

DEVOTION, DOMESTICITY, AND HEALING AMONG EARLY MODERN WOMEN:
WRITING RELIGION AND MEDICINE IN PERSONAL MANUSCRIPTS

by

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Abstract

DEVOTION, DOMESTICITY, AND HEALING AMONG PIOUS EARLY MODERN WOMEN: WRITING RELIGION AND MEDICINE IN PERSONAL MANUSCRIPTS

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The establishment of the Church of England in the sixteenth century instigated a period of turbulence as religious practices transitioned from medieval Catholicism to post-Reformation Protestantism. Protestant theology idealized proficient domesticity as an essential signifier of piety for women. In practice, daily spiritual examination, moral purity, competence in managing a household, and the efficacious administration of domestic medicine largely defined a pious Protestant woman. Consequently, women validated their piety by leaving evidence of these practices in diaries, autobiographical writing, and receipt books. Religious meditative writing and recipes occur side by side in early modern pious women's manuscripts intentionally because each of these elements are purposeful demonstrations of Christian female virtue.

This thesis argues that the development of domestic medicine in the early modern period, as revealed in women's self-writing, can only be fully understood when interpreted through the lens of religiosity. The first chapter examines the cultural transitions in education and religion that enabled women to not only read their Bibles for themselves, but also to move recipe collection from an oral to written tradition. Chapter two compares the rhetoric of domestic medicine to women's religious self-writing, emphasizing the importance of a Christian theology of the body to achieve both spiritual purity and physical healing. Chapter three examines the material enclosure of women's closets in early modern homes. Closets provided private spaces for women to develop identities broader than prescriptive religious paradigms, thus contributing to the advancement of medical practices in the period. Finally, chapter four focuses on medical recipes, demonstrating how physic, codified in receipt books, heightened the permeability of domestic and professional medical practices. Professionally trained physicians frequently borrowed from women's receipt books, and conversely those receipt books commonly included the recipes of professionally trained physicians.

Early modern women's physic, motivated by piety, gained authority within the patriarchal culture, if in sometimes covert ways, as recipes were shared across social, generational, and professional boundaries. In this way, women's physic provided an essential foundation for the progress of medical literacy and practice in the early modern period.

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Introduction

The Protestant Reformation manifested itself in England via the incriminating theses of a German cleric and the maneuvers of a calculating king. Martin Luther's indictment of the institutional Roman Catholic Church catalyzed a powerful movement of protesting reformers who brought a new theology directly to the people. Subsequently, Henry VIII manipulated the growing dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic Church's political machinations to establish himself as head of the Church of England. Reformation theology emphasized individual salvation, achieved not by the purchase of indulgences or confession of sin to a priest but instead through an individual's personal relationship with God. Luther's theses thus upended centuries of church tradition in which professional clergy served as mediators between God and Catholic adherents. This theology of "priesthood of the believer" consequently brought to the surface ancient battles concerning the extent to which women's status and roles within the church could be regarded as equal to men's. Protestant reformers, in general, believed women and men received the gift of salvation equally, becoming sisters and brothers of a "spiritual priesthood" rather than the institutional religious orders of Roman Catholicism. This "equal in salvation" belief, combined with the eradication of the role of a mediating priest, promoted personal reading of the Bible among men and women alike as they were encouraged to "work out" their salvation "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).¹ Thus, the personal reading and study of scripture contributed to improved reading and writing literacy, especially among women whose access to education was more limited than men's.

Protestant clergy in the period largely construed literacy for women as valuable in that their domestic responsibilities—household management, the education of children, and caring for the sick--could be executed with greater skill by those who knew how to read.² Danielle

Clarke confirms the growing importance of literacy for successful domesticity:

Positive evaluations of [literacy that are] often seen as encouraging women to move beyond their allotted status within patriarchal culture inevitably tend to reinforce social norms about women's roles, suggesting that reading is a skill that is useful to the bringing up and instruction of children, and to the maintenance of household virtue and female chastity. (50)

The precise separation of the roles of men and women in Protestant religious practice reinforced this gendered view of literacy. Proper religious expression for the Protestant woman was decidedly domestic, as evidenced by the emphasis on private devotion and the silencing of women in public worship. John Knox (c.1513-1572) as well as other Reformation clergy quoted from the letters of St. Paul to justify the separation of the roles of men and women in religious practice: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law" (1 Corinthians 14:34). This interpretation of Pauline theology is supported by other New Testament scriptural passages that define control of one's tongue as a characteristic of piety.³ Because religion permeated both domestic and public life during the period, the precepts advanced by Reformation theology complicated the ongoing debate about appropriate roles for women not only in religion, but also in domestic and public life.

By comparison, medieval Catholic women had more freedom to perform public acts of piety. Christine Peters describes the religious climate in the latter Middle Ages as having "a certain amount of flexibility" concerning gender roles:

Individuals in pre-Reformation Catholicism were presented with a great deal of choice in their religious acts. Catholicism offered a menu of options, as people were encouraged to

select particular saints for their own personal devotion. . . . This diversity was both a strength and a weakness. . . . [It] encouraged individual choice, which could buttress, or erode, gender distinctions, and sheds light on the importance of gender identity in the religious sphere. Whilst some saints . . . seem to have been especially associated with the female sex, the diversity of the holy company of heaven, and of forms of religious practice, means that such tight gender associations should not be generally assumed. (41)

The flexibility to which Peters refers is demonstrated in part by the belief that male and female Catholic saints of the medieval church aided and protected people irrespective of gender (97). Accordingly, the abundance of female saints, of whom the Virgin Mary was pre-eminent, inspired Catholic lay women to public demonstrations of faith, giving rise to a period of English mysticism (Temple 141). The mystic Julian of Norwich (c. 1342 - c.1416), for example, is thought to have inspired Margery Kempe (c. 1373-after 1438), a fifteenth-century English Catholic woman whose “radical social gospel . . . threaten[ed] the very basis for town life” (Staley “Introduction”).⁴ Lynn Staley describes Kempe as a woman who “evinces the manners and the tastes neither of the court nor of the nunnery, but the piety, the culture, the profit-oriented values, and the status-consciousness of the late medieval town” (“Introduction”). Liam Temple affirms that “Julian and Margery would have been influenced more by the growing positive presence of women in late medieval religion, particularly the virgin Mary and women saints, which allowed many women to achieve a position of spiritual authority” (143). Citing a sermon in the medieval *Book of Margery Kempe*, Beth Allison Barr asserts that “even as scholarship concentrates on how the English Bible empowered early modern women, *The Book of Margery Kempe* provides evidence for a biblical text . . . empowering a late medieval woman to

participate in acts of public piety” (299). In contrast, the clerical leadership of the Reformation period attempted to reduce the flexibility of gender roles regarding religious expression.

As Protestantism matured and grew in the early modern period, professional clergy tried to suppress public acts of faith that outspoken women such as Margery Kempe had helped to legitimize in the later Middle Ages. Barr speculates, for example, that the same biblical text that might have empowered a woman like Kempe would have been interpreted differently by Protestant clerics just a few centuries later, encouraging “private introspection instead of pious action”(299).⁵ The rise of Protestantism, then, engendered significant change from medieval Catholicism regarding women's public worship.⁶

The contentious shifts between Catholicism and Protestantism throughout the period found women activists of both faiths caught in the middle of the power struggles of the religious patriarchy. Anne Askew, for example, was burned at the stake in 1546 for being a renegade Protestant female preacher (Watt). Joan Boucher, an Anabaptist, was burned at the stake for heresy in 1550 during the reign of Protestant King Edward I.⁷ She is thought to have smuggled William Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament into England beneath her long skirts (Hope). Catholic activist Margaret Clitherow was martyred in 1586 for hiding priests in her home in Northern England, and in 1588 Margaret Ward was hanged for helping a priest escape from Bridewell Prison (Walker, Butler 405). Anne Line, born to a Puritan family but a converted Catholic, was hanged in 1601 for harboring priests (Butler 93). Men, of course, suffered religious persecution during the Reformation in greater numbers than women. Bizarrely, Lady Brilliana Harley's great-grandfather was "posthumously exhumed and burnt at the stake for his strident defence of the Lutheran understanding of justification by faith" in 1532 (Harris 129,

Foxe 22). Retha Warnicke cites the martyrologist John Foxe (1516-1587), who identified 275 Protestant victims, both men and women, of the Marian persecution. Warnicke concludes:

Remarkably, 55 women, about one-fifth of the total number, died for their beliefs. Only 2 of these women were burned during 1555, the first year of persecution when about 80 men went to the stake, but in the two years that followed, the number of female martyrs steadily increased, rising to 20 in 1556 and to 28 in 1557, only about 18 more men than women died for their faith, a surprising ratio when contrasted with the much smaller proportion of female victims in the reign of Henry VIII (74).

She proposes that some Protestant women were martyred because they were the wives of prominent Protestant reformers during times of Catholic ascendancy, particularly the reign of Queen Mary (76). Warnicke also questions whether Puritan women's practice of hosting small separatist congregations (considered apostate from the Church of England) in their homes endangered them (76). Given the imperative for Protestant women's religious expression to be confined to the home, leadership roles assumed by women in separatist sects like Quakerism (even, it seems, if they were leading in their own homes) endangered their safety.

In contrast to the recriminations against religious women who attempted to transcend their "allotted status," respectable pious women fostered and performed their spiritual identities in large measure through highly favored domestic activity both prescribed and demonstrated by what they read and wrote. A literate, pious woman read her Bible and kept a diary of her spiritual reflections. She also read the household manuals popular with middling and aristocratic women during the period. These texts were "by and large a 'Puritan' genre," reflecting the symbiotic relationship between religious devotion and domesticity (Amussen 46). Excellence in domesticity required the collection, experimentation, and recording of culinary and medical

recipes that reflected her ability to keep her family well-fed and healthy, thus exemplifying the biblical ideal of womanhood, most notably recorded in Proverbs 31:

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. . . . She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. . . . She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. . . . She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. (Proverbs 31:10, 14, 15, 19-21, 27, 28)

Much domestic writing in the period, especially diaries, autobiographies, and receipt books, signifies the literate, competent, compassionate, and spiritually incisive woman who is to be praised in the public sphere for her piety even as she is contained within domesticity. Although these forms of "self-writing" were distinctive genres by the nineteenth century, in the early modern period the lines were blurred. A woman's diary or autobiography commonly contained culinary and medical recipes, and receipt books often contained religious marginalia.⁸ This inclusion of recipes in personal spiritual self-writing reinforces the notion of virtuous domesticity, and the spiritual musings contained in receipt books bring God into quotidian domesticity.

My contention is that religious meditative writing and recipes occur side by side in early modern pious women's manuscripts intentionally because each of these elements are purposeful demonstrations of Christian female virtue. Lady Grace Mildmay's (1552-1620) self-writing, for

example, includes loose papers of religious meditation, instructions for her children, descriptions of medical practices, and medical receipts, together forming a textual whole of her life, at least as she desired others to view it. In other words, the early modern pious woman's diaries, receipt books, and other forms of domestic writing share a common purpose in that they "prove" her--much in the way she "proves" a medical recipe to be efficacious or a culinary recipe to be "good"--in ways acceptable to God and to the power centers of the culture.⁹

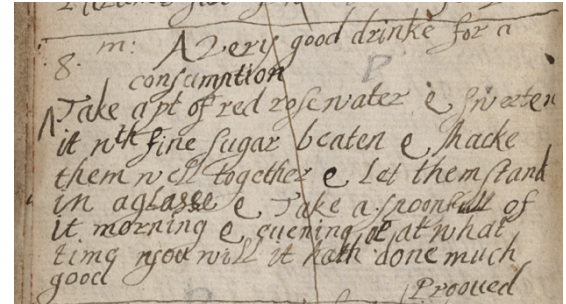


Figure 0-1. Katherine Packer Gell's "A Very good drinke for a consumption" is "prooued" (Folger V.a. 387, 3).

As a cornerstone of reformed theology, the medieval notion of Christ as Healer renders the intersection of Christianity and physic as a particularly cogent demonstration of Protestant female piety.¹⁰ It is for this reason that I support my contentions concerning the essential synthesis of domesticity and religion primarily through examining the religious and medical writing found in women's diaries, autobiographies, and medical recipes, thus largely excluding culinary recipes from this thesis.

Importantly, early modern domestic medical practice, codified by women's handwritten texts, heightened the permeability of domestic and public spheres in the period in spite of religious admonition to the contrary. Professionally trained physicians frequently borrowed from domestic medicine, and women's receipt books include the prescriptive medical advice of trained (male) physicians. Subsequently, women's physic gained authority within the patriarchal culture, even if covertly, as receipts were shared across these gendered boundaries. Therefore, women's physic provides an essential example of how women's literacy activities vis-à-vis domestic writing laid the groundwork for destabilizing a patriarchal culture "secure" in the notion that pious women could be contained within domesticity.

My thesis, therefore, argues domesticity was the primary channel through which early modern Protestant women demonstrated their piety. As such, Reformation theology intersected domesticity in three significant ways, resulting in a “reformation” of the role of women in the early modern period. First, this intersection imposed unique expectations for piety that, while improving women’s literacy, also held them in esteem for their domesticity while generally limiting any autonomy in the public sphere. Second, the physical enclosure of the closet in early modern homes, as material representations of pious women’s concurrent confinement and freedom, provided an environment that contributed to the development of essential domestic medical practices. Third, the body of domestic medical knowledge developed to “prove” piety was a fundamental, even if unacknowledged, contributor to the progress of medicine in the early modern period.

Introduction Notes

¹ All scripture references are from *The Authorized King James Version*, 1611, unless otherwise noted.

² Religious practices were both tumultuous and fluid during the early modern period. Substantial syncretism existed between the practices of the late medieval Catholic church and the newly forming Church of England. Therefore, rather than attempting to categorize Protestant women's religious preferences into artificial designations (e.g., "puritan", "separatist", "conforming"), I focus my thesis on "pious" women. These are Protestant women who confess to a personal relationship with God that influences all aspects of their lives.

³ For example, James 3:6: "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

⁴ Julian (or Juliana) of Norwich (1342 – c.1416) was an English mystic who wrote about her visions of Christ and the Virgin Mary in a book titled *Revelations of Divine Love* ("St. Juliana of Norwich").

⁵ Barr offers the example of M. William Perkins' seventeenth-century sermon on Matthew 12:50: "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Kempe interpreted this verse to mean that both men and women were equally equipped to do the will of God by serving. Perkins, on the other hand, advocated a common Protestant interpretation of this verse, which "emphasized that doing the will of God meant having 'true faith'" (298). True faith for early modern women, it seems, was interpreted by male clergy to be characterized by "private introspection instead of pious action" (299).

⁶ A notable exception was Quakerism, or the Religious Society of Friends, a relatively small, dissenting sect within Protestantism that organized in England in the 1660s. Quakers gave women and men equal leadership within the church, and women commonly preached in public and wrote religious material for print publication. Unsurprisingly, this view of gender equality promoted literacy among Quaker women, who could read and write in greater proportion than the non-Quaker female population: "Unlike many curriculums of the period, Quaker recommendations specified that girls should learn to write as well as to read, thus assuring a balanced ability both to read and interpret the scriptures" (Rose 94, 105). Quakers also contributed to education among the poorer classes, who were commonly uneducated. Quaker women were particularly conscientious about educating their servants (105).

⁷ Anabaptists were believed by both Roman Catholics and the Church of England to be a heretical cult, mainly because they rejected infant baptism in favor of adult baptism as a public confession of their faith. They were heavily persecuted in the sixteenth century ("Anabaptist").

⁸ According to the *OED*, as early as the fourteenth century the word “receipt” could describe “a statement of the ingredients and procedure necessary for making a medicinal preparation, a prescription; (also) a medicine made according to such a prescription. More generally: a remedy or cure” (“receipt”). For clarity, I will use the phrase “medical recipe” when referring to a single recipe, and the phrase “receipt book” when referring to a collection of medical recipes.

⁹ In addition to the word “proved,” the Latin phrase *probatum est* (it is proved) was often appended to both culinary and medical recipes. For an astute analysis of the multitude of meanings the phrase *probatum est* signified in women’s domestic writing, see Chapter 5 of Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen* (2016).

¹⁰ Lyn Bennett provides an excellent analysis of the early modern religious concept of Christ as Healer. See “Women, Writing, and Healing.”

Chapter 1 Education and Religion as Antecedents to Protestant Domestic Medical Practice

“Reade gather and make carefull practice” (Packer Gell iii).

Katherine Packer Gell’s directive on the title page of *A Booke of Very Good medicines* (1639) encapsulates the religious identity of pious women in the early modern period. Gell was the daughter of a Puritan politician who subsidized Christian missionary work around the world. John Packer was as concerned for his daughters’ education as well as their spiritual condition, providing Katherine progressive educational opportunities until her marriage to Sir John Gell about 1644 (Lamont). Her *Booke* contains a collection of both culinary and medical recipes carefully gathered to ensure successful domesticity. Texts such as Gell’s *Booke* are material representations of the transitioning identities for early modern women who wished to be considered pious. Medieval Catholicism had provided a structured path to piety through religious vocation. Reformation theology, however, moved a woman’s demonstration of religiosity largely to the home through marriage and motherhood. Religion, especially for women, became a private practice.

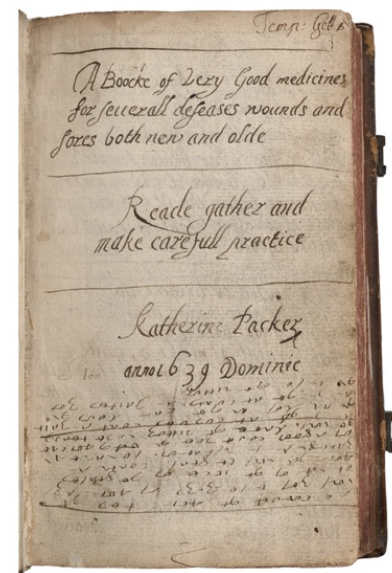


Figure 1-1. Katherine Packer's *A booke of very Good medicines* (Folger V.a. 387).

In contrast to the public, catechismal, oral tradition of medieval church, Protestants were encouraged to read scripture privately. In other words, reformed Protestants viewed the Bible as more than a text to be merely listened *to*, but also one to be read *by* the ordinary lay person in the vernacular. Consequently, much of the reading that a literate woman did was centered around the Bible, "the heart of early modern female reading culture" (Molekamp *Women and the Bible* 1). Pious Protestant women like Gell were enjoined by their religious "superiors," whether spouses

or clergy, to read scripture for themselves and reflect on it in solitude. Even the five Cooke sisters (1526-1610), who were afforded classical educations equal to those received by boys, maintained scripture as the "centre of [their] libraries" (Allen 40, 52).¹ This emphasis on lay reading of scripture spurred the mass printing of the Bible in several English translations between the years 1526 and 1611 (Barr 299, 303). The *Geneva Bible*, produced by Protestant exiles in Geneva and first printed in the 1560s, "sold more than half a million copies in the sixteenth century alone—making it, in all likelihood, the most widely distributed book in the English Renaissance, and the one that played the most crucial role in changing the patterns of lay book ownership in the age of print" (Sherman 71). Less than a century later, the *Authorized King James Bible* (1611) eclipsed the popularity of the *Geneva Bible*. This vernacular translation, prepared by a committee of more than 50 scholars in Hebrew and Greek, was intended to solidify the separation of the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church (Goodman 73, 76-78). As literate women read the Bible (as well as other religious texts instructing women in domesticity), they gathered the knowledge they gained into spiritual diaries, autobiographies, letters, and receipt books, both culinary and medical. These nascent genres of early modern women's domestic writing, born from expanding educational opportunities, both described and instructed other women in the "carefull practice" of women's domesticity and thus "reformed" women's essential identity as wife, mother, and caretaker of the home.

Educating Women

The goal of Protestant women's education was to give them the means for competent home management and living a virtuous life, free from the evil thoughts that could fill an empty mind. Theological notions of women as "weaker vessels," derived largely from Eve's temptation by Satan in the Garden of Eden, popularly validated the need for women's mental states to be

controlled by immersion in pious activity under the watchful eyes of their husbands and personal clerics. Isaac Stephens elucidates this theological paradigm by differentiating between medieval Catholic notions of an exterior, corporeal Satan with reformed Protestant theology, which painted a far different picture of the prince of darkness. Instead of viewing him as a creature who could take physical and temporal form, emphasis turned to depict the devil as more of a spiritual being whose primary objective was to enter into a person's mind and plant transgressive and tempting thoughts that produced sinful acts and behaviours. For Puritans, the root of all sin rested in the mind, and it therefore became extremely important for a godly individual to monitor his or her mental state and recognize when sinful thoughts occurred so as to keep them in check. (204)

Consequently, church leaders mostly favored the education of women if it was grounded in reading primarily the Bible and other religious texts, thereby providing a "monitor" for their minds. In other words, literacy was regarded as tool to limit transgressive behavior.

However, though the Bible was the primary text for women's education, many women from wealthy families (such as the Cooke sisters previously mentioned) were also educated in Latin, Greek, and classical literature. Regardless, the most conspicuously pious Protestant women acknowledged that their educations were only as useful it helped them better understand their religious faith and personal relationship to God. Mark Burden, for example, posits that Lady Lucy Hutchinson (1620-1681), the accomplished poetess and biographer of her husband's life, considered her education to be "connected to personal piety and family devotion rather than public performance" (174). Burden explains further, "Hutchinson shows herself in agreement with both Owen and Calvin that knowledge of God is necessary to mitigate worldly wisdom" (173). In other words, scripture was the prism through which secular thought was tested. For

example, although Juan Vives (1493-1540) considered the study of scripture to be of primary importance to a young woman's education, he also quoted Aristotle and other classical authors in his prescriptive texts for women: "And vnto sobrenes in joined measurable & sklender dyet/which things be in householding the womans party/as Plato & Aristotle say full well" (45). For Puritans especially, knowledge of the humanist classics as well as Christian theology strengthened faith by giving one the ability to identify the shortcomings of, while at the same time appreciating, secular thought (Burden 170-173). Therefore, the education afforded to women was, for the most part, not intended to extend their influence in public life (as it did men's). Instead, a classical education was intended to help them appreciate and conform to the virtuous domesticity they believed was assigned to them in scripture.

Even though aristocratic women's education was expanding, men's literacy improved more rapidly than women's in general during the early modern period. Women of the merchant and lower classes were not afforded the rich textual resources of the aristocracy. David Cressy claims that "90 percent of English women of the mid-seventeenth century could not write their own names," and Alun Withey estimates the illiteracy rate for the total population at 70 percent (Cressy 305, Withey 180). Given that literacy measurements for this period in England are difficult to ascertain (and Cressy's in particular are the subject of significant debate), scholars in general concede that illiteracy was widespread, particularly among middling and poor women prior to the eighteenth century.²

Cressy's research, based on the ability to write one's name, underscores that the differentiation of *kinds* of literacy is crucial to understand women's education in the period.

Knowing how to read was more common among women than knowing how to write, even within the aristocracy. Girls were customarily taught only to read prior to the seventeenth century, although boys were taught to both read and write (Mendelson "Women in Early Modern England 90). The school at Christ's Hospital in London, for example, taught girls how to read from the time it opened in 1552, but not how to write until 1658, more than 100 years later (Bowden "Women in Educational Spaces" 116-118). Consequently, literacy rates based on handwriting for this period are likely underestimated because more women could read, especially printed material, in higher numbers than they could write or sign their names.³

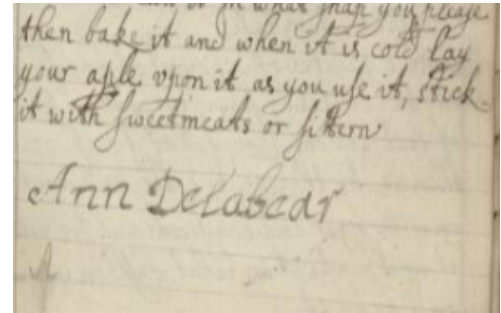


Figure 1-2. In the de la Bere receipt book, Ann practices signing her name (Wellcome MS 7577, image 29).

Controversy engendered by the acceleration of women's acquisition of handwriting skills in the mid-seventeenth century indicates the anxiety surrounding women's autonomy in the period. Male authors of women's conduct books reflected this fear of a pen in the hand of a woman (Ferguson "A Room" 93-100). Giovanni Bruto, for example, condemns "impudent" women spurred on by liberal education in his treatise *The necessarie, fits, and conuenient education of a young gentlewoman* (1598): "And feeling that in the studies which procure recreatió, there is no lesse danger that they will sooner learn to be subtil & impudent louers, [and also] learnedly to write verses, poetrie, ballads and songs." Bruto instead admonishes women to pursue domestic skills instead of writing: "likewise bee restrained to the care and gouernment of their houses. . . . Let the small profit got by learning, be compared with the great hurt that may happen vnto them, and they shall be shewed . . . how much more conuenient the needle, the wheele, the distaff, and the spindle . . . then the book and pen (G, G2). In other words, if the

educated ideas and opinions of women were written down, they would likely become transgressively public. Therefore, if women were to learn to write, according to Bruto, it should be carefully practiced within the context of religious piety.

Women, then, began to write within a decidedly domestic context: spiritual diaries, receipt books, and translations of religious works, for example. The popularity of handwriting instructors grew, even though those teachers provided instruction within a paradigm of

domesticity. The popular handwriting instructor John Brinsley (1612), for example, offered women the following advice to practice difficult letters: “And what letters they make the worst, to make them so oft ouer, in some voyde place of their book, or some wastepaper,

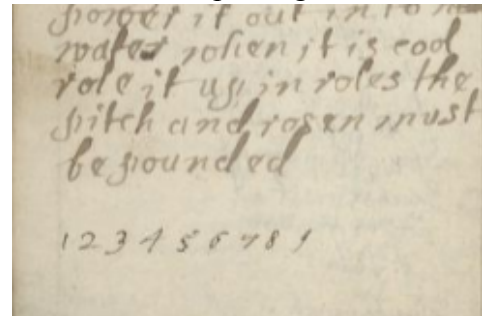


Figure 1-3. Practicing numbers in a "voyde place" (Wellcome MS 7577, 43r).

until those be as good as any of the rest” (F3r). Often the “voyde place” in which difficult letters were practiced was in a receipt book. Concurrently, some published household texts exhibited a growing approval of the acquisition of handwriting skills by women. In 1618, twenty years after Bruto’s admonitions against writing-literate women, author Martin Billingsley proclaims:

Suffer me not to give connivance to that ungrounded opinion of many, who affirmed Writing to bee altogether unnecessary for women. . . . [I]f any Art be commendable in a woman . . . it is this of Writing; whereby they. . . may commit many worthy and excellent things to Writing, which may, occasionally, minister unto them matter of much solace. . . . Wherefore their opinion who would barre women from the use of this excellent faculty of Writing, is utterly lame, and cannot by force of argument be maintained. (B5, B6, C)

Indeed, by the mid-seventeenth century, teaching handwriting to women was viewed as a practical necessity (Bowden “Women in Educational Spaces” 117,118). As the receipt book was

used as the space for practicing literacy skills, it became both a pedagogic tool for literacy as well as material proof of it.

Although handwriting was increasingly accepted as a skill for both men and women during the period, handwriting styles remained largely gendered. The elaborate secretary hand, for example, was considered to be most suited for a man's "strong" hand (Sanders 173). Conversely, the simple, supposedly less physically-taxing italic hand was commonly used by middling and aristocratic women. Characteristics of an italic hand could indicate levels of education and writing literacy for women. Upper case letters, for example, "had the effect of bestowing dignity and high status on those who learned to form them," and they would have been attempted only after writing letters in lower-case was mastered (5). Ann and Hester de la Bere's receipt book includes a gloss on scripture that elucidates the significance of capital letters. The writer uses capitalization to explain the character of God: "Moses was comforted in that glorious & fearfull name: written not in Capital Letters but Capital Attributes which the Lord caused to be proclaimed before him. Exod 34:6" (image 9r).⁴ God's name cannot be adequately honored by merely writing it in capital letters. Instead, his

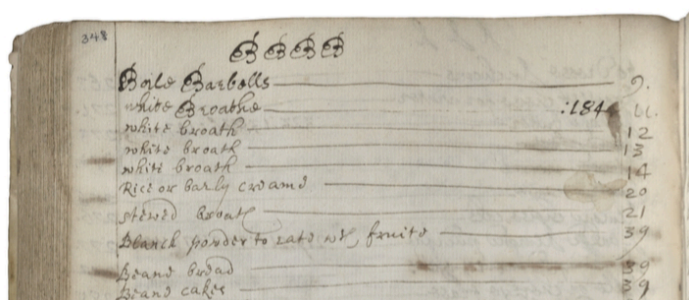


Figure 1-4. Repeating capital letters in an anonymous manuscript (Folger V.a. 19, 348).

attributes are capitalized, connoting an ultimate form of sophistication and awe. Repeating inscriptions of capital letters in various receipt books identified the writer as a person of distinction and of a more advanced degree of literacy. Illustrative of this is an anonymous cookbook manuscript in the Folger Shakespeare Library that contains an index in which capital letters are repeated three or four times with each heading, shown in figure 1-4 (V.a.19, 348).

Wendy Wall speculates that either a man or woman seems to be taking advantage of the opportunity the cookbook afforded to practice his or her skill (“Women in the Household” 106). I contend, however, that this “anonymous” text is most likely written by a woman, because women were more likely to practice their handwriting skills in the “voyde places” of domestic texts. Further, the precise repetition of capital letters in this cookbook’s index “prove” the writer’s education and the superiority of her manuscript—something generally unnecessary for a male scribe who would have had a variety of opportunities for demonstrations of literacy. In addressing difficulties of ascertaining the gender of an author of an anonymous text, Marcy North raises the question “Does this author write like a woman?” (213). While North refers to the “voice” of poetry in this instance, a cookbook such as the “Anonymous” Folger V.a.19 reveals a literal answer to the question, thus circumventing the need for difficult textual identification of essential female thought.

The author does, indeed, write like a woman as she perfects her italic hand.

The page designs in several women’s receipt books in the period show a remarkable similarity to the popular copy books, which women could purchase to aid their handwriting skills, thus strengthening

the link between receipt books and the acquisition of writing literacy. Copy books contained pre-ruled paper, which was “advised by various masters so that students learned to write letters of the same size in a straight line, between two guide lines” (Wolfe 29). Some receipt books contain recipes written in a similar manner, with hand-drawn lines and attention given to letter spacing

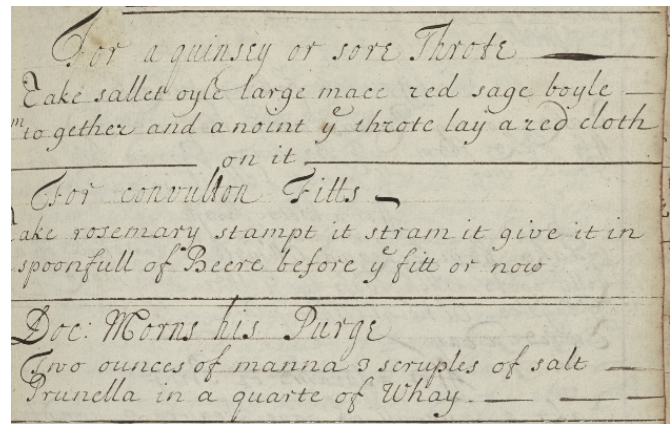


Figure 1-5. Constance Hall's receipt book, 1672 (Folger V.a. 20, 26r).

and capitalization. Constance Hall's receipt book, for example, contains medical recipes carefully written on hand-lined paper, emulating the instructional copy-books of the period (figure 1-5).

Several recipes also contain spelling corrections, such as "To Make Mangoe," in which the spelling for the word "on" is corrected (figure 1-6). In Dorothy Phillip's manuscript, *A Sermon booke* (1616-1617),

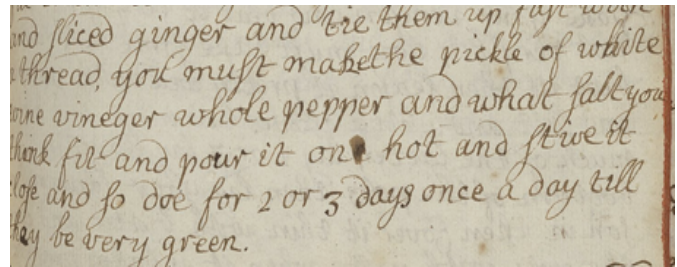


Figure 1-6. "To make Mangoe." The "e" in "on" is deleted to correct the spelling (Folger V.a. 20, 51r).

the writer of "R.e.c.e.i.p.t. to m.a.k.e R.i.c.e. C.h.e.e.s.e C.a.k.e.s," inserts periods between the letters as spacing devices for a practicing hand (figure 1-7). Phillips and Hall are two good examples of women following the advice of handwriting instructors to use any available piece of paper to practice, while at the same time compiling cook books containing highly-valued cooking and medical receipts.

Moreover, these recipes demonstrate the pedagogical function of the receipt books themselves. Most women, including those of the aristocracy, were educated in the home by their parents and assorted governesses or private teachers. Receipt books were

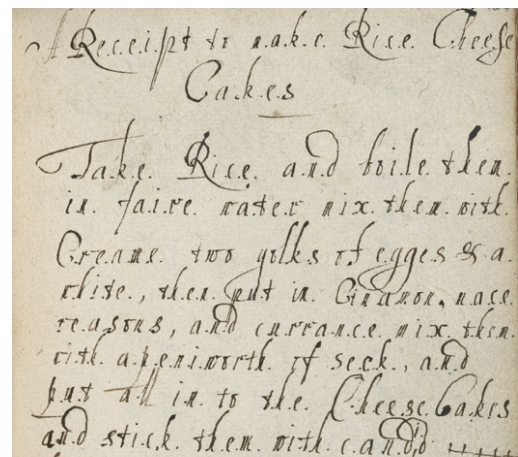


Figure 1-7. "A Receipt to make Rice Cheese Cakes" contains spacing between the letters (Folger V.a. 346, 124r).

ideal teaching tools because young women used them to practice their handwriting as well as to learn the domestic skills that were essential to female education. The inclusion of handwriting practice in receipt books, then, reinforces the circular educational characteristic of this domestic writing genre: women began to write recipes down as they became more literate, and the act of writing recipes improved their literacy.

The remarkable shift in public discourse in the seventeenth century regarding the acceptance of handwriting skills for women had its effect. By the mid-eighteenth century, illiteracy among women had dropped from 90 to 60 percent (Cressy 305). Women learned how to read and write in growing numbers, and literacy profoundly informed their concepts of “self” as they navigated the complex landscape of religious and educational reformation in the period. Personal Bible reading, the privatization of women’s spiritual expression, and women’s improving literacy through reading and writing reformed the expressions of Protestant women’s domesticity in the culture.

Reforming Women

Women’s self-writing in the early modern period reveals their questions, desires, and struggles to live as exemplars of piety in a highly-structured society undergoing massive religious change. Although "no example [from the period] has survived of a female diary below the level of the middle ranks," aristocratic families preserved a significant number of diaries, letters, and funeral sermons that provide glimpses of daily demonstrations of female piety within the upper classes (Mendelson "Stuart Women's" 137). In her *Booke of Remembrance* (c.1638), for example, Elizabeth Isham describes the joy of reading from her grandmother's library:

“I have often desired that the evil which I am borne to by nature thou wouldest reforme by thy grace” (Isham 18r).

In the time of my Grandmothers sicknes I comming dayly to see her lighted upon her Bookes (w[hich] lay in her window) wherein she much delighted and I gathered spirituall flowers out of the garden of her sweetnes, wherein one booke I found of the nesisity of Repentance & in another the effects faith & how for without faith it is impossible to please God. (16r)

Julie Eckerle proposes that "Isham's love of God is often inspired by what she reads. And over time, she develops her own method of study, combining reading and writing with praying" (108). Similarly, Lady Margaret Hoby (1571-1633), a "first generation Puritan who was learning . . . to deal more strictly with the issue of discipline and leading a holy life," kept a diary that focused on her daily habits of reading and personal devotion (Moody xli). Her entry "Wensday 22 [1599]" is representative:

After I was redie I praied, and, after I had gon a Litle about the house, I wrett out notes in my testement, and then brak my fast and walked abroad tell dinner. . .then I wret notes out into my Bible, and after went a walkinge with Mr. Hoby, and then returned into examination and praier: after, I reed of the bible, and walked alone, and then went into the kicthine, wher Mr Rhodes and my selfe had som speach with the poore and Ignorant of the som princeples of religion. (Moody 8)

Most of Hoby's day is spent in isolation or in the company of her husband or personal cleric, Mr. Rhodes, with whom she read scripture and discussed theology. Though the cleric was her spiritual advisor, an aristocratic woman was also commonly a financial benefactor of the parish and of the clergyman's family. In the above quote from Hoby's diary, she describes teaching "the poore and Ignorant" in her kitchen, in collaboration with Mr. Rhodes. Hoby's aristocratic rank places her at a higher rung on the social ladder than the cleric who is her spiritual mentor. Hoby's diary, then, reveals a relationship between an aristocratic woman and her cleric complicated by religious tradition and class consciousness.

Protestant religious tradition considered piety a private, but not solitary, pursuit for noble women, who gathered in small groups for encouragement and spiritual discussions. For example, Hoby's diary entry of July 13, 1600 reveals that "after diner I talked of the sarmon, and reed of

the bible with some Gentlewomen that were with me” (98). Similarly, in her autobiographical papers, Lady Grace Mildmay expresses her desire to not be “swallowed up” by an active social life with her friends to combat loneliness when her husband was away from home. Instead, she gives herself “wholly into God,” reading daily “a chapter in the books of Moses, another in one of the Prophets, one chapter in the Gospels and another in the Epistles to the end of the Revelation and the whole Psalms appointed for the day, ending and beginning again and so proceeded in that course” (Pollock 34). All aspects of these women’s lives were subordinate to their devotion to God, and their devotion was strengthened by the ability to read and study the Bible in solitude and in small groups.

The self-writing of Hoby, Isham and Mildmay demonstrates an overarching desire to be considered worthy of God's salvation. In the foreword to her transcription of Hoby's diary, Joanna Moody states, "There can be no doubt that Lady Margaret's diary was intended primarily as a record of her religious observances, kept as an assurance of her constant attentiveness to the life of the spirit" (xi). These texts, then, served the dual purposes of recording personal meditation as well as proving one's piety before God and imagined (or often actual) readers.⁵ Whether, as Moody postulates, Hoby's envisioned audience was her own conscience, seeking to affirm the "evidence of the hand of God in her daily life and . . . confirmation of His love," or family members who would undoubtedly read her book after her death, it was of great importance to women like Hoby to reassure themselves and others of their religious devotion. Travis Robertson argues that Hoby's diary "became a barometer of personal piety, as it allowed [her] to check off her devotional activities while gauging how she spent her time" (214). Similarly, Stephens observes that Isham's autobiography memorializes the piety of all the women in the family:

[It] at first appears to be a purely private document--with an inward subjective self at its centre--and an extended act of prayer intended for the ears of God and the eyes of Elizabeth alone. . . . Yet upon closer inspection, the autobiography appears to be not just a purely private document but also public in some sense. . . . intended to memorialize the lives of multiple generations of godly Isham women. (44, 45)

In Hoby's diary as well as Isham's and Mildmay's texts, details of family and social life are embedded within an overwhelming notion of submission to God and the desire to be found worthy as His servant. Certainly, though we cannot fully know the intent of the authors (although we do know that much of Mildmay's writing was intended for her daughter and grandchildren), Hoby, Isham, and Mildmay's texts serve as a kind of "proof" of their piety, thus validating not only their religiosity but the literacy skills that supported it.

Funeral sermons, delivered by male clergy and often printed for public distribution, provided additional proof of a woman's piety and reinforced the notion that the Protestant woman's value rested within the paradigm of domesticity. Femke Molekamp points out that eulogies for men typically praised them for acts of public service, while women were praised for their "personal piety and devotional conduct" ("Seventeenth Century" 44).⁶ For example, in the Reverend Daniel Featley's funeral sermon, "A Christian's victorie," he describes an unnamed "good house-wi[fe]" whose daily routine included attending religious "ordinances" several times a week, reading, praying, and private meditation daily, and instructing the servants in her household in the same practices (279, 280). In his funeral sermon for Jane Ratcliffe (d. 1638), John Ley describes her as "singularly pious"; a woman of "witt" who gave up her interest in "stage plaies and other publique vanities" after her conversion "changed, as now to shew her selfe a lover of God more than of pleasures" (18, 21). A middling housewife who was the

daughter of a "skinner" and married to a brewer, Ratcliffe hailed from a Puritan family, and her uncle was a Puritan professor at Gresham College in London (Kelsey). Ley continues:

Those that saw how little she meddled in worldly matters, and when she did how little she minded them, will not easily believe she had so much sacred knowledge as indeed she had. . . . So she (shadowing her selfe from acquaintance with the world) shined gloriously in her knowledge of God, and of heavenly matters. (28)

Ley's encomium reinforces the religious paradigms for Protestant women of the age: she was encouraged to retreat from the public sphere and, ensconced in domesticity, seek to know God better.

In addition to funeral sermons, popular early modern "huswifery" texts, the majority authored by men, reveal expectations for piety directed to middling women. For example, Gervase Markham's *The English huswife* (1623) offers a key insight to the distinct roles of men and women in the Protestant household. Markham divides his book into two sections: the inward and outward virtues of good English housewives. Among the inward virtues, religion is considered of foremost importance: "First, then, to speake of the inward vertues of her minde; shee ought, aboue all things, to be of an upright and sincere religion, and in the same both zealous and constant; giuing by her example, an incitement to spurre all her family to pursue the same stepps" (2). Lest the housewife gain too much autonomy, though, Markham then warns her not to display the "violence of spirit" that inhabits vain women who preach or interpret scripture publicly, something that should only be done by male clergy. Instead, Markham exhorts women to "be but hearers and beleeuers, or at the most but modest perswaders . . . learning from the worthy Preachers & her husband, those good examples which shee shall with all carefull diligence see exercised amongst her seruants"(2). Similarly, Robert Cleaver's *A Godlie Forme of*

Household Government (1598) describes a household in which husbands and wives do not dispatch their respective roles properly as a living hell:

The dutie of the husband is, to be entermedling; and of the wife, to be solitarie and withdrawn. The dutie of man is, to be skillfull in talke: and of the wife to boast of silence. . . . The dutie of the husband is, to dispatch all things without doore: and of the wife, to ouersee and giue order for all things within the house. Now, where the husband and wife performeth these duties in their house, we may call it a Colledge of quietness: the house wherein these are neglected, wee may terme it a hell. (170, 171)

Cleaver demonstrates the liminal nature of public Protestant worship practice and private conduct in the home. If women were to be silent in the church, they were also to be silent at home, especially regarding their relationships with their husbands. The predicted result—a “colledge of quietness”—evokes a pre-fall Eden and therefore the ideal relationship between the husband and his “help meet,” his wife.⁷

Ironically, the quiet, submissive demeanor of pious women in domesticity was so highly valued in the reformed religious environment that it afforded them certain uncommon authority in a culture generally dominated by men. For example, in 1633 the Puritan lecturer John Stoughton declared Lady Brilliana Harley (1598-1643) to be “transcendent” over her husband, parliamentarian Sir Robert Harley, “in all the ways of godly patronage and character” (qtd in Harris “But I thinke” 128). Johanna Harris contends that Lady Harley “was widely known, concerned for the welfare of the ministry in her county, active in religious and intellectual ‘converse,’ and individually generous with her time and money” (128). In 1641, Lady Harley wrote her husband several letters in which she implored him to give her instructions about how to best protect the family and household servants at their estate in Herefordshire during the Civil

War. In her letter dated November 20, she pleads "If you find there is Caus to suspect the Riseing of the Papis and Aproufe of remouing to some towne and like beest of Shrewsbury if you please to give me directions I will as carefully follow it as I can" (BL Add MS 70003, 172v). Even though she consistently seeks her husband's counsel in her letters to him (and thus establishes her subordination to him in writing), Lady Harley herself organized resistance to the "papist" uprising in Herefordshire through careful negotiations when her husband was away attending sessions of Parliament (Eales, "Harley, Brilliana"). In other examples, the diarist Mary Boyle Rich (1624-1678), described later in life as a "paragon of piety," was a "revered leader in her local Essex community, settling disputes between neighbours, arranging an equitable distribution of income to ministers of various denominations, and giving away a third or more of her income to the poor, the clergy, and local institutions such as Felsted School" (Mendelson "Rich, Mary"). In a distinctly counter-cultural decision during the period, Elizabeth Isham lived as a single woman by choice, not wanting to divide her attentions between a husband and God. In her *Booke*, she expresses her concern that parents would succumb to societal pressure and push her into marriage:

In these yeeres for as my knowledge increased I was so pleased at the divine truth that to injoy it with the more fullness I desired not to marry: and though my father was now solicited for mee & my mother by those our neighbours of good account. to which she semed to be willing. Yet she desired my father that he would not be hastie in marrieing of me, nor force mee to any against my owne likeing. (18v)⁸

Lady Margaret Hoby managed her husband's estate and was well-versed in husbandry and farm management as well as more typical domestic duties. In her diary entry of "Munday 20 [1599], Hoby writes "After dinner I wound yearn tell: 3, and then walked with Mr. Hoby and the tounce

to spye out the best places where Cotiges might be builded," and the same day, after supper, she "helped Mr Hoby to Looke ouer some papers" before retiring to bed (Moody 8). On "Munday the :7 [1600], Hoby reports going "into the toune about som busines: then I was in the granerie receiuing Corne" (Moody 51). Whether by choosing singleness or by participating in politics and commerce, women earned reputations for piety that empowered them to transcend their ostensibly domestic containment within the culture.

Religious practice, centered on domesticity and exemplified by powerful aristocratic women like Mildmay, Hoby, Rich, and Harley reflects the shift in the locus of women's spiritual power from the pre-Reformation period. As previously stated, King Henry VIII's closing of monasteries and convents in the mid-sixteenth century moved the center of piety to the home. Margaret King claims that the Reformation

unseated the [Catholic] priest and the confessor as the governor of the female conscience and replaced him with the patriarch. That patriarch possessed, as he always had, social and economic control of the family, but he now gained the power of the keys. It was he who read the gospel, decided innocence or guilt, and mediated with God. Within their own families, women were secondary citizens . . . Protestant theory distrusted single women and female communities alike. (137, 138)⁹

However, King's argument fails to consider the effect of women's improving literacy and reverence for piety, which laid the groundwork for some women, such as those already mentioned, to exert a growing influence with their pens. Women might no longer be in possession of the convent keys, but broadening access to vernacular scripture and classical humanist texts, mentally processed in large part through their personal writing, enriched their autonomous identity. Barbara Lewalski, for example, describes women's domestic writing as

“rewrit[ing] patriarchy and patronage, supported on the one hand by a sense of female community, and on the other by the firm conviction that God the Divine Patriarch was their ally against the many earthly patriarchs who oppressed them” (25). Though men were undeniably regarded as heads of the family and leaders of the burgeoning economic progress in the period, women’s ability to read and write, coupled with the veneration of piety in the culture, alleviated patriarchal domination. Piety, literacy and education, then, catalyzed authority for women in the period.

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ Mildred Cecil, Anne Bacon, Katherine Killigrew, Elizabeth Russell, and Margaret Rowlett were educated at home by their father, Sir Anthony Cooke. The sisters learned Latin and Greek, and read contemporary Protestant authors. A non-conformist, Sir Cooke went into self-imposed exile during the reign of Queen Mary 1 (Bowden "Cecil, Mildred"; Calkins "Cooke, Sir Anthony").

² Numerous scholars believe Cressy's estimates of literacy among early modern women to be inaccurate. Because his conclusions are derived from examining the signatures of legal and other public documents from the era, he does not distinguish between reading and writing literacies or the difference in literacy levels between upper classes and lower classes of women. Janet Theophano, for example, estimates that "52 percent of urban women and 80 percent of provincial women were illiterate" (155,156). Furthermore, it was not uncommon in the early modern period for both men and women's literacy to be restricted to the ability to sign their names. However, the dearth of reliable statistical data from this era, other than official documents requiring handwritten signatures (which Cressy used for his research), renders extrapolating accurate data extremely difficult. As a result, even though many view Cressy's statistics as flawed in their assumptions, they are still frequently cited in scholarly work. Heidi Hackel, for example, uses Cressy's measurement as a baseline for comparison in her book, *Reading Material in Early Modern England*. Even so, Cressy's data is presented with caveats such as those just mentioned. Margaret Ferguson and Mihoko Suzuki conclude that, instead of merely settling on incomplete data to inform our knowledge of literacy during the period, "scholars have increasingly turned to documents such as diaries, journals, and letters for descriptions of an individual woman's reading that provide qualitative rather than quantitative information about female literacy" (577).

³ Further complicating literacy assessment in the period is that, "even fluent readers and book-owners [both men and women] might sign their names with a mark" as a matter of preference, not a sign of illiteracy (Thomas 102).

⁴ Exodus 34:6 ascribes the following attributes to God: mercy, grace, longsuffering, goodness and truth.

⁵ Writing about nineteenth century texts, Jennifer Sinor contrasts the diary from the autobiography by describing it as "middle writing" (17). Diaries, in other words, are immediate records of quotidian activity, and autobiographies are back-looking reflections on life. While we see these characteristics in early modern women's self-writing, these genres are not easily distinguished in the period.

⁶ Femke Molekamp quotes the following excerpt from the minister Hannibal Gamon's eulogy of Lady Frances Roberts: "That closset of hers. . . would speak aloud of her constant reading, hearing, meditating on the Word, solemn Humiliations, solitary conferences with God, fervent

prayers and ejaculations, which (as the sweetest incense) she euer and anon sent vp to the Throne of Grace” (“Seventeenth-Century Funeral Sermons” 43).

⁷ “And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18).

⁸ Evidently Isham's mother supported her decision to postpone marriage, telling her daughter that "her marrying young & coming thicke w[ith] children was cause of her much weaknes." Isham concludes: "herein my mind was agreeable to my parents. for I cared not how long they kept me from marriage if at lest I thought of it at all" (19r).

⁹ See, for example, Ephesians 5:23: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body.”

Chapter 2 Religion and the Rhetoric of Domestic Medicine

“[She] hath been ever since well and free from that disease, thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ” (Lady Grace Mildmay qtd. in Pollock 113).

In an excerpt from her medical papers, Lady Grace Mildmay describes the successful treatment of “falling sickness” in a young woman 25 years of age. Mildmay enumerates some of the indicators of this disease as “heaviness of the head, dizziness, dullness of the eyes, swelling, tingling of the ears, heaviness of the tongue, yellowness of the face, impediment of the speech, fear, trembling. . .and before they fall, they cry” (Pollock 111). Mildmay treated her patient with alternate purgings, fastings, and sweating for three years. The “falling” did not occur again as the treatments gradually declined and eventually stopped. Mildmay then pronounced the young woman “free” from the disease. Importantly, even though Mildmay spent three years rigorously treating her patient, her account gives credit to Jesus Christ for allowing the young woman to be healed. Mildmay, who counted physicians among her circle of personal friends and mentors, was an exemplar of the early modern female healer who characterized her domestic medical practice as an expression of her faith.

Mildmay’s kind of domestic healing—carefully researched and approved by watchful physicians—was extolled by authoritative texts written to prescribe virtuous women’s conduct. Gervase Markham, for example, outlined the following set of principles for godly women in his popular text, *Country contentments, or The English Huswife* (1623):

To begin with one of the most principall vertues which doth belong to our English houswife; you shall understand, that sith the preseruatiō and care of the family touching their health and soundnesse of body. . .it is meet that shee have a phisicall kinde of knowledge,

how to administer many wholesome receits or medicines for the good of their healthes.

(Booke 1, 4)

Domestic medicine was also considered an essential skill for wives of parish priests, further embedding it as evidentiary of piety. George Herbert outlines three duties of the wife of a parish priest:

His wife is either religious, or night and day he is winning her to it. Instead of the qualities of the world, he requires onely three of her; first, a trayning up of her children and mayds in the fear of God, with prayers, and catechizing, and all religious duties.

Secondly, a curing, and healing of all wounds and sores with her owne hands; which skill either she brought with her, or he takes care she shall learn it of some religious neighbour. Thirdly, a providing for her family in such sort, as that neither they want a competent sustentation, nor her husband be brought in debt (chap X).

If “curing and healing of all wounds and sores with her owne hands” is an essential duty of a woman worthy to be the wife of a parish priest, evidence of this knowledge would be included in self-writing as a testament to one’s character. Consequently, many pious, literate women included accounts of their medical practices in their self- writing. Commonly, this writing took shape as a diary, such as Lady Margaret Hoby’s. Other women, like Lady Grace Mildmay and Elizabeth Isham, wrote reflectively of their healing practices in texts resembling autobiographies.

As devout Protestant women, Mildmay and Hoby considered God to be the one *from* whom their call to care for the sick originated and the one *with* whom healing ultimately rested. Jennifer Hellwarth describes the symbiotic relationship between Mildmay’s religion and medical practice as a “hinge. . . giving us brief glimpses into the ways she integrated these two significant areas in her life’s work” (110). This “hinge” between physic and religion is demonstrated in

Hoby's writing as well. Robertson proposes that Hoby's diary was not a Renaissance "expression of individuality" but rather a "response to the demands of her religion" (218). Consequently, as these women and other literate domestic medical practitioners wrote about their healing practices to prove their piety, they began to codify the physic that had been handed down to women for generations.

That women used writing to prove their piety is easily understood when one appreciates the distinct regard that these pious women had for words themselves: they believed that words were a form of physic that healed the body as well as the soul. Therefore, women's self-writing not only contains medical recipes for healing, but also written meditations about healing, the effects of reading and writing on physical and mental health, and brief narratives of the physical care they provided their family, neighbors, and the community at large. The veneration of the healing word in the Reformation had its roots in medieval Catholicism, reflecting the continuing influence of Catholic mysticism in the early modern period. Importantly, the embedding of domestic medical practices in a context of piety, as exemplified by these narratives, rendered women's medical practice more acceptable to existing patriarchal structures determined to enclose women within domesticity. Pious healing practices also facilitated domestic medicine's integration into the treatment regimens of trained physicians. In this chapter, I examine healing meditations and narratives found in the self-writing of several pious early modern women, arguing that the language of healing in these women's self-writing exemplifies the regard for words as curative not only mentally and spiritually, but physically as well.

The Physic of Reading and Writing

Reading and writing were often employed as instruments of healing from grief triggered by the frequent illness and death that characterized the early modern household. The Isham

family, for example, used reading as a basic component of physic. Elizabeth's mother, who suffered from chronic illness for years before her death, "found comfort in reading the Psalms of David when she was ill" (11r). This literate family also believed that reading promoted physical healing: "While the Ishams employed physicians and spiritual guides. . .to alleviate Lady Isham's suffering, the family also perceived that books and reading had the power to relieve her pain" (Stephens 162). In addition to reading to her mother, Elizabeth read to her chronically ill sister to ease her anguish: "I perceued her spirits was much raised with reading to her those Bookes or places wherein she delighted or found comfort & though her fitts were lamentable. . . . wee had hope of her life" (22r). Reading had been common in the Isham family for generations. Various entries in *Rememberance* point to not only the literacy of Elizabeth's parents and her siblings, but also to the reading skills of her paternal grandmother and her great-grandfather (4v, 16v). The Isham family even taught their servants to read, a practice Elizabeth learned from her grandmother. Recalling her grandmother's maid reading to her while she was sick in bed, Isham writes: "Likewise I learnt one of my mothers maids to read I tried divers but could not bring them to my perfection but onely this one" (13r, 17r). In the Isham family, reading was vital to health, thus rendering this skill important for the household servants as well as family members.

In addition to the restorative power of reading, pious women also believed writing had healing qualities. Lucy Hutchinson, for example, needed words to heal her distress when her husband died, prompting her to write his biography. Addressing her children, she explains:

But I that am under a command not to grieve at the common rate of desolate women, while I am studying which way to moderate my woe, and it were possible to augment my love, can for the present find out none more just to your dear father nor consolatory to

myself than the preservation of his memory (*Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* loc 215).

This belief in words as physic, particularly scripture, was derived in large part from the continuing influence of the medieval religious theology that highly regarded Christ as the Divine Physician. In the New Testament, St. Matthew describes Jesus as traveling "about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Accordingly, acts of healing by God's servants on earth were considered hallmarks of a pious nature in the medieval period. For example, the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure (1221-1274) compared Francis of Assisi to Christ because "He washed [lepers'] feet, bandaged their ulcers, drew the pus from their wounds and washed out the diseased matter; he even kissed their ulcerous wounds out of his remarkable devotion, he who was soon to be a physician of the Gospel" (147). Bonaventure's metaphor of Christian devotion as healing, in which the Gospel is the physician's medicine, undeniably links words with healing within a pre-Reformation theology. Additionally, Christ's acts of healing are only fully understood within the context of Jesus as the Word (*logos*) of God and the bearer of the Gospel (good news): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . .And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). Daniel McCann elucidates this pairing by explaining medieval notions of the Bible as "a universal medicine for the soul that is textually mediated. In this sense, the reading of the Bible. . . constitutes a Logos-therapeutics as it allows the *Christus medicus* to alter the soul's passions, to regenerate it and change its present condition" (343). From this theological perspective, the Word is what brings ultimate healing. The synthesis of Christ as *logos* and

physician renders Word as healer. A pious woman who was “permitted” to learn to read and write was given the gift of the words, whether from scripture or other texts, that established her self-worth in relation to *the* Word, Christ Jesus. Word(s) as healing, then, intimately tied literacy with piety and with the healing arts. Domestic medicine was, for the pious woman, an outward expression of her deep relationship with words.

The Duty to Heal

A pious woman did not simply complete her daily allotment of scripture reading and prayer and move on to other tasks, thus compartmentalizing the presence of the sacred in her life. She also regarded each domestic assignment—whether educating her children or servants or binding the wounds of a laborer—as an expression of her godly duty. The diaries and autobiographical writing of women who had significant domestic medical practices, like Hoby and Mildmay, for example, yield essential information about the contributions women made to the practice of medicine in the period, contextualized within a framework of religious piety. Consider, for example, this entry from Lady Margaret Hoby’s diary on April 26, 1601:

After I was readie I went to the church, and, after praers and sermon, I Came home and dressed Blackbourns foote: after, I dined, and after I talked and reed to some good wiffes: after, I praied and reed, and wrett notes in my bible of the mornings exercise: after, I went to the church, and, after sarmon, I dressed a poore mans hand: and after that I walked a broad, and so Came to priuat examination and praier (Moody 144).

In this brief entry, which is typical of her diary, are many of the key markers of the pious Protestant woman’s daily activities as prescribed by her religion and culture: attending church, caring for the sick, participating in religious conversation with other female friends, writing down spiritual thoughts, and examining privately the fitness of one’s soul before God. In other

entries, Hoby provides additional accounts of administering medical care as part of her godly duty. On Sunday, September 16, 1599, for example, Hoby writes: “after dinner I walked with Mr. Hoby till Catzhising was done, and then I went to church: after the sarmon I looked vpon a poore mans Legg.” The following day, she records returning to “dress” his leg, then reading from Gerard’s *Herball* at her house after dinner (Moody 18). On February 1, 1600, Hoby writes that she “dressed a poore boyes legge that was hurt, and Jurdens hand,” after which she returned to her house to read the Bible. In subsequent entries from February 3 through March 29, Hoby speaks of “dressing her patients.” Though she does not indicate whether these patients are the “poore boy” and “Jurden” one can presume that she likely returned often to continuing caring for their wounds. The entries delineating Hoby’s medical practice contain little personal reflection, detail, or other bits of information to fill in the gaps of the day. In other words, very little extraneous writing is included—the sparse rhetoric only serves to construct Hoby’s piety.

Even though the details are limited, Hoby’s diary entries confirm that she viewed other’s physical well-being, as well as her own, as subject to the control of a providential God. Hoby devoted much of her days to providing medical care for those within her circle of concern, including servants, laborers, women during childbirth, random people she saw on her walks to and from church, and various others in her parish who were too poor to pay for a physician’s care. Hoby treated her patients conscientiously—she often writes of returning to check on the same patient multiple times—but she acknowledges that their healing is in God’s hands. An excerpt of her diary entry of August 17, 1599 reads:

Friday. After priuat prairs I went about the house and read of the bible and wrought till dinner time: and, after dinner, it pleased, for a Iust punishment to corricte my sinnes, to send me febelnis of stomak and pain of my head, that kept me vpon my bed till 5: a

clock: at which time I arose, haveinge release of my sickness, according to the wonted kindness of the lord, who, after he had Let me se how I had offended, that so I might take better heed to my *body and soule* [emphasis mine] hereafter, wich a gentle correction let me feele he was reconciled to me. (Moody 7)

As Mary Fissell concludes regarding the attitude of domestic healers like Hoby, “God was pleased to hear a sick person’s petition, or preserved an injured person from an even worse wound, or spared someone’s life—illness was often an intimate and sustained connection with the divine” (159). Obviously Hoby claimed this theology for herself as well as her patients. Furthermore, even if a sick person died instead of being healed, God was still presumed to be in control of the circumstances. For example, after hearing of the death of her physician from a self-administered sleeping aid, Hoby writes, “I may truly conclude it is the Lord, and not the phisision, which both ordaines the medesine for our health and ordere the ministering of it for the good of his children. . .therefore let euerie one phisision and pactente Call vpon the Lord for a blessing” (13). God, in His sovereignty, permitted the doctor’s death since He did not circumvent in the mortal effects of the medication.¹ Rather than viewing this death as cause for pharmaceutical caution, Hoby instead adjures both doctors and their patients to seek God’s blessing when medicine is administered. The power of God is not restricted by human error. The recording of these events, therefore, is not simply a mindless rendition of what happened to Hoby on these days. Instead, they are intentional proofs of her devotion to God, his work in the world, and how she views herself within that context.

Lady Grace Mildmay’s autobiographical writing blends religious and healing rhetoric, thus constructing her domestic medical practice within the context of piety, like Hoby. However, her writing style is much more eloquent and even verbose. For example, in a spiritual meditation

transcribed by Linda Pollock, Mildmay invokes medical terminology as she paraphrases a biblical passage from The Song of Solomon:

I gather my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk. . . . Oh let my welbeloved kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, let him indue me with his love, and with the savour of his good ointments. Let his holy name be unto me as a precious ointment poured out. And let my sanctified soul continually and wholly love and be in love with him. (75)²

The combination of physic vocabulary (i.e., spice, ointments) with theological concepts such as the holiness of God and the believer's sanctification illustrates the interdependence of Mildmay's piety and her medical practice. Importantly, Mildmay considers Christ as the ultimate healer, just as Hoby does. For example, in the following meditation Mildmay refers to Christ's suffering and death to bring healing to humankind:

For whensoever we receive this holy sacrament of our Lord Jesus Christ his blessed body and blood. . .the springs of Lebanon runneth swiftly unto us throughout all our parts; from our head to our feet, so that no part is left unwashed or unrefreshed. And the worth and operation of all the bleeding wounds of our saviour Jesus Christ issued forth, unto us, the sap of life, even the most pure and precious balm wherewith we are embalmed and thoroughly healed. (Pollock 77)

Mildmay's reference to the corporeal body in this excerpt elucidates the physical transformation she believes the sacrament brings to humans through the crucified body of Christ. The physical act of drinking the communion wine spreads Christ's blood, emanating from his wounded flesh, throughout one's body. This blood gives life and serves as a medicinal balm to bring complete healing. The physicality of this meditation reflects a strong identification by Mildmay with the

Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the bread and wine of communion become the body and blood of Christ. Protestants in the period rejected this doctrine, viewing the communion bread and wine as only symbolic of the spiritual healing one received through Christ. However, Mildmay's description of Christ's blood running "swiftly unto us throughout all our parts; from our head to our feet" supports a conclusion that her theology was heavily influenced by Catholicism. Mildmay's frequent references to blood-letting as one of her common medical practices (and certainly of many domestic and professional medical practitioners of the period) echoes her reverence for the efficacy of Christ's blood. For example, in the following description of blood-letting as a treatment for "melancholy," Mildmay dedicates the entire procedure to the healing power of Christ:

And in this course of physic. . .let the caphalita vein be opened in the left arm and take about 8 ounces. Note when the blood is melancholy dust, black and thick the orifice must be made the wider, else the thin will come away and leave the rest of the blood more thickened. . . . And let this course be repeated over again so often until he be well, all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Pollock 123)

For this patient, the "sacrifice" of blood physically heals him, in Jesus' name. More importantly, Christ's blood heals him spiritually.

In contrast to Christ as the source of healing, Mildmay's conception of the origins of human illness was predominately based on the fallen state of humans resulting from original sin. This broken state of humanity requires a Healer, without whom humans are left in a state of sickness. For example, in Mildmay's narrative of curing "the falling sickness," she claims,

[T]hey who minister physic must take care and consideration of all humours and all parts, that will truly cure any one. And as they are tied thereunto by the coherence of

nature so are they tied to the observation of infinite accidents which will arise in the administration, hanging over man's head since he let in sickness by sin. (111)

If, as Mildmay believes, sickness entered the world through sin, then pious Christians, redeemed from that sin, were responsible for being agents of healing. As such, Mildmay advocated her own version of the Hippocratic Oath, writing in her medical papers that “in aiding one part we hurt not another and in curing one disease we beget not another” (Pollock 111). Causing physical harm while purportedly providing medical care not only compromised one's reputation as a pious healer, but also placed a domestic healer in danger of being accused of being a “quack” or witch. A domestic medical practitioner's reputation was essential to maintaining her relative autonomy in the community.

Though Lady Mildmay and Lady Hoby were among the most prominent Protestant domestic medical practitioners in their time who kept journals, other women included entries exemplifying the interdependent nature of medicine and faith in their hand-written books. Elizabeth Freke's autobiography (1671-1714) includes descriptions of providing medical care for servants and family members, although the preponderance of content concerns her unhappy marriage. Like some of her contemporaries, Freke included spiritual meditation in her journal. For example, her entry on June 22, 1710, contains “some emblems for my own reading” from Psalm 6:2: “Have mercy upon me, Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heale me, for my bones are sore vexed. Eliz Frek” (133). Freke does not appear to be as devoted to her religious faith as are Mildmay and Hoby. Nevertheless, her inclusion of Bible verses and spiritual musings in her journal testify to her confidence in God as healer. Ann and Hester de la Bere's receipt book offers an additional example. It is generously titled *The Land of Promises Flowing With Milke &*

Hony Containing A feast of fatt things: A rare Cabinat of rich work In the Discourse of the precious promises. This title is an obvious allusion to dozens of Old Testament passages in which the land God promises to the Israelites is described as “a land that floweth with milk and honey” (Leviticus 20:24). Furthermore, the use of the word “fatt” not only connotes the “fattening” up of livestock to be slaughtered for a culinary feast; when viewed in the context of the Old Testament, “fatt” indicates the choice part of the animal that was offered by the priests as a sacrifice to God.³ This metaphoric introduction to the sisters’ manuscript, which includes both culinary and medical recipes as well as religious meditations, represents the spiritual, gastronomical, and medical knowledge many pious women of the period synthesized to “practice” the will of God.

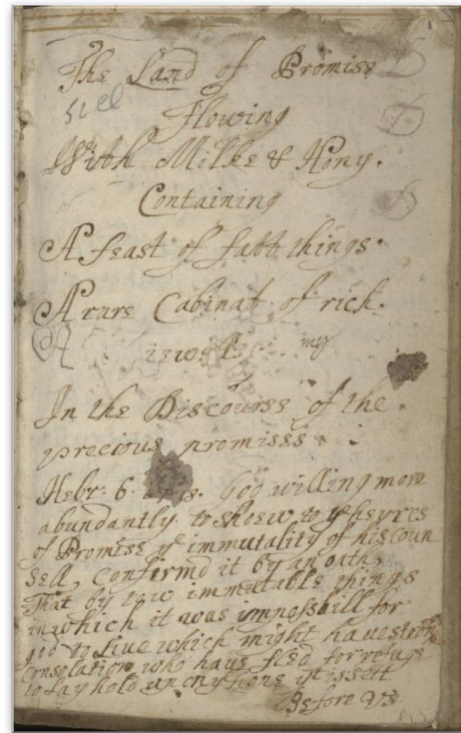


Figure 2-1. Ann and Hester de la Bere's *The Land of Promises* (Wellcome MS 7577).

The Rhetoric of Exclusion

Although women practiced piety through domestic medicine and were responsible for the healing of many who did not have access to licensed physicians, their exclusion from formal training and licensure prevented them from entering the ranks of professional medicine. Healing by women domestic practitioners, no matter how necessary or virtuous, was still thought to be best practiced under the watchful male gaze.⁴ Markham's *The English Huswife* advises that all women's medical practice should be done under the auspices of a (male) professional. He also restricts the housewife's physic to ordinary sicknesses, given that “we must confesse that the

depth and secrets of this most excellent art of phisicke, is farre beyond the capacity of the most skilfull woman, as lodging onely in the best of the larned Professors” (4). Women’s significant contributions to medical literacy were, therefore, complicated by the patriarchal culture. Initially, domestic medicine was “firmly inscribed within women’s roles as managers of households, posing little threat to the authority of male medical professionals” (Green 308). However, as women’s medical practices became more popular and ubiquitous, the male-dominated professional medical field began to manipulate this knowledge for its own economic benefit, especially if the source of that knowledge was a disempowered, illiterate woman. Attempts by women medical practitioners, particularly in the field of midwifery, to improve their skills were opposed by male physicians, even those few who completed the same licensing qualifications as men: “Men’s own status as professionals involved a separation from ‘ignorant’ [women] practitioners” (Mendelson and Crawford 316). Evidence exists that many women, too, preferred male practitioners over female ones (318). By the closing decades of the period, in fact, male physicians dominated even childbirth (Whaley 2). Nevertheless, “women continued practicing as home-based healers, physicians and even surgeons (some with licensure, some without) throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the “‘kitchen physick’ did not wither away in the face of commoditized medicaments and professionalizing medical interventions” (Pennell and Leong 137). In fact, women’s domestic medical practices played an integral role in the healthcare economy by providing charitable care for those who could not afford the fees of trained physicians (Yale 114).

The expensive cost of treatment, combined with a shortage of trained physicians, necessitated the practice of more advanced medicine by domestic practitioners, both within their households and in the neighboring community. In fact, the Herbalist Charter of Henry VIII was

enacted in 1542 to legally allow “unlicensed men and women to practice the healing arts, but only out of humanitarianism and not for a fee” (Furdell 4). Pollock asserts that this derisively called “Quack Act” was an attempt to mitigate the shortage of trained physicians, and it initially gave women credibility as healers outside their homes: “This act gave official recognition to one of the characteristics of the English medical scene: the extent of informal and private practice. These unlicensed healers were an eclectic mix of clergy, gentry, wise women and opportunists who had long constituted the backbone of medieval and early modern medicine” (92-93). By essentially limiting women’s medical practice to acts of charity, society could benefit from the practices of experienced domestic medical practitioners without endangering the reputations or bank accounts of trained physicians. Conversely, female medical practitioners, by providing their services free-of-charge, subsidized the local economy while receiving limited personal financial advantage.

Despite attempts to constrain women to leave the difficult cases to the male professionals, the demand for their services prompted female domestic medical practitioners to not limit their practices to ordinary sickness. In her diary, Margaret Hoby recounts performing surgery on a baby that was apparently born without an anus: “I had a child brought to me that was borne. . .who had no fundement, and had no passage for excrementes but att the Mouth; I was earnestly intreated to Cutt the place to se if any passage Could be made, but, although I Cutt deepe and searched, there was none to be found” (Moody 161). Though Hoby references conversations with several doctors in her diary, including her personal physician Mr. Lister, it is unclear whether they shared advice about medical treatments and procedures, such as the surgery she performed on this unfortunate child.⁵ For example, in her entry dated April 11, 1600, she writes in her characteristically sparse style, “I went and talked with my Cossine bouser: then I

went to Mr. Doctor Benets, and after supper I praied publeckly with Mr. Rhodes [her chaplain] and so went to bed” (Moody 73). Regardless, as is evidenced by Hoby’s being “earnestly intreated” to attempt to correct this infant’s birth defect, lack of affordable medical care necessitated stretching the boundaries of domestic practice.

Lady Grace Mildmay was extremely conscientious about learning from licensed medical doctors rather than simply experimenting with the recipes and techniques that were passed around women’s domestic circles. She confirms this in her medical papers by writing, “Also every day I spent some time in the herbal and books of physick and ministering to one or other by the directions of the best physicians of mine acquaintance and ever God gave a blessing thereunto” (Pollock 28). Richard Banister, an eye surgeon, praised Mildmay as “the right religious and virtuous lady” who “would use the approbations of a physician; in surgery, the aid of a surgeon, and for the eyes, the assistance of myself (“Letter to the Reader”). As a member of the aristocracy, Mildmay presumably had the financial means to purchase medical texts and the social capital to develop quasi-professional relationships with medical doctors. Pollock says, for example, that Mildmay read William Turner’s *A New Herball* as part of her childhood education. As an adult, she had a library that included a book of surgery written by John of Vigo (1543) as well as other medical texts (97). Her medical papers include a procedure for clearing “apoplexy” in which she interjects that, if the treatment she advises does not work, “it is a practice amongst physicians to apply to the head (first being shaven) the lungs of a lamb or other beast warm from the beast and when it is cool, apply another in the same manner and set cupping glasses behind in the neck and scarify” (Pollock 116). Procedures for treatment of other several other diseases are attributed to men (presumably physicians) as well. In addition, several of the letters preserved among her medical papers are from physicians offering her advice. A Mr. Harris, for example,

advises her on the proper use of cinnamon for an unnamed disease (Pollock 141). Middling and poor women, who were more commonly illiterate, would not have had these advantages, thus increasing the risk of causing harm, being accused of inappropriate practice, or in some cases, even witchcraft. For example, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of London “condemned unlicensed practitioners for medicine as ‘those who try to cure with the use of sorcery and Witchcraft’” (qtd. in Whaley 174). It seems that any woman, without money, education, or social capital, who pressed the boundaries of acceptable conduct ran the risk of being accused of legally transgressive behavior.

As domestic medicine emerged from an oral tradition to a documented (if broadly unlicensed) female profession, the resulting increased autonomy of women was perceived as threatening to existing social and economic structures of the period. Regardless of the restrictions placed on them, whether through the rhetoric of male prescriptive writing, indictments of negligence, or the exclusion from formal medical training, domestic healers like Lady Margaret Hoby, Lady Grace Mildmay, and others like them are known by their words, which conveyed not only their methods but their motivations for healing. Circumventing the conflicting messages broadcast in the culture, countless domestic healers avoided accusations of quackery because of their impeccable reputations for competence and piety. They practiced medicine in ways that, if not economically profitable for them, at least met a crucial need within their families and communities. Most importantly of all, it seems from the language of healing they left behind in their self-writing, these women were motivated by their faith, one that viewed the healing arts as an expression of gratitude for the spiritual healing they received from Christ, the Word and Divine Physician.

Chapter 2 Notes

¹ This belief in the total sovereignty of God in all circumstances is classic Calvinistic theology. According to Gordon Melton, Calvinism asserts that “God in his sovereignty, without reference to the merits or lack of merits of any person, ha[s] chosen and predestined the elect to grace and salvation.” A corollary precept to predestination is that God’s elect will not die until the precise time determined by God.

² Mildmay paraphrases the opening verses of The Song of Solomon: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments they name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee” (1:2,3).

³ See, for example, Leviticus 3:16 and 4:19, 26.

⁴ One exception was childbirth; the ancient practice of midwifery remained largely gendered until the mid-eighteenth century, when male doctors began practicing gynecology (Whaley 2).

⁵ Hoby’s diary does not reveal the fate of this child.

Chapter 3 “Enclosing” Domesticity: The Closet

*“Good huswiues here you haue a Iewell for your joye,
A Closet meete your Huswiuery, to practice and imploy”(Partridge, Treasurie).*

John Partridge’s couplet effectively describes the pervading prescriptive view of the home as the appropriate domain for women in the early modern period. A good “huswiue” should appreciate her home as the place where she could hone her domestic skills, thus satisfying her godly duties. Partridge is only one of many male authors who wrote to women, dictating the conduct and skills that identified women as praiseworthy housewives. Others, such as Richard Brathwaite, Juan Vives, and Gervase Markham, shared similar sentiments about the value of domestic space and women’s responsibility to manage it well. Vives, for example, declared the “keeping and ordering of an house” as was an essential skill to teach young women, secondary only to that which pertaineth unto the ornament of her soul” (8). Within the home, the “Iewell” that supposedly imparted joy to a woman was her closet, a secluded space in which she could immerse herself in prayer, religious study, and other activities to hone her domestic skills. Although the closet connotes the enclosure or restriction of the early modern woman’s identity to cultural norms, in practice the closet enabled women to freely explore religious texts, philosophy and medicine. Women, then, took advantage of the role of the closet to enhance their autonomy, education, and self-identity. Ironically, the time women spent in their private closets gave them the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to extend their influence in the public sector.

Although ostensibly “confined” to their houses because of patriarchal norms, the performance of those norms required interactions with the community. These interfaces varied according to their social class. For example, for the welfare of the family economy, middling and poor women were both buyers and sellers in the marketplace. Amanda Flather explains further:

Several . . . routine aspects of housework were performed outside, complicating the idea that women were urged to stay within the house. Women did most of the shopping, although time spent trading for food varied according to wealth, geography, and occupation. Domestic production as an essential part of middling rural women's work. . . . Poorer women . . . who had little time and space to cook, bought fast food from cook shops. . . . Women of all social types were expert at haggling over exchanges at shops and market stalls. Middling urban women probably spent the most time out and about on the street shopping, because they generally cooked for themselves and their families, and relied less on domestic production than did their counterparts in the country. (348)

On the other hand, aristocratic women—Lady Brilliana Harley or Lady Grace Mildmay, for example—would not have been found haggling over fish at Billingsgate. The aristocratic woman's daily interaction among men in the marketplace was quite different from that of other women:

Roughly speaking, the higher a woman's social position, the less likely she was to share or invade male physical or psychological space. . . . The lower the social level, the more common it was for women to control their own cultural, physical, and ritual space, and to share, dispute, or invade space which was under the nominal control of men. (Mendelson and Crawford 210-211)

While poor and middling housewives often worked with their husbands in agricultural or other family-based business, in wealthier urban families husbands were more likely to exit the home for their daily work, leaving wives to care for the children and manage the household, including servants.¹ Even so, when examined from the context of the economic and social obligations of women in the period, the physical house did not significantly restrict the autonomy of the woman

who occupied it. However, the architecture and gendered space of the home does demonstrate important correlations between architectural space and women's roles during the period. As Alice Friedman summarizes, "Not only can architecture control, and limit, physical movement . . . it can also create an arena and a frame for those who inhabit its spaces. . . . [A]rchitecture literally stages the value systems of a culture, foregrounding certain activities and persons and obscuring others" (43). For Protestant women, the house provided the backdrop from which they constructed their pious identities.

Protestant interpretations of scripture supported the insistence that the quality of a woman's home environment signified her spiritual health, which was enclosed by her physical body. For example, Proverbs 14:4 advises, "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." This scriptural verse renders a critical metaphorical meaning as well as its literal one. Not only were women responsible for "building" or managing their households; a wise woman's "house" is also her body, which should likewise be valued and protected. The corporeal body metaphorically referred to as "house" in scripture conforms with the Reformation theological notion of believers as priests. Reformers drew on the words of the Apostle Peter, who describes the body of Christians, collectively, as a "spiritual house: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up into a spiritual house, an holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5). One of Lady Grace Mildmay's spiritual meditations alludes to this scriptural passage: "The Lord is in his holy place. Christ Jesus is the son of God, is the chief corner stone and all his elect people are as living stones, which make one spiritual house, wherein the Holy Ghost, that blessed person in the holy trinity, delighteth to dwell" (Pollock 82). The additional designation of "house" as a metaphor for God's elect deepens the meaning of "house" for pious women like Mildmay. The

metaphor of house folds in upon itself via the physical enclosure of the home and a woman's corporeal body as the enclosure of her soul.

As houses signified both women's bodies and their spiritual states, women were also advancing physic—care of physical bodies—in the private closet. In this chapter, I argue that the gendered space of the woman's private closet was the material enclosure that supported her pursuit of piety as sanctioned by religious leadership. Furthermore, the metaphor of the closet as body influenced its function as a space for pursuing excellence in domestic medicine.

Architectural Foundations

The rise of capitalism during the period contributed to the increased designation of single-use spaces within the home compared to the architecture of homes in the medieval period, which favored largely common rooms. Middling merchants commonly designated the ground floor of their homes to commercial spaces, while the living quarters above contained an “increasing number of internal spaces,”

each serving a specific purpose (Chris King 56). This practice blurred the binary between public and private spaces as commerce was brought into private homes, with women traversing both spaces. The increasing number of rooms in early modern homes reflects not only the rise of the merchant class, but also the accelerating solidarity and pride of its culture. Margaret Hunt, for



Figure 3-1. This drawing of an early modern merchant's house includes the shop on the ground floor and living quarters above. © Geffrye Museum, London.

example, describes the growing “middling sort” in the period as the people who oversaw the birth of “premodern English capitalism” during a period of “conflict, insecurity, and uncertainty” (13). During this time of turmoil, the middling home offered an outward manifestation of status and stability. Chris King emphasizes this tendency of the middling class to use their homes to “define and negotiate their social position,” even emulating somewhat the housing traditions of the gentry as a declaration of their own upward mobility (73). Additionally, the increasing “middling” urban population resulted in city houses crowded against each other along the narrow streets, leaving slight space about their perimeters for gardens or private outdoor living space. Life was communal, life was increasingly about commerce, and the merchant class pursued the culture’s representations of wealth.

Furthermore, as accelerating urbanization necessitated close proximity of the classes, newly built aristocratic city homes also included increasing numbers of single-use rooms. A manuscript collection of seventeenth century architectural plans, bequeathed to the Bodleian Library at Oxford by Richard Rawlinson (1690-1755), includes sketches of one of the Duke of Beaufort’s in-town homes (c. 1687). As depicted in figure 3-2, the home includes a hall, steward’s room, chambers, closets, kitchen, dining room, drawing room, a dressing room, and two sets of staircases (qtd in Maguire fig. 15 no. 88). The

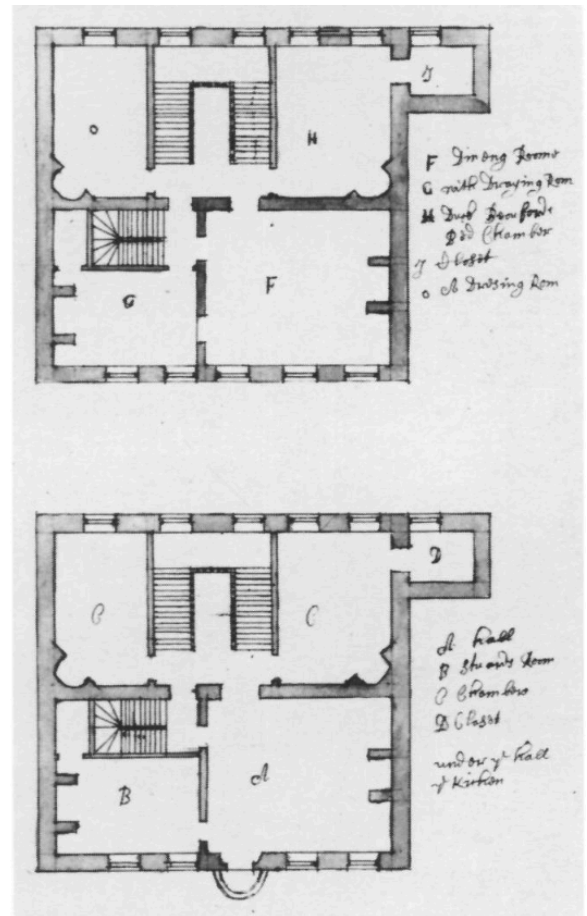


Figure 3-2. “The Duke of Beauford’s House,” a 17th century “Square Pile” design (Maguire, *A Collection of Seventeenth-Century Architectural Plans*, Fig. 15 No. 88).

closets are situated in the far corners of each floor next to the bedrooms, separating them from the rest of the house and thus providing the privacy needed for spiritual meditation, self-writing, and other pursuits. Roger North, lawyer, writer, and architect of the period, explains the transition of a simple bedchamber to the addition of features, including closets, preferred by his wealthy clientele in country and city homes alike:

But now ease and convenience is made the rule; wee demand these accommodations: first a passage to a back stair, for the servants in their common offices to pass by; next a room for a servant to be within call, and lastly for a closet, where the person, who is supposed of quality, to retire for devotion, or study, whilst the chamber is cleaned, or company present. (134)²

Although men used closets for personal study, the uses for women's closets appears to be more varied. Some women of means had several closets within their homes, presumably allowing for a single use for each one (i.e., one closet for storing food, one for prayers, one for writing, one for distilling, and another for keeping family documents).³ The incorporation of closets in early modern architecture reflects the preference of wealthier families for privacy and the reinforcement of class status by separating themselves from spaces occupied by household servants.

Religious Framework

The changing mores of religious expression also influenced the architecture of homes in the period, particularly for women, who largely lost the option of religious vocation with the establishment of the Church of England. Though men could become ministers in the Protestant church, women were excluded from ecclesiastical vocation with the exception of "rogue" separatist groups like the Quakers. Additionally, Protestant theology in the period placed a

greater value on marriage than singleness. Subsequently, especially for pious women, the female domestic space of the home became a metaphorical convent, with their closets dedicated to private prayer and scripture reading (Margaret King 135, 136). Therefore, this lost opportunity for a religious vocation was partly regained in a pious woman's closet:

Whereas before the Reformation women in England could enter a convent if they desired to remove themselves from the world, the seventeenth-century Englishwomen had not such option. In this respect, the closet. . .replaced the nun's cell, providing the woman who entered it with the facilities and comforts of monastic life. (Botonake 52)

The Protestant identification of the home as the space in which women expressed their faith was further demonstrated by the inclusion of chapels built on the estates of the gentry and the patronage of personal clergy by aristocratic families (Kaplan 1050). Additionally, during this period some monasteries or abbeys were converted into manor homes, further syncretizing the relationship between the house and the church. Jane Croom says that these conversions "were made fairly rapidly," subsequent to Henry VIII's closing of Catholic monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century. Courtyards connected the various houses of the former priory, forming one complete manor complex. Examples of manors converted from priories include Lee Priory in Essex and Titchfield Abbey in Hampshire (107). A seventeenth-century aristocratic Protestant woman residing in a former priory might, then, have spent private devotional time in a personal "closet" that had been used for a similar purpose by a monk or nun in the previous century.

This relegation of prayer and devotion to the closet has a biblical foundation. For example, Matthew 6:6 instructs, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." *The Geneva Bible* (1599) use the word "chamber" instead of "closet"

in this verse, thus supporting its designation as a room for prayer in the home. In obedience to God, a woman could literally “withdraw” to the privacy of her closet to separate herself from the world and deepen her faith through solitary prayer.

Pious women extended the modes by which they internalized scripture (i.e., reading, prayer, and self-writing) by posting biblical verses and religious mottos on the walls of their homes. Whereas the walls of medieval convents contained artwork featuring the lives of the saints, Protestants avoided images of saints that could promote idolatry and substituted scripture as a way of demonstrating the faith of their households. As D. Jütte explains, “[John] Calvin exhorted his followers. . . . ‘Let us have Gods lawe written, let us have the saying of it painted on our walls as in tables, and let us have things to put us in mind of it early and late (668).’⁴ Likewise, George Herbert exhorted the parish priest to include scripture on the walls of his home: “Even the walls are not idle, but something is written, or painted there, which may excite the reader to a thought of piety; especially the IoI *Psalm*, which is expressed in a fayre table, as being the rule of a family” (Chapter X).⁵ Lady Anne Bacon Drury (1572-1624), granddaughter of Sir Francis Bacon, decorated her seven-foot square closet with several panels painted with philosophical and religious quotations and illustrations (Cullum, qtd in Meakin 25). One of those panels includes the motto “Let pure things please others,” which H. L. Meakin attributes to Joseph Hall, who wrote a meditation in 1605 dedicated to Lady Drury. “The meditation,” Meakin explains, “closes with Hall determining, ‘I will oft summe up my estate with GOD, that I may knowe what I have to expect, and aunswere for. Neither shall my score runne on so long with GOD that I shall not knowe my debts, or feare an Audit, or despire of payment’” (275). Meakin hypothesizes that, by including this motto on the wall of her closet, Drury is “reminding herself that she needs to undergo self-examination and an accounting to God” (277). As a whole, Lady Drury’s painted

closet was in large part a response to “Protestant urgings that individuals engage in self-examination” with the closet being the physical space “to practice that self-examination” (285). Thus, Lady Drury’s closet symbolized the internalization of faith that was advocated by Protestant clergy as religion transitioned from medieval formalism to individual expression via the Reformation.

The theological basis for the posting of spiritual epigrams and scripture can be traced to the *Shema* of the Torah:

Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when our risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The *Shema* is the Jewish confession of faith. Jesus quoted from the *Shema* when answering a religious leader’s question: “Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him. The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12: 28-30). By quoting from the Torah, Jesus validates the importance of the *Shema* in the lives of Christians as well as Jews. For Protestants, Jesus’ quotation of the Torah affirmed the Protestant vision of Christians as the new “chosen people,” thus designating the Protestant church as the inheritor of God’s Abrahamic covenant (passed down generationally through the Jewish patriarchs), and therefore bypassing

the Roman Catholic Church.⁶ The practice of the *Shema* rendered the home, one's physical body, and one's soul as receptacles of God's presence, through his word, among his chosen people.

As suggested above, Lady Margaret Hoby, Lady Grace Mildmay, and other pious women practiced the *Shema* daily. They taught scripture to their children, talked about scripture among their families and friends, meditated on scripture during long walks, and they prayed upon waking in the morning and before going to sleep at night. God's words, then, would be written on the walls of houses as well as on the "walls of the hearts" of pious people through personal study and meditation, reflecting the New Testament prophetic word: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:10). The physical act of writing, whether on the walls of one's home or in a diary, imprinted God's word upon one's heart. The form of the early modern Protestant home, consequently, with its interior rooms, private spaces, and visible representation of scripture was a testimony of the primacy of scripture and the individuality of religious expression.

Subverting Function

Though closets were intended to support women's religious piety, their private nature could not insure that they were always used for prescribed religious purposes. Closets could also be used for private transgression. Even scripture warns about the potential for sinful acts to be perpetrated in the private closet. Criticizing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Jesus warns, "Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light: and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:3). In this verse, the closet is defined as not exclusively a place of solitude, but as a private place in which

people might whisper secrets. The *Geneva Bible* provides a suggestive translation: “Wherefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness, it shall be heard in the light: and that which ye have spoken in the ear, in *secret places*, shall be preached on the houses (emphasis mine). Current scholarship confirms that early modern women’s closets could be used for transgressive purposes. Botonake, for example, proposes that “[t]he closet could accommodate, or, in fact, even provoke, due to the privacy it granted, thoughts, attitudes, and employments that were ‘improper’” (50). The closet, to the pious Protestant woman, was a private place for spiritual meditation, surely; it was also a feminine space in which she could share secrets with trusted friends or even participate in activities considered unfitting in the culture.

The transgressive temptation afforded by the closet is a reaction against its signification of the bodily control of women within domesticity. Feminist scholars, including Effie Botonake, Femke Molekamp, and Katherine Larson share a view of the closet as a metaphor for a woman’s body—something intended by the patriarchal norms of the period to be closed off and private. Molekamp argues that the function of closets was largely prescribed by men to preserve chastity:

As the authors of funeral sermons commemorating women make clear, the function of the female closet is defined by male expectations of female chastity and piety, since the kind of prayer and meditation often practiced in the closet would use [male-authored] devotional manuals containing set prayers, female devotion inside her little room could to some extent be controlled by the dominant (male) ideology. (“Seventeenth-Century” 49)

Similarly, Larson explains:

For prescriptive writers, successful containment of the ideal woman was at once verbal and spatial; a woman’s moderate tongue and her confinement within sanctioned architectural boundaries substantiated her sealed body. . . . Accordingly, private and

interior domestic spaces were often gendered female, the restriction of the woman within the innermost parts of the home mirroring the ostensible containment of her body and words. (43)

Botonake broadens the metaphor to label not only the closet, but the entire early modern house as a prison for women's bodies. She considers the act of "shutting the early modern woman up in her home" as a symbol assuring the men in their lives that they would remain chaste and unavailable to other men: "then the father or husband could rest assured that he had secured her modesty, innocence, and unavailability to other men" (44). However, she recognizes the closet's liminality, admitting that the closet was "at once a prison cell and a space of freedom"(44). She additionally proposes that early modern women, burdened with extensive responsibilities as home (and often several children), could find respite and creativity in their closets (52). In fact, the closet, she asserts, gave a wife and mother a way to "forsake her familial and other duties without guilt and without any excuse; her repeated withdrawals from the earthly concerns are described as a right that is not to be questioned. And for the seventeenth-century woman, this was a rare, if not the only, instance of self-appointment and self-government" (46). In other words, though men attempted to prescribe how women should use their closets, women did not restrict themselves to reading male-authored religious material behind closed doors. Their self-writing provides ample evidence that these private rooms were used for diverse purposes. Therefore, as the house, with the closets situated as small interior rooms, mimicked the enclosure of the woman's body, it also generated freedom from the male gaze, and it catalyzed introspection and activity that complimented women's desires to construct their own moral and spiritual paths.

Elizabeth Isham's reflections about her closet support Botonake's conclusions that closets ultimately gave women opportunities for self-governance, for good or bad. Isham had a closet "which . . . seems to have been both a pantry and a space for reading—and the leisure to use it from a young age" (Longfellow "Public" 321). A transgression led to this closet being made available to her. Isham records in her autobiography that she stole a piece of fruit from her mother's "coberd, she letting me have a nether roome of it to myself. I longed to trie whether I could open it with my key. Which when I had found the way of it I tooke fruite from thence" (10r). Feeling simultaneous shame and delight, Isham reveals that her mother, realizing that her daughter needed a private space, then gave young Elizabeth a closet of her own: "My mother let me keepe a closet to my selfe, wherin I kept pares to dish out for the table, my father iniointing me that I should eate no pares but they tempting me every time I saw them" (10r). Two thoughts merit attention regarding this account. First, Isham's mother values the privacy her closet allows her so highly that, when her daughter invades it, she rewards Elizabeth with a closet of her own even when one might expect punishment. It seems as if the privacy of the closet is to be maintained at all costs. Second, young Elizabeth is trusted with a supply of pears, of which Isham confesses to being highly tempted to eat rather than save for the family meal. The privacy of the closet encourages Elizabeth to transgress. The closet, therefore, is used for spiritual renewal or transgression; it is a place for secrets. Isham's closet was a place where she could act with autonomy, away from her parents' or siblings' watchful eyes. Yet the feeling of guilt engendered by her desire to sin is a constant companion in her private space: "for these things I scaped without the offence of my parents, not knowing what I did in secret, but my Consience hath often reproved me"(10r). Isham repeatedly implores God to keep her from sinning, as exemplified by the front leaf of her *Booke of Remembrance*, in which she quotes Proverbs 16:3:

“Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be directed” (1599 *Geneva Bible*). Yet despite the temptation it engendered, Isham’s closet also brought her much joy: “for I remember the Bookes which I had in my closet reading & praying to thee in secret, thinking my selfe safe in so doing, hearin I praise thee my god, for the good things I learnt in my testament after writing nots out of it” (10r). Her acknowledgement of the secret nature of the closet, even as a young girl, reinforces the notion that closets were both freeing and confining. Though the closet physically enclosed Isham’s body and tempted her to sin, it also opened her mind to edifying spiritual and intellectual pursuits.

Likewise, Lady Margaret Hoby’s diary reveals the significance of her closet in her ongoing struggle to avoid transgression and maintain spiritual purity. This excerpt from her diary is typical: “After priuat praers in the morninge I reed of the bible, and so dined: after dinner I hard Mr Rhodes read, and was busie in my Clositt tell all most 4a Cloke” (Moody 55). Similarly, on a subsequent day she writes, “After praers I did goe about the house and, hauinge dune some buseness, I did eate a little, read and lastly dined: after, I was busie about needful thinges as preuented temptation, yet was not Cerious, so that, tell Mr Hoby Came home, I was not Idle” (Moody 70). According to Hoby, her completion of numerous “needful thinges” kept her from being tempted to sin. Notably, many entries in Hoby’s diary end with a mention of “priuat examination” before going to bed, presumably to determine any unconfessed transgression. This introspection appears to take place in her closet: “att 5 a Clock, I returned into my Closett vnto priuat examenation and praier. . .” (Moody 46). Both Hoby and Isham insinuate that they want nothing more than to please God. Their spiritual struggles, manifested in their closets, render these small rooms as the primary material spaces in which their spiritual identities were constructed.

Building Physic

Closets served as secure storage for valuable medical supplies and even sometimes provided the private space needed for the distilling and experimenting that supported the pious woman's commission to provide efficacious medical care to her household and neighbors. A wealthy woman could afford to purchase the costly ingredients needed to concoct the medicines essential to her healing practices. Pollock describes Lady Grace Mildmay's closet, for example, as so stocked with medicinal supplies that it looked like an apothecary shop (102). Mildmay's inventory of the closet she used as a still room includes ingredients such as



Figure 3-3. Seventeenth-century beakers and bottles. ©Geffrye Museum, London.

“thirty-one large bottles, many containing several quarts, all full, of various cordials, oils and waters. . . . She also had shelves of bottles, pills and powders” (102, 103). In various letters to servants, family members, and friends, Mildmay mentions ingredients such as “aqua vitae,” a variety of cordials, seeds, gums and herbs; rhubarb, agaric, aloes, and cinnamon (140-142). The gentlewoman Elizabeth Freke seems to have had a stock of medicines comparable to Mildmay's. In her diary entry for December 7, 1710, Freke provides a list of the contents of only one of the many closets in her home. In one “little” closet, Freke claims to have “32 quarts of red strek cider, 9 quarts of cowslip syne, 3 stone bottles of damson wine, 3 quart bottles of damson wyne, 9 quarts of white meade, and 1 three-gallon bottle of elider vinegar” (329). In contrast, Lady Margaret Hoby's diary does not include a list of medical items contained in her closet. However, her frequent mention of “dressing” the sores and wounds of servants and neighbors implies that she kept medical supplies on hand. Additionally, she states that she was “forced to use diuerse

medesons that did little profit” to relieve the pain of a toothache, something that troubled her frequently (Moody 65). Hoby also says that she “did busie my selfe about making of oile and in my Clositt tell towards diner time,” and she also records giving a “poore woman of Caton saulue” (101, 112). However, it seems that most of the information about Hoby’s supply of medicine is implied in the phrases like “making of oile,” “did some Husswiffrie,” “I was busie sorting diuers things,” “I took note of such thinges as are in my Clositte,” that are frequently used in her brief diary entries (95, 97, 113, 115). Through this information, revealed in the writing of domestic medical practitioners like Mildmay, Freke, and Hoby, the closet’s expanded use as part apothecary, part laboratory reinforces its consideration as ultimately a space that freed women intellectually and spiritually, rather than simply constraining them to patriarchal expectations.

Closets provided the framework from which women developed their piety and demonstrated their domestic skills. Though the middling home contained rooms that were open to communal life, the closet was a physical space that signified keeping Protestant women’s bodies enclosed so that their piety remained intact. The purity of the body was especially cogent in reformed theology because the Christian’s body was viewed as the “house” of God: his spirit dwelled within each “priestly” believer. Ironically, though, in her private closet, a woman might privately succumb to sin as well as supersede it. Thus, the pious function of the closet could easily be subverted. Significantly, this religious metaphor of the body finds expression in the early modern woman’s practice of domestic medicine. Following Jesus’ example as healer, women learned how to heal bodies physically through experimentation, distillation, and codification of domestic medicine—all within the private space of the closet.

The diverse functions of women's private closets did not preclude a rich communal life, but enhanced it. Women's reflective self-writing, often composed in closets, reveals the development of shared domesticity. The communal nature of the receipt book, to be discussed in detail in the next chapter, is an outgrowth of the interconnected lives of early modern women who, even as their performative roles were based in domesticity, used their homes as bases for community rather than barriers to sociality. Ultimately, closets were liberating textual spaces and storehouses used for the construction of women's identities.

Chapter 3 Notes

¹ For an excellent discussion of gendered spaces and their fluidity among classes, see Amanda Flather's "Space, Place, and Gender: The Sexual and Spatial Division of Labor in the Early Modern Household," 2013.

² North elaborates further that ladies dressed in their bedchambers, not in a closet or a dressing room: "[T]he lady keeps the possession of the bedchamber, and is served with a little table brought in, with her glass and toilett, and doth not affect a different room for dressing, as formerly" (134, 135).

³ Lena Cowen Orlin asserts that a woman's early modern closet had nine common uses, "all simultaneously possible." These are: (1) a prayer closet; (2) a study; (3) a countinghouse; (4) a storehouse; (5) a private pantry; (6) a jewel house; (7) a pharmaceutical closet; (8) a parlor; and (9) a bedchamber" (Orlin 53).

⁴ An example of those "things" which would put one in mind of piety includes the needlework sampler, which rose in popularity among Protestants during the period. Samplers in the seventeenth century frequently contained a Bible verse or a religious truism, whereas these were less common in medieval needlework. ("Martha Salter").

⁵ Psalm 101:2b, 7: "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. . . . He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

⁶ God's covenant to Abraham is first recorded in scripture in Genesis 12: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (2, 3).

Chapter 4 The Codification of Physic through Domestic Medical Recipes

I sene an aged man, who after he had been unable to stir without a staffe for 31 years did by the use hereof recouer & goe allone! ("For the Sciatica," Ranelagh 24v).

A small, thin volume housed in the British Library is entitled *My Lady Rennelaghs choice Receipts: as also Some of Capt Willis who valued them above gold*. Written in a single, rather messy hand, the book contains medical recipes claiming to heal not only sciatica but other illnesses as diverse as rabies, hoarseness, and kidney stones. "My Lady Rennelagh" or Katherine Jones, Viscountess Ranelagh, was the sister of Robert Boyle, Jr., a prominent natural philosopher and founding member of the Royal Society. The *Dictionary of National Biography* describes her as "the leading woman intellectual of her generation, actively involved in contemporary politics, and deeply interested in educational, ethical, religious, and scientific matters" (Hutton). Known for her piety, she was an advocate for the free exercise of religion for all Protestants, even those who separated from the Church of England (Connolly 244). Like Lady Grace Mildmay, Elizabeth Isham, and Lady Margaret Hoby, Lady Ranelagh was an overtly religious woman with an advanced knowledge of medicine. In addition to her receipt book, some of her medical recipes are included in Thomas Willis's *Pharmacopoeia rationalis* (1684) and in her brother's *Medicinal Experiments* (1692) (Hutton). Lady Ranelagh and Boyle lived together in her London home for 30 years, and Ranelagh supported her brother's research in natural philosophy. Boyle, in fact, had a laboratory on his sister's Pall Mall estate, and as Lynette Hunter hypothesizes, they would have shared the results of each other's experimentation, even though Lady Ranelagh likely practiced her science in the kitchen and distillation room—an acceptably female space within the home ("Sisters" 185). Therefore, inclusion of his highly-respected sister's medical recipes in Boyle's texts is not surprising.

Whether demonstrated through the shared interests of siblings in an aristocratic family like Lady Ranelagh's, or by a poor woman telling a friend how to cure a child's rickets, women's practice of domestic medicine in the early modern period was a communal pursuit. The knowledge evidenced by a woman's recipe collection, obtained through networks of family and community connections, reinforced her reputation as an exemplar of Protestant domesticity. Consequently, as pious women of the period constructed their spiritual lives in diaries and other autobiographical writing, recipes were an essential inclusion. Similarly, their receipt books often contained scripture and spiritual meditation because recipes and the self-writing of pious Protestant women were inseparable. Here I argue that the ubiquity of recipes codified in Protestant women's receipt books and self-writing contributed significantly to their pious reputations. Furthermore, the perceived efficacy of these recipes, their provenances, and the competence of the women who administered the physic derived from them, impelled the progress of medical literacy in the period.

The Shared Recipe

The influence of domestic medical recipes upon the health of early modern communities can be measured by their frequent sharing, both laterally among friends and family as well as longitudinally to subsequent generations. This sharing of recipes increased exponentially as women's literacy improved. Prior to the sixteenth century, when rates of literacy among women were quite low, recipe exchanges were predominately oral. However, the method for exchanging recipes transitioned from oral to written form as literacy improved during the period (Green 308). Monica Green ties recipes not only with general literacy among women, but with medical literacy in particular, stating that collecting recipes was "women's first large-scale engagement with medical literacy. . . . [W]omen's roles as household managers seem to have led to a new

sense among women that they were also responsible for collecting the best remedies available to them in order to maintain the health and good order of their households” (309). I would only add that health and household order also signified Protestant piety. As stated earlier, clergy hailed pious women as exemplars for the culture at large, thus establishing such a reputation as highly valuable for social capital. Certainly, for Protestant women of the period, the religious obligation to be healers and the desire to be recognized as competent, pious housewives contributed significantly to the extensive medical recipe collections produced during the period. Recipes were not simply random collections. Those considered to be particularly important or efficacious were shared over and over. Dr. Burges’ recipe for plague water, for example, can be found in Mary Granville’s book of recipes (1641), in Lady Katherine Ranelagh’s receipt book (17th century), in Charlotte Johnstone, Dowager Marchioness of Annandale’s receipt book (c.1725), and in Eliza Smith’s published *The Compleat Housewife* (1741), among others (41r, 5v, 99r, 237). The recipes contained in a receipt book were collected from an important network of relationships, and the reputation of the “owner” rested on the efficacy of the recipes in her collection.

Though the communal nature of recipes certainly allowed for editing and refinement to improve efficacy as they passed from hand to hand, the similarity of many frequently shared recipes is remarkable. Catherine Field posits that the “genre of the receipt book was . . . an unstable one with ‘how-to’ knowledge moving back and forth between print and manuscript, as well as between the owners of receipt books and their community of contributors” (51). However, the instability of the genre did not preclude consistency in ingredients, amounts, and directions for administration among contemporary recipes as well as those that were handed down generationally. For example, a comparison of Dr. Burges’ popular plague water recipe in

Granville, Ranelagh, Johnstone, and Smith reveals a remarkable similarity in ingredients and amounts, even though the approximate dates of these texts span almost a century.

Granville (1640)	Ranelagh (1615-1691)	Johnstone (1725)	Smith (1741)
3 pints malmsey	3 pints malmsey or muscadine	3 pints malmsey or muscadine	3 pints muscadine
Handful of rue	Handful of rue	Handful of rue	Handful of rue
Handful of sage	Handful of sage	Handful of sage	Handful of sage
1 pennyworth long pepper	1 pennyworth long pepper	1 pennyworth long pepper	2 pennyworth long pepper
½ oz ginger	½ oz ginger	½ oz ginger	½ oz ginger
¼ oz nutmeg	¼ oz nutmeg	¼ oz nutmeg	½ oz nutmeg
4 pennyworth mithridate	---	----	¼ oz mithridate
2 pennyworth London treacle	4 pennyworth treacle	---	¼ oz Venice treacle
¼ pint angelica water	¼ pint angelica water	¼ pint angelica water	¼ pint angelica water
---	---	---	1 oz angelica root
---	---	---	1 oz zedoary root
---	---	---	½ oz Virginia snake-root

Table 1. Comparison of four of Dr. Burges' plague water recipes.

Though malmsey as the basic ingredient transitioned to muscadine in the four recipes, most of the herbal ingredients, both by kind and by amount, are consistent: rue, sage, long pepper, ginger, and nutmeg.¹ Smith's addition of three varieties of root is the most significant variation to the recipe. Interestingly, Eliza Smith claims on the title page that her receipt book is "[a] collection of above Two Hundred Family Receipts of Medicines . . . never before made publick," even though by 1741 Dr. Burges' plague water recipe had been making the rounds among household practitioners for at least 100 years. Perhaps this claim compelled her to add the additional ingredients so that the recipe would be considered original. Regardless, the remarkable similarity among the four versions of Dr. Burges' recipe, in both written and printed texts, attests to domestic medical practitioners' ability to maintain the accuracy of a recipe that passed through many hands.

While many recipes, like “Dr. Burges’ Plague Water,” include attributions, recipes with no acknowledged “author” also became part of the domestic medicine canon quite simply because they were believed to be effective. Elizabeth Bulkeley’s “The Vertues of sages,” found in *A booke of hearbes and receipts* (1627), provides a pertinent example:

Singular good for the head & braine quickneth the sences & memore. . . . for the
Canker or other soreness in the mouth especially if you boyle in it a fayre bright shining
seacoale, sage also beinge brewed [with wine and fennel seeds] . . . is exceeding
wholesome. (image 7)

Though unattributed, Bulkeley copied her sage receipt from John Gerard’s *The herbal or Generall historie of plantes* (1597), even using the same phrasing, such as “singular good for the head & braine, and boiling it in a “fayre bright shining seacoal” (Gerard 694). Gerard’s codification of herbs was not original, nor was his compendium the only resource for early modern herbalists. Ancient scholars extolled the use of herbs as medicine. The botanist Theophrast, for example, classified more than 500 plants as medicinal in the second century B.C.E. (Petrovska). Almost 300 years later, Dioscorides, considered the “father of pharmacognosy,” included sage as one of his preferred medicinal herbs in his treatise *De Materia Medica*, (Petrovska). A military physician, Dioscorides traveled with Roman Emperor Nero’s army in the first century A.D., when Roman armies occupied territory along the Thames River now known as London (Ackroyd 70, 71). *De Materia Medica* was commonly consulted for herbal efficacies from the first century through the Renaissance (Petrovska). Dioscorides’ herbal guide, then, likely contributed to the ubiquitous use of sage as a medicinal herb in the early modern period. Though Bulkeley does not mention Dioscorides in this sage recipe, she does reference him in another recipe in her *booke* that extolls the benefits of the plant called pellitory

wall (5r). The provenance of Bulkeley's sage recipe, then, could include a professional physician like Dioscorides, whose physics were passed down from antiquity. Though her recipe is almost identical to Gerard's, and a common Roman heritage can be inferred, Bulkeley does not disclose from whom she received it. For that matter, the source of Dioscorides' knowledge of sage is largely unknown except that he is thought to have experimented with herbs during his travels with Nero's army (Petrovska). The "virtues of sage" thus exemplifies the ambiguous origins, and yet essential accuracy, that often characterizes domestic medical recipes that were passed on to succeeding generations.

Furthermore, not only were individual recipes shared, but entire receipt books were also passed among friends and to subsequent generations as well, as evidenced by the variety of handwriting styles often found in them. For example, the inscription on the inside cover of the

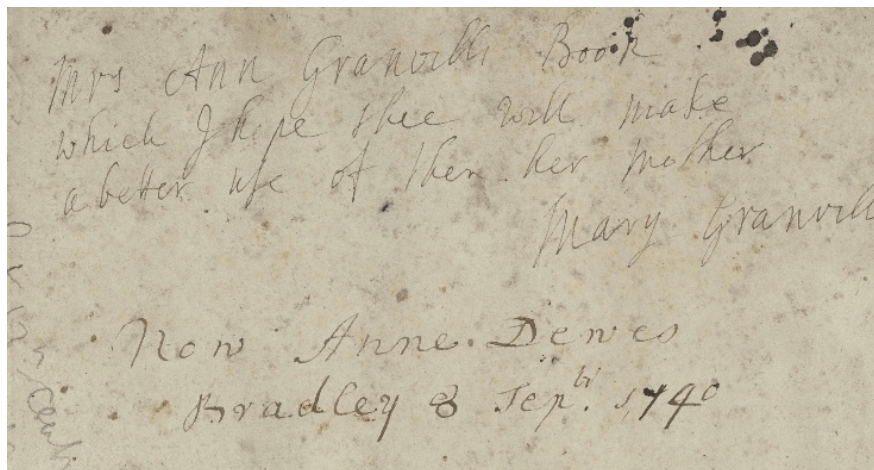


Figure 4-1. Mrs. Ann Granvills Book which I hope thee will make a better use of then her mother. Mary Granville. Now Anne Dewes Bradley 8 Sept. 1740 (Folger V.a. 430, 1).

Granville family receipt book reveals that Mary Granville presented it to her daughter, Ann. Dorothy Phillips's *Sermon booke*, which contains a substantial number of recipes, is written in at least

six different hands. Katherine Packer Gell's and de la Bere's sisters' manuscripts are written in several hands as well. Although identifying the scribes and original owners of these texts is often problematic, many of the recipes and receipt books include evidence of multiple ownership that reveal the depth and diversity of women's recipe sharing.

Writing Reputations through Attributions

A recipe's attribution provided several advantages to its holder, including gravitas and insulation from accusations of quackery. Attributions, therefore, aided women in building their reputations for domestic excellence in the community. Lady Katherine Ranelagh's diminutive receipt book includes not only "Capt Millers" favorites, for example, but also those of trained physicians and women of aristocratic rank: Lady Barrington, Lady Leyster, Lord Canter, Lord Devon, Dr. Baron, and the ubiquitous plague water recipe of Dr. Burges. Both Gell's and the Granville family's receipt books, for example, include a "plaster for many diseases" attributed to Paracelsus (17, 59).² Ann and Hester de la Bere include "a recipe to make Collonell Thompsons Pill" and "Dr. Cox bitter drink for an ague" in their collection (43, 44). The gentlewoman Elizabeth Freke includes in her journal a receipt for laudanum she received from her sister, who received it from a member of the aristocracy: "The Ladys Powells receitt sent me by my deer sister Austen in my distress; of which she has taken of itt neer two years her selfe" (329). Freke's tracking of the provenance of this recipe establishes its legitimacy and her family's close relationship with aristocracy. Elaine Leong confirms Freke's impressive social network, adding that Freke, like Mildmay, distilled her own medicine, and her well-stocked closets

reflect Elizabeth's manuscript recipe collection, which was typical in its blend of information taken from her friends and family, from consultations with medical practitioners, and from offerings from the booming vernacular print trade. The contents of the cupboard and the notebook suggest that in collecting medical knowledge for use, Elizabeth combined information gained from private and public spheres and domestic and commercial medical practices. (153)

Freke's knowledge of commercial medical practices was common among domestic practitioners with both the social connections and the wealth to purchase expensive texts and develop relationships within the professional medical community. The inclusion of recipes of the aristocracy as well as physician's receipts in women's collections ascribed value not only to the recipes but also to the woman in possession of them.

In addition to enhancing the reputation of the recipe or receipt book's holder, the inclusion of physician's recipes insulated female domestic practitioners from accusations of quackery. Female domestic medicine practitioners were encouraged to work within boundaries that did not compete with the professional services offered by trained physicians. As early as 1529, for example, Juan Vives directed women to be content with collecting recipes for their own use instead of striving for professional recognition: "And this I would she shoulde learne. . .and have them diligently written in some little book and not in the great volumes of phisick"(310). As previously mentioned, in 1622, Dr. Richard Banister extolled the virtues of Lady Grace Mildmay's domestic medical practice, in part because she consulted with so many trained physicians. Even so, female healers were commonly criticized harshly. In 1633, a mere decade after Banister's encomium of Mildmay, James Hart, author of *Klinicke, or The diet of the diseased*, emphatically expressed his distaste for female medical practitioners, calling them "erroneous and ignorant" as well as "dangerous members in a well-governed commonwealth" (2). Hart's reasoning for his concerns were that these women's "education" was based on experience and not on professional training, which ironically was not open to women. Resulting from these both covert and overt restrictions, "[e]arly modern women's receipt books are generally filled with practical medical remedies fit for a gentlewoman, with the scholarly theories behind illnesses being reserved for university educated men" (DiMeo "The Draft"). In other words, the contents of

many receipt books were carefully edited to reflect a proper respect for the professional field, of which women were excluded. Including efficacious recipes ascribed to trained physicians in their collections insured female domestic practitioners that they would not be accused of stepping outside of the boundaries placed upon them for medical practice. There were, of course, exceptions. As previously discussed, Lady Grace Mildmay's medical papers reveal a personal knowledge of medicine comparable to a trained physician's. In addition, Elizabeth Isham's receipts and medical notations attest to her medical curiosity, experimentation, and education. Written in the 1640s, Isham's small collection, preserved on loose scraps of paper, includes handwritten copies of surgical texts as well as recipes such as "oyle of cammille. . .made after my own manner," implying that this is a recipe she created (DiMeo "The Draft"). A few recipes, according to Michelle DiMeo's research, have Latin titles, indicating that Isham "had a more sophisticated knowledge of medicine than many women of her class" ("The Draft"). Likewise, Lady Katherine Ranelagh was admired for her medical expertise. Lynette Hunter provides this excerpt from Robert Boyle's funeral sermon, in which his sister is described as using her knowledge and influence "for doing good to others, in which she laid out her Time, her Interest, and her Estate, with the greatest Zeal and the most Success that I have ever known" ("Sisters" 180). The respected medical knowledge of women like Mildmay, Isham, and Ranelagh, combined with the approbation implied by the inclusion of the recipes of trained physicians in their collections, was a decisive factor in the flourishing of informal medical practices throughout the period.

As domestic medicine received more consideration by physicians in the seventeenth century, their own medical papers began to include women's medical recipes. This inclusion of recipes attributed to female practitioners demonstrates the growing liminality between domestic

and professional medicine. Pollock proposes that, during the period, “there was much overlap between informal and formal medicine, with the latter drawing much from the former” (107). She speculates, for example, that, because Mildmay’s practice bears a “remarkable resemblance to that furnished by regular practitioners,” trained physicians were not only providing instruction to Mildmay, but that they were also incorporating some of Mildmay’s physic into their own practices: “the remedies, courses of treatment and ingredients of trained doctors were often similar to those utilized by amateur healers and vice versa” (107). Similarly, Lady Ranelagh’s brother, Robert Boyle, commends his sister’s experimentation with colcothar (copper oxide) to cure ricketts in children. Boyle writes to his nephew, Richard Jones:

And yet I suppose you may have heard that Excellent Person your Mother, several times mention her having performed divers cures...of this Disease, barely by that slight preparation of *Colcothar*, lately taught you, and presented Her by us; And by which (we having made and distributed, at Her desire, a considerable quantity of it) several other Persons have freed Children from that disfiguring Sickness. (204) ³

Although the preponderance of commendations to women practitioners in male medical papers are of women in the aristocratic class, the rise of middling women’s contributions to medicine are evident as well. For example, the receipt book compiled by Dr. Caleb Lowdham (1665-1712), a surgeon in Exeter, and his wife, Jane, includes recipes from “Aunt Mathew” as well as “Boyls usefullness of experimental Philosophy,” in the same handwriting (images 10, 85). In addition, Christopher Morley, M.D.’s medical journal (1681), housed at the British Library, contains two sections of medical receipts attributed to “Madam Jones” and “Madam Porter” (Sloane MS 1289, Ff. 1-79.4). Though the recipes themselves are unremarkable, their inclusion in the collection of a trained medical professional is significant in two ways. First, the unknown

Madams Jones and Porter are not of the aristocracy, at least as indicated by their titles. Thus we see an example of not only the sharing of recipes across domestic and professional spaces, but also an acknowledgement of medical expertise of middling informal practitioners. Second, that these women received attribution for their contributions is in itself commendable. “Male authors often made use of information gleaned from illiterate women, with or without acknowledgement, in their scientific, literary, and practical publications” (Mendelson and Crawford, 215). The citations afforded to Madams Jones and Porter, then, are a testament to Dr. Morley’s integrity as well as the efficacy of these women’s domestic medicine. Citations of female domestic medical recipes in physician’s medical papers attest to the growing respect for domestic medicine and the breaking down of distinctions between formal and informal medicine in the period.

Efficacy and Piety: God in the Recipe

Even as pious women carefully curated their recipe collections, thus improving their reputations as domestic healers, their receipt books still attest to the Protestant belief that a person’s health ultimately depends on the will of God (Bennett 158, 159). This symbiotic relationship between domestic medicine and faith is revealed by the scripture and religious inscriptions commonly found in receipt books of the period.⁴ However, a more profound marker of faith in God’s healing power is revealed within the recipes themselves: God as the ingredient that is essential to the efficacy of the recipe. Such an inclusion of God *in* a recipe completed the receipt book’s testimony of the piety of its owner.

As I discussed more fully in chapter two, Protestants in the period embraced a belief in God as ultimate healer because of the lingering influence of medieval theology as well as the growing predominance of Calvinism in Protestant theology in the sixteenth century. In his seminal *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), for example, Calvin declares that “life and

death are fixed by an eternal and immutable decree of God” even as he chastises the rising threat of antinomianism which concluded that “the elect” could act without moral restraint since they were predestined for eternal salvation (589). Similarly, medieval Catholicism affirmed a positive correlation between a person’s physical and spiritual health. McCann describes the Galenic medical practices in the late medieval period as having “as much to do with being in a state of grace as it does with the humours, and so . . . to return to a state of health, one must find means of returning to a state of grace” (342). The theological principal of God’s absolute sovereignty over his creation, including humans, was foundational to both Catholic and Calvinist theology.

Consequently, appeals to God inserted *within* the recipes of highly-educated women such as Katherine Packer Gell, Lady Katherine Ranelagh, Mary Grosvenor, and Brilliana Harley attest to their belief in the centrality of God in healing. In Gell’s receipt book for example, a recipe titled “A good thing for the white fleeme that growth ouer the eye” ends with the phrase “and it will doe good by gods help” (41). The concluding phrase of another recipe, “To stay vomiting” is similar: “by the grace of God it will help you” (63). Lady Katherine Ranelagh’s recipe “For a bruise a drink,” contains a similar concluding phrase: “T[ake] a green oaken bow or limbe of anoake & burne it to a cole & T[ake] the cole thereof & put into a Cup of ale & toss the foume as it riseth & drink the ale. & by Gods help it will doe you good” (35v). The bruise, according to Ranelagh, will only heal if “God’s help” is added as an ingredient to the recipe. Likewise, Mary Grosvenor’s generic recipe, “For all menner of sicknesses a Souernigne Medisyne,” claims that if the pottage concocted is eaten “the Body shal neuer be sicke by the grace of God” (BL 3235, 15).⁵ Another recipe, “For spitting of Blood,” claims to “helpe you God willinge” (21). Lady Brilliana Harley’s granddaughter, also named Brilliana, includes the will of God as an ingredient in several of the recipes in her receipt book. For example, “To Cure the Falling Sikness” ends

with the phrase, “by the blessing of god it will cure.”⁶ In the same receipt book, a recipe claiming to cure blindness promises: “he shalbe whole in 40:dayes by the grace of God” (BL Egerton MS 2214, 80r). God as an ingredient in these women’s recipes confers a unique efficacy on the physic. If the person being treated is not healed, the will of God is invoked rather than blaming the practitioner or the recipe.

Recipes that failed often were those claiming to prevent bubonic plague, a disease that early modern Protestants believed to be a curse from God to punish people for their sin. This belief in the cause-and-effect relationship between the plague and sin reinforced the view that healing the soul cured the body (Killeen 194). Therefore, Protestants (as well as other religious adherents) pleaded with God for forgiveness and mercy when the plague appeared in the vicinity. For example, pastor John Ley eulogized Jane Ratcliffe with these words:

When this City was in peril of the pestilence, as doubtlesse it was diverse times,
especially when the arouse of the destroying Angell flew abroad, and many of them light
and killed many in the bordering counties on both sides, when at every gate of the Citie
watchmen were set to keepe out suspected persons; she kept a watch in her chamber,
watched and prayed to the watchmen of Israel to keepe the City. (ch 17, III)

In this example, the Reverend Ley’s rhetoric recalls the angel of death that killed the first-born males of Egypt as punishment for failing to allow Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and into the land Jehovah God promised them.⁷ Ratcliffe’s fervent prayer in her closet that “the City” be passed over by the “destroying Angell” of the plague connotes the puritanical belief of a direct relationship between the will of God, sin, sickness, and death.

Seemingly random outbreaks of the plague occurred about every ten to fifteen years in the seventeenth century, and when the disease struck those who could afford to left the city.

Kevin Killeen asserts that it was not uncommon for doctors as well as wealthy citizens to flee, leaving behind middling and poor families (194). Lady Margaret Hoby includes several mentions of the plague in her diary, including details of cutting short a trip to London in June, 1603, at the order of King James: “This day Mr. Hoby and my selfe remoued from London into kent, to Mr Bettnames house, wher, I praise god, I had my health very well” (Moody 189). One month later, Hoby reports the news that 3200 people per week were dying in London (191). During the outbreak that devastated London and Westminster in 1636, an estimated 10,400 people died, representing 7.5 percent of the population (Newman 809). Presumably, middling female domestic practitioners, remaining in the cities when the plague descended, anxiously dispensed their homemade physic concocted from the popular domestic recipes for “curing” the plague. However, regardless of the numbers of plague water recipes amassed, thousands of people died because neither domestic practitioners nor professionally-trained doctors understood the origins of the plague, which was bacterium traveling from fleas, to rats, to humans.

Certainly, the desperate crisis of the descent of bubonic plague on a town makes exhortations to God, even among the non-religious, in the plague water recipes understandable. Rebecca Totaro claims that England developed “a repertoire of medical, religious, civic, and professional methods for dealing with the disease” because of the hopeless desperation it brought to the people (18).

[P]eople turned to a variety of sources of comfort and cure available in what medical historians now refer to as the early modern medical marketplace where licensed and unlicensed practitioners . . . made their skills and goods available to consumers. . . . Church leaders and their wives then as now provided counsel on bodies and souls, prescribing prayer and repentance side by side with health regimens. (18)

One's spiritual health affected the efficacy of the recipes that claimed to prevent contracting the disease. The Granville family receipt book offers a pertinent example. Of two plague recipes included on a single page, the first one, "To make plague Water," simply lists the ingredients and instructs to steep these ingredients in "5 gallons of the best sack 3 daies, stirring it once a day, then still itt in a common still with a soft fire" (41). No dosage instructions, claims of effectiveness, or appeals to God are included. However, the second recipe, the popular "Doctor Burges his direction against the plague," includes this imploration in its text: "keepe this as your life above all worldly Treasure. . .under God trust to this for this never did faile either man woman or child" (41). A recipe worth more than any material treasure explains in part why this cookbook was passed from generation to generation and carefully preserved. Doctor Burges' recipe was believed, at least by the one whose hand wrote this iteration, to prevent or cure a disease, through God's providence, that baffled scientists who were contemporary to the times. A fail-safe cure for the plague, particularly one with the provenance of a medical doctor, kept hope alive in the chaos of a seemingly random and devastating disease.

If the good doctor's prescription "never did faile," why include both plague recipes in the collection? Why not mark out the former? The recipes are written in the same hand and on the same page. They could have been written on same day. In contrast to Dr. Burges' recipe, "To make plague Water" is not "proved" and is not declared to be a treasure. The ingredients are substantially different from those included in Dr. Burges' recipe. Perhaps it simply never hurts to include more recipes than one requires, just in case. Regardless, recipes such as these appeared to give those who possessed them power "under God" to snatch life from death.

The abundance of inclusions of God as an integral part in all kinds of recipes, in addition to those purporting to prevent catching the plague, raises the question of whether phrases such as “by the grace of god” are merely tropes in early modern women’s recipes. Though I do not believe this to be the case, even as tropes these phrases should not be dismissed because they serve the important function of mitigating prejudice against the texts. For example, the common trope “pardon my scribbled hand” found in women’s hand-written correspondence was a way in which women purposefully discounted their skills or intelligence to persuade their readers to succumb to their “humble” requests.⁸ Comparably, appeals to God in recipes rendered women’s collections acceptable to the religious leaders and professional physicians who had the power to extol or destroy domestic healers’ reputations. Admittedly, the veracity of the religious faith of the writer of each receipt (or, if an amanuensis is employed, its “owner”) is often, but not always, undetermined. However, the deep religious devotion demonstrated through the self-writing of women like Lady Grace Mildmay, Lady Margaret Hoby, and Elizabeth Isham supports my contention that God was integral to their pursuit of excellence in domestic medicine. Even Dr. Burges’ plague water recipe provides support for this conclusion. Of the four versions I examined, only the Granville recipe includes God’s providence. “Under God trust to this” is a testimony to the faith of whoever emendated the recipe with this phrase. Therefore, the inclusion of God as an ingredient in a recipe is consistent with the symbiotic relationship between spiritual and physical health that was common to pious religious expression in the period.

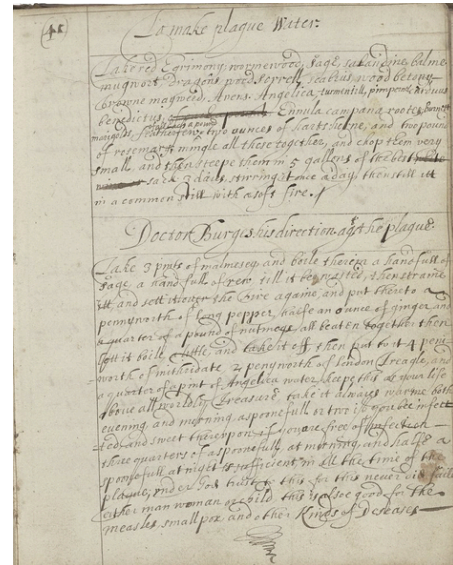


Figure 4-2. Two plague recipes in the Granville family receipt book (Folger V.a. 430, 41).

From manuscript to print

The practice of efficacious domestic medicine ostensibly within acceptable religious and cultural boundaries, paired with women's improving literacy, enhanced the reputation of domestic medicine in the male-dominated public sector. By the mid-1600s, women's medicinal recipes emerged from the hand-written household cookbook and began to appear in published texts. Both Lynette Hunter's and Elizabeth Tebeaux's research regarding the surge of published medical-related texts authored by women during this concludes that these texts, many of them written decades previously, were the fruit of the intellectual advances of women in the period, not only in the aristocracy but in the middling class as well.⁹ In 1655, a landmark text was published that acknowledged some female medical practitioners as having equal standing with males: *Natura Exenterata: or Nature Unbowelled by the most Exquisite Anatomizers of Her*. This extensive volume contains 1,720 "receipts and experiments," collected from approximately 90 contributors, of whom at least 35 are women. *Natura Exenterata* is an important example of the respect women were gaining as "professional amateurs" in the medical field, beyond household medicine (Green 309, 310). These kinds of collaborations reinforce the communal aspect of medical receipts, even between professional and non-professional practitioners, and thus reduces even further the binary of domestic versus professional medicine in the period.

In addition to their recipes being included in more traditional male texts, women began writing their own domestic manuals for publication in the seventeenth century. Hannah Woolley, for example, authored several books containing both culinary and medical recipes long before Eliza Smith wrote *The Compleat Housewife* in 1741. Exemplifying the heritage of the domestic recipe culture, Woolley's manuals are characterized by simple language understood by women of all social standings: "I Here present you with a true, and most easie way of Practising what

you shall find mentioned in this little Book,” she explains, while accusing male authors of similar books to be “rather Confounders, than Instructors” (*Ladies Directory* A2). Considered the “most popular domestic writer of the late seventeenth century and the first woman to publish a cookbook,” Woolley gained her domestic skills while working as a household servant (Wall “Literacy and the Domestic Arts” 394). Later in life, she began writing professionally to support herself after the death of her husband. Woolley’s *A Supplement to The queen-like closet, or, A little of everything* (1674) includes numerous physics, including cures for deafness, coughs, hemorrhoids, and pimples. The popularity of Woolley’s books--and of other women authors that succeeded her--coupled with the growing interdependency between domestic and professional medicine, confirmed women’s recipe collections as essential bodies of medical knowledge. Furthermore, the codification and dissemination of medical receipts, whether through handwritten manuscripts, vernacular texts such as Woolley’s, or professional medical texts, contributed to the autonomy of women by granting them more influence in the public sphere as well as in more traditional domestic spaces. Through recipe collecting and experimentation, shaped in the context of piety, women formed bodies of knowledge and both formal and informal networks that spurred the progress of medicine in the early modern period.

Chapter 4 Notes

¹ Malmsey wine originated from the Mediterranean (see OED “malmsey”). Muscadine was a “wine made from muscat or similar grapes” that was a product of France and Italy during the seventeenth century (see OED “muscadine”). Both were “sweet wines” and therefore might be used interchangeably in physic during the period (see Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, 638).

² Paracelsus (1493-1541) was a physician who established the role of chemistry in medicine (Hargrave).

³ Thanks to Dr. Amy Tigner for this information.

⁴ See, for example, figure 2-1, the title page of Ann and Hester de la Bere’s receipt book, which quotes Hebrews 6:17-18.

⁵ Mary Grosvenor was the daughter of Sir Richard Grosvenor, a patron of puritan ministers and vocal opponent of “popery” (Cust “Grosvenor”).

⁶ In this recipe, the cure for the falling sickness, as well as “vapors” or a “megrim in the Head” is peacock dung dried in the sun and mixed with white wine (20r, 21v).

⁷ “And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the first born in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (Exodus 12:29, 30).

⁸ For example, Anne Talbot’s letter to Bess of Hardwick dated 8 May 1575: “I hope my longe scryblynge wyll the lesse trouble your Ladyship and so wyth my moste humble dewty. . .take my leue” <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=092>.

⁹ See “Women and Technical Writing, 1475 – 1700” by Tebeaux and “Women and Domestic Medicine: Lady Experimenters, 1570-1620” by Hunter, both in *Women, Science and Medicine, 1500-1700*, Ed. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton.

Conclusion

“On the historical curb rest the domestic, the broken, the consumable, the useful, the female, and the ordinary”(Sinor 3).

Until recent decades, the marginalization of women’s self-writing left scholarship with an incomplete picture of the essential contributions women’s physic made to medical advances in the early modern period. However, the research of current feminist scholars reveals that women’s receipt books, diaries, and other autobiographical writing tell an important story of medical literacy built in major part on the foundation of the domestic “physic” practiced by informally trained women. I add a filter of religion to that research to examine how, as revealed in their self-writing, the devout faith of Protestant female healers influenced their domestic medical practices. Viewed within the context of the religious turbulence of the period, these women utilized self-writing as a platform from which they could textually construct their faith. The faith identities disclosed in women’s self-writing reveal that a reputation for efficacious physic exemplified pious domesticity as defined by the prevailing religious culture.

The Protestantism born of the Reformation influenced the patriarchal norms of the period that attempted to enclose women in domestic spaces as a means of retaining power. Many of the domestic manuals authored by men in the period attest to this conclusion. Women were extolled for their domestic expertise and advised to remain within the confines of their homes—the material representation of their domesticity—to maintain their virtuous reputations. However, early modern women valued community, and therefore homes were spaces for sharing essential domestic tools like culinary and medical recipes. Even the closets in homes, signifiers of the “enclosure” of women’s bodies, provided the privacy that gave women the freedom to read, write, and experiment with physic. Therefore, whatever “rules of conduct” were prescribed for women, and whatever conflict ensued from attempts to enforce such rules, daily life in the early

modern period found its meaning in religious devotion and in the practical ways of living that supported essential family and community structures for men and women alike. Lady Margaret Hobby, for example, was undoubtedly a devout Protestant woman who desired to live her life congruent with the tenets of the Protestant church. Yet, she paid the bills, managed the grain harvests, and otherwise executed many tasks that contradict a narrow view of the patriarchal dominance of the period. Importantly, she did these things while also fulfilling her role as a pious woman, demonstrated in part by providing essential medical care to her household and the community.

Perhaps the best way to describe the effects of the intersection of devotion, domesticity, and medical practice of women in the period is to consider the way devout Protestant woman deconstructed cultural binaries even as they ostensibly worked within the confines of those boundaries. The liminality of women's self-writing is a cogent example. Distinctions among diaries, autobiographies, and receipt books are unclear because common aspects of each of these genres are found in all three; i.e., recipes are found in diaries, and spiritual devotional text is included in receipt books. Therefore, especially given the communal nature of recipes, women's self-writing in the period can more accurately be viewed as a nascent, inclusive genre that would later divide into more congruent identities. Accordingly, the inclusion of medical recipes in multiple forms of women's self-writing denotes their cultural value and catalyzed their contribution to the deconstruction of the binary of domestic and professional medicine in the period.

As the popularity of domestic medicine grew, the professional medical class attempted to retain control of medical practice by deriding female healers in published literature and restricting their services to charity work. Even so, doctors could not deny the essential medical

contributions of largely self-educated practitioners like Lady Grace Mildmay. Over time, as medical receipts were shared throughout generations as well as communally during the period, trained physicians began to include women's recipes in their medical papers. Thus, the practice of medicine in the period is, I argue, more accurately thought of as a continuum of integrated practice rather than separate spheres of domestic and professional.

Medical recipes also addressed the growing division between religion and science in this period of the dawning Enlightenment. The medieval belief that God ultimately healed disease, and that the spiritual body and the physical body were inseparably linked to holistic health, continued to influence the emerging reformed theology of the period. Pious Protestant women merged these religious principles with their physic, which was often derived from centuries of herbal as well as chemical discovery. Consequently, "God as ingredient" appears in numerous medical recipes, syncretizing faith and science in the pursuit of complete healing. Therefore, women's self-writing reveals the complex, liminal roles of women in the period and their unique contributions to an era poised for advancement in both science and the humanities.

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V.a. 19

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