The Emergence of the Feminine Voice, 1526-1640: The Earliest Published Books by English Renaissance Women

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No male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his themes, his language. But to a lesser or greater extent every woman writer has written for men, even when, like Virginia Woolf, she was supposed to be addressing women.

Adrienne Rich

Yet, in every generation, everywhere women were struggling for intellectual expression, some 'carping tongue' reminded them of their female limitation, their female duty.

Gerda Lerner

During the period 1526-1640, English Renaissance women writers began to address wider audiences than ever before possible. Often those audiences were primarily hostile or suspicious, viewing the very act of writing as inappropriate for a woman, and their degree of hostility was greater than women writers as a group would ever encounter again. While women writers of this time might address their works to a personal reader such as a child, might remind their audience that they were writing within an acceptable genre for women such as devotions or prayers, might couch their comments in a distinct gender role such as advice on mothering, or might attempt to defuse criticism of their efforts by seeming to accept the "weaknesses" of their sex, they were ever aware of the critical and skeptical nature of their audiences. Even if they had been encouraged by a male mentor and therefore had an initial receptive reader, these women writers had to address the "carping tongue" of broader audiences that would greet their words with skepticism and dismay.

In this essay, we describe what rhetorical strategies a sampling of these women writers developed to address those primarily hostile audiences. While women writers had many "voices" at this time, they had in common the
same challenge in overcoming audience resistance, and they often chose similar strategies to do so. We hope that those modern scholars asking about differences between men's and women's communication style will benefit from learning the characteristics of these first published "feminine voices."

**Scope of the Study**

In our study, we isolated the first published works written by English women, determined the nature of the content, examined the style, and studied the milieu in which these works were produced. We focused on the Renaissance period of 1526-1640, and we selected prose, rather than fictional or poetic works of women, as this period represents the time when a great many women first ventured into the world of ideas and debate, when their audiences expanded beyond familial or local ones. During this period, English women composed or translated over 100 works that found their way into print (see, for example, Crawford; Gartenberg and Wittamore). These works covered a wide range of genres: translations of religious works, meditations and prayers, admonitions for godly living, works on godly advice, lamentations, maternal advice manuals, and diverse poetic forms—songs, sonnets, dream visions, rhymed history, narrative, descriptive, religious, and epistolary verse that used a variety of rhyme scheme and stanzaic pattern (Gartenberg and Wittamore). Approximately 60% of these were prose works, and 40% were poetry. The major prose genres published by women during the first century of printing in England (ca. 1501-1600) were translations of religious works and spiritual and/or maternal guide books. Between 1600-1640, women began to write, publish, and expand their efforts in a wider range of genres.

In examining what English Renaissance women wrote and how they wrote, we were able to make the following observations:

- Published women writers were usually members of the upper classes who had families who believed that women needed classical and/or religious education.
- Most possessed a high level of composition skill in both English and Latin.
- They were quite cognizant of and accepted in varying degrees the entrenched theological and social prejudice against women and women writers and thinkers.
- Their tools and genres for expression were culturally dictated and limited, but their perceptions were often different from those of men.
- Those who wrote for publication often struggled to maintain their confidence that what they said was worthy of written expression.

More specifically, we found that even though these first published works by Renaissance women were by women of the privileged classes, the works exhibit numerous examples of self-doubt and self-deprecation, particularly:
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- a sense of insecurity—spiritually, socially, and emotionally
- almost a calculated choice in content and phrasing that reflects these women writers' adherence to women's traditional place and her traditional virtues, such as chastity and humility
- subtle and developing affirmation of the value of women's distinctive perspective
- tension in the handling of ideas resulting from these learned women's growing expertise in composition which was stifled by their awareness of low status in relation to men.

The English Renaissance, as it has been traditionally assessed, occurred in male-dominated genres, and the fact that English Renaissance women generally were not part of that rebirth can be seen in part in the kinds of prose works they wrote: translations of works by Church fathers, maternal advice books, and books of devotions and prayers in which the woman writer was seen in search of her own spiritual perfection (chastity, obedience, and humility) and that of her female readers.

These stylistic choices are based on the women writers' sense of their audience. Historical scholars provide an in-depth description of the societal and religious attitude toward women at this time. We would modify Adrienne Rich's comment at the beginning of this essay by saying that women were writing not only for male readers, who often failed to welcome their efforts, but also for an audience of men and women well versed and generally accepting of the societal and religious role of women. Perhaps the work of Gerda Lerner best exemplifies the historical research on those societal and religious roles. As Lerner puts it, these women write within a "gendered society, that is, one in which the societal definitions of behavior and expectations appropriate to the sexes are embedded in every institution of society, in its thoughts, its language, its cultural product... From this perspective, female voice and female culture can be seen not as attributes of sex, but as products of gendered history" (168). Although we comment on historical aspects of social and religious attitudes as we describe our women writers' stylistic choices, we leave more extensive descriptions to Lerner and others.

Moreover, while we focus on the rhetorical choices in relation to the women writers' visions of audience, it is also beyond the scope of this article to offer in extensive contrast the persuasive strategies of male writers of the time. We have done so elsewhere (Tebeaux and Lay; Tebeaux) and believe that these strategies are well canonized and documented in literary studies. Instead, we focus on identifying and describing the rhetorical strategies women writers chose because of their social and cultural situations.

Definitions of Audience and Voice
Before beginning our comments on the English Renaissance women writers' rhetorical or stylistic strategies, we must define our use of the terms "audi-
ence” and “voice.” We use voice much the same way as Linda Brodkey and Jim Henry define it in their essay on poststructuralism; voice is the “relationship between a discourse and its identifiable subject. A voice articulates the social identities of the discursive subjects it represents in relation to a discourse” (147). In other words, within the text the woman writer establishes a subject relationship to or stance for herself in a discourse on such things as mothering, biblical interpretation, and the obligation of men to care for their families. For our purposes then, the voices of the women writers we study articulate (often by accepting but sometimes, within that acceptance, resisting) their social identity in terms of the patriarchal systems in which they lived.

Within their texts, these women writers also establish a relationship with and for their audience. Of course, we cannot simply say “audience,” as scholarship has shown the existence of many audiences within and outside of texts. In this essay, we approach audience much in the same way Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, Douglas Park, and Jack Selzer have—as a multiplicity of audiences addressed and audiences invoked, real readers and audiences created within the text. The women writers we studied at times addressed specific audiences—the encouraging male mentor, the beloved son, the betrayed husband—the “concrete reality of the writer’s audience,” as Ede and Lunsford define it, when “knowledge of this audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible (via observation and analysis) but essential” (156). Park might call these audiences “external readers or listeners as they are involved in the rhetorical situation,” as they are part of the conversation and in fact may give the women writers permission to enter into the conversation (244; for definitions of “intended” audiences, see Selzer 164). Addressing this specific audience became a persuasive strategy for women writers imagining a hostile reception from another, more universal audience; for example, they excused their boldness in publishing their thoughts by reminding the reader that they were simply performing within their gender roles as mothers teaching children.

The women writers also invoked an audience within their texts, an audience they acknowledged would be initially hostile to the idea of a woman writing and thinking, but might appreciate nonetheless that she was not overstepping her gender role and therefore was worthy of attention, given the rhetorical stance or voice that the woman writer assumed. Here the women writers’ stylistic and rhetorical choices reflect the audience invoked; an audience, according to Ede and Lunsford, reflected in “the semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help the reader define the role or roles that writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text” (160; see also Walter Ong’s landmark treatment of audience invoked, and Gay Gragson and Jack Selzer’s recent application of Ong’s theory to nonfiction works). The women writers cued their audience that the women, too, shared the social and theological views of women’s
place, that their work did not venture beyond that place or did so in non-threatening ways. The women writers cast their potentially or previously resisting audiences into receptive roles by establishing common ground.

Communication and Gender Difference
Within our examination of Renaissance women writers, we also need to establish our stance on communication and gender difference. Since the 1970s, feminist scholars in written and speech communication have focused on possible differences in the styles and strategies of male and female speakers and writers. Scholars such as Robin Lakoff, Don Zimmerman and Candace West, Elizabeth Aries, Cheris Kramer, Dale Spender, Carole Edelsky, and Elizabeth Abel describe what they believe are differences in the way men and women express themselves. Women seem to use more qualifiers and tag questions in their speech as well as different metaphors, vocabulary, and imagery in their writing. As Catherine Dobris states of women and men writing today, “women and men appear to communicate differently, may perceive language in different ways, and have preconceived notions about the style, credibility, and effectiveness of female and male speakers” (145). Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin find evidence that women rate impersonal verbs as more extreme in emotion while men rate the same verbs as extreme in power, and Thomas Fox concludes that men write more easily with force and anger. These scholars speculate on the cultural reasons for these differences: many women feel less powerful in public forums; some women focus on their unique birthing and mothering experiences; women’s writing may appear in less public genres such as the diary and journal.

Other scholars register skepticism about such sex-marked communication differences, either because they find no differences or because they determine the question to be too complex to ask and answer. They remind us that all women do not write the same, or one woman writer might write differently in different settings. For example, Judith Fetterley states that women learn two languages—their own and that of the dominant male culture. And, Don Kraemer proposes that women use the language formulated by men, and therefore cannot say what they really want to say. Moreover, some scholars are uneasy with labeling any stylistic characteristics as “masculine” or “feminine” without fully acknowledging the cultural effects. Dennis Baron states the problem this way:

Women are reminded by men that their language is a nonstandard dialect, possibly of alien origin, and they are encouraged to develop a passion for correctness that involves both the rejection of what is supposed to be their natural feminine dialect and the adoption of a supposedly masculine standard English that would represent for women an alien tongue. The problem is compounded because it is based not on actual language production but on stereotype: it is difficult to find with much certainty either spoken or written dialect features—whether of pronunciation, voice quality, choice of word or idiom, syntax, or anything else—that can be safely labeled male or female independent of the social constraints that are placed upon the sexes. (88)
Women writers do seem always to fight for status within their gendered cultures (see Spitzack and Carter as well as McCord on women writers and status, and McIntosh as well as McMillan et al. on modern women speakers).

Because of its complexity, some scholars who first felt comfortable contrasting men's and women's style have backed away from the question. For example, Dale Spender describes one such turn in her 1989 The Writing or the Sex?:

Of course it took some time for me to appreciate that the salient characteristic of women's talk in conversation with men was silence. . . . So I stopped dwelling on my own ostensible failure to obtain data and rephrased my questions about the language of women and men. Not just about why women talked so little in the presence of men, but why in the face of such overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we could continue to believe that women were the talkative sex? (8)

Spender goes beyond asking how women express themselves to wondering what cultural messages women receive that might determine their choice of expression. Similarly, Sandra Bem turned from asking which traits were "masculine" or "feminine" to asking which individuals identified with the gender schema that culture provided (see also Fecteau et al. for a recent assessment of the limits of gender orientation scales).

We hope that our study will enrich the discussion on gender and communication by examining the early years of women's first publication efforts. Of course, we cannot do full justice to every woman writing during this period; moreover, we must balance our explications of particular passages with summaries of others. However, in our treatment of Renaissance women writers, we do place our comments on difference in the context of culture, a culture that was indeed gendered. As we describe "feminine voices," we assess how that gendered culture determined the women writers' senses of audience and their stylistic and rhetorical choices. After all, as Lerner states, "If the female voice were not different than the male or as acknowledged or honored as the male, there would be no need to abandon, deny or disguise it" (168).

English Women Writers, Literacy, and Renaissance Culture

As we have mentioned, Renaissance women who wanted to write did not find a supportive social climate (Otten; Crawford). Based on the Pandora myth and the Book of Genesis, women were perceived as deceitful, destructive, disruptive, and needing punishment. They existed only to serve as men's helpmates. Because Eve had led to Adam's fall and Pandora to Zeus's, women were assumed to be theologically and morally inferior to men. The admonitions that women were to be "chaste, silent, and obedient" (Hull) emanated from the Church's perspective on the Genesis story: Women, because of Eve's seductive, perfidious actions, were believed to be potentially unchaste; failure to follow God's commands in Eden showed their potential for craftiness; and silence insured that women would keep their place in a
social order defined by men. As Crawford states, in the Renaissance, “it was generally believed that women belonged to a separate sphere. Their place was the household” (214).

While previous studies of Renaissance culture and Renaissance women's reading have shown that women led active lives in business, government, and estate management and that English women enjoyed widespread freedom in their lifestyles (Hogrefe; LaBalme; Tebeaux and Lay; Tebeaux; Ezell), the diminished role assigned women was a powerful force that throttled much written expression until the English Civil wars in the middle years of the seventeenth century (Crawford).

Educational opportunities available to women of the Renaissance reflected the Biblical assessment of women's worth. While both men and women received a rudimentary education, only men of the privileged classes (and later the commercial classes) could attend grammar school and the universities. Women of all classes generally received less education than men (Houston). As Lawrence Stone observed, most of the wives of all classes lacked the reading and writing skills possessed by their husbands (158). Lerner supports this description: “We can generalize that up until the later 17th century a woman's chances for acquiring any education at all were best if she were the daughter of wealth or rank; a daughter in a family without sons; and if her father were enlightened on the subject of women's educability” (28). Because women were viewed as helpmates, they received education designed to prepare them for that role. Instruction in reading prepared women to read the Bible, to interpret its message, and then to summarize major truths for children and servants. Other education prepared women for their domestic roles. As Crawford notes, “Women were aware that there were certain rules for different kinds of discourse, and they felt uneasy at not knowing them” (215). Ultimately, the role assigned women, while it shifted appreciably by the end of the Renaissance, pervaded their writing—both in terms of style and content—and may still to a certain extent be reflected in women's language today.

While early sixteenth-century humanists, such as Vives and Mulcaster, argued for providing women with classical educations, the push for women's education did not gain significant momentum until the latter half of the seventeenth century. Even though women thinkers such as Christine de Pizan argued for women's education as early as the fifteenth century, the Querelle des femmes or debate over women's human rights that she and her companions began lasted for over three centuries (Lerner 144). Books written for women published during the 1517-1600 period were largely works of devotions or guidebooks on cooking, household management, home medicine, gardening, and animal husbandry. The popularity of these books, as indicated by the substantial numbers of subsequent editions, indicated the existence of a growing audience of women readers who accepted in varying degrees the pervasiveness of the Biblical injunction on the domestic, helpmate
role of women. Thus, the growing number of books not only written for women but also written by women demonstrates how that helpmate role shaped women's writing and reading and the first courageous steps women took in moving beyond that role. In brief, interest in improving the literacy, social position, and intellectual stature of women grew during the English Renaissance, and during 1616-1634, at least four published tracts written under female pseudonyms (Constantia Munda, Esther Sowerman, Rachel Speight, and Jane Anger) challenged Joseph Swetnam's misogynistic attack on women based on the teachings of Saint Jerome.

The struggle women faced in being recognized and heard was evident in other areas besides education and publication. While women became increasingly more active in commerce, public affairs, and estate management than they had been during the Middle Ages, women were still not as a group granted the same opportunities as men during the Renaissance. As Travitsky noted, even upper-class Englishwomen were educated to fulfill specific social functions and responsibilities. Although Christian humanists and Protestant reformers laid the major ground work for women's education, they expected women to exercise their newly acquired intellectual abilities "in private roles within the confines of their homes" (Travitsky 5): the humanists advocated examination of classical writings as these could be meshed with Christian teachings, principally the teachings of the early church fathers. The reformers were interested principally in a reappraisal of Biblical materials. But the goal of both humanists and reformers was to produce sober, virtuous women able to provide moral and spiritual training for their households. The writing produced by English women in the Renaissance both reflects and at times resists these perspectives.

Published Works by English Renaissance Women

*A devout treatise vpon the Pater noster* (1526)

Although the first extant published English work and perhaps first autobiography written by a English woman was *a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon* by Margery of Kempe in 1501, of more interest from a historical and rhetorical perspective was *A devout treatise vpon the Pater noster*, a commentary upon Erasmus by Margaret More Roper, who was nineteen in 1526 when this work was published. Historical studies of her father, Sir Thomas More, and the treatise itself show that Roper embodied the humanist idea of the learned and virtuous woman. Roper used her competence in Latin and English composition to translate Erasmus. A living product of Vives's concept of a classical education for females, Roper, like other women writers of the Renaissance elite classes, received private but rigorous study in Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch; daily New Testament readings; and readings in the church fathers, Christian poets, and useful sciences like the preparation of medicines. Roper illustrates the female model advocated by Vives, that women should study, not for their own sakes,
but for their children, to help them grow in wisdom and goodness. Margaret's translation of Erasmus was apparently attempted as part of her spiritual training.

Important to our analysis of Roper's 31-page translation is its 10-page foreword written by her tutor, Richard Hyrde, who agreed with such humanists as Sir Thomas More that literacy in women helped them achieve godliness. Hyrde assumed a voice within the on-going conversation about women's education and addresses an audience he imagined would be more concerned with this issue than with the translation itself. Although encouraged by Hyrde to participate in this work, Roper knew the "doubt" of many men who thought women would be more subject to vice when exposed to any "newelty" and should simply "abyde most at home"—physically and mentally. Hyrde attempts to reverse this opinion by reminding this audience that those women who read the holy writings available in "latyn and greke" will either become much better or less evil:

> I haue herde many men put great dout, whether it shuld be expedyent and requisite or not / a woman to haue lemyng in bokes of latyn and greke. And some vterly affyrme that it nat onely nother necessarye nor profytable / but also very noysome and icoperdous: Allegyng for their opinion that the frayle kynde of women / beynge enclyned of their owne corage vnto vice / and mutable at euery newelty ... And women abyde moost at home / occupied euer with some good or necessary busynesse. And the latyn and the greke tonge / fe nat but there is a lytell hurt in them / and in bokes of Englishe and freche / whiche men bothe reede them selfe / ... Also can beare well ynoouge / that women rede them if they wyll / neuer so moche / whiche comoditeis be farre better handele in the latyn and greke / than any other langage: and in them be many holy dottours writinges / so deuout and effectuous / that who soeuer redeth them / muste nedes be eyther moche better or lesse yuell. (np)

After acknowledging the majority point of view, Hyrde invokes the agreement of his audience; he proposes that the potential harm to the "frayle kynde" of women who would be tempted to vice by what she read would be far outweighed by the benefits other women would gain from the "holy dottours writinges." Thus, he does not debate the innate spiritual weaknesses of women but asserts that their weak natures will not be ill-affected by learning, and in doing so prepares the way for Roper's acceptance.

Hyrde's style seems much more concrete, unadorned in contrast to Roper's imaginative translation of Erasmus:

> Here O father in heuyn the petycions of thy chyldren / whiche though they be as yet bodily in erthe / natwithstandynge / in mynde euer they desyre and long to come to the countre celestial / the fathers house / where they well knowe and vnderstande / that the treasure of everlastynge wethe and felycite / that is to saye / the inheritance of lyfe immortal / is ordained for them. We aknowledge thyne excellency / O maker / sayour / and gouernour of all thyng/ conteyned in heuen and in erthe. (np)

Hyrde enters freely into a debate about the idea of women's education, a debate in which although women were the subject, they would not be welcome to express an opinion. On the other hand, Margaret subsumes
herself in praising God. She does not enter any debate but adds her voice to a safe subject and so may embellish Erasmus’s words without inviting criticism from the audience Hyrde attempts to tame.

All seven of Roper’s petitions represent a responsible but fervent translation of Erasmus. As Rita Verbrugge has noted, Roper was highly educated, confident, and admired by her father, Thomas More, and by Erasmus. Her privileged position in the eyes of both men apparently produced a young woman who was not only intelligent but also confident enough to make Erasmus her own, going beyond literal translation to show spiritual feeling she saw in Erasmus. For example, in one section on the inherent weakness of humans, Erasmus used the same word, “imbecillitatem,” to teach three points: (1) we fail because of this inherent weakness or imbecillitatem; (2) Christ shows a way to overcome this imbecillitatem, and (3) in acknowledging imbecillitatem, we receive encouragement from God to forgive and live peacefully with one another. Roper, in contrast, translated the three “imbecillitatem” to mean (1) “the weaknesse and frailte of nature”; (2) “the imbecilite and weakenesse of this membre”; and (3) “our owne imbecilite and feeblenesse” (Verbrugge 41). Roper’s version focuses less on how humans fail and must be saved by Christ and more on how all humans share this nature, a nature that perhaps she suggests would be shared both by “frayle” females and by men.

Roper’s translation thus went beyond Erasmus in emphasizing the loving-kindness of God. When Erasmus described Jesus as a “naturall child,” Margaret describes him as “a very kynde and naturall childe.” Although she is harsh in emphasizing man’s vileness, she goes beyond Erasmus in emphasizing God’s loving qualities. Roper accepts her cloistered role as a woman within the More household, but her voice appears as she translates Erasmus’s praise of God in her own particular way, a way that would not attract the attention of the audience Hyrde attempted to defuse for her.

Perhaps feminist scholars might find in Roper’s voice the qualities they measure in modern feminine styles. Roper emphasized not the constant weakness of humans but the relationship between a loving God and needy humans and the shared nature of all humans; some feminist scholars find modern women who stress relationships and connections rather than logic or abstract principles (see, for example, the findings of Hunter and Pearce; Flynn; Lyons). Lerner certainly concludes that because, as early as the 12th century, patristic teaching dictated that rationality was reserved for men, some women found self-authorization in an emotional connection to God, in mysticism, in “giving-over-of-the-self to the Other” (67). In any century, when denied the power that comes from defining roles and making laws, do thinkers and writers turn to personal interaction?

A True Discourse Of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell (1604)

We have noted that women during this period wrote on standard topics such as marriage, health care, childbirth, and religion; however, a few women
wrote about the physical abuse they received from their husbands and about life in prison as a result of religious persecution (Otten). Generally, these women, unlike Roper, had to assume a voice that spoke more directly to relationships with one man or with an institution governed by men. (Note that the nunneries had lost their positions of learning at this time [Lerner 27].)

One of the earliest published works that addressed abuse was *A True Discourse Of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell*. The first part of this work consists of Gilbert Dugdale's description of Elizabeth Caldwell's life, while the second part consists of a letter written by Elizabeth Caldwell to her husband during her imprisonment for his attempted murder. The work, which may be an early form of historical fiction, opens with Dugdale's authoritative description of the life of Elizabeth Caldwell:

> So this Caldwell being young, and not experienced in the world, gave his mind to travel, and see forraine countries, which tended rather to his losse then profit, as also to the great discontentment of his wife, and other his friends, leaving her often times verie bare, without prouision of such meanes as was fitting for her, and by these courses hee did withdrawe her affection from him. . . . (np)

Dugdale attributes Caldwell's troubles to the natural temptation of being young and inexperienced. Elizabeth Caldwell begins an affair with Jefferey Bownd, who persuades her to poison her husband with rat poison baked into rice cakes. The attempt fails, as Thomas Caldwell vomits the poisoned cakes, but both Bownd and Mrs. Caldwell are executed for their plot as the cakes accidently poison a neighbor's small child.

Elizabeth Caldwell's letter to her husband, written while she was in prison awaiting execution, reflects the impassioned, disorganized expostulation of many pietistic writings by Renaissance women. Caldwell's style contrasts starkly to the direct, factual account offered by Dugdale, and as typical of writing by women at this time, she appears to assume the appropriate subservient position. While her immediate and real audience is her husband, she also addresses him as a member of another audience, one she invokes by admitting guilt. The voice she assumes is that of the repentant sinner who has to beg for the audience's attention. She seeks authorization to speak because of her lesson in the "Schoole of affliction," an appeal to the experience she and her husband cannot share because they are not equals. Knowing that she cannot establish experience as common ground, she offers an award for her audience's attention, some news about the "joyes of heauen":

> Although the greatnes of my offence deserues neither pitie nor regarde, yet giue leaue vnto your poore sorrowfull wife to speake vnto you, what out of her owne wofull experience, with aboundance of griefe and teares, she hath learned in the Schoole of affliction. . . . And therfore deere Husband, if you have, any hope or desire, to bee partaker of the ioyes of heauen, let my speeches finde acceptance, and doe not slightly esteeme what I write vnto you. . . . (np)
As her letter unfolds, we can see her real purpose: her letter clearly shows that she believes her husband is the vilest of sinners and that she is justified in poisoning him. She admits that she was tempted, much like Eve, by the "deuill," and she admits that she is weak. However, she describes her weakness as coming not primarily from her nature but from his absence and her resulting poverty:

And because none can be converted, nor come vnto Christ except the Father drawe him, neuer leaue to solicite the Father of mercy to create a new hart, and renew a right spirit within you, and call to remembrance the desolutenesse of your life, I speake it not to lay any thing to your charge, for I doe loue you more deerely, then I doe my selfe, but remember in what a case you haue liued, howe poore you haue many times left me, how long you haue beeene absent from mee, all which advantage the deuill tooke to subuert mee. And to further his purpose, he set his hellish instruments a work, euen the practise of wicked people, who continuallie wrought vpon my weaknes, my poertie, and your absence, vntill they made me yeeld to conspire with them the destruction of your bodie, by a violent & suddaine death. (np)

She bluntly states that, like other reprobates whose actions were recorded in Scripture, he should hasten to find repentance. While suggesting she has his best interests at heart, Elizabeth Caldwell invites her audience to assume that Thomas is a sinner:

Deferre no time . . . make hast, euen before your hands part with this paper to search therein, that so you may truly understand the wretched estate, & condition of those who following the lusts of there eyes, wallow in all sensualitie, and so heape vp vengance against the day of wrath. (np)

In constantly alluding to sins of "worldly pleasures, drunkennes & filthinesse" in her admonitions for her husband's repentance, she indirectly and shrewdly states that her wanton husband is as guilty of debauchery as she is:

You see the iudgements of God are begunne alreadie in your house, happie shall you be if you make holy vse of them, otherwise heauiiur may be expected, especially, if you persist. In his mercy he hath spared you, and doth yet waite for your repentance, doe not you abuse his patience any longer, lest thereby you prouoke him to proceede to execution against you. (np)

We see in Elizabeth Caldwell a subtle appeal to an audience that would accept Thomas's right to abandon Elizabeth and travel. While she could not desert him without recourse, she was powerless to defend herself from whatever economic abuse he chose. Elizabeth Caldwell borrows what authority she could find by alluding to the Bible, but she also asserts the authority of her own experience, experience fully accorded to her as a woman in the eyes of her audience—the experience of sin: "None can better speake of it, for none better, knowes it then my selfe, my sorrowful hart hath smarted for it, and my sould hath beene sick to the gates of hell" (np).
Finally, Elizabeth Caldwell might have had one more audience in mind: women who had suffered her same experience, although she could not be sure that they would ever see her letter. Spender laments that until the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, absent was the "record of women's feelings towards the men who have been responsible for their [unfortunate] state" (The Writing or the Sex? 116). However, in Elizabeth Caldwell, we find such an early record of women's feelings, a record that would impact on a male audience because Caldwell assumes the misogyny of the age as she unsettles her husband's stability. As Susan Schibanoff states of male readers in general, "according to the topos, [they] are neither offended nor troubled by literary misogyny" (85). Caldwell manages to claim authority within that misogyny. She also gives some comfort to any female who has suffered the same treatment; again, she is weakened by circumstances created by her husband, not by her nature. For this female audience, Caldwell's work may anticipate the "female reading schemata" of the modern age as described by Hunter and Pearce: "particular experiences of individual women, as valuable as paradigms or lessons" and "stories of cultural victimage" (24-5).

Miscelanea. Meditations. Memoratues (1624)

This collection of meditations, written by Elizabeth Grymeston, a Catholic recusant, reflects two more options that became available to some women writers during the English Renaissance: (1) writing as spiritual inquiry, where rhetorical method became a means of revealing God in new ways to both the writer and the reader; (2) writing as rhetorical exercise within an accepted female genre the religious meditation (see Lerner 88, for an in-depth analysis for the cultural origins of these options).

Miscelanea reveals Gymeston's ability to use tropes and figures to vivify spiritual truths she gleaned from an impressive array of authors. She selected and then synthesized vast erudition, which strongly suggests Gymeston was familiar with the formal meditation genre. While not clearly Catholic or Protestant in form and lacking the expertise of devotional writers such as Donne, her meditations reflected a two- or three-part division: (1) the subject is presented by an imaginative presentation by the memory; (2) the subject is examined by reason; and (3) sometimes the renewed will praises God:

Speculum vitae.
A sinners glasse. What is the life of man but a continuall battell, and defiance with God? What haue our eies and eares beeene, but open gates to send in loades of sinne into our minde? What haue our powers and senses beeene, but tynder to take, and fewell to feed the flame of concupiscence? What hath thy body beeene but a stewes of an adulteresse, but a forge of Sathan, where the fire of our affections kindled with wicked suggestions, haue enflamed the passions of our heart, and made it the anuile to tum vs to most vgly shapes of deformed sensualitie? [imaginative presentation]

So that by this metamorphosis we are become more odious to God then the diuell himselfe: for the diuell by creation was more beautifull then we: it was sinne that deformed him, and that sinne that made him odious, makes vs detestable: for our sinnes
arewoofse than his, and we are not so good as he: for his sinne was one, & ours are infinite
... So that our case is now such as infinite goodnesse detesteth, and infinite love cannot
condole... but see how sinne hath transformed pleasure into plagues... for the damned
suffer death without death, decaie without decay, eneuie without enuie; for their death
euer liueth: their end euer beginneth, and their decay never ceaseth, but are alwaies
healed to be new wounded, dying but neuer dead, repaired onely to be anew decayed.
[rational exposition by paradox and antithesis] (np)

While Margaret More Roper in 1526 could at best add a phrase to Erasmus in her effort to make the Humanist theologian her own, Grymeston in 1604 goes beyond translation into seamless verbal synthesis that shows an acute mind capable of reaching into what were previously considered masculine rhetorical and intellectual domains. In her meditations, Grymeston synthesized the church fathers, scripture, Robert Southwell's and Richard Roland's poetry, and the style of Gregory, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Chrystotm, Seneca, Virgil, Terance, and Pindar. The effectiveness of the work is evident from its four editions.

Regardless of Grymeston's religious and literary knowledge and skills, she still must claim authority by taking on a traditional role and invoke an audience who will grant her permission to express these skills. The Miscelanea were written to allow Bernye, Grymeston's only surviving son of nine children, to "see the true portraiture of thy mother's mind" (np). And, as other scholars have noted, the work is a highly revealing portrait of her mind—"her reading, her talents, her limitations, her prepossession with the moral and religious side of things, her consuming love for her son" (Hughey and Herefore 91). But more important to our study is the fact that Grymeston must invoke an accepting audience by assuming the traditional calling for women—the spiritual welfare of her son.

My dearest sonne, there is nothing so strong as the force of loue; there is no loue so
forcible as the loue of an affectionate mother to hir naturall childe; there is no mother
can either more affectionately shew hir nature, or more naturally manifest hir affection,
than in aduising hir children out of her owne experience, to eschue euill and encline them
to do that which is good. (np)

Motherhood gave women self-authorization as well as an early and positive sense of group identity (see Lerner 117, for a description of this group identity). Even though Grymeston uses her religious and literary knowledge as evidence throughout her Miscelanea, she still feels she must claim that her authority comes from her "forcible" love and her "owne experience." Thus, she distracts the potential hostility to her work by highlighting the acceptable rhetorical strategies for women—exploring relationships (in this case, between God and humans), teaching the young, and extending the imagination—even within what was becoming a permissible genre for women, the religious meditation.

Scholars such as David Bleich often identify intellectual or academic writing as "masculine" writing, excluding personal experience and seeking
some ideal of "pure truth" (Genders of Writing 19). This view was created in modern language studies by such stylists such as Havelock Ellis, who in the late 1800s proposed that the language of men was abstract, rational, aesthetic, and creative, while that of women was concrete, emotional, practical, and receptive (described in Baron, Gender Interests 81). Modern women academic writers might, according to Bleich and others, take on a "masculine" voice that excludes personal experience. However, when Renaissance English women needed permission to venture into the world of publishing, they claimed they were expressing only personal experience and maternal feelings; as with Grymeston, they could not highlight their true intellectual knowledge and skill.

*The Mothers Legacie, To her vnborne Childe* (1624)

Part of women's experience, part of those maternal feelings that women writers used to justify their entrance into the world of writing, came from fear—fear of dying during childbirth and fear of not being able to give their children the best personal or moral education. Dealing with these issues also evoked the struggle to define proper learning for women—a debate in which women had little voice and therefore had to manage their words carefully. Dedicated to "My Trvly louing, and most dearly loued Husband, Tourell Jocelin," Elizabeth Joceline's small volume, *The Mothers Legacie, To her vnborne Childe*, seems to address an immediate audience, her husband and her unborn child. However, the volume not only exemplifies fears of dying and the issue of proper learning but also invokes a greater audience that had to be more distracted from, than convinced of, Joceline's right to expression. Even though she does not claim it in her writing, Joceline was as highly educated as Margaret More Roper. Reared by her grandfather, Bishop Caderton of Chester and Lincoln and Professor of Divinity at Queen's College, she received intense education in religion, languages, history, and art. According to Elaine Beilin, Joceline's "adoption of a humble, self-deprecating demeanor combined with her pious fervor perfectly fulfilled the humanist ideal of the educated woman" (273). As Joceline feared, she died a few days after her only child was born. Echoing the humanist and reform admonition to use learning to shape the lives of children, Joceline provided such direction to her unborn child. While she imagined addressing either a son or a daughter, she makes clear that the difficulties she anticipated for a daughter contrasted sharply with those a son would have:

> And if thou beest a daughter, thou maist perhaps thinke I haue lost my labours; but reade on, and thou shalt see my loue and care of thee and thy saluation is as great, as if thou were a sonne, and my feare greater. (np)

Her audience might feel education would be wasted on a daughter, but Joceline knew the challenges her daughter would face.

As Joceline expresses her fear of dying in childbirth and her desire to leave a written moral directive to the unborn child, her tone is openly self-
effacing. Because she faces the possibility of dying, writing is her only way to express her "motherly zeale," but she still feels compelled to assure her husband that her attitude is not one of superiority: "That I wrote to a Childe, and though I were but a woman, yet to a childes judgement, what I vnderstood might serue for a foundation to a better learning" (B3). She asks her husband to excuse her errors in expression, because of her love for the child and her motherly duty to set up an educational goal for her children. She immediately admonishes her husband to educate the child, whether it be boy or girl. If the child is a daughter, Joceline says:

I desire her bringing vp may bee learning the Bible, as my sisters doe, good houswifery, writing, and good workes: other learning a woman needs not: though I admire it in those whom God hath blest with discretion,—yet I desired not much in my owne, hauing seene that sometimes women haue greater portions of learning, than wisdome, which is of no better use to them than a main saile to a flye-boat, which runs it vnder water. But where learning and wisdome meet in a vertuous disposed woman, she is the fittest closet for all goodnesse. She is like a well-balanced ship that may beare all her saile. She is—Indeed, I should but shame my selfe, if I should goe about to praise her more. (np)

Joceline makes clear but underplays her belief in the appropriateness of literacy and feminine virtues and thus keeps her enthusiasm for learning from appearing unseemly. Learning must be balanced with wisdom; while Joceline become enthusiastic about such a possibility, she censors her words, before her audience can.

Perhaps because Joceline fears her audience will accuse her of pride in setting up educational directives to her husband, she decries women who lack humility and parents who teach their children the importance of self esteem:

Many Parents reade lectures of it [pride] to their children how necessary it is.... As first, looke how much you esteeme your selfe, others wil esteeme of you. Again, what you giue to others, you derogate from your selfe.... I haue heard men accounted wise that haue maintained this kind of pride vnder the name of generous knowing or understanding themselves. But I am sure that hee that truly knowes himself shall know so much cuill by himselfe, that hee shall haue small reason to think himselfe better than unother man. (np)

Within the frame of her self-censorship and self-effacing tone, Joceline actually argues with "men accounted wise" who believe pride is self-understanding rather than evil or selfish—a bold step if she had not prepared her audience to view her as a humble and academically ignorant woman with a traditional purpose to her writing.

She concludes her "The Epistle Dediactorie" by further justification of her writing; her husband would suffer less in reading than in hearing about her possible death, and if she does live, her writing will enable her to reflect on her standards:

Nor shall I thinke this labour lost, though I doe liue: for I will make it my owne looking-glasse, wherein to see when I am too seuerle, when too remisse, and in my childe fault through this glasse to discerne mine owne errors. (np)
Joceline finds it hard to claim authority based on experience, as she views writing as worthy only if it is polished:

My deare, thou knowest me so well, I shall not need to tell thee I haue written honest thoughts in a disordered fashion, not observing method. For thou knowest how short I am of learning and naturall inowments to take such a course in writing. Or if that strong affection of thine haue hid my weakinesse from thy sight, I now professe seriously my owne ignorance: and though I did not, this following Treatise would bewray it: But I send it onely to the eies of a most louing Husband, and of a childe exceedingly beloued, to whom I hope it wil not be altogether vnprofitable. (np)

Her themes amply illustrate the tension between her need for expression and her awareness of woman's limited place in a world of learning, her knowledge that as their mother she could best design an educational pattern for her children and her disdain for any show of pride; this tension is reflected in Joceline's awareness that the most effective way to deflect hostility is to claim a limited audience and purpose.

While nearly every paragraph of Joceline's preface reveals uneasiness in expressing her thoughts, in the manual itself her instructions become conventional doctrines. Only when Joceline speaks as a woman writer does she perceive the essential conflicts between tradition and the individual woman. Once she began her actual instruction, the internalized result of intense Biblical instruction obscured her individuality. Feeling was subsumed by theological lexicon, as in the following sample:

(I)

The first charge I giue thee, I learned of Solomon, Eccles. 12.1. Remember thy Creator in the dayes of thy youth. It is an excellent beginning, and fit lesson for a childe. Looke with what the Vessell is first seasoned, it retaines the taste: and if thou beginnest to remember to serue GOD, when thou art young, before the world, the flesh, & and the deuill take hold on thee, God will loue thee and send his holy Spirit to take possession of thee, who shal resist those enemies, and not suffer them to hurt thee. (np)

Here Joceline seems confident in her application of Biblical guidelines to her "charge" on how to live.

Again, modern women writers have been described by some scholars as having different perspectives because of their gender roles. As Sally McConnell-Gionet puts it, "The man's view is more likely to be familiar to the woman than hers is to his" (43). In this very early piece, we see that Joceline not only knew but also appeared to accept that she had little right to record her thoughts. However, she was ready to use her text as a part of "on-going self-definition" (a process recognized by Judith Gardiner in modern women's writing). She saw the possibility of making her text her "owne looking-glassse".

\textit{A ladies legacie} (1645)

Even with direct encouragement in a genre permissible to women writers, Renaissance women writers relied on the convention of apology to
deflect criticism. Elizabeth Richardson’s prayers, written in three books during 1625, 1634, and 1638, were designed for the use of her children, her immediate audience. However, Richardson also addresses a wider audience when she asks that her boldness in publishing be excused, for her “matter is but devotions or prayers”:

Therefore I have adventured to bear all censures, and desire their patience and pardon, whose exquisite judgments may find many blameworthy faults, justly to condemn my boldness; which I thus excuse, the matter is but devotions or prayers, which surely concerns and belongs to women as well as the best learned men. (qtd. in Otten 304)

Richardson, as again with many women writers at this time, felt that her lack of polish in writing would invite more attention than her content:

I nothing doubt of your loving acceptance of it, for my sake, though in it selfe, unworthy to have a roome in your library, or to come into the view of any judicious eye, that may soon spye more faultes, than leaves: yet I know you would in your owne goodness, pardon & excuse, all defects therein, that comes from me, a weake unlearned woman, who being so neare unto you, you will gently censure & beare it all. (qtd. in Otten 301)

She reminds her audience of her personal relationship with her immediate reader, her children, who would know she does not claim a place in their library, as would be inappropriate as a “weake” and “unlearned woman.”

Thus, Richardson’s maternal relationship with her children, its spiritual foundations, became her justification for the prayers:

I know you have many better instructors than myself, yet can you have no true mother but me, who not only with great pain brought you into the world, but do now still travail in care for the new birth of your souls, to bring you to eternal life, which is my chiefest desire, and the heighth of my hopes. And howsoever this my endeavor may be contemptible to many (because a woman’s) which makes me not to join my sons with you, lest being men, they misconstrue my well-meaning; yet I presume that you my daughters will not refuse your mother’s teaching. (qtd. in Otten 305)

Richardson states that as she was responsible for their physical birth, she must be responsible for her children’s spiritual birth. However, she soon refines her immediate audience to include her daughters, who will not be critical of her “well-meaning,” her good intentions. Because of their gender roles, Richardson imagines that her sons would join that broader and more critical audience.

Richardson’s prayers themselves reflect traditional religious doctrines and the concerns of the Renaissance mother, but these were woven together by a style that drew upon Biblical phrases, rhythms, and themes:

I have long and much grieved for your misfortunes, and want of preferments in the world: but now I have learned in what estate soever I am, therewith to be content, and to account these vile and transitory things to be but vain and loss, so I may win Christ the found of all bliss, wishing you with me, to condemn that which neglecteth you, and set your hearts and affection on better subject, such as are above, more certain and permanent. (qtd in Otten 308)
While the goal of the prayers was the spiritual education of the readers and even the writer, the emphasis is not on theology but on the effort of the feminine soul searching for God's blessing and peace. Richardson identifies with Mary and Hanna and seeks a relationship with God to replace and imitate the one she had with her dead husband:

And now, O Lord, since it hath been thy will and pleasure to take away and call to thyself my dear husband out of the transitory life before me, and to bereave me of him who was my chief comfort in this world: I humbly beseech thee, vouchsafe to take me into thy care, and give me grace to choose with Mary that better part which may turn this freedom from the bond of marriage only the more to thy service, and may become thy bondswoman to serve and praise thee day and night like Hanna, so long as I live... Now dear God, make me to change and far exceed the fervent affection and careful observance I have lived in towards my husband, into a holy fear, with devout and since love of thy Majesty and service. (qtd. in Otten 309)

She does not imagine any other relationship but that of a "bondswoman."

Richardson asks for permission to enter a male-dominated field, as writing was at this time. She relies on encouragement and mentoring of those in power and focuses on acceptable topics for women. In this way, she is much like the women who first entered the traditionally male fields of science and technology, particularly in the twentieth century. These women too were invited to learn by their fathers and husbands and were allowed to work with their husbands and male professors, but in many cases were assigned "women's work," such as the research assistant who recorded the details of the experiment rather than participated in its creation (see, for example, Gornick; Alic). Richardson may write devotions and prayers for the enlightenment of her daughters, but with such tenuous invitation into the publishing world, no wonder that women like Richardson took on such a self-denigrating tone.

The Coventesse of Lincolnes Nevserie (1626)

Up to this point, we have discussed women writers who deflected criticism by writing within conventional "feminine" genres, by accepting their roles as weak and unlearned women, by claiming a small and immediate audience of children and husbands, and by identifying their purpose in writing as appropriate to the traditional roles for women. We have shown where and how these writers may have indirectly or subtly departed from their roles, claimed a voice in broader debates, or demonstrated their learning. However, we also need to point out exceptions—women who claimed worth through the uniqueness of their perspective, a right to their own ideas. One such exception was Elizabeth Clinton. How Clinton was able to define her audience determined her stance.

Clinton's subject is "the duty of nursing due by mothers to their owne children" (B). Clinton's sentences, like Joceline's, show a firm mastery of English style; but unlike Joceline's, Clinton's polemic is well organized, beginning with a concise introduction that included statement of the subject, rationale, thesis statement, and plan of development. Clinton begins her
argument in the same way many women writers at this time did: by alluding to Biblical women, those who nursed their children. But, Clinton soon moves from Biblical precept to direct emotional appeal and castigation of women who choose surrogate nurses:

I adde to this the worke that God worketh in the very nature of mothers. . . now if any then being euen at liberty, and in peace, with all plenty, shall deny to giue sucke to their owne children, they goe against nature: and shew that God hath not done so much for them as to worke any good, no not in their nature, but left them more savage then the Dragons, and as cruell to their little ones as the Ostriches. (8)

Clinton does claim authority by interpreting what is God-given nature for women—giving “sucke to their owne children.”

Clinton’s directness and non-apologetic stance along with her carefully structured argument suggests she was not only educated in rhetoric but also comfortable in her decision to use writing as a tool to present her views. Her knowledge of the Bible seems to equal that of many of the women writers we have looked at thus far. However, much of her confidence may come from a certainty that she would be addressing only women. As few male readers would bother with a manual on breast-feeding, Clinton need not envision an audience hostile to her sex; any hostility then would be based only on her proposition. As a result, her style lacks any circumlocution in its presentation and is characterized by vivid nouns, verbs, and modifiers. She is arguing without the burden of being judged immediately inadequate because of her sex.

In Clinton’s case, then, she needed only to justify her own life decisions in her audiences’ minds to gain credibility. She was dowager-countess and mother of eighteen children when she wrote the Nurserie, and this particular work was “the first work of mine that ever came in print” (A2), a comment suggesting that she had written other unpublished works. Clinton did not nurse her own children and addressed this issue to her audience, an audience described by Beilin as “a closed feminine world predicated on the inescapable links she [Clinton] sees between biology and destiny, anatomy and virtue” (281). Clinton states in her preface that she wanted to nurse her children but that she was overruled by her husband. To her particular and same-sex audience, Clinton can express her anger at male authority, men who often forbade their wives from breast feeding to increase their own sexual pleasures (Beilin 282). Clinton wrote at a time when, according to Thomas Wilson in Arte of Rhetorique, “What becometh a woman best, and first of all: Silence. What second: Silence. What third: Silence,” (qtd. in Baron 56). However, because of her same-sex audience, Clinton need not justify speaking or writing but could more freely use language for self-expression.

The Mothers Blessing (1627)

Whereas Clinton gained authority by addressing a same-sex audience, Dorothy Leigh found authority through biblical evidence of women’s spiritual worth, quite a turn from those women writers who accepted the biblical
dictates that they were weak and sinful. She enters into the religious and cultural debate about women's worth, recognizing as did other women writers that even though her immediate audience is familial, her broader audience is social and critical. *The Mothers Blessing*, a work that enjoyed seventeen editions, is more a justification for women's writing and women's spiritual worth than an advice manual for her children, a phenomena revealed in Leigh's stylistic choices and sense of audience.

Leigh first confirms to her audience that women must stay in "second" place; however, within that place, Leigh claims women could overcome the taint of Eve's transgression. While at other times in the book, Leigh addresses her sons directly, in the following passage and others the inconsistencies in her style reveals her struggle to recognize an audience that might consist of unreceptive men as well as interested women. Leigh speaks of the weaknesses of women as "their infirmities" and her children as "them," but also addresses women directly as "we" and "us":

Not to be ashamed to shew their infirmities, but to give men first and chief place: yet let us labour to come in the second; and because we must needs confesse that sinne entred by us into our posteritie; let us shew how carefull we are to seeke to Christ, to cast it out of us and our posteritie, and how fearefull wee are that our sin should sinke any of them to the lowest part of the earth; wherefore, let us call upon them to follow Christ who will carry them to the height of heaven. (16-17)

It is this broader, cultural audience that Leigh has in mind when she emphasizes that a woman brought forth a savior, who then saved humanity from sins of Eve. Here her work is a theological argument, not a manual on godly living:

But now man may say, if he say truely; The Woman brought me a Saviour, and I feede of him by Faith and liue. Here is the great and wofull shame taken from women by God, working in a woman: man can claime no part in it: the shame is taken from vs, & from our posteritie for euer. This seed of the Woman hath taken downe the Serpents head, and now, whosoeuer can take hold of the seed of the Woman by Faith, shall surely liue for euer. (34-5)

Leigh boldly reminds her audience that "man can claime no part" in the source of redemption and the lifting of "shame." While Leigh uses the typical way of referring to offspring—the "seed"—she qualifies this seed as coming from "the Woman." Moreover, she identifies as participating in this argument, the "man" who may "say truely," a more universal voice rather than her own womanly one.

Leigh was not the first woman writer or thinker to focus on the redemptive role of Mary or even question the guilt of Eve; Christine de Pizan, Laura Cereta, Maruerite d'Angouleme, Jane Anger, and others as early as the fifteenth century interpreted biblical stories to elevate the rights of women (Lerner 145-49). However, as Lerner says, Leigh and other women writers would have no knowledge that other women asked similar questions:
Men argued with the giants that preceded them; women argued against the oppressive weight of millennia of patriarchal thought, which denied them authority, even humanity, and when they had to argue they argued with the "great men" of the past, deprived of the empowerment, strength and knowledge women of the past could have offered them. (66)

What we find in Leigh is the epitome of the struggle of other Renaissance women writers for authority and a deliberate turn to reason. Her style itself reveals her conflict between couching her words in a traditional maternal role and her need to reason and to argue with a cultural and religious role that dictated silence and guilt.

While seeming to address her children directly in the following passage, Leigh actually reminds a broader audience that her purpose is the spiritual education of her children and that motherly affection motivates her:

> But lest you should marvell, my children, why I doe not according to the vsual custome of women, exhort you by words and admonitions, rather than by writing: a thing so vnusuall among vs, and especially in such a time, when there bee so many godly bookes in the World, that they mould in some mens Studies . . . know therefore that it was the motherly affection that I bare vnto you all. (3-4)

However, Leigh’s analogies reveal her true purpose. For example, she compares women’s choices to St. Paul’s:

> My little Children, of whom I doe trauaile againe in birth vntill Christ bee formed in you? And can any man blame a Mother (who indeede brought foorth her Childe with much paine) though she labour again till Christ be formed in them? Could S. Paul with himselfe separated from God for his brethrens sake? and will not a Motherventure to offend the world for her childrens sake? Therefore let no man blame a Mother, though she something exceeded in writing to her children, since every man knowes that the loue of a Mother to her children, is hardly contained within the bounds of reason. (11-12)

Although Leigh describes herself as a mother beyond the “bounds of reasons,” she actually uses reason to claim equal motivation to a male saint. If St. Paul could not stand separation from his God, could she ignore her children’s spiritual needs? Otten sensed such duality in Leigh’s tone: “The mother’s insights and the father’s authority are here blended into one compelling book of instructions by a woman whose writing exudes confidence” (137). Such confidence is revealed within the advice given; for example, Leigh states that the husband has a duty to continue to love his wife and that she will cease to love her sons if they do not persist in loving their wives. However, Leigh’s style and sense of audience also reveal that The Mother’s Blessing is more of an argument for the mother’s written perspective and an early venture into the world of theological argument than a traditional maternal advice book.

Elizabeth I

In the works of Queen Elizabeth I, we find rhetorical and stylistic choices made possible as a women writer gains acceptance and power within the public sphere. In fact, contrasting Elizabeth’s early, less public writing to her
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later prose reveals a turn that most other women writers would have to wait at least another century to enjoy.

Elizabeth’s prefatory letter to her translation of Queen Margaret of Navarre’s *A godly Medytacyon of the christen Sowle* was written when Elizabeth was about 14 years of age, a time when her fate was uncertain. With her half-sister Mary Tudor and her half-brother Edward VI, Elizabeth was shunted from place to place and subjected to alternating harsh and pleasant treatment by a mercurial father. While scholars have suggested that the uncertainty of the tone evident in the letter likely emanated from her tenuous place in the royal hierarchy (Travitsky), Elizabeth’s style also reveals the same timidity and submissiveness other women writers expressed because of their gender roles:

If thu do thoroughly reade thys worke (dere frynde in the lorde) marke rather the matter than the homely speache therof, consyderyng it is the studye of a woman, whych in her neyther conynge nor science, but a fervent desyre that yche one maye se, what the gifte of God the creatour doth when it pleaseth hym to justyfye a hart. . . .

Thefore gentylly reader, with a godly mynde, I besyche the pacientely this worke to peruse whych is but small in quanytie, and taste nothynge but the frute therof. Prayeng to God full of all goodnesse, that in thy harte hewyll plante the lyvelyfaythe. Amen. (qtd. in Travitsky 142)

Elizabeth invokes a potentially critical audience, one that would be unimpressed by her “homely speache,” to accept her work because it was inspired by faith—a technique we have seen in other Renaissance women writers.

However, Elizabeth was educated to fulfill such public roles as men might have, or, as Lerner says, she was trained to be a stand-in for men (29). The prayers and meditations composed by Elizabeth during her years as sovereign, when she entered that public and primarily masculine world, reveal directness, confidence, and determination. She asks for God’s protection from treason and commits herself to serve God:

Grant, O God, that the wicked may have no power to hurt or betraie me; neither suffer anie such treason and wickednesse to proceed against me. For thou, O God, canst mollifie all such tyrannous harts, and disappoint all such cruell purposes. And I beseeech thee to heare me thy creature which am thy servant, and at thy commandement, trusting by thy grace ever so to remaine. Amen. (36)

She immediately compares her position to Daniel’s, taking the same bold step that Dorothy Leigh took in comparing her motivation to St. Paul’s. Elizabeth I is delivered not from the fears of childbirth, as Elizabeth Joceline sought, but from the “greedie, raging lions” who wish to undermine her royal position:

O Lord almightie, and everlasting God, I give thee most hartie thanks, that thou hast beene so mercifull unto me, as to spare mee, to behold this joiful daie. And I acknowledge, that thou hast dealt as woonderfully with me, as thou didst with thy true and faithfull servant Daniel the Prophet, whom thou deliverest out of the den from the
Rather than defending to her audience her right to a public position, Elizabeth instead thanks her God for helping her when she was "overwhelmed" by the demands of this position.

As Constance Jordan has stated, the famous Siene portrait expressed artistically Elizabeth's androgynous characteristics by the use of contradictory images of sexuality and political power. In Elizabeth's regal attitude, virginity and chastity were used not as weaknesses but as wise discernment and refusal to be subordinate to man. Imperial will and silent ruthlessness command the portrait while totally dominating the lesser procession of frivolous courtiers depicted behind her left shoulder. She was a female queen who fashioned the weaknesses associated with femininity into a mantle of quiet power and sovereignty.

This complex personality was evident in her style, which adopted traditionally masculine images but maintained much the same sensitivity as other women writers in recognizing God's role in giving her the "especiall honour" of her position:

I will giue thanks vn to thee, 0 Lord, least I be vn thankfull to thee, my God, my deliuerer and Saviour. And I yeeld thee now most humble and hartie thanks, for that it hath pleased thee, of thy singular mercie, to giue mee this especiall honour: first, to suffer for thy glorious truth much extreme miserie, feare, care, imprisonment, peril of bodie, trouble of mind, hazard of life, and danger of death, by sicknesse, fire, conspiracie, and sword: and afterward blessedlie protecting and preseruing me from so manifold dangers, and miracule the deliuering me out of the hands of all mine enemies; to call me to this excellent state and roiual dignitie of a Prince: and as this dare to cloath me with the garments of honour, to set the Crowne of gladnesse, and diademe of dignitie vpon mine head . . . and consecrate this handmaid QUEEN of this Realme . . . (261-62)

Within her later writing, Elizabeth no longer addresses a hostile audience but instead a personal God, who has honored her by allowing her to "suffer for thy glorious truth" and delivering her from the "hand" of all her "enemies." Rather than asking a "gentyll reader" to accept her words as she did in her first writing, Elizabeth thanks a God who has done her a personal service, a God who in her mind "consecrates" her position as Queen rather than forgives her womanly weakness and sin.

In a way, Elizabeth anticipates a dilemma that modern women writers face: Should they command a place in the literary world because they have experienced uniquely female experiences such as childbirth and mothering, or should they demand a place by competing successfully in a previously masculine world? Elizabeth seems to have chosen the later course, as she participates in what James Catano called the rhetoric of masculinity, which stresses origins, initiative, and perseverance (435; see also Bleich, Gender Interest; Schweickart).
The Emergence of the Feminine Voice

We can see in this examination of English Renaissance women writers how their rhetorical and stylistic choices and images of audience were determined by gender roles. The 1526-1639 period represents the first courageous steps of these women writers, while the 1640-1660 period demonstrates how they sought additional authority. In part, the English Civil Wars took men from their homes, their estates, and their professions and drew women into new roles and spheres of experience. After 1640, published writing by women increased five-fold (Crawford), as more women expressed their views on church, state, monarchy, government, and their own status, going beyond motherhood, family relations, and godliness. Publication was no longer limited to women of elite classes but open to any woman who could prove to the publishers that their thoughts on contemporary issues had an audience and a market.

Because our study can represent only a starting point in an investigation of the voices of early women writers, we offer here only a brief look at a number of women writers who represent at times similar cultural struggles and at times different rhetorical and stylistic choices. If one thing links all the writers we have described, it is their sense of a suspicious and hostile audience, one that goes beyond any personal and familial audience and one that they or their mentors deliberately invoke in order to diffuse that hostility. Often they attempt to overcome the prejudice of that audience by assuming a traditional feminine role, one often defined by the patriarchal religions and systems. Only then can the women writers begin to express what may have motivated them to write in the first place.

Thus, Mary More Roper needs Hyrde to confirm that her writing will not lead women to evil before she can add her own interpretation to Erasmus. Elizabeth Caldwell identifies with Eve before she can suggest that her husband is as sinful as she. In order to participate in spiritual inquiry, Elizabeth Grymeston seeks self.authorization through motherhood. Elizabeth Joceline denies pride as she defines how women should be educated. Elizabeth Richardson may explore the relationship of the female soul to God, but she does so in traditionally accepted genres for women—devotions and prayers. Addressing an all female audience, Elizabeth Clinton finds not only confidence but also anger. And, Dorothy Leigh finds evidence of women's spiritual worth in Mary and compares herself to St. Paul, as Elizabeth I, seeing herself as a kind of Daniel, addresses not a critical audience but a personal God.

In our examination of each of these writers, we have highlighted the words and phrases that give evidence to our interpretations. In doing so, we hope that scholars studying women's writing today may have a broader framework in which to place their research. Moreover, we hope our study of English Renaissance women's writing properly balances culture and style,
audience and voice, gender and communication, as symbolized by the words of Adrienne Rich and Gerda Lerner offered at the beginning of our article.

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New Book in Composition Theory

*JAC* is pleased to announce that SUNY Press has just published *Composition Theory for the Postmodern Classroom*, a collection of the most outstanding scholarly articles published in the *Journal of Advanced Composition* over the last decade. These twenty-one essays represent the breadth and strength of composition scholarship that has engaged fruitfully with critical theory.

Authors who contributed to this collection include prominent figures in rhetoric and composition, such as Lynn Bloom, James Kinneavy, John Trimbur, and W. Ross Winterowd, as well as influential figures from outside of the field, such as David Bleich, Henry Giroux, and J. Hillis Miller. Many of the articles included in this collection have won the James L. Kinneavy Award for the most outstanding article of the year.

Jacqueline Jones Royster provides a Foreword, and Linda Brodkey contributes an Afterword. This volume is expected to be used both by scholars and by instructors in graduate courses in composition theory. Copies can be ordered by calling SUNY at (607) 277-2211.