarre, Parr assumes the voice of the sinner in search of redemption and teaches her fellow sinners" (*Redeeming Eve* 73). The difficulty Beilin encounters is that for all Katherine Parr's education, status, and groundbreaking publication of her work, Parr's texts are still characterized by devotion and submission to social, political, and religious authorities, leaving little room for an analysis of her oppositional rhetoric. In other cases, feminist scholarship selectively determines which women writers produce work oppositional enough to deserve critical attention. As recently as 2005, Edith Snook suggested, "Indeed, contemporary critics' lack of interest in Parr's work may be because the text does not lend itself to an analysis of resistance to limiting early modern constructions of femininity" (31). This kind of selection can obscure historical forms of female identity and agency because they fail to adhere to patterns that match contemporary assumptions. While the lack of scholarship on Katherine Parr has since improved with the release of Janel Mueller's critical anthology *Katherine Parr: Complete Works &*

*Correspondence* in 2011, feminist scholars are still formulating strategies for reading Parr's work.

While Parr may not have directly criticized "early modern constructions of femininity," she frequently demonstrates her active influence in the philosophical and religious shifts of her time. Her letter to the University of Cambridge on February 26, 1546, reveals her familiarity with and participation in the humanist criticism of scholasticism within academia, criticism that most notably appears in Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*. In a tone far gentler than Erasmus's, Parr exhorts the university,

and for as much as I do well understand all dynde of lernyng doth floryssche amongst you in thys age as yt dyd amongst the grekes at athenes long ago, I require and desire you all not So to hongre for the exquisite knowledge of prophane lernyng, that yt may be thought the grekes univertye was but transposyd or nowe in England ageyne revyued, forgetting our chrystianitye, synce theyr excellencye only dyd atteyne to morall and natural thunges, but rather I gentyllye exhorte you to study and aplye those doctrynes as menes, and apte degrees to the atteyning and setting for the the better chrystes reverent and most Sacred doctrine that it may not be layd ageynst you in auydence at the trybunall seat of god how ye were aschamed of chrystes doctrine. (Mueller 114)

Although, the primary matter of discussion in the letter exchange involves the appeal from Sir Thomas Smith for protection against possible seizure of personal property from the academics at Cambridge, Parr uses the opportunity to emphasize her own education worthy of scholarly status and subtly remind "the whole said University" that she follows with interest its knowledge

production because of her self-identification as an adherent of the Petrarchan and Erasmian *philosophia Christi*, the idea of the inseparability of true philosophy and true Christianity.

Although Katherine Parr practically represents herself as an intellectual equal to her Cambridge audience, incorporating little deferential language throughout the reply, her work is more typically framed by humility and submission, which she represents as natural qualities of her female status. Unsatisfied with attributing the extremity of Parr's language to theological inclinations, Janel Mueller speculates, "Reformation thought does not seem a likely source for the insistent dependency and submissiveness expressed by the soul in *Prayers or Meditations*. More likely these traits were ingrained in Parr as a feminine obligation—and reinforced by her experience as Henry's wife" (381). Within the political context of an evolving reformation, however, another possible reason for Parr's language emerges.

A reformist shift of exegetical responsibility from institution to individual had potentially drastic consequences for the political stability of England. As Luther maintains, the identity of the believer involves kingship and priesthood, a status he extends to cobblers and peasants in his *Address to the Christian Nobility*. Misappropriation of this liberty and responsibility could easily result in civil unrest. Henry VIII's 1543 Act for the Advancement of True Religion addresses the politically problematic "diversities of opinion, disputations, tumults, and schisms [that] had arisen, to the great inquietation of the people and displeasure of his majesty, as well as contrary to his true intention and most godly purpose in what he had done" (Craik and MacFarlane 700). To combat the unrest, Henry revoked access to Scriptures from all his people but the nobility and clergy and stipulated that noblewomen must read only in private. Clearly the ability to read the Scriptures included the ability to interpret, and without the centralized authority of the Church, dangerous multiplicity could ensue.

Katherine Parr became Henry's queen two months after Parliament passed the Act; subsequently, her tenure as queen coincides almost exactly with the lifespan of the Act, revoked by Edward VI in 1547. During this time, Henry renewed his energies toward his prioritization of maintaining royal authority for the stabilization of England in preparations for the aftermath of his death in hopes of averting potential crisis. Because of Henry's sensitivity toward any affront to his own authority, Parr necessarily handled her Protestant reflections on authority with the utmost care. To overemphasize individual access to the guidance of the Spirit through interaction with the Word could easily imply a subversion of the monarchical authority that Henry had invested his kingly resources to centralize; a slight misstep could easily have resulted in her condemnation as a traitor. To avoid reproach, as well as potential arrest, Parr needed to include in her writings a drastic reinforcement of her own submission to authority. Janel Mueller discusses one such passage from one of Parr's letters to Henry:

“I make like account with your majesty as I do with God for His benefits and gifts. . . . Zeal and affection forceth me to be best content with that which is your will and pleasure. Thus love maketh me in all things to set apart mine own convenience and pleasure, and to embrace most joyfully his will and pleasure whom I love.”

Who is the “he” of “his will and pleasure”—Henry or God? The ambiguity appears irresolvable in light of Parr's declaration that God's and Henry's benefits and demands have been all of a piece in her experience. (381)

Any occasion that allowed for the interweaving of her overt submission both to God and to Henry created for Parr an expedient defensive base should her loyalties be questioned. Although Parr personally embraced reformist theology, the political context under which the reformation entered England required constant assurance that the shift toward individual responsibility would

have no effect on the authority of the King. Overt submission to the divine authority of both God and King could temper the precarious political ramifications of the reformists' re-centering of authority, at least for a time.

Under these volatile conditions, Katherine Parr's options as a writer would seem to be forced into a public role either of passive conformist or revolutionary martyr. However, like Anne Askew, Katherine Parr instead identified the advantages that placed her in a position of influence and leveraged them to influence the emerging Protestant religious discourse and knowledge production in England without martyrdom or complete conformation. Likely because of her educational investment in and adherence to *philosophia Christi*, Parr carefully writes her devotional texts in ways that distinguish reformist piety from its predecessors. Mueller writes,

“Only the advantage of hindsight across the spectrum of her eventual four works can reveal how characteristic of Katherine Parr's spirituality and writing the conjunction of abjectly confessed sinfulness and affective meditation on Christ's passion would become. This conjunction has been proposed as a defining feature of female religious writing in England in her era. At this point, near the end of Parr's first year of queenship, it can already be seen that she resists developing this crucial conjunction in the direction of mystical transport or Eucharistic adoration. (Mueller 204-05)

For Parr, the carefully planned articulation of spiritual devotion facilitated by learning better reflects her doctrinal values than the more subjective mystical transport. She anchors her writings in her practice of exegesis, patterning her hermeneutic after that of Luther and Calvin as it appears in the work of William Tyndale.

Katherine Parr frames her hermeneutic, her formulation of appropriate exegesis that results in the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, by probing the depths of her own understanding of faith and knowledge and the relationship between the two. Her conclusions appear most succinctly in *Lamentation of a Sinner*, which Parr wrote in 1547 and published after Henry's death in 1548. In this work, which narrates her conversion in detail, Parr states,

By this faith I am assured; and by this assurance, I feel the remission of my sins. This is it that maketh me bold; this is it that comforteth me; this is it that quencheth all despair. I know, O my Lord, Thy eyes look upon my faith. Saint Paul saith we be justified by the faith in Christ, and not by the deeds of the law. For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain. Saint Paul meaneth not, here, a dead, human, historical faith, gotten by human industry, but a supernal, lively faith which worketh by charity, as he himself plainly expreseth.”  
(Parr 456)

The first sentence of this passage summarizes Parr's epistemic process: faith [in Christ] results in assurance. Assurance then confirms the effectual outworking of that faith by producing a feeling. Parr then expounds on the combined sensory and spiritual nature of her feeling: it communicates the remission of sins, an undeniably abstract concept. But it also increases her boldness, a quality sensed internally and manifested externally. She continues to build on her sensory imagery with the simultaneously internal and external concept of comfort and climaxes with the highly sensory verb *quencheth*.

These sensory confirmations lead to propositional knowledge that God sees her faith, which she further grounds with an exegetical reference to Galatians 2:21. She states the text directly then clarifies it, drawing from distinctly reformist language. Mueller notes the source as

Tyndale's *Answer to More*, in which "Tyndale distinguishes between 'historical' faith—i.e., believing that such a person as Jesus actually lived—and 'feeling' faith, an assurance 'written in thine heart . . . because the Spirit of God so preacheth and so testifieth unto thy soul . . . that thou shalt be saved through Christ'" (456 n51). Parr's exegesis of the Pauline passage clarifies the nature of her epistemology, which drives the entire narrative of *Lamentation of a Sinner*.

The first passage on knowledge in *Lamentation* occurs early in the text and underscores Parr's pre-conversion self as incapable of understanding knowledge by employing a series of contrasts between perception and reality: I would not learn to know the Lord and His ways, but loved darkness better than light: yea, darkness seemed to me, light. I embraced ignorance as perfect knowledge; and knowledge seemed to me superfluous and vain. . . . I called superstition godly meaning, and true holiness, error" (Parr 448). As a narrative device, this admission of failure in the discernment of true knowledge heightens anticipation for the redemptive revelation to come. As a rhetorical device, it casts doubt on the knowledge that Parr's audience might value by suggesting that in the unregenerate spiritual state, an individual's certainty over truth is based on false premises invisible to the individual because of spiritual blindness. Parr later condemns this knowledge as utterly useless: "if any man had said I had been without Christ, I would have stiffly withstood the same. And yet I neither knew Christ, nor wherefore He came. As concerning the effect and purpose of His coming, I had a certain vain, blind knowledge, both cold and dead, which may be had with all sin:" (453). By contrast, Parr foregrounds the association of warmth and life with true knowledge, a dynamic force that cannot be attained merely through the intellectual pursuit of knowledge. This association, however, demands her careful distinction between her own epistemic approach to faith and mysticism.

To avoid implying that her spiritual transformation occurs as a direct, mystical encounter with God, Parr carefully chooses language that privileges exegesis by anchoring the experience in the Word. Parr explains, “But my heart was so stony and hard that this great benefit was never truly and lively printed in my heart, although with my words it was often rehearsed, thinking myself to be sufficiently instructed in the same, and being indeed in blind ignorance. And yet I stood so well in mine own judgment and opinion, that I thought it vain to seek the increase of my knowledge therein” (451). This passage inherently condemns the mere repetition of words that vocalize an individual’s supposed belief. Parr explains that this confidence in traditional assumptions about truth removes the individual from the necessary, continual acquisition of knowledge that signifies a living faith. A true believer has the agency, as well as the responsibility, to actively pursue knowledge as a continual endeavor.

Parr ties the process of obtaining this knowledge directly to the biblical text; in contrasting her former deceived self with her enlightened and enlivened self, she points to the Word as the catalyst for change. She testifies,

I lament much I have passed so many years not regarding that divine book, but I judged and thought myself to be well instructed in the same: whereas now I am of this opinion, that if God would suffer me to live here a thousand years, and [I] should study continually in the same divine book, I should not be filled with the contemplation thereof. Neither hold I myself contented, but always have a great desire to learn and study more therein. I never knew my own wickedness, neither lamented for my sins truly, until the time God inspired me with His grace, that I looked in this book. (466)

Not only does Parr emphasize the power and necessity of individual interaction with Scripture, but she also criticizes non-reformist instruction for her previous deception when she states that she had mistakenly assumed herself “to be well instructed” in the “divine book.” Although she takes personal responsibility for her wickedness, her narrative implicitly rejects the idea that clerical interpretations sufficiently mediate spiritual knowledge to the public. Instead, Parr strongly advocates the benefits of personal access to the Scriptures by demonstrating that the benefit of biblical exegesis cannot be fully internalized unless the individual personally participates in the process.

For Parr, verbal confirmation of belief cannot replace the direct study of the Word, through which the autonomous self-mediation of the individual believer is invited and confirmed. The Word itself justifies the direct appeal to God for knowledge. Anticipating accusations of pride and arrogance as opposition to her own spiritual authority, Parr avows,

And therefore I will seek none other means nor advocate, but Christ’s Holy Spirit, who is only the Advocate and Mediator between God and man, to help and relieve me. But now, what maketh me so bold and hardy, to presume to come to the Lord with such audacity and boldness, being so great a sinner? Truly, nothing but His own Word: for he saith, Come to me all ye that labor, and are burdened, and I shall refresh you. (455)

By aligning herself with the Protestant model of universal access to God, Parr demonstrates her right as an individual to return directly to the Word for knowledge and self-justification. While she makes no mention of her gender in this passage, instead consistently using the universal language of repentance before an almighty God, her public act of publishing *Lamentation of a Sinner* as a female writer marks her entrance into the public forum to ensure a place of

prominence for women in the emerging models of Protestant piety. Near the end of *Lamentation*, Parr addresses “the younglings and unperfect” who “are offended at small trifles” (472). She maintains that the worst of their errors is their tendency to be “offended also at good things, and judge nothing good but such as they embrace and esteem to be good.” Then, to correct their erroneous thinking, Parr refers them to the behavior of Christ:

Now these superstitious weaklings, if they had been conversant with Christ, and seen Him lead His life, sometime with women, sometime with Samaritans, with publicans, sinners, and with the Pharisees, they would have murmured at Him. Also, if they had seen Mary pour upon Christ the precious ointment, they would have said with Judas: ‘This ointment might have been sold, and given to the poor.’ . . . if they had seen him . . . practice with the woman of Samaria, yea, and how her of His most divine doctrine and life? (473)

As Parr emphasizes Christ’s unconventional interactions with people, she reminds her readers of the prominence that Christ gave women, both in his recognition of their devotion (Mary) and in his choice to impart to them significant doctrinal revelation (the Samaritan). By incorporating these female examples into her admonitions, Parr tasks the spiritually mature reader to welcome the inclusion of women in the work of God.

Katherine Parr’s first bold demonstration of female self-mediation appears in *Psalms or Prayers taken out of holy Scripture*, her English translation of John Fisher’s *Psalmi seu Precationes*. Parr first printed twenty leather bound copies of her work privately in 1544, and several other public editions were released before her death. Janel Mueller points out the obvious motivation for the publishers’ failure to acknowledge Fisher as source; his execution for rejecting the Oath of Supremacy had occurred only a decade before Parr’s publication of her

version (197). Parr's title, however, suggests an even more provocative explanation for the wording of the title: Parr has taken the prayers directly out of holy Scripture just as Fisher did when he translated the Psalms and prayers into Latin to begin with. In effect, the title suggests that Parr has achieved the same accomplishment as Fisher: a translation, or a transference, of biblical texts. The title implies an aligning of both Fisher and Parr as equals in the act of translation and interpretation. In fact, simply by publishing a translation of the Psalms, Parr places herself within an even broader developing tradition of reformist theologians who demonstrate their capabilities as interpreters of Scripture by publishing their own versions of the Psalms, including Martin Luther (1522), Martin Bucer (1530), Ulrich Zwingli (1534), John Calvin (1539), and Clement Marot (1541). The act of translating Scripture problematizes the old assumption of translation's supposed inferiority to authorship, as does the proliferation of the versions and translations and reappropriations of the Psalms throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Janel Mueller, recognizing that *Psalms or Prayers* traverses beyond the bounds of translation, argues, "Queen Katherine took up the redacting functions that Fisher had performed in his *Psalmi seu Precationes* and Cranmer in his *Litany*: the selecting, adapting, and free recombining of source materials that yields a transformative synthesis, a creation that qualifies as authorship" (18). The reproduction of Psalms translations likely continued because the process involved new contextualizations that each resulted in different kinds of pleasurable endeavors for both translator and audience. Katherine Parr enters this sphere, which blurs the boundaries between original authorship and authoritative translation, on par with other male theologians. Because the source material is always the Word, the translation process concerns the personal acquisition, interpretation, and communication of ideas. As a result, the reframing of

ideas becomes more significant than the origination of ideas, which must always be attributed to God.

This alternate way of reading Parr's translation emphasizes that she has chosen to internalize her source texts before reproducing them. She has requested knowledge directly from God, and his Spirit has responded with the ability to perceive truth; consequently, her words reveal a "lively" faith that had not existed before she personally accessed the Word. Thus we can read as intentional, rather than accidental, the fact that her first published work opens with a self-mediating prayer "for the obtaining remission of sins." Parr writes,

O Lord God, which art rich in mercy, and of Thine especial love towards us, even when we were Thine enemies, by sin, didst send into the world Thine only begotten Son Jesus Christ: that whosoever believeth duly in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, according to Thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of Thy mercies, put away mine offenses. (216)

The conspicuous transition, or lack thereof, between a rehearsal of the redemptive act of Christ's sacrifice and a personal, emphatic request for mercy clarifies immediately that its author adheres to the Lutheran doctrine of the believer's priesthood. Because the title page does not list Katherine Parr as the author of the text, her audience could not have known, except improbably through hearsay, that she had produced it. Consequently, scholars have dedicated special attention to the admittedly limited ways that Parr disclosed her gender through the nuances of her translation.

Whatever the audience would have assumed about the author of *Psalms or Prayers*, the self-mediation apparent from the beginning of the work suggests that Katherine Parr personally

weaves her Protestant identity together with her female one, resulting in a stance that represents both. Kimberley Anne Coles discusses how the inclusion of the female identity within the exegetical foundations of the reformation requires women to participate in the formation of new expressions of faith:

The conviction that ‘contrayn[s]’ Parr to write that all souls dwell in the same fallen state (and are equal before God), and that every soul is individually accountable to God similarly compelled other women to bear witness to their faith. . . . However, the agency of women in the interpretation – and dissemination – of scriptural and religious meaning communicated to an emergent Protestant community the underlying religio-political goal of the Reformation: individual apprehension of ‘Gods law’. Of course, the expression partly traded upon cultural notions of female inferiority – the egalitarian impulses of reform are conveyed through the vehicle of women *because* of their status. Nevertheless, the circumstance in which women became ideal figures of political and religious disruption opened space for the empowerment of women within the written culture of the Reformation. (Cole 6)

The epistemic platform on which Katherine Parr asserts her intellectual merits is her Spirit-led hermeneutic. Like Anne Askew, Parr emphasizes a straightforward self-interpretation of Scripture, which is so unified within itself that she can re-combine and re-arrange biblical texts in an act of authorship without threatening the original, inspired meaning of Scripture as she does in *Psalms or Prayers*. And in *Lamentation of a Sinner*, Parr outlines the motivation for the believer’s uninhibited pursuit of the knowledge contained in Scripture, “It were all our parts and duties, to procure and seek all the ways and means possible, to have more knowledge of God’s

Word set forth abroad in this world. And not allow ignorance, and discommend knowledge of God's Word, stopping the mouths of the unlearned" (476). Parr continues her argument by lambasting the abundant "unwritten verities" that characterize Catholic doctrine because they have multiplied far beyond the biblical texts themselves. For Parr, the only means of checking such pervasive clerical error and abuse of power is the individual study of Scripture, the exegesis of which will confirm the truth.

Parr's emphasis on epistemology's role in faith appears throughout her work as she frequently elaborates on the nuances of knowledge acquisition. While Parr's extreme self-deprecation in *Lamentation of a Sinner* appears to provide a comprehensive confession of guilt, Edith Snook points out that Parr is actually quite selective in her representation of sin:

"Ontological and epistemological distinctions are fundamental to Parr's purpose. She does not lament sins such as gluttony or avarice, but those connected with knowledge and knowing. . . . Her transgressions pertain almost exclusively to how she understood truth: (46-47). Because Parr correlates the work of the Spirit with the obtaining of true knowledge, her admission of her own former ignorance is equivalent to an admission of the lack of a former relationship with God. The knowledge of the truth is the primary identifying factor of the enlightened believer. Parr elaborates, "For they [the fleshly children of Adam] are clothed with Christ's garment in utter appearance, with a fair show of all godliness and holiness in their words . . . But the children of light know the contrary. For they are led by the Spirit of God to the knowledge of the truth; and therefore they discern and judge all things right" (478). For Parr, spiritual knowledge and discernment will always characterize the elect. The foundation of Katherine Parr's faith is her epistemology, which intertwines belief and knowledge, a foundation that she articulates in writing and demonstrates (and reinforces) in action.

While the writings of Anne Askew and Katherine Parr demonstrate the relevance of epistemology in the intersection of faith and literature, the work of Anne Dowriche adds historiography to the intersection, both complicating and deepening the epistemic contributions of women to the reformations. Born forty years after Anne Askew, Anne Dowriche lived in an England much altered since Katherine Parr's brief tenure as Queen. The country had survived Edward's reformation and Mary's counter-reformation, finding a sometimes tenuous but more inclusive compromise under Elizabeth's attempts at re-unification and stabilization. A gentlewoman with influence somewhat limited to the similarly landed families of the West Country, Dowriche's material circumstances differed sharply from those of Katherine Parr. Dowriche, however, apparently determined to devote the entirety of her literary prowess and familial connections to influence the political debate over Catholic-Protestant relations both on the continent and in England. Anne Askew carefully avoids incriminating Henry, instead accusing his traditionalist advisors of spiritual corruption. Katherine Parr avoids political accusations altogether, instead preferring to influence the reformation's development primarily through her personal demonstrations of piety and study of the Word. Anne Dowriche, however, publicizes her written work specifically for political purposes, presumably seeking to influence Elizabeth through her brother Pearse Edgecumbe, a member of Parliament. Furthermore, Dowriche extends her argument all the way to Elizabeth, whom Dowriche hopes will take stronger action to abolish Catholicism in light of Catholic terrorist threats. Dowriche's potent Calvinist positioning reflects the fact that the reformation in England has evolved beyond the initial need for unification toward factionalism. The question over who can define the reformation changes, and Dowriche desires to protect it from any possible influence of

Catholicism. At face value, Dowriche's work appears profoundly different from the works of Anne Askew and Katherine Parr.

However, what Dowriche shares with Askew and Parr is the quest for epistemic certainty through the process of personal exegesis. She introduces her work with support for the moral and epistemic value of poetry. With historical poetry as a genre at her disposal, Dowriche can represent the literal Word as metaphoric seed in order to bolster confidence in the individual conscience as epistemic confirmation. Anne Dowriche spends little time with nuanced articulations of her epistemology, preferring instead to launch the practical demonstration of it directly at an audience in need of exhortation. However, her prefatory materials, a letter to her brother and an address to the reader, do provide some reflection on her strategic assembling of materials. In her article *Moral, Method, and History in Anne Dowriche's The French Historie*, Megan Matchinske reminds scholars of "early modern history's propensity to convey moral rather than evidentiary truths" (176). Anne Dowriche draws her evidential source material primarily from Thomas Tymme's *The Three Partes of Commentaries, Containing the Whole and Perfect Discourse of the Civill Warres of Fraunce*. However, her moral source material comes from exegetically derived conviction. The title page of *The French Historie* includes a biblical confirmation for the veracity of Dowriche's interpretation: "All that will live godlie in Christ, shall suffer persecution. 1. Tim. 3.2" (A1r). Dowriche heightens the godliness of the martyrs in her narrative with the intensity of their suffering; she has chosen her three "chief" and "bloodie broiles" as a means of amplifying the biblical text.

Despite the seriousness of her subject matter, though, Dowriche describes her utter delight in the historiographical process in her letter to her brother, "This hath beene my ordinarie exercise for recreation at times of leasure for a long space together: If I were sure that you

would but take halfe so much pleasure in reading it, as I have in collecting and disposing it: I should not neede anie farther to commend it” (3). The reason for Dowriche’s uncontained enthusiasm for her studies is not entirely clear. At the very least it reveals that she had no concern that representing *The French Historie* as a product of recreation, a luxury resulting from the combination of education and leisure, would result in any concern over its veracity. In a markedly more pious tone, she explains to her readers, “That my onelie purpose in collecting & framing this worke, was to edifie, comfort and stirre up the godlie minds unto care, watchfulnesse, zeale, & feruentnesse in the cause of Gods truth; you shall easily perceiue by the chusing and ordering of these singular examples which herafter insue” (4). This purpose statement draws unusual attention to the “chusing and ordering” of the materials in the text, resulting in a correlation between Dowriche’s interpretive efforts and the spiritual growth her actions will produce through the text. In fact, her words distinctly evoke the exegetical processes of paraphrase, narration, and interpretation by which a theologian might ensure the spiritual profitability of an audience’s encounter with a text. This theological impetus supports Dowriche’s literary strategy to rehearse the details of French martyrdom through poetry “so that here are not bare examples of virtue and vice, but also the nature and qualities of those vertues or villanies are manifestly depainted to them that will seeke for it” (4). Dowriche’s rhetoric contributes to contemporary defenses of poetry with her emphasis on its power for spiritual enlightenment.

But particularly interesting is the contrast between her exegetical positioning and that of others such as Anne Askew and Katherine Parr, who believed in the sufficiency of the Word of God to communicate all necessary truth. Askew and Parr rhetorically avoided drawing attention to the ways they shaped their arguments, instead preferring to establish their authority as

receptors and conduits of truth directly from God. Dowriche, however, draws significant attention to her rhetorical devices. She states her concern that the French martyrs, of equal didactic significance to the English martyrs, will go unnoticed in England, and this concern is just cause for the poeticizing of their story to increase their appeal to her audience. She further emphasizes her importance as a poet, “To speake trulie without vaine glorie, I thinke assuredlie, that there is not in this forme anie thing extant which is more forceable to procure comfort to the afflicted, strength to the weake, courage to the faint hearted, and patience unto them that are persecuted, than this little worke, if it be diligentlie read and well considered” (4). Dowriche boldly claims that her poetry achieves its spiritual goals more effectively than any other poetry, assuming the audience reads it appropriately. Her rhetoric demonstrates an exegetical shift from simplicity to ornamentation: while Scripture might speak clearly to the spiritually enlightened, history requires a messenger with skill in the art of acquiring and shaping meaning.

Of course, Dowriche remains deeply indebted to the power of the Word, the devotion to which unifies the martyrs in her three primary narratives. However, she often represents the Word metaphorically to her audience rather than literally, particularly through her prevalent use of the parabolic language of seed and sower, associated with life and growth. Dowriche introduces the metaphor through Satan’s first appearance in the dialogue. Pained by the “new reformed life” (l. 156), he formulates a plan to “cut off this sower word, as fast as it shall rise” (l. 180) by corrupting the testimonies of believers who publicly profess the word, preach it, or sing it. Dowriche’s next two uses of the imagery links the idea of sowing life-bearing seed with the blood of the martyrs. First, the idea appears as a threat or warning to King Philip: “But yet of this be sure, the blood that thou doost wring / From us uniuertlie, is the seed whereby the Church doth spring” (ll. 375-76). This significant association between blood and new life refashions gruesome

stories of torture and death into victorious reproductions of truth throughout the narrative. Again, Dowriche emphasizes the physical suffering that spreads the seed of truth:

So now there was a league, where both did giue their word  
To roote and rase Gods sowen truth, by fagot, fire and sword.  
The graffe that Sathan greeues did yet begin to spring,  
The tree of life some ioyfull frute as now did seeme to bring.  
Whose bud enameld greene, and blossome sweete to see, (ll. 515-19)

Despite *The French Historie*'s reputation for the grotesque, Dowriche herself commends her poetry to her readers as "this my pleasant exercise" (5). By imbuing of her visceral descriptions of death with the promise of the living Word, Dowriche means to refresh an audience overfamiliar with torture and death. In fact, her various references to the sowing of the Word actually lead to a comedic moment. The King reveals his ignorance in his orders regarding Annas Bergeus: "That presentlie he gaue in charge that there they should arrest / *Annas Burgeus* as the chiefe, and him to prison bring: / Who was, he thoght the only root by who the rest did spring" (ll. 732-34). In this moment, the King's foolishness is inconceivable in light earlier worry that "this infectious seed / Hath taken rooting in our Court (ll. 709-10). By this point in the narrative, Dowriche has used her seed and sower imagery often to create a burst of irony as the King misidentifies Bergeus as the root, rather than the Word and blood of the martyrs. And after Bergeus's rather magnificent final sermon before his execution, Dowriche confirms the satisfying conclusion of Bergeus's tale, "Whose constant death in *France* and blood did sow the seede / Wherby the church did much increase, & godly yet do feed (ll. 987-88). In fact, Dowriche herself intends to ensure that the godly will continue to feed on this seed by disseminating it through her broadly anecdotal exegesis.

However, the question of the origin and nature of certainty still exists for Dowriche, much as it did for Katherine Parr and other reformist theologians. While Parr formulates certainty through the believer's illumination by the Spirit, confirmed externally by the believer's subjection to Scripture, Dowriche's formulation of certainty relies heavily on conscience. Dowriche supplies a particular emphasis on commentary for her readers because evidentiary truth alone could not convey the full scope of conscience's role in discernment. On one hand, the conscience within the guilty is capable of physical destruction. Three antagonists are afflicted by their consciences for their misdeeds. First, Dowriche describes the subtlety of the guilty conscience, which for Munerius "did consent to worke his owne decaie" (l. 488). The decay continues to the point where no one trusts Munerius's testimony, even those who share his opposition to the reformations. Dowriche continues, "But whil'st he was in holde his conscience did confesse, / This plague was iust; for that he sought Gods chosen to oppress" (ll. 497-98). This revelation occurs just before an angel climactically strikes Munerius dead. A fellow conspirator who witnesses Munerius's demise immediately recognizes his own guilt, and to re-emphasize her point, Dowriche notes, "O the dedlie sting of a guiltie conscience" (n. 79). Dowriche's examples do not allow her readers to interpret this "dedlie sting" figuratively. Instead, she builds up a direct correlation between the physical condition and spiritual condition of her antagonists, which also include the King, whose "guiltie conscience betraies it selfe" after his execution of Annas Bergeus (n. 147), and Aristobolus, whose bloody demise rivals the deaths of the martyrs in its gore. The conscience of Aristobolus, murderer of both his mother and his brother, literally afflicts him till he bleeds, ultimately causing his death. "Aristobolus after he had put his mother & brother to death, greeued in conscience, fell into such horrible extremitie, that blood came from him both by vomit & otherwise til it brought him to his end" (n. 236). Dowriche then uses

Aristobolus to foreground the death of Charles IX, concluding her series of God's enemies who perish not by the sword or fire but by their own self-destruction. To remove the possibility for confusion, Dowriche posits conscience as the ultimate source of certain knowledge. Her heroes know they have clean consciences, and her villains know they have guilty consciences. She leaves no margin for conscientious differences and justifies this strategic certainty with physical experience. If a conscience destroys a person's body, or in some cases a person's humanity, all witnesses can justifiably judge that conscience to be guilty.

On the other hand, Dowriche includes Annas Bergeus to exemplify a clean conscience submitted to God. He prays for his own conscience (l. 790) then forewarns the King, "Your Conscience shall be iudge" (l. 895). But the Bergeus story not only adds to Dowriche's epistemic emphasis on conscience as an agent of certainty but also functions as a parabolic admonition to Elizabeth I, whose censorship of religious debate in Parliament directly conflicted with Dowriche's hope that allowing Parliament to vocalize their consciences in religious matters would result in a more radically Protestant England. Having established the spiritual authority of conscience, Dowriche carefully lays out the dramatic tension. The King momentarily seems to privilege the voicing of conscience when he proclaims, "This is therefore in few our crave and eke request; / That everie man doo shew his minde as he shall thinke it best" (ll. 579-80). To subtly urge Elizabeth to make a similar decree, she reveals what a wonderful outpouring of truth ensues from this new freedom as Annas Bergeus delivers a courageous sermon that emphasizes the powerful Word of God, a message undeniably appealing to a Protestant audience. As the king's deceptively laid trap subsequently becomes clear, Dowriche's narrative warns Elizabeth of the detrimental silencing of truth. In her analysis of the political opposition expressed in *The French Historie*, Elaine Beilin asserts, "Although Dowriche certainly positions the attack safely

within the framework of the Protestant counselor correcting the Catholic king, once readers substitute 'England' for 'France' and 'queen' for 'king,' the words may be taken to resonate boldly against Elizabeth's prohibitions on free speech" ("Some Freely Spake" 137). Dowriche insists both spiritually and politically that just as a guilty individual conscience destroys itself, the silencing of a national conscience will ultimately destroy its people.

Anne Dowriche's contribution to the Protestant hermeneutic does reflect Katherine Parr's epistemic conclusion that knowledge internalized becomes faith, evidenced with spiritual benefits. She articulates her poetic version of this process in "To the Reader," where she claims that the "chusing and ordering of these singular examples" as she has "depainted" them will result in comfort, strength, courage, and patience. Historical fact may provide the seeker with knowledge, but the "liveliest" knowledge, an idea repeated in numerous reformist sources including Katherine Parr and Elizabeth, comes from the poetic retelling and rehearsal of events with the enhancement of poetry and moral guidance. As Beilin argues, "[Askew] models her own reader's task as actively hermeneutic, always ready to extend and multiply the meanings of the text" (132). Dowriche demonstrates how the meanings of the texts multiply even in their retelling to an England audience. And for Dowriche, the potential for multiplicity to result in erroneous theological conclusions are eliminated by the knowledge-confirming power of conscience.

Elizabeth Isham also writes extensively on the relationship between conscience and knowledge. Although the entirety of her forty-five years of life is contained within the early seventeenth century, her manuscript "My Booke of Rememberance" (1638) reflects the continuation of the Protestant optimism that the reformation's values can be corrected and clarified through exegetical quest for epistemic certainty. The document manifests characteristics

of autobiography, life writing, epistemic inquiry, and spiritual conversion narrative, revealing Isham's personal persuasion that her own search for knowledge confirmation carries the potential for profound influence on the self as well as on others. Coincidentally, Isham's work also carefully outlines her intense determination to avoid marriage and the multiple challenges to her resolve, including her interactions with suitors, the criticism of unnamed acquaintances, and a confrontation with her father. In the writing of Elizabeth Isham, exegesis stabilizes her arguments for her own spiritual authority even as it supports her decision to remain unmarried.

Like Anne Askew, Elizabeth Isham demonstrates her confidence in her exegesis by transforming Scripture into new knowledge framed by her own life. Like Katherine Parr, Isham splices and rearranges scriptural texts into new narratives, creating reciprocal illumination between scripture and her experience. For example, after an extensive reflection on a time of "dullnes and a decay as I thought or feared in my soule" perhaps somewhat instigated by her disagreement with her father over the question of her marriage (28r), Isham recounts a series of biblical texts that clarify the soundness of her decision not to marry. Through these texts and her own self-examination, she concludes, "Now some counting me not so wise because I was \could/ not \be/ perswaded to marry I rather thought I was foolish because I desired not the heaven\ly/ wisdom so much as I should" (28v). After contextualizing her disagreement with her family and society within the ongoing process of her own increase in wisdom and knowledge, Isham selects a number of passages, primarily from various Psalms, and fashions them into a new psalm that retells the story of her recent difficulty. As a result, "thou enduest my Soule with much strength" becomes a declaration of her steadfastness in her determination to resist marriage. "Thou has set me at Libertie when I was in distresse" becomes a statement of release from the difficult choice to defy her father's wishes to remain unmarried. "Surely thou hast delivered me from the snare

of the hunter, and from the noisome pestilence” becomes a statement of praise that God has freed her from the life-altering possibility of marrying against her will (28v). By telling the deeply personal story of this conflict in her own words and then retelling it in the deeply personal words of the psalmists, Isham defers her critics to the rhetorically indisputable work of God. In this way, she uses Scripture as a tool for interpreting her own life and subsequently offers her own life as a tool for interpreting Scripture. The resulting exegesis is distinctly personal.

From the beginning of her text, Isham clarifies her intention to publicize her autobiography as a necessary form of praise preserved for the generations. She implies that because of her positioning within a spiritual genealogy, she is compelled to continue the legacy: “from my youth thou hast taught \me/ even untill now therefore will I tell of thy wonderous workes, that the memoriall of thine abundant Kindnes may never be forgotten . . . O God forsake me not but \untill/ that I have deleared thine arme unto this generation.” Her subsequent annotation reveals that she has at least considered her work’s suitability for a public audience beyond her family: “not that I intend to have th[is] published. but to this end I have it in praise a than[k]fullnes to God. and for my owne benefit. which if it may doe my Brother or his children any pleasure I think to leave it them. whom I hope will charitable censure of me and thy power to them that shall come” (2r). This proviso is interesting for a couple of reasons: first, were her brother to have published her manuscript, he would not be the first male relative to do so for a female family member, ostensibly against her will. This note provides an apology for the text well suited to prefacing its dissemination, should relatives deem the text worthy of a greater audience. Secondly, the fact that Isham’s proviso directly follows her appropriation of the biblical language of declaring truth to the generations suggests that by this time, this language had been so commonly used as the impetus for publication that Isham realizes her language will

naturally result in her readers' assumption that she intends to reach a broader audience. Although the circulation of Isham's manuscript was limited, preventing her audience from broadening past her family until the twenty-first century, Isham's language indicates that she had not only considered but also prepared for that possibility.

"My Booke of Rememberance" contains evidence of the entire process of biblical exegesis, the internalization of the conclusions made through exegesis, and even the construction of a self, capable of exegesis and of transferring the resulting knowledge to a public audience. Isham's frequent use of the idea of "coming to knowledge" reflects the specifically epistemic nature of her self-evaluation and records of her personal development. As with her Protestant predecessors, Isham's struggles with doubt motivate her search for certainty, and she turns to biblical exegesis for solutions. By the early sixteenth century, the influence of the Puritans on exegetical thought emerged partly through an extreme emphasis on the act of hearing the Word, as opposed to reading or seeing it, because of the untrustworthiness of the eye. In *The Art of Hearing*, Arnold Hunt attributes the distrust of sight partially to *The Vanitie of the Eie*, in which George Hakewell explains that "hearing was inherently superior to sight, because the ear could perceive the depth of objects ('the soundnesse of timer, the emptinesse of vessels' and so forth) whereas the eye perceived only their 'crust and surface'" (Hunt 23). According to Hunt, a century of reformation had resulted in a Puritan culture that privileged secondary access to Scripture through hearing a sermon over individual access through reading the biblical texts themselves, a alteration easily in effect by the time Elizabeth Isham records *My Booke of Rememberance*.

Indeed, Isham's book contains frequent references to the benefits of listening to expositional sermons, often those of John Dod, a Puritan clergyman who made exhortative house

calls during her mother's doubt-induced depression and maintained a close connection with the Isham family, even to the point of participating in the failed marriage negotiations for Elizabeth. In addition to listening to Dod's sermons, the Isham family members would frequently read printed sermons to each other. After one occasion, after she had listened to her sister read a sermon by Dr. Preson, Elizabeth Isham reflects on the process of knowledge confirmation: "Now when I called to mind the knowledge that thou gavest me of thee not onely by the hearing of the eare in a most plentiful maner. but also causest me more evidently to feele thy goodnesse and power towards me by speaking to my inward part whereby thou causest me (in my distresses) to feele what thou art unto mee" (31r). In this moment, Isham acknowledges the benefit of hearing as an epistemic aid, yet she also incorporates the familiar sensory language of knowing through feeling, a highly personal means of confirming knowledge.

Throughout her text, Isham characteristically insists on her own autonomy as a seeker of knowledge by defining the process of its acquisition and confirmation. Her careful attention to epistemic nuance appears after one moment of confession of the sin of atheism: "many times I have bine driven by naturall reason to beleeve in thee. or the law of nature by which I perceive verified the word of God by the successe of all things according to it. for the Gentiles which have \know/ not the law. doe by nature the things contained in the law. they shew the effect of the law written in there harts. there consience also bearing wnesse" (31v). For Isham, multiple types of knowledge exist, but they are not equal in spiritual value. Natural, or innate, reason, she argues, can produce belief. This pre-modern philosophical formula privileges belief over knowledge but fails for Isham to produce certainty. Conversely, observation of the law of nature seems to verify her belief in the Word. This modern epistemic formula, which confirms belief through knowledge acquisition, still leaves Isham unsatisfied. For her, neither method can adequately

distinguish between the true believer who knows God's law and the Gentiles who do not. Ultimately, Isham satisfies doubt by locating personal certainty within the framework of providence, confirmed by experience: "I find thy providence wonderfull towards me that even at the very same time of the pitts brinke of despare thou shouldest comfort for I have found thine owne words accordiing to truth fit for me, yea and if I call to mind former times I have found the experiance of thy goodnesse toward me by mine inla\tr/gments in praire and successe thereafter" (32r). Remarkably, this experience occurs by means of highly subjective participation in prayer, a means of producing both knowledge and knowledge confirmation by the experiential measure of success afterwards. For Isham, the confirmation of knowledge and belief is only ever an individual endeavor. She theorizes epistemic methods but always through and for her individual subjectivity. In this way, "My Booke of Rememberance" demonstrates her epistemic independence from mainstream religious and philosophical thought. In addition to her epistemic independence, Isham models her literary independence, unconstrained by the Puritan preference for the spoken word over the written word. As Elizabeth Clarke and Erica Longfellow note in "[E]xamine my life': writing the self in the early seventeenth century," Isham adopts the common practice of Puritan self-examination but translates it into "a new genre of writing" (n. pag.). While the combination of self-examination and exegesis does appear in early modern texts, Isham's incorporation of a sustained epistemic inquiry into the personal nature of knowledge within an overarching narrative of the process of coming to knowledge is far more unusual and profound.

While Isham maintains her spiritual and epistemic independence, she also carefully draws on a history of spiritual inheritance that uses the imagery of the generations to ground her ideas. Early in her narrative, Isham states the epistemic value of the exemplary lives of her relatives,

particularly her grandmother and mother: “About this time being as I take it the eight yeare of my age, I came to a fuller knowledge of thee; that wheras before I apprehended thee to be Glorious in thy selfe that thou wert God. (so by their Education which they gave me and their good example) now I understood that thou wert able both to heare and helpe us” (3v). Isham’s strategic clarification between apprehension and understanding evokes Katherine Parr’s strategic distinction between blind knowledge and living faith; both writers contrast previous forms of knowledge with current forms of knowledge in order to emphasize the kind of spiritual growth that retroactively certifies the presence of true faith. Both Parr and Isham emphasize an early repetition of the Word as a failure rather than an achievement. In *Lamentation of a Sinner* Parr elaborates, “with my words [this great benefit] was often rehearsed, thinking myself to be sufficiently instructed in the same, and being indeed in blind ignorance” (451). Isham, likewise describes her frequent repetition of God’s commandments, claiming “I thought the saying of them acceptable when inded I kept them not” (4v). While both women point to the necessity of an internal feeling of certainty to confirm knowledge, Parr’s narrative repeatedly emphasizes that true knowledge comes directly from a personal encounter with the Word. Isham, on the other hand, represents experiential knowledge, facilitated by education from others, as a necessary foundation on which to build her individual quest for truth. While she eventually privileges, like Parr, her own immediate contact with Scripture, this establishment of her location within generations of pious believers rhetorically protects her emerging self from potential accusations of self-deceit. In fact, her comparison of her mother and paternal grandmother to the Old Testament women Naomi and Ruth establishes the biblical precedent for female figures as sources of life and truth, particularly with Ruth’s notable role in the genealogies of David and Christ.

Isham's epistemic autonomy results in boldness in her personal exegesis and generosity in her relationship with the exegesis of others. From an early age Isham demonstrates particular aptitude for textual interpretation and mentions her gratitude for the "pleasant easey" expositions of Mr. Dod, though in her mature retrospect, she carefully distinguishes her own expositional voice from Dod:

I am not of there opinion who extole Mr Dod above all others. for it is a hard mater to make comparison. for so I should doe without my knowledge: every owne hath his proper gift of God one after this maner, and another after that neigher bind I my selfe to the privat opinion of any. I know there is none but hath there infirmities, as Mr Dod excellenly expounded James the v. [and] the 17. I desire to take that generall good whereby my self may edifie: neither doe I mislike of others who are not altogether of my owne mind (15r)

This aside implicitly criticizes those believers who align themselves with "privat opinion" of one authority without critically examination. Isham defends her autonomous position of evaluating both the Word and the sermons she hears by positing that every person has unique gifts and shortcomings when it comes to exposition. Her autonomy allows her to choose the "general good" while rejecting what does not edify her. And significantly, her estimation of her own autonomy leads her to a position of open-mindedness towards others with whom she may disagree. She continues the narrative of her youth with an anecdote about asking her grandmother a crucial exegetical question: "Now it came into my mind questioning whether these promises belonged to me or not, though I did partly understand that they did. I therefore asked my Granmother of what seede wee came or whether wee were Jewes or not," (15r). This request implicitly questions the entirety of the exegetical foundation that Isham would have been

familiar with; if she cannot establish a connection with the Jews, then she could argue that the promises and instructions throughout the Old Testament and large portions of the New Testament could not apply to her directly. By including this moment, Isham stresses her capabilities as an exegete. Unsatisfied with her grandmother's response, she illustrates the value she places on personal exegesis by proceeding to answer her own question with texts from Genesis, Revelation, and Galatians. This passage is one of several in her narrative that emphasizes personal participation in exegesis rather than reliance on the exegesis of others.

In fact, Elizabeth Isham's familiarity with the exegetical process and her frequent study of sermons does, at one point, cause her own narrative to become distinctly sermon-like. After recalling her childhood *schadenfreude*, particularly towards her sister because of a competitive drive to appear more worthy, Isham launches into an exposition on love (9r). Even though she eventually brings the exposition around to a personal confession at its conclusion, she uses the first-person plural as a means of simultaneously acknowledging her own faults and addressing the faults of her readership, a distinctly sermon-like rhetorical device. Smattering her argument with biblical proof texts, Isham also fashions this exposition into the mode of corporate confession, where she personally addresses the faults of an entire group before God. In this manner, Isham fashions herself as both spiritual teacher and intercessor early in her narrative. To an extent, Isham represents these qualities as concordant with the expectations of at least one family mentor, John Dod: "Now Mr Dod comming divers times. to edifie that good worke which he had begun (for which I much rejoyced) demanded of us if wee keep that order which he injoynd us of reading our chapters and relateing what wee could remember. and though I could not say much (especially in the Epistles) yet he would take it in good part" (14v). Contextually, the emphasis lies on the responsibility of the women of the household to read and repeat

Scripture since Isham's father is severely ill during this time. Dod's encouragement of these women to investigate Scripture and repeat their recollections suggests that his counsel went beyond prescribing the rote memorization of Scripture to specific encouragement to pursue a great deal of interpretive liberty. And as Arnold Hunt argues,

repetition was never just a derivative activity. [. . .] And even the simple exercise of repeating the sermon and looking up the biblical citations was a potential challenge to the preacher's authority. The men of Berea, it was pointed out, had tested the reliability of St Paul's sermons by 'comparing them with the veritie of the word written' and giving them 'no further credite . . . than they were consonant to the written word'. Hearers were enjoined to follow this example, and to exercise their own critical judgment by checking the preacher's proof-texts 'to see whether they be truly alleaged or no'. (77)

In fact, as Hunt points out, John Dod, along with his co-author Robert Cleaver, stress the medicinal benefits of personal amplification of spiritual truth as a means of practicing medicine in *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandements* (1604). Isham herself clearly associates Dod with this kind of spiritual healing, particularly because of his ministrations to her mother; she refers to him as one "who hath a singuler gift in comforting afflicted consciences above any I know" (11v). John Dod appears to have encouraged female exegesis of both Scripture and sermons as a means of internalizing spiritual truth, which could in turn act as medicine for the believer. Isham does not address Dod's reactions to her various disagreements with him (playing cards) or her father (spinning); she also does not clarify whether she ever vocalized those disagreements. She does clearly, however, validate her individual authority based on her personal exegesis and carefully represent that exegesis as sanctioned by a respected clergyman.

In conclusion, a reformation that located its foundational authority in the Word required the formulation of hermeneutical and exegetical strategies to clarify the process of obtaining knowledge and belief from that Word. The emphasis on submission directly to the text rather than to the Church as the authoritative interpreter of the text resulted in a massive shift in authority that brought to the foreground of public religious debate epistemic questions regarding the nature of truth and certainty. G.R. Evans identifies the primacy of epistemological concerns during the early reformations, explaining, “The Reformers’ appeal to ‘Scripture alone’ asserted that only the Word of God constituted authoritative evidence for truths of faith. But that evidence itself was proving more and more elusive in the light of contemporary scholarship” (112). Meanwhile, individual believers, including Anne Askew, Katherine Parr, Anne Dowriche, and Elizabeth Isham recognize the exhortative public benefit of written demonstrations of their certainties. They, like others of their contemporary reformist theologians, draw heavily on the direct appeal to the Divine for personal illumination and direct revelation of truth. While each, to varying degrees, makes prefatory mention of her gender in a rhetorical apologetic form, gender is conspicuously absent in these request to be taught of God. These women proceed with their devotion and exegesis under an assumption of the equality of souls so accordant with reformist teachings that they needed no apology.

Their exegetical strategies vary by social position, as well as necessity. Anne Askew begins her *Examinations* by carefully de-emphasizing her own capabilities in order to highlight the indomitable power of the Word and maintain her personal innocence. However, the popularity of *The First Examination* frees her to assume a more suitable authoritative posture for *The Latter Examination*. With little hope of persuading her interrogators to embrace her beliefs, Askew instead figures herself as a prophet and herald of truth in the face of Satan’s

opposition. Without restraint she demonstrates how her familiarity with the Word facilitates its interpretation through a process of selection and recombination; in using the words of the texts themselves, she cannot err. She also demonstrates her capabilities for producing spiritual knowledge by internalizing Psalm 54 and reproducing it within her own experiential context. Through her *metaphrasis*, her life functions as *enarratio*, a narrative of biblical truth publicly amplified through her bodily suffering and spiritual triumph.

Elizabeth Isham demonstrates her exegetical autonomy, which she frequently refers to as justification for her autonomy as an unmarried woman. Katherine Parr's exegetical achievements reveal the benefit of functioning outside of conventional expectations for public sermons and formal religious texts. In a fluid act of rewording, paraphrasing, and producing personal prayers and meditations, Parr locates previously accepted truth within the locus of the individual believer, resulting in a conscientious confirmation that imbues knowledge with life. For Parr, authority does not require originality; rather, authority comes from the internalization and personal reproduction of knowledge, always confirmed by the Spirit and the concordance with the Word. She leverages her social position of influence to demonstrate that the role of interpreter of Scripture has opened to all believers, whose new identity is both sanctioned and confirmed by the Word. And Anne Dowriche reimagines her authoritative role with a literary-historical obligation to interpret Scripture with spiritual immediacy and political urgency.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTERIORITY AND IDENTITY

In an overarching reformist endeavor to acquire epistemic solutions to problems of knowledge, faith, and certainty, women eagerly internalized the truths they discovered through personal exegesis, as well as their responsibilities as acquirers and transmitters of knowledge. The individualistic protestant mode of exploring scripture frequently resulted in a rich interiority and spiritual egalitarianism (regardless of whether that egalitarianism compensated for what they could not achieve in material spheres or fueled their efforts to change material spheres). As women probed the scriptures as knowledge seekers, they also looked for ways to articulate their process of personal identification with biblical types. Consequently, female interiority, a subjectivity largely facilitated by reflection upon scriptural texts, began to acquire new formulations of personal identity more rapidly than society's rules, both written and unwritten, could keep up with. Of the spiritual roles traditionally available to men, such as patriarch, confessor, intercessor, prophet, preacher, teacher, and pastor, which could women claim?

In *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*, Phyllis Mack demonstrates the potency of these labels for spiritual roles in the mid-seventeenth century. Although the politico-religious climate of the Commonwealth seemed to foster curiosity about and occasional acceptance of female prophets, the volatility of claiming the role of female prophet led Mary Cary to redefine prophecy in 1648: "Every saint in a sense, may be said to be a prophet . . . for when the Lord hath revealed himself unto the soul and discovered his secrets to it, . . . the soul cannot choose but declare them to others. . . . He that speaketh to edification, exhortation and consolation, though with much weakness, doth as truly prophesy as he that hath greatest abilities" (qtd in Mack 90). Mack points out that Cary's language carefully democratizes

the prophetic role, partially through its contrast of characteristic human frailty with the greatness of God. In “Prophecy,” Elaine Hobby joins Mack in singling out prophecy as a particular role in which “women might be thought especially likely to be used by the Lord . . . since the obedience and self-effacement normally required of them made them especially responsive to divine possession” (265). The array of public female voices during the Commonwealth demonstrates the potential malleability inherent in signifiers of authority. Women, for example, might find more public sympathy by fashioning themselves as prophets due to the lingering assumption of maleness behind the idea of preaching. And careful appropriation of traditional female identifiers could actually bolster female authority. For example, in *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England*, Erica Longfellow discusses Anna Trapnel’s careful self-construction as “handmaid of the Lord,” minimizing the volatility of preaching by representing the act of prophesying as passive reception and service, “As a ‘Riminge precheresse’, ‘singing’ quietly in a trance, Trapnel participates in a form of prophecy that she can construct as private devotion, the praying in her chamber that was acceptable for a woman where preaching in public was not” (Longfellow 158). In varying levels of defiance, early modern women usurped connotative social constructions as self-authorization. Which of these skillful rewritings of female roles contributed to a climate shift that would enable the dramatic reconfiguration of female involvement in the sectarian conflict of the mid-seventeenth century?

Wielding confidence backed by biblical exegesis, these writers recognized opportunities to reshape cultural expectations, often through the skillful navigation and manipulation of traditional female archetypes, which already tended to evoke a measure of reverence and respectability that writers could utilize as self-protection. In *Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England*, Megan Matchinske observes a significant trend beginning with Anne Askew,

“In the *Examinations*, she gestures toward a singular definition of ‘self’ (materially required as she is a woman), and she explores an as yet open and oddly a-religious creation of private being – of conscience – that will eventually discursively announce female interiority as synonymous with both family and the domestic” (49). While Matchinske views Askew’s interiority as “a-religious,” I argue that Askew’s interiority, as well as the interiority of later reformist women writers, necessarily relied on religion for both personal and public validation. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the crucial relationship between an individual and religion was changing. The very admission that the Church had strayed into human error because of its failure to recognize the supreme authority of Scripture had not only created a significant space for doctrinal revision but also necessitated the recognition of the authority of the conscience. Female writers such as Anne Askew strategically base their public justification of their interiority on Scripture-infused religious discourse to leverage their authority for maximum influence at a foundational epistemic level. And as Matchinske suggests, sometimes women could bolster their leverage by drawing on the familiar and relatively safe language of family and the domestic. Elizabeth Joceline, for example, carefully weaves her self-designated moral authority into the protected language of pious and devoted mother. *A Mother’s Legacie* begins with carefully positioned self-deprecation, yet as Joceline builds toward its conclusion, she increasingly enriches the work with her self-authorization with particular emphases on her intercessory and exhortative roles.

Of course, to claim overtly the titles of priest and preacher likely would have drowned Joceline’s work in controversy and silenced her message. Joceline instead employs figurative language that would circumvent such loaded terminology. In her justification for her work *The Mother’s Legacie*, Elizabeth Joceline avoids the idea of *preaching* altogether. Instead, she

invokes the parental right of the godly to bequeath her spiritual goods to her child, a right that ironically contrasts with the application of the legal system to material wealth. Thomas Goad, minister and author of the approbation to Joceline's work explains, "Our laws disable those that are under covert-baron, from disposing by Will and Testament any temporall estate. But no law prohibiteth any possessor of morall and spirituall riches, to impart them unto others, either in life by communicating, or in death by bequeathing" (A3r). Goad further strengthens his language by arguing that "corruptible riches" come with no moral obligation to confer them for appropriate use, "whereas vertue and grace have power beyond all empeachment of sexe or other debility to enable and instruct the possessor to employ the same unquestionably for the inward enriching of others" (A4v). This language intentionally circumvents anti-female rhetoric in favor of a more egalitarian idea of Christian virtues, reflecting Joceline's own positioning of men and women as equal in responsibility and ability. In effect, the moral and legal metaphor, used by both Goad and Joceline, levels the ground between male and female estate holders. Joceline's belief in the inevitable reproductive power of spiritual riches obligates her as a parent, rather than a mother, to share her own wealth with her unborn child, and her metaphoric legal language, introduced in her title and emphasized by both the legacy and the attached introductory materials, diffuses potential opposition to the public preservation of her female voice.

In *A Mother's Legacie*, Joceline redefines maternal authority, beginning with the preservation of her instructions in writing. The prefatory letter to her husband almost immediately addresses her authority as her duty: "I no sooner conceiued an hope that I should bee made a Mother by thee, but with it entred the consideration of a mothers duty, and shortly after followed the apprehension of danger that might preuent mee from executing that care I so exceedingly desired, I meane in religious training our Childe" (A11v-r). Joceline not only

associates spiritual training with maternal duty but also shapes the legacy to follow as a condensation of the entirety of the education she intends to bestow on the child. In effect, writing this work allows Joceline to preserve and publicize the authority that she would have otherwise have privately confined to the household. Her choice to publish also reveals her personal investment into the continuation of reformist teaching. Before she begins her *Legacie*, Joceline normalizes her spiritual authority by implying its common existence within households. What differentiates her authority is her choice to write her instructions for public consumption, under the guise of a private document intended solely for “the eyes of a most louing Husband, and of a childe exceedingly beloued” (n. pag.). As an additional protection, Joceline’s letter to her husband includes self-deprecatory language regarding her skill in writing:

I thought of writing, but then mine owne weaknes appeared so manifestly, that I was ashamed, and durst not undertake it. But when I could find no other means of expresse my motherly zeale, I encouraged my self with these reasons. First, that I wrote to a Child, and though I were but a woman, yet to a Childs iudgement, what I understand, might serue for a foundation to a better learning. (B1v)

However, despite this self-deprecation common to prefaces of women’s writing, Joceline does not specifically attribute her reluctance to write to a specifically female inability; instead her “weaknes” is non-specific and therefore non-debilitating, serving solely to enhance the magnitude of her motherly dedication. In fact, even though the phrase “though I were but a woman” suggests on its surface a level of female inferiority, Joceline clearly intends to emphasize the suitability of the spiritual instruction that comes from a pious mother; in fact, the *Legacie* itself quickly reveals her absolute confidence in the quality of her exhortations.

Contextually, Joceline’s doubts regarding the strength of writing emphasizes the

desirability and trustworthiness of speaking rather than writing. In *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590-1640*, Arnold Hunt explains, “This emphasis on the verbal, as opposed to the visual, was an integral part of Protestant self-definition and a deliberate break with the pre-Reformation Catholic past” (21). Joceline appears to have internalized this Protestant preference for the spoken word; in her particular circumstances, she clearly states that her writing is meant only for use in the case of her inability to speak directly to her child. Concordantly, conscious of writing’s limitations, Joceline again de-emphasizes writing in the *Legacie*: “If I had skill to write, I would write all I apprehend of the happy estate of true laboring Ministers” (5). Instead, she emphasizes her personally acquired practical knowledge of ministerial labor, knowledge apparently too vast and profound for adequate written articulation. Joceline thus manages to use deprecation of her writing skill, and writing generally, as a strategic means of emphasizing her own practical authority. She sets this authority as mother on equal footing with her husband’s as father late in the *Legacie*:

Thus farre I haue endeouored to exhort thee to thy duty towards God. Of which, the honour due to thy Parents is such a part as cannot bee separated: for God commands it *Honour thy father and thy mother*, it is the first Commandement of the second table, as *Thou shalt haue none other Gods but me*, is of the first: Idolatry being the greatest sin against God, & disobedience to parents, being the ring-leader in sinnes against man (91-92).

In this fervent passage, Joceline makes no distinction between maternal and paternal authority. In fact, the ambiguity of the second sentence can carry two meanings. One possible reading is that honor towards parents cannot be separated from duty towards God. Another more provocative reading is that honor due to parents is a part of duty that cannot be separated into categories of

father and mother and that consequently, parental authority is equal before God regardless of gender. Joceline represents this parental authority as so powerful and crucial that a child's respect of and obedience to parents is actually the key to keeping the remainder of the commandments.

Elizabeth Joceline's redefinition of motherhood also involves her use of ministerial language to shape her spiritual identity, despite her careful avoidance of directly applying the title "Minister" to herself. Instead, she tactfully represents herself as intercessor: "I haue so often kneeled to God for thee" (3). Moreover, Joceline actually models prayer for her child. Rather than referring her child to a scriptural or model contemporary prayer, Joceline writes her own prayers specifically to meet the needs that she anticipates for her child, including prayers for salvation and eternal life. She also customizes personal exegesis to be suitable for her child, expositing, for example, Ecclesiastes 12:1 as a lesson intended to produce meditation and service (12-14). She follows her exegesis with a set of rules she has designed for her child's spiritual guidance and preservation. Joceline demonstrates how seriously she takes a personal epistemic approach by stating, "I write not to the world, but to mine own childe, who, it may be, will more profit by a few weake instructions coming from a dead mother (who cannot euey day praise or to proue it as it deserues) than by farre better from much more learned" (11). For Joceline, the meaning of knowledge is partially dependent on an established relationship, increasing her maternal responsibility. Subsequently, her *Legacie* is filled with practical wisdom with an emphasis on personal conscience. In her conclusion, she specifies, "But alwayes make the Spirit thy guide, for there is life and peace" (108). Having recognized the potential for the immediacy of her death, Joceline proceeds under the assumption that shaping the Protestant epistemology of her child is her best move as an attempt to guide the child to heaven.

Although Elizabeth Joceline subtly extends the identifying features of motherhood to increase female authority, she frequently couches her efforts in the socially conservative language expected of her. When addressing the possibility of a son, she uses milder requests such as “I desire thee” and “Yet as I would not have thee”; however, she takes fuller liberty when addressing a future daughter with verbs like “instruct.” Generally, her wishes for her unborn child’s moral development are strong and thorough, yet she sometimes represents herself as speaking as a passive conduit for other undisputable sources of authority: God and preachers. In her admonition to pursue learning, Joceline points out, “Seeing God thus commands thee by his power, perswades thee in his mercy, and teaches thee, both by rule and his own most gracious example, how canst thou bee so deuoyd of grace, nay of reason, as not to obey so iust a Master? So mercifull a Father? so gracious a Teacher?” (81-82). Joceline protects her female voice from opposition by conferring the roles of master, father, and teacher on a socially indisputable authority other than herself. Yet even in her deflections, Joceline finds ways to justify her own authority. One strategy that appears is alignment of herself with conventional male authority: “But I once heard a religious Preacher affirme, (and I beleueed him) that those who had the ability of body to goe to Church, and yet out of any euill disposition . . . absented themselves, though they prayd, they were not heard” (84-85). This particular passage subtly joins Joceline’s voice with that of the preacher, using her personal belief to further validate the preacher’s own assumption. He receives credit for the teaching, but she adds the final note of verification.

In *A Mother’s Legacie*, Elizabeth Joceline probes the limits of traditional maternal authority, gaining ground for her public voice by avoiding, even blatantly denying, an attempt to appropriate traditionally male identifying labels as her own. Instead, she builds her grounds for female authority on maternity and simply takes action to preserve that authority even as she

relies on the safe identifying label of “good wife” to protect her legacy. Likewise, Elizabeth Isham draws heavily on the connotative safety of pious daughter, especially as she builds the narrative of her early moral development.

In my previous chapter I focused my analysis of Isham’s writing on the development of her exegetical style and her self-validation as an autonomous seeker of knowledge through attention to her relationship to biblical texts, sermons, and other devotional writings. I return to her here, however, because of her expansive use of her familial role as sister, daughter, and granddaughter (but not wife) to ground her spiritual roles as teacher, intercessor, healer, and prophet. I will show in this chapter how Isham employs exegesis as a means of justifying her choice to remain single and assuaging the doubts that arise when others oppose her decision. In fact, her struggle through doubts over the wisdom of refusing marriage reflects a greater struggle through doubts over spiritual certainty: in her life narrative, doubt links her social status and her spiritual one. In each case, her eventual victory testifies to her faithfulness to her convictions regarding her inner spiritual character and her divine calling to a single life.

Like Elizabeth Joceline, Elizabeth Isham fashions herself as a devout believer offering her legacy for the spiritual benefit of her familial audience. She stabilizes her societal position as a pious daughter and sister while expanding the possibilities for selfhood within these identities and redefining their roles as influencers of both family and society. The stakes of her success are heightened by her determination to avoid marriage, thus giving up the rhetorical protections of the traditional wifely role. Two forms of Elizabeth Isham’s self-writing survive: a *vade mecum* comprised of thirty-two folded sections, each of which contains brief notes on a year or phase of her life, and a manuscript entitled “My Booke of Rememberance,” a thirty-eight leaf autobiography written completely in prose. In her article “Coming to Knowledge: Elizabeth

Isham's Autobiography and the Self-Construction of an Intellectual Woman," Julie A. Eckerle discusses the complexity of genre categorization of the text, suggesting the possibility of identifying it as a conversion narrative then persuasively arguing for its identification as a literacy narrative, "a tale of the construction of the literate self" (103). As a personal text allegedly written only for the limited audience of Isham's brother's family, "My Booke of Rememberance" draws upon previous patterns of self-writing without many of the constraints of public expectation for devotional writing or spiritual exhortation. The daughter of a landowning gentleman, Isham received both education and spiritual heritage from her Protestant family. In her work, she weaves through her records of education and spiritual heritage, as well as her insistent refusal to marry, and strikingly reveals personal detailing of the inner conflict that produces doubt and leads to certainty.

In fact, Elizabeth Isham's epistemology and exegesis distinctly shape her interiority, as well as her form. Presenting the single life as a higher calling, she writes under the condition that the continual acquisition of knowledge is a substantial reason for recording and preserving the acts of God: "But \now/ such is thy great mercy O my God to grant me the Knowledge of thee wherein I glory; And althought in these thinges I was inferiour to \my/ Brother and Sister yet by thy grace I am that I am and I trust thy grace in me is not in vaine. which by thy assistance I hope to declare in the growth thereof from time to time to thy praise" (5v). Isham wants to use the increase of knowledge, correspondent with spiritual growth, as a measure of God's work in her life. The process of recording development becomes a method of creating meaning that, in turn, clarifies her experience. Her narrative is a painstaking attempt to reconstruct significant moments of spiritual knowledge acquisition, which together define a life course towards godliness. Consequently, her childhood contains some troublesome behaviors such as insincere

prayer: “I \have/ considered of my praying when I was a yong Child unto thee, and thought it better not to have done it, because that I uttered a vocall kind of Servis talking like a parrit rather of custom then devotion, and littel better after more of devotion then of knowlege; speaking words too wonderfull for mee” (6v). Yet Isham chooses to shape these behaviors into early forms of godliness that will point to a trajectory of growth. She continues, “yet upon consideration I thinke better of this early serving of thee my God” (6v-7r). Isham then finds a way to represent this early service as a sign of knowledge, albeit incomplete:

nither can I now so well remember what I thought of thee when I first learnt, onely this is the first that I can call to mind haveing an areall apprehension of thee to be glorious and increasing in this knowledge I thought thee to have a celestiall being from all eternity . . . haveing but a small Sparke of knowledge, to that which now of thy goodnes thou has endued me withal yet whatsoever I then had or now have is of thy giveing (7r)

Isham strategically subsumes a potential cause for doubt within a pattern of continual change. While tempted to judge her childhood behavior as worthless, she is now inclined to perceive it as a healthy step towards spiritual knowledge. For Isham, spiritual epistemology is itself a sign of spiritual safety. Reconstructing the epistemic process confirms and validates both the process and its significance. As a result, remembering, as well as shaping memory, is a necessary part of spiritual certainty for Elizabeth Isham.

Isham’s reconstruction of the epistemic process not only incorporates doubt but also purposes it as a literary device to anchor the entire narrative. Throughout *My Booke of Remembrance*, Isham periodically forms seasons of doubt, often of eternal security but sometimes in relation to decision-making, into crucial transitions between stages of increasing knowledge. Arguably, doubt is the nemesis that Isham must overcome to refine and stabilize her

epistemology. When she experiences a trial of doubt where sermons cannot help her, she relies on her own exegesis, as well as familial models of faith, to reorient her interpretation of her past actions and current trouble. Retrospect allows Isham to conclude, “also by this time (as I take it) I came to a more perfect or fuller knowledge of the Blessed Trinity” (28v). Later she refers to an Augustinian model of knowledge confirmation: “Since I have found S Aust words thus. I know thee O Lord God who knowest me” (29r). Augustine’s model more clearly states the self-reflexive confirmation of knowledge. Clarke and Longfellow have identified Rogers’ translation of Isham’s source as “Thus knowe I thee, o Lord God, who knowest me, thus knowe I thee” (qtd in Isham 29r). Isham’s marginal annotations reveal her specific intention to represent coming to knowledge as a process correspondent with growing faith. In effect, Isham justifies her entire book as a useful resource in the midst of doubt by demonstrating epistemic strategies for dealing with uncertainty. Doubt motivates her authorship; an individual’s doubt requires individual certainty, which for Isham is available most readily through individual access to the Word.

As Julie A. Eckerle discusses the generic inconsistencies in *My Booke of Rememberance*, she also posits the question, “might such fissures—particularly her recording of moments of doubt—be necessary for the spiritual component of her text? Although such questions are themselves unanswerable, they help to explain why rigid generic labeling is often neither possible nor desirable” (113). My response is unwaveringly yes. In fact, as I have argued, these moments of doubt function both literarily and rhetorically as identifying markers in Isham’s epistemic quest to assure herself of her own eternal security. Isham herself very clearly articulates the benefit of her “relapses” of faith: “I feared for thou mightest justly hide thy face from mee, for so aggravating a weight upon sinne is a relapse. it being upon knowledge. and a profession of a former recovery yet found my selfe the better when I thought of those good

resolutions which I had formerly being more ready with willingnes and joyfullnes (with comfort) in thee to embrace the same” (32v). Here Isham provides her readers with both the internal struggle of doubt and its resolution: that her selfhood is improved and strengthened as she looks back upon previous patterns of doubt and reassurance. For Isham, doubt is a necessary part of the spiritual experience because it results in deeper faith, as well as interiority. By recasting uncertainty as an epistemic tool, rather than an affront to her epistemology, she subsumes it into the overarching narrative of her own rich inner spirituality. Externalizing her testimony becomes an internal verification of truth.

Isham interprets Scripture through the lens of personal experience, and she interprets her personal experience through the lens of Scripture. Her climactic concluding prayer obviates these strategies as she assumes her readers will naturally use her life and her proof texts to reflect upon each other. The fact that her life narrative ends in an extremely long prayer suggests that Isham believes she can best conclude her written development of her interiority by opening up her deepest self to reveal an inner struggle over sin and ultimate submission to God. Ultimately, this is the identity that she chooses to leave recorded for others. She not only references the inner spiritual struggle of Romans 7 but also represents herself as its embodiment, resulting in the emphasis on a strong female will determined to direct its force into self-submission to God while maintaining its autonomy with its resolution not to marry.

Elizabeth Isham relies on personal exegesis not only for epistemic clarification but also for the validation of her identity as an acquirer and transmitter of spiritual knowledge. She justifies her self-inscribed role as unmarried spiritual matriarch with careful contextualization of the authority she claims. Such authority requires both intelligence and humility, causing Isham to

simultaneously emphasize the strength of her intellectual gifts and deemphasize them with submissive and deferential language:

therefore now the more praise I owe unto thee. Both for Enriching my Fancy. and clarifieing my thoughts. . . . as also I have found my owne pride and high mindednes to hinder me in good. and in conceiving some mens persons not able to utter that. which some others can. and to despise plannes because I have found the golden chaine of Eloquence to be more attractive to draw. yet have I found much good in those persons. which I have heard but meanly esteemed of. as I have found that Doctren wholsome to me which hath not bene florished with the flowers /words\ of Rhetorick for what good doth all human witt or art aford us (tho I desire to account them as thy gifts) in respect of that one knowledg S paule the Apostle speaketh of when he said I esteemed to know nothing save Jesus Christ. and him crucified (35v)

Isham's paradoxical language prevents self-negation. Her high-mindedness is corrected by clarification that comes from God. Her intellectual capacity enables her to evaluate the caliber of rhetoric and ability of teachers of doctrine, and she finds irony in the communication of truth through improbable sources. Her words likely reflect on a number of local clergy whose sermons she has evaluated; however, her emphasis on the paradoxical location of truth in those "meanly esteemed of" also endorses her own position as spiritual authority in case her femaleness causes any of her audience to reject her authority. Isham's confidence in her own rhetorical ability appears with her understated note that human wit and art are gifts from God, implicitly gifts given to her.

Even these, however, she subordinates to spiritual knowledge that comes from Scripture and is accessible to all. While this language provides a level of protection against critics, Isham will not hide her perception of a direct correlation between her intellectual gifts and a divine calling: “lord I praise thee for those faculties of the mind thou hast given me and perfect sence and hast set me in a calling so fit for my condition. and given me such a competent estate and delivered me out of troubles and vexations as I have [fallen into]” (36r). In a prayer that includes a series of praises for familial blessing, this marginal addition reveals Isham’s awareness that her combination of spiritual authority and single status is still questioned by some. Isham counters this opposition with the assertion that her spiritually authoritative familial role was designed directly by God’s bestowment of her particular abilities. In effect, Isham implies defends the assignment of social role based on individual merit, regardless of gender.

Apart from a generalized exegetical argument for her own spiritual authority, Isham does claim specific influential models that justify her authority on the grounds of spiritual heritage. Her mother Judith functions as a primary model of exemplary female teacher. She extends the same spiritual responsibility to her maids that she requires of her children and provides spiritual instruction to prepare them for communion. The strength of her mother’s spiritual intuition appears in Isham’s reference to “a simple fellow in whom my mother much delighted in and admired because of his Devotion.” Obviously concerned for this man’s spiritual state, Judith “asked devines if they thought he might be saved, but some seemed to doubt of it,” likely due to an intellectual disability. Her response suggests a remarkable opposition to these authorities; she chooses to base her belief on the simple fellow’s future in heaven based on her spiritual insight into his “good inclination and harmolesnesse” (18v). Elizabeth Isham not only records these particular characteristics of her mother but also represents herself as their inheritor. Following

Judith's pattern of concern for the servants, Isham defies the expectations of the rest of her family to improve the servants' education:

Likewise I learnt one of my mothers maids to read I tried divers but could not bring them to any perfection. but onely this one some discourridged me that hardly any olde body would learne. they having many bussnesses to set there heads a worke, which children have not, yet I stuck close to the teaching of one who was industerous to learne. and thereby profited. contrary to the expectation of some (17r)

In her mother's intuitive footsteps, she perceives the inner worth of the industrious maid and responds with particular attention. In fact, at one point, in reference to her mother's struggle with melancholy, Isham's language suggests that she associates prophetic ability with her mother:

"Now in part she prophesied truly of her selfe, though not so bad as she feared" (11r). In fact, Isham's entire narrative represents her mother as having a deep interiority as a forebear who experiences the same epistemic uncertainty and triumph as Isham herself. On the same page, Isham references her mother's notes as a preserved text suited for instruction, both for self and for future generations. Later in the narrative, Isham even more clearly states the epistemic value of these records: "yet many more things came into my mind which I thought would be profitable for me to doe. as also I thought to make use of my mothers writtings wherein I might find many good instructions for the bettering of my owne life (for me thinkes I enter in \to/ her very soule which tho her body be dead yet speaketh) and now I have found that which heretofore I should hardly have beleaved" (34r). Like her mother, Isham determines to overcome doubt with the practice of writing towards a solution. Isham's twofold justification for the preservation of her own writing involves the power of the written word to speak to the soul, as well as the power of the written word to live far beyond the body. By recording her life process of coming to

knowledge, Isham ensures the longevity of her epistemic production with a strong likelihood of its reproduction through her present and future influence.

Isham also internalizes the medicinal language used by John Dod to describe his spiritual function as a healer of afflicted consciences. Her description of her participation in Dod's work reveals how seriously she took her responsibility to use her exegesis for the benefit of others. After an extended time of confinement to bed, possibly self-imposed, Judith Isham's physical and spiritual state caused her husband a great deal of distress. At this time, John Dod was called in to help her. Elizabeth Isham records the process with specifically language that reflects the combination of medical and spiritual diagnosis and effect, explaining, "the very first \time/ he came to her she was much revived" (12r). Elizabeth continues by emphasizing the particular effects of Dod's exposition of Isaiah 28 and his subsequent instruction that she and her siblings each read two chapters of Scripture a day to either of their parents, as well as prepare to recollect the contents later. Although Dod does not appear to have assigned this responsibility to the Isham siblings specifically for the spiritual benefit of their mother Judith, Elizabeth is apparently profoundly influenced by the transformation she has seen in her mother. She claims to have her own spiritual ability to provide exegetical diagnosis: "I perceving the cause of my mothers sadnes would picke out places fitt for her. when she called mee to read to her besides some nots which I would put in her mind of as James 2.12. the 4.7. 1 pet.5.8. psal. 27.14. these when I had mentioned to her" (12r). Although Isham's subsequent comment that she uses this skill to get the better of her sister reveals both childish immaturity and insecurity, Isham's persistence in applying her exegetical abilities to the specific needs of her mother reveals a growing confidence in her own authority. She not only recalls Scripture but also applies it appropriately to the particular doubts of her mother with apparent success. As part of Isham's construction of herself

as a woman set apart from marriage for particular service to God and her family, this childhood story emphasizes that she has learned from a respected model of authority (Dod) and proven herself worthy of performing his services herself.

In order to clarify and validate her subjectivity, Isham models her identity after her mother and grandmother, sanctioning her own spiritual authority by showing how these female relatives modeled their own spiritual authority. She carefully weaves the roles of intellectual, prophet, teacher, and healer into her narrative in order to solidify that authority. But the biblical model of authority that is perhaps most persuasive and pervasive in her narrative is the Old Testament personification of wisdom. In her article “Female Authority and Authorization Strategies,” Jane Stevenson summarizes wisdom as a model:

The Bible also provided contradictory models for writing women. The Old Testament puts a number of female figures in positions where their words are authoritative, but the most important to early modern women is the personification of *chochma*, Holy Wisdom, the Beloved of God. As an image of supernatural female creativity and power, she is potentially a fertile model for women. The description of Wisdom in Ecclesiasticus overlaps with that of the Bride in the Song of Solomon, identified both with the Church and with the Virgin Mary, creating a single, polysemic, feminine, image of creativity.

(23)

Stevenson continues her argument by with a discussion of the association between the biblical Wisdom and the classical model Minerva as a powerful model of female authority quite familiar to early modern writers. While Elizabeth Isham does not directly incorporate classical imagery, her fixation on wisdom is prevalent and consistent, appearing most intensely at a moment of crisis: “Now some counting me not so wise because I was \could/ not \be/ perswaded to marry I

rather thought I was foolish because I desired not the heaven\ly/ wisdom so much as I should” (28v). Isham imbues this social disagreement over her marriage with irony to emphasize her commitment to God and to wisdom.

An extended meditation on wisdom follows. By associating wisdom with Christ, she implies a direct replacement: wisdom/Christ will be her sole desire, one that she will not allow to be misinterpreted. She justifies her choice to elevate wisdom above all other desires by referencing Solomon, whose sole request for wisdom pleased God. A brief aside reveals one of her particular Scriptural interests: “I understood this with reading the marginall note on the Booke of proverbes which I was \now/ much taken with especially with that place the 8.31” (28v). In Proverbs 8, the female personification of Wisdom offers an eloquent address that climactically reinforces humanity’s need for wisdom. This text strongly influences Isham’s association between wisdom and Christ, as well as her confidence that having Christ results in having wisdom. Accordingly, images of wisdom appear throughout her narrative. Julia A. Eckerle notes that Isham “constructs herself as a wise woman with the benefit of hindsight and age . . . she implies that she herself has the wisdom that many others lack, solidifying this persona of a wise old woman as she draws her narrative to a close” (100). For Eckerle, Isham’s consistent references to wisdom unify an otherwise fragmented narrative. I argue that Isham’s identification with wisdom supports the greater emphasis of her narrative as a whole: “also I had a fuller knowledge of the wisdome of the sonne and of the power of the Holy Ghost and I thought my faith like a goodly tree spreding it selfe into goodly branches” (28v). In this moment, the epistemic quest for certainty joins together with the obtaining of wisdom to produce a healthy, growing faith. The joint biblical personification of wisdom, both as female and as Christ, offers to Isham a solid foundation on which to build her authoritative identity.

Isham's final prayer, the conclusion of her entire life narrative, supports this idea. She writes, "Receive therefore thine owne gift. and let not my unworthynesse or weaknesse in it hinder my desire which I hope thou wilt not reject. . . . but accept. even as thou did-est the offering of the women which spun goats haire for the use of the Tabernacle. when the princes bro-ught there golden offerings," (38r). This final imagery of spinning women might initially appear random, even inconclusive. However, the context of Isham's source, Exodus 35:25-29, clarifies her intentions:

And all the women that were wise hearted, did spin with their hands, and brought ye spun worke, euen the blewe silke, and the purple, the skarlet, and the fine linen. Likewise al the women, whose hearts were moued with knowledge, spun goates heare. And ye rulers brought onix stones, & stones to be set in the Ephod, and in the brest plate: Also spice, and oyle for light, and for the anoynting oyle, and for the sweete perfume. Euery man and woman of the children of Israel, whose hearts moued the willingly to bring for all the worke which the Lorde had commanded the to make by the hand of Moses, brought a free offering to the Lord. (*Geneva Bible*)

The building of the Tabernacle, the mobile center of worship for the Old Testament Israelites until the building of the Temple, was a remarkably collaborative process. Men, women, the wealthy, and the poor all contributed as they desired. Isham's citation, however, highlights the particularly powerful image of wise and knowledgeable women spinning. Their work stands side by side in significance with the jewels offered by rulers. Isham perceptively associates her own work, the writing of her life narrative, with the spun fabrics that would adorn God's temple, and she validates her participation in the work of God by aligning herself with wise and

knowledgeable women of the Word. And, somewhat ironically, this Old Testament imagery gives her the final upper hand in her disagreement with her father over the merits of spinning.

The abrupt end to *My Booke of Remembrance* may result from Isham's ironic acquisition of the maternal role. Although she ended the *Booke* in 1638, Isham would live another sixteen years, during which time she entered brief notes in her *vade mecum* and recorded medicinal recipes and practices, though she never extended her life writing into the final stage of her life. In addressing this shift in record-keeping, Eckerle footnotes Isham's altered familial role:

As Millman noted at the Princeton Symposium, the nature of Isham's notations in her diary changes after her sister-in-law's death: 'in practical terms as well as spiritual, the impact of these events would be significant for her: in this case, the outcome would have been to shift her position in the household, giving her additional responsibilities. . . . The extra burden of a parental role may have pushed her from a reflective, devotional model of writing to a more businesslike approach. (117)

Eckerle supports the plausibility of this explanation for Isham's lack of literary output in the final years of her life by referencing Rachel Speght, whose literary persona disappeared altogether from the public forum after her marriage. While Isham's experience as a deeply introspective, single female theologian suddenly turned caregiver halts the expanse of her influential writing, it does also lend its complexity and subjectivity to the host of early modern mothers who fail to draw critical attention because of their literary silence by giving us a glimpse of the kind of women who raised families in middle-class early modern England.

Although Elizabeth Isham's exegesis often appears highly individualistic because of her personal quest to apply Scripture to her immediate circumstances, both male and female exegetes

mingled within an ecclesiastical community with its own exegetical influences. Until the Rump Parliament repealed it in 1650, compulsory church attendance ensured the ongoing influence of ecclesiology in family life. From the beginnings of the reformations, opposition to clerical celibacy, deliberately publicized in iconic marriages such as those of Martin Luther and John Calvin, increased interest in the development a richer body of teachings on the doctrine of marriage and inspired reformers to clarify biblical grounds for teachings on gender. In the meantime, the Church of England continued to disseminate its liturgy and praxis within an established body of traditional language. In her article “Religion and the Construction of the Feminine,” Diane Willen notes, “Historians of gender recognize that religion played a prominent part in women’s lives and culture; that women in turn must be part of the narrative of religious change . . . and that religion was itself gender, that is, experienced differently by men and women and expressed through gendered images or language” (33). The language used by reformists to reclaim mystical marriage theology and reshape its implications reveals a mutual influence between marriage and ecclesiology with both liberating and constraining implications for female roles.

Liturgical texts read consistently in the churches during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I contain some surprisingly democratic language regarding marital relationships. For example, *A Homily of the State of Matrimony* explains “whence the original beginning of Matrimony cometh and why it is ordained. It is instituted of GOD, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendship, to bring forth fruit and to avoid fornication” (Davis 24). Alternate editions of the text use the phrase “perpetual friendly fellowship”; in either case suggesting a level of equality in the union. However, ancient

assumptions of the physical and intellectual inferiority of women quickly interrupt this otherwise ideal marital scenario.

William Heale's 1608 *An Apology for Women* rises to defend the female sex against the blatant misogyny of a Mr. Dr. G, whose pamphlet advocating the lawful beating of wives had circulated rapidly through Oxford. This particular pamphlet, produced in an admirable spirit of defense against male cruelty, illustrates two particularly complex problems for early modern women. First, in his section "The Same Confirmed by the Rules of Morality or Civil Policy," Heale extends the democratic language of the homily:

Many are the friendly offices of thy friend, many more of thy wife. She sits at thy table, she lies in thy bosom, she shares of thy grievances and lessens the burden, she participates thy pleasures and augments thy joy. In matters of doubt she is thy counselor, in case of distress thy comforter. She is a co-partner with thee in all accidents of life. Neither is there any sweeter taste of friendship than the coupling of souls in this mutuality. (69)

Heale's language describing an admirable vision for mutuality and partnership unfortunately detracts from female subjectivity by centering each item on his list in the husband's realm of experience and failing to cast a vision for reciprocation from the husband back to the wife.

Secondly, in "The Same Discussed by the Civil and Canon Law," Heale shares his opinion on "too too holy women gospellers" who sermonize "if the spirit of their devotion move them." As a result, Heale concludes, "As well then too much curiosity of religion as too much neglect is a fault in women. So that if their frailty lead them into either extreme the husband hath the bit of reprehension in his power to keep them in the golden mean" (77). In this unfortunate rhetorical turn, Heale's concession weakens the foundation of his defense by succumbing to the practicality

of the civil law instead of adhering to the idealized homily. Of course, for women, the “golden mean” represents an impossible balance between devotion and silence in their quest for piety, a balance that rests entirely on the subjective inclinations of their husbands.

The reformist insistence on the presence of the mystical union did not preclude practical implications for households. For example, the Geneva’s glosses directly implicate contemporary male readers in ungodly practices: “Because many men pretende the infirmities of their wiues to excuse their owne hardnesse and crueltie, the Apostle willeth us to marke what manner of Church Christ gate, when hee ioyned it to himself, and how hee doeth not onely not loathe all her filth and uncleannesse, but ceaseth not to wipe the same away with his cleannesse, until hee haue wholly purged it” (*Geneva*, Ephesians 5:26). This passage illustrates the ongoing the mutual influence of established views of marriage and ecclesiology. Texts such as Ephesians 5 reinforce the implementation of hierarchal structure with the husband’s headship expected in marriages, and the implementation of this structure with its successes and failures influences the interpretation of the text. Richard Sibbes, author of several major sermons on mystical marriage, finds in this mystery the ultimate solution for the corruption of humanity: “*There must be a conjugal love to Christ*, so that there are no terms on which they will change their Lord and husband, and yield themselves absolutely over to be ruled by their own lusts, or the lusts of others” (60). In this passage from *The Bruised Reed*, intimate engagement in both literal and figurative marriage prevents the sins of infirmity.

The prevalence of exegetical incorporations of the mystical marriage tradition within the Church created extensive space for the re-appropriation of traditional gender roles and sexual imagery. In fact, Diane Willen traces a pattern of subsequent gender confusion in imagery, beginning in the Medieval Church with popular images of men representing their feminized

selves in submission to God. The Medieval origins of the mystical marriage tradition appealed to Protestant and Catholic theologians alike, resulting in the consistent appearance of mystical marriage language in early modern writings regardless of particular religious affiliation. Willen's research leads her to the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, who "also argues that medieval religious women avoided 'metaphorical maleness' and relied instead on female images to describe their own relationships with God. She concludes that medieval women 'saw in their own female bodies . . . a symbol and a means of approach to the humanity of God'" (Willen 33). As a result, both male and female poets frequently use intimate language as an expression of spiritual submission to God. Richard Crashaw's poem "A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa" illustrates the male gravitation toward the representation of extreme piety through female exempla. In this tribute, Crashaw uses the martyr Saint Teresa as a single figure representative of the Church, the bride of Christ. She has determined to travel to spread knowledge of Christ's death with the Moors, but before she herself dies, Crashaw interjects,

Sweet, not so fast; lo! thy fair spouse,  
Whom thou seek'st with so swift vows,  
Calls thee back, and bids thee come  
T' embrace a milder martyrdom.... (ll. 51-54)

The subsequent stanza extends the moment of death through the language of sexual submission, implying an orgiastic sigh where Teresa's soul finally "exhale[s] to heaven" (ll. 74-75).

Crashaw's poetry, which frequently appropriates female experience as a means of spiritual meditation, provides evidence of early modern male poets' voyeuristic approach to poeticizing mystical marriage. For men, sexualized language facilitated an engagement with the divine extended eroticized through the "other" experience of humility and submission.

For female writers, however, the gender confusion resulting from mystical marriage theology opened interpretive room for hermeneutical approaches to biblical texts that valued their femaleness as truly enabling rather than debilitating. The biblical text perhaps most influential in disrupting Protestant exegesis is Song of Songs, which somewhat confounded otherwise straightforward reformist emphases on mandatory literalness in scriptural interpretation. In his study “Reformation Attitudes toward Allegory and the Song of Songs,” George L. Scheper explains,

We shall see that many Protestants (almost all of whom accepted the allegorical interpretation of the Song) insisted even more fervently than the Catholics that the Song had *only* a spiritual sense and neither a typological historical reference to Solomon (which many Catholics accepted) nor any reference to carnal love at all . . . . Indeed, it was their very scruples about admitting any implication of multiple senses that led a number of later Protestant theorists of exegesis to admit a more extreme brand of allegorization than the medieval Catholics . . . . In Madsen’s words: ‘By the middle of the seventeenth century the distinction between the Catholic theory of manifold senses and the Protestant theory of the one literal sense had, for all practical purposes, become meaningless.’” (555)

While Protestant exegetes sought to avoid Catholic error by emphasizing the unifying literalness of all Scripture, Song of Songs perpetually created trouble with the extremity of its inevitable literal sensuality. Commentators like Nathanael Homes tried to prevent their audiences from succumbing to carnality: “away, say we, with all carnal thoughts, whiles we have heavenly things presented us under the notion of Kisses, Lips, Breasts, Navel, Belly, Thighs, Leggs. Our minds must be above our selves, altogether minding heavenly meanings” (qtd in Scheper 558).

This kind of interpretive difficulty forced reformists to rearticulate their exegetical strategies to protect their assumption that a single literal meaning of Song of Songs could involve solely the allegorical relationship between Christ and the Church. Despite the associated interpretive problems, Song of Songs appeared frequently in sixteenth century sermons, Protestant commentaries, and poetic literature to the extent that Scheper claims, “the centrality of that book to Reformation spirituality cannot be doubted” (556). The reformist preoccupation with mystical marriage and its uncertain epistemic foundation created room within the community of theological debate for women like Aemilia Lanyer to join the conversation, intending to reshape public opinion regarding female authoritative roles.

The years of Aemilia Lanyer’s life nearly encompass the lifespans of both Elizabeth Joceline and Elizabeth Isham. While these women shared the same historical and political context in England, Lanyer’s interactions with nobility, namely her time in the households of Susan Bertie, Countess of Kent, and Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, enabled her to gain access to connections at court, where she eventually spent several luxurious years as a mistress to Elizabeth I’s cousin Henry Carey, 1st Baron Hunsdon. Married to her cousin and musician Alfonso Lanyer after conceiving Carey’s child, Aemilia Lanyer spent most of her life grappling with an unsatisfying marriage and financial difficulties. As Su Fang Ng points out in “Aemilia Lanyer and the Politics of Praise,” “By overemphasizing Lanyer's feminism, we lose sight of important class tensions within the poem (that partly arise from her own class aspirations) and obscure the complexity of her poem as she negotiates the patron-client relationship” (434). Although I agree with Ng that Lanyer addresses class difference with an element of criticism and that these differences complicate her prefatory materials as well as her exegetical approach, I wish to focus my analysis primarily on Lanyer’s attempt to negotiate a

reformist cultural position for female authority by drawing heavily on the language of mystical marriage.

Before introducing mystical marriage into her work, however, Lanyer first sets the tone for the epistemic irony crucial to the development of her message. She begins “To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie” with irony involving her own access to knowledge:

But in this triall of my slender skill,  
I wanted knowledge to performe my will.

For euen as they that doe behold the Starres,  
Not with the eie of Learning, but of Sight,  
To find their motions, want of knowledge barres  
Although they see them in their brightest light:  
So, though I see the glory of her State,  
Its she that must instruct and eleuate. (B1r, ll. 131-48)

This slightly unconventional introduction ascribes knowledge’s source to Queen Anne but leaves Lanyer’s poetic skill unquestioned. Metaphorically, Lanyer’s senses serve her well, but she must combine their power with the instruction and elevation of knowledge in order to successfully produce learning. She continues to build her epistemic foundation for her poetry in “To all virtuous Ladies in generall,” in which she instructs her audience,

Put on your wedding garments euery one,  
The bridegroom stayes to entertaine you all;  
Let Virtue be your guide, for she alone  
Can leade you right that you can neuer fall;

And make no stay for feare he should be gone:  
But fill your Lamps with oyle of burning zeale,  
That to your Faith he may his Truth reueale. (B3r, ll. 8-14)

This passage combines epistemic ideas with the mystical marriage metaphor: Lanyer associates female preparation for the accommodation of the bridegroom with preparation for the revelation of truth as an enhancement to faith. Lanyer's allusion to Christ's parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 implies that virgins can either be wise or foolish in preparing for the bridegroom's arrival, which Christ likens to the coming kingdom of heaven. Lanyer's incorporation of this text reflects how early modern women, personally motivated by this text to prepare for their bridegroom Christ, might seek means to acquire wisdom, as well as epistemic revelation, through access to the Word.

While a number of early modern women's texts claim personal investment in the medieval tradition of extensive emotional identification with the body of Christ in the midst of passionate meditation, Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* perhaps epitomizes the way this familiarity and intimacy between the female believer and Christ results in female empowerment. Elizabeth M. A. Hodgson argues that Lanyer uses female identification with the qualities of Christ to multiple advantages: "The mutual sympathy of women and Jesus that Lanyer constructs is also clearly designed to color Lanyer herself as a writer. Her self-descriptions in the poem deliberately invoke this same figure of the woman who, through her pitying love for Jesus, is rendered both weak and powerful" (107). Lanyer extends the empowering language of intimacy with Christ particularly to Lady Lucy, the Countess of Bedford, adding undeniably sensual overtones to her epistemic implications:

Me thinks I see faire Virtue readie stand,

T'unlocke the closet of your lovely breast,  
Holding the key of Knowledge in her hand,  
Key of that Cabbine where your selfe doth rest  
To let him in, by whom her youth was blest:  
The true-love of your soule, your hearts delight,  
Fairer than all the world in your cleare sight. (D4r, ll. 1-7)

Knowledge here becomes both a kind of epistemic certainty of spiritual knowledge facilitated by virtue and a suggestive reminder that virtue precedes physically intimate knowledge between lovers.

Having hinted at the epistemic substructures of her work to come, Lanyer lays important factual groundwork in "To the Vertuous Reader" for the coming epistemic irony. She lists underappreciated female roles in the preservation of humanity, a series of wise and valiant biblical women, and a climactic passage on Christ's multifaceted relationships with women. Then in "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum," after an extensive recompilation and amplification of biblical texts, primarily from the Psalms, Lanyer positions herself as a transmitter and certifier of knowledge by demonstrating her capacity to recount the relevant, faith-increasing acts of God:

Pardon (good Madame) though I have digrest  
From what I doe intend to write of thee,  
To set his glorie forth whom thou lov'st best,  
Whose wonderous works no mortall eie can see;  
His special care on those whom he hath blest  
From wicked worldlings, how he sets them free:  
And how such people he doth overthrow

In all their waies, that they his power may know. (A3r, ll. 145-52)

The digression to which Lanyer refers actually demonstrates her breadth of familiarity with scripture and ability to re-communicate it through incorporation into her broader message. Not only does God overthrow the wicked as a revelation of his power, but Lanyer's task of rehearsing God's glorious acts also acts as a testimony to her knowledge of that power and a demonstration of her exegetical abilities. She does not hide her confidence that God has ordained her for this purpose:

Yet if he please t'illuminate my Spirit,  
And give me Wisdom from his holy Hill,  
That I may Write part of his glorious Merit,  
If he vouchsafe to guide my Hand and Quill,  
To shew his Death, by which we doe inherit  
Those endlesse Ioyes that all our hearts doe fill;  
Then will I tell of that sad blacke fac'd Night,  
Whose mourning Mantle covered Heavenly Light. (B2r, ll. 321-8)

This tightly constructed conditional statement replaces a longer invocation or prayer for illumination. Lanyer has already demonstrated in previous stanzas her wisdom and ability to record God's merits, giving little doubt that her desire for illumination already has and will be successful. The structure of the stanza confirms her confidence by launching directly into the resulting narrative of Christ's even before concluding the conditional outcome.

Through this narrative, Lanyer strategically incorporates epistemic irony that emphasizes the juxtaposition of accessible knowledge with inept observation.

And who they seeke, thou gently doest demand;

This didst thou Lord, t'amaze these Fooles the more,  
T'inquire of that, thou knew'st so well before.

.....  
When Heavenly Wisdome did descend so lowe  
To speak to them: they knew they did not well,  
Their great amazement made them backward goe:  
Nay, though he said unto them, I am he,  
They could not know him, whom their eyes did see.

How blinde were they could not discern the Light!

How dull! if not to understand the truth, (B4v-Cr, ll. 494-506)

Lanyer repeatedly reminds her audience of the irony that the highly educated High Priests, as well as their hired men sent to retrieve Christ, could encounter firsthand the clear divinity of Christ without any recognition of truth. She seems to dwell particularly on the failure of education and status to result in true knowledge, an ironic "learned ignorance"; eventually criticizing "unlearned men" for being so "farre from knowing him" (Cv, ll. 546, 553-5). In these lines, Lanyer subtly transitions the irony from general guilt to specifically male guilt, eventually directing the epistemic irony toward the singular figure of Caiaphas, who demands to know Christ's identity. Once again, Lanyer points out the accessibility of truth as Christ speaks in a manner "As they might easly know from whence he came" (l. 698) as a means of unraveling Caiaphas's stated objective:

To thee O *Caiaphas* doth he answere give,  
That thou hast said, what thou desir'st to know

.....  
He speaketh truth, but thou wilt not beleeve,

Nor canst thou apprehend it to be so:

Though he expresse his Glory unto thee,

Thy Owly eies are blind, and cannot see. (ll. 705-12)

Caiaphas epitomizes the epistemic irony that Lanyer seeks to communicate: he declares a desire for knowledge but refuses the knowledge offered to him. As representative of the highest order of Jewish learning, he lacks the ability to understand truth. This dramatic portion of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* positions Lanyer as a keen observer and, as poet, purveyor of spiritual knowledge.

By mentioning Pilate's wife, whose perception contrasts markedly with her husband's lack of judgment, Lanyer introduces the idea of the epistemic soundness of women's spiritual insight just before her climactic reading of the Fall. Pilate's wife subtly reminds the audience that while the male characters in the story of Christ's final hours demonstrated their own ignorance, there was a woman who saw clearly the wrong of their choices. This reminder provides some guidance for Lanyer's retelling of the Fall, which strongly builds the irony of its epistemic climax on cultural assumptions of male intellectual superiority. In "Gnosis in Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,'" Wendy Miller Roberts succinctly observes that in the moment that Lanyer declares "If *Eue* did erre, it was for knowledge sake / The fruit being faire perswaded him to fall" (Dv, ll. 797-8),

Lanyer clearly indicates her judgment of Adam: he fell because of the outward appearance of the fruit, a remarkable indictment considering that Early Modern women were frequently accused of external and frivolous preoccupations. In one

stroke, Lanyer reverses the expected critique of women's superficiality and instead credits women with a preoccupation exclusively associated with men: knowledge.

(16)

Roberts is insightful in attending to the crucial irony surrounding knowledge in Lanyer's version of the conflicting motivations for the Fall. This irony prepares Lanyer's audience for her strong indictment of men's pride, "Yet men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke / From *Eves* fair hand, as from a learned Booke" (ll. 807-8). Arguably this point is one of Lanyer's most significant in the entirety of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Lanyer's occasional admission of female limitations demonstrates that her goal is not complete exculpation of the female gender; rather she seeks to correct the biases that prevent the widespread acknowledgement of women's spiritual authority. Her extensive incorporation of epistemic irony serves, not to humiliate men, but to move men to humility and correspondent gracious respect for women that will acknowledge equality.

In case her correctives have not yet been enough to convince male readers to correct their behaviors towards women, Lanyer extends her epistemic irony to the realm of conscience by returning to the cautionary tale of Pontius Pilate. This time, however, the innocence of Christ reflects the innocence of women who "never gave consent" either to the sin of Pilate or to the sins of men (D2r, ll. 833-4). By the time Lanyer re-questions Pilate's interrogation of Christ a few stanzas later, her rhetoric forces the internalization of the epistemic irony by assuming that men's consciences, like Pilate's, must be "asham'd to aske what he [and women] hath done, / When thine owne conscience seeks this sinne to shunne" (D2v, ll. 863-4). As Lanyer continues to emphasize Pilate's repeated deliberations despite the evidence of Christ's guiltlessness, the scene more clearly reflects men's badgering of guiltless women. The similarities in her

vocabulary used to describe Pilate's behavior and men's behavior emphasize this correlation. In her first address to Pilate, Lanyer proclaims, "Let barb'rous crueltie farre depart from thee, / And in true Justice take afflictions part (C4v, l. 753-4). In her later appeal to men, she requests,

You came not in the world without our paine,  
Make that a barre against your crueltie"  
Your fault being greater, why should you disdain  
Our being your equals, free from tyranny? (D2r, ll. 827-30)

In these parallel criticisms of cruelty, Lanyer associates the undeserved physical suffering of Christ with the unrelieved physical suffering of women. Likewise, Lanyer links men and Pilate through tyranny. The syntactical ambiguity of the phrase "free from tyranny" allows it to accomplish multiple purposes: as a phrase describing men, it negates reason to maintain gender inequality. As a phrase describing women, it negates the threat of female authority. Several stanzas later, in her continuing censure of Pilate, Lanyer completes her imagery of flawed male authority:

Yet *Pilate*, this can yeeld thee no content,  
To exercise thine owne authoritie,  
But unto *Herod* he must needs be sent,  
To reconcile thy selfe by tyrannie:  
Was this the greatest good in Justice meant,  
When thou perceiv'st no fault in him to be?  
If thou must make thy peace by Virtues fall,  
Much better 'twere not to be friends at all. (ll. 873-80)

In Lanyer's characterization, Pilate's only recourse that maintains his political friendship with Herod is to relinquish Christ to Herod's jurisdiction, thus recovering his good public standing with a tyrannical act. The stanza's concludes with the irony of gaining peace through the loss of virtue, a likely prod at men who profit from the disparagement of female virtue. Ultimately, Pilate's violation of his own conscience reinforces the epistemic irony inherent in the examples of men who fail to see divinity of Christ and in men who fail to recognize the spiritual perception of women.

My analysis argues that Lanyer's version of the Fall and Passion is structured specifically to create the epistemic irony necessary to restore women to a biblical position of significant female authority. Wendy Miller Roberts, on the other hand, argues that Lanyer's interest in epistemology reveals the influence of Gnosticism in her narrative. Roberts posits that Aemilia Lanyer's may have drawn material from Cornelius Agrippa's *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (*Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*), published in 1529. For Roberts, the possibility of Lanyer's awareness of Agrippa "increases the likelihood that she was familiar with the occult, since he has been thoroughly linked to the Gnostic and hermetic traditions" (12). Roberts fails to mention a more convincing relationship connecting Lanyer to the occult: astrologer Simon Forman records in his diary that Lanyer visited occasionally in 1597, seeking information about her future financial prospects. Despite Lanyer's possible familiarity with Gnosticism through Forman, however, Roberts builds her analysis on admittedly uncertain ground, "While I am not claiming that Lanyer was a Gnostic, I am suggesting that her arguments for Eve's reclamation bring her to a place strikingly similar to Gnostic interpretation and, whether she intended it or not, subvert the Genesis narrative in a way previously unexplored" (18). Much of Roberts's evidence turns on itself, diminishing the force of

the connection she attempts to construct. For example, she argues that because Lanyer represents knowledge as desirable and because Eve innocently takes the fruit to obtain knowledge, “she positions Yahweh as an unjust punisher of an innocent persona as well as a god of questionable character found lying to his newly created companions in order to keep a good gift from them. This must, of course, be inferred, as Lanyer does not write it” (18-19). In her narrative about the Fall and Passion, Lanyer does not include Yahweh as a character at all; in fact, “*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*” contains few references to God (the Father) as independent of Christ (the Son). Furthermore, Roberts attempts to establish solidarity between Lanyer and Eve through a surprisingly transgressive act: “[Lanyer] then beckons [women] to enter a chariot guided by ‘simple Doves, and subtil serpents,’ which will lead them ‘to the fields of rest’ where they will find themselves ‘transfigur’d with [their] loving Lord’ . . . Lanyer aligns herself with Eve by asking the serpent to guide women to paradise, as well as guide her in rewriting Scripture” (19). Roberts supports this theory with ancient symbolism representing wisdom as a serpent a Christian Gnostic association between the serpent and Christ. However, she fails to mention the much more likely scenario in which Lanyer alludes to Matthew 10:16, which contains Christ’s exhortation to his disciples to “be yee therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves” (*Geneva*). This exhortation occurs as part of Christ’s commissioning of his disciples to preach about the kingdom of heaven.

Roberts’s interest in Lanyer’s epistemology leads her to probe the infrequencies of analysis of the epistemologies of early modern women, specifically of Aemilia Lanyer. However, her analysis of “*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*” could be stabilized with a closer look at how epistemic inquiry provides a means of advancing female authority within the reformations. I appreciate Roberts’s citation of Debra Rienstra, who claims, “Lanyer’s volume is at heart an

astonishingly radical exegesis of Scripture, one that lays bare the truth of Scripture that had lain hidden, from her point of view, behind a centuries-old veil of mean-spirited and misguided interpretation” (Rienstra 82). However, I disagree with Roberts that Lanyer introduces Gnostic heresy, whether intentionally or inadvertently, into the progression reformist thought. Instead, I read Lanyer’s assertions, such as “If Eve did err” and “If any Euill did in her remaine” (Dv, ll. 797, 809), as hypotheticals intended to enhance the epistemic irony of the dramatized Fall rather than intended to acquit Eve of sin. These unconventional and ironic moments significantly enhance Lanyer’s primary allegation: “Her sinne was small, to what you doe commit.” (Dv, l. 818). Despite our interpretive differences, I do, with Roberts, conclude that Lanyer portrays women as “blessed seekers of knowledge” (19). However, the women in Lanyer’s poem are blessed specifically through the natural female identification as bride of Christ within mystical marriage.

In her graphic description of the crucified body of Christ, Lanyer again addresses the Countess of Cumberland, combining epistemic language with the marriage metaphor. In reference to her portrayal of the extremity of Christ’s suffering, Lanyer explains, “This with the eie of Faith thou maist behold, / Deere Spouse of Christ, and more than I can write” (E3r, ll. 1169-70). Lanyer then clarifies that the Countess’s emotional response that mingles both joy and sorrow represents the broader spiritual mystery:

O glorious miracle without compare!

Last, but not least which was by him effected;

Vniting death, life, misery, joy and care,

By his sharpe passion in his deere elected: (E3v, ll. 1177-80)

This succinct representation of the mystical marriage tradition precedes and also justifies the intensity of the subsequent physical language of spiritual devotion. Both Edith Snook and Erica Longfellow, among others, have written on the Lanyer's seemingly uninhibited language of female desire in the stanzas to follow. The association in the final portion of "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum" between desire and knowledge has similarly received a great deal of scholarly attention.

However, I want to emphasize that Aemilia Lanyer, like many other women writing in the protestant tradition, navigates the complexities of redefining female identity often by re-appropriating traditional, often familial, female roles. Under the protective cover of the indisputably female identifiers of daughter, mother, and wife, Protestant women like Elizabeth Joceline, Elizabeth Isham, and Aemilia Lanyer could experiment with wielding the authority of intercessors, prophets, and preachers without unnecessarily igniting controversy by claiming those specific titles. For example, in her praise of the moral superiority of the Countess of Cumberland, Lanyer proclaims,

But in thy modest vaile do'st sweetly cover  
The staines of other sinnes, to make themselves,  
That by this meanes thou mai'st in time recover  
Those weake lost sheepe that did so long transgresse,  
Presenting them unto thy deerest Lover:

That when he brings them backe into his fold,

In their conversion then he may behold. (F2v, ll. 1394-1400)

Lanyer positions the Countess of Cumberland in a redemptive role that remarkably combines pastoral imagery with a responsibility for souls. In effect, the identities and abilities of the

Countess and the Church are so intertwined that the immensity of the Countess's authority cannot be diminished without insult to the Church. As an individual embodiment of the Church, the Countess wields the Church's authoritative ability to cover sin with love and to win souls as gifts for Christ the Bridegroom. Lanyer locates knowledge in intimacy with Christ, by stating, "who rightly knows him shall be truly wise" (G2v, l. 1636). The force of her rhetoric, however, suggests that while this knowledge is accessible for both men and women, it is perhaps best represented by the women who can physically, as well as spiritually, reflect the bridal role. Careful appropriation of the identities of bride and wife results in authority that must be recognized outside that marriage relationship: by establishing intimacy and solidarity between the female believer and the divine Christ, Lanyer infuses female authority with knowledge and wisdom directly from God that requires recognition and respect.

Lanyer's epistemic groundwork for her defense of female authority comes from the same mystical marriage ecclesiology that more conservative male reformers attempted to contain within specifically male realms of control. As George L. Scheper notes, "the Song involved for the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the whole question of the place of the senses in the spiritual life and helped 'to shape man's ideas of symbolism and of the function of the imagination.' This helps explain the prodigious exegetic history of the book; the number of commentaries is astounding" (556). In the ongoing attempts to refine Protestant thought, Aemilia Lanyer identifies the interpretive debates over the exact interpretation of Song of Songs and the significance of mystical marriage as a fertile ground for influencing public opinion about female authority. The freedom she proffers to the series of women, climactically with the Countess of Cumberland, results in a wide variety of critical readings, perhaps most radically in Krontiris, who argues, "Like medieval women, Lanyer appropriates a powerful religious symbol, turning it

into an uncontroversial vehicle for expressing her own anger and opposition to tyrannical authority. The story of the Passion allows her to speak about as well as for the oppressed subjects” (117). While Lanyer may indeed have felt acutely a pre-feminist rage, perhaps her poetry is better described as an attempt to ignite the spark of the kinds of spiritual and physical equality that mystical marriage ecclesiology had always tended to contain. From an epistemic level, Lanyer draws on her poetic ability to enliven Scripture to highlight gender equality within a protestant movement characterized by widespread access to the scriptures and an emphasis on the individual responsibility of the believer before God.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANTHOLOGY AND APOLOGY

By focusing on ways that women situated themselves as divinely compelled agents of truth, compelled to obtain, preserve, and bequeath knowledge of genealogies of women writers, this chapter concludes the pattern begun with the exegetical encounter between an individual and a text, furthered by the internalization of textual interpretation, and concluded by apologetic externalization. Although the externalization of epistemic assumptions and hermeneutical practice can occur through a variety of forms, this chapter juxtaposes historically distinct debates over the social and spiritual function of women in order to illuminate rhetorical differences in the use of anthologies and catalogues of female achievement throughout the ongoing English reformations. Boccaccio and Christine de Pisan, whose popular catalogue structure influenced centuries of anthologized authors and texts, provide context for the use of female exempla in the early stages of reformation. I then discuss the impact of England's first major anthologist John Bale on the preservation of a heritage of female authorship that preceded the sixteenth century. Concerned primarily with swaying popular opinion favorably towards reformist efforts, Bale presents the writings of Anne Askew and Elizabeth Tudor as remarkable demonstrations of divine favor toward the Protestant cause through miraculously enabled female voices. Elizabeth's accession to the throne, however, complicates these images, and a great deal of written debate over the appropriateness of female authority ensues. Sometimes ironically, as in the case of John Knox, this debate preserves anthologies of women writers. John Knox and John Aylmer, among others, assemble female exempla for their own rhetorical purposes, and by juxtaposing their debates over female authority with the poetry of Aemilia Lanyer and responses

to Joseph Swetnam's 1615 *Arraignment*, I will provide clarification on the way women commandeered and transformed the epistemic use of female exempla.

As I begin discussing ways that early modern women established their lineage of female writers and thinkers and created various forms of catalogs and anthologies to represent those relationships and strengthen their own authority, I want to note specifically that I do not hold to the idea of emergent feminism as represented in Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy*. I realize that Lerner, adhering to a broad definition of feminism as "an awareness by women that they belong to a subordinated and wronged group, that their oppressed status is not natural, that they must join with other women to effect change, and that they must create an alternative vision of egalitarian gender relations" (Bennett 1193). Notwithstanding the quality and necessity of Lerner's work on several centuries of women writers and thinkers, I believe that her feminist terminology used to describe the ideas of many centuries of women writers is problematic for two primary reasons. First, the anachronistic use of the word *feminism* suggests a reverse trajectory of historical inquiry, beginning with contemporary feminist assertions and then looking backwards to trace their patterns of origins. This kind of historiography tends to result in teleological fallacies, the dangers of which are clearly evident in the historical records of and scholarship on the Protestant reformations. Scholars such as Christopher Haigh are still attempting to unravel several centuries of historiography that created the idea of a singular English Reformation upon the premise of the miraculous outworking of divine will in an effort to justify rather drastic and often violent actions taken to stabilize England's religion and politics. As Haigh has asserted and my previous chapters have testified, the outcomes of the English reformations were far from clear, and many voices over several generations tried to wrest control of the Reformation narrative. I am

optimistic that with careful nuancing and contextualization, feminist scholarship can avoid the dramatic problems that result in historiography built upon teleology. Second, I believe that the use of the word *feminism* to describe these centuries of women's writings obscures, rather than illuminates, the past because of the instability of the meaning of *feminism*, which I have discussed in my first chapter. Of course, noticeable changes in female self-representation and tone occur throughout the English reformations. Rather than attributing these changes to an emerging "feminist consciousness," however, I view them as linked to epistemologies popularized by the establishment of Protestantism in England and often formulated by women.

Nevertheless, Lerner's volume *The Creation of a Feminist Consciousness* provides some much needed clarification on centuries of women's often-overlooked philosophical influence. Although I disagree with Lerner over some of her overarching critical language, early in her work she introduces a point relevant to this chapter and thesis:

There is a strong connection here to the question of the 'women of genius,' and of 'outstanding women' or 'notables' and 'worthies.' The latter categories have long been suspect in Women's History because the bias of patriarchally framed selection has tended to make only those women 'notable' and 'worthy' who did what men did and what men recognize as important. I have tried to avoid this obvious pitfall in selecting the women to be discussed, by focusing only on what women wrote and thought about themselves and other women. (16)

Inevitable problems exist in the fact that we inherit historical texts from those who have chosen to preserve them, and those preservationists have proven to have various kinds of biases against women. Many of the women writers in Lerner's work, as well as those included here, have come to us because men of influence classified them as "notables" and "worthies." Frequently this

separation of women's literary history from men's has functioned to perpetuate the notion of its relative weakness or lack of influence. For this reason I seek to avoid personally classifying the women in my thesis as exceptional in their character, although it would be equally problematic to claim that they are representative of all women of their generations. I will, however, discuss ways that early modern women resist uses of exempla that confine female achievement to the extraordinary.

The desirability of an establishment of a literary female community is obviously appealing enough that feminists like Gerda Lerner have worked tirelessly to trace their development. Careful nuancing of representations of female writers can avoid the problems of essentializing and homogenization; this kind of detailed scholarship is necessary, because as I will show, seventeenth century women writers did frequently draw upon histories of their female predecessors. For example, Aemilia Lanyer creates her own predominantly female catalogue of contemporary exempla in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Rachel Speght's tracts remind readers not to overlook a significant body of female literary and spiritual heritage. And Bathsua Makin's *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* suggests her awareness not only of an existing tradition of women who had participated in the entirety of the classical literary tradition leading to Elizabeth's reign, but also of the necessity of participation in the preservation of that tradition through ongoing female scholarship.

Whereas the previous chapters have discussed women's participation in exegesis and their corresponding self-authorization as writers through skillful appropriation of biblically supported identities, this chapter demonstrates early modern women's awareness of the reproductive power of epistemology as seen in catalogues of women writers that provide genealogical evidence for the historical and current existence of powerful female piety and

rhetorical ability. Significantly, the generic catalogue of worthy women or women writers did not originate during Europe's Protestant reformations. *Exempla* of famous men and women had grown in popularity for much of the High and Late Medieval Periods, largely as a result of Boccaccio's popularity. The first recorded female authorship of such a catalogue, however, occurred in the early fifteenth century. In response to the inflammatory, anti-women sentiments expressed in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pisan completed *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* in 1405, a landmark work in the earliest stage of Europe's *querelle des femmes* that deconstructs misogynistic ideas through dialogic encounters between the author Christine and the personified Reason, Rectitude, and Justice and subsequently builds up the city of ladies with classical female exempla, using source material from Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (*On famous women*). Translated into English and published in London in 1521, *The Book of the City of Ladies* offered itself as a counter to anti-female rhetoric not only through the logical dissection of faulty premises and false accusations but also by inundating the counter arguments with examples of female strength, courage, intellect, faithfulness, and wisdom from histories that span ages past and present. For de Pisan, even pagan women represent the consistent appearance of godly character in this heritage of female worth as with the ten sibyls, who "spoke more clearly and farther in advance of the coming of Jesus Christ, who came long afterward, than all the prophets did, just as can be seen from their writings" (II.1.3). Together, these multitudes of pagan and Christian women form bases for de Pisan's argument for the longevity and soundness of a civilization built and ruled by women for as long as eight hundred years, a point she drives home via her notes on the empire of the Amazons. Christine de Pisan's collection of female exempla demonstrates the lasting nature of female accomplishment, a goal that sometimes distinguishes her from her source Boccaccio. Natalie Zemon Davis notes, for example,

Christine's conjoining the story of Tertia Aemilia given by Boccaccio with that of the countess of Coemon is a good example of how Christine uses her source for her own purposes: the remarkable women whom Boccaccio treated need to be seen as the predecessors of contemporary women of equal or greater stature, and not as historical aberrations or anomalies in the female character. (n. 264)

Boccaccio's female exempla tend to highlight the extraordinary in representations of women, implying a rarity of greatness. De Pisan, on the other hand, seeks to exemplify typical female character through such frequent examples of women as to restore a public sense of the regularity of female achievement.

Twenty-seven years after Christine de Pisan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* became available in English, John Bale began the publication of his important work *A Summary of the Famous Writers of Great Britain, that is, of England, Wales and Scotland* (1548), published in Latin. By that point, John Bale had already identified the broad appeal of the writings of two contemporary women, as well as the potential of their representation as Protestant pillars of faith to increase both public demand for further reforms at the end of Henry VIII's reign and public support for the reforms of Edward VI. Bale's studies represent five hundred years of English writers for the benefit of offering to English readers a rich literary history. Unlike Christine de Pisan's female exempla, however, Bale's women function as fleeting breaths of piety and courage that serve solely to fan reformist flames. As Jennifer Summit explains in *Lost Property*, it is

in his editions of Anne Askew and Elizabeth Tudor in particular that Bale allows himself to speculate more broadly on the shape that a literary history of women might take. In tracing these imaginary literary histories, Bale attempts to wrest

control over the representation of women writers from editors like Pepwell, thereby showing that if ‘the woman writer’ was an instrument in the battle for Catholic orthodoxy, she could be transformed into an equally powerful figure of religious dissent. Bale’s career shows how the task of fashioning ‘the woman writer’ and that of fashioning English literary history came together as preeminent sites for the Protestant redefinition of the English past. (138-140)

Because female models of piety had existed in Christendom’s didactic literature for hundreds of years, Bale chooses to reimagine rather than suppress the role of women in English reformist efforts in an effort to rewrite the spiritual genealogies that will exhort and comfort his audiences. As I have noted in a previous chapter, the extensive editorial annotations of the 1546 publication of *The First Examination of Anne Askew* betray Bale’s concern that Askew’s strategy to let scriptural texts speak for themselves leaves too much room for erroneous interpretation. Consequently, Bale takes every opportunity to amplify Askew’s text with his own version of the reformist rhetoric in circulation in Europe, offering as a replacement for female models of Catholic saints his own female model of martyrdom. Bale’s effort to create a new community of imitable Protestant females as a means of influencing an English reformation reflects his attention to the epistemic questions at the heart of the religious and social changes. Unfortunately, his potent epistemic strategy may very well be the cause of the dilemma that women writers for the next century will face when developing their connectedness to their literary predecessors. Bale’s commitment to Protestantism frequently sacrifices female agency through his well-documented emphasis on the miraculous nature of God’s imbuing of certain women with spiritual strength despite their physical weaknesses. In addition, Bale’s strategy sacrifices the possibility of links to their immediate female authorities.

In “Female Authority and Authorization Strategies in Early Modern Europe,” Jane Stevenson briefly references a longstanding tradition of citations and precedents: “The identification and citation of authorities is in fact not classical in origin, but Christian. In order to demonstrate the orthodoxy of their own arguments, Christian writers from the fourth century onwards buttress their work with catenae of citations from earlier writers whose orthodoxy is not in doubt” (16). A practice tied, somewhat, to the clarification and development of theological nuance, the citation of authorities or *auctores* was, like most literacy practices, dominated by male writers throughout the Medieval Church. However, the prevalence of male writers over female does not fully excuse Stevenson’s somewhat awkwardly phrased question, “But if author/authorities are by definition male, how can the female subject become an author – is authorship, or is it not, like becoming a father? Could the experience of maternity offer an appropriate paradigm for creation?” (17). Rather than male by definition, the idea of authority was limited by cultural defaults, both linguistically through singular masculine nouns and pronouns and traditionally as a self-perpetuating cycle of assumptions regarding male authority. However, Stevenson does aptly pursue the kind of rhetorical space available to women desirous of building up their own authority through acceptable domestic language, a phenomenon I have discussed in my previous chapter. Notwithstanding the default association of authority with men, early modern women found a great deal of biblical and classical support for the expansion of authority to include pious women. As Stevenson asserts,

women *did* have a Renaissance: a minute one, compared to the mass of writing by men that was flowing from the presses of Europe, but perfectly genuine, which gave women a small and precious group of *auctrices* of their own. And with respect to women’s intellectual history, the distinction between ‘some’ and ‘none’

has been of far greater significance to the aspirations of later generations than the distinction between ‘some’ and ‘many.’ (17)

The educated woman of the early modern period saw a tradition of female authority, female wisdom, and female writing that began symbolically in the Old Testament, continued through classical Greece and Rome, and required the participation of Protestant English women for its continuance.

The relatively small number of more recent authorities from which women writers could draw as a means of grounding their work in a stabilized tradition, however, was likely affected adversely by the polarizing nature of the Catholic-Protestant conflicts within England. Despite John Bale’s catalog of the female English predecessors of Elizabeth Tudor, Jennifer Summit points out the inherent problem in Bale’s representation of this tradition:

Bale’s recuperation of the history of women as an object of loss, fragmentation, and textual obscurity frees him from the more troubling responsibility of recovering a history of women that does not answer to his desire for dissent. Contrary to his assertion otherwise, there was a recent history of women in the church, but that history contains Margery Kempe as well as Hid, St. Bridget as well as Eleanor Cobham—figures, that is, who are much more difficult to assimilate into a narrative of dissent. Imaginarily removing women’s history to a shadowy realm of loss enables Bale to abstract it and therefore avoid confrontation with the elements that run contrary to a Protestant historiography, just as his bibliography of absence allows him to mournfully recall ‘what profygthes, yea, what pursuance, ayde, and confort we haue lost’ while also saving him from recollecting the Catholic contents of those works. The history of

the pious English women, in other words, has to be recovered as an object of loss, lest it be acknowledged to have taken the more immediate forms it did. (156)

This new precedent for female Protestant spiritual genealogies, with conspicuous holes in recent Church histories, limits the access of an emerging reformist generation of English readers to a significant body of female writers. In addition, this precedent so strongly politicizes the female exempla both included in and excluded from Bale's text that any future women writers desirous of establishing ideological inheritance from their foremothers must carefully weigh the political and social ramifications of doing so.

By the mid-sixteenth century, English reformists John Bale, John Knox, and John Day had seized upon the valuable opportunity to spin catalogues of exempla as a means of rewriting England's spiritual genealogies as a means of bolstering support for the reformations. Thomas Bentley's publication of *The Monument of Matrones* in 1582 affirmed that a specifically Protestant form of piety could be facilitated and continued through a collection of prayers and devotional texts written by female exempla. In the meantime, the presence of several female monarchs in Europe spurred debate over female authority and opposing strategies on how to relate ideological and spiritual heritage from female predecessors. Advocates of female rule could compile historical female exempla referenced in classical texts, along with a number of biblical women, to demonstrate the existence of successful female leadership, a task made accessible by increasing numbers of anthologies circulating Europe. However, critics of female rule could also compile lists of biblical and historical women whose reputations for violence and corruption might evoke fear in contemporary audiences. Consequently, catalogues of female writers and leaders sometimes appear unexpectedly in texts with little aim to preserve heritages of female accomplishment. With obvious antagonism towards female authority, under a

pseudonym in 1558, John Knox published *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, which inadvertently outlines a biblical, classical, and contemporary anthology of influential women.

In anticipation of the counterarguments of female supporters, Knox discusses the achievements of a few biblical women in order to refute any notion of the relevance of their divine authority to contemporary female rule. Shortly before he introduces these godly exempla, Knox reminds his readers of Jezebel and Athalia, two Old Testament Jewish queens made infamous by their Baal worship, and in Athalia's case, ruthless elimination of rivals to the throne. References to this pair of women reoccur in *The First Blast* to denote female apostasy, and they provide Knox with convenient typology for the Marys that have so incensed him. Knox also presumably intends their reappearance to highlight the rarity of God-ordained female leadership, which he introduces as disputable: "First they do obiect the examples of Debora, and of Hulda the prophetesse, of whome the one iudged Israel, and the other, by all apparance, did teache and exhorte" (39r-v). These women, along with the daughters of Zalphaed, present the most difficulty for Knox to unravel, and he spends the remainder of his work addressing them. His strategy is primarily two-fold: establish that the existence of exceptional females cannot be the basis for acceptance of their authority and then use these exceptional females to denigrate the character of Mary of Guise, Mary Stuart, and Mary I by contrast. Knox sets up the correlation between the Marys and Jezebel and Athalia as a contradiction to the divine power of Deborah and Hulda: "as we find a contrarie spirit in all these moste wicked women, that this day be exalted in to this tyrannouse authoritie, to the spirite that was in those godly matrons: so I feare not, I say, to affirme, that their condition is vnlike, and that their end shalbe diuers. In those matrones we finde that the spirit of mercie, truthe, iustice and of humilitie did reigne" (F1r). By this point, Knox seems to find that he can safely praise the character of Deborah and Hulda

because of their temporal distance from his contemporaries and because he views their success as isolated. In this way Knox, like John Bale, takes rhetorical advantage of the transience of individual exempla: singularities might offer momentary inspiration, but they cannot establish patterns or “laws.”

This strategic use of limited female exempla, intended to prove the absence of consistent female aptitude for authority, constitutes a rather precarious position that any evidence for a continuous presence of female strength might shake. In Knox’s case, his argument is profoundly befuddled by the timing of Elizabeth’s coronation, which occurs only months after the publication of *The First Blast*. Knox dares his readers, “But to prosecute my purpose, let such as lift to defend these monstres in their tyranie, proue first, that their souereine maistresses be like to Debora in godlines and pitie:” (41v). And of course, during and after her accession, Elizabeth was frequently likened to Deborah. In fact, Knox’s description of the tyranny and ineptitude of the Marys, along with his rhetorical admiration for Deborah and Hulda, actually presages the very language later employed by Elizabeth and her allies to garner support. Knox writes, “God by his singular priuiledge, fauor, aud [sic] grace, exempted Debora from the common malediction geuen to women in that behalf: and against nature he made her prudent in counsel, strong in courage, happie in regiment, and a blessed mother and deliuerer to his people” (42r). Ironically, Knox’s description of the biblical prophetess and leader Deborah, intended as an exclusionary example, lends powerful language to Elizabeth’s future self-fashioning as England’s providential inheritor of sovereignty and embodiment of numerous biblical archetypes. Knox’s grand miscalculation reveals an inherent instability in the use of exempla to ground arguments regarding essential qualities of femaleness, an instability also present in the repeated emphasis of John Bale that divine power is particularly manifested through female

weakness. In each case, the ongoing, living manifestations of female agency undermine textual constructions of female passivity.

Although he refused to retract his arguments against female authority, Knox would eventually offer something of an apology to Elizabeth with an acknowledgement that she was indeed miraculously imbued with the same divine spirit as Deborah. Although Elizabeth's self-representations frequently suggested this miraculous divine empowerment, she did not confirm or deny a personal belief in the innate ability of women to rule. Regardless, Knox could not successfully obtain her forgiveness for his invective against female authority. The severity of his accusations did prompt John Aylmer's rebuttal *An harborowe for faithful and trewe subiectes* in 1559, one of many such defenses of the queen's authority. Aylmer's multitudes of female exempla, drawn extensively from the Bible and secular histories, obviate the vulnerability of Knox's argumentative construction based on relatively few examples of women; however, his rhetoric does little to promote female agency. Unlike Knox in his original work, Aylmer is unafraid to draw positive parallels between contemporary women and revered biblical women. He figures Anne Boleyn, for example, after Esther: "vvas there euer in Englande a greater feate vvrought by any má: then this vvas by a vvoman? I take not from kyng Henry the due praise of broaching it, nor from that lambe of God king Edvvard, the finishing and perffighting of that vvas begon, though I giue hir, hir due cómendacion. I knovv that blessed mastir of God Thomas Cranmer Byshop of Cáterbury, did much trauaile in it, and furthered it: but if God had not gyuen Quene Anne fauour in the sight of the kynge, as he gaue to Hester in the sight of Nabucadnezar: Hamá and his company" (B4v). However, Anne's lack of agency in this parallel is obvious: not only is her favor received from God and directed specifically toward Henry, but also her role is carefully delineated from the achievements of Henry, Edward, and Cranmer. Aylmer does

reinstate the agency that Knox extricates from the story of Deborah by citing her activities as a leader who “iudged the people of Israell . . . delyuered them out of thraldome, and set them at libertie” (D2v). However, he follows this rather volatile image of Deborah with a clarification: “woman as a wife must be at commandement, but a woman as a magistrate may lawfullye commande” and specifies that Deborah’s remarkable demonstration of authority occurs only once in all of Scripture (D3r). Even Aylmer’s stated admiration for Elizabeth has more to do with her piety than her activity. The motivation of his work, after all, most likely had more to do with his own self-promotion via his rhetorical skill than with the merits of female rulers.

In *Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*, Pamela Joseph Benson contextualizes Aylmer’s anthology of female achievement within the series of ostensibly pro-Elizabethan defenses published during the early years of Elizabeth’s reign. She concludes, “Essentially, Calvin, Aylmer, and the other radical Protestants defined their works as defenses of the Queen, but they were, in reality, equally as much defenses against queens and female autonomy. The independent woman was the primary enemy against whom the society and the text needed to be protected” (233). In this kind of literary climate, the absence of a sixteenth-century formal anthology published by women for women, such as Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrones*, is unsurprising. Texts written by women consistently required mediation through friends, relatives, or at the very least their publishers, as a protection against the slander and vitriol that could follow a woman who presented her ideas too boldly. The consistent inclusion of approbations, introductory letters to and from male relatives, and diplomatic apologies testifies to the extremity of the necessity. The compilations of female writings and accomplishments disseminated by Bale and Bentley follow suit but with an editorial consistency that frames each entry with apologetic rhetoric

clearly directed towards the reinforcement of Protestant values. Other compilations of female achievement, such as those by John Knox and John Aylmer are fashioned as personal political statements and leave little room for actual female influence. The body of English literature in the sixteenth century readily establishes the relevance of catalogues of women writers and anthologies of their accomplishments and writings as powerful literary tools wieldable either in defense of women or in their criticism.

While popular, anthologies of female literary achievement were infrequent. In *Strong Voices, Weak History*, Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham argue for a lack of public demand for this type of work after anthologies published by Thomas Bentley in England (1582) and by Lodovico Domenichi in Italy (1559): “In spite of the excitement these two early modern female anthologies generate among students of women’s history today, they did not inaugurate a new taste for all-female anthologies, and unlike the general category of poetry anthology to which they belonged, they exercised no canonizing influence” (6). Nevertheless, the absence of formal anthologies of women’s work compiled specifically by women deserves additional analysis. Perhaps women believed that alternate strategies of recounting female literary and spiritual heritage could aid them more than a formal anthology. Volumes like Bentley’s were prohibitively expensive, especially in comparison with more easily obtainable and transferable tracts; as a result, many women required other, more practical means of drawing on previous female authorities. In addition, the tradition of female exempla as saints and martyrs had begun long before the reformations and was, in this way, a Catholic tradition associated with Catholic centers of female knowledge. For women to draw on *auctores* while participating in the ongoing reformations required careful nuancing. Their pious motivation is undeniable: women writers wrote from a sense of unwavering duty to themselves, to other believers, and to God.

I do not intend to imply that this sense of duty as a motivation for writing distinguishes early modern women from men. I do want to discuss, however, the unique ways that early modern women seem to approach exempla as rhetorical support, and I will do so by contrasting the mid-sixteenth century debates over female authority, centered on Elizabeth and written by men, with the early seventeenth century debates over female authority, which typically have little to do with Elizabeth or any single female leader. The strategies employed in these debates evidence ways that the relationship between women and the reformations has changed. Early in the reformations, the women who explored the epistemic foundations of Protestant ideology authorized their exegetical relationship to Scripture using universal biblical mandates. Men like John Bale jumped to leverage these written female achievements for maximum political and social effect in efforts to protect and increase the growing reformist loyalties in England, resulting in the heroizing of outspoken Protestant women, particularly those whose lives were cut short. However, the stabilization of England as formally and practically Protestant under Elizabeth ended a series of female Protestant martyrs and removed the urgency that had invited female champions to the fore as signifiers of divine favor of the Protestant cause. The rhetorical use of biblical exempla that had stabilized the justification for female authorship and speech was increasingly secularized as it was leveraged as political capital during Elizabeth's early reign by male writers competing for Elizabeth's attention by debating the nuances of her female and royal identities. Men such as John Aylmer presented themselves as champions for the sake of personal advancement: they had to figure out what to do with Elizabeth's identity in order to establish their own political positions. As Pamela Joseph Benson points out, "The issue of her sex has been raised by the male author to create the illusion that he is needed or to create a position of leadership and authority for himself among other men or to demonstrate his obedience to her

authority; he does not have the authority to confer power, only to confirm it” (*Invention* 248). In writing about Elizabeth for self-promotion, male writers seek to maintain epistemic control over the definition and confirmation of female power. Female writers, on the other hand, tend to leave Elizabeth’s identity alone, even while, as in the case of Anne Dowriche’s *The French Historie*, addressing Elizabeth’s public policy.

By the early seventeenth century, the apologetic rhetoric surrounding the continuance of Protestantism had shifted. England had become definitively Protestant, so debates turned away from defining Protestantism against Catholicism into more nuanced discussions seeking to determine the social outworking of Protestantism. In this context, women, concerned with their own identities and agency, draw upon biblical, historical, and contemporary female exempla to demonstrate the presence of female religious influence as grounds for respect for their continued participation in the articulation and definition of Protestant practice. A number of scholars have participated in a critical debate regarding the exact nature of the representation of the community of women in Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, for example. Lanyer undeniably leverages the work of biblical and classical women, as well as the respectability and influence of a coterie of contemporary women, for her own self-authorization as a poet. Scholars tend to disagree, however, on exactly what Lanyer offers back to this female community as support for female agency in general.

I propose that Lanyer recognizes the need for continued influence to ensure that the outcome of reformist efforts in England will result in widespread acknowledgement of the spiritual equality of women and men. In this respect, I differ somewhat from John Rogers, who in “The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition: Aemilia Lanyer’s ‘Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum’” represents Lanyer as primarily self-serving in her creation of what he calls “literary

matrilineage.” Rogers builds his argument on passivity and failed attempts at agency, insisting that “Any exercise of agency—anything construable as purposeful motion or work, and even speech itself—is dismissed throughout the main narrative of the Passion as not only vain but also morally suspect . . . action itself, of any kind, in so many instances meets with the poem’s stern disapproval” (440). He extends this criticism of action to Christ’s enemies, as well as to Christ and the female characters, going further to suggest that “the poem itself seems largely to question the assumption that female speech—indeed, any original speech—might succeed in effecting positive change” (440-41). I disagree with Rogers’s idea that Lanyer intends to criticize female speech in her depiction of the Passion.

As I have previously discussed, Lanyer’s retelling of the Passion builds extensive epistemic irony by contrasting what Christ’s enemies, and sometimes his male disciples, should know and what they actually say. More importantly, Lanyer enhances this epistemic irony by revealing that women know the truth that men have ignored and speak that truth while men continue to ignore them. Female speech in *Salve Deus* is not futile: the women who cried at the crucifixion, for example, subsequently “obtained such grace / From him whose worth the world could not containe (D4r, ll. 969-70). Lanyer spends three full stanzas lauding the perception and pity of these women, which Christ rewards by turning and speaking directly to them, an honor he consistently withholds from his accusers. Rogers reads the failure of women’s speech to change the hearts of Christ’s oppressors as a failure of agency within Lanyer’s Passion narrative. However, Lanyer’s dramatic irony relies upon her confidence that her readers share the women’s knowledge of Christ’s deity long before the poem’s resolution of the Passion. As a result, a more appropriate reading of female agency through speech emphasizes the spiritual efficacy of their words, directed to God and subsequently blessed directly by God.

I concur with Rogers that the irony of the Passion narrative enhances Lanyer's concluding celebration of female power, both spiritual and physical. However, Rogers represents Lanyer's "sweeping derogation of the verbal activity of those great scriptural women" as an "entire category of verbal action—in fact, a category that the poem had labored to derogate as both Hebraic and feminine—is redeemed, implicitly redeeming the verbal agency of this woman of Jewish descent (if the biographical evidence can be trusted), Aemilia Lanyer" (441). As Rogers continues, he implies that Lanyer has sacrificed the voices of her biblical female predecessors for her own self-authorization as poet, leading to Rogers's unusual statement, "If it is not exactly the case that Christ died so that Lanyer could write this poem, it may well be, I propose, that Lanyer narrates Christ's death in order to *effect* the sacrificial substitution whereby her womanly obligation to passivity could be traded for the glorious redemptive activity for which the Messiah is typically praised" (442). I question Rogers's conclusion, in part because of the unlikelihood that Aemilia Lanyer would be the only woman of her time to cast herself as a powerful female poet by downplaying or even subverting biblical models of female piety and in part because of the instability created by founding an argument on universal metaphysical constructions and reversals, as I have discussed in Chapter 1.

Rogers portrays Lanyer's description of the death of Queen Elizabeth I as self-sacrifice intended "for the empowerment of Lanyer's contemporaries" and that this redemptive act occurs distinctly apart from Christ. Later, he suggests that Lanyer's literary genealogy requires the self-sacrifice of each generation for the birth of the next, citing Lanyer's potential profit at the death of Mary Sidney, whose legacy of poetic power she hopes to inherit. Others have noted Lanyer's desire to follow Sidney's legacy of literary achievement, but what distinguishes Rogers is his loose employment of biblical typology to emphasize a line of self-sacrifice that connects Lanyer,

through Mary Sidney, to the Hebraic poetic legacy, a point that requires additional clarification since he has previously represented this Hebraic legacy as denigrated by Lanyer.

Marie H. Loughlin's article "'Fast ti'd unto Them in a Golden Chaine': Typology, Apocalypse, and Woman's Genealogy in Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*" provides the clarification on the relationship between typology and genealogy that Roberts lacks by emphasizing Lanyer's typology as a specifically exegetical method. In a reference to Lewalski, Loughlin explains,

Protestant Reformation and post-Reformation writers transformed typology into an exegetical tool which permitted the "probing and exploring [of] the personal spiritual life with profundity and complexity" and "the assimilation of the events and circumstances of contemporary history – and even the lives and experiences of individual Christians – to the providential scheme of typological recapitulations and fulfillments throughout history." (136)

The place of *Salve Deus* in this interpretive heritage represents Lanyer's ability to draw from the full, rich scope of reformist exegesis as a means of positing new social alternatives as correctives to past theology that Lanyer finds insufficient to meet the demands of a generation of powerful female spirituality.

Drawing heavily from the advantageous language of the mystical marriage metaphor, Lanyer's poetic freedom from the constraints of translation of biblical texts reveals how far English reformist influences have stretched the limits of female participation in exegesis in less than a century. Eleven stanzas near the beginning of *Salve Deus* retranslate and reorganize portions of the Psalms in a manner reminiscent of the relatively conservative *metaphrasis* of past versions of Psalms reconfigured by women such as Katherine Parr and Elizabeth Tyrwhit. Yet

Lanyer has also transformed their content to include the extended metaphor of Christ's attractive physicality as bridegroom juxtaposed against previously unrelated content from the Psalms. For example, she claims,

Who sees this Bridegroom, never can be sad;  
None lives that can his wondrous works declare:  
Yeah, looke how farre the Est is from the West,  
So farre he lets our sinnes that have transgrest. (A2r)

In this passage, Lanyer splices together an allusion to the parabolic words of Christ to his disciples, "Can the children of the marriage chamber mourne as long as the bridegrome is with them?" (*Geneva*, Matthew 9:15) with a close paraphrase of Psalm 103. This combination not only demonstrates a typological interpretation of Scripture that readily correlates material from both the Old and New Testaments but also reflects how quickly Lanyer can generate personalized intimacy within the exegetical process. While intimacy characterizes much of the language that permeates *Salve Deus*, the rhetorical structure has a definitively broadening effect in the establishment of female community. Loughlin successfully argues that exegesis

allows Lanyer to envision a genealogy of woman, where the poem's Old Testament women become the prefiguring types for its New Testament and Jacobean women, whereby her dedicatees become the heirs to the spiritual excellence of Sheba, Deborah, Judith, and a host of others. The poem's simultaneous emphasis on apocalypse and eschatology allows Lanyer to imagine the final destiny of the line of women she constructs throughout the poem. (135)

Lanyer achieves her vision primarily through extensive use of exegetical *enarratio*; in fact, narrative interpretation constitutes a majority of *Salve Deus*. With a careful selection of and

exposition on the exemplary biblical women whose stories she weaves into her work, Lanyer posits a commonality among the spiritual experiences of women throughout history (both biblical and classical) and in her own time, that has little historical precedent.

The discussion of any group of early modern women as a community contains the potential to create theoretical problems such as lack of historical nuance, the essentializing of femaleness, or the homogenization of socio-economic backgrounds. These problems often appear when feminist scholars, hoping to find a corrective to patriarchal biases in an idealized, unified female community overlook contextual difference in favor of broad and overarching comparisons. Addressing this kind of problematic in early modern studies, Barbara Lewalski points out in “Writing Women and Reading the Renaissance,”

Jacobean women did not see themselves as a cohesive group defined by gender, and those I mean to discuss are hardly representative of women in other or even the same ranks of society: four are noblewomen, and two are gentlewomen with court or city connections. Yet several of them (Lanyer, Speght, Clifford, Wroth) register some consciousness of common gender interests; Lanyer and Speght also claim to formulate the wrongs and complaints of many women. (794-95)

Lewalski’s important observation has far-reaching applications in historiography, as well as feminist criticism. As I have addressed in my introduction, feminist scholars have too often organized female figures as a group categorically opposed to male-dominated ideology and have revisited literary and historical records with the aim of correcting patriarchal problems by arguing that women successfully found ways to leverage their “feminine” abilities in demonstration of their unique female power. Once feminist scholarship moves beyond the idea

of viewing women as men's historically underrated rivals, it can more accurately clarify the ways women viewed themselves as co-participants in philosophical and social change.

In this regard, Lewalski's work on Lanyer has actually sparked some critical debate. She argues, "Lanyer's volume as a whole is conceived as a Book of Good Women, imagining a female community sharply distinguished from male society and its evils, that reaches from Eve to the contemporary Jacobean patronesses, with virtue and learning descending from mothers to daughters" (803). Su Fang Ng takes issue with this particular passage within a broader message to the feminist community to avoid the assimilation of varying socio-economic statuses for the sake of a unifying message (434-35). Later Ng clarifies her concordance with Lisa Schnell, who "challenges feminist criticism that posits a false singularity in women's experience in order to create an equally false unified female community—the latter, as I have said, a creation often assumed in Lanyer criticism" (444). The insight of these scholars into the class differences among the women to whom Lanyer appeals for patronage is important, particularly as it shapes Lanyer's language of address. We must keep in mind that their commonality lies in Lanyer's bid for patronage and her optimism regarding their support of her egalitarian spiritual ethic grounded in Protestant exegesis rather than in a set of values that they have already chosen to support publicly. However, despite Ng's careful attention to socio-economic context, she does not address the fact that Lanyer herself creates an extensive series of biblical women, from the dislocated Miriam to the politically influential wife of Pilate to the economically poor but eternally blessed Mary, mother of Christ. While Lanyer treads carefully through the process of requesting patronage from her social superiors, she does appear to be establishing a kind of spiritual community that transcends social status.

More importantly, though, I believe the shortcoming of Lewalski's analysis occurs not in her idea of a "Book of Good Women" but in her idea that the female community is "sharply distinguished from male society and its evils." Even though Lanyer builds a great deal of epistemic irony on the ignorance of a number of male biblical figures, her Passion narrative does reference some noteworthy men, including David, who prophecies of Christ's deity, and Simon of Cyrene, who carries Christ's cross. In fact, Joseph of Arimathea's desire for the body of Christ reflects a portion of the impassioned language that describes the Countess of Cumberland's desire for her spouse:

Now blessed Ioseph doth both beg and sue  
To haue his body who possest his faith,  
And thinks, if he this small request obtaines,  
He wins more wealth than in the world remains;

Thus honourable Ioseph is possest,  
Of what his heart and soule so much desired,  
And now he goes to giue that body rest, (E4v-Fr, ll. 1269-75)

Remarkably, Joseph's compassion and respect for Christ's abused body receives from Lanyer two stanzas of admiration and blessing in the narrative. Clearly, Lanyer's cast of characters does not amount to a series of exclusively good women set in opposition to a series of exclusively evil men. To view her work in this way is to reduce her complex volume of poetry to an overly simple reversal of a common misogynist binary. This pitfall is evident in Ng's criticism of Lanyer's conclusion:

Lanyer seems to have finally caved in to the pressures of patriarchy when she concludes her poem with a list of male martyrs (*SD*, 125-28.1745-1824)—a strange tactic if indeed she means to defend women. Ironically, when addressing the Countess of Cumberland directly in the last two stanzas, Lanyer tells her to ‘take a view of those, / Whose worthy steps you doe desire to tread’ (*SD*, 128.1825-26), and the antecedent for the word ‘those’ are the men. Apparently, in the end, the standard for virtuous behavior is still man, despite Lanyer’s heroic efforts to praise women throughout the poem” (439)

In this passage, Ng seems to forget the immense spiritual and social value placed upon martyrs through the turbulent history of England’s reformations. A defense of women and a tribute to male martyrs are not mutually exclusive, and positioning the Countess of Cumberland as a successor to a line of male biblical martyrs does not trivialize the female sex through overemphasis on men. Rather, Lanyer honors the Countess of Cumberland by admonishing her to view the worthy steps of her predecessors, an honor that reminds her readership of the spiritual equality of men and women.

Two of the most accessible anthologies that contain Lanyer’s work, the Penguin Classics *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets*, edited by Danielle Clarke, and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, omit entirely the passages of *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum* that describe Joseph of Arimathea and the list of martyrs that Ng takes issue with. In my opinion, these omissions are grave errors that have likely prolonged feminist scholarship on Lanyer that inadequately addresses the egalitarian nature of her exegesis. This exegesis pays long overdue tribute to holy women of Scripture frequently overlooked in sermons and pamphlets. Yet it also appropriately represents the men of

Scripture as deeply flawed but jointly “adopted Heires.” Her narrative returns to the disciples in her list of martyrs, emphasizing their newly acquired spiritual perception as a motivation for their radical acts of sacrifice:

Nay, what great sweetnesse did th’ Apostles taste,  
Condemned by Counsell, when they did returne;  
Rejoycing that for him they di’d disgrac’d,  
Whose sweetnes made their hearts and soules so burne  
With holy zeale and loue most pure and chaste” (Hr, ll. 1793-97)

Lanyer’s vision of the tremendous redemptive glory and grace surpasses the limitations of women, whose spiritual insights have often been ignored, and the limitations of men, whose ignorance have often prevented their spiritual insight. She offers to both women and men the sensual language of the sweet delights of Christ, and her creation of a genealogy for her community of women is encompassed within an even more radical and visionary combination of male and female spiritual genealogies for an inclusive community of believers.

Only four years after Lanyer published *Salve Deus*, and along with it her rich citations centuries of female exempla as evidence of the consistent female philosophical and literary presence throughout history to her present, an ill-written yet extremely popular misogynist pamphlet reinvigorated the *querelle des femmes*. Joseph Swetnam’s *The Arraignment of Women*, published under the pseudonym Thomas Tell-Troth in 1615, draws on its own history of exegetical argumentation with Scriptural evidence, along with a host of classical and mythological allusion, to criticize women. His strategies provoked three particularly notable responses allegedly written by women, each of whom seizes the opportunity to demonstrate superior exegesis and critical thought by addressing the mythological, classical, and biblical

errors in Swetnam's logic. Rachel Speght, the nineteen-year-old first responder, published *A Mouzell for Melastomus* in 1617, and her tone immediately establishes that what Swetnam has argued somewhat flippantly, she plans to address with gravitas despite her youth and inexperience. Her upbringing as the daughter of the Calvinist minister James Speght, appears rather overtly in her frequent marginal annotations of scriptural references which provide for her a reliable source of authority to protect what little, tenuous reputation she has as a young, previously unknown, and unmarried woman, even while she hopes to expand that reputation through her sound logic and exegesis.

Rachel Speght's risk in revealing her identity is emphasized by the female pseudonyms under which the two responses that follow were published. The first, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman* (1617) includes on its title page a riddle, which has perpetually intrigued and confounded early modern scholars: "Written by Ester Sowernam, neither Maide, Wife nor Widdowe, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all" (A1r). The inability of scholars to locate the true identity of the pamphlet's author has revealed some insecurities and inconsistencies within feminist modes of inquiry, particularly in regards to the inclusion or exclusion of writers based on sex and/or gender in early modern women's studies. As Jo Carruthers observes, "The pamphlet highlights the opposing aims of feminist readers who on the one hand demand empirical female authorship (it needs to be an actual woman writing) against opposing demands that womanhood as a category needs to be dismantled, deconstructed or at least considered as a precarious category (but there is no such thing as 'woman')" (325). Subsequently, feminist scholars, eager to include another influential work in a growing list of powerful female writers, have conflicting ideas regarding Ester Sowernam's exact place in the study of early modern women. The stakes of the decision have been raised by such arguments as appear in *Major*

*Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England*: “An implicit foundation upon which attention to women writers of the early modern period rests is that the sex of the author is the crucial factor in the interpretive process” (qtd in Carruthers 325). If this prerequisite is truly necessary, then scholarship has reached an impasse, not only with Ester Sovernam, but also a number of early modern writers whose identities are either unknown or contested. “Material Girls: The Seventeenth Century Woman Debate,” Diane Purkiss’s article that suggests the possibility of male authorship for *Ester Hath Hang’d Haman*, provides a useful counterpoint to the face-value assumption of female authorship; however, the unanswered authorial question has still somewhat buried the pamphlet in theoretical nuance.

For the purpose of this thesis, I assume that “Ester Sovernam” is a pseudonym for a female writer for two primary reasons: first, both Constantia Munda (whose identity is also as yet unknown) and Rachel Speght, who openly joins Ester Sovernam and Constantia Munda in further condemnation of Joseph Sovernam in her 1621 pamphlet *Mortalities Memorandum with A Dreame Pre-fixed*, unquestioningly proceed with their own writings under the assumption of the female authorship of *Ester Hath Hang’d Haman*. Second, the assumption of these authors’ femaleness shaped their works’ reception, providing more useful context than scholarly belaboring over the true identity of these authors because some essential male or female quality might come through between the lines.

Although I agree with Carruthers, Matchinske, and others that the volatily-worded title page riddle, “Written by Ester Sovernam, neither Maide, Wife nor Widdowe, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all” could suggest a personal acknowledgement of whoredom or at least an invitation of the association, I suspect, rather, that the audience may have noted the titillating phrase as an ironic and direct reply to Swetnam’s accusation “you have thus unluckily

made your selues neither maidens, widowes, nor wiues” (E2r). A published confession of fornication however intriguing is unlikely, though. In *Women and the English Renaissance*, Linda Woodbridge posits that the author “has been maid, wife, and widow successively and is ‘therefore experienced to defend all’” (93). If the riddle does hint at Sovernam’s identity, she may have included the riddle partially to distinguish her argumentation from that of “the Maide” who “doth many times excuse her tendernesse of yeares” and who “doth rather charge and condemne women” (A2v). In fact, Sovernam may have referenced Speght in her title page with the phrase “neither Maide” as a point of contrast between the two writers. This possibility allows for an alternate reading of the riddle, “Written by Ester Sovernam, neither Maide” (a reference to Rachel Speght who insufficiently responded to Swetnam. In this case, the word “maide” could double as “made.” Sovernam is not the maid Speght, but she has also not yet been “made” a wife or a widow. Yet as a maid anticipating marriage, the likelihood of Sovernam’s accumulating all three statuses within her lifetime is high, motivating her to write on the topic. In any case, the simplest reading may be best. “Ester Sovernam,” a pseudonym rather than an actual person, cannot literally be a maid, wife or widow since a person named Ester Sovernam does not actually exist. Instead, in this reading, Ester Sovernam becomes a representative of all women regardless of their relationships to men or lack thereof, and consequently the riddle is meant not as a hint of the true identity of the pamphlet’s author but as an implication of the cumulative power of assent built up behind its arguments.

The set of female responses to Joseph Swetnam published in 1617 included *The Worming of a mad Dogge* written under the pseudonym Constantia Munda, which is promptly followed by the succinct “–*dux faemina facti*,” a woman was the leader of the deed. Despite the absence of a definitive identity for the pamphlet’s authorship, the biographical details surrounding Constantia

Munda have received significantly less critical attention than those of Ester Sowernam.

Constantia Munda's dedicatory epistle does emphasize her status as daughter of a lady, a detail that has perhaps assuaged the greatest of critical concerns in combination with Munda's lack of tempting title page riddle. As the third of a series of female responders to Joseph Swetnam, Constantia Munda indirectly references the work of Speght and Sowernam as having yielded positive results: "Besides, these books which are of late come out (the latter whereof hath preuented me in the designes I purposed in running ouer your wicked handi-worke) are like so may red-hot irons to stigmatize thy name with the brand of a hideous blasphemmer and incarnate Deuill" (D3r). Rather than representing *The Worming of a mad Dogge* as a corrective to previous failed attempts at diffusing Swetnam's vitriolic arguments, Constantia Munda represents her pamphlet as a useful addition to them, emphasizing that she has carefully established her own rhetoric separate from the points of her fellow respondents, "I will not speake of those which others haue espied, although I had a fling at them" (Ev). Here Munda pointedly establishes that she has common ground with previous female pamphleteers in the censure of Swetnam but that she also has new and relevant argumentation to contribute.

Rachel Speght even more specifically establishes commonality with Ester Swetnam and Constantia Munda in *A Dreame Prefixed to Mortalities Memorandum* (1621). Her references to their work suggest success through coordination and repetition by representing the defense of women against the "Beast" as complete only after all three writers have joined the effort. Notwithstanding the briefest of retorts to Sowernam's criticism, Speght joins Sowernam in censuring the limitations of *Mouzell*:

But, as it seems, my moode out-run my might,  
Which when a self-conceited Creature saw,

Shee past her censure on my weake exploit,  
And gaue the beast a harder bone to gnaw; (9)

Speght's conclusion of the matter readily defers first to the superiority of Sowernam's response and then to the finality of Munda's as the finisher of the job left incomplete by Speght and Sowernam:

And like an Artist takes away the cause,  
That the effect by consequence may cease.  
This franticke dogge, whose rage did women wrong,  
Hath Constance worm'd to make him hold his tongue.

In my description of the community among these three women writers, I want to emphasize that community does not suggest a wholesale agreement of methodology or of nuance as some critics have apparently assumed. In her review of Elaine Beilin's *Redeeming Eve*, Linda Woodbridge concludes, "Beilin's [sic] view of the women's tradition is appealing . . . One only wishes for evidence that the writers were aware of each other's writing—unfortunately, one of the only women Beilin [sic] mentions who refers to another woman's writing is Ester Sowernam in her unsisterly attack on Rachel Speght (349). Woodbridge's unfortunate use of the word "unsisterly" reflects a dangerously homogenized view of what a successful female community of writers might be. Beilin's own language may be a bit misleading when she describes the tone of *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*, "Sounding rather annoyed, Ester Sowernam claims that the 'Maidens Booke' is too short, that Rachel Speght is too young to argue effectively, and actually condemns women" (*Redeeming Eve* 258). Ester Sowernam might have been annoyed, but more likely she was only briefly set back by Speght's publishing first, giving Sowernam the opportunity for additional ammunition in her own contribution. Alternatively, Sowernam's reference could

simply be a rhetorical tactic justifying her production of a second response with similar content. The language used by Woodbridge and Beilin somewhat overdramatizes the conflict at the expense of acknowledging that mutual respect can be indicated just as frequently by disagreement as agreement. Sovernam, Mundia, and Speght share a rhetorical structure that defends the addition of an additional pamphlet to the existing public debate by suggesting that a previous contribution has been incomplete. As a result, their minor differences are contained within, rather than emphasized over, their shared quest for justice against a common enemy.

Although Rachel Speght, Ester Swetnam, and Constantia Munda, write in a genre distinct from Aemilia Lanyer's poetry and intended for markedly different audiences, they join Lanyer in an approach to the defense of women that combines biblical exegesis with historical precedent and classical reasoning. Within a decade of London publications, these women had not only vastly increased the number of accessible texts that reinforced a female heritage of learnedness and achievement but also publicized its use as an anti-misogynist tactic. While the content of their work was not always original (a value that often carries more worth to contemporary scholars than to early moderns), the novelty of the position of the female taking ownership of the defense of women ensured the circulation of the pamphlets, though Lanyer's publication failed to secure the patronage to which she had aspired. In addition to the defense of women, these writers also reflect the ongoing Protestant urge to exegete accurately to avoid error. Elaine Beilin writes of the female pamphleteers,

*because* of their Christian beliefs, these women argue seriously about feminine virtue; and to discredit their opponents' style and views, they do not participate in the joshing, but concentrate on a rhetorical response. . . . And if they do not have much new material to contribute to the defense of women, they do assume the

more dramatic pose of self-defense, as well as provide the first occasion in this period when women writers attack men in print. (*Redeeming Eve* 250)

Of course, they aimed to attack misogynistic men, not men in general, and they carefully directed their criticism to flawed arguments within a particular text. The English reformations had encountered almost at the outset the fracturing nature of locating epistemic certainty upon the interaction between the believer and the text when individuals consistently proved that rational exegesis could create irreconcilable differences of interpretation. Subsequently, the effort to demonstrate superior exegesis through sound reason became a primary mode of those attempting to ensure that the ongoing reformist developments in England would result in desirable social change. For these women, that change included respect for the authority of the learned and articulate female writer.

Rachel Speght's *Mouzell for Melastomus* has rightfully earned continuing scholarship and recognition despite the corrections and additions made by her successors. In fact, this pamphlet in itself includes a demonstration of the ways that a personal relationship with Scripture as developed through exegesis translates into an internalization of Scriptural identities that protect and justify the self-authorization necessary for exegesis in the first place. In "The Epistle Dedicatorie," Speght explains,

This my briefe Apologie (Right Honourable and Worshipfull) did I enterprise, not as thinking my selfe more fit then others to undertake such a taske, but as one, who not perceiuing any of our Sex to enter the Lists of encountring with this our grand enemy among men, I being out of all feare, because armed with the truth, which though often blamed, yet can neuer be shamed, and the Word of Gods Spirit,

together with the example of vertues Pupils for a Buckler, did no whit dread to  
combate with our said malevolent aduersarie (A4r)

In this passage, Speght takes on an identity far more aggressive than the familial identities of Elizabeth Joceline and Elizabeth Isham that I have discussed in my previous chapter, though she wields the identity less directly by introducing her warrior-like self with the phrase “as one, who.” Perhaps this increase in aggression occurs because the stabilization of Protestantism in England has unburdened writers from the pressures to help reformist ideas survive. Regardless, Speght’s externalization of her Scriptural identity, directed specifically toward the defense of all good women, is undeniably more potent in force and language than the internalization of biblical identities intended for self-authorization. Speght justifies this metaphorical force first with language implicitly aligning herself with the biblical David, who upon hearing Goliath’s boast to the Israelite camp voices is surprised that no one has risen to avenge the affront against God. Though she represents herself as no “more fit then others” for the task, a slanderous assault requires her action. Her publication of this exegesis is swiftly justified through her sense of urgency and necessity. Speght’s reference to “the examples of vertues Pupils,” however, interests me most in this apology. This inclusion reveals Speght’s confidence that the strength of female precedent will shield her; thus she reveals anthology as an integral part of her apology for women.

Additionally, Speght adroitly represents her ammunition as truth facilitated by the Word of God’s spirit. Her specification that the Word is from God’s spirit emphasizes her ability to receive truth directly from God, and she will continue to rely on this God-given authority throughout the body of *A Mouzell* as she demonstrates her proficiency in exegesis. Later, the poem “In praise of the Author and her Worke,” which Speght rhetorically represents as written

by Philalethes, the lover of truth, reveals a bit of literary sleight of hand. This poem explicitly aligns Speght with David and calls for her praise,

*Then let another young encombatant  
receive applause, and thankes, as well as hee:  
For with an enemie to Women kinde,  
she hath encountred, as each wight may see:  
And with the fruit of her industrious toyle,  
To this Goliah she hath given the foyle. (B4r, ll. 7-12)*

The stanza not only equalizes Speght's and David's achievements, but also militarizes an otherwise rather socially acceptable description of female accomplishment as "fruit of her industrious toyle." The phrase connotes the industrious woman of Proverbs 31, an often-cited chapter offered as a primer for godly female living. Speght tactically turns a biblical model of domestic virtue into a valiant model of female strength, capable of destroying misogynistic giants; in her female identity, she finds empowerment capable of exhibiting qualities of both male and female biblical pillars of achievement. The internalization of biblical identities through female exegesis results in Speght's dramatically forceful persona. Unlike many of the female writers of the previous century, who often base their authority to publish on wifely or maternal obligation, Speght reworks her youthful, unmarried state into a platform for public address.

Rachel Speght's only other published work, *Mortalities Memorandum*, reveals that a few years of time tempers Speght's individualistic self-representation as warrior into a member of a justice-seeking female community consisting of Ester Sowernam, Constantia Munda, and herself. Of course, this membership does not negate her desire for individual recognition. In "The Epistle Dedicatory" to *Mortalities Memorandum*, Speght insists, "by occasion of my

*mouzeling Melastomus*, I am now, as by a strong motiue induced (for my rights sake) to produce and divulge this offspring of my indeuour, to proue them further futurely who haue formerly depruiued me of my due, imposing my abortiue vpon the father of me, but not of it” (A2v). Speght’s indignation at the attribution of *Mouzell* to her father reflects her confidence in the quality of her work and the right of the female author to receive appropriate public recognition for her achievement. Affirming the female authorship of *Mouzell* also iterates Speght’s contribution as the first of the God-fearing women to censure Swetnam publicly in 1617.

*The Dreame* that prefaces *Mortalities Memorandum* situates the defense of women within an epistemic endeavor to overcome the malady of ignorance. Having entered a dream state, the speaker, whom Speght explicitly identifies as herself near the end, requests a remedy from personified *Thought*, citing the limitations of a non-rational epistemology:

Instinct of nature is my chiefest guide;  
I feele disease, yet know not what I ayle,  
I finde a sore, but can no salue prouide;  
I hungry am, yet cannot seeke for foode;  
Because I now not what is bad or good. (A4v)

The trajectory of the speaker’s development begins with an ironic allusion to Joseph Swetnam’s frequent comparisons of women to animals in *The Arraignment*. Suffering from a lack of sense and able to act only through animal instinct, she laments her ineptitude at addressing the misery her ignorance has left her. Yet her initial encounter with *Thought*, the first of a series of personifications that provide epistemic guidance, obviously distinguishes her intelligence through her interest in knowledge acquisition, which Speght as a poet is adept at allegorizing. *Thought* refers Speght to *Experience*, “For she can best direct you, what is meet / To worke your

cure, and satisfie your minde” (B1r). In a significant epistemic turn, experience trumps knowledge. This passage reflects Ester Sowernam’s personification of Reason and Experience as judges in the indictment of Joseph Swetnam. She describes the reliance of Reason on Experience,

For albeit, *Reason* if it selfe may be blinded by passion, yet when she is ioyned with *Experience*, shee is knowne to be absolute, and without compare. As for *Experience*, she is knowne of her selfe to be admirable excellent in her courses . . . no man commeth before her but she maketh him ashamed, and shee will call and proue almost euery man a foole, especially such who are wise in their owne conceits. (E2v)

Ester Sowernam and Rachel Speght’s shared emphases on experience’s superiority to reason and reason’s reliance on experience predate the groundbreaking philosophical contributions of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who criticize the epistemological limitations of rationalism in *Leviathan* (1651) and “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (1690) respectively. In *Dreame*, the Speght’s subsequent allegorical encounters with Desire, Experience, and Industry lead her to a climactic point in her epistemic quest as Truth, who dissolves Dissuasion’s anti-female biases. Truth’s speech, which justifies female participation in epistemology, begins with an exegetical argument:

Both man and woman of three parts consist,  
Which *Paul* doth bodie, soule, and spirit call:  
And from the soule three faculties arise,  
The mind, the will, the power; then wherefore shall  
A woman haue her intellect in vaine,

Or not endeuour Knowledge to attaine.

The talent, God doth giue, must be imploy'd,

His owne with vantage he must haue againe:

All parts and faculties were made for use;

The God of *Knowledge* nothing gaue in vaine.

“Twas *Maries* choice our Sauour did approue,

Because that she the better part did loue. (B2r)

To emphasize the exegetical authority of these lines, Speght includes marginal references to her biblical sources: I Thessalonians 5:23, Luke 19:23, I Samuel 2:3, and Luke 10:41. This point in the *Dreame* is her first use of proof texts, though she includes a few more later in *Dreame* and adds them fairly frequently in *Mortalities Memorandum*. By drawing attention to her sources, Speght ties together her epistemic journey with the pursuit of theological and spiritual truth. In the garden, Truth pronounces, “Who wanteth *Knowledge* is a Scripture foole” in condemnation of those who do not choose to access the truth readily available in the Word of God. In her next speech that reveals the value of knowledge, Truth calls knowledge “the mother of faith, hope, and loue” (B3v). Speght’s epistemic journey leads her to the central source of all spiritual knowledge, available to all through exegesis. After these crucial revelations, Speght describes herself as distracted by “some occurrence” that “quenched hope for gaining any more” knowledge (B4r). Although she does not specify the nature of her obligations to find contentment with the little knowledge she has acquired, this portion of the narrative is likely critical of the social demands that limit her chances to publicize her thoughts until Swetnam’s dramatic attacks on women constrain her to publish a response. Through the aid of Ester

Sowernam and Constantia Munda, Speght realizes that her knowledge is weaker than she had realized, so rhetorically leaving Swetnam to their justice, Speght turns to the weighty subject of her recent experience of her mother's death, which results in a meditation that affords her the chance to publicly refine her epistemology for the spiritual benefit of her readers. *Mortalities Memorandum*, which briefly establishes the equality of men and women through the retelling of the Fall narrative at its outset, skillfully balances the epistemic ironies centered around the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its timing within the context of the possibility of certainty through faith.

Ester Sowernam addresses her readership with a bit of tactical flattery "To All Worthy and Hopefull young youths of Great-Brittaine." After laying out the plight of women represented in Swetnam's *Arraignement*, Sowernam appeals to a specifically male audience, "You my worthy youths are the hope of Man-hoode, the principall point of Man-hoode is to defend, and what more man-like defence, then to defend the iust reputation of a woman" (A4r). Not far into the body of the pamphlet, Sowernam reveals that this appeal to male chivalry is an invitation to join women in the defense of women rather than a request for the protection of women who cannot defend themselves. Only a page later, Sowernam figures herself as champion, "I am not onely prouoked by this Author to defend women, but I am more violently vrged to defend diuine Maiestie, in the worke of his Creation" (B1r). Like Rachel Speght, Sowernam justifies her departure from traditional female roles into aggressive and even violent action by claiming spiritual necessity.

However, despite the similarity in the apologetic for authorship, Ester Sowernam's Epistle Dedicatory establishes a broader epistemic base than Speght does in either *Mouzell* or *Mortalities Memorandum*, using philosophical, exegetical, historical, and experiential

approaches to the collection of knowledge. By the end of Chapter I, she has established her authority on her exegetical abilities, “Now, hauing examined what collections *Ioseph Swetnam* hath wrested out of Scriptures, to dishonor and abuse all women: I am resolued, before I answere further particulars made by him against our sexe, to collect and note out of Scriptues [sic];” (B2v). In contrast to Joseph Swetnam, who condemns himself by violently tearing apart Scripture for his own purposes, Sowernam presents herself as a calm and obedient collector and annotator as a means of enhancing the credibility and consistency of her exegesis. Her exegetical style, however, reinserts personal experience into the biblical narratives. Whereas in Rachel Speght concedes the common assumption “that Sathan first assailed the woman, because where the hedge is lowest, most easie it is to get ouer, and she being the weaker vessel was with more facility to be seduced” (C2v) in her representation of the temptation of Eve, Ester Sowernam quite defiantly points out, “shee was assaulted with a Serpent of the masculine gender; who maliciously enuying the happinesse in which man was at this time, like a mischieuous Politician, hee practiced by supplanting of the woman” (B4v-r). Sowernam’s witty association between male serpents and politicians aside, the interpretation that posits envy as the serpent’s internal motivation for the deception had existed for centuries.

However, Sowernam’s consistent emphasis on internal motivation sets her exegetical pattern apart. Her exegesis seeks specifically to recover the scope of human experience in the texts, resulting in a repeated emphasis on a uniquely female experience of joy. Sowernam insists that this joy is increased through affliction, and more significantly, is unsurpassable because of God’s choice to “recouer Heauen” for humanity through woman (C1r). In this exegetical pattern, Sowernam rewrites the lesson of the irony in the story of the Fall,

Amongst the curses and punishments heaped vpon the Serpent, what greater ioy could she heare, or what greater honour could be done vnto her, then to heare from the voyce of God these words; *I will put enmitie betwixt the woman and thee, betwixt thy seede and her seede*, and that her seed should break the Serpents head? This must perforce be an exceeding ioy for the woman, to heare and to be assured that her fruit should reuenge her wrong. (C1v)

Sowernam asks the question rhetorically since the uplifting joy she finds in the story does not appear explicitly in the Genesis 3; in fact, the only emotion depicted at all is God's prediction of sorrow for both Adam and Eve. Instead, she chooses to re-teach her audience how to interpret the irony of the narrative. Once again, in a grand effort to restore the pathos of human experience to the exegetical process, Sowernam casts a new vision for reading Adam's motivation for naming his wife Eve: "hee comforts himselfe, he taketh heart from grace, he engageth his hope vpon that promise which was made to the woman. Out of this most comfortable and blessed hope hee now calleth his wife by a name, in whose effects not onely he, but all mankinde should most blessedly share: hee calleth her Eue" (C1v). She promptly supports this alternate reading with the entirety of Chapter III, which launches into a broad kind of genealogy of Eve's female offspring, who consistently echo the lifesaving and liberating promise to Eve. Consequently, this compendium functions both as a strategic defense of women and an epistemic foundation for a restorative exegesis that, for Sowernam, proffers to women full authority as equal, and even superior, inheritors of grace.

Constantia Munda's contribution to the 1617 pamphlet war against Swetnam clinches the relevance of the defense of women to female aspirations to influence ongoing English reformations, beginning with maternal allegory. The personified Lady Elegant Discretion

(Prudentia Munda), with both pain and perseverance, has birthed a daughter, Elegant Courage (Constantia Munda). The author of *The Worming of a mad Dogge* subtly chooses *constantia* over *virtus* as the first name of her female champion, likely because *virtus*, though a feminine noun, has direct connotations with manliness. Constantia includes extensive gratitude for the ongoing efforts of her mother Prudentia, who despite her continual labor to produce courage has ceremoniously returned to church after the birth of her child, and encourages Prudentia with the written response to Swetnam as an emblem of courage in action. Thus, the pseudonymic Constantia Munda joins Aemilia Lanyer in the specific use of matrilineage as a means of proliferating piety, an approach that Ester Sowernam also uses less directly through the genealogy of female life-preservers beginning with Eve. Munda later continues this strategy by asking,

Is there not as many monuments erected to the famous eternizing of charitable deeds of women renowned in their generations, as trophees to the most courageous Potentates? In the commemorations of founders and benefactors, how many women haue emulated your sex in bountifull exhibitions to religious vses and furtherance of pietie? I might produce infinite examples (C2v)

Mundia joins a number of women writers included in this chapter who participate in an early modern pattern of using a cross-generational biblical and historical community of women as evidence that directly unravels the accusations that women have brought and continue to bring trouble into the world.

Mundia also, along with others before her, clarifies the urgency of acknowledging the relationship of female piety to England's Protestant religious climate. Her rebuke of Swetnam's bitter complaint reveals an optimism regarding the conditions produced by Protestant efforts,

“Bur you, sir, were whelpt in a better age, at least in a better climate, where the Gospell is preached, and *the voice of the Turtle is heard in our land;*” (C2v). But Mundia also appears aware of the tenuousness of a climate of peace, brought to England through the pious deeds of both men and women, and her clarification serves to protect the purity that reformist efforts have produced in England by extinguishing the slanderous and irresponsible exegesis of Joseph Swetnam. The pamphlet links the defense of women to the defense of religion, despite its inclusion of relatively few biblical citations, by representing Rachel Speght as a defender of religion and “the first Champion of our sexe”: You see your blacke grinning mouth hath beene muzzled by a modest and powerfull hand who hath iudiciously bewrayed, and wisely layed open your singular ignorance . . . so that tis a doubt whether shee hath shewed more modesty or grauity, more learning or prudence in the religious confutation of your vndecent raylings” (D1r). This inventive little reference to Speght also reinvents conventional female modesty as fully concordant with solemn and authoritative public argumentation and establishes solidarity with Speght as a compatriot in a just war. The series of works, presumably including Sowernam implicitly, “are like so many red-hot irons to stigmatize thy name with the brand of a hideous blasphemmer and incarnate Deuill” (D3r). Constantia Munda positions herself not as sole defender but one of a community of women who publicly reference their mutual respect for the furtherance of their godly heritage. Bringing the force of the Word to bear in the concluding pages of *The worming*, Constantia Munda demonstrates that exegetical battles are won through knowledge of Scripture and application that reinforces the dignity of God’s creation.

Nearly six decades lie between the early reformist writings of women such as Anne Askew and Katherine Parr and the later Protestant writings of women such as Aemilia Lanier and Rachel Speght, and during those decades a radical reformist minority develops into a

defining feature of English religion and politics. Within the whole of my thesis, the juxtaposition of the work of women writers from separate points in England's evolving reformations highlights a shift in the epistemic strategies that women employ to influence these reformations. This chapter in particular looks at the epistemic uses of female exempla: what they mean and how they are interpreted and contextualized for rhetorical purposes. The pre-Elizabethan female exempla employed by John Bale diminish the awareness of a presence of a consistent female literary culture in England and Europe. John Knox and John Aylmer use female exempla as a mechanism for epistemic control over the meaning of female identity and function as a means of protecting patriarchal social structures from the threat of female monarchs. These men share in common a use of female exempla that isolates female achievement and portrays it as supernatural.

The women of my chapter, on the other hand, use female exempla to establish a longstanding and continuous history of female achievement from Eve to their contemporaries. Lanyer's rich collection of exempla emphasizes female spiritual strength, not to replace male spirituality, but to reposition women in their rightful place throughout history as equal demonstrators of human ability and as equal inheritors of divine grace. Because the process of "reformation" in Protestantism is an ongoing, continuous effort to clarify and correct, Lanyer directs her revised historical narrative to effect the acknowledgement of spiritual equality in Protestantism's epistemic foundations. Likewise, Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam, and Constantia Munda grapple with Swetnam's *Arraignment* in their highly publicized demands for recognition of the social necessity of recognition and respect for women's epistemic contributions to Protestantism through sound exegesis and appropriate demonstrations of female authority. During a time of obvious marginalization of female publication, early modern women

saw strength in numbers and used exempla to establish historical and contemporary communities of female influence and intellectual production. The proliferation of female-authored publications in the seventeenth century attests to the power of apology through anthology.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many of the women in my thesis pursue a spiritual certainty that seeks validation and self-assurance on an individual level through exegesis of Scripture. These highly personal and devotional experiences with the Word of God unite reformists of distinct generations and differing theological persuasions within the development of a Protestant tradition formed by access to Scriptures in the vernacular. This interior epistemic pursuit leads to varying methods of confirming truth externally and communally: establishing commonalities with biblical and historical female models, tracing spiritual heritage through familial relationships, and joining contemporaries to defend women in public debate. In the transitions from interior self-reflection to exterior self-defense in early modern women's writing, the need to find self-assurance and project that assurance onto the world appears as a persistent concern. As these women write their journeys towards spiritual certainty, they sublimate their interior concerns about the stability of English reformations that existed on an external level in terms of the socio-political outcomes that reform would produce. Protestant doctrinal reforms might imply the ability to rely on personal exegesis for spiritual truth as a measure of authority independent of the spoken word of a preacher, but what could this authority mean for women?

Anne Askew provides an early example of a female writer who takes advantage of political and religious peril to position herself as a cultural influence. In her account of her first examination in 1545, Askew represents herself as a traditionally pious and deferential woman provoked to public demonstrations of her beliefs by her commitment to the Word of God. She reinforces this commitment by repeating the words of Scripture as her rhetorical defense. During her second arrest and examination in 1546, however, Askew represents herself more clearly as an

exegete by drawing from reformist exegetical practices, drawing on interpretive consensus with her audience, modeling her behavior as an imitation of the suffering of Christ, and recontextualizing Scripture through her personal experience in order to produce imitable truth in action. This exegetical method highlights the commonalities between interpretation and translation, namely that each involve, or can involve an external encounter with a text, an internalization of the meaning and relevance of the text, and the externalizing production of new text that has taken on additional meaning. In my chapter on women and exegesis, I show Katherine Parr's work in this arena as both translator and exegete. In 1545, Parr demonstrates the availability of Protestant self-mediation to all believers, including women, in *Psalms or Prayers taken out of Holy Scripture*, a translation of Fisher's *Psalmi seu Precationes*. Although her source material comes immediately from John Fisher, her work more significantly positions Parr alongside a number of influential reformists who publish translations of the Psalms.

Additionally, Parr's spiritual narrative *Lamentation of a Sinner*, written in 1547, positions her as a Protestant model of piety, as well as a model of the Protestant means to certify truth. In this work, Parr articulates an epistemic process by which faith results in the confirmation of knowledge via assurances produced as senses. She distinguishes these assurances from mysticism by locating them firmly in the exegesis of Scripture. Both Anne Askew and Katherine Parr represent their exegesis as literal and straightforward, a preservation of the unity of Scripture that allows biblical texts to be recombined, rearranged, and recontextualized to produce newly relevant meaning authorized both by the writer herself and by God, from whom all truth originates. Although Anne Dowriche did not publish *The French Historie* till several decades after the posthumous publication of Katherine Parr's works, Dowriche shares with Parr and Askew the use of personal exegesis as a means of arriving at epistemic certainty. *The French*

*History* (1589) openly advocates the use of poetry and history as appropriate for the moral benefit of the audience, and poetic language enables Dowriche to represent the individual conscience as a primary conduit for the epistemic confirmation obtained through exegesis using the metaphoric language of the Word of God as a seed that spreads, grows, and produces throughout Europe. To avoid the epistemic confusion potentially created by differences in conscience, Dowriche places additional epistemic merit on physical and embodied signifiers, which she argues will ultimately reveal the truth or error of an individual's beliefs.

Elizabeth Isham's writing suggests some ways that early modern women could clarify their spiritual identities through reformist exegesis and articulate them in ways intended to protect their authority as exegetes from opposition. Her "Booke of Remembrance" (1638) combines autobiographical life writing with spiritual and epistemic inquiry, preserved for the future because of Isham's conviction that her own search for knowledge can effectively aid others with similar epistemic questions. In Elizabeth Isham's case, reformist exegesis also simultaneously validates her spiritual authority and vindicates her refusal to marry. Like Anne Askew in her translation of Psalm 52, Isham uses Scripture as an interpretive aid for her own experience as she offers her own experience as an interpretive aid for Scripture. Unlike Askew, though, Elizabeth Isham covers most of a lifetime of exegesis and experience in her work, casting her alternating experiences of doubt and belief in terms of an increasingly successful epistemic process of knowledge acquisition and confirmation. For Isham, this process is highly individual and personal, and she frequently defends her exegetical autonomy. However, the preservation of the records of the individual process offers immediate benefit for her audience in the same way that the preservation of her mother's and grandmother's records of faith have benefited Isham herself. Isham draws on these familial sources, along with biblical women, as

precedents worthy of imitation. Within a community of believers, a spiritual seeker like Isham can present herself as spiritual teacher and intercessor that facilitates both corporate confession and private meditation, and in doing so revitalize familial roles such as daughter and sister and defend social roles based on individual merit rather than gender. Elizabeth Joceline similarly redefines the maternal role in *The Mother's Legacie* (1624) by designating herself as a moral authority for her child and advisor to her husband as an earnest and pious mother, an identity less likely to be disputed than spiritual intercessor or teacher. Joceline's framework reflects a seventeenth-century Protestant preference for verbal communication over written communications, allowing her to find a means to publicize her authority within a rhetorical criticism of written forms. In writing, she encapsulates a lifetime of verbal instruction that she would have proffered to her household if her lifespan would have allowed and consequently reaches an otherwise inaccessible and wide audience with her own exegesis of Scripture and spiritual insight.

As Joceline and Isham exemplify, locating female authority within the familial and domestic offered a level of protection for female exegetes seeking to expand their reformist influence. In addition, longstanding ecclesiastical teachings on mystical marriage, which became increasingly popular during England's reformations, disrupted not only the ostensible literalness of reformist hermeneutics but also assumptions about the spiritual sensibilities of men and women. In depicting the husband-wife relationship as a reflection of the union between Christ and the Church, male theologians and poets found themselves describing their spiritual experiences either literally from a male perspective or metaphorically (and voyeuristically) from a female perspective. Aemilia Lanyer takes advantage of this malleability of spiritual imagery in *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum* (1611), which uses mystical marriage imagery to negotiate a reformist

cultural position for female authority. Throughout her Passion narrative, Lanyer builds epistemic irony with frequent examples of men who have access to truth yet continue in ignorance in contrast with women who receive little recognition for their spiritual insights apart from the commendation and love of Christ. Lanyer does not, however, denigrate the biblical men in her narrative. Instead, she points out their limitations, along with the spiritual abilities of women, as part of a program to restore women to positions of authority within an egalitarian community of believers that acknowledges the spiritual efficacy of female speech and action.

Communities consisting primarily of contemporary women or female exempla from history and Scripture, on the other hand, have separate and distinct rhetorical functions in early modern debates over female authority and ability. Although catalogues of female writing and achievement existed long before the English reformations, their popularity increased as reformists employed them in public disagreements. As Jennifer Summit has argued, John Bale incorporates female exempla either as contemporary rarities or as glimpses of historical pasts to the effect of obscuring connections between current female scholars and the memory of recent female achievement and its connections in his editions of Anne Askew's *Examinations* and Elizabeth Tudor's 1544 English translation *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, written by Marguerite, Queen of Navarre. The few positive female exempla in John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet* (1558) function similarly: in Knox's work, Deborah the judge and Hulda the prophet, along with their English counterpart Anne Boleyn, provide momentary, miraculous reflections of divine power but are used in contrast with the remainder of his female exempla, who are characteristically devious and incapable of rule. Even John Aylmer's 1559 defense of Elizabeth's authority, *An harborroove for the faithful and truwe subiects* undermines the merits and achievement of women by distinguishing Elizabeth authority as God-ordained monarch from any

kind of authority otherwise wielded by women. Thomas Bentley's anthology of female writing and achievement, *A Monument of Matrones* (1582) constructs a recent history of imitable Protestant female piety alongside biblical and historical exempla, which despite its limitations ensured an unprecedented accessibility to women's writing in England in the later sixteenth century, perhaps facilitating the following increase in rhetorical uses of female exempla.

Along with Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum*, the female responses to Joseph Swetnam's *Arraignement of Women* (1615) illustrate how women use female exempla, often along with biblical exegesis, to reconstruct contemporary, biblical, and historical communities of women as justification for female authority based on precedent. Swetnam inadvertently invites this kind of powerful response with his frequent misappropriations of both reliable and unreliable sources. Not only do Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam, and Constantia Munda, all of whom publish their pamphlets in 1617, unravel Swetnam's logic by outmatching his anecdotal evidence, they also establish a community amongst themselves that isolates Swetnam and establishes female solidarity. Speght, writing first, draws on biblical precedent as her greatest buttress against Swetnam's attacks. Sowernam, writing second, develops a restorative exegesis of scripture that surpasses a defense of women to show that they have been divinely appointed throughout history for grace and achievement. She also offers constructive criticism to Speght's *Mouzell*, a gesture of solidarity rather than competition. Constantia Munda, writing third, reinforces the idea of mutual respect among women who share the ability to correct error through exegesis. Then in her later work *A Dreame Prefixed* (1621), Speght reimagines her role as coordinate with Sowernam and Munda through their shared emphases on reason and exegesis, a public demonstration of the interconnectedness of a Protestant community with a continued vision for reform that acknowledges past and present female agency.

Although some might argue that Anne Askew is the only woman with a direct influence on the English reformations via public exegesis, I think such a position overlooks the reality of influence that increases (directly or indirectly) through the accumulation of publicized female literary presences. Writing during the first emergence of Protestant doctrine in England, Katherine Parr confidently offers her exegetical path to epistemic certainty as a model for her fellow English citizens to follow. Anne Dowriche employs exegesis for the shaping of public conscience in order to ensure that reformist efforts will not be corrupted by the continuing presence of Catholics in England. Although Elizabeth Isham's work did not reach a large scale audience like that of Elizabeth Joceline, both women write under the assumption that exegesis is the means by which their arguments will be respected and accepted. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, personal exegesis has become a respected tradition in England, creating a climate in which Aemilia Lanyer, as well as Rachel Speght and her female counterparts, can leverage her proficiency in exegesis toward the public defense of women. With the exception of Askew, these women may not be named directly as influencers of the English reformations; yet as some of the first women to publicize Protestant exegesis, their influence surely contributed to the proliferation of women's religious publication and public speech in the seventeenth century.

Disputations regarding exegetical processes and alterations in their structure throughout the English reformations created an unstable space within English religious belief and practice in which women found ways to articulate new epistemic and exegetical foundations for Protestant ideology. Beginning with their encounters with biblical texts facilitated by the reformist emphasis on personal responsibility to read the Word of God, the reformist women writers in my thesis found ways to answer epistemic questions regarding the nature of certainty over knowledge and belief through exegesis combined with personal experience. Their devotional

experiences, through which they internalized the Word, often produced the motivation and vocabulary necessary to reformulate articulations of female identity. And as they externalized these identities with confidence in their exegetical capacity, their apologies for female authorization drew on thousands of years of precedent, both spiritual and secular. During a series of English reformations seeking to reimagine and preserve new forms of autonomy within religious and political structures, these devout Protestant women established that women could and would continue to benefit from and contribute to reforms by posing and answering epistemic questions through exegesis.

My thesis draws attention to the relevance of the relationship between epistemology and religion in pre-modern philosophy to studies of early modern literature. Epistemologies, conscious or unconscious, determine the ways in which people filter information as belief or knowledge; they also determine the ways that knowledge is acquired, confirmed, and transferred. For this reason, any attempt to understand a text's relationship to its socio-historical context must also consider the epistemologies that have produced and preserved the text. Further clarification is needed within early modern literary studies not only of the role of religion in knowledge production but also of the role of women in developing articulations of knowledge theory. In *Writing, Gender and State*, Megan Matchinske argues of the developing role of conscience during the reformations,

It is my contention that the domain of the private is, by 1640, concrete, defined, and invasive. Spiritual interiority and religious conscience have been joined by a variety of other private spaces. In addition to a singular relationship between private sinners and their God, between secret thoughts and public ramifications, notions of a secularized civic conscience also begin to gain cultural weight. . . .

Women begin to replace priests as regulators of conscience and bearers of secular *and* spiritual morality. (4)

In Matchinske's work, which addresses the shifting social structures of early modern England, I see implications for future studies of women's epistemic influences on culture. If women truly did functionally replace priests as Matchinske suggests, how precisely was this ideological identity transition supported and proliferated in a culture with such strong reformist emphasis on the authority of the Word? And in the midst of increasing secularization, what persisted of reformist epistemologies?

My thesis also offers to the scholarly community a kind of literary analysis continuously aware of the danger of pseudohistorical gender constructions and the tendency of metaphysical language to reinforce reconstructive and essentializing gender analysis. Feminism has, in some ways, contributed to monolithic binaries in its attempts to disrupt them, though these contributions are typically subtle rather than blatant. In reference to early modern and pre-early modern women writers, for example, Joan Kelly claims, "Most of the earlier feminist theorists lacked such a vision of social movement to change events. Until the time when a women's movement would join feminist theory and practice, the feminists of the *querelle* carried on their long and patient intellectual resistance at a remove from action" (6). In her footnote, she clarifies that early modern "feminist activities" did exist, though her examples are so exclusive as to limit almost the entirety of published women who have not "escaped two of the major institutions of male power: the family and the church" (n 4). This framework fails to acknowledge the real and active agency obtained by sincere female religious devotees and limits the idea of action to those women who lived in communities of women apart from families. Thus the "action" listed by Kelly can be identified as ahistorical notions, influenced by some strains of contemporary

feminism, that fail to allow us to imagine alternate types of action and trace the very real contributions of sixteenth and early seventeenth century women to social change. Although I do not believe Kelly intended her analysis to limit the scope of early modern women's studies, I believe that this limitation has occurred.

In my introduction, I have argued for the need for critical clarification in early modern scholarship, particularly because of the problems that uncritical language can create. To model this clarification throughout my thesis, I have used terms such as "English reformations" and "reformist" rather than "The English Reformation" and "Reformers" to refer to the religious movements in sixteenth and seventeenth century England in order to emphasize the disjointedness of these reforms. My critical language not only circumvents the teleological problem of analytical predestination frequently found in representations of a unified English Reformation but also points to the continuity between the religious and social reforms. As a result, my linguistic choices in the communication of my thesis reflect, rather than detract from, my greater emphasis on the relationship between women's spiritual theologically egalitarian persuasions. I disagree with Diane Willen that early modern women and men experienced and expressed religion differently (23). Instead, my thesis shows how women's and men's shared devotional and religious experiences motivated women to extend theological commonalities into familial, ecclesiastical, and even sometimes political social structures.

While metaphysical language certainly contributed to a suppression of female influence, the women writers in my thesis demonstrate, as Elizabeth does, that the semiotic control of language can often surmount the prejudices created by metaphysical language itself. However, I have also shown that early modern scholarship has often perpetuated the same essentialisms and problematic binaries that it has tried to overcome. To avoid making the same mistake, I have

chosen not to use essentializing descriptors such as “masculine” and “feminine” that suggest universally accepted qualities inherent in men and women. The ideal of “feminine virtue,” for example, frequently appears in scholarship on early modern women to connote chastity, piety, wisdom, and a number of other qualities. When I reference character traits relevant to particular texts or arguments, I choose to detach these character traits from potential gendering by naming them directly and specifically. Furthermore, when I have included scholarship that does use generic, essentializing descriptors, I have attempted to distinguish carefully between the scholarship’s problematic language and its useful insights. In my references to scholarship by Elaine Belin, Helen Wilcox, Michele Osherow, and Ellen Macek, I show how gendering genre as masculine or feminine actually destabilizes their arguments through the oversimplification of fluctuating cultural values.

Lastly, my thesis contributes to early modern scholarship an alternative to the logic of counterpower, which attempts to reverse binaries by setting female achievement in opposition to male achievement in order to elevate women. In my work on Aemilia Lanyer, I show how such an approach can result in misreading the text by overlooking some of its parts. Through my analysis of women’s responses to Joseph Swetnam, I also show how even in discussions of communities of women writers, binaries that posit female community against male individualism can be avoided. In addressing the question of whether the writer’s gender matters at all, I argue that gender can matter, not because of inherent gender qualities that emerge in texts, but because socio-political context can effect the means of textual production, as well as its style, content, and reception. In my attention to early modern epistemologies – the theories of knowledge acquisition, confirmation, and conference—I find a means of recovering historical presuppositions and appropriately differentiating them from contemporary presuppositions.

Despite their commitment to liberatory socio-literary analysis, feminist scholars have also inadvertently contributed to problems created by the limitations of anthologies despite other attempts to correct them. As in the case of Aemilia Lanyer's work, which I discuss in Chapter 4, common publications of excerpts of *Salve Deus Rex Judaorum* have likely contributed to restrictive interpretations of her characters and narrative. Of course, scholarship limited to commonly anthologized texts can produce other limitations. As Kimberly Anne Coles points out, "Critical methodology that has concentrated on versified (canonical) literary texts has distorted the cultural values of the seventeenth century by marginalising the production of the literate non-elite" (183). In my thesis, I have focused on writers whose works are relatively accessible to students and whose level of education has contributed most poignantly to my interests in exegesis and epistemology. However, my future research can most assuredly benefit from expansion into the literate non-elite that Coles mentions. In particular, I would like to further investigate the exegesis of female Quakers in the mid- to late-seventeenth century.

The work of Margaret Fell Fox, for example, falls outside this project despite her rhetorical use of female exempla and remarkably concise exegesis, which is traditionally structured and non-traditionally developed, resulting in some unusual interpretations of familiar biblical passages. For example, she ties together the enmity between the serpent and the woman with Galatians 4:4-5:

Let this Word of the Lord, which was from the beginning, stop the mouths of all that oppose womens speaking in the Power of the Lord; for he hath put enmity between the Woman and the Serpent; and if the Seed of the Woman speak not, the Seed of the Serpent speaks; . . . it is manifest that those that speak against the Woman and her Seeds Speaking, speak out of the enmity of the old Serpents Seed;

and God hath fulfilled his Word and Promise, *When the fullness of time was come, he hath sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of Sons,* (4)

She continues this complicated explication to connect women and the seed, the seed and the Church, and ultimately the Church and women so that anyone who speaks against women speaks against the Church and by implication Christ, the defender of the Church. Where other early modern theologians read a mystical union between Christ and the Church, Fell finds an unusually literal connection between women and the Church that preserves the authority of women to speak on spiritual matters. Rather than acknowledging room for differing interpretations of the women's voice in the spiritual community, Fell relegates all dissenters to the realm of financial corruption: "yet you will make a Trade of Womens words to get money by, and take Texts; and Preach Sermons upon Womens words; and still cry out, Women must not speak, Women must be silent" (16). After this dramatic pronouncement, Fell builds her conclusion upon a series of biblical and historical examples of female prophets, speakers, and preachers, a new construction of a female spiritual community that adds additional authorization to Fell's claim to divine calling. Yet Margaret Fell Fox is the best known of the numbers of Quaker women who preached and published during the sectarian conflicts of the seventeenth century, and her sermons have already received a great deal of scholarly attention. I intend to further investigate the relationship between epistemology and exegesis as it appears in the sermons and writings of lesser-known Quaker women.

In my introductory chapter, I posed a question that has driven much of my research for my thesis: during England's reformations, did religious women write motivated by feelings of exclusion or assumptions of inclusion? The women writers whom I have represented in this

project seem to indicate that they did indeed assume that reformist efforts not only included women but also necessitated their contributions. These women approach knowledge with a perspective both shaped by Protestantism and that shapes Protestantism: the early modern women writers in my thesis justify their authority in religious discourse regarding knowledge, belief, and the interpretive process in between. The broadening of accessibility to the Scriptures in the early half of the sixteenth century positioned educated women in England as definers and practitioners of exegesis before Protestantism could stabilize enough to delineate fully whom to exclude from the process.

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