

“Paine and Patience”: The Deathbed Performances of Early Modern Women

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In the conclusion of his 1627 biography of Lady Montague, a Catholic woman living in Protestant England, Richard Smith reflects on the lingering presence of this pious woman's body, claiming that everyone present could still smell the odor of “her most rare and fragrant virtues” (46). Smith, Lady Montague's priest, makes it clear that this woman dies heroically, with no fear of death and with a valiant desire to suffer “more paine” in order to do the utmost service to God. Her death, according to Smith, leaves behind that same “odour of vertue” to both Protestants and Catholics, serving a greater purpose for the faith of the beleaguered Catholics.

Perhaps the narrative of Lady Montague's death is not remarkable; after all, martyrologies of the period often portrayed the martyr as an example of stoic commitment to the faith. Yet Lady Montague is no martyr – she is a noblewoman dying at the age of seventy from natural causes. Despite the lack of persecutorial violence, however, accounts of the life and death of religious women during the period were enormously popular, on both sides of the religious schism. Both Protestant and Catholic accounts of the life and death of early modern women often position the woman as a pillar of the faith, a heroine that provides a model for an appropriately pious lifestyle. As Diane Willen has noted, women during the early modern period were often represented as achieving the most “exemplary deaths,” because they were accustomed to practicing the very same behaviors in life that were most honorable when one would be approaching death: “humility, patience in suffering, [and] subordination to higher powers” (26). Scholars are comfortable identifying these virtues as common to both Protestant and Catholic women (Willen 23), yet this claim is undermined by careful study of the biographies that were popular among both Catholic and Protestant readers. In these biographies, we see Catholic and Protestant women living their lives in a way that most appropriately corresponds to the demands of their faith. In particular, the deathbed scenes in these narratives become a clear line of demarcation within the genre.

Appropriate behavior on the deathbed was a preoccupation for both faiths, and each biographer works to accommodate those constructs within the context of their female subject. In this essay, I will explore how the lives of these women are constructed in order to appropriately set the stage for the hour of their death, a performance that becomes doctrinally and socially significant for both groups.

Four primary biographies will be examined here, two from each religious group. Imperative to any study of these biographies is an acknowledgement of the complicated relationships that often exist between biographers and their subjects, for it is in these relationships that we can see the motives for particular representations of women. Philip Stubbes, a Protestant polemicist best known for his tract *An Anatomie of Abuses*, wrote the biography of his wife, Katherine, and though she is presented as a mirror for feminine piety, she is also presented as an appropriately docile wife, perhaps to showcase Stubbes's own success as a household manager. William Hinde, the biographer of Katherine Brettergh, was commissioned to write the story of her life by her husband William, a man who was embroiled in the project of arresting recusant Catholics in Lancashire. The story of her life, then, is repeatedly linked to the struggles that her husband faced in a region where he was religiously outnumbered. Both Catholic biographies examined in this essay were written by people who had taken religious orders: Lady Montague's life was written by her priest Richard Smith and throughout her biography she is connected with service to and sacrifice for the persecuted Catholic clergy. The Lady Falkland's life is written by one of her daughters, who was also a nun, and although the account highlights Lady Falkland's Catholic devotion, it also includes intimate glimpses at her failures and successes as a mother, an account that could have only been written by a family member. These relationships will not be the primary focus of this essay; however, acknowledging biographer bias and motive is an important component for examining texts that posit a truthful rendering of a life. As we will see, these renderings are always mediated by the particular goals of a given biographer; most important for the purposes of this essay are the religious goals.

Though these biographers are writing with specific goals in mind, it is helpful to first examine the generic conventions to which they all seem bound. These similarities in structure can make the eventual differences seem even more pronounced. In employing the conventions of medieval hagiography, a genre that exalted the lives (and deaths) of both male and female saints, the narratives often seem to follow a set formula. In her introduction to John Capgrave's medieval hagiography *The Life of*

Saint Katherine, Karen Winstead notes that the formulaic nature of hagiography serves an important social function:

The lives of countless saints draw on a few standard plots, stock characters, and conventional incidents. Miraculous escapes, violent and sexually charged conflicts, and ingenious methods of inflicting death figure prominently. Medieval readers of saints' lives – much like contemporary fans of James Bond movies, slasher flicks, bodice busters, or whodunits – relished the repetition of familiar plots and motifs. Yet such repetition also conveyed a religious "truth," namely, that all saints are the same, in that all live a common life of holiness modeled on the life of Christ. (1-2)

Much like the saints' lives that Winstead mentions, the biographies of religious women made for popular reading in the early modern period as well. As Patricia Phillippy notes, the life of Katherine Stubbes, written by her husband Philip, was published in thirty-four editions between 1591 and 1700 (81). Frances Dolan cites a similar trend in Catholic reading circles, arguing that Catholic women were important "subjects, consumers, and much more rarely, authors of a large body of biographical writing" (328). Many of these texts were presented to readers as practical guides for virtuous living and appropriate devotional practice. Philip Stubbes explains that he wrote the life of his young Protestant wife because "while shee lived, she was a myrour of womanhood, and now being dead, is a perfect patterne of true Christianity" (A2). When he concludes the biography, Stubbes uses Katherine's life as a "good example" of the right and true way to be nearest to God's graces (C4). For the authors of Katherine Brettergh's biography, the goal was to "teach many Gentlewomen how vaine the pleasures and fashions of this world are, and how farre unable to bring that peace to a distressed heart, that the embracing of a true religion can" (Hinde 1-2).

The trope of the mirror for women is also present in the life-writings of Catholic women; many of these texts cite similar reasons for publishing texts that valorize the life of a devout woman. Writing the life of Lady Montague in 1627, Richard Smith claims that his subject's life needs no "flourishes of Rhetorike," for the Lady Montague's virtues were perfect enough to be seen through a looking glass (A4r). For both Catholic and Protestant women, these texts were serving an inherently educational function, one that sought to outline the appropriate structures of power and the appropriate corresponding behaviors, whether they be devotional or domestic. As Kenneth Charlton has noted, prescriptive literature such as the conduct book was a staple in nearly every early modern household that had educable young women, these books

expounded upon the cardinal virtues of womanhood during the period – chastity, piety, and obedience (Charlton 7). These virtues, as we will see later, are often standard in both Protestant and Catholic accounts, yet they are sometimes manipulated for different purposes, especially in the case of the deathbed.

Initially, one might think that the use of texts as a means to conversion or spiritual enlightenment is yet another similarity between the Catholic / Protestant discourse. But it is in the subtle differences within the reading practices of these women that we begin to see how the debate between these two groups was played out through the biographies of women. For Protestant women, *sola scriptura* was the organizing principle behind textual consumption. Katherine Stubbes, for example, is continually praised for her constant study of the Bible: “for her whole heart was to bent to seeke the Lord, her whole delight was to be conversant in the scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night, in so much that you could seldome or never have come into her house, and have found her without a bible, or some other good booke in her hands” (A3). By contrast, Elizabeth Cary, a convert to Catholicism in her adulthood, is described as reading religious tracts as a means to self-discovery:

She continued to read much, and when she was about twenty years old, through reading, she grew into much doubt of her religion. The first occasion of it was reading a Protestant book much esteemed, called *Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity*. It seemed to her, he left her hanging in the air, for having brought her so far (which she thought he did very reasonably), she saw not how, nor at what, she could stop, till she returned to the church from whence they were come. (190)

Indeed, both texts are careful to note that these women were readers of *religious* texts; however, it is important to note that for Katherine Stubbes, reading is always confined to scripture, and when she is not reading on her own, she spends her time “conferring, talking, and reasoning with her husband of the word of God” (A3).

A similar pattern marks the reading practices of the Protestant Katherine Brettergh, whose daily routine was “to reade, to pray, to sing, and to meditate” (3); more importantly, her particular brand of reading is said to be different than that of her Catholic counterparts:

She was not like the simple Popish women of our daies, which are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth; but rather like the noble men and women of Berea, which received the word of God with readiness and were able to discern of Paul and Silas preaching. But why doe I speake of Popish women, whose understandings are darker than the darkenes of Ægypt? (4)

Brettergh's status as a learned woman is continually identified with her knowledge of scripture; she also “weeps bitterly” at another Protestant devotional text of the period, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (9). This type of learning is hailed as the most appropriate for Protestant women. Catholic women, on the other hand, are criticized for their reading of texts that do not focus explicitly on religion; as Brettergh's biographer William Hinde notes, Catholic women are unable to answer any question regarding scripture, for religion “is the last thing they regard” (4).

Frances Dolan contends that the rich texture of Catholic women's reading was particularly suited for their social circumstances, for in a social climate that was often patently intolerant of Catholicism, the reading of texts, both secular and religious, fostered a sense of community that could no longer be formed within the confines of the church (Dolan 330). From the Protestant side, a reading list like Elizabeth Cary's, which included texts by Greek and Roman historians, ancient poets, and both past and contemporary religious thinkers, would have been evidence of her lack of interest in religious matters. From the Catholic side, however, Cary's reading list made her an even better Catholic: well read enough “to confute a Protestant clearly” (269) and intelligent enough to participate in literary culture through the writing of hagiographies (213). In the Protestant biographies, textual consumption is consistently figured as a means to a more direct spiritual communion with God. By contrast, Catholic women's reading practices were far more eclectic, certainly owing to the fact that Catholic doctrine maintained that scripture was to be read only by those properly trained within the structures of the Church. The Protestant focus on scripture continues to figure prominently, culminating in deathbed scenes that are heavily focused on the woman's knowledge of appropriate Biblical verses.

The reading practices of both Protestant and Catholic women provide only partial insight to how they are constructed as models for piety, however. The daily lives of the women are also held up as exemplars of their extraordinary devotional skill, and the differences between the Protestant and the Catholic accounts are subtle, yet extremely important. Presenting women as devotionally and domestically exemplary helped to create a picture of a godly and strong Protestant community. In the case of Katherine Stubbes, daily life consists of the study of scripture and maintaining the household. The description of this maintenance is relatively vague, not focused on the details of cleaning or preparing meals. Instead, her biographer presents her as a good hostess, both “gentle and courteous” (A3r); moreover, she is repeatedly commended for the services that she performs for her husband:

Againe, for true love and loyalty to her husband, and his friends, she was (let me speak without offence) I think, the rarest paragon in the world: for she was so far of from disswading her husband to be beneficiall to his friends, that she would rather perswade him to be more beneficiall to them. If she saw her husband merry, then she was merry: if he were sad, she was sad...(A3v)

Yet Katherine Stubbes does more than just satisfy her husband's standards for domestic harmony. Philip Stubbes's profession as a Protestant preacher is important here; rather than just being his domestic servant, she is also an example of the success of his religious teachings. Stubbes reminds his reader often that Katherine was not "carefull for the things of this life" (A3v) because she is too busy engaging in study of the scripture with him. And though she is careful "not to contrarie" her husband (A3v), she is quite willing to use her knowledge of scripture on friends and neighbors. Answering their curiosity about her constant study, Katherine is said to reply, "if I should be a friend unto this world, I should be an enemy to God, for God and the world are two contraries" (A3v). Here, Katherine is an extension of Philip's missionary work.

In the case of Philip Stubbes's biography of Katherine, "humility and submission" are earmarked as traits of ideal feminine piety (Phillippy 83); this seems unremarkable given that as an author, Stubbes certainly would have wanted to be sure his wife appeared appropriately submissive to him. Yet Philip Stubbes also inserts more active traits for Katherine for the purposes of evangelism, traits that signal the more active role she will eventually take on her deathbed. Early in the biography, Stubbes presents Katherine as a woman unafraid to engage in religious debate with Catholics:

[I]f she chanced at any time to be in a place where either Papists, or Atheists were, and heard them talk of religion, of what countenance or credit soever they seemed to be, she would not yeeld a jote, or give place unto them at al, but would most mightilie justifie the truth of God, against their blasphemous untruths, and convince them, yea, and confound them by the testimonies of the word of God. (A3r)

The disparity between Katherine's behavior with her husband and her behavior with religious detractors is not necessarily unusual: as a wife, Katherine was held to a particular standard, one that demanded her meekness. Indeed, Protestant conduct books often praised submissive behavior to the husband as a sign of godliness: "For the apostle praised *silence* to wives in their husband presence, and inforceth that dutie with a

strong reason in these words: *I permit not the woman usurpe authoritie over the man, but to be in silence* (1 Tim. 2:12)" (Gouge 116). As a model of Protestant piety, however, Katherine Stubbes is also afforded the role of an evangelist: part of her virtue is her willingness to engage in a sort of ministry to those outside the faith, and she is even praised for being successful in the conversion of those with whom she debates.

The evangelical impulse of the Protestant woman's biography is even more apparent in the narrative of Katherine Brettergh, whose entire life is figured as a conflict with recusant Catholics in Lancashire. Katherine's husband, William, was responsible for the arrests of recusants in the Lancashire area, a known hotbed for Catholic recusancy (Phillippy 99). Like Katherine Stubbes, Katherine Brettergh also serves her husband, but her service is one that bolsters his commitment to seeking out Papists; she is said to have made him more "hardened against the devill, and all his agents" (5). Patricia Phillippy explains that the Recusant Riots of 1600 were in part incited because of William Brettergh's attempt to arrest a recusant during the funeral procession of a Catholic woman. Several days later, a number of Brettergh's cattle were maimed, and according to Katherine's biographer William Hinde, priests were most certainly responsible (Phillippy 99-101). Katherine, then, is a woman who knew religious controversy firsthand, and her biographer makes sure he acknowledges her willingness to be involved:

Oftentimes also in these vexations, she would have said; the mercies of God are infinite; who doth not only by his word; but also by his justice, make us fit for his kingdome. Little doe are enemies know, what good by these things they doe unto us, and what wrack they bring to their owne kingdome, while they let forth the wickednesse thereof. (7)

Katherine's life suffering takes place at the hands of Catholics, a faith she found "so grosse and foolish, that she would not once name it, except it were to argue against it" (9). Katherine is not only a mouthpiece for anti-Catholic sentiment; she also "ministers" to her husband, encouraging him to be forgiving of tenants that are late in their rents, and asking that he offer his prayers for the poor and the wicked (10). Just as in the case of Katherine Stubbes, we hear little about the details of Katherine Brettergh's life: instead, we are offered glimpses of a life lived against the backdrop of religious controversy. This kind of conflict with Catholicism is demonstrative of a larger pattern in the biographies of Protestant women, one that represents them as part of a large-scale conflict between the true faith and the enemy religion. Far from being angels of

the house, these women are presented as actively engaged in religious debate.

One might assume that a similar pattern would follow for Catholic women; after all, Protestantism as the state-sanctioned religion may have forced Catholic women to openly defend their religion in the same way that Protestant women did. Yet in the biographies of Catholic women, we see that the daily life is given as much weight, if not more, than direct conflicts with Protestants. The biographies worked to establish Catholic women as persistent survivors in a harsh world – put simply, these women become “living martyrs” (Dolan 334). The conditions these women endured were not necessarily extreme, however, and even somewhat unnecessary. Lady Montague, for example, subjects herself to “housewifely mortifications” (Dolan 341) by both her dress and her actions: “On working dayes, she had her hair dressed with plaine linnen, covered with an ordinary hat, used in England commonly, by serving maids” (16). In spite of her noble background, she also performs “the base service” of being a chambermaid while she studies under the Countess of Bedford (5). Much later in the biography, we are given some insight into her struggles against powerful Protestants, yet she remains a passive figure, content to suffer at their hands: “she was once accused to the pretended Bishop of Canterbury, her house twice searched, and her priest once taken, and imprisoned; yet was she prepared to suffer whatsoever it should please God” (27). Even in her most overt involvements in Catholic subversion, Lady Montague is performing the role of a domestic servant, housing priests that put her safety at risk: “When there was danger of searching her house, she was more sollicitous of her Priests then of herselfe” (30).

Lady Falkland’s biography also highlights this kind of protracted self-mortification. Part of her suffering is her continued submission to her Protestant husband; her biographer tells the reader that she even dressed to please him. Though she disdained the vanities of women’s fashion, she would curl her hair “alone for his will”; furthermore, when he became angered with her following her conversion, she punished herself with “extraordinary great carelessness,” never leaving the house in anything other than “plain black, frieze, or coarse stuff” (194). Her biographer, also her daughter, reminds the reader that even though Lady Falkland had a great appetite, she often endured self-imposed fasts: “some Lents she did confirm her observance of the obliged fast by resolving and observing some farther abstinence, as particularly one Lent when her table was filled with flesh for her Protestant children, she forbid herself anything with sugar in it” (216). For Lady Falkland, daily suffering included being part of a family led by a Protestant patriarch; in the case of her fasting, she seems to take on added

mortification for her children. Frances Dolan highlights another incident in the narrative of Lady Falkland that proves her willingness to suffer. When her husband’s broken leg quickly turns to gangrene, Lady Falkland refuses to leave his side, watching over as the leg is cut off. This act of nursing transforms itself into an act of attempted conversion as the Lady Falkland brings in her priest to be with her husband at the hour of his death. In spite of their estrangement and in spite of the efforts he made to keep her children at a distance, the Lady Falkland entrenches herself in the hour of her husband’s death, suffering along with him (Dolan 346).

The gruesome description of Harry Cary’s death is unsettling, yet consistent with the rest of the biography’s focus on the physical details of its subject’s life. The physicality of narratives like the ones written about the Lady Montague and the Lady Falkland are precursors to the focus on the physical torments that will accompany their deaths. Richard Smith points out that in her youth, Lady Montague had a face “beautiful and long” with sharp eyes the color of “hazel-nutt” (43). Yet closer to her death, she is apparently “fat and grosse in body” (43), and at one point she is said to think of herself as “a sack of dung” (18). The Lady Falkland’s narrative is also infused with physical details. Indeed, her biography was written by one of her daughters, which may account for some of the more intimate details about lapses in the Lady Falkland’s memory. However, the decay of her memory and her body is more than just the remembrances of one of her children: it is consistent with a trope that contrasts the weakening of the physical body with the strengthening of the spirit. Lady Falkland is afflicted with a “cough of the lungs” for nearly twenty-two years, yet she remains committed to good works for the poor (264). Lady Montague also suffers from a decaying memory as a result of her “long and tedious affliction” (43). Bodily afflictions and daily suffering can certainly be seen as doctrinally consistent with the Catholic faith; according to David Cressy, early modern Catholics saw good works and suffering on earth as a way to offset “the pains of purgatory” (383). The “self-abasement” that is recorded in these biographies is simply another dimension of the devotional practice of these women, and part of the virtue they achieve is by mastering bodily experience (Dolan 343).

For Protestants, however, purgatory was nothing more than a superstition from a dark age. According to Protestant doctrine, “the passage of the soul to heaven could take place in an instant” (Cressy 383), and so the need to prove oneself worthy of a reduced sentence in purgatory was completely devalued. Protestants also were ambivalent about the effectiveness of “good works” while on earth, and so self-mortification in life was certainly not a necessary path to heaven. Because of these doctrinal

differences, the deathbed accounts of Protestant women emphasize the woman's confession of faith instead of her life on earth. In the case of Katherine Stubbes's biography, Philip Stubbes appends a lengthy account of Katherine's last moments. In this account, she is remarkably lucid, outlining all of the pillars of her faith while simultaneously refuting points of Catholic doctrine:

And whereas the professed enemies of GOD the Papists doo bragge of their good workes, of their merits, righteousness, and desserts, I here before you all, in the presence of God and his holy Angels, do utterly renounce, abandon, and forsake all my own merits, righteousness, and desserts as filthy dung, acknowledging my merits to be the merits of GOD in Christ, who is made unto me righteousness, holiness, sanctification, and redemption. (B3r)

Here, Katherine's biographer emphasizes that she is part of the godly community that is elected by God for salvation. Furthermore, her extensive knowledge of scripture and Protestant doctrine places her in the role of a visionary: she claims to have "fought the good fight" (C4r) and in her last moments, she claims to see God approaching to take her soul (C4v).

Katherine's last confession is not her only act of agency in the narrative, however, for Philip Stubbes tells us that on her deathbed she also gives him instructions for the proper care of her child, telling him that he must "bringe up this childe in good letters, in learning and in discipline, and above all things, see that he be brought up and instructed in the exercise of true religion" (B1r). Patricia Phillippy argues that Katherine's will and her directions that her husband not mourn for her are evidence that the Protestant deathbed was a space in which women could "defy the culture's more usual and pervasive alignment of femininity with immoderation" (87). Indeed, the final moments of these women suggest a fracture in traditional gender roles. More importantly, perhaps, they also suggest that strength of mind was consistent with strength of spirit. Even though Katherine Stubbes has been "languished" by a five-week illness, she is coherent enough to make both a lengthy confession and a will.

The importance of this strength of spirit is a primary concern of the biography of Katherine Brettergh, who languished on her deathbed "in the manner of a hot burning Ague," one that made her, according to her biographer, "talk somewhat idly" (Hinde 11). It is a subtle hint at what must have been a painful and disoriented deathbed experience, yet our authors are quick to resurrect Katherine's wits:

The Lord presently and wonderfully delivered her, giving so joyfull an issue to the temptation, that shee might well use the words of the Prophet, as afterwards shee did, For a moment O Lord thou diddest hide thy face from me, for a little season, but with everlasting mercie thou hadst compassion on me. (11)

The passage that focuses on Katherine's death continues in this manner: we are given slight reminders of the toll which the sickness must be exacting on her, yet we are constantly reassured that ultimately, she was preserved from pain and suffering by God, and her final moments were both coherent and courageous. This version of the story is even more important given that Lancashire Catholics contended that Brettergh's death was awful enough to prove that she was being punished for a confession of "fraudulent faith" (Phillippy 97). William Hinde, Brettergh's biographer, combats these rumors by continually reminding us that any "vaine speeches" (14) from Katherine were short-lived and a result of "want of sleepe" (14).

Katherine Brettergh gets her ideal deathbed performance when she is relieved of her sickness, which is suddenly less "troublesome" to her (25); this relief positions her to deliver a will to her husband. Like Katherine Stubbes, she asks him to raise her children "among children of God," and she reminds him to "beware of Papistry" (24). After this, she acts as a minister to those present; she leads visitors to her deathbed in prayer. In her final moment, Katherine has instructed all who were present to recite the Lord's prayer with her, and then tells them, "My warrefare is accomplished, and my iniquities are pardoned" (37). For both Katherine Brettergh and Katherine Stubbes, the deathbed places them in a position of power, for it is here that friends and neighbors have come "to watch mortal life expire" (Cressy 390). At the moment of their death, these women are functioning as emblems for appropriate godly behavior. Moreover, their bodily suffering is underplayed, even shunned, in favor of a portrayal that emphasizes strength of spirit. This portrayal highlights the Protestant belief in immediate salvation at the time of death – their direct and willful actions position them as Christians whose battle has been fought in life, thus proven worthy of direct passage into heaven.

Does this mean, then, that Catholic accounts do just the opposite, focusing on bodily suffering in order to undermine the strength of the spirit? This juxtaposition would be too simple indeed, for Catholic women are also presented as strong in spirit. Yet in these accounts, physical suffering is seen as part of the exaltation of the spirit. Much like the attention to physical detail in their life stories, the deathbed

performances can be seen as consistent with doctrine that sees one's life experience as an exercise in easing the pain of purgatory; indeed life itself is here constructed as the purgatory, with the deathbed scene as its final and most painful culmination. More importantly, however, the ability to bravely endure physical suffering connects these Catholic women to a form of martyrdom, in spite of the fact that they are dying natural deaths. They become eager to embrace death as a means of pleasing God. The Lady Falkland becomes "quiet, pliable, and easily ruled" on her deathbed, forgetting what was once a "dreadfull apprehension of death" (274) and confessing to her priest only that she was indifferent to dying as long as it best pleased the will of God (274). The Lady Monatague's last illness is described in detail; she suffers from a severe stroke that leaves her paralyzed, accompanied by various other "extreme physical torments" (38). Her physical suffering is further glorified by her unwillingness to be medicated in any way; instead, she remains focused on the necessary sacraments of her faith. She, like Lady Falkland, is eager to suffer for the will of God, and she asks others at her deathbed to read her accounts of Christ's passion.

In emphasizing the stoicism of these women in the midst of bodily suffering, the biographers are creating a culture of martyrdom within the domestic space. As Frances Dolan notes, while actual martyrs drew attention to the plight of Catholics in England, raising continental sympathy for their religious persecution, each martyr meant one less living Catholic (336). Dwindling numbers of committed Catholics meant that keeping priests and missionaries alive was at least as important as, if not more so, than exalting their deaths at the hands of bloodthirsty Protestants. The drama of living, "the heroism of living" became the new focus for Catholic biographies, particularly for women, who were by the late sixteenth century summarily denied "the privilege of execution" for their faith alone (Dolan 336).

If execution was a privilege, then it was a privilege also denied to Protestant women, but obviously for far different reasons. Living under Protestant monarchy meant that the drama of persecution was no longer immediate for Protestants; they would never again see the kind of persecutorial violence that they read about in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. This meant that the stories of the pious would have to account for the privileged status of Protestantism. In the biographies of Protestant women of the period, we can see that the spiritual warfare of evangelism was supplanting the role of suffering at the hands of powerful Catholics. In these narratives, Protestant women are part of the extended battle for religious "Truth" through their evangelical impulse in life and in death. The moment of death is the culmination of that life—Brettergh's last

words express this success: "I have finished the worke which thou givest me to do, and now glorifie me" (26).

The biographies examined here are borne out of a time period in which women's roles were almost entirely connected to the home. Yet even the domestic space was not insulated from the religious schism of the early modern period, and nowhere is that more visible than in the biographies of early modern women. In these narratives, Protestant writers develop portraits of women that connect them with one of the pillars of the faith, the reading of scripture. Moreover, in a country that had only recently established itself as "reformed" by the Protestant faith, Protestant women were constructed as a part of the godly community, committed to the struggle against the nation's religious enemies, the Catholics. Catholic writers were also invested in the woman's biography as a means to disseminate standards for model female piety. The suffering that is endured, even enjoyed, by Catholic women aligns them with the plight of Catholic martyrs, a fate that they could only figuratively attain. We must read these biographies, then, with an eye toward how textual subtleties mirror the doctrinal and social subtleties of the period. The life stories of religious women during the early modern period were certainly not monolithic, neither in the way they lived life nor in the way they faced death. For both Protestant and Catholic biographers, important distinctions needed to be made—distinctions, I think, to which modern readers must be sensitive in order to construct multi-dimensional approaches to the life-writing of the period.

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The Death Drive in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra

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If you count "Pyramus and Thisby" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra* is Shakespeare's third telling of *Romeo and Juliet*, the story of star-crossed lovers from feuding worlds who ultimately commit suicide. Love is a "poison," one that will literally kill Cleopatra in the phallic love bite of the asp. In *Twelfth Night*, imagination and love must surfeit so that they will die (1.1.1-3). In tragedy, Antony and Cleopatra themselves must die so that imagination and love will be without limit.

This tragedy, for me, has always most embodied the idea of Freud's *todestrieb* or death drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud shockingly asserts that "*the aim of all life is death*" [emphasis his] and that:

Our views have from the very first been dualistic, and today they are even more definitely dualistic than before, now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego-instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts. (Freud 18.53)

Appropriately, the great Freudian paradox of the death drive underscores the Shakespeare tragedy perhaps most characterized itself by contradiction and opposition.¹ In *Antony and Cleopatra*, love is conceptualized in no terms other than death, as if the opposing drive has already been vanquished. Life itself becomes an agony, more of an enemy to the lovers than Caesar and Rome.

In loving homage to death, Cleopatra conceives herself as a *femme fatale*:

...Now I feed myself
With most delicious poison. Think on me
That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black
And wrinkled deep in time? Broad-fronted Caesar,
When thou wast here above the ground, I was
A morsel for a monarch; and great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow;
There would he anchor his aspect, and die
With looking on his life. (1.5.27-35)