Framing the Reformation Woman Writer: John Bale's Prefaces to Anne Askew's *Examinations*

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As a site in which the cultural meanings of female authorship are contested and negotiated, the preface is a key feature of the authorial apparatus that introduces the woman writer to her early modern reading public. John Bale's prefaces to The Examinations of Anne Askew (1546/7) articulate a strident defence of Askew's Reformist convictions, positioning her as an exemplary martyr in a 'primitive', proto-Protestant English tradition. Providing historical precedent and scriptural justification for both Askew's authorship and his own role as editor, Bale's prefaces provide valuable insights into the ways women's writing was produced, framed, circulated, and promoted for its earliest print audiences.

Spatially, formally, and historically, the preface occupies a unique role in the apparatus of authorship. Over the past thirty years, developments in the material history of the book, in formalist literary analysis, and in critical theory have championed the preface as a crucial component of the printed book, as a primary site for authorial self-fashioning, and as a location that most clearly marks and yet also problematizes the complex relationship between text and paratext. In early modern literary studies, these developments have revived interest in a genre previously neglected as marginal, and renewed attention to the preface's multiple roles in the production, transmission, and reception of early modern texts.¹ In its focus on the preface, this article

¹ Wendy Wall's *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) offers a fascinating exploration of the preface's role in negotiating the early modern stigma of print, elaborating allegories of reading and writing, and encoding the erotics of the commodified book. Kevin Dunn's *Prefaces of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) views the preface as the place Renaissance rhetorics of authority appear in their most concentrated and complex forms, and identifies the early modern period as the time 'of the fullest exercise of self-authorizing rhetoric' in the Western literary tradition before the Romantics (*ibid.*, p. 9). Studies such as these provide historically rigorous and rhetorically rich contexts for current considerations of the early modern preface. They also highlight, albeit in quite different ways, the relative absence of women's prefaces from this enterprise. While Dunn's careful archaeology of classical prefatory rhetoric identifies the place of the preface as one particularly amenable to claims based on gender, age, and race, his study focuses almost exclusively on the canonical texts of male authors such as Luther, Milton, Descartes, Bacon, and

follows developments in textual criticism that emphasize the importance of the text's material features to historicist critique.² As Wendy Wall has argued, 'the text's "packaging", so frequently erased when a work's history is drained from it, speaks to the specific conditions by which meaning was and is transmitted'. Paratexts like the preface 'construct protocols of reading and provide the grounds on which the text is authorized'.³

Prefaces to women's works in early modern England adopt a rhetoric designed to facilitate the printed book's entry into a potentially hostile literary market. As Kate Lilley has argued in her recent reading of Rachel Speght's *Mortalities Memorandum with a Dreame Prefixed* (1621), the relative rarity of the publishing woman in early modern England, 'particularly one willing to sign her own name', combined with 'the implicit cultural imperative to offer some defence or apology for doing so', charge the preface of early women's books with the burden of negotiating cultural norms.⁴ 'It is in these ostensibly marginal and less literary framing devices', Lilley suggests, 'that the cultural meanings of female authorship are most strenuously interpreted and mediated'.⁵ Prefaces to early modern women's works have long been a staple in modern anthologies of women's writing from the period and are frequently utilized in studies of more prominent individual writers like Mary Sidney Herbert and Aemilia Lanyer. And yet, as Julie Eckerle notes in one of the few essays to focus on the early modern woman writer's preface, there has to date been no published study to examine 'in any collective, comprehensive way how these women used this valuable textual space'.⁶ The

Hobbes. Wall's study takes the category of gender as its primary analytic and deploys it to illuminating effect over four chapters devoted to primarily male-authored sonnets, pageants, prefaces, and impersonations.

² Representative of the many works contributing to the 'new bibliography' or History of the Book are: Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983); Stephen Orgel, 'What is a Text?', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 24 (1981), 3–6; Joseph Lowenstein, 'The Script in the Marketplace', in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 265–78; Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

³ Wall, p. 5.

⁴ Kate Lilley, "Imaginarie in Manner: Reall in Matter": Rachel Speght's *Dreame* and the Female Scholar–Poet', in *Reading the Early Modern Dream: The Terrors of the Night*, eds Katharine Hodgkin, Michelle O'Callaghan, and S. J. Wiseman (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 97–108 (p. 98).

⁵ Lilley, p. 97.

⁶ Julie A. Eckerle, 'Prefacing Texts, Authorizing Authors, and Constructing Selves: The Preface as Autobiographical Space', in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern*

diversity of texts that form the current corpus of early modern women's writing make the 'collective, comprehensive' study of women's prefaces an urgent, ongoing, and ineluctably collaborative undertaking, one that is best approached with due consideration of the historical and literary conditions that mark different stages of the long early modern period.

The current article seeks to enhance our understanding of the authorial apparatus of early modern women's writing by examining an early example of paratextual framing in John Bale's prefaces to *The Examinations of Anne Askew* (1546/7).⁷ As male-authored paratexts to a female-authored text, these prefaces stand in a paradoxically tangential and proximate relation to the corpus of early modern women's writing. As Jennifer Summit has noted:

Such materials shape female-authored texts in ways that can seem very far from their authors' intended aim, as many of them offer representations of the woman writer that appear to wilfully misread their subjects. They have thus more often been seen as signs of corruption from which women's writing needs to be rescued than as objects of analysis that are valuable in their own right for the study of women writers.⁸

Feminist scholarship of the past thirty years has produced important and well-founded critiques of male editors' attempts to frame and interpret the work of early modern women writers. For Anne Askew in particular, the paratexts produced by her early modern male editors have been viewed variously as misleading impositions, attempts at co-option, and successful containment.⁹ These formulations construct an essentially combative

England, eds Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 97–114 (p. 98).

⁷ Anne Askew, *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, ed. Elaine V. Beilin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). References to this text will be cited by page number in the body of the article.

⁸ Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000) p. 9.

⁹ Bale's undeniably intrusive 'elucydacions' of Askew's text have received considerable scrutiny from scholars of early modern women's writing. Viewing Askew's text as compromised by its process of transmission, particularly by the framing of its early modern editors, recent scholarship has seen Askew's text as overwhelmed, undermined, and even occluded by her male editors, especially by Bale. Kimberly Anne Coles views Bale's commentary as 'invasive annotations' that are 'intended to direct our reading' of Askew's text and argues that, 'throughout, Bale revises, restates, and reshapes Askew's narrative to suit the purposes of Protestant polemic': Coles, 'The Death of the Author (and the Appropriation of Her Text): The Case of Anne Askew's *Examinations*', *Modern Philology*, 99 (2002), 515–39 (p. 531). Theresa D. Kemp calls Bale's an 'overwhelming intertextual commentary' through which he is able to 'tame her voice' and 'transform' Askew 'into a mere conduit for a battle between male figures, the Henrician conservatives and God': Kemp, 'Translating (Anne) Askew: The Textual

relationship between male editor and female author in which the woman writer is already and always on the losing side. And yet, as Summit suggests, 'the encounter between editor and woman writer is never a unidirectional assertion of will onto a wholly passive text'. Indeed, editorial paratexts 'often yield signs of interpretive struggle that indicate points of the texts' resistance to the editors' intended framing of them'.¹⁰ With the ways in which Askew's texts resist Bale's interpretative frame already an active and productive site of current scholarship, this essay focuses precisely on Bale's framing activity, arguing that male-authored prefaces such as Bale's shed important light on the ways women's texts were produced, circulated, and consumed in the early modern literary market. Male-authored paratexts to female-authored texts in this period undertake historically specific rhetorical tasks in framing the relatively novel figure of the woman writer for what is also a relatively new English-reading public. In their elegiac, epideictic presentation of Askew as author, their self-reflexive consideration of Bale's role as editor, and their forensic disputation on Christian martyrology, Bale's prefaces negotiate the minefield of English Reformation theology as it was contested in the fierce factional controversies of Henry VIII's final years.

Anne Askew's *Examinations* – the record of her trials for heresy at the hands of Henry VIII's ecclesiastical officials – were first published after her death by Protestant antiquarian, propagandist, and dramatist, John Bale. Bale claimed that the record of Askew's trials was 'written by her own hand' and that it was smuggled out of England and delivered to him by Dutch merchants in the Protestant Duchy of Cleves shortly after her death by burning as a heretic at Smithfield, London in 1546. In his exile on the continent, Bale published *The First Examinacyon* in 1546 and *The Lattre Examinacyon* in 1547. As a text written by a woman who had been prosecuted under the 1539 Act of the Six Articles and burnt at the stake for her Reformist views on the sacrament, Askew's *Examinations* would have been dangerous to publish in the turbulent political climate of mid 1540s England. Bale himself was in no position to do so, having fled England with his family after the fall

Remains of a Sixteenth-Century Heretic and Saint', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 52 (1999), 1021–45 (pp. 1028, 1033, 1031). Elaine Beilin makes this point forcefully when she speaks of Bale's responsibility for beginning the process of Askew's 'deauthorization': Beilin, 'A Woman for All Seasons: The Reinvention of Anne Askew', in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Modern Women Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy*, eds Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 342–63 (p. 347). She continues: 'Bale appears to have construed Askew's text as the guided writing of a medium more than the work of a writer ... she becomes a vessel and an exemplum rather than an agent or author' (ibid., pp. 349, 351).

¹⁰ Summit, *Lost Property*, p. 10.

and execution of his patron Thomas Cromwell in 1540. On 8 July 1546, moreover, Bale's name had been listed in 'A Proclamation for the Abolishing of English Books, after the Death of Anne Askew, set forth by the King', banning the consumption, circulation, and reproduction of certain radical authors and books. The injunction forbade 'any man, woman, or person, of what estate, condition, or degree soever' to 'receive, have, take, or keep in his or their possession ... any manner of books printed or written in the English tongue ... set forth in the names of Frith, Tyndale, Wickliff, Joy, Roy, Basil, Bale, Barnes, Coverdale, Turner, Tracy, or by any of them'.¹¹ In his seven-year exile, spent mostly in the pro-Reformist northern German states and at Antwerp, Bale wrote and published prodigiously, completing between two and four books each year. His polemic, *The Image of bothe churches after the most wonderfull and heavenlie Revelacion of Sainct John* (1550), his reflections on the death of Martin Luther, *The true hystorie of the Christen manner of departynge of that reverende man D. Martyne Luther*, *The Examinations of William Turner*, which he attributes to William Tyndale, and *A brief Chronicle concerning the Examination and Death of Sir John Oldcastle* (1544) all date from this period and provide important contexts for his edition of Askew's *Examinations*. Together with these latter two narratives, Askew's *Examinations* forms the third text of a trilogy of Protestant martyrologies that Bale produced during this time, and as we shall see, he fully intended to supplement this trilogy by publishing further Protestant martyrs' stories in English.

The first editions of Askew's *Examinations* state that the volumes were printed in Marpurg, but modern scholars have questioned this provenance. John L. King suggests that Bale may have chosen to fake this origin in order to associate his texts with the printing programme of the earlier exiled English Reformer, William Tyndale.¹² Elaine Beilin suggests that Bale may have used Marpurg as a decoy location in an attempt to distract attention from his actual residence in Antwerp.¹³ Each scenario, and they are not mutually exclusive, suggests that the production, publication, and circulation of the *Examinations* occurred under conditions of stress. Bale was an exiled author producing volatile religious texts that, by virtue of the king's injunction, were in essence banned before publication in the English market that was their primary destination. Two dozen books attributed to him had been burnt at

¹¹ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1563), p. 565. Cited in Jesse W. Harris, *John Bale: A Study in the Minor Literature of the Reformation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1940), pp. 33–34.

¹² John L. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 72.

¹³ Elaine V. Beilin, 'Introduction', in Askew, *Examinations*, pp. xv–xli (p. xxxiii).

Paul's Cross by Bishop Bonner on the strength of the 1546 proclamation. His role in bringing Askew's work to print put him at risk of a similar fate if he was apprehended.

The prefatory apparatus attached to Askew's *Examinations* registers these tensions both graphically and textually. The title page to the first volume announces the text as *The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe, lately martyred in Smythfelde, by the wycked Synagoge of Antichrist, with the Elucydacion of Johan Bale*. It displays a woodcut of Askew presented as a learned woman writer, reader, and saint. She holds the Bible in one hand and a martyr's palm – which also resembles an oversized writing quill – in the other. Rays of light create a nimbus around her head and extend to the top frame of the woodcut. Askew stands triumphant over the smiling, bearded beast that lies at her feet, which can be identified, by its three-tiered tiara, as the Roman Catholic Church. To the left of this image is a quote from Psalm 116: 'The veryte of the lorde endureth forever' and to the right is the inscription 'Anne Askewe stode fast by thys veryte of God to the ende'. Underneath the image is a verse from Proverbs:

Favoure is disceytfull | and bewtye is a vay
ne thyng. But a woman that feareth the
lorde | is worthy to be prayesd. She open
neth her mouthe to wysdome | and in her lan
guage is the lawe of grace.

The visual rhetoric of the image reinforces and dramatizes the surrounding biblical inscriptions. The title page as a whole works both to establish Askew's legitimacy as a vessel for grace and prove her worthiness as an object of veneration. The implicit obstacle to this rhetorical project is the dubious moral and ethical standing in which women were placed by contemporary gender and political discourse, as alluded to by the text's references to their proverbial deceit and vanity. The full verse from Proverbs attempts to combat and counteract these inferences. Askew is referred to as a woman 'that feareth the lorde', and, as such, she is presented as worthy of praise by both the book's makers and its potential readers. By raising the question of Askew's right to speak or '[open] her mouth to wisdom', the inscription extends this justification into considerably more controversial territory. St Paul's injunction prohibiting women from preaching or teaching the Word of God was certainly contested in Reformation England, but it had received legal reinforcement several years prior to Askew's arrest for heresy through the 1543 passage of the conservative Act for the Advancement of True Religion,

which banned women from reading the Bible aloud or in public.¹⁴ The title page to Askew's *Examinations* invokes a justification of women's right to speak that would not have been available to Askew during her inquisition. In her own record of her trials by Henry's court and clerical officials, for instance, Askew is unwilling to contravene Paul's teaching. Indeed, at certain points in her narrative, she specifically employs Pauline doctrine prohibiting women's speech to defend her silence to her interrogators. The peculiar teleological position of the printed book's preface, however, provides both a pre-emptive and posthumous defence of Askew's engagement with the Bible, asserting from a retrospective vantage point that, 'in her language [was] the lawe of grace'.

The project of English and continental humanists, like the project of the early Reformers, was deeply invested in the translation of Latin and Greek texts into the vernacular languages. As a consequence, the preface plays an unusually pivotal material role in books produced throughout this period. The preface increasingly becomes the place where points of ideological resemblance and difference are elaborated and negotiated. Kevin Dunn associates the story of prefatory rhetoric with 'the story of humanism', and considers Luther's prefaces to his *Collected Works* – first in German (1539) and later in Latin (1545) – emblematic of what he calls the 'rhetorical quandary of the Protestant writer'.¹⁵ Protestant writers of the period, for whom the proliferation of Catholic glosses on the Bible were one of the principle corruptions of the Roman Church, were deeply skeptical about the value and utility of the paratext. The Reformist doctrine of *sola scriptura* – by scripture alone – rendered paratexts as a genre both extraneous and suspicious. At the same time the translations being produced at a rapid rate by Reformers required the preparation of a new kind of reader and the formulation of new reading protocols. As Dunn relates, for Luther, the problem of the preface was especially acute:

For Luther, in the discursively fallen world, the Word cannot exist without the intervening preface, and he must tackle head on the problem that his translations and commentaries are also additions to Scripture, additions that threaten to "scatter" further rather than unify Christian thought.¹⁶

¹⁴ As Heidi Brayman Hackel notes, the 1543 Act criminalized 'public reading for all English women, regardless of rank': Hackel, "'Boasting of Silence': Women Readers in a Patriarchal State", in *Reading, Society, and Politics in Early Modern England*, eds Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 101–21 (p. 103).

¹⁵ Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority*, p. 43.

¹⁶ Dunn, p. 42.

Luther's preface to the 1522 translation of the New Testament testifies eloquently to this dilemma. He writes:

It would be right and proper for this book to go forth without any preface or extraneous names attached and simply have its own say under its own name. However many unfounded interpretations and prefaces have scattered the thought of Christians to the point where no one any longer knows what is gospel or law, New Testament or Old. Necessity demands, therefore, that there be a notice, or preface, by which the ordinary man can be rescued from his former delusions, set on the right track and taught what he is to look for in this book.¹⁷

In reaction to this predicament, Dunn suggests, Luther's prefaces become 'as much spiritual autobiography as theological summa'.¹⁸ It is this 'double narrative of preface and work' that allows Luther 'to have his cake and eat it too, to show himself the unwitting servant of God's plan and a prophet who has come to an understanding of his role in that plan, an understanding that serves as the basis of his ministry'. The paradoxical proximity and distance that Luther establishes between preface and work allows him to represent himself 'as simultaneously responsible agent and mere tool'.¹⁹ This is a rhetorically fraught exercise, which Bale's edition of Askew accomplishes through a simplified division of textual labour.

The visual iconography of the woodcut is elaborated in the textual introduction Bale provides to *The First Examinacyon*, 'Johan Bale to Christen readers'. Bale begins this lengthy discourse by comparing Bede's prophecy concerning the 'horryble persecucyon' of faithful martyrs that will precede Judgement Day with the 'world's alteracyon now ... the terrible turmoylynges of our tyme' (3). He asserts that the spirit of Elijah informs the work of recent Reformist martyrs such as William Tyndale and Robert Barnes, who 'turned the hartes of the fathers into the children' and in so doing 'toke a great nombre of our nacyon, by their godlye preachynges and writynges, the corrupted beleve of the pope ... reducyng them again to the true fayth of Abraham and Peter' (4). Like Tyndale and Barnes, Bale contends, Askew and her three companions at the stake are now: 'verye gloryouse martyrs afore God, what though they be not so afore the wrong judgyng eyes of the worlde whom the bloody remnaunt of Antichrist put unto most cruell deathe in Smythfelde at London, in the yeare of our lorde, M. D. XLVI in July'

¹⁷ Luther, *Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 51 vols (St Louis: Concordia, 1955–76), xxxv (1960), 357, cited in Dunn, p. 41.

¹⁸ Dunn, p. 42.

¹⁹ Dunn, p. 43.

(5). Bale continues to argue that if Askew and her companions 'be only great before God', they are 'as was Johan Baptist':

I dare boldelye afferme these 4. myghtye witnesses also to be the same, so well as the martyrs of the prymatyve or Apostles church. For so strongelye had these those vertues as they, and so boldlye objected their bodyes to the deathe for the undefyled Christen beleve, against the malygnaunt Synagoge of Sathan (5).

Tracing her genealogy back through Barnes and Tyndale to John the Baptist and Elijah, Bale positions Askew in a line of 'undefiled', 'prymatyve' English martyrs, in contrast to what he presents as the hysterical hyperbole of Catholic saints and the contemporary clergy who venerate them. He upholds Askew's simplicity and lack of ostentation in order to denigrate by comparison the elaborate, flamboyant saints of Roman Catholicism. In marking out this comparison, Bale also foregrounds the difference between what he sees as the simplicity of Askew's narration and his own robust prefatory rhetoric. Bale was known to the more refined tastes of succeeding generations as 'Bilious Bale', and his style in this preface, as in many of his other works, is by turns crude and inflammatory, bitter, acerbic, and derogatory. Where Luther had adopted different rhetorical roles and writing styles to distinguish his preface from the Scripture he translated, Bale assumes to himself the public role of introducing Askew's text to its readers and accords her a more private position, that of 'the unwitting servant of God's plan'. Dividing the literary labour of the preface and the work, to use Dunn's rubric, Bale can applaud Askew's apparent humility while giving full reign to his own fluent stridency as a 'prophet who has come to an understanding of his role' in the divine plan. Bale here undertakes energetically what Luther had described as the purpose of the Protestant preface, 'by which the ordinary man can be rescued from his former delusions, set on the right track and taught what he is to look for in this book'. Splitting the dual roles that Luther took upon himself, the authorial apparatus to Askew's *Examinations* positions the woman writer as God's 'tool', and accords to Bale the position of 'responsible agent'.

The preface's role as the interface between the private and public worlds of the text is pertinent in this context. Bale's paratexts to the *Examinations* provide the 'trappings', to use Wall's phrase, which 'construct protocols of reading and provide the grounds on which the text is authorized'. Central to this process is Bale's representation of his own role as editor. Bale states that in recording Askew's trials he is performing a task similar to that of the 'faithful Brethren in France, in the cities of Lyon and Vienna' (10) who recorded the struggles of the martyred slave, Blandina. He draws attention to the recent spate of censorship and book burning in England and claims that he is not

afraid of his detractors: 'Nothyng at all shall it terryfy us, nor yet in anye point lett us of our purpose, that our bokes are now in Englande condemned and brent, by the Byshoppes and prestes with their frantyck affynyte' (8). Bale promises to continue to publish more books in future, including the trials of Anne Askew's companions at the stake – '[t]he handelynges of her other iii. companyons, shall be shewed in other severall treatises at layser' (7) – and he affirms that these volumes will continue the important work of conversion:

For the glorye and great power of the lorde, so manyfestlye apperynge in hys elect vessels, may not now perysh at all handes, and be unthankfully neglected but be spred the worlde over, as wele in Latyne as Englysh, to the perpetuall infamy of so wyllfullye cruell and spyghtfull tyrantes (8).

Bale presents his own job as preserving Anne Askew more perfectly than her body has been: 'Thus hath not the fyre taken Anne Askewe all whole from the worlde, but left her here unto it more pure, perfyght, and precyouse than afore' (13). A marginal notation to the text at this point records the phrase 'not all dead'. Bale thus presents his book of Askew as a more perfect, durable, eloquent text than that of her burnt body. As Kimberley Anne Coles has noted, this dynamic stages an implicit competition between the texts of Askew's body and Askew's work, with Bale taking advantage of her death to appropriate her text for his own political purposes.²⁰ While this assessment is ultimately valid, it also trades in a loaded language of loss that can distort our sense of Bale's role in the production of Askew's writing for print. Bale is, metaphorically, both a midwife to Askew's text and an embalmer of her body; his position as the (self-appointed) preserver of her text and the posthumous promoter of her work in print means that his role is not only one of simple appropriation.

Bale's representation of Askew as author can also be viewed from a number of different perspectives. On the one hand, Bale presents Askew to his readers as 'a gentlewoman very yonge, dainty and tender' who 'latelye suffered the tyrannye of this worlde for ryghtwysnesse sake' (9). Using the rhetoric of exemplarity that is a standard feature of prefaces from antiquity onwards, he compares her with 'Lydia the purple sellar' (9), who was converted by the preaching of Paul and 'the holye mayde Celia' who, like Askew, bore 'the Gospell of Christ' in her heart (9). Once she was taught the scripture without 'superstition', Bale narrates, Askew rejected the false worship and idolatry of 'the wycked schole of the Antichrist' and 'became from thensforth a true worshypper, worshyping her lorde God, (which is a

²⁰ Coles, 'Death of the Author', pp. 515–39.

sprete and not a bread) in sprete and in veryte according to that word of his, Joan 4' (9). There follows an extended point-by-point comparison between Askew and 'a lyke faithful yonge woman called Blandina': 'Blandina was yonge and tender. So was Anne Askew' (10). Bale uses this pairing to demonstrate surprising affinities between these two women, ultimately underscoring how 'that which was frail in nature of them both, Christ made most strong by his grace' (10). For Bale, both women exemplify how 'the lord choseth the foolish of this world to confound the wise, and the weak to deface the mighty' (13).

It is certainly accurate to say that Bale wilfully misrepresents the spiritually astute and rhetorically savvy Askew as 'the unwitting servant of God's plan' in his preface. Feminist scholars, myself included, have been understandably vexed by Bale's distinctly disingenuous representation of Askew's simplicity, and his propensity for focusing on only those aspects of her narrative that suit the purposes of his specific Protestant platform.²¹ On the one hand, Bale is undeniably condescending about Askew at various points in his presentation; for his providential narrative to ring true Askew must appear as a considerably less sophisticated and more passive participant in her trials than she appears in her own testimony. On the other hand, this dynamic of denigration and repression does not tell the whole story of Bale's interaction with Askew's text, even if we limit this analysis to the place of the preface. Bale's comparison between Askew and Blandina in particular highlights some of the combative and feisty qualities he admires in Askew: successive comparisons underscore Bale's approbation of Askew as 'ferventlye faythfull' (10), 'most lustye in corage', 'lyvelye and quyck' (11), 'hygh stomacked' (12), 'stowte, myghtye and earnest' (12). He clearly applauds and takes special delight in Askew's scornful derision and approbation of her accusers.

While the *First Examinacyon* records Askew's skilful attempts to evade being pinned down on her definition of the Eucharist and avoid the charge of heresy, the *Lattre Examinacyon* records her trials once the charge of heresy has been laid and she has to defend her stated position. Accordingly, the *Lattre Examinacyon* is more direct than the first and records the position Askew ultimately articulates to defend her faith. Comprised of a series of documents that mark the stages of her journey to Smithfield, the *Lattre Examinacyon* includes Askew's brief exposition on the Lord's Supper and her account of her examination before the King's Council at Greenwich where

²¹ See especially Beilin, 'A Woman for All Seasons'; Coles; Kemp, 'Translating (Anne) Askew'; Paula McQuade, "'Except That They Had Offended the Lawe": Gender and Jurisprudence in the Examinations of Anne Askew', *Literature and History*, 3.2 (1994), 1–14; and Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), chap. 2.

she was questioned about her husband, her beliefs about the sacrament, and her possible connections to Queen Katherine Parr's circle at court. Bale includes Askew's 'confessyon' of faith, various prayers and meditations, and a summary of her condemnation for heresy at Guildhall on 28 June. Also included are Askew's letters to Lord Chancellor Wriothesley and the king, and a chilling account of her transfer from Newgate to the Tower where, contrary to existing law, Wriothesley and Sir Richard Rich tortured her on the rack. The last items included are Askew's 'confessyon of faith' and the ballad she ostensibly wrote and sang in Newgate. Bale's preface to the *Lattre Examinacyon*, printed with the first edition of that volume in 1547, extends the discourse on his editorial role and provides a new contextual frame through which he encourages his audience to assess Askew's narration and its place in English religious and literary history.

The title page to the *Lattre Examinacyon* reproduces the woodcut and framing inscriptions from the *First Examinacyon*, and the biblical exegesis, this time from Joel, defiantly upholds a woman's right to prophesy:

I wyll poure out my sprete upo[n] all flesh
(sayth God) your sonnes and your dough
ters shall prophecy. And who so ever call
on the name of the lorde | shall be saved.

As has been widely noted, women occupied an unusual and ambivalent position in the religious discourse of the English Reformation. On the one hand, they were banned from preaching, speaking, and, sometimes, even reading. On the other hand, they benefited from an emerging theological egalitarianism, which argued that the Reformist cause needed to be upheld and prosecuted by *all* believers. As Susan Wabuda has argued:

For English women during the Reformation, the balance between silence and teaching was tested, especially when the appropriateness of Bible reading was at issue. The startling anomalies of children teaching their parents, of laypeople instructing the clergy, of women directing men, which accompanied the new availability of the Bible in English, represented potent threats to the usual economy of obedience and deference.²²

The title page to the *Lattre Examinacyon* locates itself firmly on the Reformist side of this struggle. And again, the paratextual apparatus of the printed book is able to claim much more for Askew than she could possibly have claimed for herself. The title page provides an external authority that grants a specific

²² Susan Wabuda, 'The Woman with the Rock: The Controversy on Women and Bible Reading', in *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: A Tribute to Patrick Collinson*, eds Wabuda and Caroline Litzenberger (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 40–59 (p. 41).

legitimacy to the woman's text that follows, positioning it firmly within a Protestant programme of Reform. Even if, as Coles has carefully argued, this programme diverges significantly from the precise terms of faith that Askew upholds in her own testimony, the paratext to Askew's printed *Examinations* staunchly, if somewhat bluntly, provides its future readers with a potent platform of justification for the author and her text.²³

John Bale's preface to the *Lattre Examinacyon*, again titled simply, 'Johan Bale to the Christen Readers' continues to elaborate his role in producing the text that follows and evinces a metatextual concern to position the book and its protagonist in what he sees as their appropriate positions in English religious and literary history. If the first preface was largely epideictic, pointing out Askew's virtues in analogy to those upheld by the martyrs of the primitive church, the second preface is more forensic in nature, arguing a specific case about the nature of martyrdom, putting forward what Bale sees as the scripturally sanctioned definition of the Christian martyr, and comparing this model with a variety of misleading 'counterfeits' and substitutes.

The centrepiece of Bale's second preface is a forensic disputation on the nature of the true martyr and an extended comparison between true and improper martyrs of various stripes. The primary antithesis Bale establishes in the second preface is that between martyrs and saints, where martyrs uphold proto-Protestant protocols and saints cling to Roman Catholic convictions. Bale's pedagogical project in this preface is to direct the reader in 'conferryng' – or comparing – these martyrs: 'the olde with the newe, and the popes with Christes' (76–77). He reports that 'Saynt Bernarde sayth in hys homelyes upon Salomons canticles, that the godlye sufferance of martyrs hath geven as good erudycyon to the christen churche, as ever ded the doctrine of the sayntes' (76). The 'confessions, causes, and answers' of the martyrs who have suffered recently at the hands of 'Antichristes furyouse advocates' are 'a great deale more notable and godlye, *if they be ryghtlye wayed*, than ever were the confessions, causes and answers of the olde canonysed martyrs, which in the popes Englysh churche have had so manye solempnytees, services, and sensynges' (76, emphasis added). The readers' 'right weighing' of the respective merits of such saints and martyrs is Bale's explicit concern in this preface. Much in the manner of a modern critical introduction, Bale provides precise directions for reading the text that follows, urging readers to discern what 'great difference is there of the martyrs whom they make, from the martyrs whom they canonyse. Of them whom thye dampen, from them whom they worshypp' (79). The double parallel of these lines underscores the technique of understatement, or litotes, that Bale unexpectedly employs in

²³ Coles, 'Death of the Author', pp. 515–39.

referring to the Catholic Church's 'making' of Protestant martyrs, a process usually achieved through particularly violent forms of torture and death.

The fulcrum of Bale's disputation on saints and martyrs is his definition of true martyrdom, which 'the lorde Jesus Christ [left] in hys holye Gospell, that we shuld always by them discerne hys true martyrs, from the popes and Mahometes counterfett martyrs'. Bale paraphrases:

I sende yow forth (sayth he) as shepe amonge wolves. Men shall delyver ye up in their counsels and synagogues. Ye shall be brought before rulers and kyniges, and be hated of all men in maner for my names sake, Mathei 10. Cast not afore in your myndes what answeere to make. For I in that houre shall geve ye both utteraunce and wysdome, whych all your adversaries shall not be hable to withstande, Luce 21. They shall excommunicate yow or condemne yow for heretyckes. Yes, they shall brynge yow in soche hate of the world, that who so ever killeth yow, wyll thynke he doth God great good service. And thys shall they do bycause they knowe ryghtlye neyther the father nor yet me, Joan 16 (77).

Throughout the second preface, Bale is at pains to distinguish, and teach, differences between 'ii kyndes of martyrs': 'one of monasterye builders and chaunterye founders' whose images 'have been sett up in their temples, lyke the olde goddes of the pagans, and have had ther vygyls, holye dayes, ryngynges, sacryfysynges, candels, offerynges, feastynges, and moch a do besides' and 'the other sort' who were 'preachers of the Gospell, or poore teachers therof in corners' who never had 'so much as a penye dyrge or a grote masse of Requiem, nomore had Johan Baptyst and Steven amonge the Jewes' (78). It is part of Bale's self-appointed editorial responsibility to draw the reader's attention to these differences, just as it is the reader's responsibility, in Bale's view, to note them properly: 'Yea, so great a difference or dyversyte betweyn them (*if ye marke them wele*) as is betwixt golde and dyrt, or light and darknesse' (79, emphasis added).

Bale proceeds to offer a Reformist critique or indictment of Catholic saints, beginning with Thomas Becket, moving though 'Wenefryd, otherwyse called Bonyface', 'Saynt Clare of Orchetre', 'Saynt Edward', 'Saynt Cadock of Cowbridge', 'Syant Elphege of Caunterburye', and 'Saynt Indract of Rome' among others. The failings of these saints are related with relish by Bale, who delights in their dubious honours and condemns their sometimes ignominious downfalls: Saint Clare who condemned lawful marriage was beheaded in his own garden 'by procurement of a woman' and 'Saint Clytanke of Southwales' was 'in lyke case' stabbed 'bycause a yonge mayden loved hym', whilst 'Saynt Thomas of Dover' was slain by the French 'for hydynge the churches jewels, crosses, chalyces and copes' (80–83). The parable behind each example is

reliably easy to read; Bale is nothing if not thorough in foregrounding the meat of his own matter. Thus: 'The martydome of Anne Askewe and her Bretherne, was neyther in battelynge nor huntynge, rydyng nor drynkyng, but in that right course whych Christ prescribed unto hys dyscyples under the cruel Byshoppes, for hys only glorye' and 'The cause of Anne Askew and her companions was neyther madnesse nor moneye, but only the sekynge of their lorde God a right' (81).

Bale is also extremely explicit in his directions to the reader, setting out new protocols of 'diligent' reading for the apprehension of a new type of Christian martyr: 'In the conferryng of their olde canonysed martyrs with our newlye condemned martyrs here, Anne Askew and her other iii companions, with soch lyke, their difference wyll be moch more easilye perceived (79). Bale elucidates, with occasionally excruciating precision, the ways he wants readers to respond to his disputation: 'Compare me Anne Askewe and her condemned cumpanye, with these clowted, canonysed, solempnysed, sensed, mattensed, and massed martyrs and tell me by the Gospels tryall, which of them seme most Christenlyke martyrs' (84). Bale helpfully foregrounds the literary machinery of his didactic programme: 'Soch pyled popysh martyrdoms, compared to the martyrdom of Anne Askew and her faythfull cumpanye, is as rustye yron to pure sylver' (83). Leaving little if anything to readerly interpretation, he hedges and hastens his readers into his own interpretive framework:

In all these Englysh martyrs reherced here afore, ye shall fynde verye fewe coloures or yet tokens, that Christ sayd hys martyrs shuld be knowne by, unlesse ye take pylgrymages, pompes rellyckes, women, battles, huntynge, ydelnesse, monkeryes, moneye, treasure, worldlye kyngdomes, contempt of marriage, supersticyons and soch other vanytees for them (85).

Returning to the terms of his previous definition of true martyrdom, Bale satirizes the distance between the Gospel's words and their Catholic interpretations.

In the tradition of forensic rhetoric, Bale's return to what he presents as the Gospel's definition of the Christian martyr provides the crux of his disputation. He presents Askew and the three companions who joined her at the stake as the very models of the modern Protestant martyr:

If ye marke wele these ii examynacyons of Anne Askewe, ye shall fynde in her and in her other iii companions ... the expresse tokens that Christ sealeth hys martyrs with. They apered as shepe amonge wolves. Thy were throwne in stronge preson. Their answeres were out of God's sprete (as herin apereth) and not out of their owne. Thy were ryvyled, mocked, stocked, racked, execrated, condemned, and murdered, as is sayd afore.

By a spirytualte also, as he promised they shuld be, Math 23 and 24 (85–86).

Agreeing in all points with his approved biblical precedent, the fate of Askew and her three companions conforms to, and in doing so confirms, the Gospel's prophecies Bale has already cited.

In the opening lines of the second preface Bale provides the textual precedent for the literary labour he undertakes in framing Askew's *Examinations* for the public: 'In the prymatyve church, as the horryble persecucyons increased, manye dylygent writers collected the godlye answers and tryumphaut sufferynges of the martyrs, as neccessarye examples of Christen constancye to be folowed of other' (75). In providing his own frame for Askew's testimony, Bale draws attention to both the risk of his enterprise and the importance of its prosecution: 'No lesse neccessarye is that offyce now, though fewe men attempt it, nor no lesse profitable to the christen commonwelth than it was in those terrible dayes' (75). At the conclusion to the second preface, Bale returns to the stakes of his unelected 'offyce', presenting his version of Askew's *Examinations* as a text in direct competition with the 'spyghtful sermons and wrytynges' to be seen 'in the bokes of wynchester and Peryn' (86). In pre-emptive response to his detractors' imagined backlash, Bale rails:

let those Epycures pygges dampnen them with as manye blasphemouse lyes as they can ymagyne. ... And we shall on the other side canonyse them agayne with the myghtye wordes and promises of Christ, which they shall never be hable to resist (86).

The plural 'we' that Bale mobilizes in the last lines of this preface acknowledges his participation in a wider Reformist literary project, one in which he played a leading role from his continental exile and in which editing and publishing such texts as Askew's was an aggressive, volatile, and dangerous undertaking. Bale's final words in the second preface are thus appropriately an invocation for divine sanction and support of this communal endeavour:

The father of our lorde Jesus Christ, graunt the light of hys worde so to sprede the worlde over that the darke mystes of Sathan maye clerelye be expelled, to the specyall comfort of hys redemmed church, and the glorie of hys eternall name (86).

Together, Bale's prefaces to the *Examinations of Anne Askew* highlight the political and physical dangers involved in producing Askew's testimony in material book form in the fierce factionalism of Henry VIII's final years. Bale's reflections on his own role as editor, his representation of Askew as an exemplary Christian martyr in both the 'primitive' and recent history of the

Reformed Church, and his lively, learned, passionate, and partisan disputation on the nature of true martyrdom provide valuable insights into the production of women's writing in early modern print culture and a remarkably self-reflexive example of the authorial apparatus deemed necessary to safeguard the printed book's passage to its prospective audience. Bale's prefaces are minutely concerned with directing readerly engagement into what are for him the preferred, indeed the necessary, channels of interpretation. Despite his obvious 'man-handling' of Askew's text – his belittling or misleading representation of her intelligence and rhetorical sophistication, his subjection of her own testimony to his voluminous critical apparatus, and the subsequent revision of her stated religious convictions that occurs as a result of this process – Bale's prefaces, and indeed his paratexts in general, speak to the specific historical conditions in which Askew's text was produced for its first public audience: the battle between Catholic and Protestant definitions of martyrdom; the contested role of women in interpreting and embodying the Scripture; and the role of print in representing these struggles. Prefaces such as Bale's played an undeniably important role in the material production, circulation, and reception of women's texts in the English Reformation and as such they offer new opportunities to explore the authorial apparatus of Englishwomen's writing in its earliest printed phase.

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