CREATING MOTHER:

MOTHERS' LEGACIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONDUCT LITERATURE OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Creating Mother: Mothers' Legacies in the Context of the Conduct Literature of Seventeenth-Century England. (May 2013)

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This thesis, focusing on seventeenth-century English writers, examines the genre of Mothers' Legacies in relation to the conduct literature being written around the same time. It discusses the manner in which the women writers of Mothers' Legacies both confirm and deny the ideal form of womanhood laid out by conduct writers. By writing from the place of the *mother*, these women are fulfilling a socially prescribed role, but by publishing for a wide audience, they are stepping out of their traditional domestic domain. The end result of this thesis is the delineation and explanation for the gap between what seventeenth-century women are told to do and what they actually do. First, the thesis looks at the various attitudes and opinions held by men about the "Can and Cannots of womanhood." Then, it examines the rhetorical platforms women must erect in order to maintain social approval as they move from the domestic (feminine) sphere to the public (masculine) sphere. The research looks for social and historical factors that could explain the presence of the niche that enabled women to publish their works. (For example, this was a time period marked by high death rates and religiopolitical turmoil partially in response to the Protestant Reformation of the previous century. Therefore, a mother's fear of early death or

worries about the unstable state of politics and religion could have been thought of as justification for them to publish their wisdom, which could then be passed down to guide future generations.) The research is mostly based on analysis of seventeenth-century printed books and manuscripts containing the Legacies and conduct books, but it also draws on secondary sources that discuss pertinent information such as the history of seventeenth-century England and the biographies of the writers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An examination of the English literature of the seventeenth century places one right in the middle of the historical time period of early modern England, a period that covers roughly the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries. The social and political turmoil that operated as a backdrop to the lives of the early modern Englishmen and women developed into a violent civil war in the middle of the seventeenth century, destabilizing many of the core beliefs around which they built their existence. Meanwhile, established practices of religious worship, a shared experience of the middle and upper classes, were challenged by new Protestant sects that formed throughout the century. When King James I ascended the throne in 1603, many rejoiced in the hope of increased religious tolerance and some long-overdue closure in a time in which one's political and religious affiliations could literally be a question of life or death. However, as history revealed, the worst was yet to come, and many more lives would be taken over these debates before the close of the seventeenth century. This general instability affected the lives of the Englishwomen in particular in such a way that greatly complicated their existence. While the women of seventeenth-century England found themselves surrounded by rules – rules for how and when to pray, how and when to speak, how and when to marry – the religiopolitical atmosphere provided an anything but solid foundation on which these rules could be sustained.

Perhaps as a direct result of this volatile atmosphere, many women took to the pen in order to provide some sense of written stability, wisdom, and encouragement to current and future generations. One of the first of these women was Dorothy Leigh, whose work entitled *The*

Mother's Blessing was published in 1616. The book was addressed to her three sons, George, John, and William, yet, significantly, her writing clearly speaks to a larger audience. Indeed, Sylvia Brown, who produced a modernized anthology of some of these women's works, calls Leigh's criticism of her society's preaching "scathing," not a term one might expect to be used to describe a book written to a child (Brown 3). However, despite its certain degree of political charge, Leigh's attitude was not viewed as being entirely impertinent, for her work was prized as the number one selling book with a woman's name on the title page (Brown 3).

Leigh is one of the earliest participants in a genre that became known as "Mothers' Legacies." The genre has been discussed by several scholars, including Jennifer Heller, author of *The Mother's Legacy in Early Modern England*, who notes the key features of the genre as being 1) a mother-as-advice-giver perspective, 2) a child-as-advice-receiver perspective, 3) a backdrop of the mother's deathbed, and 4) a religious discussion (Heller 2). This genre essentially comprises the works of a group of educated women who wrote messages to their children as a way to preserve their wisdom for future generations – a wisdom that was seen as much needed in a world in which foundational religious values became the subject of society's fiercest debates. Heller's book actually places the legacies in their respective historical context, providing valuable insight into the many complicated social forces at play in the women's writings. This unstable environment, coupled with the fact that the mortality rate during childbirth was extremely high, prompted many women who were eager to provide religious teaching for their children to do what their society told them was inappropriate: write for publication.[1] Indeed,

[1] In this time period, many members of the upper class (both men and women) considered commercial publication something beneath them. "Respectable" people who wanted to write did not have their works but would circulate manuscripts of their works amongst their friends in order to display their abilities for their entertainment. Therefore, a woman placing her works in the public eye stood out as an anomaly. She

some have argued that, for women in the seventeenth century, the act of writing for publication was unquestionably breaking the rules and, thus, was done only by a few exceptional women. In her book *Women According to Men*, Suzanne W. Hull, well-known for her studies on the early modern Englishwoman, describes the works of these lonely women writers as “whispers among the shouts of men” (Hull 26).

On the other hand, another pertinent work, *The Patriarch’s Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* by Margaret Ezell, questions the commonly-accepted presumption that seventeenth-century England was an oppressive male-dominated society that allowed no room for women’s freedoms. It investigates the gap between *theoretical* patriarchal rule and the actual *practical* lives of the seventeenth-century women. Ezell points out the fact that many of these women demonstrated thoughts and actions that challenged the patriarchy, proving that this social force was not left unquestioned in the minds of the English people. The book examines important topics and patterns in the literature from the time such as women’s education, anti-marriage rhetoric, profemale works/antifemale satires, and women’s friendships, in order to prove that, in practice, the patriarch’s wife was far from being the docile, muted stereotype that many believed (or hoped) her to be. Indeed, the writers of Mothers’ Legacies cannot be said to be such, for their very act of writing for publication challenged their typical prescribed role. These women, who were educated by a biased society, were well aware of what was demanded of them by their contemporaries, yet they still found it in themselves to create their own versions of motherhood despite this pressure.

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was necessarily concerning herself in public affairs and, thus, breaking out of the household space to which women were supposedly bound.

The question I will examine is this: how, in a world in which women's lives were meant to be centered around the core values of chastity, silence, and obedience, did these women manage to build the powerful rhetorical platform on which they stand? The ideal role of the wife was clearly defined for these women, namely by men, yet they were respected and oftentimes rewarded for doing something that they were directly told not to do – entering the public sphere. To answer this question, I will undertake a comparative reading of seventeenth-century conduct and advice literature, and I will place the Mothers' Legacies in this context. The purpose of doing so will be, first, to gauge the manner in which the advice literature created the role of the wife/mother and, later, to determine how this role was distorted to enable women the space to stretch their own rhetorical muscles.

However, the issue at hand appears to be more complicated than this. The writers of these legacies were highly concerned with the rules they were in danger of breaking, and therefore, they wrote in a manner that was both socially conservative and socially progressive simultaneously. Interestingly, I saw this newly created version of motherhood as operating in a liminal space,[2] straddling the threshold between the quiet, docile mother and the bold, transgressive woman writer. Therefore, a key explanation for how these women succeeded in avoiding their society's criticism is found in the fact that they never fully left behind the role of the mother and moved into the dangerous role of the publicized woman writer but remained in a state of ambiguity. When these women wrote their respective messages to their children, they were ostensibly acting out a prescribed social function of "The Good Mother," whose entire set

[2] "Liminality," from the Latin word meaning "a threshold" is a word used to describe a state of ambiguity that occurs in the midst of a ritual in which participants are in between the pre-ritual and post-ritual state. This liminal space is thought to be marked by a reversal or dissolution of social hierarchies. When applied to Mother's Legacies, the pre-ritual state is the role of the mother and the post-ritual state is the role of the woman writer.

of motives and attentions was bestowed solely upon her family (Heller 16). However, in this very act, they were turning this image on its head, for, in theory, being a public figure was not seen as compatible with the sort of mother who cares dutifully for her children. Significantly, the writers of Mothers' Legacies could no longer be easily classified as long as they remained in this ambiguous, liminal state, and, thus, the rules of their society could no longer be easily enforced. A central reason why they did not incur blame for their actions is because their actions were complicated and did not appear palpably blameworthy to their contemporaries.

What I ultimately wish to argue is that the writers of Mothers' Legacies were acting fully within the confines of social approval but, at the same time, were actually manipulating their womanly duties. By carefully and deliberately constructing rhetorical strategies, these mothers managed to justify their actions to potential critics, turning the act of writing itself into a motherly role. In this study, I will further examine this rhetorical platform from which they published – both how it is formed and how it is used by this group of women writers. While Hull argues that women writers purposefully ignored male rules, I believe that the aggregate of the conduct literature written by men did not completely disallow the possibility of their writing (192). Indeed, it cannot be said that these rules were not ignored at all, for I found them to be very much present in the legacies in a crucial way, serving as a launching point for the women to base their rhetorical platforms. Rather, I believe women writers operated in a certain liminal state, extant amongst the rules of the patriarchy that enabled them to publish without being censured. At first glance, the role of mother and the role of woman writer seem entirely incompatible. However, what this study attempts to discover is the manner in which this apparent paradox is finally reconciled.

CHAPTER II

THE “CAN AND CANNOTS” OF WOMANHOOD

To begin to formulate an idea about how the women writers of the seventeenth century operate within their social context, I decided that I first needed to piece together a clear picture of what these women might have read or heard from their ministers. Therefore, my first readings were chosen with the goal of understanding and being able to state precisely what the time period would call the “ideal” seventeenth-century mother. (What does she look like? What does she sound like? What rules does she follow?) All my preliminary reading warned me that such an ideal is a highly suspect thing. Clearly there exists a schism between what women are told to do and what they actually do in practice. However, it is also clear that this ideal operated in a very real way to create a theoretical list of the women’s “Can and Cannots.” Even as women’s actions, at times, seemed to completely contradict this list of what they could and could not do, this list was still alive and well and in operation in the back of the legacy writers’ minds, never being completely subverted but merely stretched and sometimes supplemented.

In the accounts of the duties of women written by men, there is less variation than one might imagine given the variety of religious affiliations of the writers. The people of seventeenth-century England took for granted the fact that they lived in a hierarchized society in which power proceeded from God to men, men to women, and finally women to children and servants. Families were depicted as miniature church or government units upon which the functioning of

larger entities depended, the husband often being compared to Christ or kings. John Dod and Robert Cleaver's *A Godly Forme of Household Government* (1598) argues the importance of proper household management in the midst of the religious debates of the time.

> For such Householders, as pretend to be great protestant, and sound professors of the Gospell, may long enough talke of discipline, and stil complaine of the want of Church government; but all in vaine, and to no purpose, unlesse they will begin this most necessary discipline in reforming their owne houses (Dod and Cleaver The Epistle Dedicatorie *n. pag.*).

John Dod was a rigid puritan, who integrated his ministry into every facet of his daily life, serving not just on the Sabbath but every day of the week. In fact, he was so rigid that he was ejected[3] in 1607 for refusing to accept the compromises offered to the puritans by King James I while more moderate puritans found them satisfying.[4] Beginning in the 1620s, Dod led opposition against crown policies. While less is known about Robert Cleaver, it is known that he was a student of Dod and spread the Gospel with him while he was on the run after his ejection[5] (Fielding). Like Dod, Cleaver was also censored for refusing to conform to government policies (Brook 516). As seen in the above quote, Dod and Cleaver produce a sense of urgency by throwing their work into the debates of the day. This urgency enables them to unapologetically issue their decree without the need to concede their oppressive opinion on women or justify many of their particularly conservative stances. Dod and Cleaver's work speaks mostly to men, urging them to demand obedience from their subordinates at the risk of punishment by God (The

[3] "A casting out or expulsion from a particular place or position; also from office or possessions" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
[4] King James I, while Protestant, still maintained some religious principles that, in the eyes of many, were pro-Catholic. He received a lot of criticism for this during his reign.
[5] Once ejected, it was illegal for a man to preach or perform other roles of a clergyman. This explains why Dod and Cleaver were on the run.

Epistle Dedicatorie *n. pag.*). According to their work, this is also beneficial to his inferiors, who, being weak, would probably fall into sin without his guidance and protection (16).

Qualified Power

The fact that women were the weaker sex was understood as a fact. As such, they were to be submissive and obey their husbands without question. Duties of women included the teaching of young children, ordering of servants, provision for charity, and, whenever necessary, helping with (but not overtaking) the husband's duties. Women were given a certain degree of influence in these duties; they were permitted to exercise judgment over them without gaining the concession of their husbands. However, they were allowed to do nothing that their husbands expressly forbid. William Gouge (1575-1653), a celebrated clergyman and author who was described as an "Arch-Puritan" for his rigid self-discipline and support of Calvinist theology, discusses the financial responsibilities of a wife in great depth in his conduct book entitled *Of Domesticall Duties* (1662) (Usher). He argues that even though women can be considered the joint governors of a household, they are still subject to their husband's command (Gouge 259). For example, if a husband refused to allot his wife money for charity, she was not permitted to give anything despite the fact that charity was frequently described as being a godly duty of women (Gouge 305).

Despite the fact that *Of Domesticall Duties* can be seen as less rigid than the works of other clergymen such as Dod and Cleaver (Gouge's fellow Puritans), the depiction of the wife's role in Gouge's work ends up being about the same. While it is true that his work contains many concessions to women and seems to be particularly wary of offending them, he ultimately

upholds the strict gender roles described by conservative clergymen. In one concession, Gouge makes it clear that the duty of women should be as equally burdensome as the duty of men. He argues that vice in both sexes is equally likely, an opinion that places him on the more liberal side in comparison to many clergymen of the time who argued that women, who were evil by nature, were the source of vice in the world (Gouge, The Epistle Dedicatory *n. pag.*). Furthermore, his work has been described as depicting a "companionable" marriage in which *mutual* duties of husbands and wives are stressed (Usher). Gouge even goes as far as to gloss the wife's duties with references to comparable duties of the husband in order to indicate that the burden of marriage "will so equally lie on both their necks" (The Epistle Dedicatory). However, all this does not mean that he is an advocate of complete gender equality. "Even in those things wherein there is a common equity, there is not an equality," he says, "for the husband hath ever even in all things a superioritie" (271-2).

Clearly the legacy writers had a very narrow avenue of freedom that they had to walk just right in order to be able to write lawfully – that is in accordance with these conduct books' prescription of their roles. According to their ministers, if their husbands were to object to their writing, they were to quietly and cheerfully submit despite the enormous amount of pressure they felt to preserve their wisdom for future generations. Even the holiest expression of motherly love had to pass the test of a husband's approval in order to be allowed to prosper. If Gouge denies women the ability to fulfill their duty of providing for charity if their husbands disallow it, he would certainly deny them their ability to write for their children without their husbands' consent – no matter how necessary such an act seemed to the fulfillment of their motherly responsibilities. As it stood, women writers already carried a certain social stigma as being

outside the norm, and without a husband's approval, these mothers could hardly justify their writing in the face of such opposition. Women, in short, were given a certain role with a certain list of feminine duties, but they were not always given the opportunity to fulfill these duties. When it came to writing, they had to continue carefully, for this act stretched beyond their typical sphere of power.

Society also put a lot of pressure on women to aid in the religious health of their husbands, but at the same time, limited their ability to direct them on a correct path. If a woman's husband was bad to her, was a non-believer, or was an otherwise flawed individual, she was still expected to obey him. Dod and Cleaver argue that a bad husband is an adversity sent from God and should be viewed as a blessing, for it is an opportunity for a woman to test the strength of her faith. "She may not be sorrowfull for any adversitie that God sendeth: but, must alwaies be carefull that nothing be spilt, or go to waste, through her negligence" (Dod and Cleaver 220). Christian wives were to be an example for their non-believing husbands in order to win them over to the faith. However, this was to be done subtlety and respectfully. Otherwise, women risked being censured for their "shrewishness,"[6] the omnipresent word with which strong, transgressive women were always in danger of being labeled (See Figure 1). In *A Looking Glasse for Good Women* (1645), John Brinsley (1600-1665) tells wives that they are free to counsel and even criticize their husbands "so [long as] it be done not in an imperious way, but with due observance, and respective acknowledgement of duty and subjection" (Brinsley 33). Thus, any power of women was highly qualified and could be taken away entirely with one disapproving word from her husband.

[6] "A person, *esp*…a woman given to railing or scolding or other perverse or malignant behaviour; freq. a scolding or turbulent wife" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Figure 1.This illustration of a “shrewish” woman is taken from Anon. *Brideling, Sadling, and Ryding*…London, 1595. The work tells the story of Judith Philips, who, in discontent, left her husband in search of more money. She was tried and punished for deceiving a man and his wife into paying her for her “skills,” which she told them she would use to find them great wealth. The scene above shows Judith Philips on the man’s back. (She told him this ritual was a necessary part of her magical processes.) This illustration is also used on the cover of Suzanne W. Hull’s *Women According to Men*.

Moreover, wives were to hide the faults of their husbands and emphasize their goodness to the outside world. A woman’s honor was dependent on her husband’s, so it was important that she protect his reputation in order to protect her own.

> Take heed therefore, that what thou dost, goes not in thy name, but his; not to thy exaltation, but his; carrying all things so, by thy dexterity and prudence, that not

one of thy husbands weaknesses be discovered to others by thee (Bunyan 74).[7]

Women were not to have glory of their own but could only help to build the glory of their husbands. If a husband were to fail, judgment would belong to both the man and the woman, who would have been held responsible for failing to help her husband achieve his duties. Therefore, women were to work diligently in the shadows of their husbands, doing everything in their power to promote their husbands' respectability with the hope that his honor would reflect upon them, as well.

Public versus Domestic Spheres

The gendered division between public and domestic spheres also had an enormous effect on the ability of women to publish, which, by definition, included an entrance into the public sphere. Women clearly belonged to the domestic sphere; they were, for the most part, instructed to stay at home and govern affairs behind the scenes. According to propriety, only men were to be involved in public affairs. It was their responsibility to carry out business negotiations and provide a living for their families. Naturally, because these spaces became gendered, the public, male sphere maintained precedence over the domestic, female sphere. Gouge writes that women must take care of the domestic sphere in order to free the man's time from "some less, but very needful matters" so that he is able to concentrate on "the great and weightie affaires of the family" (Gouge 259).

Hints of this division of labor are seen throughout seventeenth-century literature. While we shall

[7] This quote is taken from John Bunyan's *Christian Behaviour* (1663). While some have argued that the second part of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* proves his loose adherence to conservative gender roles, others point to works such as his "A Case of Conscience Resolved" to show that his opinions are not as sympathetic to women as some have claimed them to be (Austin 84, 85).

see later that some new religious sects objected to such established religious views, the limiting of female influence to the domestic was apparently something that most people took for granted. *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie* (1622), a treatise written by Elizabeth Clinton[8] to urge mothers to breastfeed their own children rather than sending them to wet nurses,[9] lists a "desire to have liberty to gadd[10] from home" among the sins of a loathsome mother (Clinton 13). Gouge directly states that while a wife may teach within her household, she may not teach in public gatherings (Gouge 258). Citing Titus 2:5[11], Dod and Cleaver argue that it is safer for women to go out only for a set of necessary household duties, for there is a positive correlation between a woman's chastity and how often she stays home (Dod and Cleaver 223). Indeed, it was simply assumed that a woman's proper sphere of control and action was within the family itself, not out in the larger public world of business or politics.

A woman who was often "out" or "abroad" therefore was frowned upon for multiple reasons. She could be seen as an idle gossiper, wandering from house to house to chat with her neighbors, or she could be seen as a bad wife or mother, leaving her home and children behind and neglecting her womanly duty of governing household affairs. However, perhaps the greatest danger this type of woman faced was the questioning of her chastity. The people of the seventeenth century often viewed sins as being interrelated. For example, if a woman failed to control her feet, it could be assumed that she lacked control of other, more important things, as

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[8] Lived 1574-1630. She was the wife of Lord Clinton and countess of Lincoln and, thus, was a noblewoman (Travitsky).

[9] Breastfeeding was seen as a woman's godly duty, and women were urged to do it themselves. Furthermore, it was believed that women passed on traits of themselves through their milk during breastfeeding, so women were warned that if they gave their children to wet nurses, they may inherit bad character traits (Heller 54)

[10] Wander, go out

[11] "To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (*King James Bible*).

well – such as her religious devotion or sexual impulses. It should be noted that this tendency to draw complicated connections between sins made it extremely important for women to avoid public derision. Therefore, the public-versus-domestic sphere constraint becomes hugely significant in the context of my research. Reading the conduct books makes one aware of the precarious position in which the legacy writers placed themselves, for they clearly put their reputations on the line in order to publish their works. If being a public figure meant risking questions about their godliness and chastity, they had to be careful that they were justified not only so that their works would be given due reverence but also so that their names would be kept clean in a time in which one's name – especially a woman's name – was highly significant to one's social standing and well-being.

William Gouge's "Extraordinary" Circumstances

As indicated above, certain conduct book writers appear to be more sympathetic towards women than others. For example, Dod and Cleaver were obviously more authoritarian than Gouge. I read Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* as being full of little "loopholes" that could enable women to circumvent limitations and still remain justified under Gouge's interpretation of Biblical texts. For example, Gouge makes it clear that although the wife is meant to be subordinate to her husband, her role as his helper gives her many "extra" responsibilities. His work seems to follow a cyclical pattern in which he first stretches the duty of the wife, affording her a seemingly great degree of power ("Hence is it that the wife is called mistresse of the house, as well as the husband master of the house"), then, on the next page, places restrictions on this power ("…she is subordinate to her husband, so rule others as she be subject to her husband") (258-9). Significantly, in speaking of women's rights in disposing of the goods of the family, Gouge

allows that women may bypass approval from their husbands in "extraordinary matters" (292). This may lead one to wonder if this same line of thinking could be applied to other circumstances so that women's writing and entrance into the public sphere could be justified as an "extraordinary" situation. The sort of situation that Gouge would call "extraordinary" is conveniently undefined. He describes it vaguely as any case in which "the wife by disposing the goods without or against the consent of her husband may bring a great good to the family, or prevent and keepe a great mischief from it" (292). Certainly one could make an argument that the religious turmoil of the times, the predicted death of the mother, and the vulnerability of the child all add up to fit the circumstances under this heading. If the religiopolitical environment of the seventeenth century was viewed as "extraordinary," it could be seen as a viable excuse for the writers of Mothers' Legacies to take "extraordinary" measures, such as breaking from their typical gender role.

The Nature of Women: John Sprint and Richard Allestree

A common denominator between many of the conduct books written by men is a general sense of disillusion with the society in which they are writing. The political turmoil that led up to the English Civil War (1642-1651) and execution of Charles I in 1649 was only followed by more bloodshed and confusion. Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, but his successor, James II, who was unpopular for his pro-Catholic sentiments, was overthrown in 1688. Furthermore, an outbreak of the Plague in London in1665 and a devastating fire that burned tens of thousands of homes in 1666 added to a feeling that the order and godliness of former times had passed. Lamentations over the decadence of society are scattered throughout the literature of the time. For example, Richard Allestree in *The Ladies Calling* (1673) argues that his society is so fallen

into sin that hypocrisy is no longer an issue because “[r]eligion is grown so unfashionable, so contemtible, that none can now be temted to put on so ridiculous a disguise” (Allestree Part I, 117). Indeed, a large part of why both the men and the women are writing in the first place is in response to what they perceive as a loss of a collective social morality, whether it be to warn others to turn away from their sin or to guide them through these difficult times.

What becomes highly significant then is the manner in which the male writers place women in the midst of this social disorder, for it presents a clear insight into their attitude about the nature of women. For example, some men, such as John Sprint, a late seventeenth-century minister living in Sherbourne, Dorsetshire, blame women for being naturally inclined to sin and causing the overall decline of morality. Others argue that women’s weak nature necessitates them to be safely tucked away from the danger of the outside world. Still, others, such as Richard Allestree (1621-1681), argue that women (namely of the upper class) are so naturally inclined to goodness that it is up to them alone to lead others out of this iniquity. The question of the nature of women (Are they naturally good or naturally evil?) is far from being a matter of unanimity. However, a closer study of the variety of attitudes towards women reveals much about the seventeenth-century woman’s role in her society. As an example, I will look at two specific works: John Sprint’s “The Bride-Womans Counseller” (1699) and Richard Allestree’s *The Ladies Calling* (1673).

In his infamous wedding sermon entitled “The Bride-Womans Counseller,” John Sprint paints the nature of women in a very unflattering light. While a wedding is obviously a union between two people, Sprint’s disparaging sermon focuses only on the woman. Women’s weakness and

tendency to be at the root of all marriage problems, he says, necessitate him to confront them with austerity (Sprint 4). Another justification he gives for the writing of this sermon seems to set the tone for the remainder of his argument:

> Because the Love of a Husband does very much depend upon the Obedience of a Wife; Stubbornnes and Obstinacy in a Wife may check and quench the Affections of an Husband…So that, in plain Terms, you are more afraid than hurt, and instead of being so scrupulous of having your Duty told you; you should use your utmost Diligence to learn and practice it, if ever you mean to have your Husbands loving and kind to you (4-5).

Here, Sprint seems to blame women for their own mistreatment. If bad husbands are caused by bad wives, then women are left with no ground to lament their circumstances. According to Sprint, the effect that a bad wife can have in spoiling her husband dates back to the Original Sin when Eve spoiled Adam by seducing him with the apple (6). Thus, he places women at the center of *all* the iniquity in the world as he also castigates them for their *own* sins. As I mentioned earlier, Sprint is not alone in blaming women for the sins of the world. Many men and women held this belief, which was not seen as completely egregious or unconventional. Wives are burdened with the guilt of their husbands, and thus, according to this tradition, the duty of pleasing them can be seen as womankind's effort to make up with mankind for the personal suffering she has caused him.

John Sprint's ideology on the nature of women leads him to prescribe to them a very strict code of behavior. Because Adam's Fall at the hands of Eve made all men harder to please, women must toil with "a great deal of Art and Skill" or risk an unhappy marriage (Sprint 7). If followed

precisely, Sprint's work strips women of all ability to labor for their own personal satisfaction. Women may gain pleasure only vicariously from whatever pleasure they are able to give to their husbands. Their lifestyles must be highly regulated at all times, for they, being weak, are in need of all the help they can get in fulfilling their duty. To top it all off, he even ends the sermon, after turning briefly to address men's roles, snidely saying that he must stop talking to the men before the women forget all the things he told them to do (16). Interestingly, the only hint of power Sprint lends women in his sermon must be earned by their excellent fulfillment of their subservient role. By pleasing their husbands, says Sprint, "they would thereby open a way for the obtaining of their Husbands what they themselves do will and desire" (8). Thus, wives who act in a prescribed way are able to achieve unprescribed power; they are able to break social norms (in this case, the yielding of the ability to manipulate their husbands) by following the norms exactly. Thus, even in the midst of a work as infamously harsh as Sprint's, we find an extant loophole that enables women a (very slight) expansion of freedom.

While the power Sprint affords women does not come from their own sphere of autonomy but is granted by their omnipotent husbands, it should not be dismissed as insignificant. In fact, the formula Sprint sets up proves itself to be highly significant in the context of a seventeenth-century woman's life and certainly in the context of the lives of the writers of Mothers' Legacies. The women who write these works must be careful not to break rules but to maintain the appearance of a humble mother writing for the benefit of her children – certainly a prescribed role. As a result, the adherence to social rules enables women to escape censure as they enter the public eye through publication – an unprescribed power. The women writers must actively work to maintain social approbation; one can see in their works their struggle to reconcile what they

are doing to what they are told to do.[12] By behaving and writing in a socially-sanctioned manner, they escape the derision a bold, ostentatious entry into the public eye would necessarily bring. For example, one Mother's Legacy writer, Elizabeth Russell, faced public criticism for 'spirite and undaunted Courage, or rather will' before the Privy Council in 1606, where she petitioned for property rights of Donnington Castle for her daughter ("Russell v. Nottingham" qtd. in Heller 97).[13] However, Russell knew better than to adopt this spirit when she published her legacy entitled *Reconciliation* the year before. Instead, this work adopts a deliberatly-constructed public persona that is matronly and conciliatory in order to avoid censure on either her or her daughter Anne, to whom the work was dedicated (Heller 97). Russell, like the other women writers, knew she had to enter the public arena cautiously, and only by rhetorically displaying this caution are these women able to justify their publications.

In complete contrast and writing nearly twenty years earlier than John Sprint, Richard Allestree is extremely generous in his praise of womankind. The introduction of Allestree's *The Ladies Calling* (1673) is telling as he condemns writers like Sprint who speak ill of female nature:

> For such is either the inadvertence, or malice of a great part of mankind, that (against all Rules of Discourse) they deduce Generals from Particulars, make every woman so far an Eve, that her depravation shall forfeit her whole kind; and because there are foolish and scandalous women, will scarce allow any other (Preface *n. pag.*).

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[12] See full discussion of their rhetorical strategy in Chapter III.
[13] Elizabeth Russell was not the only woman who petitioned for property rights for her children, nor is she the most famous woman to do so. However, she apparently found herself involved in legal disputes multiple times in her life, and in this particular trial, her rude behavior during the proceedings, which she frequently disrupted, may have lost her the case (Preistland). Russell's life and works is discussed in depth in Chapter III.

The motivation behind this work is Allestree's dual desire to lay out a woman's duty as well as to convince her of the potential of her sex and to persuade her to fulfill a higher calling than many would deem her worthy (See Figure 2). His fear is that those who preach of the evil of female nature will cause women to internalize this message and prohibit their attainment of a deep, spiritual existence and godly lifestyle. He even goes as far as to say that "the reputation of Religion is more kept up by women than men," indicating the worthiness of the sex (Preface *n. pag.*). Allestree's work is also interesting for the fact that it was published anonymously; he clearly lacks the boldness demonstrated by other clergymen who frequently show no remonstrance for their opinions. Indeed, in the first line of his preface, Allestree writes that an introduction is hardly necessary for his humble work (Preface *n. pag.*).

One can see the contrast between his attitude and that of Sprint. While Sprint sternly argues that women, who are evil at their core, must work hard to compensate for their innate defects, Allestree argues that women's nature equips them with so much potential that it would be a shame to see them deviate from it. In a theoretical sense, the advice Allestree gives women is actually fairly conservative. While his praise of women is noteworthy, he does not go as far as to encourage women to break from a traditional image of female virtue entirely. In the first part of his work, he focuses on standard feminine virtues of modesty, meekness, compassion, affability,[14] and piety. According to Allestree, because these are at the root of female nature, the opposite vices are seen as even more heinous, for they are unnatural deviations from God's creation. For instance, Allestree says that the opposite of modesty is boldness, which "is like a cloud over the sun" (Part I, 6). The idea that women, underneath the cloud of vice, are as

[14] By "affability" Allestree refers to something like courtesy or obligingness. In other words, it is the virtue of serving and being kind to others out of sincere humility (Allestree Part I, 68-69).

beautiful as the shining sun is seen throughout Allestree's work. To him, a woman's vice is something external that darkens what is good rather than something internal that must be masked by outside control.

Despite his traditionalism, Allestree does afford women a certain degree of power – power that may be attained in their own right. As the title of his work reflects, Allestree calls upon the upper-class women to set the example of virtue for the rest of the world. He cites many reasons why this social group is the best for this duty. Besides the fact that the nature of women inclines them toward devotion, upper-class women are also more visible and are further removed from the toil of business affairs. Thus, they are in a more practical position to fulfill this role. "[W]here [God] gives so much liberty from secular, he expects a greater diligence in spiritual emploiments" (Allestree Part I, 103). Such a position necessarily carries a great deal of influence. If women were accepted as the unofficial spiritual leaders of a society, they would gain that society's respect and trust, enabling them to avoid the restrictions that Sprint argues they should follow. While Allestree's proposal is idealistic in many ways, he does not fail to acknowledge the fact that the current behavior of women is far from setting the example he outlines. He gives lengthy accounts of the sins to which women are particularly prone (gossip, prodigality, vanity, etc). However, Allestree also makes concessions for himself such as: "I am far from making this a universal charge, I know there are women of the highest quality, that guide themselves by other rules" (Part I, 75). Overall, Allestree's work is highly significant for the ideas it presents and the powerful potential it affords seventeenth-century women.

Both John Sprint and Richard Allestree were ministers of the Church of England. As mentioned

above, Sprint led a relatively small congregation in Devonshire during the latter part of the seventeenth century, but, unfortunately, little else is known about him. However, more is known about Allestree, who had a biography written about him by one of his contemporaries. Before taking orders, Allestree, who was from an ancient, formally-prosperous family, fought on the side of the royalists in the English Civil War. His biographer and friend Bishop John Fell suggests that he took orders as a way to defend the church and king through prayer rather than bloodshed (Spurr). Allestree's familial connection with royalty could explain his respect for the upper classes and upper-class women.

The Larger Debate

Sprint's and Allestree's works represent perhaps the more extreme cases in the study of attitudes about women's nature and place in the world. The debate is hardly a simple one and has been going on since way before Dorothy Leigh wrote what is now known as one of the most significant early examples of a Mother's Legacy. One of the most debated issues of the time, the "Rib Question" is a term coined to describe the debates surrounding the interpretation of Genesis 3. Does the fact that Eve is created from Adam's rib make her inferior? Could it, in fact, make her his equal? Even his superior? Another debate is that which surrounds the Fall. John Brinsley (1600-1665) argues that Eve, being a weak individual, was in the ideal situation to attract Satan to prompt her Fall (Cust). Then, because she had the affection of Adam firmly in her possession, she was again in the perfect position to cause him to fall, as well (Brinsley 4). Furthermore, Brinsley removes blames from Adam by arguing that he was not "properly and formally" deceived because he was given the apple by Eve, who did not have "a minde and purpose to deceive" (2). Such an interpretation reinforces the need to control women and encourage them

not to challenge established authority. If a free woman caused sin to enter into the world, then the safest way to ensure the good of humanity is to keep women carefully guarded and subjected, for the weak nature of women makes them vulnerable to the Devil's seduction.

At the same time as this debate about the innate nature of women, real women were challenging the roles in which the ministers had placed them. A large issue that was under discussion in the seventeenth century was whether or not women should be allowed to speak in churches. As seen in the works of writers such as Margaret Askew Fell Fox, author of *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666), certain sects such as the Quakers challenged the prohibition on women speaking in church despite the fact that this prohibition was considered one of the most basic tenets of female learning at the time. Pieces of scripture such as 1 Timothy 2: 11-12[15] and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35[16] were widely accepted as justification for rigid gender roles and female subjugation. Fox's work is bold; in it, she completely denies Biblical interpretations that have governed the lives of men and women for centuries. In regard to the fact that the message of Christ's resurrection was first spread by women, Fox says the following:

> Mark this, you that despise and oppose the Message of the Lord God that he sends by Women; what had become of the Redemption of the whole Body of Man-kind, if they had not believed the Message that the Lord Jesus sent by these Women, of and concerning his Resurrection? (Fox 7).

Here, Fox points out that the entire Christian faith is dependent on the message these simple women (not men) first delivered. Consequently, if the words of these women received honor and

[15] "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (*King James Bible*).

[16] "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. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (*King James Bible*).

praise, then it is foolish to automatically reject the words of other women. Other Quaker women such as Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, authors of *To the Priests and People of England we Discharge our Consciences, and Give them Warning* (1655) also participated in this debate even while they were imprisoned for practicing their religion. (Cotton was in correspondence with Margaret Fox, an early leader of the Quaker movement (Trill 200).) This work makes its argument indirectly by seeking to undermine the clergymen's body of knowledge on which they have based their opinion on the role of women. For example, they point out the fact that the highly-educated ministers were confident about their learning when they used it as their reasoning to crucify Christ. Education, they argue, is fallible, and they warn the seventeenth-century clergy not to depend on it too heavily (Cotton 1).

These women are proof that religion was anything but stable in the seventeenth century; all sorts of people were questioning basic religious truths. If these works were afforded widespread merit, the entire system of hierarchy, which placed men above women, might completely collapse, as might the social implications built upon it. It is no wonder that many viewed the times with a degree of alarm, for in a world in which the religiopolitical climate governs the entire social order, turmoil in this arena means changes in a basic, underlying structure that is normally taken for granted.

The events of seventeenth-century England caused many church leaders to feel a need to re-impose order in the face of dramatic social change. Indeed, the publication of advice books reflects a general attitude of distress. In each of these works, women occupy a specific place in relation to the iniquity that is described. John Sprint places women as the cause of the society's

decadence while Richard Allestree places them as the solution. Each author's view of the nature of women ultimately governs this placement; how he depicts a woman's role in society becomes dependent upon his view of her soul. Allestree, who places a great deal of trust in womankind, is able to afford them a more powerful role. He has no problem suggesting that women should be educated and feels no need to suggest they remain indoors whenever possible, focusing only on their domestic sphere andkeeping out of public affairs. Sprint, on the other hand, argues that their decision-making authority, independence, and physical mobility should be greatly restricted and should only be granted to them by their husbands as a reward for their obedience. The continuing debate on the nature of women makes placing the Mothers' Legacies an arduous task. Even two ministers like Sprint and Allestree, both of whom belonged to the Church of England, had vastly different views about women. Then, to add to the confusion, the seventeenth century also saw very real challenges to many of the key concepts which had structured both religious authority and family life. What is clear, however, is that the writers of this genre had to proceed with great caution, for the social environment in which they wrote was highly unstable.

Figure 2. This is the illustration found on the inside cover of Richard Allestree's *The Ladies Calling*. It shows a woman reaching for a heavenly crown while rejecting the worldly riches that lie at her feet.

Richard Braithwaite: Opening the Door

Richard Braithwaite engaged in the debate on women's nature from an interesting perspective, making him a key figure in seventeenth-century conduct literature. As a professional writer, his work on women's conduct, *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), takes on a different meaning than those works written by clergymen. Furthermore, it also contains many themes associated with Mothers' Legacies and, therefore, is worth discussing in depth. Braithwaite (1587/8-1673) was a poet and writer who was educated in law but never practiced because his father's death necessitated his management of his family estates. He knew English, Latin, and Italian. Braithwaite's works are extremely diverse, including poetry, political satires, dramatic works, and, of course, religious and moral treatises (Sanders). Overall, this particular work is characterized as being more practical and less disparaging than those works written by

clergymen, and it has a much more sanguine attitude toward its female audience. A key theme in Brathwaite's work is moderation. Therefore, rather than condemning women for doing things such as visiting neighbors and participating in fashion, he merely urges them to practice a wise degree of moderation when doing so.

The audience can clearly discern that, like Allestree, Braithwaite exercises a healthy degree of respect for womanhood. Braithwaite's work is meant to serve as a guide to gentlewomen in what he sees as rapidly-changing times, rather than an admonition of their sins. While this particular volume of Braithwaite's was dedicated to Lady Arabella Wentworth (1608/9–1631), wife of Sir Thomas Wentworth, Braithwaite's work is more commonly considered to be dedicated to Lady Anne Clifford, whom he depicts as the ideal of her sex and whose praises he lists extensively (Asch; Sanders). Lady Anne was the countess of Pembroke, Dorset, and Montgomery. She was an extremely powerful and educated noblewoman who was known for her bitter disputes over her father's estates in which she took an active role in negotiations (Spence). At the time of Braithwaite's publication, she was married to Phillip Herbert, earl of Montgomery and fourth earl of Pembroke, to whom Braithwaite dedicated the *The English Gentleman* (1630),[17] published in conjunction with *The English Gentlewoman* (Spence; Sanders). The two were probably patrons of Braithwaite – a fact that could provide an explanation for his deferential tone as he delivers a woman's duty (Sanders). His work is written with the goal of pleasing his audience and patron, the strong and independent Lady Anne Clifford, rather than fulfilling a religious duty by preaching to them about their wrongdoing.

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[17] Both *The English Gentleman* and *The English Gentlewoman* were widely read. Each was published in several editions (Sanders).

Furthermore, the nature of the praise he offers to his Lady is itself less conservative and Biblically based than the sort of praise a clergyman might offer. For example, Braithwaite honors his ideal woman's education, which "hath so enabled her, as shee can converse with you of all places, deliver her judgement conceivingly of most persons, and discourse most delightfully of all fashions" (Dedication *n. pag.*). One would not expect such articulate expression to conform to the type of "chaste, silent, and obedient" feminine ideal that the clergymen depict. The role of Lady Anne's religious beliefs is mentioned but relegated to a mere backdrop of her other more practical charms. Interestingly, Dod and Cleaver's dedication also includes women but names them only as the "virtuous and religious wives" of "Master Robert Burgaine, Master John Dive, and Master Edmund Temple" (Dod and Cleaver, The Epistle Dedicatorie *n. pag.*). Thus, the women, as is God's command, are kept out of the public eye and hidden in the shadows of their husbands' honor. The fact that Lady Anne Clifford is praised in her own right is enough to indicate Braithwaite's contrast with those writers whose works are based on a more conservative adherence to scripture.

On the one hand, Braithwaite's birthdate and publication year place him roughly in the middle of William Gouge and John Brinsley, both of whom deliver lessons on women that contrast with Braithwaite's. Brinsley's work especially, which was written to admonish the women in his congregation who were leaving his church to hear other ministers,[18] presents an excellent point of comparison to Braithwaite's work due to the differences in their authorial purposes. While Braithwaite's background provides an explanation for his generous praise of women, Brinsley's background could provide an explanation for his fierce conservatism in his work. A staunch

[18] This act of changing churches was called gadding. While it was illegal to attend church in a parish other than the one in which you live, gadding was somewhat common in the seventeenth century in response to the religiopolitical debates, which caused many to question their church leaders (Heller 110).

Presbyterian, Brinsley spent much of his life fighting for the right to preach. He went through multiple trials for rights to lead various congregations, was arrested for preaching without proper licensing and eventually ejected in 1662. He was deeply involved in the religious debates of the day, writing tracts that condemned or justified various sects. Therefore, when female members of his congregation left his church in protest of his methodology, it is no wonder that he had a powerful enough response to inspire his stern argument in *A Looking Glasse for Good Women* (Cust).

All this is not to say, however, that Braithwaite's ideal woman completely departs from that of the ministers. Braithwaite obviously writes from a Christian perspective; his work simply does not have the conservative Biblical focus or "preachy" tone that one might expect from a clergyman. For instance, at one point,he writes that modesty "is that virtue, which expresseth you to be women," creating an amalgamation between modesty and femininity itself (180). This is certainly in line with Puritan John Brinsley's opinion on feminine modesty, which he also seems to believe should be woven into the fabric of women's lives. For instance, in *A Looking Glasse for Good Women* (1645), Brinsley cites 1Timothy 2:9,[19] warning women to dress modestly and not succumb to new fashions. Then, he extends woman's onus to practice modesty in apparel to a command to exercise modesty in religiopolitical opinions, as well, telling them not to give sway to "fashionable" philosophies (13). Braithwaite should not be understood as unchristian, nor should he be placed in complete opposition with Brinsley. Indeed, Braithwaite writes about an ideal woman that is very similar to Brinsley's. He simply does so from a different perspective, with a different motivation than the clergymen.

[19] "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array" (*King James Bible*).

While Braithwaite does not measure virtue by a close, literal interpretation of the Bible, he does develop his own sort of standard by which he evaluates his gentlewoman's honor: *that which is good is that which will be remembered in a positive light by future generations; that which is bad is that which will tarnish one's reputation or be forgotten entirely after one's death.* Therefore, according to Braithwaite, things such as fashion, formalities, and appearances should be minimalized in the face of deeper, time-honored virtues.

> The style you enjoy, the state you retaine, the statues which after you may remaine, are but glorious trophies of fading frailty. Vertues are more permanent Monuments than all these; these are those sweet flowers that shall adorne you living, impall you dying, and Crowne you with comfort at your departing (206).

Out of this standard emerge two natural consequences, each of which becomes highly significant in the context of the Mothers' Legacies. The first is an underlying obsession with death throughout the work that is very much in line with the obsession of the time period. The second is a drawing of focus away from the supernatural afterlife (Heaven and Hell) toward a more worldly focus on one's posterity. As we shall see, each consequence has an important effect on Braithwaite's attitude in his depiction of a gentlewoman's responsibilities and freedoms.

Braithwaite's emphasis on death is not at all uncommon in the seventeenth century. Jennifer Heller's discussion on the significance of the deathbed in the legacies reveals that there existed a certain "cultural script" around death that women were expected to follow. The proper procedure required a mother to "bless her children, remain stoic in the face of physical suffering, and assure her deathbed watchers of her salvation" (Heller 177). As caregivers, women were often called

upon to nurse the dying and, therefore, were often familiar with death in a very personal way. Thinking about death was so pervasive that an entire thought tradition called *ars moriendi* (the art of dying), originally out of Medieval times, was still said to be alive and well in the seventeenth century (Heller 158). In this way, both Braithwaite and the writers of Mothers' Legacies can be seen as participating in a socially-sanctioned phenomenon; a concern for posterity is certain something they have in common. Indeed, the legacies themselves are born out of the concept of the dying mother, which was very much a gendered, cultural event (Heller 177). "Short is your race, neare is your rest," says Braithwaite, who here and throughout his work can be seen as playing into the *ars moriendi* tradition with his constant warnings about death and the need to be prepared for when God calls one for it (221).

The fact that Braithwaite writes to *gentle*women, who would have been highly concerned with the preservation of their family's name and reputation, also affects his obsession with death. In this way, Braithwaite's work suggests an attitude about death that is as dependent on one's class just as much as it is on one's gender. Braithwaite distinguishes between gentility by *blood* and the more important gentility by *honor* (157). As gentlewomen, he says, his audience must seek to preserve and add to the honor of the family line, for "[g]entility is not to be measured by antiquity of time, but precedency in worth" (160). If there is a proper way for a woman to die, then Braithwaite's work suggests that there is a proper way for a woman from an elite class to die that takes on an even larger degree of importance due to the responsibilities that are associated with the fame of the family line.

Like the family name, virtue in Braithwaite's work is seen as something that is passed down

from generation to generation, echoing the very spirit of the Mothers' Legacies. Upper-class women were public figures who did not have to write in order to have their names remembered, a position of great power and responsibility. These women "wrote" their legacies by the manner in which they lived, so as Braithwaite suggests, it was important that they protect their good reputations. In the same way, the writers of Mothers' Legacies (some of whom were upper-class and some of whom were not) also had great motivation to protect their reputations. They knew that they would be remembered for what they wrote and that what they wrote would affect their children's names, as well. Thus, they had to write strategically in order to clearly establish themselves as virtuous women, worthy of being praised and listened to by future generations.

The second effect of Braithwaite's standard is an orientation that turns away from the afterlife and toward life after death *on earth*. Braithwaite refers explicitly to the Christian afterlife only a handful of instances in his work and certainly not in much depth. While Brinsley's work is brimming with threats of damnation, Braithwaite's contains only one significant mention of Hell, which the reader may dismiss as a mere rhetorical strategy or afterthought toward the end of his work. In contrast, Braithwaite spends a great deal of time discussing the manner in which one's life will affect future generations. Braithwaite's hope is that his reader will live so virtuously that people will still talk about her and use her as an example of goodness after she is dead. "Fame they [modest people] hold the sweetest flower that ever grew neare the border of Time," he says (102). Thus, counter intuitively, striving for fame becomes an act of modesty according to Braithwaite's standard, for women gain lasting fame only by being virtuous.

Interestingly, by placing less emphasis on the afterlife and more emphasis on the world,

Braithwaite is able to afford the female sex more freedom than any of the ministers do, for certainly women must have some degree of ability to affect the world in order to establish their claim to immortality. In fact, at one point, Braithwaite directly advocates mothers' legacies, for writing is an act that preserves one's memory and, therefore, is a good thing according to Braithwaite's standard. Significantly, this moment occurs as Braithwaite lists examples of women who he believes deserve praise for their excellent care of their children.

> Sulpitia the wife of Calenus,[20] who not onely instructed her children which she had tenderly nursed, with excellent precepts while shee lived, but left sundry memorable instructions, as Legacies or Mothers blessings to them, when she dyed (108).

While a woman who is focusing only on the afterlife could easily remain chaste, silent, and obedient, staying home and avoiding any corruption that society might bring, Braithwaite's ideal gentlewoman, who is concerned with her reputation and the advancement of her family's interests, may become a more public figure. Indeed, the idea that a woman should be remembered after her death by anyone other than her immediate family certainly entails power. Her memory is established through her public reputation, implying that she must *have* a public reputation (a concept that many of the clergymen directly contradict). In light of Braithwaite's work, the Mothers' Legacies can be seen as the public preservation of one's honor for future generations – something to be valued and praised.

The tone of Richard Braithwaite's work is vastly different from any of the conduct books I have read. The overall lack of Biblical references is striking after reading the works of clergymen such

[20] Sulpicia was an accomplished Roman poet who lived during the reign of Domitian (24 October 51-18 September 96). Her poems were known for demonstrating her wifely devotion. They offered lessons on the proper relationship between husband and wife.

as John Brinsley. The perspective that Braithwaite provides will prove to be highly valuable to my reading on Mothers' Legacies, for his work affords women freedoms that are limited by the others' literal interpretation of scripture. However, I find it interesting that Braithwaite's ideals are not completely different from those of the clergymen but are merely focused differently. Braithwaite's standard, while not based solely on scripture, is not unchristian, either; the Biblically based "ideal woman" continues to underlie his thoughts. On the other hand, the practicality of his advice makes it different and, therefore, something that is worth keeping in mind while examining the Mothers' Legacies as part of the social context in which they were written and read.

The women who ventured to write their legacies were by no means ignorant of the ideal that they were challenging. Indeed, one may argue that their higher level of education made them even more aware of this ideal. However, rather than having this awareness hold them back from doing what they did, this awareness simply makes them careful and artful. They must justify their writing in such a way that avoids all the rules that they are breaking. These conduct books were meant to educate women and argue them into submission, and in achieving this goal they were met with both success and failure. Certainly the legacy writers believed in the importance of what these books were saying, and, in a way, they used these societal expectations to govern their own writings. However, they did not follow the advice as it was written but followed it in their own way, stretching it so much that it at times makes one wonder how Gouge, Dod, and Cleaver would feel about such an interpretation of the messages they preached. The irony lies in the fact that the women writers' knowledge of God's word turns out to be the very thing that enables them to survive in their endeavors to write.

CHAPTER III

RHETORIAL STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING THRESHOLDS

The literate women living in seventeenth-century England were caught in a dilemma. They were expected, as was their godly duty, to get married, raise children, and conform to restricted societal roles. However, motherhood meant risking one's very life during childbirth, and marriage meant subordination to a man who may or may not have been sympathetic to a woman's situation or religious beliefs. Furthermore, women were expected to keep out of politics and public affairs, but as the responsible party for their children's initial religious upbringing, they had a large stake in the religiopolitical debates of the day. While we know that girls were taught at home by family tutors and that there were some schools attended by girls, their access to education, especially beyond housewifery and the Bible, was typically more limited than that of their brothers and husbands. Meanwhile, women's duties were becoming harder and harder to fulfill in the midst of an era of revolution.

In spite of these limitations (or, perhaps, in response to them), the writers of Mothers' Legacies prevailed, fulfilling their womanly duty on their own terms. The mothers who became a part of this genre were certainly accomplished and well-educated; many of them spoke multiple languages and were well-read in classical literature. Significantly, many of them were also very much seen as public figures. As mentioned in Chapter I, Dorothy Leigh's work was extremely well-read, and her name certainly would have been well-known amongst the seventeenth-century English. However, despite this fact, none of these women faced the criticism the English sometimes directed at both male and female commercial published writers. One, then, may be

led to wonder how exactly these women managed to escape their public's disapproval.

While women like Bathsua Makin[21] or Aphra Behn[22] wrote and published in order to survive, writing became more to the legacy writers than a way to make a living or display personal abilities. Rather, it was a way to ensure the well-being of their children and glorify the God who blessed them with the gift of motherhood. This authorial purpose was not overlooked by the social critics of the time. As women, they were stretching the bounds of their liberty and challenging the social order, but as mothers, they were fulfilling a God-ordained duty and submitting to this order. In short, these women operated in a liminal space that enabled them to circumvent much of the criticism faced by other women writers. By remaining on the threshold between the role of the mother and the role of the woman writer, they gained a certain degree of freedom from their society's limitations for women. In this state of ambiguity, their society could no longer easily classify their actions, and, thus, their society could no longer bind them as firmly to normal social rules for women.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the writers of Mothers' Legacies, developed rhetorical strategies that would enable them to publish while remaining apparently within the status quo. These rhetorical strategies guaranteed that these women remained in this liminal space, never crossing over into the dangerous role of the publicized woman. Mothers' Legacies are works

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[21] Bathsua Makin (1600-1675?) was educated by her father, Henry Reginald, a schoolmaster, and was praised as one of the "the greatest scholar…of a woman in England." Her work An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen (1673) was an advertisement for the school she opened and ran (Teague).

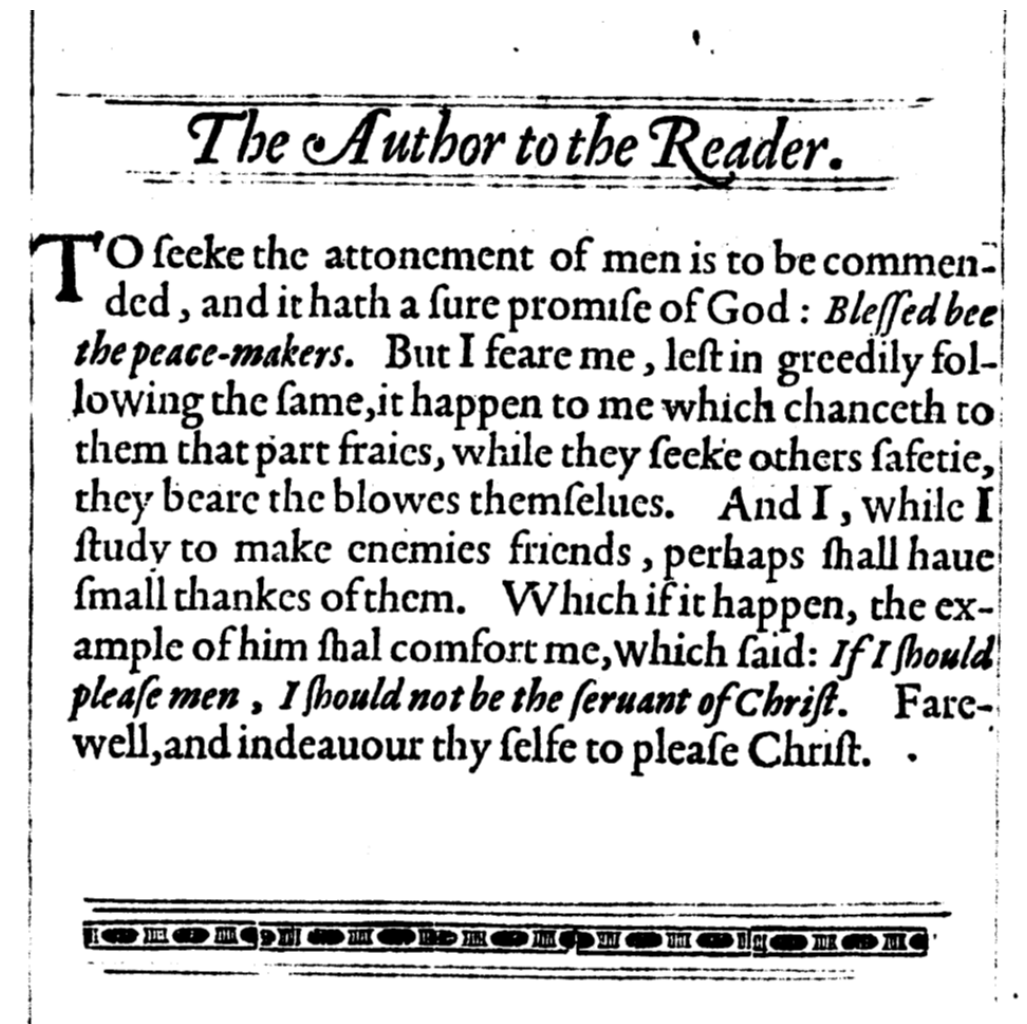
[22] Aphra Behn (1640?-1689) was a woman of low birth, who was called by King Charles II's regime to be a spy due to her connection with William Scott, an antimonarchist. Because the King delayed her payment, she was put in debtors' prison and later started writing to avoid such a situation in the future (Damrosch).

addressed primarily to children, yet their writers knew that they would be judged, not by their children, but by the wider male audience. The works had to satisfy a dual mission to both (a) be useful and convincing to a child and (b) to conform to society's conception of appropriate female decorum. The women were well aware that convincing the child would be the easy part, especially a child who is taught from birth that his/her place is to obey mother and father, as was sanctioned by God. The harder task would be to convince their male peers, who, unlike a child predisposed to respect them, were the ones in the position to lay censure on their works.

To accomplish this duel mission, women took advantage of two basic types of justifications: explicit and circumstantial. All the women I read explicitly state their desire to be seen as nothing more than humble mothers, adopting a deliberate rhetorical strategy. Each of them gives concessions to their audience and makes active attempts to justify their writing. The acknowledgement of their place, manipulation of motherly authority, and demonstration of excessive humility all fall into this category. In addition, women also utilized what I will call circumstantial justifications to aid their mission. These are the elements of the social environment that provide justification for women to write and are not dependent on the volition of the women to do so. These are factors that are unique to the time period of seventeenth-century England that women could depend upon as an excuse for their actions. The rhetorical power of motherhood, the social implications of the deathbed, and the shared fears that were felt throughout society in response to the general instability all belong to this category. While women did not create these phenomena, they certainly took advantage of them in their works. The women identified themselves, first and foremost, as mothers; however, it should be kept in mind that these women were also educated, pious, some were very wealthy, some aristocratic, some

Catholic, others Protestant. Therefore, several other factors play into their writing to varying degrees. Often, the categories I determined to organize these factors become indistinct, overlapping and combining in interesting ways. What I want to do, then, is examine each of these justifications, both explicit and circumstantial, in depth, focusing on the manner in which the women used these things to reconcile their womanly role with their actions.

Explicit Justifications



The Author to the Reader.

TO ſeeke the attonement of men is to be commen-
ded, and it hath a ſure promiſe of God: *Bleſſed bee
the peace-makers.* But I feare me, leſt in greedily fol-
lowing the ſame, it happen to me which chanceth to
them that part fraies, while they ſeeke others ſafetie,
they beare the blowes themſelues. And I, while I
ſtudy to make enemies friends, perhaps ſhall haue
ſmall thankes of them. Which if it happen, the ex-
ample of him ſhal comfort me, which ſaid: *If I ſhould
pleaſe men, I ſhould not be the ſeruant of Chriſt.* Fare-
well, and indeauour thy ſelfe to pleaſe Chriſt.

Figure 3. This image shows prefatory material from Elizabeth Russell's *A Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man* (1605).

Acknowledgement of their Place

The explicit acknowledgement of a woman's place is seen frequently in the rhetoric of the Mothers' Legacies. By acknowledging that what they are doing is contrary to their typical actions as women, they assuage the negative effects of stretching this typical role; they cannot be seen as transgressive if they constantly draw attention to their place in the world and demonstrate, every step of the way, their desire to preserve this place. For example, Elizabeth Richardson's book of prayers entitled *A Ladies Legacie to her Daughters* places stress on a woman's religious responsibilities, for in it she assumes the role of religious leader by teaching others how to pray. Because the duty of leading the family in prayer typically belonged to the head of the household (i.e., the man), Richardson's adoption of this role places her in danger of being seen as quite transgressive. Indeed, Richardson's life in general was ostensibly untraditional. Throughout most of her adult life, Richardson struggled to maintain wealth and status for both her and her family. When her husband John Ashburnham of Ashburnham, Sussex died in 1620, he left the family in financial trouble, and she was left with his burden (Burke). A hint of this struggle is seen in the opening sections of her book, which was printed in 1645 but began years before her husband's death. (An early manuscript version of the work at the Folger Shakespeare Library is dated 1606 (Burke).) In the letter to her daughters at the beginning of the work, Richardson says that she "[has] long and much grieved for your misfortunes, and want of preferments in the world" (4). We also know that she worked to get a baronetcy for her son-in-law, Sir Edward Dering – another instance of her deliberately placing herself in the midst of public affairs (Burke). Perhaps Richardson's awareness of the fact that her life and work could be seen as challenging her womanly place explains why she explicitly states that she does not write these prayers for her adult sons "lest being men, they misconstrue my well-meaning" (6).

Writing religious instructions to grown men, even to her sons, meant running the risk of being accused of usurping male authority, and therefore, she acknowledges her place as a way to circumvent this accusation.

On the other hand, one could read this line as having a double meaning, the alternative being that her male sons will not be perceptive enough to interpret her correctly. Indeed, this is not the only place in which Richardson uses a purposely ambiguous line. At one point she writes that her work only concerns "women, as well as the best of learned men," implying that only the best men can match a woman (3). Instances like these cause one to question just how modest Richardson intended to be. The tone of the work itself seems to be rather authoritative. It contains a detailed, well-planned table of contents and a confidently-delivered list of advice on the proper preparation for prayer. However, despite her confident tone, Richardson frequently refers to her work by diminishing her accomplishment, calling it "my poore labor" and speaking of its "many blameworthy faults" (1; 3). In addition, her prayers show her humility before her Lord Jesus: "I willingly submit my selfe to thy good pleasure to dispose of me as thou seest best" (160-1). Thus, Richardson acknowledges her place by adopting a pointedly modest attitude about capabilities. In a short paragraph inserted between the dedication and the prefatory letter she wrote to her daughters, she justifies the publication of her work by saying that she was "lately over perswaded by some that much desired to have them [her books]" (3). This indicates that her work was circulated in manuscript and was read and approved by people knowledgeable enough to pass judgment on it. Thus, while Richardson is clearly aware that she cannot explicitly proclaim the worthiness of her text, she is able to insure its value by citing the praise of individuals more notable than herself.

Some of the mothers, like Elizabeth Jocelin (1596-1622), state outright that they did not want to be published or that they were published against their consent. However, even as Jocelin says that she writes strictly to her children "in private sort," one can still sense her caution (The Epistle Dedicatorie*n.pag.*). She still takes care to placate potential criticism by acknowledging her place as a woman, saying things such as "my love to my owne might excuse my errours" and "I comforted myself, that my intent was good, and that I was well assured God is the prosperer of good purposes" (The Epistle Dedicatorie *n. pag.*). Jocelin wrote her work *The Mothers Legacie to her Unborne Child* during her pregnancy and actually died just nine days after giving birth to her first and only child in 1622. After her death, Thomas Goad, chaplain to the archbishop of Canterbury licensed and published her work in 1624 with an added "Approbation" he wrote to indicate his endorsement (Brown). Goad's "Approbation" suggests that Jocelin's manuscript was widely read and, significantly, was read by respectable people. Goad's status as a high-standing religious figure provided her legacy with unquestionable credibility. The work went through seven editions in the seventeenth century, indicating that it was well-received and widely read.

The fact that Goad felt the need to include this endorsement indicates his belief that a woman needed a man's approval to stand before the public eye, for the public eye was not the proper place for a woman. In it, he portrays Jocelin as an obedient daughter and wife and praises her intelligence, which she would demonstrate only by memorizing sermons during church and writing them down afterwards (The Approbation *n.pag*.). In short, he attributes to her every attribute of the "ideal" woman. She was educated, he says, but she only used it for religious learning. She was a weak woman, he says, but this only makes her accomplishment rarer and

more praiseworthy. While Goad (and assuredly the majority of male society) would not approve of Jocelin publishing on her own, one may find nothing wrong with a woman being in the public eye if introduced to it by a man. With a man leading her in, Jocelin's voice becomes that of a meek, submissive follower; the reader is explicitly informed that because she died before finishing her work, she never shared it on her own accord, even amongst her closest acquaintances. Therefore, Goad's introduction assures readers that her work is pure, free of any of the negative connotations surrounding women who might wish to force themselves into public discourse.

Invoking Motherly Authority

While the role of the mother could be seen as highly restricting, it could also be seen as quite powerful given the fact that it was a woman's God-given place in the world. Within a household, mothers were subordinate to their husbands but were superior to children and servants and exercised an important amount of influence on these people. The maintenance of the social order depended on the proper functioning of the link between the mother and the child as much as it depended on all the other links in the hierarchical chain of power. Therefore, while the omnipotent order of society forced mothers into a certain role, it also guaranteed them this arena of authority. Proverbs 1:8, which appears on the title page of Dorothy Leigh's *The Mother's Blessing* (1616), reminds children to "hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (King James Bible). The anonymous writer of *A Mothers Teares Over Hir Seduced Sonne* (1627) also uses this verse. "Art thou a Child? *then heare the Instruction of thy Father, and forsake not the Law of thy Mother*," she says, implying that obedience should be part of a child's very nature (A Mothers Epistle to hir Child *n. pag.*). It was generally acknowledged

that mothers had a great deal of influence over their children, and the writers of Mothers' Legacies utilized this power associated with the mother to their own advantage, often invoking their God-given motherly authority to persuade their audience of the validity of their words.

In her legacy, Elizabeth Jocelin argues that while idolatry is the worst of the sins one can commit against God, "disobedience to parents" is the "ringleader in sinnes against man" (93). Furthermore, according to Jocelin, just as idolatry is a gateway to other sins, disobedience to parents leads to other sins, as well (93).

> So thou canst not bee a disobedient childe, but thou art a murderer, a double one: first of nature in thy selfe, which if thy wicked purposes doe not smother, will of her self breake forth into that duty…Secondly, thou art a murtherer of thy father, who having stored up all his joy in thee, hath by thy disobedience his gray head brought with sorrow to the grave: which God forbid (94-5).

This passage sets up parenthood as a pillar that holds the foundation of all virtue. Clearly, Jocelin is calling upon her God-given motherly authority in a very powerful way. Exodus 20:12, "Honor thy father and thy mother," is the fifth of the ten commandments, yet Jocelin places a great deal of importance on it based on the fact it often appears at the top of the second tablet in most pictorial representations of the ten commandments. Her highlighting of this commandment is not entirely deviant, either. In the seventeenth century, just as obedience of wives to husbands was stressed, obedience of children to parents was equally urged, for both the husband-wife relationship and the parent-child relationship needed to function smoothly for the sake of the order of society.

The author of *A Mother's Teares* (1627) creates an especially powerful effect by evoking guilt in her son along with her motherly authority. "Now hearken to what this wise woman saith, (for as hir actions, whereof anon, so hir words will betray hir to be a mother:)…Comfort me, comfort me, for my strength faileth; mine eye breaketh my heart; it powereth forth rivers of teares" (74-5). A firm supporter of Protestantism, this mother was writing in response to her adult son's recent conversion to Catholicism. The work is essentially a series of letters sent back and forth between mother and son as they engage in the same debates in which many others were engaging throughout the seventeenth century. The anonymous writer publishes her work in the hope that even if she cannot persuade her son, "[i]f I warne many, one or another will receive instruction" (A Mothers Epistle to hir Child *n. pag.*). This mother's passion, ignited by her sincere solicitude to save her son from what she sees as great sin, burns throughout the work. Often, the reader observes her frustration overflow and her tone become quite austere. She challenges her son with boldness: "Doth he [the son] renounce his own [Jesus'] righteousness? is it filthy ragss?" (9) However, at the same time, her passion remains within prescribed social boundaries due to the fact that her authoritative tone is expressed solely within her private letters to her son. Because of the work's epistle form, the public reader is not directly addressed but takes the role of spectator to the mother-son dialogue. Therefore, the writer's authority extends only as far as her motherhood. Furthermore, the familiarity of the Protestant-Catholic debate and the tension that surrounded it would have sparked sympathy for the mother from Protestant readers. The writer comes across as a mother naturally driven to extremes by a family crisis.

Excessive Humility

As mentioned above, both male and female writers of the time practiced the tradition of

including dedications or epistles to their works when they were published, and frequently, as was the formal convention, these prefatory sections demonstrated an excessive degree of humility, especially when the work was dedicated to a patron. (A good example of a male writer who does this is Richard Braithwaite, a discussion of whom can be found in Chapter II.) In his dissertation on early modern English book dedications, John Buchtel writes, "[t]he dedication of an early modern book is a highly crafted rhetorical performance" (Buchtel 2). Buchtel compares dedications to sonnets, arguing that, as with sonnets, the writers of dedications use this form to weave together their own meaning that is just as complex and inventive as anything else that follows (2-3). While conforming to a particular tradition, writers frequently adapted this form to their own purposes, using it to set the proper tone for their target audiences. For example, the following excerpt is taken from the dedication of William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties*:

> If noble Birth, high Honour, great Estate, true Piety, bountifull Charity, good Esteeme of Gods word and Ministers, and in particular, intire love of the Author, be inducements to choose a Patron for his worke, I, for my part, need not goe farre for a Patron. In mine owne parish are all these. To you therefore (right Honourable, right Worshipfull, and other my beloved Parishioners, most worthy of all due respect) doe I dedicate these my poore paines about *Domesticall Duties*.

Here, Gouge's parish takes the formal place of a patron, a seat of reverence and honor. In contrast, John Brinsley's *A Looking Glasse for Good Women* is dedicated "To all the well affected, but ill advised of the weaker Sex." Far from being humble, Brinsley's dedication is ostentatiously unapologetic: "If any shall herein espy some *spots* and *blemishes* discovered, not becoming the *face of profession*, let them not blame the *Glasse*, which represents things as they are, but *themselves*, or *others*, who have given the *ground* to these *Reflections*" (The Epistle

Dedicatory *n. pag.*). Brinsley's unwillingness to make concessions gives him an air of perfect confidence in his message, for, he implies, the sins he finds in women are serious enough to occasion his austerity without the need to soften his words with deference to his readers.

Like both male and female professional writers, the writers of Mothers' Legacies also demonstrated excessive humility in their dedications, degrading both their personal capabilities and their works. However, the motivation behind professional writers' ostentatious humility necessarily differed from the motivation behind the humility of the unpaid women writers of Mothers' Legacies. The subtleties of the mothers' position (which are the central focus of this thesis) must be kept in mind, for they shaped the genre in which these women participated. In her study of the modesty or humility rhetoric in the works of early modern women writers, Patricia Pender criticizes readings of female modesty that discount the rhetorical complexity of this formal tradition by viewing these instances "as an acknowledgement of exclusion and a literal assertion of ineptitude" (Pender 3). In other words, by reading women's expressions of humility in their works as nothing more than proof of their internalization of patriarchal values, we mistakenly ignore the rhetorical strategizing taking place in these moments. According to Pender, "[e]arly modern women used the literary conventions of modesty variously, and to different ends," and from this, it may certainly be suggested that the explicit expressions of modesty seen in the Mothers' Legacies served a rhetorical purpose unique to the genre, as well as to each mother on an individual level (Pender 11). Certainly, all writers who sought publication had to make an effort to preserve respectability due to the negative associations that might accompany print publication. Professional writers who made a display of their humility were doing so in order to please a patron and make a living. However, without the use of

patronage, the words of the legacy writers take on an additional meaning, for their works were written for a different rhetorical purpose.

Dorothy Leigh's *The Mothers Blessing* contains both a dedication and an epistle to the reader. Her work is dedicated to Princess Elizabeth, the queen of Bohemia, whom she regards with great deference. Interestingly, she uses her dedication to both praise Princess Elizabeth, a powerful female role model, and recruit her aid in the success of her writing. "I adventured to make your Grace the protectresse of this my Booke," she writes, "knowing that if you would but suffer your name to bee seene in it, Wisedome would allow it, and all the wicked winde in the world could not blow it away." Leigh's eagerness to provide for the religious upbringing of her children shifts the tone of her dedication in a subtle yet meaningful way. Rather than simply trying to appear meek and humble, she explicitly reveals her ulterior motive in her appeal to Princess Elizabeth, bravely requesting the service of her powerful name. Leigh announces that the purpose of her writing was simply to guide her sons "lest for want of warning they might fall where I stumbled." In order to do this, she throws herself humbly at the princess' feet to beg her to support her mission, which, significantly, would have been considered an honorable one. In short, Leigh approaches Princess Elizabeth as a lowly mother in need rather than a simple flatterer, hiding her boldness behind this rhetorical platform.

Following the address to Princess Elizabeth, Leigh includes an additional address to her three sons: George, John, and William. In this address, she justifies her publication as her fulfillment of her husbands' dying wish to bring up his sons to be godly: "I could not chuse but seeke (according as I was by duty bound) to fulfill his will in all things." Her desire to do her duty, she

says humbly, is what has pushed her to "shew [her] imperfections to the view of the world" (The Mother to her three Sonnes *n. pag.*). Here, Leigh first humbles herself, putting her in line with writers of all genres, then uses her motherly duty to excuse her flaws, taking up a rhetorical device unique to Mothers' Legacies. Her humility arms her from criticism both as a writer and as a *woman* writer simultaneously. She signs this epistle as "Your fearefull, faithfull, and carefull Mother, D.L." – just the opposite of the bold, unchaste image she is trying to avoid. Indeed, Leigh's strategic humility is seen throughout her work. Each of her chapter titles is labeled as a different motivation for her writing, perhaps in order to show her good intentions behind everything she says. Apparently, Leigh's strategy was met with a great deal of success; her work was published in twenty-three editions, implying that she had a wide readership (Catty). In fact, as mentioned in Chapter I, she was the number one best-selling woman writer of her day.[23]

Some Mothers' Legacies, like Elizabeth Grymeston's[24] *Miscelanea. Meditations. Memoratives.* (1604) are only defined in this genre because of their prefatory epistle to their children. Grymeston, a Catholic living in the now Anglican country of England, was already in danger of drawing suspicion. In either 1592 or 1593, Grymeston was fined for being a recusant,[25] and while her work does not contain explicit Catholic sentiments, it does borrow from many Catholic figures (Travitsky). Therefore, Grymeston's modest introduction to her son transforms her from a bold woman writer into a humble mother, adding sanctity to her words. In it, she writes that the impetus she feels to publish is based solely on her powerful motherly love. Because she

[23] Despite her success in her writing, little is known about Leigh's life. She was the daughter of a gentleman and married a gentleman, and she died young in 1616, the same year her work was first published (Catty).

[24] Elizabeth Grymeston was born in or before 1563 and died sometime between 1601 and 1604 (Travitsky).

[25] This is a term, usually associated with Catholics, for someone who refused to go to Anglican Church. This was illegal at the time.

recognizes the lawlessness of the age, she says she "resolved to breake the barren soule of [her] fruitlesse brain, to dictate something for [her son's] direction." Furthermore, she admits that "if every Philosopher fetched his sentence, these leaves would be left without lines," belittling her work as merely the careless amalgamation of others' thoughts and words.[26] Like that of other legacy writers, Grymeston's humility fits her within the ideal image of womanhood. Modesty and humility are frequently mentioned amongst the conduct writers as traits associated with proper femininity. Paradoxically, by maintaining this ideal, these women were able to stretch their social role by entering into the public sphere and offering instruction to their readers.

Circumstantial Justifications

The Rhetorical Power of Motherhood

Throughout all genres of seventeenth-century literature, the word "mother" itself seems to carry a great deal of rhetorical significance. Motherhood was described as a beautiful thing, something that both God and man rejoiced to see.

> A Mother is a title of so much Tenderness, that we find it borrowed by our common Dialect to express the most exuberant Kindness; nay, even in Sacred Stile it has the same use, and is often set as the highest Example our weakness can comprehend of the Divine Compassions (Allestree, Part II, 42).

By naturalizing the bond between motherhood and womanhood, this society gave the word "mother" a connation of godliness, orderliness, or rightness that could be invoked in convincing ways. In discussing the duty of a step-mother to adopt her new husband's children as her own, Dod and Cleaver say, "what christian woman is so farre from all humanitie and natural affection, that will not be moved and mitigated with this word Mother, of whom soever it be spoken?"

[26] Most of the book was indeed taken from other sources. None of the poetry was original (Travitsky).

(Dod and Cleaver 243). Thus, Dod and Cleaver invoke an idea of motherhood that is laden with associative meanings in order to prompt women to care for their stepchildren. Criticizing those who abandoned the Church of England to join new religious sects, Brinsley compares the Anglican Church to a mother, who having given birth to the dissenters, is now sadly denied the opportunity to nurse them (29-30). Significantly, the word "mother" in this argument has been separated entirely from an actual woman yet still maintains rhetorical efficacy as a metaphor for the abandoned church.

Heller points out how, in many of the legacies, motherhood was seen as being tied to a woman's body, and thus, it was portrayed as something natural or God-ordained. According to Heller, while these women knew that the amalgamation between their bodies and maternity was not completely natural, they did take advantage of the rhetorical power this naturalization lent (50). Significantly, Richardson defines a "true mother" as one "who not only with great paine brought you into the world, but do now still travel in care for the new birth of your soule" (6). Here, Richardson collapses the divide between her natural, bodily care for her children and her socialized onus to care for their religious upbringing. By referring to both these roles as being a necessary mark of a "true mother," Richardson makes the latter just as natural as the former. Thus, she implies that she is justified to write based on the fact that she was fulfilling a natural motherly function that could not be neglected any more than carrying a child during pregnancy or giving birth to the child after nine months.

The naturalization of a socialized image of motherhood can also be seen in the plethora of discourse surrounding breastfeeding in the seventeenth century. Nursing was seen as a key factor

that directly altered the disposition of a child, for it was believed that women passed attributes of their characters along to children through their breast milk. Thus, this natural bodily function of mothers took on the responsibility for what today's society attributes to socialization. Significantly, the consequence of all this was that, as the nurse, the mother was afforded to a great deal of power over the child that men could not take away or have any control over at all. Of course, there was no baby formula in the seventeenth century, so this process could not be avoided no matter what I man might have willed.

In literature, breastfeeding became an act that was loaded with rhetorical significance due to the meaning assigned to it in the time period. *The Countess of Lincolnes Nurserie* (mentioned briefly in Chapter II) provides a noteworthy example of how nursing affected the rhetorical power of motherhood. "I pray you, who that judges aright, doth not hold the suckling of her owne childe the part of a true mother, of an honest mother, of a just mother, etc., etc…" (Clinton 7). Nursing, something that women were (supposedly) naturally inclined to do (although we know that wealthier women were in the habit of sending their children to wet nurses instead), was associated with countless praiseworthy traits. Therefore, when Leigh writes, "…will shee [the mother] not blesse it [her child] every time is suckes on her brests, when shee feeleth the bloud come from her heart to nourish it?"[27] she is recalling an image of a mother that is supported by these associations (10). As she writes, Leigh is seen as driven by her natural maternal instincts; she is the "Good Mother," so eager to care for her children that she breaks out of her domestic role and publishes her writing for their benefit.

As seen above, many of the Legacy writers explicitly invoke their motherly authority over their

[27] It was thought that breast milk was produced by the body from the woman's blood.

children; however, there is something to be said about the subconscious emotional associations the readers of the seventeenth century carried with them as they undertook to read these works. Many of the works had the word “mother” in their title, which would have prompted feelings of warmth and affection in the reader before he/she even opened the book. While a woman’s name on the binding might have been a red flag to male readers, the word “mother” could be a cue for men to let down their defenses. The concept of motherhood was simply incompatible with the sort of bold, ostentatious woman who would have been deemed worthy of censure.

Social Fears and General Instability

The general sense of instability in the seventeenth century left this society on edge. As seen in Chapter II, many of the writers of conduct literature demonstrated an awareness of this social and religious instability in their works and responded to what they saw as a time of great moral impotence. The influx of new religious sects in particular raised fears amongst the writers of both conduct literature and Mothers’ Legacies, both of which were concerned with the maintenance of a stable religious philosophy. Furthermore, religion and politics were so closely aligned that instability in either of these camps only compounded the fears of the people. For example, Heller points out that the debate surrounding Eucharistic meal in the early part of the century was just as much political as it was religious, for James I used it as an emblem of commonality in his attempt to unite the Lutherans and Calvinists (although these groups did differ slightly in their interpretation of the sacrament) (93). Later, in response to the growing Catholic threat, James passed a law requiring recusants to participate in the sacrament or risk excommunication and the denial of legal rights. “Receiving the Eucharist in the English fashion had now become a sign of political loyalty” (Heller 94). Moreover, as a result of the English Civil Wars, the authority of the

king went from coming from God to coming from Parliament. The King was no longer seen as God's chosen head of the church, and therefore, the ideal of a unified, pious country became harder than ever to achieve. In fact, James II's Catholic beliefs were the primary reason for his removal by Parliament in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The fact that the Royalists, many of whom were Protestants, continued to support James II as the rightful king indicates the new divide between a king and a religious leader.

Elizabeth Russell's Mother's Legacy entitled *Reconciliation*, which was published just five years into the seventeenth century, is built on the social fears caused by religious instability. Russell's work is a translation of an anonymous man's work from French into English and discusses and criticizes the debate surrounding the sacrament of Communion. Russell, a fierce opponent of sectarianism, calls the debate over the Eucharistic meal a "cruel and pernicious contention." Russell admires the anonymous writer of the original text for his initiative to work towards "the remembrance of the Christian peace, and the forgetting of devilish debate" (A Certaine Man *n. pag.*). Russell's participation in this debate places her in the midst of a complicated public issue. The fact that she deemed this work worthy of publication indicates her concern of sectarianism and the loss of peaceful religious stability grounded in the Church of England.

Russell led a rather busy life, especially so for a woman. Clearly, she was quite educated; her translations indicate that she must have been a skilled linguist. Russell's father, who was the tutor to Edward VI, made sure that she received this extraordinary education. Interestingly, as I discussed in Chapter II, Russell's involvement in a legal dispute over Donnington Castle ended in her public disgrace. In fact, her life was marked by frequent property disputes. (Another

dispute between her and a man by the name of Lovelace, lieutenant of Windsor Forest and Castle, erupted into violence.) However, despite her legal struggles, Russell enjoyed royal patronage under Queen Elizabeth, who attended the wedding of Anne Russell, the dedicatee of *Reconciliation* (Priestland). Russell, in short, was very much a public figure, and her translations can be seen as yet an additional component of her busy, publicized life. Indeed, the *Reconciliation* in particular shows her directly engaging in the religious and political debates of the century.

Significantly, Russell's work is another example of a Mother's Legacy that is only defined as such by an address to her daughter attached to the beginning of the work. The work itself was not written for a child but for a wider adult audience. (Anne was a married woman at the time of publication.) The fact that Russell presents the work as a legacy shows her utilizing the rhetorical platform of the genre. Russell's work presents itself as a simple motherly lesson to her daughter rather than an opinion piece that engages in the debates of the day. "I meant this to you, good daughter, for a New-yeeres gift, but altered but griefe for your Brothers broken arme," she says, portraying herself first and foremost as a concerned, loving mother (Epistle Dedicatorie *n. pag.*). Because Russell is careful to set herself up in this light, the fears of the general instability of the time the reader sees her express can be read as her natural motherly fear of her child growing up in an unstable world. Here, the shared fears of society all combine to produce a powerful justification for Russell's work. Russell expresses her desire to have her daughter "sucke the perfect milke of sincere Religion," a desire held by many for future generations. Indeed, this is the desire that lies at the very heart of Mothers' Legacies. Russell's address "The Author to the Reader" (see Figure 3) blesses "peace-makers" in this time of contention, but also acknowledges

that even though she "stud[ies] to make enemies friends, perhaps shall have small thankes of them" (*n. pag.*). The social fears, however, excuse her boldness, which can be dismissed as a necessary step under "extraordinary circumstances."

"Extraordinary circumstances," the phrase found throughout the work of William Gouge, can indeed be fittingly applied to women's positions in the seventeenth century. The mothers often wrote as if they were doing something "extraordinary," or contingent upon their desperate situation. For example, the writer of *Mother's Teares* writes, "yet I beseech thee spare thy Censure this once, I will never venture it againe; nor had I now unlesse there had beene a cause" (To the Christian Reader *n. pag.*). Made desperate by her son's "idolatrous" Catholic practices, she publishes her work to fulfill what she sees as her motherly duty to correct his behavior. Her fear for her son's soul, underlined by her culture-dependent Catholic prejudices, cause her to do what she would not dare do otherwise.

Dorothy Leigh also uses her fear for her children to justify her writing. Like the fear of those women mentioned above, Leigh's can also be seen as being consequent to the general society-wide fears of the time period.

> [B]eeing troubled and wearied with feare, lest my children should not find the right way to heaven, thought with my selfe that I could doe no lesse for them, then everie man will doe for his friend, which was, to write them the right way, that I had truly observed out of the written word of GOD" (The Epistle Dedicatory *n. pag.*).

Interestingly, Leigh is operating with the awareness that there is both a "right way" and a "wrong

way" to heaven, and the right way may not be easy for her child to determine in this tumultuous society. Leigh believes that a return to scripture is the only way to put her child on the correct path. However, in this time, any attempt to read the Bible at all was problematic in itself, for reading necessarily entailed interpretation. Leigh and all the mothers write from a certain personal background that has altered their perspectives, and in doing so, each of them engages in the public debates of the day over religious and political matters whether they wish to or not. Thus, motherly fear over a child's religious upbringing necessarily worked alongside the general social fears caused by an unstable religious and political world. Leigh's fear, while portrayed in the smaller context of a mother fearing for her child, is supported by a larger fear over social and religious instability seen throughout the literature of the seventeenth century as both Catholic and more radical protestant sects challenged orthodox Church of England practices.

The Deathbed

The deathbed can also be interpreted as another "extraordinary circumstance" that enabled women to write without facing public censure. Because these women were on the verge of death, it became necessary that they do what they could for their children's spiritual health while they had the chance. Because of the mothers' lack of time with their children in which they could give them religious instruction, in combination with the religious instability of the day, women on their deathbed were extraordinarily eager to preserve their wisdom. To a reader, this eagerness can be seen as the mark of motherly love, a Godly entity free from social stigma rather than the mark of a transgressive woman. Therefore, the mothers' actions remained justified behind this impressively high level of dedication to care for their children – even in the face of certain death.

Furthermore, while the deathbed removes the suspicion that these women might have been seeking either fame or money as writers, it also serves to add authority and emphasis to their words. According to Heller, the concept of the deathbed carries a powerful rhetorical effect.

> Last words are all-sufficient: once a mother commits them to writing, her child needs nothing more. By describing their advice as their last words, legacy writers compel the reader to carry out maternal commands, in perpetuity (Heller 182).

As a mother's final message, the works would have commanded a certain degree of reverence out of respect for the mother's memory. The sanctity of the "last words" gives them strength to impact readers. For example, Grymeston writes her words "hoping, that being my last speeches, they will be better kept in the conservance of thy memorie," demonstrating her awareness of the powerful position she is in as a dying author. Thus, on the deathbed, the women become both the tragic, dying innocent and the powerful, wise authority simultaneously. Indeed, the dual rhetorical effect of the deathbed reflects the dual nature of the Mothers' Legacies as a whole; the deathbed, like the genre, is at once both conservative and transgressive in relation to these women's socially-prescribed "ideal" image.

> [C]ome againe; that I may see thy face with comfort once more before I make my bed in the darke (it is now almost night with me) and I shall be seen no more. O returne my Son: returne my Sonne, my Sonne (Anon 2).

These words, taken from *Mothers Teares*, demonstrate the manner in which some women utilized the deathbed to their advantage. The parenthetical statement seen above seems somewhat unnecessary or repetitive and makes her intention to invoke the deathbed unambiguous. Clearly this mother is aware of the potency of the rhetoric surrounding the deathbed, and she uses it to

her own advantage, drawing on its rhetorical associations. The backdrop of the mother's deathbed creates a sense of guilt and urgency in the reader. The statement "O returne my son: returne my Sonne, my Sonne" reflects the erasure of the dying mother but also creates a sense of movement that attempts to prompt movement or action in the son. The fact that *Mothers Teares* was written to an adult child who is mature enough to leave home and make his own decisions about his religious beliefs, complicates the structure of the legacy. The mother's strategy prioritizes convincing her son of the worthiness of her message rather than convincing a larger society. Her tone becomes somewhat demeaning and frantic as she forces her son to confront her deathbed and, she hopes, feel the change of heart it has the power to produce. The writer becomes a mother that is both lowly and coercive at once.

While the writer of *Mother's Teares* uses the deathbed in a deliberate, powerful way. Grymeston's focus on the afterlife throughout her work shows her as a stoic, faithful mother preparing to die. She keeps her eyes and her heart on the world to come and remains pure to the end, using the deathbed as a sign of her non-confrontation. Grymeston believes that death is something to be faced confidently and bravely, for "[w]ho lives most honestly, will die most willingly" (*Miscelanea n. pag.*). Grymeston's deathbed, then, is a moment of peace and comfort. "It is onely death that brings us into harbor, where our repose is without trouble…our teares shall be turned into triumph," she writes (*Miscelanea n. pag.*). Playing into the *ars moriendi* tradition,[28] Grymeston seeks to instruct her child on the art of dying in a religious fashion. She seeks to utilize the deathbed experience in order to set an example for her son. While she faces death bravely, for those that do not live rightly, death is nothing more than "the beginning of their damnation" (Miscelanea *n. pag.*). Grymeston reminds readers, both child and adult, that her

[28] See Chapter II

example of the joyful, dying mother comes only from a life of piety. She gains rhetorical significance from the deathbed both as a place of non-confrontation and place of revelation that enables her to pass on her wisdom to her son.

Significantly, Heller writes about the "liminal nature" of the Mothers' legacies – a nature that she says is created by the "dying mother" perspective and the fact that these works are presented as the "last words" of the writer (182). By thinking about this genre in such terms, Heller is assigning to it a certain quality that elevates it above the traditional hierarchy of the seventeenth century. Because these women are on the threshold of life and death, they are operating with a certain degree of freedom from the social restraints around them. Indeed, in looking at the genre as a whole, the women can be seen as operating in a liminal state of uncertainty. They occupy both the role of the transgressive woman who writes and wields authority and the role of the caring mother who fulfills her assigned duty faithfully, but they never settle into one of these roles or the other. The reader views them as operating on the boundary between two types of femininity and is unable to classify them in the end.

One thing that the study of Mothers' Legacies reveals is that the role of women in seventeenth-century England was far from simple. The conduct literature of the time produced a long list of "Can and Cannots" for these women, and in their legacies, they demonstrated a constant awareness of what was expected of them. Indeed, the fact that these women *were* educated means that they were educated to know and to understand the strict roles that their society prescribed for them as women – roles that they could never simply ignore. The writers of Mothers' Legacies knew that, as women, they were expected to be mothers and wives and to

remain safely in the domestic sphere. However, what were the mothers to do when their duties began to clash? They needed a way to fulfill their motherly role in the face of death and in the midst of a society whose central, organizing institutions – the Church of England and the absolute monarchy – were becoming more and more threatened by a variety of different groups, yet they were told that entering into such conflicts was no business of a woman's at all. Meanwhile, not just man but God, as well, was watching expectedly for their fulfillment of this duty. Thus, the genre can be seen as an attempt of these women to reconcile their contradictory roles of mother and woman writer. Through the use of explicit and circumstantial rhetorical strategies, the women created a more complicated version of motherhood than that which can be found in all of the century's prescriptive works about them. What we see emerging from the genre of Mother's Legacies, then, is an entirely *new mother* that, it may be suggested, can be most accurately described as liminal, neither transgressive nor conservative but, perhaps, both at once.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: A GLANCE AT MARY MORE AND WILLIAM PAGE

As we have seen, during seventeenth-century England, there arose a new level of complexity in the lives of the English people. In the previous century, with a clear order, a clear hierarchy, citizens had no difficulty in determining where their political loyalties resided. The monarch governed with unquestionable God-given power, and aristocratic class enjoyed a comfortable seat of privilege over the lower classes. Furthermore, the religious debate between the Church of England and the Catholic Church was fierce but not complicated. Initially, the Church of England could hardly be considered a threat to established religious practices and, in reality, differed very little from the Catholic Church. However, overtime, all this began to change. The monarch's authority was called into question during the English Civil War, and the emergence of new religious sects went far in challenging the country's religious customs. New debates emerged within every aspect of life that could not be easily reconciled, and English citizens found themselves thrust into the middle of a tumultuous religiopolitical environment that penetrated their lives in multiple ways.

In discussing the role of women in the seventeenth century, one must note that the complexity of religiopolitical debates necessarily had an effect on the complexity of the view of women at the time. If the writers of Mothers' Legacies were able to reconcile the "ideal" version of womanhood to their roles as published women writers, one must naturally wonder just how stable this ideal for women actually was in its rather *unstable* seventeenth-century environment. In Chapter II, I explored the "Can and Cannots" of womanhood and found that the "ideal"

woman, while clearly a fixed entity in the abstract, did not always remain constant and intact in practical terms. John Sprint's and Richard Allestree's works both reveal definitive beliefs about the way women should appear and behave, and, significantly, these beliefs do not appear to be contradictory. However, when the two men begin to describe, in practical terms, the manner in which women should live on a daily basis, the works begin to depart. While both men argue that women should be submissive, what each has in mind when he imagines the concept of "female submission" is quite different than what the other envisions. Sprint advocates complete submission from women to their husbands that is incompatible with her having any authority or power in any sphere. Meanwhile, Allestree, who argues that "since Gods assignation has thus determined subjection to be the womens lot, there needs no other argument of its fitness, or for their acquiescence," also argues that women *can* and *should* be more than servants to their husbands (Allestree 40). In short, while there existed an "ideal" woman, what this ideal actually entailed when applied to a woman's daily life was unclear. Women were vaguely told to behave a certain way, but there was no definite list of "Can and Cannots" for them to follow.

Perhaps this lack of consensus provides the key to explaining how the writers of Mothers' Legacies were able to accomplish what they did; a unified *theory* about how women should behave was clearly not enough to keep women from exercising a great deal of freedom in *practice*. *The Patriarch's Wife* by Margaret Ezell is largely concerned with the gap between what women of the seventeenth century were told to do and what they actually do. The book questions the practice of assuming that a woman's physical subjection to her husband under a patriarchal system of authority automatically entails submission of a woman's mental faculties, especially when conclusions based on this assumption are used to explain current social and political

inequalities.

> Ultimately, the disturbing question raised by the image of "the patriarch's wife" offered as an explanation for current domestic conditions is how one set of individuals can so thoroughly impose a philosophy that diminishes and restricts another group…Was seventeenth-century England a society of submissive, deferential, opinionless females whose quietude was ensured by their ignorance and a hostile legal system? (Ezell 7-8).

On the contrary, women, as exemplified by the writers of Mothers' Legacies, did not always find their traditional role helpful or agreeable. In fact, many women such as Margaret Fox, Priscilla Cotton, and Mary Cole, all of whom are discussed in Chapter II, wrote their opinions of the limitations of their sex in a direct, unapologetic way, and while the writers of Mothers' Legacies did not challenge their role with their words, they certainly did so with their actions, which stretched the limit of what was considered acceptable conduct for mothers.

Another woman, who is discussed in depth in Ezell's book, is Mary More, a writer and portrait artist who was born in 1633 and died in 1716. More's late seventeenth-century work entitled *The Womans Right* uses Biblical scriptures to challenge male authority over women. More was a highly-educated woman with interesting connections, including Oxford fellow[29] Richard Whitehall, tutor to the Earl of Rochester.[30] (Whitehall wrote a condescending response to More's work called *The Womans Right Proved False*.) Much of what is known about More is known through her association with her children by her first marriage and the preface to the manuscript

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[29] The name given to the incorporated members of a college or collegiate foundation; one of the company or corporation who, with their head, constitute a "college" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
[30] Rochester himself was well-known for his misogynistic poems that reflected his sexual and moral looseness.

of her work, which was not published until recently (Ezell, *Oxford DNB*). She was married twice: first to Richard Waller and then to Francis More, who died in 1693. More lived in a small parish in London called Bishopsgate near the homes of her daughter, Elizabeth Pitfield, and her son Robert Waller, both of her first marriage. All three of these houses were apparently fairly well-off and were connected with the first institution of science established in England, The Royal Society of London (Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife* 145). More's young adulthood was spent in the time of the Commonwealth and her work dates during the height of the Restoration period. Significantly, she wrote as both a wife and a widow, so her work contains the perspective of both these womanly roles (Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife* 127).

More's work essentially argues that the social inequality between men and women in the seventeenth century was the result of misreading and mistranslation of the Bible. She says that despite the fact that male superiority is "allowed neither by [the] Laws of God nor Nature" men maintain authority over women out of custom (More qtd. in *The Patriarch's Wife* 193). Her methodology includes a close examination of scripture that undermines common Biblical interpretations of the time. For example, while many men have argued that Adam's superiority can be proved, in part, by the fact that he was created before Eve, More argues that this fact proves just the opposite. "God in [the] order of Creation went on higher & higher, creating the choicest & the best last," she says, so in other words, just as God made inferior animals before people, he made the inferior Adam before Eve (More qtd. in *The Patriarch's Wife* 104). Another key point she makes involves the translation of the Greek words *ύπακόω* and *ύποτάτλω*, meaning obedience and submission, respectively. More points out that while the word obedience implies an onus to follow commands, the word submission does not imply this onus but simply signifies

a slight difference in rank. While in the original Greek *ὑπακόω* was used mostly to describe the less equal relationship between parents and children or between masters and servants, *ὑποτάτλω* was used to describe the relationship between husbands and wives, a more equal partnership. Despite this fact, she argues, the translators of the King James Bible used these words interchangeably, creating an inequality where there was none in the original.

More sees the creation of this unfounded inequality as the source of her age's most unjust laws for women. She criticizes property laws that make the husband the owner of his wife's property upon marriage. She also criticizes laws that allow for child marriage (women at the time could get married as young as 12). "None can believe any one marrys that child but for her Estate," she says, and furthermore, such laws only serve "to empower [the] Man & enslave the Woman" (More qtd. in *The Patriarch's Wife* 198). More also criticizes women's exclusion from higher education and Parliament, which she says increases the divide between the sexes. She gives several examples from the Bible of women excelling in various ways and cites the philosophical maxim "What hath been done may be done" (More qtd. in *The Patriarch's Wife* 191).

In *The Patriarch's Wife*, Ezell suggests that because More's manuscript drew little attention during her life despite its controversial opinions, it can be said to represent More's intellectual society accurately, "neither standing outside them as radical or dangerous opinions, nor the result of personal circumstances, but the expressions of literate English thought at the time" (129). In other words, More's work should not be read as an instance of exceptional female rebellion but rather as proof that the voice of women in the seventeenth century was anything but silent. More acknowledges the limitations placed on her sex, but, paradoxically, she implies that there are

women in worse marriages than her own who have even more of an impetus to challenge the current order of things.[31] In this sense, challenging the patriarchy is seen as something plausible and, indeed, *commonplace*, the natural result of watching women suffer or suffering themselves under the cruelty of a bad husband. One may conclude that women of the seventeenth century were not as passive and obedient as the entity of the "ideal" woman would suggest. The writers of Mothers' Legacies were not as abnormal as one would assume from reading sermons and conduct books written about them; they, like More, were able to step outside of the bonds of the patriarchy and write what they felt needed to be written.

Furthermore, the challenging of the patriarchy was not something that only women wished to do. *Womans Worth or A Treatise Proving by Sundry Reasons that Women doe Excell Men* (See Figure 4) was written by William Page probably in the late seventeenth century, although it has been suggested that in was written in the 1620s when writings about the special merits of women were particularly popular (Brod).[32] Like More's work, Page's work was circulated in manuscript but never published. The existence of multiple extant manuscripts of *Womans Worth* suggests that it was widely read in Page's day, although little mention of it from the seventeenth century is known. William Page, a Church of England clergyman, was born in 1590 and died in 1663/4. After receiving his BA and MA from Balliol College, Oxford, he became a fellow of All Souls College, a powerful Oxford campus, from which he received his doctorate in 1634 (Brod). (Ironically, Robert Whitehall, the sardonic writer of the rebuttal to More's work was also

[31] "At first view of this following discourse it may seem strange to thee that I thy Mother of all Women should concern my self in a Subject of this Nature, having never had any Reason as to my self to complain of the least Ill Cariage of my Husbands to me…"(More qtd. in *The Patriarch's Wife* 191).
[32] *Womans Worth* by William Page is marked as a late seventeenth-century work at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC (Call No. 477), but the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* makes the latter suggestion.

associated with Oxford.)

Like More, Page uses the Bible to re-examine the social hierarchy that places men above women. Page being a clergyman adds to the academic credibility of his work, which overcame many of the prejudices held by Page's peers. At the university, he was known as a polemicist, highly concerned with the current debates within the Anglican Church. In fact, his *A Treatise Justifying Bowing* (1631) was so provocative that Archbishop Abbot tried (unsuccessfully) to prevent its publication. One of his largest criticisms of England's religions was the lack of charity shown between different churches to one another, an idea seen in the introduction to his 1639 translation of Thomas à Kempis's *De imitation Christi* (Brod). However, despite this ostensibly liberal view towards other religions and his liberal view of women in *Womans Worth*, he did not appear to support a complete abandonment of hierarchal authority. In his reply to John Hales' *Tract Concerning Schism* in 1642, he argues that such an abandonment would be too dangerous to attempt (Brod). Perhaps this provides an explanation for why Page does not offer a specific solution to the problems he points out in *Womans Worth*. Unlike More, who argues that better education is the key to ameliorating women's lives, Page remains apolitical; the purpose of his work is to alter false perspectives about women and nothing more.

Nonetheless, Page's criticism of common Biblically-based views about women is striking for its unapologetic use of logic to overcome degrading female stereotypes. Each chapter of his 110 page manuscript denotes a different area in which women excel men (women more chaste than men, more religious than men, more charitable than men, etc.), and all leads up to his final conclusion that "women bare rule over men" (Page 96). Some of Page's arguments closely

resemble More's; both Page and More argue that Eve was Adam's superior before the Fall. However, while More says this order was reversed as part of Eve's punishment because Eve was more at fault than Adam, Page reasons that, on the contrary, women still maintain this superiority. He argues that because Eve was created after God commanded Adam not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, she cannot be held as responsible as Adam, for Adam might not have properly explained God's command. Furthermore, whatever fault women held in the Fall was pardoned when Mary gave birth to Jesus without a man's help. Thus, Page is able to conclude that women, by nature, excel men.

> In whom, for all this small offence [that] woman hath committed, as I shewed before, observe I beseech you what a large recompence woman hath made, who as though she had especiallie [sinned] above man, nay as though she alone had sinned, & not man, hath alone [without] the helpe of man brought forth the savior of all mankind (Page 20).

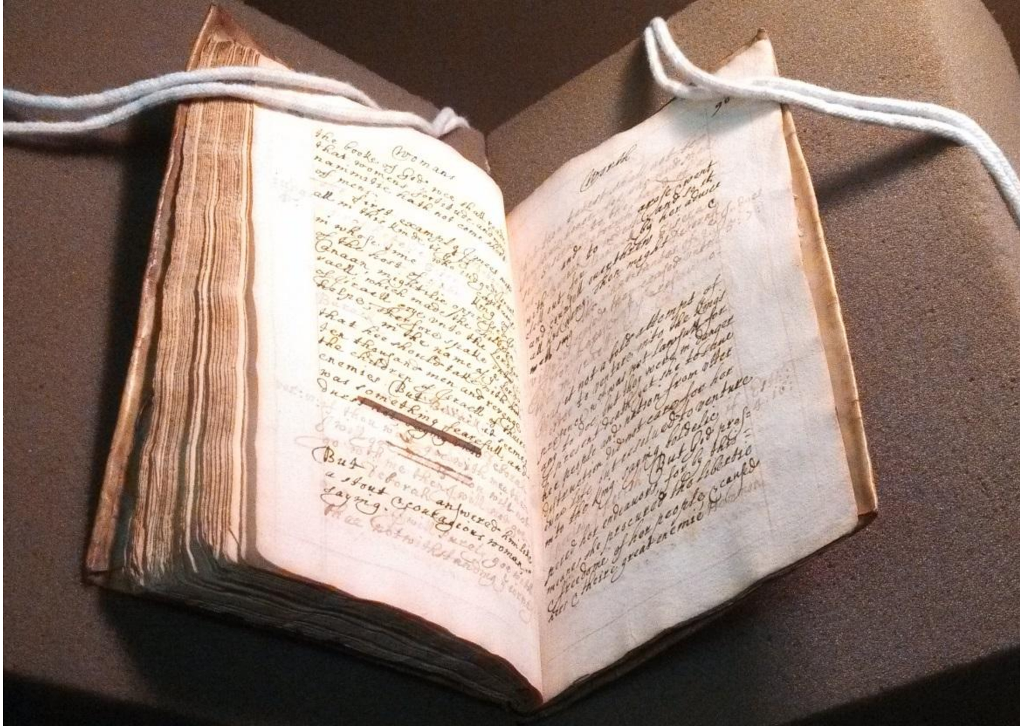

Figure 4.This is a photograph of the manuscript copy of William Page's *Womans Worth*, housed at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC (Call No. 477). There are four other extant manuscript copies of this work known today, and while this makes the work seem rare, the fact that it was hand-written four times during the seventeenth century implies that it was widely circulated amongst Page's contemporaries. This particular manuscript at the Folger uses two different colors of ink: black for normal text and red-brown to emphasize quotes from the Bible.

Page's work is systematic and detailed; each argument appears well-researched and demonstrates an awareness of its opposition. For example, Page anticipates the argument that "women are more loving & kind than men, rather through a tenderness and weakness of nature, then by reason of any vertuous inclination of minde" by writing an entire chapter about how women are wiser than men (79). *Womans Worth* can be read as an exercise in theological argumentation, highlighting the abilities of a well-read academic. Page's arguments in favor of his conclusion are numerous and often rather intricate. To argue that "women are more chaste then men," he offers several proofs (26). First, he points to that fact that even the greatest men in the Old

Testament had several wives and concubines, including Solomon, "the wisest king [that] ever was," who had "no fewer then seaven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines" (27). Then, he argues that women only married to have children, pointing out the fact that no women in the Bible remarried after their husbands died if they were already mothers. To support this point, he uses several Biblical examples, such as the story of Sarah and Abraham. Because "all [Sarah's] mind…was upon a child, she cared not by whom Abraham had it, soe it might bee accounted hers," it is obvious that she cared more about being a mother than protecting her husband's fidelity (29).

Indeed, the very organization of his work reveals his systematic approach. The title of each chapter presents an argument that is proven in depth before Page moves on to the next. Page's work provides an interesting perspective on the debate about the nature of women. Because his work is more philosophical and theological than political, it can be suggested that it was written as more of an exercise in Biblical speculation than a call to reform. The fact that it was never published but merely passed down in manuscript form is highly significant. The manuscript shows a learned man who wrote honestly and openly in order to share his thoughts with his acquaintances. As such, it can be viewed as an instance of intellectual thought in the seventeenth century. Clearly, it provides evidence that the figure of the "ideal" woman was not left unexamined. Even William Page, a highly educated clergyman and academic, was questioning what many were told they should never question.

What, then, are the implications of this lack of consensus about women's roles on the study of Mothers' Legacies? As Chapter III suggests, the writers of Mothers' Legacies made a deliberate

effort to overcome the effects of a society that assigned specific roles to both men and women in order to pass on what they thought were crucial lessons for their children. Each legacy shows an awareness of the precarious position in which their actions placed them. They each adopted a deliberate rhetorical strategy in order to keep them within a liminal space that enabled them to circumvent these social constraints. However, while the mothers had to proceed cautiously, the fact that they were able to reconcile their role as a mother with their role as a woman writer indicates that the women of the seventeenth century were not as limited as historians have presumed.

> The conventional, or stereotyped, representation of women in literature is often assumed to reflect actual practice, overlooking the possibility that even though a wife may have acknowledged the theory of "the Good Wife," if she was not wed to "the Good Husband" she may well have run the family (Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife* 162).

Therefore, another key factor that could explain how these women managed to accomplish this freedom is the fact that there was no definitive list of "Can and Cannots" for women. The patriarchy, while powerful in controlling the ideals about women in an abstract sense, did not control their thoughts nor their actions completely. Without a clear consensus on the prescribed rules of everyday living for women, the women of the seventeenth century were able to interpret the abstract idea of "the Good Wife" or the "ideal" woman in a way that they, on an individual level, found convenient, useful, or personally fulfilling.

Thus, by writing for publication, the writers of Mothers' Legacies were not necessarily overturning an entire established tradition that restrained women from publishing their works.

Indeed, there was no definitive rule that forbade them from using the medium of publication to fulfill their motherly duties. Because they wrote as mothers, with extensive and artfully-prepared rhetorical strategies justifying their actions, they managed to deviate from the "ideal" woman persona without facing public censure. While it is clear that the writers of Mothers' Legacies wished to conform to their society's image of the "ideal" mother, they were not willing to sacrifice the well-being of their children to do so. The act of writing for publication places the women in a liminal space, operating on the boundary between the type of woman who conforms to her society's prescription for how to live and the type of woman who is willing to place herself in the public eye by writing for publication. In such a space, the rules of the patriarchy begin to break down. Because the actions of the mothers are both conservative and transgressive at once, these rules can no longer be applied. These mothers demonstrated their personal strength and determination to provide for their posterity, doing so on their own terms. They created their own version of motherhood and carried out this role to the end of their days.

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