

ABSTRACT

“Verie Needfull for this Time”:
Representations of Women in Sixteenth-Century English Prayer Manuals

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Using three texts written by different authors, this thesis argues that sixteenth-century English prayer manuals set rigid boundaries for women by representing them in limited ways. Analyzing and comparing Thomas Becon’s *The Flour of Godly Praiers* (1550), Thomas Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrones* (1582), and Anne Wheathill’s *A Handfull of Holesome* (1584) highlights the various ways scripted prayer could confine women readers. In the intimate arena of prayer, women using these manuals would have encountered narrow categories to occupy. Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill employed gender exclusive language, presented restrictive categories, and tailored biblical examples to be proper models for Englishwomen in a changing world. These manuals have been overlooked in the study of women and religion, and this thesis aims to emphasize the importance of prayer scripts as valuable sources that show how English writers perceived and portrayed women in the sixteenth century.

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Representations of Women in Sixteenth-Century English Prayer Manuals

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the second half of the sixteenth century, English men and women were encouraged to study their Bibles and read devotional texts to inspire private piety and promote proper behavior. An eager audience of early modern women living in a generation that emphasized literacy and personal faith looked to published prayer manuals for instruction on how, when, why, and what to pray, and they either encountered narrow categories in which to fit or the absence of a female voice in these published works of private devotion. While writers of published prayer manuals ranged from clergymen, established laymen, to even particularly pious women, each of them wrote with a unique devotional voice, and they all produced prayer manuals that limited female readers in some way. The popularity of prayer manuals in mid to late sixteenth-century England shows that they were purchased, read, and implemented by a large reading audience made up of both men and women.¹ Prayer manuals were important sources where individuals could learn what it meant to communicate meaningfully with God, conduct themselves within Christian community, and construct their own identities as Protestant men and women in a changing world.

Prayer manuals are valuable sources for scholars, yet they represent a complicated genre that is often overlooked in the study of women in literature and even more so in the

¹ On the widespread popularity of devotional and prayer literature in sixteenth-century England, see: Helen C. White, *Tudor Books of Private Devotion*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin press, 1951), 149-151. Faye L. Kelly, *Prayer in Sixteenth-Century England*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Monographs, 1966) 4. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 224-225.

study of women and religion.² One objective of this thesis is to bring published prayer manuals to the foreground as sources worth analyzing for their rhetorical categorization of Christians according to gender. This thesis also argues that strict categorizations and limited representations of female subjects reflect the writer's perception of his or her society and its patriarchal boundaries. These limited representations of women presented female readers with relatively narrow examples to follow in their quest to develop proper habits of piety, prayer, and godly behavior.³

Prayer Manual Writers

While a number of prayer manuals were published in the second half of the sixteenth century, this thesis revolves around the works of three specific authors. Occupying varying levels of the social hierarchy, Thomas Becon, Thomas Bentley, and Anne Wheathill produced prayer collections to assist their fellow believers and promote Protestantism as it developed in England. Analyzing the works of these three individuals allows us to survey the language of scripted prayer from different sources with different audiences at different points in time during the second half of the sixteenth century. Men and women may have had equal access to salvation, but the private devotion and prayer involved in sanctification was still rooted in their social world and clearly reflected its gender constructs and boundaries. Since prayer manuals were popular forms of instruction informed by scripture that affected self-perception and identity construction,

² Micheline White, *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500-1625*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 6-7. White explains that prayer manuals have often been overlooked because they are not as compatible with feminist theory as other texts and are often categorized under "pious devotions" despite their unique literary structure.

³ Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Law Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 82-83

their portrayal and treatment of women reflects attitudes towards gender, prayer, and language in mid to late sixteenth-century England.

The first prayer manual included in this thesis is *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, which was originally printed in 1550 and reprinted five times throughout the next two decades. Thomas Becon was a member of the clergy with the Church of England, and his powerful prayers were intended to reach a wide audience of men and women despite the limited representation of female subjects. Intended for a general audience, Becon's text places its subjects and prospective readers in ideal prayer situations and presents them with acceptable examples to follow. With his strict categorization of women and preference for male readers, Becon's prayer guide shows how the reformer perceived and portrayed his reading audience. The next prayer manual discussed is *The Monument of Matrones* by Thomas Bentley. While the details of Bentley's identity are unclear, we do know that he was a lay author writing for a female audience. Published in 1582, the fifteen hundred-page work is organized into seven major sections titled the "Seven Lamps of Virginitie," each with a different theme or purpose. "The Fifth Lamp of Virginitie," is a prayer manual containing prayers that apply to women in specific life stages. *The Monument* was a devotional text intended exclusively for women, yet the text places women in restrictive categories and excluded those who do not fit socially acceptable norms. Lastly, I will examine Anne Wheathill's *A Handfull of Holesome (though Homelie) Hearbs* published in 1584, the first English prayer manual written by a woman for women. As a female writer of prayer literature, and a single one at that, Wheathill provides contrast to her male predecessors. The autobiographical material in the introduction shows that Wheathill at least recognized the traditional concerns about

women's place in devotional practice, but these issues are not central to her supplications. While her work is addressed to her fellow women, a number of her prayers are oriented for a male speaker and present predominantly male examples for readers to adapt to their lives. Wheathill had many of the same concerns as Becon and Bentley, such as the primacy of scripture and the importance of godly behavior, yet she represented women differently in her published manual for private devotion.

While assessing these writers and their work, it is important to keep in mind that although the tradition of private devotion changed as the Catholic Church in England went from being Mother to Antichrist, writers of private devotion maintained many medieval preoccupations and patterns.⁴ On this "Medieval Inheritance," Helen White writes, "One may scorn fifteen hundred years of corporate experience, and even forget it, but he cannot escape it...Especially this is true of private devotion."⁵ The works of sixteenth-century prayer writers cannot and should not be seen as completely disparate from the works of their forerunners, yet England in the sixteenth century presented a unique stage to construct the self through reading and writing.⁶ While preserving the medieval emphasis on private prayer according to occasions and events, many writers of early modern prayer used their prayers to promote "true religion" and exorcize any hint of Catholic practice. As the earliest author, Becon expressed his views on lingering

⁴ David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450-1830*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61.

⁵ White, *The Tudor Books of Private Devotion*, 11.

⁶ Helen Wilcox, "'the birth day of my selfe': John Donne, Martha Moulsworth and the Emergence of Individual Identity," in *Sixteenth Century Identities*, ed. A. J. Piesse, (New York: Manchester University press, 2000), 173. While Wilcox deals with seventeenth-century texts, she specifically states, "the factors which led to a greater consciousness of separate selfhood- including the Reformation and the rise of humanist and mercantile values- clearly belong to the sixteenth century..."

Catholicism clearly, yet he still maintained a number of its textual traditions and important images. Both Wheathill and Bentley wrote after the Elizabethan political reformations and during the ongoing religious reformation.⁷ Bentley promoted the Church of England and its superiority over Rome, yet he did so mostly to praise Elizabeth and reinforce her sovereignty. In contrast to the candid Becon and courting Bentley, when Wheathill wrote in the 1580s, she did not express the same hostility. She repeatedly addresses those who believe in “true religion” and provides prayers against unnamed enemies of the church, but she does not directly attack those she perceived as promoting untrue religion or name the Church of Rome as the enemy. The “medieval inheritance” and simultaneous hostility to Catholic practice illustrates how writers like Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill were born out of a long and complex tradition of private devotion with shifting views of the church and the proper practice of piety. As England experienced its own unique form of reformation, its growing print industry and rising literate culture made published works a primary tool in discussions about women’s roles, the structure of society, reformation controversies, and religious evolution.⁸

Prayer Manual Readers and Researchers

Just as writers both maintained and modified medieval traditions to fit their newly Protestant faith, English readers in the sixteenth century witnessed monumental changes in the structure of the church and the practice of religion, yet private devotion and proper prayer practice continued to be important pursuits throughout the changes of the early-

⁷ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 14.

⁸ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 243. Haigh, *English Reformations*, 13.

modern period. The emergent print culture and consequent book trade, along with the increased emphasis on literacy so Christians could read their Bibles, contributed to the popularity of devotional literature. In addition, a renewed attention to the individual's direct communication with God with Christ as the only mediator led to the production and consumption of prayer manuals for private use. In a discussion of the Book of Common Prayer and the construction of individual identity, Timothy Rosendale shows that prayer practice was directly impacted by Reformation changes. "By repositioning the individual alone before the throne of judgment, Luther implicitly authorized that individual, and rendered institutional mediation essentially unnecessary for salvation."⁹ While these changes grounded in Luther's "vision of the naked self before God" translated differently in the varying arenas of spiritual life, it led to an increased attention to proper private prayer practice.¹⁰

The works of Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill fall into a liminal place in the body of work produced in the sixteenth century, in that they do not fit neatly into any established genre. They are part of the group of self-help or how-to books that rose in popularity as printed works became more affordable.¹¹ They are also part of a genre of devotional literature that taught readers the basics of an evolving Protestant faith in England and how to conduct themselves in private and public spaces.¹² These two genres often overlapped, and published prayer manuals represent a form of didactic religious

⁹ Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71.

¹⁰ Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England*, 71.

¹¹ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 243.

¹² Mary Hampson Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation: Protestant Best Sellers, Private Devotion, and the Revolution of English Piety*, (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University: 2007), 293.

literature that occupied both categories. They taught readers how to pray while showing them how to be good Christians and citizens. The frequency and character of private prayer is nearly impossible to determine, as a number of scholars have noted, yet the publication of prayer guides shows a clear demand for instruction on how to go before God with confessions, exaltations, and petitions.

Both men and women could use the many general prayer guides published in sixteenth-century England, even if those general guides favored male readers with their organization and content. As more women learned to read their Bibles, they also sought further guidance from religious texts for their specific circumstances. As writers and printers began to recognize the potential profit and impact to be made through the publication of women's books, and more texts addressed to specific women and a general female audience were produced.¹³ These could include best selling fiction, devotional literature, and commentaries on the female sex. In *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, Suzanne W. Hull, an established authority on the relationship between print culture and women's reading, explains that the changes in literacy combined with the existence of a female monarch led to more books for women in the 1570s and 1580s. Christian women with specific practical and spiritual needs suddenly became a reading audience to be reckoned with, and many of these reading women possessed faith that needed to be independently rooted in the Bible, devotional works, and sermons.¹⁴

¹³ Suzanne Hull, *Chaste Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 7-9.

¹⁴ Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 127.

Colin and Jo Atkinson argue that since men and women “were not regarded as all that different spiritually,” they shared common spiritual texts such as the *Book of Hours*, the *Book of Common Prayer*, John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, and, most importantly, the Bible.¹⁵ Since men and women typically used many of the same devotional materials, there were far more non-religious books published for women than devotional texts. Hull comments on the irony pointing out that many women were told to read only “good works,” yet few of these published texts were specifically for women.¹⁶ Although the ratio of religious to non-religious texts for women suggests women’s religious needs were not a priority, the existence of printed works such as *The Monument*, which would have been quite expensive, shows there was a perceivable market for women’s devotional texts.¹⁷

While the increased production of books for women suggests that they could read and interact with the texts, we must establish that a notable number of women could conceivably pick up a book like Becon’s *Flour of Godly Praiers* or Wheathill’s *Handfull of Holesome* to read, digest, and apply their instruction. Female literacy seems to have grown along with the middle class, and the number of books printed for women is a convincing clue that many women could read even if they could not write.¹⁸ During the sixteenth century and beyond, women actively engaged with printed works; and In *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, Patricia Crawford discusses several women

¹⁵ Colin Atkinson and Jo Atkinson, “Thomas Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrones* (1582): The First Anglican Prayer Book for Women,” *Anglican Theological Review* 74 (June 1992): 407.

¹⁶ Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient*, 91.

¹⁷ Colin Atkinson and Jo Atkinson, “The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley, Compiler of *The Monument of Matrones* (1582),” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31 (Summer, 2000): 324.

¹⁸ Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640*, 4.

that kept devotional diaries where they could “confess their sins and find some comfort in the promises of forgiveness.”¹⁹ These diaries were often published posthumously by a male relative who lent a heavy editorial hand, but these editors typically made subtractions or revisions to make the woman writer more presentable. The widespread practice of women’s writing shows how the spread of literacy affected women’s involvement with religious texts and spirituality, even if it was often a mediated involvement. Even when these prayer diaries were not published, their existence shows that a growing number of women were literate and actively engaging with printed devotional texts.

Texts like Anne Wheathill’s *Handfull of Holesome*, Thomas Bentley’s *Monument*, and Thomas Becon’s *Flour of Godly Praiers* taught similar lessons and served the same essential purpose, but the books themselves took varying forms. Becon’s *Flour of Godly Praiers* was reprinted multiple times in London by the same publisher, showing its popularity. His later manual, *The Pomaunder of Prayer*, enjoyed even greater success, and Becon’s manuals may have even encouraged other writers, including Thomas Bentley, to publish their own prayer manuals.²⁰ Bentley’s work was certainly purchased and preserved since numerous copies of his manuals survive in various libraries around the world. The existence of such a large work in an intricate style shows that printer Henry Denham perceived a demand in the market. With its detailed borders, decorated initials, and sheer volume, *The Monument* in its complete form would have been an

¹⁹ Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 82.

²⁰ H.S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1558 to 1603: Being a Study in the History of the Book Trade in the Reign of Elizabeth I*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 138.

expensive text, and it was never reprinted in its entirety. While an affluent household could purchase the complete *Monument*, Lamp Five would have cost approximately six pence, making it the least expensive section of the expansive work.²¹ Despite being printed by the same publisher, Wheathill's *Handfull of Holesome* looked nothing like Bentley's work. Wheathill's short prayer manual took the typical form for women's books; and as a small duodecimo devotional text, it could have been easily purchased, carried, and passed from reader to reader. Suzanne Hull suggests that books of its size and style could have simply "worn out with practical use, or considered ephemeral or of little value as succeeding generations developed newer guides and literature for women."²² The quantity of Becon's books, the mere existence of Bentley's manual, and the practical nature of Wheathill's work show that these devotional guides were in demand in sixteenth-century England.

A brief discussion of this sort of devotional writing warrants a distinction between a prayer *book* and a prayer *manual*. While most scholars use the terms interchangeably and discuss prayer books and manuals as one simple category of prose prayers, the two types of prayer literature are different in their origins, aims, and impact. The works discussed in this thesis are prayer *scripts*, providing readers with word for word prayers to recite and use as their own. As works dealing with deeply personal themes of devotion and communication with God, the language in these works carry considerable weight. A number of well-known early-modern women wrote prayer books; and while these were

²¹ The Atkinsons calculated the price of *The Monument* to be 4 shillings and 2.5 pence using Francis R. Johnson's "Notes on English Retail Book Prices, 1550-1640," *Library*, 5th series, vol. 5, no. 2 (1950): 83-112.

²² Hull, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient*, 16, 214.

also didactic devotionals, they did not function as scripts to be performed by the reader in first person. This distinction shows how anomalous Anne Wheathill was, as the first woman to venture an instructional prayer script. For example, Marguerite of Navarre's *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (1531), which was translated into English as *The Glass of the Sinful Soul* by a young Elizabeth in 1544, and Queen Catherine Parr's *Lamentations of a Sinner* (1544) and *Prayers Stirring the Mind unto Heavenly Medications* (1545) were well-known books of devotion that informed readers' piety, but they were not intended to be read as personal prayer scripts. This difference does not reduce the importance of either genre, rather it shows the variety and vibrancy of prayer as a type of literature. The difference between these prayer books and prayer manuals is often ignored in discussions of prayer and private devotion, yet the prayers in devotional books and those found in prayer manual scripts would have been approached and implemented in different ways. Writers such as Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill were putting words into the mouths of their readers, while women like Parr and Navarre were presenting general devotional literature for the common good of all Christians.

Both prayer books and prayer manuals were heavily reliant on scripture, and many of the prayers found between their covers were paraphrases of the Psalms, allusions to New Testament parables, or praise for godly figures from the Bible. The authority and primacy of the Bible was central for all three of our authors, even if they presented scripture and its characters in varying ways. Alec Ryrie explains that the Bible's presence in set prayer served multiple purposes, and one of them was to supply perfect words to imperfect people. "Human words were by definition inadequate and indeed corrupt, but if true prayer was supposed to be the work of the Spirit within, what better

words to use than those which the Spirit himself had inspired?”²³ Becon repeatedly refers to his prayers as verses taken from or inspired by the Bible, and Bentley presents his biblically grounded prayers alongside excerpts from scripture about biblical women in “The Seventh Lamp” and the prayers of those same women in “The First Lamp.” Wheathill likens her forty-nine prayers to “hearbs, gathered out of the goodlie garden of God’s most holie word.”²⁴ Prayer manuals showed readers how to pray, but also how to approach and apply scripture, as a majority of their text was drawn from the Bible itself. As extrapolations of the Bible, Becon and Wheathill’s prayers were often sermonic, teaching readers about their sinful selves and the path to salvation. One would expect this from Becon, who studied under Latimer at Cambridge University, became a teacher of grammar, and labeled himself “humble and faithfull oratour, Thomas Becon” in his *Pomaunder of Prayer*.²⁵ Wheathill, a laywoman of no exceptional learning as indicated by the introduction to her work, displayed a thorough knowledge of scripture, and she presented varying passages and themes throughout her text. The Bible played a central role in the construction of Wheathill’s prayers, and two scholars comment on her presentation of scripture, saying, “Wheathill assumed the role of preacher.”²⁶ This period of history represented a time when writers from a variety of social ranks could access,

²³ Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 225.

²⁴ Anne Wheathill, 1584, *A Handfull of Holesome (though homelie) Hearbs, gathered out of the goodlie garden of God’s most holie word; for the common benefit and comfortable exercize of all such are devoutie disposed*, edited by Betty Travistky and Patrick Cullen, (Ashgate, 1996), Title Folio.

²⁵ Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 83. Thomas Becon, *Pomaunder of Prayer, Newly Made by Thomas Becon*, (London: John Day, 1561), STC 237:13, 3^v.

²⁶ Susan Felch, “‘Halff a Scrypture Woman’: Heterglossia and Female Authorial Agency in Prayers by Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit, Anne Lock, and Anne Wheathill,” in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500-1625*, ed. Micheline White, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 166. Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 55.

learn, and reiterate the Bible in their writing in order to understand themselves and help others do the same.²⁷ Writers of all genres responded to the new accessibility of scripture and implemented its language in their work. Early-modern English writers “made their own worlds of words, often rehearsing, sometimes disclaiming or remaking, but usually echoing the biblical Word.”²⁸ As the 1547 Homilies direct, the scriptures were the place a Christian could go to find God and him or herself. “In these Books/ we shall finde the father from whom, the sonne by whom, and the holy/ Ghost, in whom all things have their being and keeping up, and these/ three persons to be but one GOD, and one substance. *In these books/ we may learne to know our selves...*”²⁹ Since the prayer scripts written by Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill were essentially extrapolations of scripture where the Christian could look to construct identity and develop piety, the gendered language found within them could directly influence how women saw (or did not see) themselves portrayed in scripted prayer.

While scholars admit that the publication of these prayer manuals or “goodbooks” reflected the public’s preferences and social values, few of them analyze the words within the prayers themselves. The contents of the prayers are often sidelined while researchers analyze the books as physical artifacts of sixteenth-century print culture. The religious language and rhetorical implications of published prayer scripts may be less prone to empirical inferences, yet their cultural and religious importance should not be minimized.

²⁷ Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers*, 7.

²⁸ Daniel W. Doerksen and Christopher Hodgkins, *Centered on the Word: Literature, Scripture, and the Tudor-Stuart Middle Way*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 15.

²⁹ *Certaine Sermons Or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches, In the time of the late Queene Elizabeth of famous memory*, 1547, ed. Ian Lancashire, (The University of Toronto Library, 1997) (accessed June 16, 2013). Emphasis added. Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers*, 3.

The words that make up the many scripted prayers found in early-modern prayer manuals reflect the social world in which they were printed; and one could argue that if any printed words carried weight, it would be those intended for God's ears.

A number of scholars write that religious literature, specifically published prayers, were popular in sixteenth-century England, yet historians still under use them. Faye Kelly states, "If one may say that fashions exist in devotion, then prayer was certainly the fashion in sixteenth-century devotion."³⁰ They admit that the publication of these prayer manuals reflected the public's preferences and social values, but very few of them discuss the words that makeup these often lengthy prayers and values behind them. Virginia Reinburg highlights the importance of prayers, saying, "Perhaps not surprisingly, the forms of discourse and relationship people used in prayer mirrored those they knew in the wider social world. All prayers speak about the self, the supernatural persons being prayed to, and the human community of which the praying self is a part."³¹ Published prayer manuals are often cited as passing examples within discussions of religion or print culture in sixteenth-century England, but the texts themselves are rarely analyzed for their gendered language or representations of women.

Analytical Method

Looking for representations of women within early-modern literature is not a new enterprise; looking to published prayer rather than popular prose, however, is. A number of researchers have analyzed the poems and plays of the great writers of early-modern

³⁰ Kelly, *Prayer in Sixteenth-Century England*, 4. While she does not clarify the meaning of prayer, the rest of the monograph shows that she is discussing *private* prayer.

³¹ Virginia Reinburg, "Notes on John Bossy's 'Prayers,'" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series 1 (1991): 149.

England to determine how and why women were depicted in the context of sixteenth-century culture, yet very few have looked to prayer manuals that may have been more widely accessible. Published prayer manuals as didactic religious texts taught the reader how to live a godly life, communicate properly with Christ, and visualize him or herself within a larger body of praying believers. If representations of gender in Shakespeare's plays or Spenser's poems inform our understanding of sixteenth-century gender constructions, how much more would practical and applicable devotional texts influence readers' perceptions of their own place in a gender-conscious world? Since the texts within prayer manuals were intended to shape the inner and outer lives of pious readers, the presence or absence of women and the way in which they are categorized would have influenced how female readers oriented themselves within proper prayer practice and the religious community as a whole.

The analysis of gendered grammar and language and the presence, absence, and purpose of female biblical models are two primary concerns in this thesis. Through the construction of gendered subjects using masculine grammar, prayer manual writers pictured the perfect prayer as a man, and the scripts also showed women how they could and could not behave if they wanted to be counted among the godly. On the importance of language, Beth Allison Barr explores modern research that shows how women can be impacted by the use of gender exclusive language, and from this research she concludes that "word choice matters in modern female and male responses to language. Women seem to have difficulty comprehending, processing, and applying language directed towards men; but they seem able to use language directed towards themselves."³² While

³² Beth Allison Barr, *The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England*, (Woolbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 40.

her research considers the complexities of late medieval pastoral care and the relative inclusion of women in sermon literature, her discussion of gendered language applies to our sixteenth-century texts as well. In *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women*, Suzanne Hull writes, “Many women lived, as best they could, the way society (and male directives) told them to live. Many who could read would try to emulate the ideals set forth in the books men wrote for them.”³³ As we see with Wheathill, a woman also presented restrictive language and behavioral models for other women to consider. What would it mean to a Christian woman looking for guidance when she opened a prayer manual to find no reflection of herself, encountering mostly male subjects instead?

Both Becon and Wheathill consistently refer to male subjects and speakers in their prayer manuals, implying that the best possible reader was a man. In *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, Anne Curzan explains that the presence of the default male subject in legal and religious texts suggests that the ideal representative of a group was a man. This “prototypicality” reveals the gender order and values of the society in which the author lived.³⁴ The three prayer scripts studied here show that women could be part of prayer practice, but they would never be the “best example” to perform the prayers. Curzan also discusses the complexity of gendered grammar and explains that by the sixteenth century English used natural rather than grammatical gender. The difference between natural or notional gender and grammatical gender means that the gender of pronouns and other

³³ Suzanne Hull, *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women*, (London: AltaMira Press, 1996), 7.

³⁴ Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

identifying words carry semantic information about the subject.³⁵ Using “he” and “him” instead and in place of “her” and “she” had implications since natural gender distinctions were culturally motivated and not simply drawn from the structure of a subject’s name.³⁶

This thesis works from the assumption that the language used to describe gender was and is important. In *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern England*, Laura Gowing proves that the labels and language of insult could shape the definitions of gender and be shaped by them. Gowing proves that language and social labeling carried weight in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and those words should also matter to researchers.³⁷ If the authors of published prayer scripts were intentional and the readers were attentive, they would have applied the instructions they encountered in devotional texts, including those concerning gender. Cordelia Beattie describes the importance of language in relation to social perception and public portrayal in *Medieval Singlewomen: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England*. She explains,

The labeling of specific individuals identifies those individuals as members of a particular group, and thus assigns them a place in the social structure. Not fitting into any of the named groups could also have ramifications. The power of classification, though, resides as much in language, in dominant cultural ideas, as with individual classifiers...Any text that presents society (or a subset thereof) as divided into various subgroups can be viewed as an interpretive scheme, even if it ostensibly did this for a specific purpose...Nevertheless, they are not neutral descriptors of society but represent it from the observer’s perspective.³⁸

³⁵ Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, 60.

³⁶ Terttu Nevalainen, *An Introduction to Early Modern English*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 82-83.

³⁷ Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1-2.

³⁸ Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Singlewomen: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2-4.

Taking Beattie's discussion of the value of language in social classification a step further, this thesis argues that the presence of gendered language and narrow categories in Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill's prayer manuals not only shows how the author perceived his or her world and its women; but also how female readers may have, in turn, been included or excluded from the important practice of private prayer.

CHAPTER TWO

“Without Respect of Persons”: Thomas Becon’s *The Flour of Godly Praiers*

Introduction

Thomas Becon witnessed the reigns of Henry, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth, and he participated in the tumultuous English Reformation as it progressed. Despite his sixteenth-century popularity, he is typically characterized as a friend of more notable men or “an associate of some of the great figures of the Henrician or Edwardian Reformation.”¹ While he receives relatively little scholarly attention, Becon’s contributions to the tradition of published manuals for private prayer are undeniable. Alec Ryrie writes that many published prayers were “lightly disguised sermons,” and Becon was an “early master of this genre.”² Becon authored over seventy published works and was arrested twice for his reformist tendencies, yet he is conspicuously absent from many studies of the Reformation in England.³ One of Becon’s many works is his prayer manual titled *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, which showcases his anti-Catholic polemic and his portrayal of society as it should be. Becon’s treatment of women in prayer was dependent on his perception of society, marriage, and sexual sin. Drawing from his “medieval inheritance,” Becon emphasized the role of sexual sin in the determination of an individual’s identity, but he also promoted the necessity of a well-

¹ Mary Hampson Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Presses, 2007), 81. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church of England*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952), xiv.

² Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 224.

³ Bailey, *Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church of England*, 15-17.

ordered household. Women could fit into either discussion as dangerous agents of the flesh or godly silent wives.

Using the prayers in his short manual, Becon preached against perceived threats to the Edwardian reforms, and in an earlier collection of “flowers” or prayers, Becon labeled the Pope the “Butcher of Rome”—among other things.⁴ In *The Flour of Godly Praiers* he clarifies that the Catholic menace threatened the just cause of the Reformation, and those who followed Rome with its heresies put the very stability of society at stake. These threats led Becon to clarify how subordinates should ideally relate to their superiors and vice versa, including husbands and wives. In the organization, content, and language of his prayers, Becon describes the ideal order of a godly society as seen in scripture, and his prayers reflect a clear attention to the New Testament household codes. Becon’s prayer manual follows the typical structure, including generic prayers for confession and those to be said before and after meals. After these introductory entries, a reader would find occasional prayers for different times of day and some for specific people, namely the king, his council, judges, and magistrates.⁵ The prayers for high-ranking officials ask that they would stay true to Christ and avoid evil influence, since they held the power to reform the realm. They were to “seek thy [God’s] glory, to banish idolatrye, supersticion and hipocrisy” and set an example for the common people.⁶

⁴ Phineas Rainer, “Polemical Technique in the Works of Thomas Becon,” *Moreana*, 17 (1968), 51. Thomas Becon, 1542, “A Pleasant Newe Nosegaye,” in *The Early Works of Thomas Becon: Being the Treatises Published by him in the Reign of King Henry VIII*, (Cambridge University Press, 1843), 216.

⁵ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 263-264. Green explains that this attention to governmental and social groups constitutes a difference between Catholic and Protestant manuals.

⁶ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, (London: John Day, 1550), 16^v Abbreviated words have been expanded for readability in all quotations.

The manual moves from the treatment of government to church to household structure, and the prayer scripts emphasize the necessity of wives submitting to husbands, children obeying their parents, and servants following their masters.⁷ Becon also stresses that all of those groups were subject to the state, which had the people's best interest at heart when it was in accordance with true religion. The biblical examples Becon supplies serve to reinforce the image of the ideal wife, and he presents women such as Sarah and Susanna to show how chastity, obedience, and silence could bring glory to God. This concern with the divinely-ordained order led him to emphasize women's roles as submissive wives and describe them, their responsibilities, and place in prayer practice in rigid terms. Misbehavior, specifically sexual sin, disrupted household order; and when describing the flesh with its temptations he personifies it as a "she." Threats to a godly ordered society could take the shape of female flesh, leading good men astray, and the flesh personified as a "she" parallels the feared Whore of Babylon with her "trifling tradicions and dirty deceits."⁸ The women who appear in Becon's manual were silent at best and worldly at worst, and those who subverted God's order were a danger to themselves and society.

Historiography

The life and works of Thomas Becon are rarely discussed for their own sake. Scholars have dismissed him as a "professional propagandist," and the last full biography to address his identity and contributions was published in 1952. In *Thomas Becon and The Reformation of the Church of England*, Derrick Sherwin Bailey parallels Becon's

⁷ For the order of Becon's prayers, see the Appendix, page 129.

⁸ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, A2^v.

career with his after life in the historiography. Becon was passed over for preferment during his own life, and historians similarly sideline him to a supporting role in the narrative of the reformation in England. Bailey tries to bring Becon back into historians' scope of study, yet assesses him critically, emphasizing that he was "primarily not a theologian but a propagandist."⁹ Despite Bailey's harsh judgments, his text is the most complete biographical sketch of Becon's life, and most—if not all—scholars who deal with Becon or his writings rely on Bailey for their background information.

Most discussions of Thomas Becon primarily address his arguments against Catholicism. In "The Polemical Technique in the Works of Thomas Becon," Rainer Phineas analyzes the various ways Becon attacked his opponents and supported his allies. Phineas also comments on the absence of Becon in recent scholarship, stating that his role as a polemicist decreased his notability.¹⁰ Phineas touches on Becon's 1550 prayer book when he cites *The Flour of Godly Praiers* to highlight how Becon prayed for his enemies in a form of "polemical prayer" which "permits him to attack his adversaries while ostensibly seeking their welfare."¹¹ Of course, Becon was a well-known polemicist, but ridding the realm of the "Antichristes tyranny" was not his only concern. While it certainly translates as the thesis in many of his works, Becon also aimed to maintain order in society, which included confining women to their proper Christian roles.

⁹ Bailey, *Thomas Becon and The Reformation of the Church of England*, 105.

¹⁰ Phineas, "The Polemical Technique in the works of Thomas Becon," 49.

¹¹ Phineas, "The Polemical Technique in the works of Thomas Becon," 51.

While Becon praised the virtues of a silent wife, he dedicated his manual to a woman who has frequently been dubbed “domineering.”¹² Becon described Anne Seymour, Duchess of Somerset, as “a worthye Patrones booth of the godlye and of godlynesse, boothe of the learned and of learninge.”¹³ The reformer was connected with the duchess and her family, serving as their chaplain during her husband Edward’s protectorate. After Edward Seymour’s imprisonment in 1549, Becon stayed loyal to him and wrote prayers and pamphlets that helped construct Edward’s image as the “Good Duke” who suffered because of his fervent faith.¹⁴ Historians have not been particularly kind to the Duchess of Somerset, yet Becon and many of his reformist contemporaries saw her as an ally.¹⁵ Becon repeatedly refers to her as a “mooste vertuous lady,” but Elizabethan historians typically reviled her as a meddling woman and overpowering wife, the very sort Becon’s manual prayed against. In 1599, Sir John Hayward blamed the duchess for her husband’s downfall and declared her to be “a woman for many imperfections intolerable, but for pride monstrous.”¹⁶ Becon’s prayers were not meant to be specifically about the duchess or solely for her, yet she was a logical patroness for him since she was known for her support of prominent Protestant authors and her husband’s

¹² Retha Warnicke, *Wicked Women of Tudor England: Queens, Aristocrats, Commoners*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 77

¹³ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, A12^R.

¹⁴ Scott Lucas, “Coping with Providentialism: Trauma, Identity, and the Failure of the English Reformation,” in *Images of Matter: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Proceedings of the Eighth Citadel Conference on Literature*, edited by Yvonne Bruce, (University of Delaware Press, 2005,) 262.

¹⁵ Cathy Hartley, *A Historical Dictionary of British Women*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 797.

¹⁶ John Hayward, *The Life and Raigne of King Edward the Sixth*, ed. Barrett L. Beer, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993), 19.

influence in the printing community.¹⁷ Although the prayer manual was dedicated to a specific woman, it was intended for a wider audience. The title folio introduces the text as a manual “most worthy to be used in these our daies for the safegard, health, and comforte of all degrees, and estates.”¹⁸ By 1550, Becon would have been a well-known preacher and writer with a flair for the dramatic that contributed to his appeal among those his foremost biographer terms “the common people.”¹⁹ And while he dedicated his works to the nobility, he typically targeted a larger readership of lay people. Phineas explains that his readers were “what we could call today a ‘mass audience,’ never the most critical of bodies.”²⁰

While Becon was clearly anti-Catholic, his discussions of sexual sin and the purpose of marriage echo those from earlier pastoral manuals like John Mirk’s *Instructions for a Parish Priests*. Becon may have preached against manifestations of Catholicism in England, but he could not rid his own writing of the medieval traditions surrounding marriage and sexual sin.²¹ Although Becon receives little attention as a devotional writer, it is worth noting that he contributed the “Homily Against Whoredom and Adultery,” which was included in the first book of homilies in 1547.²² Ronald B. Bond uses Becon’s teaching on sexual immorality to highlight Shakespeare’s treatment

¹⁷ Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 94. Retha Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1983), 100.

¹⁸ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, Title Folio.

¹⁹ Bailey, *Thomas Becon and The Reformation of the Church of England*, 121.

²⁰ Phineas, “Polemical Technique in the Works of Thomas Becon,” 49.

²¹ Beth Allison Barr, “Gendering Pastoral Care: John Mirk and his Instructions for Parish Priests,” in *Fourteenth Century England, Volume 4*, edited by Hamilton, J. S. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 94.

²² Bond, “‘Dark Deeds Darkly Asnwered’: Thomas Becon’s Homily against Whoredom and Adultery, Its Contexts, and Its Affiliations with Three Shakespearean Plays,” 192.

of sexual misconduct and its consequences in *King Lear*, *Othello*, and *Measure for Measure*, and Becon's portrayal of sin, sex, and society, likely affected his "common" readers as well. Bond contrasts the theory of chastisement for sin explained in the homily and other texts with the reality of lax procedures that rarely administered the harsh punishments prescribed. However, he does highlight an important facet of Becon's worldview. Bond states that Becon exhibits a "preoccupation with sexual sin that the protestant churches and the English reformers inherited from the Middle Ages."²³ The "medieval inheritance" could take many forms, and the strict intolerance, at least in theory, of the sexually sinful was one of them.

One of the most recent texts to address Becon and his contributions to sixteenth-century thought is Mary Hampson Patterson's *Domesticating the Reformation: Protestant Best Sellers, Private Devotion, and the Revolution of English Piety*. Patterson's primary goal is to show how popular Protestant texts brought reformation theology from the conversations of clergymen to the intimate space of the household, or how it was "domesticated." She calls her study a "popular intellectual history" and emphasizes the relevance of devotional literature and manuals for modern scholars.²⁴ Drawing from three texts, Patterson shows how reformation thought made its way into the home and changed the way ordinary people experienced religion. Her first text is Becon's *The Sick Man's Salve*, which is essentially a morality play that teaches the Christian how to live and die well. Commenting on the text's popularity, Patterson writes, "First printed in 1558, Becon's *The Sick Man's Salve* went into at least twenty-nine editions and averages two

²³ Bond, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Asnwered,'" 191.

²⁴ Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 21.

hundred pages in length...*The Sick Man's Salve* is a drama principally about conversion and death, and secondarily about what might be summarized as a Protestant lifestyle and worldview."²⁵ Patterson explains that Becon needs to be reassessed as more than a simple contrarian. Drawing from and pressing against Bailey's analysis of Becon, Patterson urges that scholars must go further with his work to understand household religion in England. "Bailey remains steadfast that Becon's importance ultimately lies only in his usefulness as an overexcitedly negative propagandist, a wrecker rather than a builder."²⁶ Working from Patterson's plea, this chapter examines *The Flour of Godly Praiers* as a text that constructed identity and categorized readers according to their place in the social, spiritual, and household hierarchy.

These few works on Becon's life and place in the English Reformation do not address the implications of his manuals for women. His other works, especially his later *The Book of Matrimony*, have led many to assume that Becon made much of women in marriage, giving them more individual opportunity; however, his *Flour of Godly Praiers* tells a different story.²⁷ In 1582, Thomas Bentley converted parts of Becon's work on marriage into prayers, specifically the part on wives' responsibility to retain her chastity of both body and mind. The 1562 *Book of Matrimony* states: "For a shipwreck of a women's honesty be once made, there remaineth nothing in her praiseworthy...It is unseemly for a man to use unclean talk; but for a woman to use it, it is more than twice

²⁵ Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 101.

²⁶ Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 150.

²⁷ Bailey, *Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church of England*, 112-113. Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 128-130.

unseemly, seeing that there is nothing that so garnisheth a woman than silence.”²⁸

Although Becon’s main objective in *The Flour of Godly Praiers* was to differentiate the true gospel from the one preached by intolerable “mass mongers,” he placed limitations on women throughout the prayer manual by representing them as extremes within a strict social hierarchy.²⁹ Women could either be obedient wives, pursuing the common good, or worldly whores ruled by the flesh, causing others to stumble.

Obedient Wives and Female Flesh

In his prayers, Becon defines the various roles played by different people in society. From the duties of the king to the obligations of servants, Becon preaches to his readers through prayer scripts, and he urges them to act according to their position. Along with a constant reinforcement of social and gender categories, *The Flour of Godly Praiers* repeatedly references Peter’s observation in Acts 10:34 that God does not discriminate as “no respecter of persons.” While Peter referred to persons of any and every nation, Becon applies the sentiment to individuals that occupied different levels of society and played different roles in the household. The necessity of prayer and proper behavior was required of everyone “without respect of persons,” but individuals had different roles to play based on their placement in society. Becon uses the same language to discuss the relationship between a king and his subjects, ministers and their flock, husbands and wives, and masters and servants, establishing the chain of authority from the head of the realm to the head of the home.

²⁸ Thomas Becon, 1562, “The Book of Matrimony,” in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook, Constructions of Femininity in England*, edited by Kate Aughterson, (London: Routledge, 1995), 110.

²⁹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 144^v.

In the general prayer of confession, the speaker is prompted to say that all people, regardless of rank, have a duty to confess their sins since the gospel is meant for “al that be faithfully penitent without respect of persons.”³⁰ Language of authority and obedience permeates Becon’s manual, and he consistently has to reconcile the notion of an equal opportunity deity with the rigid social hierarchy promoted in his prayers. In the prayer for masters, the speaker affirms the order of society drawn from scripture and explains it is God’s will that every person has a specific place. “Al we are brethren having one father which is in heaven, yet forasmuch as thou accordyng to thy blessed will hast appointed some superiours, some inferiours, some masters, some servants, some to commaunde, some to obey, some to rule, some to searve, and by thys means suche as be in superioritye have obteyned by thy holy word.”³¹ The clearly defined power structure left no room for interpretation; and for subjects, servants, wives, and children, to operate obediently within the boundaries set by their station was to honor God. The clear outline of household authority may be one reason why Becon’s speakers and subjects appear as men with very few exceptions. By default, the person in prayer refers to himself and others consistently with masculine pronouns and identifiers. If the prayer serves a gendered purpose, then female voices appear to discuss women’s proper roles, piety, and prayer posture. Fathers and husbands were given specific responsibilities as well as authority, and the predominantly male speakers and subjects may reflect an assumption that the head of the home would read the text and pass its instructions on to his

³⁰ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 5^R.

³¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 43^R.

subordinates.³² This assumption, however, cannot be applied to all of the scripts, since Becon calls them “secret” prayers and some are specifically for and about women who experience specifically feminine travails, namely childbirth.

Becon was concerned that both men and women were well behaved and acted according to their station in society. While his prayers place women in rigid categories according to their relation to men, his instructions for husbands and wives are not altogether negative for women. The wife was clearly defined as a subordinate and silent actor in the marriage, but the husband was supposed to “provyde for them, defend them and cherish them even as they cherish theyr owne bodyes.”³³ Becon prompted husbands to be kind and loving, rather than authoritarian and “churlish.” Husbands were instructed to “be not bitter, that is churlish and unkynde unto their wives, but love them as thy dearly beloved sonne Christ loved the faythfull congregation...gevyng honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel.”³⁴ Interestingly, Becon uses the same terms “churlish and unkynde” to describe masters who mistreat their servants, ministers who mislead their congregants, and state officials who misrule the people. The terms “churlish and unkynde” seems to apply to any relationship between an authority figure and a subordinate.

For Becon and his contemporaries, marriage ideally symbolized and paralleled Christ’s love for his bride, the Church. In *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and the Law in the Western Tradition*, John Witte briefly explains how Becon approached marriage in different ways at different points in his life. The reformer

³² Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, 264.

³³ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 37^v.

³⁴ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 37^v.

essentially gave three fundamental reasons for matrimony: mutual marital love symbolizing Christ's love for the Church, procreation as commanded in Genesis, and the evasion of fornication and other sexual sins.³⁵ In *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, symbolism and procreation number among the reasons for marriage, but the avoidance of fornication and adultery are mentioned most often. The instructions for good husbands and wives are found in the lengthy "prayer for them that be married," and Becon uses the model of the first man and woman to instruct married couples. After paraphrasing the creation of woman from Adam's rib in Genesis 2 and referencing Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 7, Becon describes the practical purposes of marriage:

Here learne we (o heavenly father) that thou art the author of mariage, and that so many as mary in thy feare, are coupled together of the blessed and defended, and that thou hast joined them together to thys ende, that thei should encrease the earth and bryng forth sons & daughters unto the glorie of thy name. Thy holy apostle also commaundeth that to avoide fornication every man shuld have his owne wife & every woman her owne husband, so that if they cannot live single they shuld marry, for it is better to mary then to burne.³⁶

God is identified as the "author of mariage," and Becon explains that marriage and its inherent power structure exist for the good of the individuals, helping them reign in their human sinfulness.³⁷ Patricia Crawford explains that, beginning in the 1530s, "Protestants argued that celibacy was no longer a special virtue...Marriage was instituted by God, and marriage and childbearing were women's appointed purposes."³⁸ Becon was one of the loudest voices, along with Thomas Cramner, against Catholic sacramental

³⁵ John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 232.

³⁶ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 36^R.

³⁷ Carrie Euler, *Couriers of the Gospel : England and Zurich, 1531-1558*, (Zurich : TVZ Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2006), 259.

³⁸ Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 39.

marriage, and he argued for covenantal and social models inspired by reforms on the Continent as the English Reformation continued.³⁹ However, when he penned *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, Becon still described marriage mainly as a God-given solution to a human problem, rather than a positive good.

In *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, marriage appears as a containment plan for those who risked being overcome by their own fleshly passions, those men and women who did not have the gift of “continency” or self-restraint. Marriage was good for both parties but, Becon described its primary role as a defensive one. The prayer for married persons continues, “Thou hast ordayned matrimonye to be a salve unto the infirmyte and weaknes of oure flesh and haste geuen it as a present remedy unto use agaynste the raging lustes of olde Adam...and by this means exchuing whoredome and al unclennes.”⁴⁰ Although Becon and Bentley applied different labels and values to the institution of marriage, they both described single life as a gift given to the few. The speaker in Becon’s prayer for single people admits that no one can be single and chaste unless they are given an “above natural gift,” making them specifically chosen by God for single life. “For as muche as some throwe thyne exceedyng & above natural gift (for no man can hve chast, except that geve him the gift) lyve free from the sweet yocke of matrimony...we most hertely praie the, that they which have recyved of the gyft of continency, may so traine their liyfe in godlie exercizes.”⁴¹ Since most men and women did not have the gift of chaste singleness, they were urged to marry.

³⁹ John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 130-131.

⁴⁰ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 36^R.

⁴¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 35^V.

Becon's perspective on marriage changed over time, and he himself married at some point between 1550 and 1553.⁴² While the shift from Catholic to Protestant may not have immediately impacted the position of women within marriage, the purpose and reason for marriage changed as perceptions of human sexuality slowly evolved.⁴³ Virginité most often accompanied by singleness could be a powerful tool in the context of the medieval Church, even if many men and women did not intend to model themselves after the virginal saints to which they prayed. In the sixteenth century and after, a well-run household rooted in a healthy marriage became the ideal scenario, particularly for women. Suzanne Hull states that society taught young women that their "ultimate goal on earth" was to be married; and as Thomas Bentley's manual shows, married life came to be seen as a positive good for men, women, and the society they comprised.⁴⁴

Becon describes marriage and subsequent motherhood as the only "vocations" available to women while giving men many detailed options. In Becon's manual, men could be magistrates, judges, lawyers, ministers, landlords, merchants, or laborers, and each vocation was assigned its own prayer. Men in their many roles appear more often and with more dynamic descriptions than women. For the good of themselves and society, the only proper vocations for women, according to the prayers, were those of wife and mother. In "A generalle prayer that all Men may walk in their vocation and callynge," Becon restates the household codes in prayer form. He assigns women the role

⁴² Patterson, *Domesticating the Reformation*, 95. The exact year of Becon's marriage is unknown.

⁴³ Crawford, *Women and Religion in England*, 40-41.

⁴⁴ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 174-175. Suzanne Hull, *Chaste Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 47-48.

of wife, and the speaker prays, “graunt that the wives be in subjection to theyr owne husbandes as unto the Lord in al things...”⁴⁵ The section of the prayer for wives also includes a paraphrase of 1 Peter 3. Becon includes “Genesis xvi” with this section, but the story of Hagar and her prayer in the desert are not included.⁴⁶ Following the description of unsuitable attire, the part of the prayer for wives says, “Let the inward man of the hert be uncorrupte wyth a meke and quiet spirit, which before the (O God) is much sette by. For after this maner in the old time did the holy women which trusted God tyre themselves, that were obedient to their own husbands, even as Sara obeyed Abraham, and called him Lorde, whose daughters the married women are, so longe as thei do wel.”⁴⁷ Instructions drawn from scripture are repeated throughout the manual, placing women as wives squarely within the boundaries of the household.

Becon also includes instructions for persons at different stages of life. The speaker prays the same for young and old men, that they would be “sober, honest, discrete, sound in faith, in love, and in pacyence.”⁴⁸ Becon briefly mentions older, presumably unmarried women, explaining how they should conduct themselves. The section is short, but it highlights specific issues that Becon may have observed in his own society. He grants that older women act as teachers, teaching younger women how to be good wives and mothers. “The elder wemen likewise grant that they be in such raymente as becommeth holyness, not false accusers, not geven to much drynkyng, but teachers of

⁴⁵ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 63^V.

⁴⁶ He may have meant to cite Genesis 18, where Sarah does refer to Abraham as Lord. Interestingly, he does not include a specific reference to 1 Peter 3.

⁴⁷ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 63^R.

⁴⁸ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 67^V.

honest thinges, to make the yong women sobre minded, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discrete, chaste, housewifely, good and obedient unto their owne husbands that the word of God be not spoken evyl of.”⁴⁹ His instructions for older women, possibly widows, reiterate instructions for wives, and older women are implied to be responsible for the young women in their communities. This section of the prayer also adds a new element to wives’ behavior by including “that the word of God be not spoken evyl of.” Wives are not only responsible for mutual affection within marriage and the societal stability that comes along it, but they also risk shaming scripture if they act outside the bounds of its instructions as mediated through Becon’s prayers.

Motherhood was seen as the noblest vocation that women could pursue within the context of marriage, and Becon wrote prayers intended for mothers as well. Bentley provided pregnant women with thirty-eight prayers in his *Monument*, and Becon also paid special attention to mothers by including two prayers specifically for them. While Bentley’s prayers are more numerous than Becon’s, their perspectives on childbirth are essentially similar. William P. Stoneman and Colin Atkinson describe Bentley’s discussion of childbirth, saying, “Many of the prayers simply ask forgiveness for sins and the grace to endure sufferings and to accept God’s will.”⁵⁰ Becon’s prayers for pregnant women also include a petition for forgiveness, and they trace the origin of the travail back to Genesis 3 and the fall.

At the begynnyng o heavenly father, when thou madest manne and woman, thou commaundedst them to encrease, multiply, and replenish the earth. If thorow the

⁴⁹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 67^R-68^V.

⁵⁰ William P. Stoneman and Colin Atkinson, “‘These Gripping Greefes and Pinching Paines’: Attitudes to Childbirth in Thomas Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrones* (1582), *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 21, (1990): 196.

subtile entisements of Satan they had not transgressed thy commaundment eating the forbydden fruit, the woman, whom thou hast appoynced the organ, instrument, and vessel to conceive, norish, and bringe forth man thorow thy wonderful workmanshippe, had without any laboure, paine, or travayle brought forthe her fruit.⁵¹

Women's pain in childbearing is described as a direct consequence of the fall; and in the first portion of the prayer, blame falls to both Adam and Eve in the subject's use of the word "they." Pregnancy and childbirth are tasks assigned to women as the "appoynced organ," but the speaker goes on to say that women are not inherently up to the task due to their "own imperfecion and fiblenesse." They require additional grace from God and more prayers than usual. The prayer continues and names Eve as the ancestor ultimately responsible for the painful process of childbirth. The speaker prays, "Ease o Lord, the paines, which thou moste ryghteouslye haste put upon al women for the syn and disobedience of our graundmother Eve, in whom al have sinned."⁵² The following prayer, "A thankesgevyng unto God for theyr deliverance," urges women who survived childbirth to be grateful and go on to be "glad and joyfull mothers."⁵³ Women who did not survive their travail could be included in a prayer for anyone who passed from earth to heaven at the close of the manual.

Since parts of *The Flour of Godly Praiers* follow life stages, one of the last prayers is for a person near death. The prayer is "to be sayed for all suche as lye at the poynt of death,"⁵⁴ and it specifically references a dying man. The prayer asks that God give "hym grace even unto his last breath," and the subject is identified as a "sycke

⁵¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 38^R.

⁵² Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 10^R.

⁵³ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 11^V.

⁵⁴ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 152^V.

brother.”⁵⁵ In the prayers relating to life on earth, its complexities and joys, the subject and speaker are always male; yet in the following prayer for the dead, Becon suddenly includes women alongside men before God. Becon includes women specifically to say that they too are recipients of God’s “fatherlye benefits” if they are among the faithful. In the prayer of “thankesgevyng unto God for the departure of the faithful out of thys world,” women suddenly find a place. The prayer reads, “For that is hath pleased the to cal our Christen brethren and sisterne from this vale of misery unto thy heavenly kingdome, we geve unto the most herty thanks.”⁵⁶ He shows that women may not have enjoyed the same opportunity as men while on earth; but after death, the souls of brothers and sisters were equal in heaven.

While his prayer manual was not intended for women alone, he wrote that it was for “the handes of many” and included specific sections for women, namely housewives and women with child. The subject of the prayers is most often male, but he characterizes the sinful flesh with feminine identifiers. “He” and “his” dominate the prayer manual unless Becon discusses the desires of the flesh, which appears as a “her” or a “she.” Becon also draws heavily on the image of the Whore of Babylon, which typically represented the Catholic Church. This preoccupation with the whore archetype led him to focus on lustful living and moral conduct, which surface as a main theme in Becon’s prayers and other works. His “Homily Against Whoredom and Adultery” was published in the first book of homilies in 1547, but Becon was not the only reformer who sought to

⁵⁵ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 153^v.

⁵⁶ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 153.

reduce the frequency of sexual sin.⁵⁷ Becon held the same views of marriage and adultery as many of his reformist contemporaries, yet he described the sins and their consequences with more vigor, which helped make him a popular preacher.⁵⁸

Becon includes colorful descriptions of the dangers of whoredom in his prayers for ministers and preachers. In this prayer, Becon brings his concern with social order and attention to moral conduct together to describe the dangers of living loosely. The “good herdemen” stand in sharp contrast to the whore of Babylon that Becon describes in entertaining detail. “Bishoppes and ministers of goddess word” were instructed to pray against many evils, but the image of the whore emerges as the most threatening foe as Becon effectively quotes Revelation 17.⁵⁹ “Take away from us the proud whore of Babylon, that great and blasphemous baude of al the whoredomes and abominacions of the earth...Down o Lorde with that purpled and rose coloured whore, decked with golde, pearle & precious stones...”⁶⁰ This description of the Whore of Babylon and her appearance serves to attack the pope, his cardinals, and bishops who were easily identified by their red and purple garments, and opulent clothing as a reflection of frivolousness and evil also highlights the importance of proper dress, a theme repeatedly emphasized in the prayers for wives. The directives concerning godly women’s outward appearance alludes to descriptions of women’s clothing in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3, where Becon reminds women that good wives do not decorate themselves “with broided heare, other golde, or pearles or costly araye, but wyth such as becommeth

⁵⁷ Bond, ““Dark Deeds Darkly Asnwered,”” 192.

⁵⁸ Bailey, *Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church of England*, 121

⁵⁹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 23^R-24^V.

⁶⁰ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 23^R.

wemen that professe the worshippinge of God.”⁶¹ The description of the whore as an embodiment of heresy and worldliness continues:

Down, o Lord wyth that gorgous strompet which is dronke wyth the bloude of saynctes, and with the bloude of thy Martirs, O Jesu. Let that whore be hated of al menne, lette her be desolate, comfortless and naked, yea let the very fleshe of her be gnawen of & she consumed wyth fyre...For of the wine of her pestilent whoredome have al nacions drunken, yea the very kings of the earth have committed whoredom wyth her, and the Marchauntes of the earthe have waxen ryche thorowe her wonton pleasures.⁶²

The Whore of Babylon as seen in Revelation 17 was an archetype for all worldly evils rather than a named female character from scripture, and the image parallels biblical descriptions of Jezebel, who was killed after adorning herself in finery. When the speaker prays “the very fleshe of her be gnawen,” he echoes Revelation 17:16, the image of Jezebel’s death, and Elijah’s prediction that her body would be eaten by dogs. Becon’s images of the Whore of Babylon and the implied Jezebel contrast with the good wives that pray for modesty and the grace to be submissive. Becon’s women occupy these two extremes, as worldly temptresses or chaste wives, and he personifies the flesh itself with the same language he used to describe the Whore of Babylon.

The flesh is personified as a feminine character in league with the Devil, and she makes her first appearance in “A confession if our synnes unto the Lord Jesu Christe.” In the prayer, the female flesh is juxtaposed with God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 and the incarnation of Christ through Mary. While praying for deliverance from Satan’s devices, the speaker says, “Thou therefore (o lord my god) arte able to delyver me from his ravenygne teethe, and to kepe me safe from hys bloude thyrsty ministers. For thou arte

⁶¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 64^R.

⁶² Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 24^V.

the blessed sede of the woman that tredeth down the head, destroyeth the power of that old serpant...Moreover not onlye Satan and his angels, but also the world and the flesh mooste grevously assaile me, yea, and lead me away captive as theyr pray.’⁶³ The flesh is an active character in the prayers, and she acts alongside the devil to push people further into sin. The only rescue available to sinners who are “all together fleshe” is the incarnation of Christ. While Jesus, the only one with “pure fleshe,” is the primary actor in the demolition of the flesh with her temptations, the Virgin Mary plays an important supporting role. The female flesh implied in the confession is defeated through an “undefiled” woman’s body. The prayer reads,

The fleshe also with her subtile entisementes so wholely occupieth me, that I am all together flesh, and al that nought is, and by thys meanes wholely without thy holy spyryt. Yet haste thou by the pureness of thy blessed fleshe which thou haste unfainedlye taken of the undefiled mayde Mary thy mother by the wounderfull operacion of the holye ghooste, so slaine the raging lustes of our sinfull flesh.⁶⁴

A vast majority of the speakers and subjects in the prayer manual appear to be male, but the sinful flesh is described with feminine terms as the devil’s partner. Despite his colorful anti-Catholicism, Becon described the sinful flesh along with images of the whore in medieval ways. Becon’s temporal proximity to medieval Catholicism meant that he was a direct heir to the medieval inheritance discussed by Helen White.⁶⁵ He drew from a similar word bank and presented much of the same ideas about women and sexuality as his Catholic forerunners, yet he was more dogmatic about the moral necessity of a rigid household hierarchy.

⁶³ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 8^R.

⁶⁴ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 9^V.

⁶⁵ Helen White, *The Tudor Books of Private Devotion*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 149-151.

Becon may have visualized the Whore of Babylon or Jezebel as he described the danger of the flesh, and he always depicts her alongside Satan, the one responsible for death itself. The next reference to the female flesh is found in the “prayer against the temptacions of he devil, the world & the fleshe,” and the prayer recounts the first case of human sin, prompted by the devil out of jealousy.⁶⁶ Before asking for the strength to resist temptation, the speaker gives a brief history of the adversary, explaining that the devil remains active in the present day “for the olde malyce.”⁶⁷ The speaker describes the fall in the prayer, placing himself in a long line of sinners assailed by Satan. “He prevailed against our fyrste parentes, yea and that in the state of theyre innocency and immortality.”⁶⁸ Upon this loss of innocence, humankind gained two new enemies along with the devil, the world and the flesh. Described as products of Satan, these two threats to purity and life itself manifest as a couple with specific weapons, “The one with his vain pleasures, the other with her carnal lustes so compasse us round about, that if thy present help wer not, we must nedes perish.”⁶⁹ Since a majority of subjects and characters in the prayers manifest as men, the presence of the flesh described as a “she” is noteworthy particularly because she is the one responsible for “carnal lustes.”

Using the language of scripture, Becon associates fleshly lust and sexual sin with women, much like in his description of the Whore of Babylon, in his “prayer against whoredome.” Becon quotes Proverbs 5, saying, “For although the lips of an harlotte are to the foolyshe a droppyng honey come, and her necke softer then oyl...Her feete go

⁶⁶ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 97^R.

⁶⁷ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 98^V.

⁶⁸ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 98.

⁶⁹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 96^R.

down unto death & her steppes haste them into hell, and he that accompanieth himself with an whore, shal go down unto hel but he that goeth away from her shall be saved.”⁷⁰

While Becon used a warning from a father to son in Proverbs, the blaming of women continues when men are specifically warned to “beware” the company of women. Men were warned against the dangers of fornication while women were suspected of adultery, and women as wives are instructed to behave like Susanna and keep their marriages honorable and marriage beds undefiled. The prayer also implies that the avoidance of whoredom would make them good mothers of multiple children. Only the prayers against sexual sin and slander deal with women, implying that he suspected women of these specific misdeeds more than the seven other sins he discusses.

The female flesh appears in the “prayer agaynst slauderne and backebytynge” as a foil alongside “Christian brethren,” who profit from using their speech well. Much like Adam and Eve were intended for innocence until sin corrupted them, so the gift of speech was intended for good until it was distorted for evil. The tongue “which thou madest to be an instrument of the holy ghoste is now become in mani people an instrumente of the Devyll.”⁷¹ Becon is not abnormal in his association of women with gossip, slander, and improper speech. Women in late medieval and early modern England were often accused of possessing unruly tongues, and the consequences could be severe. Sandy Bardsley connects Biblical precedent with women’s sinful speech, saying, “Just as Eve’s speech with the serpent resulted in humanity’s fall from paradise, so too the speech of all women

⁷⁰ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 118^R-199^V.

⁷¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 137^V.

threatened to disrupt peace and order in the street, the church, and the home.”⁷² This common cultural perception combined with Becon’s attention to social order may have led him to characterize the tongue, the part of the flesh responsible for wicked words, as a female character. The speaker describes the dangers of ill-used words, saying, “In what age hath the slanderous & backbiting tonge ceases from her slaundrynge and backbiting? Who of al thy welbeloved servants escaped fre from her poysonfull and venomous darts?”⁷³ This association could also be drawn from the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, but Becon alludes to Joseph and Susanna as godly figures that were subjected to slander and eventually saved. While the devil is the main antagonist in *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, the female flesh also appears to tempt those in pursuit of purity through prayer.

Godly Examples and Biblical Ideals

In his *Flour of Godly Praiers*, Becon implies that the best weapons against false teaching were reading the scriptures and praying properly. Combining the two, he composed a prayer manual filled with biblical characters that represented right religion, God’s grace, and good behavior. Becon wrote, “Oh, who is able to expres with how readye and glad myndes they magnified the and thy holy name? We therefore synfull wretches excyted and stirred up with the godlye examples of these thi servant.”⁷⁴ Becon provides his readers with prayers that combined his own words and those from scripture, and he chose models that would show his readers how to live according to God’s word.

⁷² Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 58.

⁷³ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 138.

⁷⁴ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 58^v.

Like Bentley and Wheathill, Becon presents a number of biblical models in the hopes that his audience could look to them for encouragement and guidance and incorporate the stories of godly men and some righteous women into their daily lives. Remembering and emulating those men and women in scripture who endured trials and experienced God's favor would inspire thanksgiving and lead to godly behavior.

The Bible and its authority lent legitimacy to many devotional works, and Becon's prayer manual was no exception.⁷⁵ Throughout the manual, Becon's own words and the words of scripture become indistinguishable as he blends stories and parables with his prayer scripts. He wrote in what Kate Narveson calls "scripture phrase," maintaining the cadence and tone of the Bible.⁷⁶ Unlike Bentley and Wheathill, Becon includes the specific references to the stories and examples present in the prayers in the margins of the text, guiding readers through the Bible as he showed them how to pray. The title of Becon's manual, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, reflects the popular image of the Bible as a garden full of wisdom to be harvested. "I have travayled to the uttermooste of my power too use in thesee prayers as fewe woordes of my owne as I coulde, and to gleane oute of the frutieful fyelde of the sacred scryptures."⁷⁷ The Atkinsons say that Becon was one of the first to use the image of the Bible as a garden, which only became

⁷⁵ Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 9.

⁷⁶ Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 52-52. While Narveson deals primarily with lay writers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the term applies to those like Becon, who taught their parishioners to speak and write in "scripture phrase."

⁷⁷ Anne Wheathill, 1584, *A Handfull of Holesome (though homelie) Hearbs, gathered out of the goodlie garden of God's most holie word; for the common benefit and comfortable exercize of all such are devoutie disposed*, edited by Betty Travistky and Patrick Cullen, (Ashgate, 1996), A2^R.

more popular in the late sixteenth century.⁷⁸ Wheathill uses a similar image in her *Handfull of Holesome*, describing her prayers as herbs, which were often understood to have healing potential. She called her manual “a small Handfull of grose hearbs; which I have presumed to gather out of the garden of God’s most holie word.”⁷⁹ A number of researchers say Wheathill used the Bible in her manual to gain authority because she was a writing woman, yet Becon does the same thing, showing that this reliance on scripture was not merely a matter of *female* authorial agency.

Expressing his concern for the state of society, the church, and the realm, Becon wrote that every man had to faithfully pursue his vocation, and he knew that his was to preach and provide prayers for those in need of proper models. He wrote, “I not otherwyse knowyng howe I may doo good to my cuntrye but by prayinge, preachynge, and writynge...have these few weeks pas compiled and made a booke of prayers...”⁸⁰ Becon saw his work as a small part of the resurgence of true religion during the Edwardian reforms, and he repeatedly compares the young English king with the biblical king Josiah. He expresses his sadness that England was ever under the “Antichristes tyranny,” but he rejoices that the realm transitioned to true religion, which included constant prayer and individual reading of the Bible.⁸¹ The biblical women Becon presents in his manual showed female readers how silence and chastity could benefit the Christian community. Since Becon emphasized order, social responsibility, and the proper

⁷⁸ Colin and Jo Atkinson, “Anne Wheathill’s *A Handfull of Holesome* (though *Homelie*) *Hearbs* (1584): The First English Gentlewoman’s Prayer Book,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996), 668.

⁷⁹ Anne Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, A2^v.

⁸⁰ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, A11^r.

⁸¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, A4^r.

preservation of households, it was crucial that women model wives like Sarah and Susanna, who, if presented properly, could lead them to silence and obedience.

From the very first page of *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, Becon places himself and his readers alongside characters from the biblical narrative, equating their king with Josiah, likening England under the Pope to the Israelites under Pharaoh, and comparing his readers with various scriptural characters. In the introduction, Becon praises the young king Edward VI, crediting him and his council with reforming the church and the realm. “For who seeth not, except he be wilfully blynde and obstinately refuse to see, how many notable and excellent benefits of our salvacion we have recyved of God under this our kyng? A prince for his godly disposicion and virtuous enterprises worthy to enjoy not onely immortal fame, but also the yeares of ancient and long-living Methuselah.”⁸² Becon perceived his own time through the lens of scripture, comparing the recovery of the law in 2 Kings 22 to the Edwardian reforms. Josiah, “but a childe of eyght yeares when he began to reygne,” emerges as the main character in England’s story of redemption because he provides an easy parallel. Although her prophesies support the power of prayer and the righteousness of young Josiah, Huldah, the prophetess who served as the conduit for God’s words in 2 Kings is missing from the story. Whether this is due to her obscurity, authority in the text, or failure to fit the requirements for proper womanhood, she is removed from the retelling of Josiah’s reign in the prayer manual.

Becon’s attention to the household codes and the preservation of proper authority made women’s roles within the home under the headship of their husbands more defined. The praying women who appear in his manual are defined in relation to men and his

⁸² Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, A1^v.

biblical women are no different. As can be expected in a manual for a mixed audience, Becon favors men from the Old Testament as precedents of God's provision, but he also includes a number of women who were recipients of grace or examples of proper behavior. Becon references Susanna four times throughout the manual; and while four appearances may not seem like much, she appears more than any other biblical woman besides the allegorical Whore of Babylon. Becon cites Daniel 13 whenever he references Susanna, and the deuterocanonical chapter he used was based on the Greek additions to the book of Daniel.⁸³ Lynn Staley observes, "The tale is certainly a courtroom drama, but it is also a narrative of transgressions, of female chastity and modesty, of the household and property, of justice itself."⁸⁴

The story of Susanna can be interpreted in different ways, and Christine Peters writes that Susanna's popularity grew more than any other biblical woman in the Reformation era because she was a good wife whose story taught valuable lessons about chastity, honor, and obedience.⁸⁵ Drawing from visual and literary sources, Peters paints Susanna mainly as an empowering figure for women, since she "reverses the assumptions inherent in the story of Eve."⁸⁶ Conversely, Alice Bach casts Susanna as a weakening image for women since she was a powerless object of the male gaze.⁸⁷ Since the

⁸³ Robert C. Dentan, "Susanna," In *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, edited by Bruce M. Metzger, Michael D. Coogan, Robert C. Dentan. Oxford Biblical Studies Online (accessed January 15, 2014).

⁸⁴ Lynn Staley, "Susanna and English Communities," *Traditio*, 62 (2007): 25.

⁸⁵ Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 251.

⁸⁶ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 252.

⁸⁷ Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in the Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 131.

condemned woman cannot speak for herself, Bach describes her as “the woman immobilized by the engines of patriarchy.”⁸⁸ Peters is primarily concerned with the interpretation and implementation of Susanna in late medieval and reformation text and art, and Bach deals mostly with the story itself, showing how biblical women fall prey to sexual traps. Peters and Bach show how the story of Susanna can be read and interpreted in different ways among modern readers, and Peters notes the ambiguity of the character, saying, “Nevertheless, it may be precisely the ability of stories like that of Susanna to sustain problematic and unsettling readings that accounted for their popularity and gave them an educative capacity...”⁸⁹ Becon presents her story to teach readers about parenting, God’s deliverance, and the dangers of dishonesty.

The first mention of Susanna in *The Flour of Godly Praiers* is in the prayer for fathers and mothers, and her parents are mentioned alongside other godly guides. Within the story itself, her father and mother are responsible for raising her to be a good woman with knowledge of the law of Moses. Susanna herself is not presented as a role model, but her parents are praised as good examples for parents to follow.

We knowing how frowarde evil disposed and untoward the harte, wyt and disposicion of manne is even from his very youth, if it be not restrained with the byt of thy most blessed lawe, hertely pray to geve al fathers and mothers grace after the example of Abraham, David, Tobi, Mathathias, the parents of Susan, Philip the Evangelist, and suche other, to brynge up theyr children, even from theyr very infancy, in thi feare...may shew them selves profitable members of the chrysten publique weale...”⁹⁰

The prayer urges parents to be like those from scripture who prepared their children to be good Christians and citizens. Abraham is praised for his faith, and Becon references the

⁸⁸ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in the Biblical Narrative*, 66.

⁸⁹ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 253.

⁹⁰ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 128^R.

story in Genesis 18 when he and Sarah first heard that they would have a son. It is possible that Sarah is not referenced in the portion on parenting because in Genesis 18, she laughs at the prediction. The reference to David cites the passage in 2 Samuel 2, or “ii reg. ii,” when he is anointed king. This passage does not directly comment on his role as a parent; but as the father of Josiah, it is not surprising that he is among those deemed good parents. Tobi and Mathathias were mostly known for the deeds of their sons, and Becon references Acts 21 to praise Philip the Evangelist, friend of Paul and father of four virgin daughters who prophesied. In Daniel 13, Susanna’s parents are known to be righteous, and Susanna’s godliness, displayed in her determination to stay true to God and her husband, is a credit to them.

The next mention of Susanna is in “A praier for a faithful manne beyng in trouble or enduraunce.” Again, Susanna is mentioned in a group of characters that exhibit God’s preservation. The speaker describes the many ways Christians suffer, including death and poverty, and explains that God’s will is always perfect, even if humans cannot understand it. The speaker says that he, “workest in thi creatures according to thy blessed wyll, which is alwaye good and godlye, howsoever blynde & frail flesh judgeth of it...”⁹¹ David and Jonah each appear twice in the prayer as prime examples of God’s mercy and deliverance. In his list of models, Becon describes each example being delivered after calling on God, emphasizing the power and importance of prayer. After describing God as a “lovyng Phisicion,” the prayer says,

We thefor thy poore & sorrowfull creatures perceiving in thy holy scriptures so large fountaynes of thy greate mercies...moost humblye beseech the, that as you deliverest Jonas out of the whales bely, Daniel from pryson, Peter thine Apostle out of warde, David from the handes of his enemies, Susanna from the power of

⁹¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 55^v.

her adversaries, with other, so in like manner thou wilt deliver and set at libertye thi servant...”⁹²

In the story, Susanna refuses to sleep with the two elders, although she knows that their testimonies will condemn her in a trial. Rather than sacrifice her marital chastity, she risks a punishment of death since the law indicated that an adulterous woman would be stoned to death if testified against by two men.⁹³ In the “prayer agaynst whoredome,” Becon presents Joseph as an example for unmarried men to follow and Susanna for married women. Alice Bach observes, “Biblical exegetes have occasionally compared the pious Susanna with Joseph, since both stories bear motifs of a chaste hero falsely accused of sexual activity.”⁹⁴ Both men and women are urged to keep themselves from sexual sin, and he supplies an example for both groups. Becon presents biblical characters who did more than live chaste lives; they resisted the easy path and risked punishment for refusing their tempters/accusers. Unmarried men are instructed to “kepe themselves pure and undefiled after the example of that godly yong man Joseph and bring with them into the honourable wedlocke both their bodyes and myndes chaste & honest.”⁹⁵ Women are given a similar prayer, but Susanna stands in as their biblical ideal. “Graunt that al married women may practyse the maners of that virtuous woman Susanna &, nether for flattering nor menacing words at anytime consent unto unclennes, but so keepe the bed undefiled...”⁹⁶ Bach states that while the stories have parallels, the characters do not

⁹² Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 55^V.

⁹³ Kathryn A. Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 16 (1993): 3.

⁹⁴ Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in the Biblical Narrative*, 67.

⁹⁵ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 119^R.

⁹⁶ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 119^R-120^V.

receive the same treatment in the narrative. Bach writes, “God rewards the hero Joseph by allowing him to rise to be second chariot to Pharaoh. Susanna is rewarded by returning to her life inside the house of a husband who did not even try to defend her.”⁹⁷ Whether Bacon considered these implications cannot be known, but his treatment of Susanna serves to praise her as a proper model of prayer while placing women in a certain space defined by household hierarchy.⁹⁸ Susanna is silent before her peers, family, and accusers, and she only communicates with God through prayer, which proves to be efficacious.

The final reference to Susanna is found in “a prayer agaynst slaundrynge and backebitynge,” and she again appears with Joseph. Bacon shows how the backbiting tongue, with “her poysonfull and venomous dartes,” plagued biblical figures to prove that slander is not an insurmountable obstacle. The speaker recalls David, Elijah (or Helias), Jesus and the Apostles, individually describing the charges against them. Joseph and Susanna appear together, enduring the same trial. All of these characters serve to show the reader that he or she too could recover from false charges while emphasizing how dangerous those accusations could be.

Was not thy hertye beloved servaunt, David that king and prophete slaundered of that wicked and blasphemous Traytoure Semei, & called a bloude shedder, and a man of Belial? Was not the holi prophet Helias reported to be a sedicious personne and a disquieter of the common wel of Israel? Was not thi only begotten sonne called a teacher of newe learning, a gloton, a wyne bybber, a frende of whores and Publicans, a Samaritan a deceiver of the people, a madman and one possessed with the devyll? Were not thy blessed Apostles also called dronckards, sedicious persons, vayne prattlers, tidings bryngers of new devils, and teachers of

⁹⁷ Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in the Biblical Narrative*, 70.

⁹⁸ Peters explains it well while explaining how Susanna’s story and the perceived differences between submissiveness and obedience. “This contrast is hard to explain, but it serves to remind us that when religious stories were translated into popular forms they assimilated the gender assumptions of popular literature without abandoning their edifying purpose.” *Patterns of Piety*, 256.

strange doctryne? Wer not both Joseph and Susanna reported to be dishonest persons of living, and yet notwithstanding none more honest, none more godli.⁹⁹

Becon presents Susanna's story by mentioning her with other biblical characters. All the reader sees is her name, possibly accompanied by a few minor details. Either Becon assumed his readers knew her tale, or he expected them to follow his references to Daniel 13 and place her in the context of the story. Susanna suits Becon's needs as a beautiful and god-fearing woman raised properly by her parents who valued God's law, her marriage, and the power of prayer. When the elders testify against her and it seems certain that she will die outside the city gates, she does not appeal to her parents, her husband, or the court, but to God. In response, God sends a young Daniel to her rescue, and he proves her accusers' testimonies to be false. They suffer her potential punishment and are killed.

Becon alludes to other women from scripture as godly ideals that good Christians should emulate, and they always appear within a group of other models. Becon includes prayers against specific sorts of sins, and readers are led to pray against idleness, since it could lead to other calamities. Comparing men's public work with women's private work, Susan Cahn writes, "And recall that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English people firmly believed in the chastening effects of labor: idleness was the devil's playground/helper; regular work reduced the opportunities to behave sinfully."¹⁰⁰ In the "prayer against Idleness," Becon presents his longest list of scriptural models, starting with Adam, both within and without the Garden of Eden. The speaker describes the

⁹⁹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 139^R.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion: The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 72.

various duties given to Adam by God so he would not be unoccupied, “for idleness is the occasion of much evil.”¹⁰¹ Becon draws from both the Old and New Testaments to show how good men and one woman of God stayed busy, and he calls consistent labor and activity a “commaundement.” He lists men from scripture and their respective activities before naming Tabitha, the only woman and last character in the list. “Adam tilled the earth, Abel was a shepparde. Jubal exercised Musick, Tubalcin was a worker in metal, and a graver in brasse and yron. Nohe planted a vyneyard.” Becon explains that Abraham, Lot, Isaac and Jacob were shepherds, while Joseph worked in government. Moses, David, Amos, Jesus, his apostles, and Paul also appear on the list as those who avoided idleness and worked in various vocations when they were not doing God’s work. Referencing Acts 9 Tabitha appears as a model of industry and charity, and the speaker highlights her, saying, “Thabita is commened in the holy scripture, because she made garments, and gave them to the poore people.”¹⁰² Women’s vocations were mainly wife and mother, but they could follow Tabitha’s example and lend their talents to charity while staying within the boundaries of the household.

Women like Susanna could be models of chastity and Tabitha models of diligence, but other women served to show that women could be redeemed after surrendering to temptation. Bentley used Mary Magdalene as an example for fallen women, but she is absent from Becon’s manual. Instead, Becon presents David, Jonah, Peter, the thief on the cross, and the woman who anointed Jesus’s feet in Luke 7 to showcase God’s compassion. All of the examples show that the sinner must first confess

¹⁰¹ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 125^v.

¹⁰² Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 125^R.

and seek forgiveness, but all of Becon's examples were intended to "encourage us boldly to come unto the throne of thy grace."¹⁰³ In these scenarios, Christ is likened to the Good Samaritan and the father of the prodigal son, and Becon mixes a number of images to show how various characters with different sins were dealt with in scripture. After discussing each sinner, the speaker says, "Mani other notable examples of thy greate mercyes fynde wee in the holy scriptures, which will not suffer us to despair of thi clemency and goodness."¹⁰⁴ Becon lists each character and their sin, starting with David, his favorite biblical example. Working his way through scripture, Becon starts with Old Testament figures that were forgiven by God, including David, Jonah, and the Israelites. He then moves to those who interacted with Jesus, starting with the woman from Luke 7. The speaker describes her alongside Peter, explaining how Christ forgave them both. "Howe lovynglye speakest thou to that synneful woman in thy gospel, and forgavest her al her sins, because she repented and beleved, Peter thy disciple although most cowardly denying the, after that he had bitterly wept and lamented his sins, thou diddyst behold with thy merciful eye, and favorably receivedst him again into the number of thi holi Apostles."¹⁰⁵ Readers would know which woman Becon meant by his marginal notation where he directed them to Luke 7 and the woman's story.

Biblical women found a place in Becon's prayer manual, even if they were extremely outnumbered. In a manual for "all degrees and estates" and not solely women, the heavy use of masculine language and men from scripture is not surprising since Becon followed cultural norms and the language of scripture. It is not the frequency of

¹⁰³ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 99^v.

¹⁰⁴ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 99^v.

¹⁰⁵ Becon, *The Flour of Godly Praiers*, 98^v.

women's appearances in Becon's manual that reveals his perception of women and their proper roles; rather, it is his choice of problematic characters that were defined according by their relationship to men, specifically Susanna. Women may have been defined by their good works or their stories of redemption, but they only appear within long lists of notable men. More importantly, the women mentioned largely remain silent. That is unless they are praying. Women were recipients of the same mercy as men in scripture; and although Becon presents much fewer of them, he still shows how they sinned, prayed, and lived, giving them a place in his prayer manual.

Conclusion

Focusing on Becon's representation of Biblical women and treatment of wives may give the impression that they dominate his *Flour of Godly Praiers*, but for every reference to Susanna or passing mention of wifely duty, there are three times as many prayers for male speakers and biblical models of men to admire. References to Old Testament heroes, namely David the soldier, along with the thorough treatment of male subjects and predominantly masculine language imply that the ideal Christian typically took male form. His use of the generic masculine also implies that the "prototypical" or best possible subject was a man; and while this is more notable in Wheathill's manual written specifically for women, it shows that when Becon visualized his readers he also saw a male audience.¹⁰⁶ Becon gravitated towards the stories of David, Jonah, Abraham, and the Good Samaritan, repeatedly weaving them into his prayers. Many prayers also included a petition that God help the speaker put off the "old man" and "lustes of old

¹⁰⁶ Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

Adam” in exchange for the “new man.” Women reading Becon’s manual certainly would have encountered encouraging stories of redemption, and allusions to both men and women role models, but codes of proper conduct and the rigid categorization of persons may have been restricting. Bentley and Wheathill published their manuals over thirty years after Becon’s *Flour of Godly Praiers*, and they display the same limiting treatment of women. While all three of them attempt to incorporate women into prayer practice either by assigning prayers to them specifically or intending the entire manual for their benefit, their texts show how patriarchal social norms bled into the intimate space of prayer, limiting women in their scripted prayers.

CHAPTER THREE

“Give Me Grace to Behave My Selfe”: Thomas Bentley’s *Monument of Matrones*

Introduction

In the late sixteenth century, Thomas Bentley surveyed the existing selection of religious writing for women and found it wanting. In an attempt to fill what he perceived to be a void, he compiled *The Monument of Matrones*, a collection of devotional material including prayers, poems, and passages of the Bible. The fifteen hundred-page work is organized into seven major sections labeled “The Seven Lamps of Virginitie.” For example, the First Lamp contains the prayers of Biblical women, and the Second and Third Lamps contain prayers penned by well-known women such as Marguerite of Navarre, Katherine Parr, and Queen Elizabeth I. Each Lamp has a different theme; and as the section titles suggest, some of the main themes are “virginitie” and chastity of both body and mind. Bentley intended for *The Monument* to provide examples of behavior and piety for English women. The expansive work is typically discussed simply as an anthology of preexisting works; however, the collection also includes original contributions from Bentley. The Fifth Lamp is a particularly interesting section of *The Monument* because Bentley borrowed a number of the prayers from other texts, such as Thomas Becon’s 1561 *Pomaunder of Prayer*, yet he made additions and organizational choices that show how he perceived his readership. Many of the prayers were original, and some sections of borrowed text were altered to fit an exclusively female audience.

Scholars have discussed and analyzed the anthological nature of *The Monument* and Bentley's commentary on pregnancy and childbirth. However, the prayers of single women and those lamenting carnal sin have gone untouched. Bentley's *Monument* was one of the first texts to reflect the inclusion of women in devotional literature, yet his rigid categorization of female subjects shows that his readers' identities were determined solely by their place within the patriarchal order. Bentley's prayer scripts categorize the ideal woman as either pre-married or married, and the boundaries of those categories could only be blurred by sexual deviancy. The singlewomen pray specifically for "the grace to behave my selfe," while the married women in the Fifth Lamp typically pray to "love together hartlie without all dissimulation."¹ The women in the prayers are presented in limited ways as subjects and speakers according to their sexual sin more than their marital status; and when Bentley presents models for his readers to follow, they either show the depths of women's wickedness or the necessity of her subservience. Bentley's prayers, some original and some borrowed, highlight categories of difference among single and married women, and female readers may have been limited by Bentley's limited categorization of his subjects and biblical examples.

Historiography

While the historiography surrounding Thomas Bentley and his work is limited, those who do explore the origins and implications of his *Monument* discuss the cultural climate in which Bentley lived. His background may be unknown, but scholarly speculations about his life and pursuit of patronage may show why Bentley took a special

¹ Thomas Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones, (Lamps 5-7)*, 1582, in *Essential Works for the Study of Early Modern Englishwomen: Part I, Volume 6*, ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 5, 52.

interest in women's devotional literature. Colin and Jo Atkinson have made many contributions to the study of sixteenth-century prayer manuals, and their work on *The Monument* shows that Bentley's representation of women in the Seventh Lamp served a larger patriarchal purpose. This chapter shows that Bentley's categorization and subordination of women persists in the Fifth Lamp where "all sorts and degrees of women" were directed to find guidance and direction through prayer scripts. Other scholars point to Bentley to show that sixteenth-century women were clearly included in print culture and the development of devotional prose, yet few look very deep into Bentley's work since it is frequently catalogued as a simple anthology of texts for and by women.

Scholars of early-modern Englishwomen approach Bentley's identity and motivation for writing *The Monument* in a variety of ways, but the general consensus seems to be that his work was partially prompted by his wish for patronage. The dedication, emphasis on virginity, and the intricately decorated title leaves would have appealed to Elizabeth and her supporters, making him a possible candidate for patronage. Thomas Bentley lived in a world defined by the reign of Elizabeth I and the developing print culture. John N. King places Bentley in a time when "intricate celebration of the perpetual virginity of Queen Elizabeth I was emerging."² The text is dedicated to Elizabeth, and the images occupying the cover page make clear connections between the English queen and biblical female leaders such as Esther and Deborah.³ Edith Snook

² John N. King, "The Monument of Matrones: The Earliest Anthology of English Women's Texts," In *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers & Canons in England, France, & Italy*, ed. Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 216.

³ Colin B. Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley, Compiler of *The Monument of Matrones* (1582)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 2 (Summer, 2000), 325.

handles Bentley's social striving with some nuance since his identity is uncertain, stating "the special focus on Parr, like that on Queen Elizabeth, *may* be related to Bentley's desire for patronage..."⁴ John King implies that the publication of *The Monument* undoubtedly earned Bentley the position of churchwarden of St. Andrew, Holborn in 1584, and he does not recognize the possibility that the Thomas Bentley of St. Andrew, Holborn and the author of *The Monument* in question could be different men.⁵

While we know very little about the life of Thomas Bentley from *The Monument*, the details of its publication allow us to hypothesize about his identity, place in society, and motivation for compiling the massive work. Bentley only included one concrete detail about his career on the title page; he called himself "of Graies Inne Student." Using the publication information and the timeline of St. Andrew, Holborn, Colin and Jo Atkinson make a compelling argument that Thomas Bentley was the churchwarden and compiler of the church records.⁶ "Bentley" was a common name in the sixteenth century, but the compiler of an expansive and expensive work such as *The Monument* must have been somewhat notable in 1580s London. *The Monument* was printed by two well known printers, Henry Denham and Tomas Dawson, and they would not have published the 1, 500 page text if they did not believe Bentley's authorship would appeal to the target audience.⁷ The time and place of publication point to Bentley of St. Andrew, yet

⁴ Edith Snook, *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 53. Emphasis added.

⁵ King, "The Monument of Matrons: The Earliest Anthology," 217. King assumes Bentley, the author of *The Monument*, is the Bentley of St. Andrew's Holborn, but he does not credit the Atkinsons with this connection. Edith Snook recognizes the possibility that they are not the same Bentley, but she uses the Atkinsons' argument to bolster her discussion of *The Monument*.

⁶ Atkinson and Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley," 323.

⁷ Atkinson and Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley," 326.

the main reason the Atkinsons make their claim is the use of specific initials in the prayers. Where there would usually be an “N” for name or *nomen*, Bentley used specific initials, and they directly correlate with members of the churchwarden’s family.⁸ For example, the initials S.B. occupy the position of a woman in labor, a woman with child, or simply a wife. The Atkinsons suppose that the initials S.B. represent Susan Bentley, the churchwarden’s wife. The lone letter S. represents an infant, supposedly the churchwarden’s son, Samwell Bentley. The initials of the churchwarden’s mother and father also correspond with the initials used in *The Monument*.⁹ If the author of *The Monument* and the churchwarden of St. Andrew, Holborn were indeed the same man, then it is entirely possible that Bentley earned the position after publishing *The Monument* and accruing the Queen’s approval.

While we do not know for certain whether Bentley was indeed after Elizabeth’s favor, we do know that his work was supported by one of her allies. Bentley recognized Bishop Aylmer’s patronage in the opening pages of *The Monument*, and the author clearly followed Aylmer’s example in his praise of Elizabeth and affirmation of her role as queen. In 1559, Bishop Aylmer published *An Harbor for Faithful and True Subjects, against the last blown Blast, concerning the government of Women*. He also connected Elizabeth with biblical heroines, defending her monarchy against John Knox’s inciting 1558 attack on female rulers, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. While Knox intended his tract to weaken the position of the Catholic queen Mary Tudor, its publication was “ill-timed” since she had just died and

⁸ Atkinson and Atkinson, “The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley,” 339.

⁹ Atkinson and Atkinson, “The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley,” 339-342.

been succeeded by Elizabeth.¹⁰ Bentley's *Monument* was published in the wake of this disagreement and after the queen's last series of failed marriage negotiations, making her virginity and supremacy themes throughout his work.¹¹ In the opening epistle, Bentley describes Elizabeth as "the most natural mother and noble nurse" of the Church of England, emphasizing her role as a virgin mother rather than a single woman.¹²

Most devotional material written exclusively for women addressed the feminine travails of pregnancy and childbirth, and Bentley's collection of prayers also favored women with child. One third of the prayers in Lamp Five (or thirty-eight of the one hundred and fifteen) were intended for women before and after childbirth, midwives, and the female friends of pregnant women. This reflects the dangerous nature and high frequency of childbirth for gentlewomen as Colin Atkinson and William Stoneman explain in "'These Gripping Greefes and Pinching Pangs': Attitudes to Childbirth in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones*."¹³ Becon also paid special attention to pregnant women, giving them two prayers in his *Flour of Godly Praiers*. Both men reference the pains of childbirth as the consequence of Eve's sin, and Bentley's speakers beg for the grace to be like women from the Bible who bore children despite their supposed barrenness. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Sarah are presented

¹⁰ Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 35-36. She also comments on Becon's attacks on Marry Tudor and his condemnation of female rule.

¹¹ Atkinson and Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley," 217.

¹² Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, Epistle page 2.

¹³ Colin B. Atkinson and William P. Stoneman, "'These Gripping Greefes and Pinching Pangs': Attitudes to Childbirth in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones* (1582)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12 (Summer 1990): 193. I use the term "gentlewomen" since they would be the group that could afford Bentley's book.

as models and beacons of hope that the readers will successfully bear children despite the dangers of childbirth.¹⁴

Bentley exclusively used the Geneva Bible of 1560 to provide examples of biblical women both virtuous and nefarious in the Seventh Lamp, and he also drew from a variety of existing religious works to provide his readers with examples of good, godly women.¹⁵ The publication of devotional material designed particularly for women, such as *The Monument*, reflected shifting attitudes concerning women's status in the church and society. The Reformation brought women from various classes to the forefront to promote Protestantism and even endure martyrdom; but after the churches were mostly through reforming, women were required to settle back into their traditional places within the patriarchal order. As Colin and Jo Atkinson state, "The *Book of Martyrs* could show women how to die, whereas the Bible if suitably presented could show them how to live properly, and it was therefore from the Bible that most of the new Protestant behavioral models for women were taken."¹⁶ There are no extant records to tell us how many women purchased and read *The Monument*, and we only have one record of the complete text in a private library. However, we can conclude that several copies, both complete and partial, were bought and kept since these copies can be found in libraries such as the British Library, the Huntington Library, and other university libraries.¹⁷

¹⁴ Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 76.

¹⁵ Colin Atkinson and Jo Atkinson, "The First Anglican Prayer Book for Women, Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones* (1582)," *Anglical Theological Review* 74 (June 199): 281.

¹⁶ Colin B. Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, "Subordinating Women: Thomas Bentley's Use of Biblical Women in *The Monument of Matrones*," *Church History* 60 (1991), 292.

¹⁷ Atkinson and Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley," 327.

Many scholarly references to *The Monument* are simply parts of a larger argument, and few scholars have yielded in-depth analyses of the text. John King analyzes the significance of the symbolic images presented on the cover pages of *The Monument* and other works in *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in the Age of Religious Crisis*.¹⁸ Edith Snook comments on *The Monument*'s significance in the emerging Protestant print culture, and Linda Pollock uses the prayers intended for women in childbirth to discuss attitudes towards pregnancy and childbearing.¹⁹ Even Colin and Jo Atkinson mainly discuss the manual's physical composition, printing history, and anthological contents.

This analysis expands on the Atkinsons' work, primarily their discussion of Bentley's Biblical women. Their article "Subordinating Women: Thomas Bentley's Use of biblical Women in *The Monument of Matrones*" is by far the most in-depth analysis of *The Monument*, and it primarily addresses the stories of biblical women in Lamp Seven. The Atkinsons discuss Bentley's presentation of wicked women from the Bible, stating, "In some cases he expands the biblical narrative by silently folding in text from the marginal commentary or from passages other than those he cites as his sources. There are places where we cannot find his source and conclude that he probably added his own words."²⁰ The distortion or manipulation of text from the Geneva Bible discussed by the

¹⁸John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 243-244.

¹⁹ Edith Snook, *Women, Reading, and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England*, 54. Linda Pollock, "Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England," *Social History* 22 (1997): 236-306.

²⁰ Atkinson and Atkinson, "Subordinating Women," 293. The Atkinsons concisely state their thesis on page 298: "Time and again we see Bentley subtly using the Bible to present models of submissive female behavior. He rearranges biblical texts, adds phrases, and shifts emphasis. Lamp Seven is, therefore,

Atkinsons reveals how Bentley fashioned Biblical examples for women to emulate that were favorable to the patriarchal social structure of sixteenth-century England. The Atkinsons' analysis of Bentley's presentation in Lamp Seven supports the argument that the prayers in Lamp Five subtly created gendered categories of difference that were only complicated by sexual sin. Suzanne Hull recognizes that the collection of prayers in Lamp Five "implicitly [acknowledge] the inferiority of women," yet she does not explain how they handle women specifically. She only recognizes that the prayers typically told women how to behave.²¹ As the Atkinsons show, Bentley used his work and the presentation of other works to subordinate and categorize female readers. The Atkinsons point out, "All relations Bentley considers irregular he lumps under the term 'harlotry.'"²² Bentley paid special attention to the sexual sins of Biblical women and made their narratives more conducive to sixteenth-century standards by slightly altering the text without notifying the reader. At the end of their persuasive, well-researched article, the Atkinsons explain that Bentley's habit of "Subordinating Women" may be found elsewhere in the sizeable text, and they leave it to future researchers to elaborate.²³ This analysis answers their call to focus on small portions of the 1,500 page text and carries their argument further. The implications under the surface of Bentley's work provide valuable insight into how women were perceived and potentially treated in sixteenth-century England.

not simply a useful compendium of biblical women's lives, but is rather a patriarchal rewriting of the biblical texts to support women's subordination."

²¹ Suzanne W. Hull, *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 19.

²² Hull, *Women According to Men*, 294.

²³ Hull, *Women According to Men*, 300.

Limited Categories and Chaste Communities

Bentley introduces the Fifth Lamp with a summary of the chapter's contents. He writes that the chapter would provide "sundrie forms of christian praiers and meditations to be used onlie of and for all sorts and degrees of women, in their severall ages and callings; as namelie, of Virgins, Wives, Women with Child, Midwives, Daughters, Mistresses, Maids, Widows, and old women."²⁴ Bentley defines these "severall ages and callings" in his prayers, but women that never married do not receive the same thorough treatment as their married or marriageable counterparts. His prayers present strict categories for women to occupy based on their sexual conduct, and single women without the "gift" of chaste autonomy took greater social and religious risks by not marrying. By implying life-long singlewomen did not occupy a legitimate category and making sexuality the basis of women's identity, Bentley constructs the proper Christian woman as married, chaste, and altogether subordinate, defined by her relationship to men.

Never-married or life-long singlewomen existed and in considerable numbers, yet Bentley does not assign them specific prayer scripts that described their unique situation; rather, his minimal treatment of singlewomen serves to group them with more subservient wives and daughters. He recognizes that they exist and operate within society, yet his prayers group them with other women that played more subordinate roles in society and the household. While the "mistresses" Bentley mentions could have been women of authority who ran their own households, they are encouraged to read the same subordinating scripts as wives and daughters. Christine Peters explains that economic encouragement led a considerable number of early-modern Englishwomen to "delight in

²⁴ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 1.

the single life.”²⁵ This growing group may have led Bentley to subtly include singlewomen, but only on his own terms. They appear in the manual, but he does not endorse their behavior by supplying them with their own prayers. In “Single Women in Early Modern England: Attitudes and Expectations,” Peters states, “The existence of choice, not merely of marriage partner but of whether or not to marry at all, represents a significant acknowledgement that women’s lives were not inevitably defined by marriage.”²⁶ Bentley would disagree with Peters, as made evident by his rigid classification of women in Lamp Five’s collection of prayers, since the prayers for women in and out of marriage denote unique goals and identities. Simply grouping life-long singlewomen together with life-cycle singlewomen downplays their distinct differences, and Judith Bennett and Amy Froide distinguish between the two social groups, explaining that historians must acknowledge the difference to represent them accurately. Widows were not the same as never-married women, and young bachelorettes awaiting matrimony led different lives and interacted with society differently than life-long singlewomen.²⁷

Seven of the prayer scripts in Lamp Five of *The Monument* could be read by life-long single woman, but two of those, a “generall confession of sinnes” and a “praier for “the Queenes Maiestie and the Realme” could be said of any supplicant, regardless of

²⁵ Christine Peters, “Single Women in Early Modern England: Attitudes and Expectations,” *Continuity and Change* 12 (December 1997): 342

²⁶ Peters, “Single Women in Early Modern England,” 326.

²⁷ Judith Bennett and Amy Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 3. Amy Froide, *Nevermarried: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.

sex.²⁸ Whereas the other prayers are tailored to match a Christian woman's specific conditions, none of the prayers deal directly with the special circumstances of life-long singlewomen. The remaining five prayers that could be adapted for the never-married women are general supplications: "A Praier to be said generallie for all women, that they may haue in remembrance the fall of their grandmother Eve," "A praier to be said of all devout women," "A praier made upon the similitude of the ten virgins," and two prayers designated for the morning and evening.²⁹ Bentley may have intended for the labels of "mistresses" and "maids" to cover the never married, but he did not provide prayer scripts to fit their unique life circumstances as he did for other groups. Since their positions of relative authority did not fit the expectations both Becon and Bentley outlined, they were prompted to read proper prayers that brought them back within the boundaries of the household hierarchy.

Subtle references to singleness throughout the Fifth Lamp show that Bentley was indeed aware that women could and did live their entire lives as singlewomen without marrying. In the second prayer of the Fifth Lamp, Bentley's speaker implies that the single life may be a "gift," but God ordains marriage so women can avoid sexual sin and procreate. The speaker prays,

I may (even before the flower of mine age past, if it be thy will) enter thereinto, and be presented of them as a pure virgin to Christ, especially considering that thou has therefore ordained that state of life, that the virgin, which hath not the gift of single life, feeling her infirmitie, and to avoid fornication, might marrie, and take an husband in the Lord: as also that mankind in chaste wedlocke may be multiplied...³⁰

²⁸ For the order of Bentley's prayers, see the Appendix, page 131.

²⁹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 203-204.

³⁰ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 4. Just before this excerpt, the speaker prays that she be married with the consent of her friends and family on both sides of the marriage. Those friends and family members makeup the "them" referred to in the second line of the quote.

The speaker indirectly says that single life may be a “gift,” but it is only given to a limited number of individuals. The majority of women did not have the gift, so marriage was the best course to protect them and society from the destabilizing effects of singleness and sexual deviancy. “That state of life” ordained by God refers to the state of wedlock, the first and possibly the most important reason married life is preferable is to avoid sexual sin. Since her “infirmities” will inevitably lead her to fornication, it is best that the speaker “take an husband in the Lord.” Bentley recognizes that women could live a life of singleness, but his prayers imply that they should not if they truly wanted to maintain their chastity and godliness. The other reasons to marry included propagating and making more Christians that can be “gathered and chosen” by God.³¹ Bentley calls women’s singleness a “gift;” but since most people lived without it, he characterizes the single state as a state of vulnerability where a woman would most likely fall into sexual sin.

Most of the prayers in Lamp Five include requests for grace, yet all of the prayers for unmarried maids include specific petitions for the strength to avoid evildoers and sexual immorality. The speaker in the third prayer pleads, “I beseech thee give me grace to behave my selfe according to this thy holie commandement, that in this, my single life and state of virginitie, I defile not my bodie with whoredome, adultrie, fornication...”³² This particular prayer could have been for lifelong singlewomen that needed an extra measure of grace to “behave,” but the following prayer titled “Another” implies that a marriage was still a likely and viable option. The speaker prays for the time “when” she

³¹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 4.

³² Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 5.

marries, rather than discussing “if” she will marry. After praying that she will have the strength to resist her natural lusts, she prays, “*When it shall please thee to call me to the holie and honourable order of blessed wedlocke, I may bring with me a cleane, chaste, and undefiled bodie.*”³³ Singlewomen, even those who intended to marry, were especially prone to sexual sin, and a number of the prayers repeat the theme that marriage was the best option to avoid sin and pursue godliness. The speaker in the fourth prayer says, “Marriage is honourable among all persons,” and the eighth prayer equates “the sweet yoke of matrimonie” with love and obedience to Jesus, making it the ultimate act of submission to God. The description of marriage as a positive good for the individual and society reflects the reformation change in perspective on marriage. In the sixth prayer, the script seems to include all singlewomen asking for the grace to be submissive so that they can learn to be pure and free of corruption. She prays, “Let us rather knowe that we lacke as yet manie instructions and godlie lessons; and give us grace to learne them at their hands, whomethou doest appoint over us to governe and teach us...”³⁴ The single life is a liminal time of learning for the subjects in Bentley’s *Monument*, and the singleness in the prayer scripts is typically defined as a finite stage of life. The speaker in the seventh prayer refers to “this my single life, and *afterward*,” implying that singleness would not be a woman’s ultimate end.³⁵ While the speakers in the sixth and seventh prayers do not ask directly for husbands, they do ask for the grace to be submissive and pure. The prayers imply that marriage fulfills God’s will for women, and they clearly define singleness as a stage good women will eventually leave behind. At that point, they

³³ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 6. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 10.

³⁵ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 11. Emphasis added.

shift categories and become wives, and then they can use the many prayers assigned to married women in Lamp Five. Christine Peters discusses the historiographical state of singlewomen, saying, “The relative importance of the idea of marriage, and of the definition of status according to marital position, has led historians to neglect the significance of celibacy in this period.”³⁶ Bentley’s categorization of women is part of the problem described by Peters, and the three main categories of women in Lamp Five were pre-married, married, and fallen. The “mistresses” with authority and “maids” without husbands were absorbed into larger groups and never given their own prayer scripts, which repositioned them within the acceptable order of household and society.

Life-cycle singlewomen, wives, and any woman lost to sexual sin were clearly categorized by the placement, presence, and content of their prayers. Patricia Crawford briefly addresses the feminine stereotypes presented by Bentley, but she spends a mere three sentences commenting on his treatment of women and sexual sin. The stereotypes Bentley presents did not only reinforce prevailing views about the innate inferiority and corruptness of women, they made it clear that sexual sin could blur the lines of categorization and place a woman in a group defined by her offenses.³⁷ Bentley’s preoccupation with wicked biblical women in Lamp Seven and his tendency to define women, married or not, according to their participation in sexual sin may have been prompted by his frequent exposure to such crimes as churchwarden of St. Andrew, Holborn. If we accept the Atkinsons’ presumption, then Bentley would have “had to report men and women for sexual offenses and be present at penances for various sins

³⁶ Peters, “Single Women in Early Modern England,” 326.

³⁷ Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, 81.

[and] investigate pregnancies of unmarried women...”³⁸ Both his possible life experience and “medieval inheritance” influenced his perception and portrayal of women. Like Becon, Bentley continued the medieval tendency to label women as wholly chaste or utterly lost. Regardless of his motivation, Bentley clearly classified women according to their marital status until they were “lost by fornication or adulterie,” then their sexual misconduct became the sole determiner of identity.

The first prayer in Lamp Five is “a praier for silence, shamefastnes, and chastitie,” specifically intended for life-cycle singlewomen who intended to marry.³⁹ The first person prayer, closes with a reference to a possible future husband. Throughout the scripted prayers in Lamp Five, the female speakers frequently emphasize the importance of physical chastity and chastity of mind. An undefiled body could only be maintained if the heart and mind are untainted by gossip and idleness, and internal and external chastity were required for a close relationship with God. The speaker prays, “that my mind may be free from all evill affects, and my bodie clear from all unleanes; I may be found a meete temple for the holie Ghost to inhabit.”⁴⁰ The speaker phrases marriage as a life option only God can ordain, yet her appeal for a husband shows that marriage was the natural next step after the preparation of purity and reception of the Holy Ghost. Directly after asking for purity in order to be an eligible temple for God, she prays, “And if it be thy good pleasure hereafter to call me unto the honourable state of matrimonie, that I may bring unto mine husband, a pure and undefiled bodie, and so liev with him in thy feare,

³⁸ Atkinson and Atkinson, “The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley,” 346.

³⁹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 1.

⁴⁰ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 2.

unto the praise and glorie of thy blessed name, Amen.”⁴¹ The following prayer follows a similar pattern where the speaker requests chastity of heart and body in order to “join with thine elect virgins” in a divine marriage to “the celestiall bridegroom” or Christ.⁴² After praying for the sanctity of her divine marriage, she prays that God grant her an earthly husband if he so pleases. Using the same language as the speaker in the first prayer, she prays, “And if it shall please thee hereafter to prepare me for an husband, and to call mee unto the holie state of honourable marriage: assist me.”⁴³ Union with Christ or the Holy Ghost is the natural precursor to marriage, a defining category and label for Bentley.

Between the prayer’s title and closing remarks about matrimony, both speakers make several references to the type of community they seek to avoid in order to maintain their “chastitie, both of bodie & mind.”⁴⁴ The speaker in the first prayer is intensely invested in the type of people with which she associates. Since lewd and dishonest company could lead her to sin, the speaker requests that God “give me grace to order my selfe in eschewing idleness, and wanton wicked companie.”⁴⁵ The desire to stay away from wicked people becomes even more important when considered alongside the consequences of immorality. Not only would the sinner suffer spiritual consequences if she lost her chastity; she would also be ineligible for inclusion in both the married and single categories, leaving her without a label or identity apart from her sexual deviancy.

⁴¹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 2.

⁴² Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 4.

⁴³ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 5.

⁴⁴ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 1.

⁴⁵ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 2.

The second prayer “to be said of singlewomen against all evill behaiur, vice, and vanitie, and for the obtaining of modestie, chastitie, and all maidenlie virtues” has the speaker make five successive references to the avoidance of corrupting company. The repeated emphasis on the evasion of others that could potentially impede a woman’s quest for purity reveals the perceived importance of community, both respectable and unbecoming. Good women, like the speakers in Bentley’s first eight prayers, constantly plead for the grace or ability to “eschew all euill lusts, riotous resorts, and wanton companie.”⁴⁶ Bentley implies through his prayers that in order for a woman to retain her chastity, she must avoid anyone who may lead her astray. In order to avoid corrupting influences, she must reject any sins that could push her down the slippery slope to wantonness. The virginal singlewomen of Lamp Five strive to be separate from corrupt communities and bad influences, while the fallen women in the lamentations strive to reenter the good or virginal communities. The pure maidens and married women are defined by their marital status, and that subsequently determines the boundaries of the communities in their prayers. The fornicators and adulteresses are restricted to their community of fallen women, as implied by their desire to be reinstated in the virginal communities they left behind.

The first lamentation applies to “anie woman, virgin, wife, or widowe, for her virginitie or chastitie, lost by fornication of adultrie.”⁴⁷ Bentley places this prayer between the prayers for life-cycle singlewomen and the prayers of married women or betrothed women about to be married. The lamentations of sinful women bridge the gap

⁴⁶ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 6.

⁴⁷ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 13.

between prayers for singlewomen and those for married women, showing that those defined by their sexual sins occupy the liminal space between categories. Whereas single and married women are clearly defined in the other prayers, the lamentations can apply to women with any marital status. The lamentations' speakers refer to themselves with general terms such as "unhappie woman" and "miserable sinner," rather than specific labels such as "maiden child," "young married woman," or "virgin newly married."⁴⁸ They even describe themselves as animals, such as goats and dogs.⁴⁹ According to Bentley, the women who fell into sexual sin were not spiritually irredeemable, but they may have been socially unsalvageable since their identities were completely determined by their sins.

Other sins such as gossip, idleness, and false witness did not become identifiers, only the sexual sins of fornication and adultery. Much like Becon implied in his prayer manuals and directly stated in his *Homily Against Whoredom*, Bentley presented sexual sin as the main determiner of his subjects' identity. Ronald B. Bond argues, "venereal sins seemed to eclipse all others"⁵⁰ in Becon's work, and his emphasis on sexual sin may have influenced Bentley. In his 1547 *Homily Against Whoredom*, Becon wrote, "Above other vices, the outrageous seas of adultery, whoredom, fornication, and uncleanness, have not only brast in, but also overflowed almost the whole world, unto the great dishonour of God, and the exceeding infamy of the name of Christ, the notable decay of

⁴⁸ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 14, 17, 34, 35, 52.

⁴⁹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 24.

⁵⁰ Ronald B. Bond, "'Dark Deeds Darkly Answered': Thomas Becon's Homily against Whoredom and Adultery, Its Contexts, and Its Affiliations with Three Shakespearean Plays," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (Summer, 1985), 191.

true religion.”⁵¹ For Becon, sexual sin had the potential to corrupt the whole world and defame the name of God; and for Bentley, it became the sole determiner of a woman’s identity. For both, the effects of sexual sin were extremely serious, even ruinous. Between 1547 and 1582, the perception of sexual sin as all consuming and determinant of identity remained intact. Adultery and fornication were the only sins addressed with specific prayers in *The Monument*, and Becon wrote, “Ye may perceive that fornication and whoredom are in the sight of God most abominable sins.”⁵² Both men perceived sexual sin as a serious offense against God and the Church, possibly the most destabilizing and damaging.

After succumbing to sexual temptation, the speakers in the lamentations emphasize two main themes. They constantly allude to disconnect between themselves and the rest of the Christian community, and they reference other scenarios where God restored fallen women in the Bible. Their identities are no longer determined by their marital status, rather their participation in either fornication or adultery. Not only are they separated from upstanding Christian community, but they are also considered “fallen awaie by sinne from hir spirituall spouse Christ Jesus.”⁵³ A lamentation is essentially an expression of grief, and Bentley’s speakers have much to lament. For Bentley, the fallen woman became the corrupting company good women hoped to avoid; and in the first lamentation, the speaker says, “I that desired to be found a friend, and a favourer of

⁵¹ Thomas Becon, *An Homily Against Whoredom*, 1547, *The Digital Library of Classical Protestant Texts*, <http://solomon.tcpt.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/cgi-bin/asp/phil/cpt/getobject.pl?c.247:1.cpt> (accessed 30 January 2013).

⁵² Becon, *An Homily Against Whoredom*.

⁵³ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 13.

godlinesse and chastitie, am found a fo, and a furtherer of uncleannesse and iniquitie.”⁵⁴

By failing to stay as far away as possible from corrupting community and the “assemblies of the wicked,” the woman lost herself to sexual sin and became “an inheritour of the kingdome of the divell!”⁵⁵

The fallen women were separated from godly community; and in their prayers, they call out to those they left behind. They lament their loneliness and the loss of their chastity, and they ask for their former friends’ prayers and pity. They describe themselves with terms such as “polluted,” “comfortlesse and freendles,” “forsaken,” and “desolate.”⁵⁶ The prayers characterize women lost to sexual sin as alienated from their former friends and their chaste identity. One of them says, “Alas, O virginitie, how shall I lament thee? O all you my friends and kindred, tender my case, pitie my person, in that I am dangerouslie wounded. Pitie me, O all ye my friends and kindred, in that I am now become an abject person...Pitie me, O ye my friends, in that I am rejected and cast awaie from the face of God and man.”⁵⁷ This severance could happen to an unwed maid or a long-married wife, and the lamentations are meant for women from both categories since their sin became the ultimate determiner of their identity. Any woman could lament the loss of her identity and community, saying, “For alas my parents live, yet I am an Orphan and fatherlesse. Alas my bretheren and friends are living yet I am comfortlesse and freendles.” The married wives and mothers have two extra statements of grief: “Alas my

⁵⁴ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 16-17.

⁵⁵ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 14.

⁵⁶ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 15, 19.

⁵⁷ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 14-16.

husband liveth, yet I am a widowe. Alas my children be alive, yet I am barren.”⁵⁸ This language shows that after committing the sins of adultery or fornication a woman was rhetorically removed from her father, brethren, husband, and children, the people in her life who played the largest roles in giving her identity in society.

The scripted speakers’ sexual sins change the way they view themselves and reveal how Bentley perceived women who committed adultery or fornication. His women say, “bewaile mee that I am transformd into a dog, a sow, and filthie goat, by trespassing against mine owne soule and bodie, by dishonesting my friends, and dishonouring my God.”⁵⁹ They use animal imagery to define themselves, showing how they have been completely ruined and their identities changed after their immorality. Again, these prayers were meant to apply to both married and singlewomen, showing that adulteresses and fornicators merited the same treatment from Thomas Bentley. The paragraph before the prayer of Mary Magdalene’s repentance includes a plea for mercy, citing God’s mercy to women in the past. The sinful woman presents her case to God and begs him to be compassionate rather than just. She pleads, “I am a sinner...then who shall let thee to take compassion upon mee sillie woman? If though hadst rather he should turne and live, then who shall withhold they coutenance from me sinfull wretch...Respect no, O my God, the justice due to so grievous a sinner; but remember thy loving kindness towards thy creature.”⁶⁰ Despite the destruction of her identity as a virginal maid or a chaste wife, the prayers show that there is hope for redemption, but only if God is merciful. Bentley’s harsh treatment of women who fell into sexual sin

⁵⁸ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 19.

⁵⁹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 24.

⁶⁰ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 31.

leads to a pathos driven plea for mercy, and he clearly parallels them to Mary Magdalene, a woman salvaged by God despite her sexual sin.

Godly Examples and Biblical Ideals

Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones* followed the same tradition as Thomas Becon and Anne Wheathill's manuals, and all three writers drew from scripture to provide women with good examples to follow and anti-examples to avoid. Bentley's Biblical examples typically show women that spiritual recovery from past sins, usually sexual sin, was possible; and by showing how once wicked women could be incorporated into the story of redemption, Bentley may have intended to give women hope in their own lives. In an attempt to include women in prescribed prayer practice, Bentley presented a number of female role models from scripture, yet his primary concern was showing women how to lament and atone for their sexual sins. In the prayers, the sinful women from the Bible appear more often than the saintly, highlighting a long line of wayward women that eventually found a place in the Biblical narrative. Bentley's categorization of women relies on two main questions: Is she married? Is she chaste? If they were lost to sexual sin, be it fornication or adultery, then their marital status no longer mattered and the formerly strict categories of married and pre-married are complicated by a woman's sexual missteps, and Bentley provides Biblical examples for women accordingly. Bentley names ideal and chaste wives from the Old Testament, but the reformed Mary Magdalene surfaces the perfect example for fallen women to follow. Since *The Monument* paid special attention to those with shameful pasts, she appears most often and as the most dynamic character in the text, with her seven demons, alabaster box, and adulterous past.

Bentley was clearly familiar with biblical women, and his inclusion of their stories throughout his *Monument* shows that he saw the Bible as the ultimate instructional tool. The Virgin Mary appears only once within a long list of “godlie women,” and of all the Biblical women Bentley cites in his prayers, Mary Magdalene receives the most thorough treatment since he presented her as a woman redeemed despite her adulterous “sinfull life past.” According to Christine Peters, Bentley was not the only Protestant in post-reformation England to show preference to Mary Magdalene over Mary the mother of Christ. Peters explains, “Both women were compassionate witnesses of Christ’s passion, but, despite being considered a saint by Catholics, the Magdalen was less problematic than the virgin for Protestants.”⁶¹ Peters highlights the attention paid to Mary Magdalene’s presence at the tomb and her willingness to recognize the resurrected Jesus, pointing to her future fame in the Christian tradition. Bentley, on the other hand, repeatedly emphasizes her past before Christ to provide his sinful subjects with precedent.

Since sexual misconduct appears most often and is described as an all-consuming sin, Bentley presented Mary Magdalene’s rise from adulterer to forgiven follower as the ultimate success story. Bentley’s focus on sexual sin as the main determiner of a subject’s identity made a formerly adulterous Mary Magdalene the most dynamic Biblical character in his collection of prayers. Her first appearance is in the first lamentation of fornication or adultery to be said of the “sinfull soule adulterated and fallan awaie by sinne from hir spirituall spouse Christ Jesus.”⁶² She appears alongside

⁶¹ Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*, 234.

⁶² Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 13.

other Biblical characters whose stories exemplify God's mercy over his judgment, including the Good Samaritan.

After describing herself as a woman "choked up with inamous doings," the speaker equates her participation in sexual sin as joining "in league with the divell" and claims that she is beyond saving.⁶³ Describing her sinful state in extreme terms, she says, "There is no lamentation more lamentable than mine; neither is there sinne greater than my sinne, and there is no salve for me."⁶⁴ The immediate presentation of those who came before her in both sin and redemption refutes her claim that there is no cure for her condition. In a series of questions, the speaker points to precedent and prays that Christ would extend the same mercy he did for those in scripture, and she identifies him as both the shepherd and Samaritan, praying, "Where is that good shepeard of the soules? Where is he that went downe from Jerusalem to Jericho which also salved and cured him that was wounded of the Jewes?"⁶⁵ After characterizing Christ as one who cares for the lost and injured, she references his interaction with three Biblical women who Bentley characterized by their sexual sins.

Where is he that came from Judea to the Citie Sichem in Samaria, which also there livilie touched the woman of Samaria with her faults, and yet gave hir drinke of his spirituall grace and life, to hir and others conversion? Where is he that in the Temple so mercifullie delivered hir that was taken in adulterie, and would not suffer her to be condemned to death as she had deserved? Where is he, I say, that healed the sinfull sinner Marie Magdalen, by casting out her seven Divels, and forgiving hir manie sinnes, bicause she loved so much, to hir perpetuall fame and glorie?⁶⁶

⁶³ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 14.

⁶⁴ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 15.

⁶⁵ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 15.

⁶⁶ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 15-16.

The woman brought to Jesus by the Pharisees was clearly forgiven of her adultery, and Bentley names the woman of Samaria “with her faults,” which presumably included her romantic past—living with a man that was not her husband and having five husbands before him. Later in the text, Bentley characterizes the Samaritan woman at the well as a sexual sinner, comparing her adultery to the story of David and Bathsheba.⁶⁷ Bentley highlights these three specific biblical women in the lamentation for adulteresses, and his juxtaposition of Mary Magdalene with the woman of Samaria from John 4 and the unnamed adulteress from John 8 highlights the way Bentley portrayed women with sexually sinful pasts to show that they were indeed redeemable. With Becon, Bentley, and Wheathill, representations of women in sixteenth-century prayer scripts are complex, and they present opportunities for hope alongside limiting language.

The ninth and tenth prayers in Lamp Five are the lamentations prescribed to women lost to sexual sin. The two prayers are longer than all of the prayers for singlewomen combined, and they are followed by a “praier of Mary Magdalens repentance.”⁶⁸ The speaker of the ninth prayer expounds on the depths of her own sin, calling herself “a sinner worse than Marie Magdalen, yea chiefe of all sinners...”⁶⁹ The two lamentations include multiple references to the virginal community that the speaker used to be a part of, showing that the boundaries of her community were set by her chastity or sexual sin. The fallen woman’s scripts differ from those for virgins and virtuous wives; and once the woman joins the sinful women, her identity as single or married becomes obsolete. However, the lamentations are not without hope. The sinful

⁶⁷ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 22.

⁶⁸ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 32.

⁶⁹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 26.

women may never be fully restored to the virginal communities, but they can be forgiven and accepted by God. Mary Magdalene is the biblical example that Bentley's fallen women are prompted to follow, and Jesus's acceptance despite her past gives hope to the subjects separated from Christian community in Lamp Five. Comparing herself to Mary Magdalene, the speaker in the prayer of repentance says, "I beseech thee most merciful Jesu, which am a more sinfull woman, and now likewise most humblie with great remorse of conscience and sorrowe for my sinfull life past, doo prostrate my selfe before the feete of thy mercie, washing them with the inward tears of contrition, and kissing them with the lips of devout & earnest praier."⁷⁰ The lamentations depict lonely and disconnected women; but the final prayer of Mary Magdalene's repentance, shows that their spiritual spouse will have mercy on them as he did on Mary Magdalene.

In the "praier to be said of single women against all evill behaviour, vice, an vanitie, and for the obtaining of modestie, chastitie, and all maidenlie vertues," Bentley mentions women from the Bible that virginal maids should aim to imitate, and those they should pray to be unlike. The speaker calls her virginity and chastity "that inestimable treasure of great price," and spends a majority of the prayer naming the activities, people, and attitudes that she should avoid. These activities include, but are not limited to, "pranking, pricking, pointing, painting, frisling, & decking myself to appeare piked, feate, gorgious, & gaie in the eies of men."⁷¹ The prayers are especially clear about "filthie dalliance and dansings."⁷² Dancing was a serious problem because it led to more corrupt behavior and made her comparable with some of the most notorious women in

⁷⁰ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 32-33.

⁷¹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 3.

⁷² Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 3.

scripture. The first biblical women to appear in Lamp Five are those that the speaker hopes not to follow. She prays, “Oh let me not, I beseech thee, with Dinah, Dalila, Salomen, & such like dancing damsels, become equall with the ungodly, by plaieing the foolish virgin, as they did, and in living ungodly or dishonestlie...”⁷³ In this prayer and elsewhere, Bentley defines Dinah from Genesis 34 as a willing participant in her defilement, and he puts her in the same category as Delilah and Salome. Salome, while unnamed in scripture, was typically understood to be the daughter of Herodias who danced before Herod and asked for the head of John the Baptist in Matthew 14 and Mark 6.⁷⁴ Delilah was the woman in Judges 16 who used her love to deceive and essentially destroy Samson.

The prayers for unmarried or pre-married women name anti-examples from scripture, and they also name those women who stood out as particularly godly. While praying for an “unspotted bodie, holie vessel, and undefiled members,” the speaker asks that she be given the grace to follow the “good example of Sara, Rebecca, Ruth, Judith, Susanna, and the virgin Marie, and such other godlie women.”⁷⁵ Bentley highlights them as examples of true Christian service who exhibited “soberness, demureness, modestie...diligence in the house, care of devotion... and all other vertues bodilie and ghostlie.” Susanna and Judith were extra-biblical examples for the Protestant Bentley, but he includes them in his list of godly women. He praises Judith for her patriotism and Susanna for her chastity in a later prayer. A sinful subject wishes she had been more like

⁷³ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 3.

⁷⁴ In the 1560 Geneva Bible, it is noted in the margin that “Joseph’ calleth her name Salomen, the daughter of Philippe, and Herodias.”

⁷⁵ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 3.

Judith, who “decked hir selfe bravelie of a right discretion and vertue, for the safeguard of her people.”⁷⁶ She compares her weakness, made evident by her participation in sexual sin, with Judith’s strength. She also compares herself to Susanna, who “being secretly and forcibly assaulted, sighed, and thought it better to crie, and shrich out, that she might so fall into the hands of hir enimies, and suffer death without the deed doing...but I openly and privilie have followed too much the devises and desires of mine owne hart...”⁷⁷ Susanna’s reaction to a sexual assault exhibited chastity, making those biblical women who reacted differently wicked women to Bentley. Although the speaker in the prayer says they “were defloured against their wils,” Dinah and Tamer are presented as participators or accomplices in their unfortunate circumstances because they did not choose death over defilement.⁷⁸ They also compare themselves to Potiphar’s wife and Jezebel, saying that they have been worse than the wicked women of the Bible. “I have bewailed heretofore the state of all sinners; yet now am I plunged in them all...more impudent than Memphetica Potipher’s wife; more shameless than Lots two daughters; more wicked than Baara or Salomen; and more bloudie and persecuting than Jesebel.”⁷⁹

Bentley’s presentation of Biblical women differs from Anne Wheathill’s, and his difference is most evident in his brief discussion of Eve, the first woman. Wheathill assigns most of the blame to humanity’s “first parents” or solely Adam for the fall, Bentley makes it clear that Eve’s behavior in the first days of creation set the tone for

⁷⁶ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 19.

⁷⁷ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 19.

⁷⁸ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 19.

⁷⁹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 18.

women's existence in general. In a prayer for the grace to "keep pure the state of single life," the subject says,

My desire is to walke before thee in a pure conscience, chaste mind, and undefiled bodie. But alas, deere God, I confesse the corruption of my nature, polluted in the first woman Eve in Paradise, is such; and my weakness and unableness to stand in temptation is so much, and the custome of sinne hath gotten such dominion over me, that I am not able of my selfe so much as to thinke a good thought, much less to doo anie thing that is good and acceptable in thy sight.⁸⁰

Even in a prayer for a single virgin, Bentley outlines the ever-present expectation that she will stumble due to her inherent womanly corruption. While the Bible's upright women find a respectable place in *The Monument*, Bentley preferred to present wicked or once-wayward women to his readers, revealing his expectation that women were more likely to fail and his perception that they were redefined according to their sins. However, the references to women taken against their will, immoral women, and those who eventually attained redemption, such as Mary Magdalene, show the seriousness of their offenses along with the hope that they too will be restored. The biblical examples in Bentley's prayer scripts typically answer the subject's repeated question, "Have I beene the first that herein have sinned? Or am I the first that fell?"⁸¹

Conclusion

Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones* includes many works written by women, and it may indeed be "an entire female library between two covers," as Suzanne Hull calls it.⁸² However, its most practical section, the collection of prayers found in

⁸⁰ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 7.

⁸¹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, 22.

⁸² Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 92.

Lamp Five, is all but inclusive. Lamp Five's effectiveness relied on the specificity of its prayers, and Christian women of "all sorts and degrees... in their severall ages and callings" should have looked to the text and found applicable prayers. However, some women are noticeably underrepresented. Bentley opened Lamp Five with Matthew 26:46, "Watch and praie, that ye enter not into temptation: The spirit is readie, but the flesh is weake."⁸³ The flesh was seen as especially weak for women, and the prayers for pre-married women include countless cries for the grace to abstain from sin and avoid corrupting company. Their pursuit of purity is reliant on their ability to stay far away from those who would lead them astray. They could very easily fall into sexual sin, making them ineligible for the pure communities of virginal maids and chaste wives.

Bentley represented singlewomen and wives as separate groups with different identities; but once one from either category succumbed to lust and committed fornication or adultery, she no longer fit into Bentley's rigid classification. The fallen woman lost her label of maid or wife and became identifiable only by her sin. Bentley's selection of subjects is limited, as seen in his skewed portrayal of the never married. His handful of good women was even more exclusive, as reflected in his harsh treatment of the sexually sinful. In an attempt to include women in prayer practice, Bentley produced a text that might meet the devotional needs of England's growing female reading audience, and he described *The Fifth Lamp* as "A Treatise verie needful for this time and profitable for the Church...to the glorie of God & comfote of all godlie women." In *The Monument*, Bentley creates categories for his readers to fall into, and he emphasizes the importance godly of community, both in the pursuit of purity and the lamentation of

⁸³ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, Lamp Five Title Page.

sinners. Bentley categorizes the speakers and subjects and labels them according to their marital status, yet participation in sexual sin could destabilize a woman's social and spiritual identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Fight Therefore Manfullie and Mightily”: Anne Wheathill’s *A Handfull of Holesome*

Introduction

With a published prayer manual full of complex Biblical imagery and potent prayers, Anne Wheathill the woman remains a mystery to modern readers. Unlike Thomas Bentley, the few clues she left in her autobiographical introduction do not allow us to reconstruct her life. She also does not enjoy the same Reformation fame as Thomas Becon. Readers can hypothesize about her status and background, yet any speculations about Wheathill beyond her work are built on shaky ground. If we take the minor details of her life as revealed in the first few pages of her text at face value, we can deduce that she was an unmarried gentlewoman writing in the reformed tradition. The complexities of her work show that she was at least somewhat educated since she exhibited impressive biblical literacy and, according to Colin and Jo Atkinson, may have used a complex organizational structure typically reserved for the most educated men.¹ Published by the same printer two years after Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrones*, Anne Wheathill’s *Handfull of Holesome (though homelie) Hearbs* was directed to a primarily female audience, but her prayers were viable for any believer “devoutlie disposed.”

As a woman writing a religious work, Wheathill may have been especially aware of the role she was expected to play and the rules of the society in which she lived.

¹ Colin and Jo Atkinson, “Anne Wheathill’s *A Handfull of Holesome (though Homelie) Hearbs* (1584): The First English Gentlewoman’s Prayer Book,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996), 670. Colin and Jo Atkinson, “Numerical Patterning in Anne Wheathill’s *A Handfull of Holesome (though Homelie) Hearbs* (1584),” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 40 (1998), 5.

While Wheathill recognized and navigated patriarchal standards of her day and acted within gender boundaries solidified by the writing of her predecessors, including Thomas Becon and Thomas Bentley, the body of her text does not categorize women in such obvious ways. She argued that her devotion, rather than her sex, made her a loyal servant to God, one capable of such a weighty work. She repeatedly referred to her work as a “presumption” and wrote, “Whereupon of the learned I may be judged grosse and unwise; in presuming, without the counsel or help of anie, to take such an enterprise in hand: nevertheless, as GOD dooth know, I have done it with a good zeale, according to the weakness of my knowledge and capacitie.”² The emphasis on her Christian competency overcomes any limitations imposed by her sex, and number of scholars readily assert that Wheathill is intentionally using her devotion to subvert natural gender order, just as she uses her “state of virginity” to claim further authority. Wheathill may have intentionally framed her work as a product of her “good zeal” validated by her virginal voice, yet her text does not challenge typical gendered language patterns. Wheathill implied that she had read other devotional books or prayer manuals when comparing her own published prayers to those of others who may have been more learned or of a higher social status: “But without presumption I may boldie saie, *they* have not sought them with a more willing hart and fervent mind; nor more to the advancement of Gods glorie, & the desire of acceptation, than I have doon.”³ Prompted by her desire for God’s glory and acceptance and possibly inspired by other devotional works, Wheathill constructed a

² Anne Wheathill, 1584, *A Handfull of Holesome (though homelie) Hearbs, gathered out of the goodlie garden of God’s most holie word; for the common benefit and comfortable exercize of all such are devoutie disposed*, edited by Betty Travistky and Patrick Cullen, (Ashgate, 1996), a.iiijv.

³ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, a.iiijv. Emphasis added.

different kind of manual that did not rely on life stages, social circumstances, or a reader's gender. While she does present a movement away from the strict categorization of women seen in *The Flour of Godly Praiers* and "Lamp Five" of *The Monument of Matrones*, Wheathill maintained two important patterns seen in Bentley and Becon's text: the use of masculine grammar and the presentation of limiting biblical models.

To the disappointment of feminist critics, Wheathill did not openly criticize the limitations placed on women writers, rather she accepted her world's gender guidelines and worked within them. Even if Wheathill did not plainly comment on women's role in private prayer, her manual shows continuity with those written by earlier male authors rather than resistance. Wheathill's manual lacks a female voice, and it contains patterns of masculine language although she states that it was written specifically for women,. These subtle limitations on female readers may have kept women from seeing themselves in Wheathill's prayer practice, yet she also placed them firmly within a general audience, right alongside their male counterparts, without awarding them special esteem or condemnation. For Bentley and Becon, reading women were a separate group owned, operated, and defined by a larger male-dominated religious culture. For Wheathill, women are neither singled out for their failings nor favored for their piety; they simply exist within a "faithfull congregation" that is typically gendered male.

One may expect a female author of prayer to carry on the trend of presenting prayers for pregnant women or tempted maids, yet Wheathill, as a single woman concerned with the human condition rather than the female condition, did not highlight the specific circumstances of women. The singular sixteenth-century prayer manual writer who could empathize with virginal maids maintaining their chastity for matrimony

did not discuss the dangers of the single life, the all-consuming shame of sexual sin, or the necessity of marriage. Similarly, Wheathill, as a woman, may have understood the anxiety of potentially facing the dangers of childbirth, yet she is silent on the subject. Bentley and Becon, who could rest easy knowing they would never have to face such the travail, highlighted maternal mortality in their texts and portrayed pregnant women as especially needful of proper prayer education. Although her prayer book was addressed to women, her prayers did not express any special concern with their circumstances or place them in a separate category than their male Christian counterparts.

As her lack of attention to women's life stages and specific struggles shows, Wheathill did not categorize women in the same ways that Bentley and Becon did before her, yet her scripted prayers still represent women in subtle and limited ways. One may have to look in between the lines and read her prayers closely to find her commentary on gender and women's place in prayer, but her heavy use of masculine pronouns and presentation of predominantly male biblical examples shows that while the text may have been addressed to women it favored male readers and lacked a female-friendly voice. Wheathill's work promotes the place of women in the body of believers, making them *almost* equal participants; however, as much as we may want to see her as brazenly subverting gender order by producing a text within a genre dominated by male writers, her willingness to work within strict gender constructs and habit of favoring male subjects over female ones shows that she was a woman of her time, working within its limitations. Writing within the same tradition and producing the same kind of didactic religious text, she operated differently than Becon and Bentley, and her navigation of

gender norms reveals that her priority was closeness with God, rather than the promotion of female Christians.

Historiography

One would expect an average laywoman with a vague social status to work within the cultural norms of her society. However, the historiography repeatedly presents her as a woman writer outside of convention, who consciously manipulated readers to accept her authority while she unabashedly subverted gender order by doing a man's job.

Wheathill acted contrary to gender norms by writing a published prayer script, an activity typically reserved for men, yet scholars tend to represent her pleas for legitimacy and efforts to establish credibility as her only aim, focusing heavily on the preface. While Wheathill should be admired for her rhetorical ability and willingness to place herself in a vulnerable position as a woman writer, modern scholars must be wary of their wishful thinking and see her as she would have seen herself. The hunt for agency or authority in Wheathill's work distracts from other important rhetorical and religious gender implications.

Colin and Jo Atkinson have published a number of articles on Anne Wheathill's prayer manual. The Atkinsons are two of the foremost scholars on late sixteenth-century published prayer, and most researchers cannot approach Bentley or Wheathill without nodding to the Atkinsons' contributions. All of the Atkinsons' work on Wheathill focuses on the idea that her text was intentionally organized according to the hexaemeral tradition, and placing Wheathill in this tradition is not out of the question, as her prayers do number forty-nine and contain images alluding to the sacred number seven, the foundation of the hexaemeral pattern. In their first published article about Wheathill, the

Atkinsons explain who Wheathill may have been and how she asserted authority through her use of this complex numerical structure. As with most researchers who discuss Anne Wheathill, they are concerned with reconstructing her identity and exploring how she established credibility.

In their second article, they primarily explain how and why devotional materials for women existed in late sixteenth-century England. Placing Wheathill's *Handfull of Holesome* alongside *A Tablet for A Gentlewoman* (1574), Nicholas Breton's *Auspicante Jehova* (1594) and Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones* (1582), the Atkinsons provide invaluable context and a firm foundation for later scholars, yet they do not venture very deep into the texts themselves. They argue that these prayer manuals reflect the changing attitudes towards women in post-Reformation England, and they are "rich sources for the study of attitudes to women in general, and to their spiritual life in particular, in the late sixteenth century."⁴ However, their analysis of Wheathill shows a preoccupation with the same two themes: her identity and her acquisition of authority. They mention that Wheathill was not concerned with the "requirements of wives, mothers, and widows," but a majority of their analysis reiterates their earlier concern with the hexaemeral structure. Their final article expands and defends their argument that Wheathill's prayer manual not only contains, but is reliant upon, the complex number based pattern. They write,

Anne Wheathill was obviously not university trained, not male, and yet she has used the hexaemeral tradition as an organizing pattern... Whatever the case, it is clear that Anne Wheathill is an important figure, not just as the first gentlewoman to write a prayer book addressed to women, but as a sophisticated writer able to

⁴ Colin and Jo Atkinson, "Four Prayer Books Addressed to Women during the Reign of Elizabeth I," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60 (1997): 408.

exploit the arithmetical and exegetical learning of the Renaissance to structure her prayer book.⁵

The Atkinsons' introductions and arguments help establish prayer manuals as sources worthy of scholarly analysis, yet the study of Wheathill and her devotional text must be expanded beyond questions about her identity or her search for authorial credibility.

Before the Atkinsons made Wheathill and Bentley their primary research focus, Elaine V. Beilin addressed Wheathill's prayer manual and her place among female authors in *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*. Beilin provides a brief introduction to Wheathill's work and examines how her identity as a woman influenced her writing.⁶ Where Beilin provides an introduction of works written by women, Suzanne Hull compiles a bibliography of texts written for women in *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient*. She does not delve into close readings or in depth analysis, yet Hull mentions Wheathill in passing, stating that *A Handfull of Holesome* existed as one of a number of devotional texts in the sixteenth-century.⁷ She concisely describes Wheathill's prayer manual as a "Small general prayer book printed in decorative borders...[and] somewhat less 'wholesome' in content than the title indicates..."⁸ Both Beilin and Hull provide constructive starting points for further analyses of Wheathill, but

⁵ Atkinson and Atkinson, "Numerical Patterning in Anne Wheathill's *A Handfull of Holesome*," 20.

⁶ Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1987), 54-55. Of the limited number of scholars who deal with Wheathill and her prayers, Beilin presents her as she most likely would have seen herself. "Her work seems designed to help and comfort the godly in their daily trials. Despite her initial self-deprecation, her goals are clear, to reach her chosen audience with Scripture and to direct their prayers."

⁷ Suzanne Hull, *Chaste Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 92.

⁸ Hull, *Chaste Silent & Obedient*, 214. The prayers 'against the enemies of the church,' and 'A praier wherein the afflicted person praith against his enemies, that God would turne upon them his judgements' make the manual less "wholesome."

neither adequately address how she did or did not represent her fellow women and target audience.

Anne Wheathill's prayer manual takes a different form as an instructive script than other women's prayer books in the late sixteenth-century. However, Patricia Demers places her alongside other better-known writers to show how women were aware of each other's work and used their writing practices to link their private and public lives.⁹ Demers also questions the Atkinsons' earlier numerical interpretation, and suggests that "instead of having to impose the often awkward fit of symbolism of the number seven," the biblical images Wheathill used connect all of her prayers as a "woven tissue of repeated iconic allusions."¹⁰ Demers uses Wheathill mainly to illuminate and support her analyses of other writers, such as Katherine Parr and Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit, but her treatment of *A Handfull of Holesome* shows an awareness of Wheathill's importance in the devotional tradition and a willingness to engage with earlier historiography in a meaningful way. While Demers moves beyond the preface into the body of the text, the discussion is so brief that it simply cannot explore the depth of Wheathill's work.

Amplifying the same preoccupation with the preface and the establishment of authority as earlier researchers, Julie A. Eckerle discusses Wheathill's introduction in "Prefacing Texts, Authorizing Authors, and Constructing Selves: The Preface as Autobiographical Space." Highlighting Wheathill's claims of virginity, "good zeale," and pure intentions alongside other female author's prefaces, Eckerle explains the

⁹ Patricia Demers, *Women's Writing in English: Early Modern England*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 112-118.

¹⁰ Demers, *Women's Writing*, 119.

significance of the preface for women. She argues that because the preface is also marginalized, it becomes a place where marginalized individuals can construct themselves, speak more openly, and say things that do not belong in the body of the text.¹¹ Concerned with questions of power and authority, Eckerle argues that the preface was the arena where women writers could manipulate readers and authorize themselves. Wheathill undoubtedly uses her preface to apologize for her feminine weakness, yet authors like Becon, Bentley, and popular seventeenth-century authors, such as Lewis Bayly and Richard Allestree, also use the preface to explain their weakness and reasons for writing. Compensating for human weakness in the preface of devotional texts was not a uniquely female pattern, even if women were markedly more apologetic, specifically for their sex, than their male contemporaries.

The most thorough treatment of Wheathill's prayer book appears in Susan M. Felch's essay, "'Half a Scripture Woman': Heteroglossia and Female Authorial Agency in Prayers by Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit, Anne Lock, and Anne Wheathill." Like a majority of her colleagues, Felch analyzes women's writing, specifically prose prayer, to find how women assert agency through the manipulation of religious constructs and texts. Felch insightfully argues that women's use of "psalm collages" or "psalm paraphrases" placed them within the Reformation's *sola scriptura* tradition and gave them permission to write. Some may argue that their rephrasing or heavy use of the Psalms make their works unoriginal or uncreative, yet Felch shows how a thorough understanding of scripture, eschatological themes, and exegetical technique allowed sixteenth-century

¹¹ Julie A. Eckerle, "Prefacing Texts, Authorizing Authors, and Constructing Selves: The Preface as Autobiographical Space," in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 98-99.

women with the skills necessary to insert themselves into the devotional tradition made popular by printing. Felch's analysis highlights Wheathill's masterful literary hand while maintaining her identity as a sixteenth-century woman. Felch writes, "Such integral reworkings of the Biblical text not only give Wheathill's prayers a distinctive and graceful voice but also witness the extent to which she had absorbed the language and cadence of biblical English—the extent to which it had become an internally persuasive and therefore creative discourse."¹² Felch's reading of Wheathill and her contemporaries is insightful and informative, yet it maintains the pattern of searching women's texts primarily for literary agency and the elevation of the authorial self. Felch's exploration of Wheathill's use of scripture does not show how the implementation of biblical stories and figures also gendered her readers male.

The most recent scholar to include Wheathill is Femke Molekamp, who argues for early modern women's authorial agency based on their use of the scripture in *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing*.¹³ While Wheathill is not a central figure in the text, Molekamp draws her into the analysis where she supports the concept of authorial agency. Molekamp also infers that the "others" alluded to in the dedication are other women of varying social classes. They very well could have been male readers, and I would argue that based on the preferred audience revealed by the gendered grammar throughout the prayers, these "others" were more likely men. Molekamp also uses allusions to worldly problems from the prayers to reconstruct

¹² Susan Felch, "Half a Scripture Woman': Heterglossia and Female Authorial Agency in Prayers by Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit, Anne Lock, and Anne Wheathill," in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500-1625*, ed. Micheline White, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 166.

¹³ Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

Wheathill's identity in ways that reinforce the search for legitimacy and authorial agency. For example, Molekamp stresses Wheathill's age and status to show that her female readership solidified her credibility. Molekamp also takes references to poverty and parentless as possible clues to Wheathill's identity. However, if the strategy of searching the prayers for clues about Wheathill's identity is maintained, we must take seriously her statements about her "old age" or reflections on the days of her youth.¹⁴ Molekamp presents women's search for legitimacy as their primary goal and purpose for relying on scripture. Wheathill may have established herself as a Christian writer inspired by God's word and prompted by "good zeale," yet her prayer scripts maintain traditional gender boundaries, an acquiescence with patriarchal patterns of prose prayer, while placing women within a general readership grammatically identified as male.

In the last decade, Wheathill has been further included in the historiography about women's writing and the search for Shakespeare's sister, yet the representations of her and her prayer manual often overlook her primary goals in search of her support of women's authority to write. Scholars spend most of their time in her introduction trying to answer the same question the Atkinsons asked years before: How did Wheathill gain authority in a male dominated religious genre and culture? This thesis chapter argues that there are other questions and analytical constructs that can be applied to Wheathill's work to show how women were perceived and portrayed in early-modern England. Wheathill self-identified primarily as a devout member of the elect and secondly as a woman, and her main concern was the salvation of souls, not the acceptance of woman's writing. Treating her as one of Bentley's well-behaved women shows how female subjects were

¹⁴ Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 102.

treated by a female author who played by the rules and wrote in the same vein as Becon, Bentley, and a number of other prayer writers. Wheathill did not rely heavily on scripture in her prayers simply to establish authority, as some suggest, and she did not apologize for her sex solely to gain her readers' trust.

Gendered Language and Preferred Audience

Many of Anne Wheathill's prayers appear to apply to genderless subjects, dealing with the questions, concerns, and joys of any Christian who yearned for a closer relationship with Christ. Her prayer manual is made more notable because of her sex and seemingly average social standing, yet she maintains many of the traditions established by earlier authors such as Becon and Bentley. Bentley's *Monument* was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth and intended for women's use, and the content makes it clear that the prayers, relating to specifically female concerns, were meant to be employed by female readers only. Becon's *Flour of Godly Praiers* was dedicated to a woman, Anne Seymour, yet his prayers were viable for a general audience, even if that audience appeared as mostly male. Wheathill both dedicates her book to a female audience and intends it for their specific use. The first line of the *Epistle Dedicatorie* reads, "To all Ladies, Gentlewoman, and others, which love true religion and vertue, and be devoutlie disposed."¹⁵ A few lines later, she dedicates her book to the same audience. "Lo heare I dedicate to all good Ladies, Gentlewomen, and others, who have a desire to invoke and call upon the name of the Lord."¹⁶ Where this could be seen as an exclusion of male readers, the rest of the text shows that her book was viable not *only* for a female

¹⁵ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, A1^R.

¹⁶ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, A2^V.

audience, but for male supplicants as well. Male readers may not have used a text addressed to women when there were a number of other prayer manuals in circulation, but Wheathill implies her expectation that both men and women might read her text when she recognizes the need for the approval of both sexes. “With the good judgement and liking of all my *bretheren* and *sisters* in the Lord, I shall think my time most happy bestowed.”¹⁷

The “others” in Wheathill’s dedication could theoretically be anyone that was not a Lady or Gentlewoman. Molekamp assumes them to be other women of lower social strata, but the male reader compatible language throughout the prayers themselves implies that men were these ambiguous “others.” Molekamp asserts that the differentiation is based on class rather than gender: “The book is dedicated to aristocratic ladies and gentlewomen, as well as to other lower ranking women.” Molekamp does this so that the reaffirming power to solidify Wheathill’s authorial agency lies with a uniformly female audience, giving women the most power in the writer-reader equation.¹⁸ Going beyond the preface to the prayers themselves shows that men would have found themselves in the text more than women. In fact, Wheathill consistently uses masculine pronouns when a singular first person pronoun is necessary. Men could have picked up the small book, turned to a prayer about the depravity of humankind and justice of God, and found a familiar voice employing masculine pronouns and alluding to male Christians. Of course, terms such as “man” and “mankind” can be used to refer to humanity in general, but Wheathill also uses them in the individual sense, applying “he”

¹⁷ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, A3^v. Emphasis added.

¹⁸ Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 102.

and “him” to the singular supplicant. Even when masculine pronouns are used to apply to sinners and saints in general, the use of a gendered identifier maintains Becon’s use of male-friendly rhetoric.¹⁹

Wheathill borrows images directly from scripture, and her prayer manual as a whole is stylistically patterned after the Psalms. In most of the prayers, Wheathill likens the speaker to a biblical figure or uses phrases drawn from her primary source, *the goodlie garden of God’s most holie word*. Wheathill was concerned with individuals, both male and female, as she expresses in the nineteenth prayer: “Thy providence, O God, dooth not onlelie watch over the church in generall, but also over everie member thereof: for thy word, O Lord is easie to find...”²⁰ In this statement, the key to the individual’s connection with God is the accessibility of scripture, and not just for male readers, but “everie member.” As Beilin noted, Wheathill often appears to “assume the role of preacher” in her prayers, and some sections appear to be more sermonic than others.²¹ The clearest example of this is prayer twenty-seven, “A praier unto the sonne of God, wherein the soule is comforted, by the rehearsal of Christ’s manifold benefits.”²² The title of the prayer suggests that the speaker is the supplicant and the audience is Jesus, yet the audience of the script is actually the speaker’s soul. The speaker directs his words to his own soul, “rehearsing” the many benefits afforded by Christ. “O, my soule,

¹⁹ Hilda Smith notes how men and women were portrayed and treated differently in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Men were often understood to represent humankind, while women were discussed in more specialized terms, usually in the context of their sexual or domestic identities. *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics, and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 39.

²⁰ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 46^v. For the order of prayers in Wheathill’s manual, see the Appendix, page 134.

²¹ Beilin, *Redeeming Eve*, 55.

²² Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 67^r.

inforce thee with all thy strength to set forth the noble praises of the Lord thy God and redeemer... Consider, my soule, first, the miserable estate wherein thou wast brought by sinne.’²³ This eight-page prayer is a sermon, preached from the page by Wheathill through the prayer speaker. The rest of the prayer outlines the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, reminding the reader of the centrality of the trinity and the reward of heaven. This prayer-sermon draws themes from Colossians 3 and reflects its gendered language. Wheathill transliterated the text from Colossians into her work, and then the speaker reads it directly to the soul. With emphasis on the inadequacies of the body itself, Wheathill writes,

Wherefore my soul, whilst thou art in this present life, joined with thy fraile and hevie carcase, give thanks lovinglie to thy gentle redeemer, for his unspeakable kindnesse. His grace is readie at hand at thy call, fight therefore manfullie and mightily, against all sinful concupiscence and vice; put off the old man, and leave all the works of darkness; put on the new man, arme thee with the armor of light.²⁴

To “put off the old man” is taken directly from scripture, and its masculine representation of the new birth is echoed in Wheathill’s manual. She writes that the soul along with its earthly “carcase” should fight “manfullie and mightilie,” emphasizing the masculine action of fiercely resisting sin. We have established that both men and women could apply Wheathill’s words; and while men were included in the “others,” her dedication was primarily to women. Wheathill instructed her readers, male and female alike, to fight “manfully,” applying a masculine adjectival to all of her readership indirectly through her sermon-prayer. Wheathill may not have constructed femininity or set the boundaries for women’s behavior as clearly as Becon and Bentley, yet she repeatedly describes proper

²³ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 67^R-68^V.

²⁴ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 69^R.

prayer practice in masculine terms. In a work intended specifically for women, female friendly language and biblical role models are strangely absent. Anne Wheathill may have done what was traditionally a man's job by writing a prayer manual, but the body of the text suggests that she maintained patterns of gendered language in her manual, rather than broke through them.

The first prayer in Wheathill's manual, "A praier for the morning," is general and without gendered grammar. Dwelling on the themes of human inadequacy and God's constant presence, Wheathill's introductory entry does not establish a pattern of prayer particularly preoccupied with women's sins. Rather, the first prayer establishes a theme that dominates a majority of the forty-nine prayers: awe of God's wrath and love of his mercy. The "mightie maker and preserver" is likened to the "diligent watchman," and Wheathill explains the importance of the trinity and God's multifaceted nature in the prayer's closing.²⁵ The second prayer, "A praier for the remission of sins, for victorie against Satan, and for the inward light of the soule," presents a male subject, in accordance with the biblical text that inspired it. Throughout her manual, Anne Wheathill does not directly identify her biblical sources in the margins as many earlier prayer books did, and the Atkinsons credit this exclusion to her expectation that her readers would be learned enough to know from where her allusions were drawn.²⁶ Kate Narveson explains that the exclusion of marginal notes and use of a restrictive border implied a controlled and traditional reading space appropriate for women readers.²⁷

²⁵ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 1^v.

²⁶ Atkinson and Atkinson, "Anne Wheathill's *A Handfull of Holesome*," 662.

²⁷ Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 169.

Wheathill's repeated allusions to God's elect and human depravity place her within reformed tradition, so she may have used the same translation of the Bible as Thomas Bentley, the Geneva Bible of 1560.²⁸ Susan Felch assumes that Wheathill was influenced by multiple sources, most likely the Great Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the Geneva Bible, and possibly the Taverner-Capito Psalter.²⁹ Wherever she drew her Biblical inspiration, Wheathill maintained the gendered language from passages like Ezekiel 18, even if her supposed audience was mostly female. In plea that God forgive the speaker for service to the devil, Wheathill instructed her readers to say, "But trusting assuredlie in thy promise made to me, and all people, by the mouth of thy prophet Ezechiel, that is; If the sinner will turn awaie from all his sins, that he hath committed, and keepe all thy commandments, doubtless he shall live and not die: as for all his sinnes that he did before, thou wilt not think upon them."³⁰ This is the first instance where Wheathill identifies the sinner or speaker with male identifiers. Her target audience, as identified in her dedication and statement of intent, was clearly female, yet men would find a familiar "he" or "him" within her text as her implied preferred audience. This begs the question whether the "others," an unidentified, ambiguous group of readers, were actually the "brethren" whose liking and good judgment she wanted and needed.

²⁸ Beilin, *Redeeming Eve*, 53. Colin B. Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, "Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones* (1582): The First Anglican Prayer Book for Women," *Anglican Theological Review* 74 (June 1992): 407.

²⁹ Felch, "Halff a Scrypture Woman," 163.

³⁰ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 3^v. In the 1560 Geneva Bible, the passage (Ezekiel 18: 21-22) reads: But if the wicked wil returne from all his sinnes that he hathe committed, and keepe all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shal surely live, & shal not dye. All his transgressions that he hathe committed, thei shal not be mantioned unto him, but in his righteousness that he hathe done, he shal live."

In a prayer against temptation, Wheathill prompts her readers to say, “Joine my soule and bodie to thee O god, and confirme me in thine obedience.”³¹ Bentley presented his prayers and the models within them to reinforce the proper obedience and behavior of women within a patriarchal society. Wheathill is more concerned with general and genderless Christian behavior than a particularly female obedience; the “soule and bodie” could be male or female in the context of Wheathill’s fifth prayer. Obedience, in this context, implies disgracing human authorities that may lead the Christian astray and focusing only on the will of God as revealed through prayer. The speaker says, “I respect no man, but set thee always before me, as the cheefe helper and judge of my doings.” The “man” here refers to anyone who could lead the reader away from God, but this echoes the ideas in the preface, where Wheathill placed her duty to God above her subservient female position. In the same prayer, she writes, “There is no acception of persons with thee, but all people that feare thee, and worke righteousnesse, thou will accept.”³² While Wheathill does not categorize her female readers as obviously as Becon or Bentley, her subtle use of gendered language alongside statements of equality before God show that women were theoretically equal in the imaginative realm of prayer, but the real world words themselves favored a male audience.

In the same prayer, Wheathill casts the wicked and self-serving with male identifiers alongside the good Christian speaker. The sins bemoaned by Wheathill’s readers are ambiguous and general; and where specific sins are spelled out, they typically appear as pride or the placement of self above God. Wheathill does not connect specific

³¹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 10^R.

³² Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 11^V.

sins with either sex in particular; rather she presents repentant supplicants and self-serving sinners with the same masculine language. Whereas Becon presented the sin of lust with markedly feminine language and Bentley stressed the all-consuming nature of sexual sin for women, Wheathill did not draw on the negative stereotypes of women and portray them in her manual. She does not confine women to strict categories or social groups like her predecessors, and women do not appear as particularly dangerous or vulnerable. Rather, she presents humanity in traditional male form, which has the sinner and the saint both manifesting as male subjects in her work. She writes, “Man is cause of his owne destruction...Neither is there anie that can speake a word, except thou give it to him, nor none can save himself by his own labour, no any worldie means.”³³ Her language releases women from the sexual and domestic boundaries imposed by Becon and Bentley, yet an identifiable female voice is conspicuously absent considering her intended audience. The “prototypicality” of Wheathill’s speakers show that, while she may not have seen women as especially sinful, the perfect prayers were ideally spoken by a man.³⁴

Most of Wheathill’s prayers are reliant upon an individual speaker who calls out alone, using the singular, first person “I,” asking that God hear “my supplications,” and self-identifying with singular phrases that imply one subject or speaker, like “this miserable sinner.” In the next prayer, “A prairer for faith, and for God’s helpe and assistance at his good pleasure,” Wheathill transitions to a plural voice, asking that God “looke favourablie upon *us*.” The “man” referred to in this prayer is clearly more

³³ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 12^R.

³⁴ Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

associated with anyone included in the “us,” or any individual within the “devoutlie disposed” reading audience. Whereas in other places Wheathill uses “he” and “him” in connection with an individual sinner, the man is portrayed as “us” and “we.” “For when all mans helpe dooth faith, thou O God wilt helpe us, even as it were by a miracle; if we call upon thee with an upright conscience.”³⁵ The remainder of the prayer refers to the collective readership with gender-neutral possessive terms such as “thy children” and “thy people.” In this prayer for faith, the reader is not identified by his or her identity in relation to other people or gender, but by God’s ownership and favor.

The prayer voice then shifts back into first person singular, and the reader is directed to pray for justice, humility, and patience. In the “Praier for patience in trouble, and constant expectation of Gods goodness,” Wheathill again echoes the importance of genuine Christian devotion over that of social norms as found in the preface. In the preface, she recognizes that both men and women needed to approve of her work; but in the tenth prayer, only the men reappear. “It lieth in thy mightie power, to governe the hearts of all, thou O god preferrest and preservest them, thich are zealous of thy glorie...” These qualifications apply to “the hearts of all,” yet the prayer goes on to highlight male subjects, “and have a care and love towards their *brethren*.”³⁶ While readers may have understood that this “brethren” included sisters as well, the women reading Wheathill’s manual would have encountered more instances of male-friendly language, even if they were supposed to be the primary readers of the text. Wheathill maintains this pattern in the next prayer “wherein the bountifulness of God is confessed and praised.” Whether the

³⁵ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 12^R.

³⁶ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 26^V.

speaker is requesting competence in Christian practice or expressing direct praise, the subjects acting within the supplications tend to be male, rather than female or genderless.

Thy bountifulnesse, Lord, to all mankind, is man[i]ifest, that no reasonable creature can saie, but that he hath tasted thereof: for what good thing hath man that he hath not received of thee? Thou art good to all men, but speciallie to those that have an upright conscience, and straight heart, a mind not bowing downe to carnall and temporall things, but aspiring unto heavenlie and eternall things.³⁷

Just as in the previous prayer, the necessary behavior or posture can be practiced by all, but the “reasonable creature” who follows God’s law and enjoys the benefits is gendered male.

The thirteenth prayer expressing desire for life after death maintains this pattern, and the speaker prays in first person yet repeatedly refers to the “we” and “us” that makeup the body of believers. These patterns emphasize that Wheathill was not the assumed speaker in these prayers, rather the author providing prayer scripts to readers. Rather than publishing her own personal prayers, which would likely have been more situation-specific with feminine grammar, the speakers in Wheathill’s manual are ambiguous and mostly male. Again, in a request for God’s empowerment, Wheathill’s subjects are implied masculine. “Who so trusteth to his own strength or power, or the helpe of man, is much deveieued, and leaneth to a rotten staffe: contrariwise, he that putteth his trust in thy gracious power, wanteth never succour at need.”³⁸ Rather than representing male and female subjects interchangeably or predominantly female subjects in a text intended primarily for women, the individuals Wheathill constructs in her prayers are almost entirely masculine. References to “mankind” appear regularly in

³⁷ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 26^R.

³⁸ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 33^V.

discussions about the fall in Genesis or the blood of Christ for all humanity, but those generic masculine terms are more clearly applied to both men and women. In the highlighted instances in Wheathill's manual, the "he" appears as a defined individual acting within the imagined world of the prayer. While men were simply included under the catch-all of "others" in the statement of intent, the subtle use of gendered pronouns shows that men would have accessed Wheathill's prayers more easily, whereas women would have to accommodate and alter the male signifiers to make the scripts truly their own. The same pattern of language persists throughout the prayer manual, as the speaker recycles the same themes. In the prayer for the holy spirit's assistance and praise of God's justice, the speaker refers to subjects with general terms. Those God punished are called "anie," "them," "thy children," and they are defined according to God's treatment of them. The pronouns then shift back into the generic masculine, "For whosoever walketh in his vocation, and hath the light of God for his guide, needeth to feare no danger: thy roode and thy staff shall always hold him up."³⁹

The pattern continues throughout the text as the reader moves through the forty-nine prayers that serve varying purposes. In the title of the twenty-sixth prayer, readers encounter masculine pronouns in the title for the first time. The prayer could be said of any speaker, male or female, but the title suggests that the speaker is a man reciting "A praier unto God the father, wherein the sinner openeth *his* greefe of conscience."⁴⁰ While similar in tone to Bentley's lamentations, Wheathill's speakers do not lament specific sin, rather their inherent wickedness and propensity to do wrong. Bentley's categorization of

³⁹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 47^V.

⁴⁰ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 65^R. Emphasis added.

women according to their sexual sin rather than their marital status had no place in Wheathill's work, as all Christians are placed on relatively level ground.

After prayer twenty-six, more implied male speakers appear, such as in the thirty-ninth prayer, "A praier of lamentation, wherein the sinner lamenteth *his* miserable estate, and crieth for mercie."⁴¹ This prayer is the most popular in the historiography because it is one of the few places where Wheathill uses a distinctly feminine image. While the speaker is discussing "*his* miserable estate," he likens himself to a woman in labor. This is the only reference to pregnancy or childbirth that appears in Wheathill's manual apart from two mentions of Christ in the womb of the virgin, and those are not central to the theme of the prayer, rather cursory mentions of his humble beginnings. Using a distinctly feminine simile in a prayer assigned to an implied "he," Wheathill wrote, "I cannot but lament, moorne, and crie for help, as dooth a woman, whose time draweth neere to be delivered of her child; for she can take no rest, till she be discharged of her birthen."⁴² Her inclusion of a childbirth image is not necessarily an attempt to connect with women readers or express her own femininity. The language is drawn directly from a discussion of prayer and deliverance in Isaiah 26:17. Throughout the manual, Wheathill relies on countless biblical symbols and stories to fill her prayers, including the powerful parallel of a woman in labor and a believer in need of deliverance.

Godly Examples and Biblical Ideals

As her prayers have shown, Wheathill was immersed in scripture when she wrote *A Handfull of Holesome*; and while her work most clearly resembles the Psalms, it also

⁴¹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 103^V.

⁴² Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 103^R.

presents a number of biblical characters that readers are prompted to emulate and precedents of hope. Just as Becon presented mostly men as examples for his general audience to follow, Wheathill's scripts usually lead readers to the stories of male biblical figures that exemplified faith and godliness. In his prayer book for women, Bentley relies heavily on the image of Mary Magdalene, the female paradigm of Christ's redemption, but Wheathill never mentions her. Wheathill's penchant for Old Testament male figures may not have been a burden to female readers, and some may have even been empowered by the examples of Abraham or Ezekiel. The female models of prayer and piety from scripture that are included are lauded for their humility, rather than their action. In the opening prayer, the speaker prays, "Illuminate my understanding, that I may lead and frame my life as thou has taught me in thy holie word..."⁴³ Wheathill's presentation of godly examples in the form of male biblical ideals implies that she expected women as well as men to translate those examples into their respective spheres and callings.

The first godly woman, rather two women, to appear in Wheathill's manual are the woman of Canaan and her afflicted daughter, drawn from both Matthew 15 and Mark 7. In a prayer for God's justice and mercy, the woman appears after the speaker asks, "Consider, O God our contrite hearts, and penitent minds, and heare, heale, and amend us." The Canaanite woman who sought Jesus's help with her daughter "miserably vexed by the devil," serves as an example to the reader to ask against all odds and in hope for Christ's intercession. Her calls to Jesus in scripture are set parallel to the speaker's call to God in the prayer script. "Hope biddeth us still to crie and call upon thee for helpe, as

⁴³ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 1^v.

the woman of Canaan cried still upon thy sonne Christ for thy helpe of hir daughter, and at the last was heard to hir own contentation.”⁴⁴ The woman is a biblical example of successful prayer, and her healed daughter is the product of proper prayer. The paragraph containing the woman’s example ends with the highlighting of another instance from scripture: Jesus asking hypothetically if a friend would give away three loaves of bread out of friendship or in response to the asker’s impertinence. This short scene in Luke 11 directly follows what we know as the Lord’s Prayer and leads straight into “knock and the door shall be opened.” Wheathill puts these two moments from the gospels side by side, using a real female character and a hypothetical male character, to show the method and meaning of proper prayer practice. “So we, knocking and calling still doubt not but thou wilt grant through out importunacie, our desires, as he that granted his neighbor three loaves.”⁴⁵ The reader encounters male and female models that ask for healing or sustenance through prayer, and this is one of only three instances in her text where a biblical woman successfully models proper prayer practice.

Throughout *A Handfull of Holesome*, Wheathill draws on images of God the Father and Christ the son as good health that sick sinners must pray for and pursue. This complemented her multiple references to the Good Samaritan, another biblical story that led her to gender the speaker male. In the second prayer, the speaker says to God, “Thou art my life and health,” and later it refers to Christ saying, “Wherefore in thee my hart shall be joifull, and in thy saving health, which is thy sonne Christ out Saviour and

⁴⁴ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 19^v.

⁴⁵ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 19^v.

redeemer.”⁴⁶ Christ is the healer and health, naturally connected with the Samaritan, who saves the wounded man on the road. In connecting biblical figures with the speaker, Wheathill typically uses similes, but her first reference to the Samaritan is more direct. In the fourth prayer or “Evening praier,” Wheathill capitalizes on the image Christ as health, writing, “O Lamb of God, sonne of the father, heare thou me, thou that saiedst; I am thy health and salvation. . . O Lord, *I am the wounded man*, and thou art the good Samaritane.”⁴⁷ A reader would be prompted to pray, “I am the wounded man,” regardless of their sex.

Female figures from scripture are also referenced in the ninth prayer, a prayer specifically for humility. Wheathill references Mary, but does not name her, calling her “the meake virgin.” This is one of her two appearances in the manual as a whole. The second woman, Abigail, acted as an intercessor to the king on behalf of her husband and was effective as a result of her proper humble posture. In a description of the importance of humility, Wheathill presents Mary as an example for all readers to follow for the sake of her humility, highlighting Mary’s submissiveness and providing a traditional model for real women to emulate. Humility itself completes the action of drawing Christ into her womb, rather than Mary accepting the role. Wheathill writes that humility, “one of the most pleasant, most necessarie, and most acceptable, whose power was so great that it *drue* the sonne of God, the second person in dieti, from heaven, into the womb of the meeke virgin, whom of all others he chose to be his mother, for that she was so humble

⁴⁶ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 4.

⁴⁷ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 9^v. Emphasis added.

and virtuous.”⁴⁸ Abigail from 1 Samuel 25 presented a different example of humility, in that her meekness was to God, but not towards her husband. While she is praised for humility, Wheathill only includes the portion of the story where she appears as a successful intercessor, leaving out the sections where she acted outside the will of her husband. “The wise humiltie of Abigael pacified David, when he was minded to kill all the men of the house of her husband.”⁴⁹ This is Abigail’s only appearance in Wheathill’s text, but Bentley includes her as an extended example for women in “The Seventh Lampe of Virginitie,” a collection of scriptural excerpts meant to show women how they should and should not behave. Bentley makes edits to the Biblical text to make Abigail a more proper example, highlighting her humility over her action and her beauty over her wisdom. The changes are subtle, but they place Abigail further in bounds and make her a more acceptable role model for sixteenth-century women.⁵⁰ Wheathill’s Abigail is a proper example of effective humility, and her selective portrayal of the Old Testament model echoes how Bentley altered the text to make Abigail more acceptable for readers.

After these passing references to the Canaanite woman, Mary, and Abigail in the first portion of the prayer manual, the biblical examples that emerge are almost entirely male. The speaker is led to say, “Wherefore I will say with the prophet Daniel; it is I that have offended and sinned against thy majestie.”⁵¹ The speaker frequently equates him or herself with Peter, usually in the times of his doubt. In the eleventh prayer, the speaker

⁴⁸ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 20^R.

⁴⁹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 20^R. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Colin and Jo Atkinson, “Subordinating Women: Thomas Bentley’s use of Biblical Women in *The Monument of Matrones*” *Church History* (1991): 296.

⁵¹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 23^V.

says, “Though I had almost slipped and fallen from thee, yet I did not forsake thee. And thou full mercifullie knowing my good will towards thee, didst hold me up by my right hand, as thou didst Peter, when he was in jepardie of drowning.”⁵² Again, in the twenty-fifth prayer, Peter surfaces as a precedent for God as rescuer, “reach unto me thou helping hand, as thou diddest unto Peter; and as he was thereby made able to walke upon the water, so shall I be able thereby to performe thy holie lawe.”⁵³ Wheathill leads her readers to empathize with those men from the Bible who suffered or doubted but were eventually redeemed. In one of the most eloquent moments in her prayer manual, Wheathill equates the praying reader with a wrestling Jacob:

If we sowe with heaviness, we shall reape with gladness; if we perservere good and strong champions heere in batell, we shall for our reward behond thy glorious face, in thy heavenlie mansion...For this we make humble petition to thee, that art God of Jacob, who wrestled with thine angel, and prevailed; whose name whose name thou diddest change and called him Israel, that is, the feare or beholder of God. Even so make me a strong wrestler against mine enemies in this world, that I may after this life behold thy incomprehensible dietie, to the full contentation of both my soul and body.⁵⁴

The reader requests to be made a “strong wrestler,” and paints the worldly and spiritual struggle as a battle. Wheathill presents men, such as Jacob, who changed upon encountering God, and she expects her readers to have a similar experience. In a prayer against the “enemies of the Church,” Wheathill draws from both the Old and New Testaments to show how those enemies could be turned into allies, potential the readers share. Wheathill’s connection between a Babylonian king from Daniel 3 and the conversion of Saul into Paul from Acts 9 shows that, through time, God maintains the

⁵² Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 28^v.

⁵³ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 64^R.

⁵⁴ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 33.

same redemptive power. Her mostly male models are intended to be both examples and encouragers for readers. “Then will they say as Nabucadonosor [Nebuchadnezzar] said, after his punishment; Honour and praise be unto the Lord...Cruell Saul was touched of thy hand, and became Paul, a welbeloved apostle, through the helpe of thy grace...”⁵⁵

David serves a similar purpose in the twenty-first prayer as the speaker prays, “Since we being burthened with the affects of worldlie pleasures, and also with other cares and troubles, can by no means ascend to thee...we have no remedie, but with the prophet David now to lift the eies of our harts and minds towards thee and to crie for helpe...”⁵⁶

Wheathill’s favorite biblical figure is Abraham, and he makes his debut half way through *A Handfull of Holesome*. After his first appearance in the twenty-ninth prayer, “a praier for the increase of faith,” he is referenced more than any other individual in the prayer manual. As an example of extreme saving faith, Abraham and the promises made to him are a steady theme throughout the second half of Wheathill’s work. Introducing Abraham, Wheathill writes and the speaker prays, “Heaven and earth shall perish, rather than thy word and promise shalbe unperformed.” Abraham is depicted as an especially godly father to Isaac and a perfect example of faith, which made him a father to all believers and a parallel to Christ. As the ideal image of faith and fatherhood, Abraham would be more adaptable for men who read Wheathill, and women would have had to adapt the image to apply to their own roles as women, mothers, and wives. “By faith Abraham was justified, and by faith he was readie to make sacrafice of his onlie begotten sonne Isaac...And being fullie persuaded by thy holy scripture, I believe in thee my most

⁵⁵ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 42^v-43^r.

⁵⁶ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 52R.

mightie God...”⁵⁷ Abraham appears as a precedent for effective prayer in the twenty-ninth section of *A Handfull of Holesome*, and readers are directed to follow his example, even in the worst of situations. Abraham is repeatedly held up as the an example of proper prayer in perfect faith; and even in a prayer manual aimed specifically at women, a paternal male role-model emerges as the primary example for them to follow. Wheathill wrote of God, “For he did not refuse the praier of Abraham when he was entreated for the wicked Sodomites, if there could have been found ten righteous in the citie: how much more wilt thou grant the praiers of the goldie, when they call upon thee, either for themselves or for the preservation of thy church?”⁵⁸

Abraham is referenced again in the thirtieth prayer, and drawn from Genesis 25, he is shown interacting with the sons he sired with ambiguous female characters, his concubines. Wheathill uses Abraham’s favor for Isaac to parallel God’s favor for his children, and she writes, “Abraham gave gifts to the sonnes of his concubines, and sent them awaie; but unto Isaac, he gave his possessions, and all he had: So the Lord, to the wicked thou givest temporall things, but for thy faithful thou reservest thy everlasting heavenlie inheritance.”⁵⁹ Abraham appears twice more throughout the prayer manual, typically in a paternal role that best illustrated his good faith.⁶⁰ The godly could be any person within the true body of believers, male or female, but the examples they were directed to follow were predominantly male. Wheathill presents Abel, Job, Noah, Daniel,

⁵⁷ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 62^v.

⁵⁸ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 79^v.

⁵⁹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 79^v.

⁶⁰ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 121^v & 122^r.

Moses, Jonah, Samuel, Abraham, David, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Paul, Peter, and other men from the Bible to show how proper prayer could impact the individual.

Along with the Canannite woman, Mary, and Abigail, Wheathill presents other biblical women in limited ways that corresponded with sixteenth-century gender boundaries. Job's wife appears as a stumbling block for the suffering saint, and she is a counterexample to Job's faith. Moses is frequently praised as an example of faith and proper godly conduct; and in one instance he is lauded for resisting the temptations of Egypt and refusing to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter. She is not depicted as a rescuer or instrument, rather a weight representing Egypt that could have kept Moses from his divine destiny.

For I desire to live but onlie to please thee, as thy servant Moses did, who was brought up with the daughter of Pharao, and taken as hir sonne; where he might have live still in much wealth, if he would. But when he was great through faith, he refused to be called hir sonne, and chose rather to suffer adversitie with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasure of sinner for a while.⁶¹

She, like Job's wife, is one of the few women depicted in *A Handfull of Holesome*, and she represents a potential barrier between God's faithful and his will. The last woman included in Wheathill's work fills the same role; Potiphar's wife, the temptress from Genesis 39, is likened to the Egyptian bondage of the Israelites, the lions encountered by Daniel, and the Sodomites that Lot flees from. In the forty-fifth prayer, "a praier wherein is shewed how stranglie preserved, and how blessed they are that trust in God: the mercie of God towards sinners is declared," Wheathill provides a list of godly men and the dangers they were spared while executing God's will. Wheathill described Joseph's narrow escape as an example of God's kindness, writing, "Thou Lord of mercie,

⁶¹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 115^R.

savedst...Joseph from the danger of his wicked lady and mistres.”⁶² As the last biblical woman depicted in Wheathill’s manual, Potiphar’s wife was also one of Bentley’s wayward women of corrupt company.

Women could have been empowered and inspired by the examples of men such as Abraham and Joseph, but the prevailing presence of male exemplars reinforces the pattern that men were cast the best prayers in these scripts. However, Wheathill’s reliance on the men of the Bible was not all negative for women. In all of her descriptions of the fall in Genesis, Wheathill favors Adam as the primary perpetrator.⁶³ In fact, Eve only appears once, and she goes unnamed. Adam is one of Wheathill’s most frequently invoked characters. He typically appears in the garden, initiating the fall of humankind, and he usually appears alone. Only once in the twenty-first prayer does Wheathill include the first woman, and she acts within a “they” who disobeyed together, rather than a singular she who initiated the fall. Unlike many contemporary accounts, Eve does not appear as the primary sinner and the temptress of her husband, an intellectual inheritance produced by a long history of societal conceptions about women.⁶⁴ In this way, Wheathill’s exclusion of biblical women improves their position, and women are not depicted as eternally compensating for mistake of the first mother and wife by being ideal mothers and wives. The woman appears as Adam’s wife, but she plays no primary role in the fall, and she fades from the story as the spotlight shifts back onto the “man” and his role in sin and salvation.

⁶² Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 126^v.

⁶³ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 18^v, 55^r, 92^v, 112^v.

⁶⁴ Jean Higgins, “Myth of Eve: The Temptress,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976): 639.

O father of heaven, of power almightie, which with thine onlie word diddest create and make all the whole world, and all for the profit and service of man...induing him with a reasonable soul, and all the powers thereof, thou also diddest put him in the pleasant garden of paradise, excepting nothing from him, but the eating of the onlie tree of knowledge of good and evil: and further, for his helpe, comfort, and companie, of a ribbe of his side thou madest for him a woman, and gavest hir to him to be his wife. They had they instructions given them, and the lawe of life for an heritage...⁶⁵

As Adam emerges as the primary player in the aforementioned “they.” Adam, as a singular “he” and the embodiment of mankind, transitions into the man on the road whom the Samaritan saved, giving Wheathill another opportunity to connect the victim and savior in the parable with the speaker and the healer, Christ. She also includes a direct reference to Romans 5, where Adam brought the first sin and thus death, and Christ brought its end. Removing Eve from the story or presenting her as simply her husband’s “comfort and companie” emphasizes the presence and role of Adam, the first man. This allows Wheathill to smoothly transition into the story of Christ as the Samaritan. The sinful speaker in Wheathill’s prayers is again prompted to say and believe, “I am the wounded man.”

But their frailty was such, that they, through a small inticement, chose evill, and left the good. They left life, and chose death. Thus Lord, through sin, and breaking of thy commandments, man lost the freewill that was given him in his creation, and purchased death to all his posteritie. In the waie as he went to Jerusalem, he fell into the hands of theeves, who hurting and wounding him sore, departed, leaving him halfe dead; so that he could have helpe of none, but only of the good Samaritan, who, as he passed by the same waie, powred wine and oile into his wounds, and too the cure of him. This onelie Samaritan was thy deare Sonne Christ, which tooke upon him all the iniquities of mankind, and laid them on his backe by his death, purging and cleansing him, not onelie from the originall sin of our father, Adam, but also from all our sins which we commit from time to time...For as by Adam, death came to mankind, so by Jesus was mankind restored to life.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 51r.

⁶⁶ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 50^R-52^V.

Throughout Wheathill's manual, the speaker is prompted to reiterate the story of Adam and his fall from grace to highlight the goodness of Christ. Casting both Adam and Christ as singular characters to foil each other within the redemption narrative, leaving little room for the interruption of Eve and the inclusion of the first woman. This exclusion could have helped Christian women's self-perception, as they were not cast as the seducer, the temptress, or the first sinner. Eve does not manifest as a temptress in *A Handfull of Holesome*, rather she is primarily defined as a wife and helper to her husband.

Wheathill presents more biblical characters in the eighth prayer about God's justice. Fearing the implementation of God's wrath and withholding of his mercy, the speaker is placed alongside Old Testament figures who disobeyed God and suffered the consequences. "When I remember thy just judgment, I tremble and quake for feare..." Readers of either sex possessed the same sinful nature, and Wheathill placed them alongside a number of male characters from the Bible to define the depths of their depravity. Warning against pride, she likens the reader to the angels that fell from heaven with Satan and the men that were consumed by the earth after speaking against Moses. She writes, "The earth was not able to beare the burthen of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram; but for the rebellion against thee and thy servant Moses, the earth opened and swallowed them quick."⁶⁷ After self-identifying with the lost Israelites from Numbers 16, Wheathill warns against the sin of pride, telling the tale of God's vengeance against David in 2 Samuel 24. "For the sinne and pride of David, who mustered his men, putting his trust in the multitude of them, rather than in thee that art the living God, thou scourgedst him

⁶⁷ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 17.

with the plague of pestilence...”⁶⁸ Throughout the manual, Wheathill identifies her sixteenth-century readers with both the failures and success stories from scripture. She places her readers alongside those who doubted or clearly acted against God to emphasize their need. After describing the consequences for those who disobeyed God, she wrote, “Who would not then feare, seeing we sinne dailie with most grevous sins?”⁶⁹ She also equates her speakers and subject with those who the Lord saved and they show the potential for redemption. In both the positive examples and the anti-examples, readers encountered predominantly male figures to look up to. Whereas Bentley presents his fallen women with Mary Magdalene, Wheathill grants glimpses into the lives of mostly men from scripture.

Conclusion

Anne Wheathill and her *Handfull of Holesome* is an important text within the sixteenth-century devotional tradition. As the first prayer script written by a woman specifically for other women in England, the language of her manual and its gender implications reveal how she, as a single gentlewoman writer, perceived and portrayed women within proper prayer practice. While her work is less gendered than Becon’s and more fluid in its categorization of believers than Bentley’s, Wheathill does not represent a clean break from the established devotional tradition as defined by male writers before her, rather she maintains much of their patterns of gendered language. The repositioning of Anne Wheathill in the historiography is one of this chapter’s primary goals, and showing how she visualized male readers and presented them with biblical examples

⁶⁸ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 17^R.

⁶⁹ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 17^R.

helps reveal her aims and objectives. In a prayer book for women, Wheathill described her speakers and subjects with mostly masculine identifiers, identifying “Christian people” mostly as “loving brethren.”⁷⁰ Wheathill also relied heavily on scripture and its characters in the construction of her text, and she presented biblical figures as examples and counterexamples for Christians to follow and eschew. While a few women appear in her text, men dominate it as the best example of faith and godly living, and a number of Wheathill’s women are cast as the biblical counterexamples. Sixteenth-century women readers may not have been affected by the absence of a female voice or the predominance of male role models, but when they opened *A Handfull of Holesome (though homelie) Hearbs* to find out what it meant to be a good Christian who prayed properly, they would find the prototypical male voice, rather than prayer scripts that readily applied to them. Women like the one of Cannan could be praised as successful supplicants, but the ideal speaker in *A Handfull of Holesome* consistently manifests as a man.

⁷⁰ Wheathill, *A Handfull of Holesome*, 105^v.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Prayer manuals provided sixteenth-century readers with ready-made supplications that could be practiced and performed for specific occasions or predicaments. Even if many of them prayed spontaneously on their own without the help of a prayer script, the language of prayer found in published manuals would have shaped their perception and practice of private piety as religious practice evolved in England. As prayer manuals grew in popularity, more devotional literature was published to meet the demand and promote proper prayer practice. This thesis asks and analyzes how these prayer manuals, which gave readers the right words to say before God, portrayed women. While the sixteenth century saw an intentional effort to provide devotional literature that included women, that inclusion typically appeared as a directive to be silent, chaste of body and mind, and altogether obedient within the household. The treatment of women in sixteenth-century English prayer manuals is neither simple nor monolithic, and each author gives women opportunity while limiting them in unique ways within the language of prayer. Becon lived in a very different England than Bentley and Wheathill, but all three writers saw themselves as instruments in the promotion of prayer practice in times of religious, political, and cultural change. How authors portrayed women as readers and participants in prayer scripts reveals how they saw the world and its gender order as it should be, and each manual orients women as subordinate and secondary, defined according to their relationship with men.

When Thomas Bentley wrote *The Monument of Matrones*, he introduced the prayer manual as “a treatise verie needfull for this time,” implying that women in his day were in special need of guidance.¹ Becon’s prayers convey an urgency that readers must conduct themselves according to their position in society if England and its newfound true religion was to survive in a decaying world. Wheathill’s preface and proceeding prayers also suggest that she saw her manual as especially important in her time, and so she published the work despite calling it a “presumption.” In the ever-changing world of the sixteenth century, the nature and proper place of women was a concern among number of commentators, but where could women look to develop their own identities as Christians?² Other than the Bible, women were shown to devotional guides where scripture woven together with prayer and biblical models showed them how they should and should not live. Within the intimate space and language of prayer, writers subtly subordinated women and provided them with models of proper behavior. The prayer manuals written by Thomas Becon, Thomas Bentley, and Anne Wheathill implicitly taught the method of posture prayer; and more importantly, they provided word-for-word scripts that readers could say aloud as their own. Women reading these prayer manuals would have had to incorporate Becon’s household hierarchy, navigate Bentley’s rigid identity categories, and accommodate Wheathill’s gendered language as they read prayer scripts supposedly suited for specific moments of their own lives.

¹ Thomas Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones*, (*Lamps 5-7*), 1582, in *Essential Works for the Study of Early Modern Englishwomen: Part I, Volume 6*, ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), Title folio.

² Suzanne Hull, *Chaste Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 31, 106. Despite being told to read devotional works, the two most popular genres of writing for or about women were guidebooks and those on the controversy surrounding women’s true nature.

This thesis examines representations of female subjects and speakers in sixteenth-century published prayer and how the limited portrayal of women, whether obvious or subtle, subordinated women in proper prayer practice. In three specific prayer manuals written by very different authors, I analyze the use of gendered grammar, or what one scholar calls “the characterizing use of names and pronouns,” and the representation of female subjects within the scripted prayers, whether they were implied speakers or biblical characters.³ The construction of femininity and the proper place of women in prayer are most obvious in Bentley’s text, since his express purpose was to show women how to be good Christians by providing examples. Becon assigned prayers to readers according to their social status or spiritual circumstance; and while he directed his manual to a general audience, he placed female subjects and implied speakers in narrow categories that reflected the acceptable boundaries of his changing Christian community. Anne Wheathill’s portrayal of women was the subtlest of the three prayer authors, and she did not categorize women as much as she favored male readers over female ones. Adding her voice to this study shows that the emphasis on men within published prayer manuals and the limitations encountered by female readers was not an entirely male pattern.

Established authors like Becon and “presumptuous” women like Wheathill both used the Bible to authorize their manuals, and all three prayer manual writers modeled the language of scripture to provide readers with supplications grounded in the biblical narrative. Why, how, and when these writers reference women from the Bible contributes

³ Sally McConnell-Ginet, “‘What’s in a Name?’ Social Labeling and Gender Practices,” in *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, eds. Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 73.

to our understanding of where they saw women within ideal prayer practice. Becon and Bentley presented women from the Bible that best suited their traditional patriarchal definitions of Christian womanhood. Both show that women from the Bible could set acceptable examples for sixteenth-century Englishwomen, especially if they were framed and portrayed properly. As Michele Osherow has observed, references to the Bible tend to carry with them readings and interpretations.⁴ Direct biblical references abound in sixteenth-century devotional works, and prayer manuals are no exception. Speakers would pray to be like a certain character or to possess the same godly characteristics. The prayers could also lead a reader to recall the stories of those ungodly men and women who suffered God's just punishment. All three manuals cite biblical characters most often as precedent for God's mercy, and the speaker typically asks that they may follow the footsteps of a redeemed sinner such as Mary Magdalene. The way authors implement and frame the stories of women from the Bible, presenting them as examples to be followed, shows how they expected Christian women to act and what boundaries they were expected to observe.

Across social boundaries and gender norms, authors of published prayer in England presented limited positions for women to occupy if readers applied the instructions of sixteenth-century published prayer manuals, and these texts have gone relatively unstudied by scholars of gender, language, and religion. The portrayal of women in popular plays and well-known poetry has been a common theme for literary historians; and while women may have read the poetry and seen plays where fellow women or womankind were represented in restrictive ways, these texts did not portray

⁴ Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 6.

them in a first person script with personal religious repercussions. Prayer was and still is frequently defined as “pouring yourself out” to God, but what if women could not recognize any of themselves to pour?⁵ The prayer guides they read would have directly impacted their self-perception as they prayed the ideal first person prayers that described suitable behavior and how best to approach God.

⁵ Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation England*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 101. Ryrie reminds us that prayer was essentially seen as a “self-emptying” process.

APPENDIX

The Order of Prayers in Thomas Becon's *Flour of Godly Praiers*

1. The prayer of our Lorde
2. A prayer for the mornynge
3. A prayer for the nyght
4. A confession of our sins unto God the Father
5. A confession of our sinnes unto oure Lord Jesus Christe
6. A confession of our sins unto the holy ghost
7. A prayer to be sayd before dinner
8. A thankesgevyng unto God after supper
9. A prayer to be said before supper
10. A thanksgiving unto God after supper
11. A prayer for the kynges majestie
12. A prayer for the kinges counsell
13. A prayer for judges
14. A generall prayer for all magistrates
15. A prayer for Bysshoppes and ministyrs of God's woorde
16. A prayer for gentlemen
17. A prayer for landelordes
18. A prayer for marchaunts
19. A praier for lawers
20. A prayer for laborers & men of occupacions
21. A prayer for rychmen
22. A prayer for poore people
23. A prayer for the commons
24. A prayer for them that are unmaryed
25. A prayer for them that be maryed
26. A prayer for wemen wyth chylde
27. A Thanquesgevyng unto God for their deliverance
28. A prayer for fathers and mothers
29. A prayer for chyldren
30. A prayer for Masters
31. A prayer for servaunts
32. A prayer for them that are sycke
33. A prayer for souldiers
34. A prayer for maryners
35. A prayer for travelers by lande
36. A prayer for a faiythfull man beyng in trouble or indurance
37. A thankesgevyng to God for his deliveraunce
38. A generall prayer that all menne may walke in their vocacion and callyng
39. A prayer for our enemyes
40. A prayer for the adversaryes of Gods truthe, and that all men maye come to the true knowledge of God's blessed worde
41. A prayer for one uniforme and perfecte agreement in matters of Christen religion
42. A prayer for Common peace and quyetnes of all Realmes

43. A prayer to be preserved from the plage and other diseases
44. A praier to preserve the frutes of the earth
45. A prayer that we maye have the feare of god before our eyes in al our doyings
46. A prayer for fayth
47. A prayer for charitie
48. A prayer for a godly lyfe
49. A prayer against the temptacions of the flesh the devell and the worlde
50. A prayer for yje remysson of synnes
51. A prayer for comptetent and necessary lyving
52. A prayer to be sayde before the Sermon
53. A thansgevyng unto god after the Sermon
54. A prayer to be sayde before the receyvynge of the holy Communion
55. A Thanksgevyng after the receyvynge of the Communion
56. A short prayer to be sayd at receiving of the mistery of christes body in his holy communion
57. A praier to be sayd at the receyvynge of his the mistery of christes bloud in the holy communion
58. A prayer agaynst Idolatry
59. A prayer agaynst Swearing
60. A prayer agaynst pryde
61. A prayer agaynst Whoredome
62. A prayer agaynst Covetousnes
63. A prayer against glottony & Drunkenness
64. A prayer agaynst ideleness
65. A prayer against slaundering & backbiting
66. A general prayer for the avoiding of all kynde of Synne
67. A praier unto God in prosperitie
68. A prayer unto God in adversitie
69. A thanksgevyng unto god for sending his sonne into this worlde to dye for our synes
70. A thanksgevyng unto god that he hath brought us oute of the darckenes of mennes trasicions into the glorious light of hys holye gospel
71. A Thanksgevyng unto god for all hys benefytes
72. A prayer to be sayd for al such as lye at the poynte of death
73. A thanksgevyng unto god for the departure of the faithful out of this worlde
74. The Letenye and Suffrages with certaine other prayers for dyvers purposes

The Order of Prayers in Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones*

1. A Praier for silence, shamefastnes, and chastitie
2. A praier to be said of single women against all euill behaiour, vice, and vanitie, and for the obtaining of modestie, chastitie, and all maidenlie vertues
3. Another of the same
4. Another
5. For the grace of Gods holie spirit, to resist all sinfull motions, and keepe pure the state of single life
6. Another praier in the behalfe of all Virgins, or single women, for the keeping of obedience, modestie, chastitie, puritie, and cleannesse of liuing
7. Another praier to the same effect
8. A praier to be said for all virgins and maids generallie
9. A lamentation of anie woman, virgin, wife, or widowe, for hir virginitie or chastitie, lost by fornication or adulterie: not vnapt also to be vsed of anie Christian sinner, or sinfull soule, adulterated and fallen awaie by sinne from hir spirituall spouse Christ Iesus, diuided into sixe seuerall Chapters
10. Another lamentation of a woman that hath lost hir virginitie and chastitie: or of a Christian soule polluted with sinne
11. A praier of Marie Magdalens repentance
12. Another praier of the woman taken in adulterie
13. A praier to be said of anie damsell, daughter, or maidenchild
14. Another verie necessarie praier to be said of anie daughter, or maiden-child
15. A praier to be said of a daughter in lawe that is married
16. Another praier to be vsed of a daughter in lawe
17. A praier to be said of anie woman, when she is wooed of anie man to be his wife
18. Another praier to be vsed of anie woman, before the solemnisation of hir marriage
19. Another praier to be vsed of the man or woman, a little before they be married
20. Another meditation and praier, declaring how Christ adorneth the nuptiall feast with his bodilie presence
21. A praier to be vsed of a virgin newlie married, together with hir husband
22. A sentence out of Tobie, worthie to be called to memorie of all new married folks
23. Another verie necessarie and fruitfull praier, to be often vsed of all married couples
24. Another praier to be vsed of married folks, to liue chastlie and purelie in holie matrimonie
25. Another praier to be vsed of such married couples, as where the woman is not past child-bearing
26. Another praier for all wedded folks generallie
27. A praier to be said of a yong married woman, or wife
28. Another of the same
29. A praier to be vsed of anie Noble woman, &c. when she is married, or afterward.
30. Another praier to be said of anie Noble woman, Ladie, Gentlewoman, or modest matrone married
31. A praier to be vsed of the wife that hath a froward and bitter husband

32. A praier to be vsed of the wife for hir husband, before, or in his traueilling by land
33. Another
34. A praier to be vsed of the wife for hir husband being a Captaine or Souldiour, and gone a war-fare
35. Another of the same
36. A fruitfull praier to be said with teares of all godlie women, in the time of bloudie battell, &c.
37. A praier to be said of anie wife or daughter for hir husband or father, being a merchant-venterer
38. When your husband or father is come safe home from his iournie
39. A praier and thanks-giuing to be said, when your husband (or father) with his ship, is safelie come home from his voiage by sea
40. When your husband, or friend, is in prison and endurance, or otherwise persecuted, or in trouble, and affliction
41. When your husband or other friend is deliuered out of anie trouble
42. A praier to be vsed of a woman with child
43. Another of the same
44. Another
45. Another
46. The same praier in meeter
47. Another godlie & earnest praier to be said of euerie faithfull woman in the time of hir child-bed, vsed of the vertuous Ladie Francis Aburgauennie
48. Another praier of a woman being in trauell
49. A praier in meeter to bee said of a woman with child, made by W.H.
50. A praier to be said in long and dangerous trauell
51. Another
52. Praiers and thanks-giuings to be vsed of women in childbed, after their trauell and deliuerance
53. Another vsed of the vertuous Ladie Francis Aburgauennie
54. Another
55. A praier to be vsed of a woman at hir purification, or Churching
56. Praiers to be said for women with child, before, or in trauell, by the mid-wife, husband, or anie other man or woman.
57. Another
58. Another
59. Another praier for a Queene being with child
60. Another praier for a Queene, Noble woman, or Ladie with childe
61. A generall forme of praier for all women with child, and in child-bed
62. The same praier more breefe for women with child generallie
63. A praier to be said of euerie Christian mid-wife for hir selfe, before she execute hir office
64. Another praier to be said of the midwife, when she goeth about to doo hir office
65. Another
66. A praier to be said of the midwife and all the women about hir, if the partie be in long and sore trauell, and in danger of death
67. For a woman that trauelleth before hir time

68. If the woman traueiling be at the point of death
69. Another
70. A praier of instruction to be vsed of the women in health, attendant about the sicke and languishing woman in sore trauell
71. Another godlie and effectuall praier to be hartilie said of the women assistant, if the woman in sore trauell or childbed lie in the pangs of death, & be passing this life
72. When she is departing and yeeldeth vp the ghost
73. Another of the same
74. A praier to be said after hir departure
75. A praier and thanks-giuing to be vsed of the mother, or women about hir, after the child is baptised
76. If the yoong infant be verie sicke, and lie sore pained with anie greefe, or whensoever else it be visited with anie dreadfull disease
77. A thanks-giuing and praier to be said of the father, so soone as he heareth that a child is borne vnto him, and his wife safelie deliuered
78. Another thanksgiuing to be vsed of the midwife, or women assistant, after the safe deliuerie of a woman in childbed
79. Another thanksgiuing to be said for the safe deliuerance of anie woman in childbed, or at hir churching
80. The mothers praier for hir childrens good education
81. Another praier to be vsed of euerie godlie mother, for the godlie prooffe of hir child; made for the Ladie Lettice
82. A praier to be vsed of anie mother in lawe
83. The mistres or dames praier, &c.
84. The maidseruants, or handmaids praier
85. Another praier to be said of an handmaid, waiting woman, or maidseruant
86. The poore widowes mite, conteining seuen meditations or praiers in meeter, for the obtaining of Gods mercie, and the forgiuenes of sin, to be said or soong, gathered by William Hunnis
87. A praier to be said of a widowe, immediatlie after the death of hir husband
88. A praier to be said of widowes, for widowes
89. The same more at large to be vsed generallie for all widows and orphanes
90. The orphane or fatherles childs praier
91. The old womans praier
92. A praier to be said generallie for all women, that they may haue in remembrance the fall of their grandmother Eue
93. A praier to be said of all deuout women, &c.
94. A praier made vpon the similitude of the ten virgins
95. A generall confession of sinnes, &c.
96. A praier for the Queenes Maiestie and the Realme
97. A praier to be said in the morning
98. A praier to be said in the euening

The Oder of Prayers in Anne Wheathill's *Handfull of Holesome*

1. A praier for the morning.
2. A praier for remission of sins.
3. Another praier for the same.
4. An Evening praier.
5. Against the temptation of the devil.
6. A praier for faith, and for Gods helpe and assistance.
7. Another for the same.
8. A praier of the justice of God and of his mercie.
9. A praier for humilitie, and a confession of sinnes.
10. A praier for patience in trouble.
11. A praier wherein the bountifullness of God is confess and praised.
12. A praier for grace and repentance.
13. A praier wherein we desire the life to come.
14. A praier for comfort in trouble.
15. A praier for the prosperitie of the church.
16. A praier that we may be heard of God.
17. A praier against the enimies of the church.
18. A praier of the afflicted person.
19. A praier of the justice of God.
20. A praier for faith & grace.
21. A praier of the creation of mankind.
22. A praier & thanksgiving until God, for his manifold gifts.
23. A praier wherein the hart powreth out itselfe before God.
24. A praier wherein the afflicted person praieth against his animies.
25. A praier for the increase of faith, &c. praier.
26. A praier unto God the father &c. praier.
27. A praier unto the sonne of God.
28. Another to the sonne.
29. A praier unto the holie Ghost.
30. A praier in the remembrance of death.
31. A praier to heare the word of God & keepe it.
32. A praier wherein thw word of God is praised.
33. A praier to be said at all times.
34. A humble confession of our sinnes before God.
35. A thanksgiving unto God for the redemotion of the world.
36. Another praier of praise and thanksgiving.
37. A breefe confession.
38. A praier, shewing that none but God, is omnipotent.
39. A praier of lamentation.
40. A praier, wherein the fatherlie love and preferuation of God is set fourth.
41. A praier for grace.
42. A praier against offenses.
43. A praier for the good estate of the church.
44. A praier, that the wisdome of God is to be praised.

45. A praier wherein is shewed how blessed they are that trust in God.
46. A praier of Gods majestie.
47. A praier wherein is shewed, how blesses they are that feare the Lord.
48. A praier, shewing that God dwelleth in the harts of the righteous.
49. A praier, shewing that God is always our protection.

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