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TO WRITE A LIFE: THREE WOMEN IN HISTORY

By

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B.A. University of Louisville, 2008
M.A. University of Louisville, 2009

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities

Department of Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 28, 2016

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ABSTRACT

TO WRITE A LIFE: THREE WOMEN IN HISTORY

Justy Engle

July 28, 2016

This creative and critical hybrid dissertation explores the spiritual connections between three women in distinctly different time periods: contemporary America, nineteenth century America and early fifteenth century France. The overall dissertation explores the *autogenealogobiography*, what the author defines as the self-writings of women composed within a specific time period in relation to the current moment and generations of ancestral women. The objective of the creative texts is to record the spiritual journeys of life for the women who will come after for the purpose of encouraging careful observation of history so that women will be able to note and internalize how identification of one's own identity impacts the shift from subjugated passive observer to authoritative active participant.

The critical chapters situate the women in the creative chapters in their respective time periods in relation to relevant historical figures. The creative chapters focus on the spiritual, emotional, cultural and psychological issues associated with the position of women in society in relation to religion, family, trauma and career. The creative chapters also focus specifically on the resultant choices and associated negative

consequences. The critical chapters provide the framework, including the theoretical implications of the time period in relation to the women of the creative texts.

The first chapter provides the critical framework that sets up the paired creative text of the second chapter. The critical chapter, chapter one, focuses on eighteenth century female Quaker public friend Elizabeth Ashbridge and the creative chapter, chapter two, focuses on twenty-first century Justy Engle (1986-present). Chapter one includes a reading of Daniel Shea's critical edition of Ashbridge's text and looks at it in relation to Christine Levenduski's portrayal of the figure in *Peculiar Power* while also navigating the emotional and spiritual ramifications of the poor choices Ashbridge made in allowing herself to be passive rather than active in her life. The second chapter focuses on Justy and, through a series of vignettes, records pivotal emotions, events and prayers that demonstrate how the author created her own life. The italicized portions of the text indicate a glossing of the original text at a point later in life for the character. Both the glossing and the original text touch on the resonances of cultural trauma as present in the life of the individual.

Chapter three, also a critical chapter, treats cultural trauma and considers nineteenth century American women's life writings in order to make way for the character of Laura Ellen Hunt Short (1860-1951) in the creative Chapter four. Chapter three focuses on the differences between belief and action in women's autobiographical texts, focusing on the paratext of nineteenth century Lucy Larcom's *A New England Girlhood* as typical of a spiritually mature writer in a secular text; Elizabeth Cady Stanton's autobiographical text serves as a non-example. Chapter three utilizes Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* as well as Paul John Eakin's *American*

Autobiography, How Our Lives Become Stories, Touching the World and *Fictions in Autobiography* to examine the applications of the criticism on women's autobiographical texts. Chapter four focuses on the lack of fulfillment in the life of Laura and how the dissonance between the character's orthodoxy and orthopraxy result in a disintegration of self and a lack of true fulfillment and purpose in life. Through a series of chronologically organized vignettes and accompanying later glossings, Laura demonstrates the essence of what it means to be subtly and substantively influenced by the broader cultural trauma and what it means to stand in the liminal space in a liminal state in a post-Civil War community. While Laura ultimately comes to the conclusion about who she is in relation to God, she does not become the fully realized person she hopes to be in her nearly ninety years of life.

Chapters five and six focus on Christine de Pizan (1364-ca. 1430), with her life as the first professional female writer in the critical chapter and the underlying emotional implications as evidenced through her self-writings in the creative chapter. The critical chapter seeks to ground her in regard to her predecessors such as St. Augustine and in regard to her contemporaries such as Eustache Deschamps. The intersections of the work of scholars such as Charity Cannon Willard, Earl Jeffrey Richards and Liliane Dulac are present. Chapter six seeks to illumine the parts of Christine's life that were not recorded in her extant texts and to demonstrate how the cognitive dissonance between her orthodoxy and orthopraxy demonstrate her true beliefs. The reading of Christine's overall works includes a brief exploration of her theology, focusing on *The Book of the City of Ladies*, *The Treasury of the City of Ladies* and, arguably her most autobiographical text, *The Vision*.

The dissertation concludes with a thorough explanation of *autogenealogobiography* and its resonances throughout the text.

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PREFACE

The poet is an artist whose words assign meaning to moments, just as a painter's brushstrokes assign meaning to blank canvas. The poet values words and how the words function to paint the image. In considering this project, I thought about curated museum exhibits and how narratives are demonstrated through the specific placement of the objects and the order of presentation, while, ultimately, the objects themselves tell a fragmented story. However, as I thought of this in relation to the objects of my own family story, it became clear that the disparate objects and moments connected to form a broader narrative. I began to consider the idea of telling a story through moments in the way that a curator tells a story through objects. I asked several questions that guided my research and writing: How do we tell a story when the objects are absent? How does that absence change how we tell a story? What does the lack of a narrative arc do to the creative work or to the curated exhibit? How do the ideas of preservation of a quilt as a piece of history run counter to the use of a quilt into its eventual deterioration in "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker? How do we apply the lessons from this story to other objects? Do objects only hold cultural and family capital if they are recorded in stories or books or the memories of later generations?

I noted that writing moments down and recording them for later reflection helped me to file each as a distinct memory. Prior to my own recorded history, I used vague phrases and platitudes to capture an essence of an idea of several connected moments;

sensory details were brief and minor. This is why I only remember one “letter person,” a letter from the alphabet mimeographed onto a piece of paper—the purple outline effervescing the distinctive, disgusting aroma off the page—glued to folded paper arms and legs, from learning the alphabet in Kindergarten, even though I am quite certain another 25 exist. Prior to that event, my memory is laced with touch, and I can see my three-year-old hands and I can feel the indentations in the carpet left by the desk my father wrote his sermons on, and the stink of the burly men who picked it up and put it in the moving truck. I remember, too, the overwhelming absence I sank into when it was the last piece of furniture removed from the living room. *What does it mean?* I thought. But I had no answers. I had questions. Questions followed me from that brown carpet to the next brown carpet, and when I smell finches I can still feel the stairs sliding out from under my legs as I bumble down to the yellow wallpaper below and towards the kitchen to feed Cucumber, the lone white finch.

The light memories give way to darker realities and in my adolescence I gravitated towards stories told in epistles and diaries. They were more honest, more intimate. Reading those autobiographical texts was the closest I could come to meeting the authors. I attempted to discern the authorial intentions and the hopes and dreams behind the words on the page. How did the stories the authors told resonate within their own minds? Why were the stories important? How did they thread disparate ideas together? During this process I became my own autobiographer, writing a diary not because I’d seen Anne Frank’s and wanted my life to matter, but because I learned that just the act of writing was a catharsis that could relieve the pain of the emotional deaths that I experienced almost daily. Each day I could write out what happened and I could

bury some of that death and breathe in new life. Every morning the sun would come up and I would breathe out that life throughout the day until I was an emotional train wreck by sundown and needed to cry in my room lit by my black and blue lava lamp and write.

Whether I agreed or disagreed with an author I read, the resultant work I created after interaction with a text created a dissonance in my work and a *différance* of which Derrida might be proud. I became increasingly interested in how hybridity creates a text. As I read Derrida and Foucault alongside C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, I read biographical information on all of them and kept writing. The truth I found is that these writers have much to say about their own lives, even within their fictions. I found this as true of Christine de Pizan as I did of Dante, who both used themselves as characters in their fictional texts.

As I was writing from my own perspective and revisiting the experiences that had shaped me, the image of the ouroboros kept cropping up again in my old journals. Finally, I remembered several youth fiction books I had read over a decade ago during the time I was involved in an abusive relationship. One of those books was a dark fantasy novel, *The Riddles of Epsilon* by Christine Morton-Shaw. As the lead female character solves riddles and leans on her own courage to arrive at the resolution, the image of the ouroboros becomes increasingly prevalent. As I researched this image further, I realized that it was present in mythologies around the world and was essentially an ancient symbol rife with mysticism. The idea of the snake as a negative image had been passed on to me from an oral Biblical tradition in Sunday School, especially in Genesis when the serpent tempts Eve. I thought about Mircea Eliade's myth of the eternal return and the philosophical concept of eternal recurrence and intellectually

played with merging the ideas. While Eliade separated the sacred and the profane in religious theory, in my mind I wanted the ouroboros to connect the two and ground them in reality. The only problem with the image of the ouroboros was that it was decidedly negative because of my earlier religious connotations with the snake. In the following work, it becomes a complex negative image: while cycles of life and death are inevitable, the ouroboros prevents thriving life from taking place because it seeks to make events happen again and again without growth or real, positive change. I could not thrive in an endless circle because I had to believe that change was possible so that I would be able to move forward from the abuse and never repeat that particular cycle. The ouroboros, then, reflects fear, doubt and the perceived inevitabilities of life.

The more I researched into my family histories, the more I realized that story cycles repeated across generations. I kept asking why. Then I had to ask myself whether I believed it was important to tell a story that had already been told. I decided that the answer was yes, but only if it was from a different perspective. I wrote from the perspectives of Christine de Pizan and Laura Ellen Hunt Short, not because I believed the world needed another poem from Christine, but because I believed I could tell a story through alternate text that discerned the emotional root of the poems she actually wrote. By writing from the perspectives of Christine and Laura, I believed I could give them a voice that the cultures of their lives would not allow. I wanted to present an emotionally honest portrayal, a piece of work that derives from the soul of each woman: her thoughts, feelings and emotions. Instead, I wanted to focus on one thread, one family, and learn how to write the literary moments and pull the threads like the Fates. I had to admit that I was not a Muse living to inspire beauty as a writer, but I was a one-eyed old hag who

shared an eye with two other women across time. For my own story, my own spiritual autobiography, I realized that the work I was doing was not unlike St. Augustine or Thomas Merton, because both of those men wrote out their spiritual autobiographies—honestly confessing their faults—before composing other creative spiritual works.

In my initial writings about Christine, I had thought of her too narrowly, without the spiritual component that her Catholicism indicated: as a proto-feminist anarchist. I did not call her an anarchist, but that is certainly the tone that I wove through my early writings. I wanted her to be my symbol, my guide. The more I read about her life and her culture, the systems she navigated and her poised politic, the more I realized that I had figured her incorrectly. Christine truly was more like Laura and me than I had ever expected: she was human. She was educated on texts and how to live well in her social context. She learned to think critically and did not stop when her knowledge of facts told her that no woman had done what she planned to do—she took care of herself and her family. She wrote. She woke up every day and lived her life. Nothing I have read leads me to believe she intended to spearhead a movement of female authors. I mulled this over for a long time, realizing my attitude towards her had to change so I could appreciate her as a person instead of the initial spark of feminist ideology. In planning and revising her creative chapter, I had to adapt how I wanted to express her internal strength of character and the timeless message of her life.

Not only was it necessary to learn more about Christine and Laura and myself, to read a variety of literary and critical texts, but I also had to reflect on the visual artists whose works had inspired me. Salvador Dali was my touchstone, and I had the opportunity to view several of his works in person when I visited Madrid in 2006. The

one that touched my heart most was “Woman at the Window,” but at that point I could not discern the reason. As I have gone back and revisited the dissertation in several rounds of editing, I have found that the idea of the window increasingly appeared. I can remember the earliest instances of hearing what windows were and the idea that eyes were the windows to the soul sat heavy on my heart when I was a child. What was a soul? I knew what eyes were and what windows were, but what was a soul? As I played with the idea of the soul in my own writing and how it factored into my own faith and whether I believed that souls could be saved or lost, I kept coming back to Dali’s “Woman at the Window.” Her external world reflected her internal thoughts, feelings and emotions. Was it the soul, then, that was the embodiment of these thoughts, feelings and emotions? For me, the answer became yes.

Ultimately, my ideas merged the critical and creative, the crux where perception and reality meet. What would happen if I could trace back my story, to create and connect a poet’s moments of the times I wrote and Laura read and Christine prayed? This became a hybrid series of snapshots of three lives that incorporates historical elements, an understanding of texts contemporary to the women, and their thoughts as I imagined them to make the story a more complete narrative.

INTRODUCTION

Discerning the function of autobiography has always produced within me the discourse of non-fictive creation and lived action. The distinction between creation and action is a nuanced space that recalls the theory of the Bakhtinian heteroglossia.¹ For M.M. Bakhtin, heteroglossia “is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse...[it] expresses simultaneously...the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author.”² Within the texts, the author’s true thoughts and feelings do not necessarily coincide with the character that represents her, and it is through specific diction that the liminality between character and author is refracted. As we consider the ways in which words and personal interpretations of words guide the audience’s understanding, we are left to consider the manner by which the autobiographer utilizes words that have clear denotations and less clear connotations—at least to the audience. While one autobiographer, Elizabeth Ashbridge for instance, uses Light to clearly describe a connection to God, another might use it as it is defined presupposing only an understanding of it in relation to the Enlightenment. The difference between the secular and sacred in creation and action is just as important. On

¹ M.M. Bakhtin, in what has been translated into English as *The Dialogic Imagination*, discusses what he calls the heteroglossia in the chapter “Discourse in the Novel.” Heteroglossia comes from the Greek and translates as different languages. In this chapter, Bakhtin theorizes the purpose of the heteroglossia within the text and explores how the differences in language and speakers function to further authorial intentions.

² Bakhtin 324.

one hand, the secular precludes an understanding of the divine, but only in that it separates the divine from certain aspects of life. On the other hand, the sacred necessitates a thorough understanding of how the Divine functions. The reality is that the Divine and non-Divine come together to form a cohesive picture of life. The two cannot be so easily separated, especially for the spiritual autobiographer. The spiritual autobiographer, in the intentional later in life autobiographical mode, sees the evidence and presence of the Divine in all secular activities. The presence rather than the absence becomes the point of active reflection in the present on the lives of the past. It is within this space that often creation takes place as the autobiographer reconsiders the past in terms of new understanding. The creative part of this project attempts to gloss the original creative texts, specifically segments that do not imply deeper spiritual levels of self-awareness, with a later in life understanding of the present and how the past influenced the present to form new spiritual connections and conclusions. Rather than allow the project to devolve into disjointed stories of lamentation, my goal is to use chronological vignettes from life to demonstrate the ways in which the autobiographer's later lives differed from their earlier lives to show the internal spiritual growth of the characters. The underlying premise that allows me to perform this act is that human nature is consistent throughout history; we instinctively act and react in specific ways when we are born and, through education both formal and informal, we discover more in depth ideas about ourselves and function within the parameters of society to become functioning adults who, ideally, are at peace with the lived reality of the present moment. Autobiography, then, becomes prosopopoeial act, as Paul John Eakin notes in his

assessment of the theories of Philippe Lejeune, Paul de Man and James Olney.³ The theoretical framework for this project derives primarily from Eakin because of the nature of his texts and context and his informed interpolations of the meanings of the texts of the other critical theorists, not to exclude them from the discussion of autobiography but to allow focus to move to the synthesis of texts and mirror the ways in which I will explore female autobiography as a relation of the intellectual traditions of autobiography as passed down in the process of female synthesis in regard to female interpretations of female autobiographical subjects.

I have chosen to focus on southern women's spiritual autobiography as distinct from traditional male models of autobiographical constructs. I have also chosen to focus this dissertation on three women in different time periods, connected by what I am suggesting is a genealogical connection.⁴ If the thread of genealogy weaves across time the similar ideologies and personality traits, then the case study across the generations should assist scholars in accessing the lived truths of the female autobiographers. In the cases of lack of autobiographical accounts for a time period or person, we can interpolate between the other genealogical connections a supposed reality that could have taken place internally for other women at a place on the continuum. By connecting historical information and remembered stories from my own childhood, I have created the spiritual autobiography of my three times great grandmother. I have also pulled biographical data from Christine de Pizan's texts to create the internal emotional implications and

³ Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 186-7, 189.

⁴ In order to understand how "autobiography both cultivates and resists a genealogical impulse in its inclination," see "Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree," by theorist Julia Watson, part of the larger study edited by Watson & Sidonie Smith, *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, 319.

unwritten prayers.⁵ Christine begins her autobiographical *L'Avison*, “avis mestoit que mon esperit laissoit son corps et par exemple tout ainsi que maintes fois en songe ma semble que mon corps en lair voulast mestoit adonc avis que par le souffiement de divers vens mon esperit translate estoit en une contree tenebreuse.”⁶ Christine’s thoughts are not recorded in journals, so I seek to narrate her thoughts in poetry and prose to illustrate that her spiritual inner journey is consistent with those of women who followed her. Although external circumstances varied across the centuries, the parallels in the lives and spiritual journeys of the three women in this project are striking. Each woman undergoes challenges and emotional effects in different time periods and processes through the necessary stages at different rates, but each retains the same end goal regardless of process and critical discussion of the time period: to live.

This dissertation accedes the challenge of hybridity: combining critical and creative texts for the purpose of exploring the narrative arc that flows, or doesn’t flow, through a person’s life. The stories of me, my ancestor “Black Ma” Laura Ellen Hunt Short, and Christine de Pizan, a woman whom I adopted as the beginning of my literary heritage, are spiritual journeys. In composing the creative spiritual autobiographies, I drew from the unusual Quaker autobiography *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge* and the spiritual exercises in the teachings of St. Ignatius. As I

⁵ For grounding critical texts that informed the study, see Alcuin Blamires’ “Women and Creative Intelligence in Medieval Thought,” Juliette Dor’s *Christine de Pizan: Une Femme de Science, Une Femme des Lettres*, and, one that considers the authority of women in more depths, Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski’s *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. See also Mary-Ann Stouck’s *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 156-188, that focuses on the life and letters of Catherine of Siena (ca.1347-1380), a woman who intellectually and chronologically precedes Christine. Katherine Lewis’ “Model Girls? Virgin-Martyrs and the Training of Young Women in Late Medieval England” also discusses Catherine.

⁶ 6, edition by Mary Towner. Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard translate it as, “It seemed to me that my spirit left my body, and in example, as happens many times in dreams, it seemed that my body was flying in mid-air; and then it seemed to me that by the force of many winds, my spirit was being carried into a shadowy country,” 18.

considered the texts that each woman wrote and the memory that each left behind in their former communities, I theorized that the issues within each woman's life were microcosms of the intellectual growing pains of the macrocosm of female community in each one's time period.⁷ The gaps between what is known and not known for each woman is vast, so it is through these creative texts that I seek to fill in the gaps and understand what absence meant for their lives and hypothesize what it meant for the lives of those in the communities around them. I focused on the cultural trauma in the lives of each and considered how the emotions of traumatic or triggering situations overwhelm the women such that as a result they cannot even think clearly or pray with confidence.⁸ Cultural trauma, according to Jeffrey Alexander, "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways."⁹ As the individual is affected by the trauma of the culture, the experience of the community reflects the interweavings of the individual stories¹⁰ within the greater cultural narrative. Narratives are not created in isolation, but are framed utilizing texts and ideologies that are familiar to or resonate with the larger community. In discerning the purpose of the individual life and the individual text, the cultural trauma can be framed according to broader cultural narratives to provide a

⁷ For an understanding of Christine with a focus on her birthplace, see David Herlihy's "Women and the Sources of Medieval History: The Towns of Northern Italy."

⁸ See Alexander Jeffrey's *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* for a sociological perspective on their theory of cultural trauma in understanding the formation of social responsibility. I create my own theory of cultural trauma in its relation to life writings in American women's texts.

⁹ Alexander 1.

¹⁰ Paul John Eakin suggests in *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* that "our life stories...in a profound and inescapable way are us," x. It is this idea that I draw from to suggest that we can define the character of the author through the ways in which she writes of herself because she is actually composing her textual self. This theory is present throughout Eakin's other texts, expounded upon theoretically and critically in this particular volume.

framework that functions for recording and reflecting on specific meaningful memories in the lives of the individual.

This project focuses on autobiography as the framing of the internal life within the context of external events as lived by the narrator-creator.¹¹ The project uses biographical information as necessary in the critical framing chapters in order to connect the historical figures within the context of time and within particular literary traditions. Specifically, this project considers the distinction between types of female secular texts with a Christian focus, beginning with a study of a Quaker minister, Elizabeth Ashbridge, to discern the points at which the spiritual and divine intersect in the text.¹² William Scheick explains, “a logogic site is a textual locus where the author or reader is invited to hesitate and contemplate the confluence of secular and divine meanings.”¹³ In considering the ways Ashbridge’s early American transcontinental text works, I frame my own autobiographical narrative, as both address issues of abuse and the demonic context of the proposition of self-harm. The logogic site for Ashbridge and my own narrative is a space between the mind, the center of knowledge, and the heart, the center of emotion. Between these two centers intellectual and experiential knowledge fight against perceptions and physiological implications of life events ranging from embarrassment to true joy. Around the age of fourteen, the ability to discern the overpowering of the mind by the heart becomes increasingly difficult for the both

¹¹ In discussing regionalism as empathetic in nature, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse argue for the use of Aristotle’s poetics in theorizing an understanding of regionalism and how it relates to literature in chapter four of their book *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*. See 105-107 for the specific portion that applies to part of a consideration toward empathy in the narrator, specifically when writing out of a particular geographic space.

¹² See Kathryn Kerby-Fulton’s “When Women Preached: An Introduction to Female Homiletic, Sacramental, and Liturgical Roles in the Later Middle Ages,” for the early roots of the tradition out of which Elizabeth Elkin Grammer’s women in *Some Wild Visions* formed.

¹³ Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, 1.

autobiographical narrators Ashbridge and Justy, and each spends a considerable amount of their adult lives recreating themselves through the narrative force of the autobiographical impulse. Doing so sets in order the events of their youth for the purposes of achieving order amidst the chaos of poor choices.

As Mary Carruthers reminds us in *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, “even though the physiology of consciousness was known to occur entirely in the brain, the metaphoric use of *heart* for memory persisted.”¹⁴ The use of heart suggests that an emotional connection is bound together with the remembered moment. As a result, there is risk in conflating the emotion with the memory and remembering it askance. There are pieces of the heart that hold together, pieces that meld, and—when your mind wanders and questions the validity of memory—pieces that are incongruous and retrieved as answers that don’t necessarily fit the moment. Following the idea that these pieces are part of a lived reality, I turn to the suggestions of twenty-first century literary non-fiction writers to discern their suggestive models as I create and incorporate my own poetics in my creative texts. While there is a preponderance of nonfiction in the twenty-first century, writers Anne Lamott and Phillip Lopate provide guidance for the aspiring literary non-fiction writer. In the creative autobiography for the character of Justy, especially, I utilize Lopate’s suggestions that the autobiographer should turn the self into a character by starting with the quirks. It is necessary to “maximize that pitiful set of quirks, those small differences that seem to set us apart from others, and project them theatrically, the way actors work with singularities in their physical appearance or vocal texture.”¹⁵ By focusing on the miniscule unique

¹⁴ Carruthers 59. Use of italics hers.

¹⁵ Lopate 18-19.

aspects of the characters, I can demonstrate through actions the ways in which the characters present themselves and represent themselves to others. As Lopate advises, the backgrounds and circumstances of each individual character set each apart and make each a distinct and worthwhile character. Lamott's writing suggests an agreement with this idea and enhances it by explaining, "a person's faults are largely what make him or her likeable."¹⁶ It is these faults and idiosyncrasies that make a character dimensional rather than flat, what I believe is an essential component in autobiographical writing so that the audience sees the created characters clearly.

The project then follows along the space between Ashbridge and me, taking into consideration southern women's writing and more feminist approaches and how these intersect and miss the mark in regard to an antebellum Kentucky. Specifically, I consider Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* as the core theoretical text for the chapter, incorporating the prefaces of the autobiographical texts of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Larcom, women who would have been representative of the time period of the second autobiographical narrator, Laura. Suzanne Bunkers' reading of "Diaries and Dysfunctional Families," along with several other texts from the volume *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, including Helen Buss' "A Feminist Reading of New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing," provided a basis for considerations of life writing in the form of diary. Although the creative chapters are not explicitly diary entries, many have a similar personal tone that necessitate the reader to consider the chronology of the text and how

¹⁶ Lamott, *Bird by Bird*, 50.

re-living memory affects the ways in which it is recorded and later reflected upon for the purposes of psychological and intellectual growth and development.

Since memory is not a tangible creation, it is not surprising that it flows with time. We recall dreams as memories and they merge with reality. It is here in the merging of remembered memory that chronicled thoughts in journals and recorded unbiased truth meet the page and become creative nonfiction. As Margot Singer suggests in her essay “On Convention,” “creative nonfiction may be polymorphous, and may resist easy categorization, but it’s rooted in convention all the same.”¹⁷ Creative nonfiction, then, is a way to make conventional this unconventional blending of the activities of the self. In composing creative nonfiction, the autobiographer must create a new text, utilizing or not utilizing the traditional conventions as he or she sees fit. The true canonical writers, then, are those who discern how to provide language to express the inexplicable. Augustine draws on his study to provide the first western autobiographical text and the frame so many later autobiographers use to compose their own texts.

Life writing encourages an understanding of the implications of one’s past on one’s present. For women, this process involves being an outsider in the sense that Carolyn Heilbrun refers to it in *Reinventing Womanhood*, those who are excluded “from the cultural patterns of bonding at the heart of society, at its centers of power.”¹⁸ Stripped powerless, in a sense, women must discern how to appropriately interpret their lives and subsequently narrate them to present a viable narrative, structured either in relation or opposition to the traditional patriarchal narratives. Heilbrun further notes that outsiders

¹⁷ Singer 141.

¹⁸ Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood*, 37-38. See also Heilbrun’s *Writing a Woman’s Life* for a critical feminist study on the struggles of female writers Adrienne Rich, George Sand, Dorothy Sayers and Virginia Woolf in composing their texts.

“may gain strength in their reaction to exclusion if they bond among themselves, offering each other comradeship, encouragement, protection, support.”¹⁹ This project seeks to bond three outsiders and define their emotional connections through their compositions while also acknowledging the reflective space each creates through the original text and the subsequent glossing to create the fullness of life within the text.

The distinctions between the past and present helped me to determine that one purpose of life writing is to preserve the lessons learned within an individual life for the edification of the audience. Working from that premise, and from the ideas that James Olney presents in his essay “Memory and the Narrative Imperative,” the following dissertation is a creative and critical hybrid that seeks to discern how the interplay between the memory and the glossing of texts and the critical scholarly works, perceive a reasonable intertextual representation of work and life. How does the purpose of the life function in relation to the critical defenses of the scholars in the field? If one enters into the critical conversation under the assumption that education in terms of the autobiographical narrative is unnecessary, one is unable to perform the appropriate educational and critical maneuvers within the framework of the narrative. As one discerns the appropriate means to educational proficiency in this area, one discovers that the andragogical realm is the best place for knowledge to occur.²⁰ The pedagogical realm is essential in childhood, but if adults do not become self-directed in their search for knowledge and develop an understanding of how to manage their own lives and learning

¹⁹ Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood*, 38.

²⁰ Education theorist Malcolm Knowles provides an in depth study of the terms and defines them in *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*.

within structured frameworks, they are relegated to slippages between expectations and reality.

In the same way that concepts like andragogical and pedagogical demonstrate two perspectives to help necessitate an understanding of education by comparison, there are other conceptual models to help explain memory. Addressing the theoretical implications of memory, I turn to comparative theories explored by James Olney, in “Memory and the Narrative Imperative,” in which he discusses Augustine and Samuel Beckett; he explains that there are two different kinds of models used to explain memory, processual and archaeological. In considering the processual metaphor of weaving, Olney elucidates, “the weaver’s shuttle and loom constantly produce new and different patterns, designs and forms, and if the operation of memory is, like weaving, not archaeological but processual, then it will bring forth ever different memorial configurations and an ever newly shaped self.”²¹ It is this idea of the newly shaped self that functions in the glossing of the remembered texts in the creative chapters. In addition, Lucy Larcom’s preface to *A New England Girlhood* embodies the theoretical models presented in the glossing of the chronological events in the creative chapters. Larcom also necessitates an inclusivist poetic model of her own life and works for the purpose of excavating her past through a lens of objectivity to present it through a re-creative process. My philosophy for study, while informed by archaeological concepts, is ultimately concerned with the creation of memory and the resulting reflection after new experiences are added to the author’s mind, thus shaping the philosophical practice of each autobiographical author. The dissonance between the gloss and the original action represent the internal growth of each woman,

²¹ Olney 874.

and the distinctions between knowledge and belief become more evident to demonstrate the theological and philosophical constructs the women have chosen for their own lives.

CHAPTER 1 – AMERICAN WOMEN’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY: BRINGING LIGHT TO LIFE

“I want to love. Oh God please make my mind clear. Please make it clean.”

-*A Prayer Journal* Flannery O’Connor

The impulse to write about life is one that can be traced from self-indulgent online tweets to Augustine’s *Confessions* to hieroglyphic stories that meld man and myth. The autobiography is a form that sets in print the myth of the person as he or she wishes to be mythologized. Not only does she mythologize herself, but she incorporates others into her texts to further define her story. In Audre Lorde’s biomythography *Zami*, she explains, “every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me—so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her.”²² Even in this very revealing self-portrait, Lorde knows that she must include the lives of others in order to adequately narrate her autobiography. The autobiography is not a work of isolation, as the definition suggests, rather it is the connecting of disparate lives by one person in order to understand his or her existence. It is a way to make sense of the synchronicities of life. Doing so offers the author the opportunity to recognize the pieces of her soul that she sees in others and write the links using words to define them as part of her own self, which I explore critically in this

²² 255.

chapter. In the creative section that accompanies this chapter, I begin to connect the threads of the first of three women across distinct time periods in order that they might be more fully developed as characters and the idiosyncrasies each exhibits in her life may become evident to demonstrate the similarities in human behavior consequent to familial experiences and cultural traumas regardless of place in history. The creative section textually demonstrates the beauty of autobiographical writing as a meaning-making activity, thereby allowing the autobiography to become a work of art through which the author elucidates and illuminates portions of herself that may otherwise be obscured by the trivialities of daily life; indeed, the art gives light to the soul of the author.

In this chapter, I will focus on Elizabeth Ashbridge's spiritual autobiography, *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge*,²³ in order to note the intersections between her eighteenth century text, the creative autobiographies I have composed for the three women, and the author as a character in contemporary literary non-fiction.²⁴ The key motifs of submission and agency are evident throughout all of these works regardless of time periods. The purpose of this chapter is to present a model of how the author develops an appropriate character for herself then illustrates that development through the author's use of language and curated events.²⁵ This chapter sets the following creative autobiographical account in context. In order to do this, I draw

²³ For a deeper understanding of Ashbridge's Epistle to the Goshen Monthly Meeting and how it relates to the autobiographical text, see Elisabeth Ceppi's "In the Apostle's Words" in *Legacy*. Ceppi discusses the "prophetic and apostolic models of spiritual witness" and explains that Ashbridge focuses on the relationship between body and spirit as "dialectic rather than dyadic." 143, 145.

²⁴ Felicity Nussbaum suggests that eighteenth century autobiography is a "matrix where gender and identity meet, a common place where individual women's subject positions converge," 150.

²⁵ For an exploration of the fictionalization in diary for early American women, including Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727), Esther Edwards Burr (1732-58), Sarah (Sally) Wister (1761-1804), Anne Home (Nancy) Shippen Livingston (1763-1841), and Margaret Van Horn Dwight Bell (1790-1834), see Steven Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna's "Rewriting Her Life: Fictionalization and the use of Fictional Models in Early American Women's Diaries."

from Paul John Eakin's theory in which he proposes, "the autobiographical act as both a re-enactment and an extension of earlier phases of identity formation;" further, this particular project considers the "act of remembering as distinguished from or in addition to the substantive content of the remembered experience."²⁶ It is through remembering these earlier formative points of a life and later reflection that the autobiographer is able to identify her personal context and create the self as a text. The *différance* between remembering and remembered is the point at which the autobiographical text makes its most defining statements, the point at which the signified, what is being remembered and what is remembered, and the signifier, the meaning of both the act of remembering and the actual remembered events, appear in the same context and textual space.

I. How to Read American Autobiographical Texts

In order to read early American texts by female authors it is important to note whether the text is written with a traditional narrative in mind or if the text narrates events without a crafted narrative arc. Women's autobiographical texts have a wide range of form within the overall genre and might better fit under the category of Life Writing.²⁷ Works by itinerant female preachers tend not to have a clear, distinct narrative. On the other hand, works by more traditional figures, such as St. Augustine, have texts that follow a clear narrative structure and are thus more accessible for a larger public audience. As the audience reads the autobiographies of Christian women, the

²⁶ Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 226.

²⁷ For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the term autobiography that Eakin and Olney use, even though the term Life Writing may be used to better embody the study of diaries, epistles, and carefully crafted texts. I am considering the crafted texts for the purposes of this study rather than focus on the myriad of other texts available. I focus also on autobiographical texts rather than epistles because it is specifically the idea of crafting for a broader audience that best connects with the purpose of the crafted autobiographical text that follows each critical chapter.

motifs of submission and agency rise to the surface throughout these texts. While the author crafts the persona that expresses whether she is submitting to authority in the biblically appropriate way, she is actually utilizing agency to craft the texts.

As readers of these works, we have the agency to critique and reinterpret the narrative as we choose. Our conclusions based on the text do not necessarily align with the authorial purpose. Lawrence Sutin suggests that we are living in a “transliminal epoch,” an age of life in which readers and writers travail between two consciousnesses.²⁸ To reduce this to its essence, the author has a purpose in mind and intends to express only one meaning, but the audience does not derive the same interpretation from the text. The author and the audience use different lenses, or biases, to interpret the text. While some members of the audience might adhere to following a practical reader-response theory, others are just as apt to follow New Criticism. Suffice it to say, then, that each epoch requires that readers process the content they read differently because of the ways information is disseminated. Certainly, readers of the eighteenth century works processed the autobiographical lives of women through vastly different lenses than contemporary readers of nineteenth and twentieth century works.

Elizabeth Ashbridge presents her life through the structure of the Augustinian confessional autobiography. This idea of confession is predicated upon the necessity of a confessor in the audience. Her faith is expressed through her writing and is intended to demonstrate to her audience the predilections of her own heart, perhaps so that the audience will see that, as she is not ashamed to be open and honest, they need not be either. The discourse of trauma in her personal life is central to her authorial intention

²⁸ Sutin 22.

and provides traction for the narrative that allows a present day reader familiar with person or cultural trauma to cognitively intersect with her text in such a way as to draw conclusions on the value of faith in action for Ashbridge. The following creative autobiography considers both personal and cultural trauma in ways similar to Ashbridge, thereby allowing the intersection of the two texts from different centuries in a distinct way. The similarities in these two women in different time periods also foreshadows the later characters and the post-Civil War spiritual autobiography of Laura Ellen Hunt Short and the post-Black Plague spiritual autobiography of Christine de Pizan. While the creative spiritual autobiographies are not necessarily a product of a strict Augustinian confessional model, they do connect well with a hybrid somewhere between post-modern journal and early American Quaker journal.

Ashbridge produces a text in line with Quaker journals, their term for autobiographical accounts.²⁹ From George Fox³⁰ to John Woolman³¹ to Mary Peisley Neale,³² Ashbridge connects to the same tradition. Daniel Shea points out that Fox's journal concerns "a sense of the end of the ages," a sense that mirrors the urgent and apocalyptic tone with which he preached his sermons at the end of Quaker meetings.³³ George Fox's journal serves as the basis against which other journals are measured since he was the founder of the Society of Friends. Daniel Shea, in his research on Quaker journals and serious study in terms of John Churchman, Thomas Chalkley, David Ferris, Elizabeth Ashbridge and John Woolman, devises the driving question from which these

²⁹ See Howard Brinton's *Quaker Journals: Varieties of Religious Experience Among Friends*.

³⁰ See George Fox's journal edited by Rufus M. Jones.

³¹ See John Woolman's journal edited by Janet Whitney.

³² See *Some Account of the Life and Religious Exercises of Mary Neale, formerly Peisley*.

³³ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, 3-4.

works derived: “To what extent could the journal serve the aims of the Society of Friends alone, defending its doctrines, setting forth an exemplary autobiographical life of strenuous preaching and travel, while resigning from the larger society it so frequently indicted?”³⁴ This question surmises the purpose of the Quaker journal in America as it includes the importance of doctrine and setting examples that would result in conversion for its readers. The form necessitates the inclusion of an explanation of spiritual growth over the course of one’s life, with an indication of the activity of God as evidenced through early life experiences described by the autobiographer, as well as the thoughts and feelings of the autobiographer inasmuch as is required to define the changes within self on one’s path to the truth by way of divine revelation inwardly.

II. Self-Reflection and Spiritual Growth: The Applicability of Elizabeth Ashbridge’s Spiritual Autobiography in a Post-Traumatic America

Elizabeth Sampson Sullivan Ashbridge (1713-1755), as an eighteenth century Quaker public friend, preached on multiple continents and across what would become the eastern part of the United States.³⁵ In keeping with Quaker tradition, Ashbridge composed a spiritual autobiography that took into account her life and the vastly different experiences she had and takes her readers on a journey through survival in marginalization, as a young widow and accidental indentured servant, to thriving in a marginalized context, as a female itinerant minister in a religiously marginalized group. Ashbridge often writes from a liminal space, as does the character of Justy in the following creative chapter; these women continually find themselves on the edge of the

³⁴ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, 8.

³⁵ Levenduski, *Peculiar Power*, 1-3.

boundaries established for them by their families and broader cultures. In the early days of colonial America, female autobiographers composed books, diaries and letters outlining representations of their lives. Ashbridge's text is unique because it is a chronological account of her life with reflections of her experiences along the way and an explanation of how these experiences pushed her to embrace Quakerism. This kind of personal internal shift toward a focus on life experiences outside the home rather than life experiences within it takes into account Ashbridge's ideology as a female immigrant in colonial America with an openness to return to England and the Isles.

The ideological shift in Ashbridge is representative of a broader shift in women's narratives that operated as an additional break from how European women viewed themselves.³⁶ This shift toward new societal ideals comes at a time when cultural ideals were changing. In Quaker circles, women were able to "be active and valued participant[s] in discussions about the theological and practical problems of revivalism, the moral implications of slavery, and other issues of current importance."³⁷ Rather than act as quiet bystanders, seen and not heard, Ashbridge and her female Friends spoke out and were respected in the religious sense of the word egalitarian. Ashbridge and other vibrant female autobiographers, especially itinerant evangelists, recorded their observations and reflections when they observed injustice as commonplace in their culture, which often meant that their works rejected the ideals espoused by the popular culture of their time.³⁸ While many women felt a desire or familial push to serve in the

³⁶ See Henrietta Layser's *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500* and Anne Laurence's *Women in England, 1500-1760: A Social History* for an understanding of the social history of women in England and the women from which Ashbridge broke. For a perspective on women writing in America, see Sharon Harris' *American Women Writers to 1800*.

³⁷ Levenduski, *Peculiar Power*, 45.

³⁸ For a full discussion of the women who rose up and spoke out against the cultural ideals, see Grammer's chapter "Breaking up Housekeeping: Female Evangelists and Domestic Ideology," 27-56.

traditional gender roles of wife and mother, Ashbridge and other evangelists who took on textual representations of themselves as autobiographers had sufficient agency to recognize the importance of rejecting the traditional cultural values and replacing the values with egalitarian Quaker values that take precedence over the false dichotomies of the expectations of women's lives in early America.

It is also important to note that there are earlier autobiographies by women prior to early America that take the ideas of equality espoused by Christianity and turn them into lifestyle choices that, while appreciating the roles of wife and mother, do not solely rest their identity in those choices. In the same way that Paul John Eakin, in his introduction to *American Autobiography*, explains his view that "the pluralist nature of American culture has been decisive in the development of American autobiography," I agree and posit that the intellectual culture to which an American woman such as Ashbridge adheres directly influences the scope and purpose of autobiography and the intentional framing of life choices.³⁹ Ashbridge's autobiography focuses on the events leading up to her career as an itinerant preacher and thus provides evidence that reveals her humanity and helps her audience, typically Quakers looking for a model and hopefully those who are seeking unbelievers, relate.

Ashbridge's account begins with an explanation of her familial origins in England and the circumstances surrounding her early life. She specifically focuses on her father's absence and the religious nature of her mother. Her relationship with her parents is initially one in which she seeks approval through meeting their expectations in their actions, but later she reacts against this and causes an abrupt disconnect between them

³⁹ *American Autobiography* 15.

that she is unable to reconcile. She highlights her attitudes towards religious people, and notes that she had a great love for the ministers, which foreshadows her later entrance into ministry. The text outlines two of her three marriages: the first an elopement at the age of fourteen that resulted in widowhood five months later, the second an abusive marriage in America to a man named Sullivan, who fell in love with her singing and dancing on stage in New York. Rather than return home after her initial widowhood, her father refused to allow it, further fracturing the parent-child relationship. Her mother suggested she live with a Quaker relative, but after travelling to Ireland to do so Ashbridge was so upset by his restraint that she passed along several other homes before she was kidnapped and then indentured on her journey to Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, dark dreams and her temptations to destroy herself marked her life with Sullivan, who, she explains was “given to ramble,” and also became controlling and abusive. She explains in depth the negative associations he has with Quakers and how she becomes a Quaker Public Friend, and even notes her forgiveness of Sullivan at the close of her account. Her third husband, Aaron Ashbridge, added a lamentation on her death that is often appended to her autobiographical account. The theme of family relationships is central to all three creative autobiographies, and the themes of relational abuse and failed marriages are central specifically to Justy’s creative autobiography. Each of the three women in the creative chapters subscribe to particular familial and cultural traditions as evidenced through their actions and lifestyle choices.

In this earliest part of the American heritage, women such as Elizabeth Ashbridge subscribed to the traditions of Quaker autobiography⁴⁰ and the frame figures actively into

⁴⁰ For a comparative conclusion between Quaker and Puritan autobiographical modes based on study, see Daniel Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, 249-269. While the quest nature of journals and

her textual representation of her life. Such spiritual autobiographies and narratives are, in essence, tales of quests for truth and a means by which to express the truth from the perspective of an exemplary character for readers to emulate. It is faith in God that Ashbridge ultimately desires to point her audience toward and she was more likely to garner a response to the demonstration Inner Light⁴¹ in practice rather than in a discussion of theology; as Christine Levenduski notes, “the first-person narrative of a soul’s conversion had extraordinary spiritual and rhetorical potential.”⁴² While D. Britton Gildersleeve tends to agree with Levenduski, she reads Ashbridge’s text as an “attempt to reconcile the patriarchal nature of Christianity with her deeply ambivalent feelings towards her father [that results] in an interesting feminization of faith.”⁴³ I disagree with this reading and suggest that a much more nuanced approach to Ashbridge is in order. Following her first marriage she spent three years and three months in Ireland, where she encountered a woman who was a Papist and nearly convinced her to convert. As Ashbridge explains, “what made me sick of my new intention...was to swear that I believed the Pretender [James Edward Stuart] to be the true heir...and also that whosoever died out of the Pale of that Church was damned.”⁴⁴ It is this conversation that Gildersleeve cites and reads as an “intrusion of the patriarchy,” further noting that it is the

spiritual narratives, respectively, may appear similar on the surface, the Quaker journal comprises “endless journeying” as the “physical counterpart of his search for illumination and of the moral effort to conform his will to the divine,” the Puritan spiritual narrative might result in one finding “himself a pilgrim once again,” 249. In addition, the inclusion of the tangible is different within the two and the paradigm of the quest is also markedly different, the specifics of which Shea outlines within this conclusion.

⁴¹ The Inner Light in Quaker theology may also be described as the God within or the ability for God to speak directly to the person. It removes the necessity of the Catholic confessor and allows man to communicate directly to God; it is predicated on the belief in Jesus coming to fulfil the Levitical law and thus allow God’s people to communicate directly to Him rather than through the Levite priests of the scriptures. For an explanation of the Quaker theology and history, see Howard Brinton’s *Friends for 300 Years: The History and Beliefs of the Society of Friends Since George Fox Started the Quaker Movement*.

⁴² *Peculiar Power* 51.

⁴³ Gildersleeve 372.

⁴⁴ Ashbridge 149.

perdition of Ashbridge's mother that is the "sticking point."⁴⁵ While Christianity has a heavy patriarchal tradition, it was not a feminization of faith to desire an escape from hellfire for her "religious mother."⁴⁶ Rather, this was Ashbridge's realization that she could not be a part of a religious tradition that did not provide hope for those outside of its own confines. Ultimately, it was the understanding that even women could hear from God and speak prophetically that encouraged Ashbridge to become a Quaker.

Ashbridge addresses a challenge when composing her autobiography, as she presents what could easily be interpreted as madness within the context of the prophetic. Of Ashbridge's text, Julie Sievers explains, "it had to refute the damaging possibility that her inward experiences of voices and visions, and therefore her example of the Inner Light, resulted from madness and not the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷ Sievers understands, then, that Ashbridge authoritatively contemplates the voices that she hears and frames them in such a way as to present her interpretation of these spiritual encounters outside the realm of psychological breakdown. Rather than isolate her audience or put them into a position of fear of the unknown, Ashbridge welcomes her audience into the spiritual world that she understands as a place that contains of the presence of both Holy Spirit and demonic influences attempting to pass for truth. Ashbridge succeeds in presenting herself as living within the biblical context of the "wilderness trials of a future prophet" throughout the context of her framing of the voices and visions.⁴⁸ Even when Ashbridge does not make choices that result in positive consequences, as in the case of her marriages and indentures, she still frames the context of her choices within her perceptions of the Inner

⁴⁵ Gildersleeve 372.

⁴⁶ Ashbridge 150.

⁴⁷ Sievers 248.

⁴⁸ Ashbridge 150.

Light and creates a text that functions to draw in converts through an exegetical approach to her explanation of spiritual events rather than preclude conversion through fear.

Ashbridge produces a coherent autobiographical account, aligned in nature to the traditional male autobiographies such as Augustine's *Confessions* and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. As Daniel Shea notes, "superficially, the *Account* of Elizabeth Ashbridge appears to borrow coherence through its resemblance to a secular counterpart, the confessions of 'injured females.'"⁴⁹ The shared features of the cautionary tales of her early life with the secular confessions indeed make her autobiography account all the more remarkable. Instead of becoming a watered down version of a Quaker Public Friend's life, Ashbridge draws on secular literature she knows in order to hybridize the rhetorical devices of both secular and sacred texts to compose a conversion narrative that demonstrates the presence of the Inner Light. While Shea argues rightly that she "communicates well the fruits of her inwardness but not the phenomenon itself," I would add that her inwardness is evidenced solely through experience rather than summarizing explication.⁵⁰ Ashbridge, unlike many of the itinerant female evangelists that Grammer studies, is light on narrative summary in her own past and curates particular events to illustrate her past character and attitudes, thus demonstrating the dichotomy of past and present as she presents her life for her audience. By understanding the tension of the two different parts of her life, the audience can ascertain the demonstration of the Inner Light in practice even if the audience is not privy to the method by which Ashbridge encounters it. This authorial choice suggests that Ashbridge does not want her method of

⁴⁹ *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* 30. For a full explanation of these autobiographies, Shea suggests Donald Stauffer's *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941: 69-70.

⁵⁰ *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* 44.

encountering the Inner Light or communing with God to become the formula by which others attempt to pursue God. She provides evidence of her life using sacred and secular formulas without allowing her own work to become strictly formulaic. Ashbridge provides a nuanced reading of her own life because she does not hope that others will follow the same model she chose exactly, but she seeks to provide examples of how a life might be changed. There appears to be some cognitive dissonance between what Ashbridge does and what she wants to do, which I posit is likely the result of personal trauma.

Ashbridge focuses much of her account on how her poor choices translated into her loss of agency; her diction and stylistic choices further the audience's awareness of her extreme pain. While Ashbridge agreed to marry a man without the approval of her parents, she uses language that implies a lack of agency in the marriage itself. Ashbridge explains that at the age of fourteen she "suffered [herself] to be carried off in the night" for the purpose of marrying a man who had courted her.⁵¹ The passive tense of the verb indicates that as a result of the marriage the man carried her off and thus took over agency in her life after she made the decision to leave her parents in order to be with him. The word suffer comes from the Latin *suffere*, from *sub* and *ferre*, which translate from below and to bear, respectively. To bear from below suggests hellish connotations in addition to the denotation of experiencing a negative sensation, such as pain. Ashbridge uses the demonic connotations to set up the idea that the worst of human actions come from Satan and hell. The idea of suffering pain from below and the loss of power early in her life set her up for a series of choices that cause her to repeatedly lose her agency

⁵¹ Ashbridge 148.

throughout the text. After being widowed, and at her mother's suggestion, Ashbridge then lived with a relative, a Quaker. She was so upset by his restraints that she resolved not to "be controlled" in such a way.⁵² This unwillingness to be controlled, to passively lose her agency, is poignant, as she becomes an indentured servant and then enters into another unpleasant marriage that ends when her second husband finally dies.

Ashbridge indicates that fear and temptations gripped her early in life and caused her to run from her home where she initially experienced fear, resulting in her discerning the necessity of escape—marriage—as early as possible as paramount to a life acceptable to her parents. Ashbridge bought into the traditional marriage plot as a means of concealing the true motivation of her unwise personal decisions. Initially she developed an irrational fear born from simple statements her mother made that caused her to believe that "if [she] used any Naughty words God would not love [her];" later she applied this kind of fear to all sin.⁵³ She indicates that at the age of fourteen her sorrows began and she allowed herself to be deceived by foolish passion; it is for this reason she ran away from her home and married. Ashbridge does not indicate explicitly what she was running from, but I posit that she was both consciously running from the expectations of her family as well as subconsciously fleeing from the possibility of self-harm. Later she is unable to avoid facing the choices that she made and at that point must address her own suicidal ideation. This appears to be a subconscious choice to enter willingly into the pain: a socially acceptable self-harm because her choices on the surface appear to conform to traditional societal expectations. It was only a brief time later that she found

⁵² Ashbridge 149.

⁵³ Ashbridge 148. Ashbridge uses sin to suggest a biblical sense of the term, but it actually is often in the moral and cultural sense. If it is wrong to her mother, then it is sin. In this way, Ashbridge conceives of sin not as what God does not permit, but as what her mother does not permit.

herself widowed and unable to return home because of her father's disappointment with her choices; he was "so displeased, he would do nothing for [her]." ⁵⁴ The lack of approval and communication made Ashbridge believe that she was "quite shut out of his Affections" and should therefore find passage to America. ⁵⁵ She made a series of choices that resulted in her life in America as an indentured servant. Near the end of this indenture, she had a vision in which a "grave woman" suggested she turn to God for mercy, but her "proud heart would not Consent to return in so mean a Condition; therefore [she] chose Bondage rather," this time in the form of an abusive marriage. ⁵⁶ Time and again Ashbridge lost agency and found herself physically in bondage.

In addition to physical bondage, Ashbridge also found herself in emotional and spiritual bondage. Even though she had previously experienced a marriage ending negatively, she attempts to marry another man; however, her motives appear to have more to do with her perceptions of her mother's negative opinion of her choices and the comments her mother made concerning swearing and other sins—Ashbridge took to heart that God would not love her if she sinned and as a result felt she required punishment in order to receive the love of God. The choices Ashbridge made suggest a subconscious self-punishment and a resulting tendency towards self-harm. It even appears that the marriage itself may have been self-harm. As she herself explains, "But alas, I was not Sufficiently Punished; I had got released from one cruel servitude & then not Contented got into another, and this for Life." ⁵⁷ She cannot sufficiently account for the reasoning that she married a man she "did not esteem." While she does not make the connection

⁵⁴ Ashbridge 148.

⁵⁵ Ashbridge 150.

⁵⁶ Ashbridge 153.

⁵⁷ Ashbridge 153-4.

between the previous oppressive demonic incident and the fear-fueled choices she made, she indicates later demonic activity in her life including negative visions and her emotional dissolution into depression and suicidal ideation. She explains “for two months I was daily tempted to destroy myself,” while she was haunted by satanic insinuations. As she fought against these internal machinations, she found herself suffering again physically at the hands of an abusive husband. Her expectations of marriage failed Ashbridge repeatedly—as it fails Christine, Laura and Justy in the subsequent creative chapters—and the misalignment with the reality of marriage resulted in tragic emotional and spiritual breakdowns.

Ashbridge wants her readers to understand that in order to disconnect from fear, one must seek God, address Him and allow Him to work. Ashbridge demonstrates that through becoming acquainted with the Quaker faith and specifically understanding how to call out to God in the midst of temptations, she has the ability to resist the temptations of the devil and thereby attain peace. As she considers whether she should steal some flax to make thread, she is struck by remorse and calls out to God, but as “horror seized” her, she says, “get thee behind me Satan, I’ll resist till I’ll die before I’ll yield,” with the ultimate outcome that she feels the peace that passes understanding.⁵⁸ While she does not explicitly use the phrase Inner Light, perhaps because of the numerous interpretations and adaptations of that part of Quaker theology in her time, she presents a narrative account that succinctly outlines the events that demonstrate her life struggle between the dark and the Light. Ashbridge indeed brings the Light to life in her own text and addresses the complexities of continuing to trust God even when personal expectations, such as in the

⁵⁸ Ashbridge 155-6.

case of her own expectation not to have a desire to steal, do not align with lived reality. Additionally, and perhaps most remarkably, at the end of her story she is able to forgive her second husband and change her attitude toward him—in spite of his abuse—before his untimely death.

The honesty of Ashbridge's actions are apparent within the text, but she remains ambivalent about fully explicating the emotional aspects of her life. In the beginning of her autobiography Ashbridge indicates that she has experienced a strange life and that, as a result of the "uncommon occurrences" and her agreement with the biblical King David in the statement 'it is good for me that I have been afflicted,' she desires to share her life and experience with others so that they might be able to adequately "shun the evils" to which she had been so drawn.⁵⁹ It is through such a vague explanation that the reader is left to determine the author's emotional state at the time of the construction of the text. However, there is hope that comes from this obscuration of true emotion, as well as an altruistic desire to share one's life so that others might be enlightened and not unnecessarily pass through the same trials. This hopeful desire is a common thread I have discovered in reading these autobiographical texts. As these women take into account the strange experiences of their lives, they begin to understand that through divine intervention they have the choice to see and know life through a spiritual lens.

Female autobiographers and preachers, however, typically encounter an epiphany that has been birthed by an intensely caustic learning experience, rather than biblical interpretations based on patriarchal exegesis.⁶⁰ The severity of the physical, mental and

⁵⁹ Ashbridge 147.

⁶⁰ It is much more common for the traditional male spiritual autobiographer to have epiphanies that mirror Augustine's story of being spoken to by a voice that told him to pick up and read so that he might

emotional pain caused by the strange occurrences, essentially abuse in its varying forms, necessitate a textual expression of the events for the author to utilize her own shortcomings and consequences as teachable moments. Ashbridge discerns that her experience is unique to her personal perspective and, even though she can relate it to others who have affected her life, it is her internal experience that affords her the opportunity to relate her mistakes to an audience that have similar predilections in order that her audience might not make the same mistakes that she made in her life. Although the circumstances for eighteenth century women are not the same as for twenty-first century women, Ashbridge's work is presented in such a way as to be applicable regardless of its time period. Timelessness is what makes her work so applicable even today and why scholars like Shea and Levenduski have studied her brief text and brought it to light for a new audience. The issues Ashbridge presents in her text, including abuse, suicidal ideation and self-harm, are just as pertinent to a post-traumatic America as they were to a young woman in the eighteenth century. The time periods may create differences in presentation of the text and the ways in which the author frames the narrative, but the ultimate goal of the text is the same: to demonstrate how to self-reflect and pray in order to overcome through faith the challenges of the flesh and achieve peace.

III. American Women's Autobiography

While Christine de Pisan (1364-c. 1430), the subject of chapters five and six, was the first professional female writer and has a heritage both French and Italian, the majority of early American female autobiographers carried a British heritage. This

understand that God was directly addressing him. Men were also the traditional purveyors of the traditional exegetical thought in the authoritative mode of the transmission of knowledge.

heritage influences their work, and the earliest of these, such as Elizabeth Ashbridge (1713-1755), include fragmented lives that take place in America and England. More recent autobiographies also discuss fragmented lives, but now the context is a post-postmodern world.

Several autobiographical texts concern women who were indentured servants, especially women like Ashbridge in early America, while others concern women who were itinerant female preachers with stories as varied as their methods.⁶¹ Conversely, twentieth century women's works are composed in a style more akin to stream of consciousness and living within one's personal, simultaneous acceptance and rejection of virtues and vices, such as in the case of Anne Roiphe.⁶²

Early American women's autobiographical accounts—especially in extant diaries—include texts such as *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*,⁶³ *The Civil War Diary of Lucy Buck*,⁶⁴ and *A Secret to be Buried* by Emily Hawley Gillespie.⁶⁵ Mary Robertson sums up critic Suzanne Bunkers's assessment on the diaries, a position to which I also adhere, by explaining that she “believes that diaries and journals might well be considered the most authentic form of autobiography.”⁶⁶ Further, Robertson addresses the point of the restrictions placed on women from early America through the nineteenth

⁶¹ For a full picture of the various itinerant female preachers, see Elizabeth Elkin Grammer's *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.

⁶² While not explicitly an autobiography, Roiphe's book *Art and Madness* delineates her life out of chronological order and lists the particular year the memory or exploration of self is from.

⁶³ The original text is from 1739-1762 and was written in colonial America. The 2013 edition contains an introduction by Elise Pinckney, a direct descendant of Eliza.

⁶⁴ For a critical discussion of Buck's diary, see Elizabeth Baer's chapter “Ambivalence, Anger, and Silence” from *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, edited by Bunkers and Huff. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

⁶⁵ An edition from Judy Nolte Temple provides a condensed version of Gillespie's original 2,500 page diaries. Gillespie was a woman who desired more than Iowa offered and this is recorded in Temple's edition. See Bunkers for an essay that concerns family dysfunctions and the sisters.

⁶⁶ Robertson 18.

century, noting that the cultural expectations “limited many women to writing letters and keeping journals as a means of expressing their ideas, observations, and feelings about their society and their role in it.”⁶⁷ In letters many antebellum women, including Sarah Moore Grimke and Angelina Emily Grimke, expressed their antislavery views and even “joined the antislavery movement in the Northeast, where they expressed their strongly held views on slavery and women’s rights in speeches, letters, and journals.”⁶⁸ It is an interesting and important shift that the nineteenth century also saw more intentionally composed women’s autobiographical accounts from African American evangelists, including Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw.⁶⁹ Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton estimated their roles in bringing about greater good for women through their actions and autobiographies as of greater value than their roles as wives or mothers.⁷⁰

Belief, either in God or one’s own strength, is central to the ability to persevere through tumultuous struggles encountered by many nineteenth century female autobiographers. In addition to faith, family holds a high priority for this culture and as such the traditional marriage plot⁷¹ is often a theme in these texts. The lives of itinerant women preachers, who recorded their struggles in autobiographical texts, showed little concern for the marriage plot and how it affected their lives. In Elizabeth Elkin

⁶⁷ Robertson 19.

⁶⁸ Robertson 21.

⁶⁹ See Grammer 57-82 and Douglass-Chin 32-57 for a critical discussion of the two women’s autobiographical texts. For a brief overview on Lee, see Andrews’ *To Tell a Free Story*, 69-72. For full text of both, see Andrews’ *Sisters of the Spirit*. *Sisters* includes *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady* (1836); Zilpha Elaw’s *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw* (1846); and Julia Foote’s *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* (1879). Jarena Lee’s work also appears as *The Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* alongside Anne Bradstreet’s *Spiritual Autobiography* and other works in Mary G. Mason’s *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women*.

⁷⁰ For a full picture of Stanton, see her autobiographical text.

⁷¹ I define the traditional marriage plot as the narrative of a woman who views her life through the lens of heterosexual marriage and a subsequent family life with children, in much the same fashion as Mary-Catherine Harrison does in “Reading the Marriage Plot.”

Grammer's *Some Wild Visions*, she notes that "though most of these itinerant women were at some point married, the circumstances of their lives eventually led them into experiences not contemplated by the marriage plot—abandonment, widowhood, unavoidable self-reliance."⁷² Grammer considers the autobiographies of Zilpha Elaw, Julia Foote, Laura Smith Haviland, Jarena Lee, Lydia Sexton, Amanda Berry Smith,⁷³ and Nancy Towle in a discussion of lives that rejected the marriage plot that drove so much of the contemporary fictional literature. In idealized versions of life, women imagined themselves in the shoes of Jane Austen's heroines, but there were women who were breaking ground socially, culturally and intellectually who took note of it in their own autobiographies.⁷⁴ While theorists like Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson⁷⁵ are working diligently to broaden the traditional autobiographical canon, due to the gender divide that places other male texts such as Augustine's *Confessions* and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* into canonical prominence, women's texts are not well known. Moreover, since these women were not intriguing political figures like Franklin but instead lived on the fringes of society because of their itinerant profession, their works have not been as widely disseminated. While their works are more accessible with the advent of the internet, much work remains to be done to bring these women to their appropriate academic prominence. These texts are significant because, when considered as a whole, they signal a shift from the traditional marriage plot in the texts of women toward broader concerns of life.

⁷² Grammer 34.

⁷³ See A. Smith's *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist; Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and her Travels in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa, as an Independent Missionary*.

⁷⁴ Grammer 34.

⁷⁵ See Smith & Watson's Introduction to *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, 4-8.

In the twentieth century, there is considerably more variety in women's texts from America, ranging from a more traditional exploration by Annie Dillard,⁷⁶ to an innovative text from a Detroit trio: Kesho Scott, Cherry Muhanji and Egyirba High.⁷⁷ Many autobiographies that bridge the divide between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, even those of a spiritual nature, take the form of several interconnected texts and fall under the guise of creative nonfiction—what Lopate calls literary nonfiction. In the case of Anne Lamott, whose texts always include a spiritual component, her stories are woven across several titles including *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*, *Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith*, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, as well as several others. The twenty-first century includes many more graphic novel accounts, such as the “autobiofictionalography” from Lynda Barry⁷⁸ and several from Alison Bechdel,⁷⁹ as well as more multiethnic texts, including Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*.⁸⁰ This research does not seek to include the preponderance of blog posts, twitter accounts or other social media as autobiography, at least not at this time. More distance from the text and context are necessary before the full validity of this type of information as autobiographical can be assessed.

The proposed ideal of the function of autobiography is to write of oneself for the edification of others. The concept of life writing is one that necessitates a belief in the

⁷⁶ For Dillard's autobiographical account, see *An American Childhood*.

⁷⁷ The trio wrote *Tight Spaces* as a collaborative project and it is part of Singular Lives: The Iowa Series in North American Autobiography.

⁷⁸ The term was coined by Barry to describe her *One Hundred Demons*.

⁷⁹ Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* and *Are You My Mother?* both discuss her youth and relationships with her parents.

⁸⁰ As a journalist, Moaveni's exploration of her life and identity is a multicultural portrait that sets the scene for its readers.

understanding of an audience. A traditional expectation of autobiography is that it will follow a traditional narrative arc, while life writing allows the works to be non-narrative. While these types of writing are non-narrative, they still tell a story. What readers must understand about life writing is that work must be done to pull out the story. One must draw conclusions from the facts present—and this requires critical thinking. This is why History is so important to the project. From a series of situations and texts that do not always have a true narrative structure, I must draw the life of several women to process fully their motivations and beliefs. There is a distinction, often even cognitive dissonance, that becomes evident in the text.

IV. Author as Character in Contemporary Literary Non-Fiction

Contemporary autobiographies most often fall under the category of creative non-fiction. Instead of selectively curated truth, the written form of telling stories about the self has shifted to incorporate elements of the tall tale. The contemporary autobiographer is as likely to modify entire lives and lie to call the written word truth as it is to modify the order of events or emphasize specific events for a more cohesive narrative arc.⁸¹ This is not to suggest that autobiographers are fully appreciative of the legitimacy of the narrative act, as Paul John Eakin asserts, “autobiographers themselves constitute a principal source of doubt about the validity of the art they practice.”⁸² The fictive nature of autobiographical creation preserves doubt in regard to whether the autobiographer remembers the events with factual clarity or with a specific lens related to the time and

⁸¹ In order to understand how Eakin’s critical theory works in regard to fiction, see chapter one on Mary McCarthy in *Fictions in Autobiography*, 3-55. For an understanding of how specific chronology functions within the autobiographical narrative, see Eakin’s *Fictions in Autobiography*, 172-175.

⁸² Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 276.

place of the original event, or other layers of experience that have occurred between the memory and the moment of autobiographical creation. In contemporary autobiography, the author is the authority on his or her life and, as is often the case in self-reflective processes, chooses the degree of honesty he or she wishes to communicate to the audience about past and present selves. This may result in non-chronological narrative forms or other breaks from generic conventions. In the following creative autobiography, the character of Justy is distinct from the author and as such can cast doubt on the validity of the truth of the autobiography. While the events may be true, the chronology may be questionable in order to create a more cohesive narrative arc; but this is no more unusual than that which Augustine does in his own *Confessions*. While the vignettes in all three creative autobiographies are chronological, the italicized reflective glossings that precede many of the vignettes are completed at a much later date and thus interject later life observations into the chronological narrative. This intentional complication of the chronology and the character's understanding of her life in the case of each chapter allows the audience to interpret the intellectual conversion that happened in the intervening years. The lack of dating of the italicized portions is intentional in order that the lives and events serve as brief pieces of evidence open for spiritual interrogation and interpretation.

Past female autobiographers, especially itinerant female evangelists in the nineteenth century and prior,⁸³ would not necessarily modify the narrative arc but instead present life as an evidential document for the audience. For the sake of the story,

⁸³ For examples of these narratives, see Elizabeth Grammer's *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* and Richard Douglass-Chin's *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: Autobiographies of Nineteenth Century African American Evangelists*.

memory can be intentionally changed as it is written down rather than merely recited in brief to a friend. Typically, the more structured the life of the author is, the more likely it is that the text can become canonical. The act of writing embellishes or orders the facts insofar as it is necessary to present a story as a teleological whole that has a distinct purpose. The integration of women's texts into the western autobiographical canon necessitates the inclusion of a narrative arc for the structure and formality. In essence, coherent narrative arcs are more ideal because they are easier to read and connect to a lived reality.

The narrative of the self, whether in a traditional model or not, is constructed variously by an autobiographer in the text he or she intends to write. According to Paul John Eakin, in his discussion of the autobiographies of Mary McCarthy, Henry James and Jean-Paul Sartre, the works, "reveal the part of fiction in the self and its story in language which they set before the world. In all three cases the autobiographical act is deliberately presented as but the latest instance of an inveterate practice of self-invention."⁸⁴ Writing self is a process of fictive creation.⁸⁵ The self in writing is not an idealized depiction of a true life, rather it is a self-portrait that orders events and ideas as necessary to create order from the chaos of life. It is following a thread that the author knows will present the most interesting and vital depiction of life that will result in the most depth of the character. As a process of self-discovery, writing autobiography is a way to present the relevant pieces of one's own story, altering the stories as necessary to create a more coherent

⁸⁴ Eakin 182. For a full discussion see the chapter on Self-Invention in *Autobiography: The Moment of Language* (181-278), from the larger work Paul John Eakin *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-invention*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985. Print.

⁸⁵ This is a position Timothy Adams would agree to, as evidenced by his text *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*.

narrative, in order that the picture of the author as dynamic character within the narrative develops fully.

In these texts, the author crafts her autobiographical character for the reader to know, understand, accept and break figurative bread with. Lopate explains that in order to become a character, you must have “soldered your relationship with the reader by springing vividly into his mind, so that everything your I says and does on the page seems oddly, piquantly characteristic.”⁸⁶ By becoming a character, the autobiographer now exists as two distinct beings, one flesh and one, at least partially, fictive. The cognitive dissonance between the two is where the autobiographer must work.

After character creation, the most cumbersome work of an autobiographer that adheres to a more traditional form is curation of the series of events, or selection of key events, the character must experience that have the most coherent thread to ensure a narrative arc that maintains coherence with the intended exposition of character traits for the main character.⁸⁷ The types of character traits narrated in these works vary widely based on the authorial intentions and the measure to which autobiographers adhere to factual reality. While some authors veil fictive adjustments to their autobiographical worlds, others admit them outright. In *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith parses out “four marks of fictiveness” that are present in women’s autobiographical works: “the fictions of memory, of the ‘I,’ of the imagined reader, of the story.”⁸⁸ Critic Jonathan D’Amore discusses the unveiled fictiveness in John Edgar

⁸⁶ Lopate 22.

⁸⁷ Sidonie Smith notes that there are three generations of critics that consider the autobiographical construct, the first evaluating the quality of life and the presence of truth in the narrative, the second the struggle for the autobiographer to develop an identity, and the third the signification within the autobiographical text, 5-6.

⁸⁸ Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 45.

Wideman's *Brothers and Keepers* and Wideman's decision to explain his brother's lack of apotheosis in the final section of his book by indicating the changes that had to be made to the story—by breaking the fourth wall of autobiography, “[he addresses] the reader directly in the voice of a professional writer and what he presents to the reader is a record of what the final draft is not, since the reader is invited to assume that the published text is a correction of the failed first draft.”⁸⁹ The interactive autobiographical project that Wideman constructs allows him to deconstruct his own motives, the autobiographical construct, and provide his own representation of the truth while interacting with and intellectually manipulating an audience.

Not only do male autobiographers utilize the genre to deconstruct the autobiographical construct itself, female autobiographers often follow the same process but a shift in traditional theoretical models comes in focus: the female autobiography becomes a process of reflective self-creation.⁹⁰ Anna Camilleri, author of *I am a red dress: Incantations on a Grandmother, a Mother and a Daughter*, reflects on what she learned, how she learned, and the similarity of experience of the three women in order to expound upon how she functioned in her own self-creation process to become her own person. Camilleri includes vignettes that demonstrate that her mother wanted a life for her daughter free from the family abuse. Almost inevitably, the fear that had been beaten into Camilleri's mother took hold in unfortunate circumstances that resulted in Camilleri's fractured skull while she was a toddler.⁹¹ Camilleri becomes the “redress” for

⁸⁹ D'Amore 113. I do not consider D'Amore in more depth because he considers exclusively male American autobiographers.

⁹⁰ For a discussion on the critical issues related to the male-female discourse in autobiographical constructs, see chapter 1, “Autobiography Criticism and the Problematics of Gender,” in Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 3-19.

⁹¹ Camilleri 88-9.

the egregious acts of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by her grandfather against the women in her family. As Camilleri files sexual assault charges against her grandfather, she becomes the unabashed vocal redress.⁹² Camilleri embodies the red dress, the symbol she weaves throughout her text. In writing her story, and weaving in the stories of her mother and her grandmother, she gives the women in her family a voice when they had previously had no voice. She exerts authority in a situation that two prior generations of women had not been able to exert. Instead of accepting unnecessary repetitive family patterns, she breaks off from the cycle in order that she might break the “sea of silence” that had grown over generations. It is in this way that the works of contemporary memoirists and autobiographers often, albeit typically less consciously, work: to become the redress for generations of silence. Rather than focus on simply the self, the autobiographer hopes to guide the larger group on an edific and restorative process by reconstructing the individual. The purpose of her autobiographical account includes an element of catharsis with the hope that the readers might not repeat the patterns of silence as her family did. It is these patterns, this spiral, much like the ouroboros image I use in my own creative text, that we so often get lost in.

V. Autobiographical Instructions in an Increasingly Postmodern America: Coalescence of Factual Truth, Emotion and Authorial Interpretation

As we also consider how women create their own lives through these characters, it is vital to discern how personal experience and learned behavior affect the philosophical modalities of truth within the autobiographical text. I turn to Eakin’s “Self-

⁹² Camilleri 92-95.

Invention in Autobiography: The Moment in Language” from *Fictions in Autobiography* to explore how his perspective on James Olney and Michael Sprinker and their responses to Foucault, Lacan and Freud⁹³ provide the kind of intertextuality necessary to develop an understanding of the complicated reckoning women face when determining what truths to present when and how to do so in light of the cultural narrative of the marriage plot.

Eakin claims, “it is not surprising that the ontological status of self in autobiography has become the focal inquiry for theorists of autobiography.”⁹⁴ It is this focus that allows us to consider the manipulations of the texts and how the text does and does not project the author’s version of the truth onto the page and into the mind of the reader.

For Ashbridge, she saw her audience as potential converts and knew that it was her duty to provide the testimonial of her life in such a way as to evince through the retelling of her own emotional status the necessary sympathy to ensure that her audience was appropriately enlightened. Rather than force enlightenment on her audience in a didactic manner, Ashbridge utilizes a formational approach. Drawing her readers through her own formative years, she presents her audience with a model that they can either choose to follow or reject. As a woman writing in the context of a religious community that was often ostracized from broader American society, even to the point of persecution, she was afforded some liberties and did not rely as much on the male textual authority as she might have written. While certainly Augustine uses personal vignettes and moments in his own life to discuss his religious conversion, his takes place over the course of one chapter, while hers takes place over the entire story. Ashbridge makes it

⁹³ Eakin references and critiques Olney’s *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, in which Olney collects several of his own and others’ essays on the subject of autobiography, including Sprinker’s closing essay “Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography.”

⁹⁴ Eakin 182.

clear that her conversion did not happen by chance, nor did it happen quickly and all at once. The written account of her conversion draws from Society of Friends founder George Fox and likely the words of John Woolman even if not his own text.⁹⁵ In regard to the nature of Ashbridge's conversion, critic Etta Madden explains, "reading about people within inscribed texts...her reaction to reading is a sensational one, reminiscent of Augustine's, Jonathan Edward's and even Benjamin Franklin's."⁹⁶ Madden delineates the importance of the text for Ashbridge, noting that the text provides the appropriate transliminal space for the synthesis of thought and feeling. The text, as both physical and ethereal space, is the point of cosmological duality necessary for Ashbridge to experience conversion and create the necessary sacred space, as Mircea Eliade might suggest, as Ashbridge presents herself as possessing the same literary capabilities as the traditional male canon in conjunction with her ability to think critically and reason.⁹⁷

Madden further explains that Ashbridge's work expresses the insubstantial nature of the text itself, hearkening back to the temptation of Christ as Ashbridge presents Satan using biblical texts to present both sides of the Quaker argument.⁹⁸ Ashbridge's awareness that she is unable to rely fully on the text and the rhetoric that stems from it likely pushes her further into reliance on the Inner Light and reminds her to trust her faith above her own sense of reason. She never denigrates her ability to reason, but she accedes that her dreams are as apt to be venues by which Satan might speak to her and

⁹⁵ Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, 40-41.

⁹⁶ Madden 178.

⁹⁷ Ashbridge presents herself as reader and thinker much in the way that Christine de Pizan presents herself in *Le livre de la cité des dames*. It is unlikely Ashbridge would have encountered Christine's text, but it is interesting to note that she and Christine, separated by several centuries, attempted to enter into the textual work using similar frameworks. While Ashbridge is more concerned with autobiographical texts, especially those of a spiritual nature, Christine focuses on Boccaccio's texts that concern women as her framework.

⁹⁸ Madden 179.

provide faulty reasoning. It is this inactive moment, this moment of non-agency, that Ashbridge presents as the intellectual place where one is most suspect to deception. In this way Ashbridge posits agency in seeking the truth of God as the manner by which a Quaker can receive peace and accept humility. The action is in the choice to listen to God and, essentially, wait on Him, rather than be subject to the voice of the Accuser in dreams that are not received as a result of choice.

In addition to the importance of her conversion in creating a text of spiritual authority, Ashbridge also uses her text to discuss her recognition that God has presented her with the information on the Inner Light and faith from the time of her youth. Her mother was religious, and Ashbridge notes that, “In my very Infancy, I had an awful regard for religion & a great love for religious people, particularly the Ministers, and sometimes wept with Sorrow, that I was not a boy that I might have been one.”⁹⁹ From this, we can discern that it was not common practice for women in Ashbridge’s community to be ministers, which can certainly be corroborated by documentary evidence from the time period. In addition, her regard for religion is indicative of her attitude towards the man-made religious structure, foreshadowing her movement away from human-created religious practices and her movement towards what might be called a mystic meditative practice of seeking the Inner Light. Her love for people demonstrates her compassion and it factors into how she estimated highly the work of Ministers. She knew that if she had been born a boy that she would have been afforded the opportunity to speak and minister to the community at large. She presents these desires as inborn

⁹⁹ Ashbridge 148.

desires, or at least desires that had their bud in her life before she reached the age of fourteen.

Rather than dwell on these desires, Ashbridge moves quickly to frame what happened after the age of fourteen instead of present what might be considered heretical theology. Ashbridge demonstrates a belief that God, even before she converted, was speaking to her through her thoughts and desires. She also notes that at the age of fourteen her “Sorrows” began and it is these that prey on her emotions. Her emotions are always in accordance with a negative inclination on her part, later leading to suicidal ideation and the like. If God speaks to her through her ideas, she would also have her readers note that Satan worked through her emotions to deceive her and convince her to destroy herself. She does not ever suggest that God is speaking through the negative emotions, nor does she indicate a belief that any emotions other than joy and peace, if that can be called an emotion, come from God. In order to discuss this, even in her own writings, she necessarily had to attain a level of spiritual authority to speak. According to William Scheick, Ashbridge, through her autobiographical writings, examined and explained her own spiritual authority and pursued the logonomic conflict¹⁰⁰ to determine the truth of her own work.

¹⁰⁰ Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, 2. Scheick defines logonomic conflict as, “peculiar, sometimes subversive, narrative effects that demarcate certain tensions extant within culturally regulated ideological complexes.” It is within these competing visions of life that an author’s competing cultural backgrounds dictate, especially within an adoption of new religious practices later in life, the anxieties present within autobiographical writings. The context of autobiography provides the necessary communicative point of insinuation of authorial intention or Divine provocation, provided the author is a proponent of something similar to the Quaker Inner Light or another means of directly connecting with the Divine. While the autobiographer does always provide the spiritual context of her life, these are the points of logonomic conflict with which I am most concerned in this project.

Drawing from Scheick's identification of authorial anxiety¹⁰¹ evident in varying degrees at the logogic sites, I posit that the distance between the point of intellectual understanding, the brain, and the point of emotional understanding, the heart,¹⁰² is the physical representation of Ashbridge's logogic site. This puts the logonomic conflict as taking place in the expressions of the words of the author as they come directly from her mouth or her hands in the form of words and texts. Specifically, Scheick notes that in Puritan literature, "interweaving of the artist's craft and the Creator's artistry at these sites of dual signification provided one means of negotiating authorial pride in potentially idolatrous personal expression, on the one side, and authorial humility in possibly revealing God's concealed aesthetic design, on the other side."¹⁰³ Ashbridge tends to demonstrate that she achieves a connection with the Divine design when she is speaking and writing.

Levenduski reads Ashbridge through Eakin's theoretical frameworks. Eakin explains, "autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation," which Levenduski then interprets to mean that "the self in an autobiographical narrative is by necessity at least in part a fictional creation."¹⁰⁴ As a preeminent Ashbridge scholar, she notes that "the process of self-creation meant that [Ashbridge] faced the narrative task of unifying two very different parts of her life." As Ashbridge navigated her life pre-faith and her life after the choice

¹⁰¹ Donna Oestreich makes assumptions about this kind of authorial anxiety even in regard to Christine de Pizan in the medieval period. See chapter 5 and Oestreich's "Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*: Paradigmatic Participation and Eschewal" for a further explication of how this anxiety functions in the practice of the authorial construct of a dream-vision.

¹⁰² Roxanne Harde also focuses on the theory of the heart as logogic site in her article that I discuss later. See Harde 57-59.

¹⁰³ Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, 3; Levenduski, "Remarkable Experiences in the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge," 272.

of faith, she expresses through her actions that it is the acceptance of hope in spite of her circumstances and her willingness to forgive her abusive second husband that demonstrate what true faith and belief in God does for her. It is this narrative that she writes in order to present the pious character outside of the mainstream in order to connect with an audience that was on the margins of society. Levenduski aptly notes that Ashbridge's recreation of self is nuanced in the same vein as the seventeenth century Quaker martyrs she follows and thus places Ashbridge as part of the same spiritual heritage.¹⁰⁵

More feminist critiques of Ashbridge focus on her rhetorical techniques and the manner in which the words used lend credence to the specific theology and place of women's rights in the quotidian.¹⁰⁶ Roxanne Harde interprets the conversion rhetoric of Ashbridge alongside Abigail Bailey and suggests that these women "both position their hearts as logocentric sites in a rhetoric of self-definition in relation to their husbands and in relation to God."¹⁰⁷ Harde draws from Scheick and uses his framework to complete a comparative analysis focusing in on the specifics of Calvinist conversion and feminist theology. For Harde, the heart is the secular logocentric site that serves as the position of interpersonal conflict and God-human conflict. As Harde focuses on the plight of these women, she understands that it is necessary for each woman to discern the truth of the matter in agreement with the truth found in each's heart. While it is difficult to assign the position of feminist theologian to a woman who wrote before the term was coined, it is

¹⁰⁵ Levenduski, "Remarkable Experiences in the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge," 272.

¹⁰⁶ Susan Klepp writes about the rights of women in relation to place, using Ashbridge as an example in her article, "In Their Places: Region, Women, and Women's Rights" in *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*. Klepp notes that Quaker women specifically were given the opportunity through financial support in ministry to preach and otherwise work outside of the home and also discusses the intentional marginalization of the self in Quaker practice.

¹⁰⁷ Harde 157.

within the words of Ashbridge that it becomes evident she believes herself capable of turning within and turning to God to discern the plight of her heart and how it coincides and diverges from the Logos of God. As Ashbridge posits the value of conversion, she assigns the rhetorical argument value not because of its Calvinist or feminist theological underpinnings, but because logonomic conflict is exemplified through her chosen rhetoric. Harde also clarifies that since Ashbridge is composing her narrative later in life, she elucidates “her subjectivity as she writes from the end of her journey.”¹⁰⁸ The end of the journey—not necessarily the end of a life—is the position from which I assert one can most objectively discern the character or quality of an event, but Harde points out that this is the means through which Ashbridge expresses the nature of her own subjectivity, again decrying the traditional expectations of the genre and further exemplifying her marginal status on the fringes of society. Rather than accept a privileged position of truth and understanding later in the journey, Ashbridge understands that the undertaking of the journey is in fact the process by which she discerns her own humanity and her own spiritual distance from God. The closer she draws to God in her story, the more she realizes and accepts that she is in need of the truth and grace He offers. The journey, then, is not intended to demonstrate an ease of conversion to her audience; instead, it enhances the purpose of the conversion in light of the human choices and resulting consequences, both positive and negative.

Essentially, Ashbridge produces a coherent text that addresses the convergence of memory and the act of remembrance alongside the discordant echoes of truth and madness. Ashbridge acknowledges the abrasive spiritual voices, the demonic she hears

¹⁰⁸ Harde 159.

within her own mind, and succeeds in framing these voices alongside what she hears from the Holy Spirit to produce a text that encourages converts to encounter the Inner Light. Practically, Ashbridge falls short in her explanation of exactly how this is to happen, but I posit that this is because she understands that while her experience is unique and can provide signposts for her audience, each member of her audience will undergo an internal reaction to the spiritual voices and must make the choice of how to proceed in faith. Rather than provide a text that serves as an edict, she presents her personal experience with the hope that it will touch the lives and encourage conversion through the flowering of the fruits of the spirit as evidenced over the course of her text. Like Ashbridge, I seek to demonstrate through events and choices that I made my own spiritual journey. The italicized reflections throughout the journey function as a self-glossing of my text to exemplify the manifestation of Eakin's distinction between remembered and remembering. The remembered events of the creative lives function as starting points of self-reflection in relation to the remembering of the events in the glossings for the purpose of self-actualization.

CHAPTER 2 – JUSTY LOUISE BARNETT ENGLE (1986-PRESENT)

Justy was born to a feisty preacher man and a no-bones-about-it frugal lady in the mid-80s somewhere between neon, big hair and pick-up trucks in the biggest city in the southern state of Kentucky. She was the only child until the year after Kurt Cobain died and spent her youth in her head with music and bad poetry. At the age of 17 she put on her dad's New York beret and read the beatniks before she went to college. She was second generation college—third if you count the certificate program her grandparents completed at a small unaccredited Mountain Preachers School.

She fell in love with the city and married a boy she dragged there from the country, which resulted in disappointment for everyone, including all the Sweet Leilani loving ladies who gave her a combined eight matching place settings of china. She followed up her Poor Choices with a few more and unexpectedly, but very thankfully, became a mother and settled her bad accounts.

That was when she started researching her family history and developed a brief obsession with genealogy. That landed her as a teacher for a while (also a long-standing family tradition) before she went on to become a professor (a post 9/11 family tradition seeing as how her father also joined suit and started teaching Ethics and Eschatology).

Her passion for knowledge and love have led her down some interesting paths, not the least of which is to recount her experiences autobiographically and sometimes

even in the third person so as to pretend to have a limited omniscient perspective on her life.

She's a lot of things, really. Peculiar might be one word to sum it all up but here are a few she sussed out, as her granny might have said: mother, fighter, teacher, writer, sweet or sour or polite, student, seeker, quilter, talker, listener, coffee-er.

≠

She tried her hand at scriptotherapy once upon a time, but ultimately it was not the answer for her own cultural trauma. She would not do justice to an autothanatography. She merges the idea of the conversion narrative and the spiritual life narrative with the multiplicity of voices to address the impact and effects of cultural trauma that she began to recognize in her youth.

After a shadow of tragedy darkens a nation or a community, adolescents experience the light of youth begin to fade as the darkness of adulthood looms. It is here that a life begins, or ends. A shadow can remain permanently until an object is shrouded in darkness or it can dissipate if the sun comes out again. Cultural trauma has a strange habit of exacerbating the ideological assumptions of teenagers and pressing them down in their thoughts. Like coffee grounds in a French Press, these thoughts brew a bold coffee. But bold can be for the good of evil.

And so the web will grow and fall
Until all are gone, save one to care
Who blows the dust and cobwebs off
And opens her book of life

A Child's Prayer

Thank you God for Mommy and Daddy and Memaw and Paps and Oma and Tan and Granny Mae and Granny Harris and Grandmop. Thank you for my house and my food and my friends. Please let me have a pink bike. And a purple helmet. I guess pink would be okay, if You can't manage purple, but pink would match my Huffy and my mom likes when colors match. Amen. Oh, and make mommy not be so obstinate. Please!

The Beginning

Who is this face in the mirror? I don't recognize this face. There are lines on the forehead and bumps on the chin. There's a long black hair in a mole on the neck. Either my eyes are exaggerating or what I'm seeing just seems to grow with every look. It's evil, really.

I know that there was a time I knew who I was but sometime between the simplification of Bible college living and living on my own there was a disconnect. I began writing about myself in the second person, then the third person. I began to see that my face was changing and I no longer recognized the emptiness behind my eyes. Hollow? Maybe. I wasn't sure how to handle it. I know this happened in 2001. I know because that was the year of 9/11. The tragedy of the country two days before my 15th birthday. For a long time I attributed my sadness to that event because I felt so helpless and I used it as an excuse. The truth? I was sexually assaulted in May of that year. I wanted any excuse in the world to connect my own sadness with something outside of myself.

The Disney Channel

The earliest moments I remember begin as blotches of color, then transform into images. I remember bits and pieces of moments, but nothing fully structured. The moments skip around and feel very disjointed. The time frame doesn't connect well, but my mother's notes suggest that these moments formed over about eighteen months.

I see cats dancing in pink tutus and blue bowties around the flying circus. Acrobatic cats, white, gray. Big eyes, big mouths, bigger heads. Long tails wrapped around their midsections when their voices get nervous. A mischievous black cat in and orange and blue hat crosses his feet as he posts up against the tent. He's got green eyes. Always green eyes.

I sit down on the gray carpet and run my fingers through the grooves left by the cherry desk that was taken. The grooves are deep, but the carpet bounces back with every touch.

White, Chocolate Sweatsuit

Before all that, who was I? As I reflect on who I was and who I wanted to be—before I lost my self-esteem in shame—I have to think about when I experienced shame prior. It's a shadow that covers my childhood. The assault was the culminating event of several tiny events that developed a default of shame in my own mind. The events of my youth initiated me into believing so deeply that I was not capable of covering up the shadow of shame, that it could be as visible as chocolate milk on a white sweatsuit.

All students in primary, first through third grade, at Harmony Elementary were sitting in the cafeteria for breakfast. The video on the TV was of a bunch of kids singing around a one-eyed, one-horned, flying, purple people eater. There was something about a watermelon down by the bay that I ignored as I looked up from the bench seat at breakfast. A traffic light had just been installed in the cafeteria to tell us when we were talking too loud. I didn't understand why the school was trying to control the volume of students at lunch when it was such a small school anyway. My class did have 35 in it, though, after the twins came from Frakes.

I was eating my waffle sticks, dipping them into syrup with no problems at all. I was proud of myself. I hadn't gotten any on myself yet. Then I was drinking chocolate milk. I don't know if someone hit me when he or she got up to dump a tray, but that milk slipped and covered the white sweatsuit my mother had so kindly purchased for me. I could feel all the eyes drift from the TV, past my Sally Jesse Raphael red glasses and right down to the chocolate that was now covering everything on me—including my white socks and white tennis shoes.

I'd never felt so far pushed into the limelight. I'd never had so many negative eyes on me whose accompanying mouths followed up the eye-stares with excessive laughter reserved for the one-eyed one-horned flying purple people eater VHS. I felt excluded. I felt misunderstood. I felt lost. These kids hadn't exactly been kind before, but after that? They were downright mean. They had something to hold over me, to laugh at me about, and they were going to laugh. It's like when you're in a tunnel and you lose sight of everything else that's good and all you see is darkness. The darkness

crept in on me and the menace in their eyes shrunk me down inside myself and followed me in.

Inside my own skin I withered—embarrassed, immobile—and waited for my mom to retrieve me.

Dylan and the Dead

I never felt ashamed when I was with my dad. He taught me to write down everything I didn't like about the world so I could come up with solutions for all its problems. Even though I argued with my mom and we didn't agree on my attitude or plaid-skirt-over jeans look, I knew she loved me. I just didn't always believe it. I felt shame when I did things that might disappoint her and gave her reasons to be upset with me. When I was with my dad I was untouchable, peaceful and ready to soak up knowledge of all things.

“What is this, daddy?”

“It's Bob Dylan, sweetie. I've been listening to him since I was in high school.”

“What's he singing about?”

“A little bit of everything.”

The little girl in the passenger seat bobbed her head to the discordant chords of a folk great. She laughed when her daddy switched out the cassette and put in a song that said “Terrapin” over and over. She loved the Grateful Dead. She loved riding in the car with her dad to go get the mail or go get snacks for her mom. Most of all she just loved being with her dad. He was a calming presence in her life. He had the answer to everything. While she grew frustrated with her mother who was ever present in her

life—and had even stayed home to care for her until she went to kindergarten—she could never get enough time with her dad. He taught her to love jazz music and took her to meet old professors who listened to The Andrews Sisters on records. He taught her to take note of big band music and encouraged her when she later went on to play the trumpet, just like his father did.

This little girl constantly sat outside her father's study and waited with a book so she could ask questions when he emerged and became increasingly frustrated with her mother's persistent demands to complete the menial daily tasks, like setting the table and cleaning up the three cereal bowls stacked in her bedroom window. Her mother didn't believe her when she told her she saw demons trying to come in her windows and little hands clawing at her covers. Her mother didn't understand. But daddy did. Daddy was always escaping into books, so she did, too.

The First Nightmare

I was seven when the nightmares began. That's when I began mixing fear with shame. It was only made worse because I already believed my mother didn't believe me and we were already at odds in my mind. Shame and fear feed off of each other the way an ouroboros eats its own tail; they might just be different parts of the same beast.

You watch the bricks peel away from the fireplace in the basement and see a pit like the one your dad and all of the other pastors preached about on Sunday mornings. It's black, mostly ashes, and there are millions of arms reaching up to grab you. They take hold of your hands and they pull and pull and pull and you think you're going to fly right off the couch into that pit—but you don't. Your mom has hold of your ankles. She

keeps you rooted to that couch so the evil can't touch you, can't take you down. You don't know whether you wake up or the pit closes. But you sleep with the light on for the next three years, just in case.

There's a Portal to Hell in Grandma's Basement

It's the middle of the night and Little Honey-Brown Haired Girl is running screaming into her mother's room again.

"Moooooooooooooooooom! He's after me again!"

"Who, Honey, who is after you?"

"You know who."

"No, Honey, I don't know who. I don't see anyone behind you. Who is after you?"

"The devil."

"Pumpkin, we've been over this before. The devil is not after you. He isn't out to get you."

"Yes, he is, Mommy. I saw it in my dream."

"Sweetie, that's enough. We're not talking about your dreams. They're silly. Just pretend."

"They are not." Honey tilts her head down and clenches her jaw as she crosses her chest with her arms at angles to her body. She stops short of huffing.

"Go back to bed."

Honey stands silently, glaring at her disheveled mother.

"Now." Her mother waits for a moment and crinkles her nose. Her eyes turn to slits.

“Now,” her mother hisses.

Honey’s eyes widen and she scampers back to her room. She hops into her bed and reshuffles the pillows around her body so that nothing can come in from any side under the blanket and grab her. She flips her body facedown and pulls the purple comforter up over her head and shakes until she falls asleep again. Then she has the dream again. It’s the same dream she’s been having for months. It’s the dream her other grandmother—the one she never met, the one who gave her daddy up to Grandma Shelley—used to have.

The dream always takes place in the basement of Grandma Shelley’s old house on Norway Drive. It’s next to the navy couch with white dots where Grandpa Jack died of a heart attack in 1979. It’s always in front of the fireplace. The red bricks beside the fireplace slide away to reveal a pit of darkness. In this pit there is the wailing and gnashing of teeth like in Pastor Tim’s sermons with hellfire and brimstone. The only colors her eyes can see are red and echoes of black. The devil sits in the middle of the pit surrounded by demons and sinners. He reaches his gnarled claws up to Honey and tries to pull her into the pit. She always tries to scream but no sound comes out of her mouth. Honey is always immobile. Her mother always grabs her ankles and tries to pull her out of the pit. Honey always awakes in terror. Her other grandmother died before Honey was ever born, before she ever told anyone that she had the same dream too. Whispers from the light tell Honey she isn’t alone, but there are many family tales that whispers cannot tell. The shadows keep the whispers of illuminating tales from the granddaughters of grandmothers who give up their sons for adoption.

I Don't Even Want to Pray

There were days that I hated God. I wanted Him to leave me alone, so I ignored Him. I still wanted to talk to Him, so I let loose my anger and frustration and let Him have it. The days were tricky. I was growing up in a Southern Baptist home at a Southern Baptist College, but my best friend claimed to be a bisexual Wiccan and the issue of this awareness of our location combined with her thoughts caused some serious cognitive dissonance and questions about how deep cuts in the forearm needed to be. She once noted that an online source had suggested “down the road, not across the street.” It was a phrase I adopted with hand motions and cold eyes when rumors flew that I was going to kill myself; I hadn't realized then just how close she was to actually pursuing the action. I wanted to be her friend, but how could I do that successfully? How could I break through the emotional walls we'd both built up and used to protect ourselves from our darkest dreams? I was dealing with what they so often refer to as living in the world, but not being stained by the world. I struggled with this concept in action, because I so infrequently saw love as a positive force in this situation—if I even saw love at all. I wanted to be accepted; I wanted to be myself. I could not be both.

What does it matter, God? I'm tired. I don't want to do this. I don't want to feel this. I don't know how to talk to anyone. I can't do this. Help. I don't know what to do. My best friend wants to kill herself. She's barely 13. I just want to save her, but I keep losing myself. She tells me she loves me, and I think she means it. Really, all I want to do is turn off the lights and sneak and watch *Caroline in the City* at 2am. I don't know how to talk to her. She tells me about a pit in the desert where the demons live, where the

cries and screams of people are heard from the depths of that darkness. She taught me to listen to Nine Inch Nails and hear the fear in Trent Reznor's voice, circling around the spiral. Fear and shame, the ouroboros at it again. God, does she love me? Why won't she listen to me? Why do I want to die, too? Are you even listening?

Little Red Dress

Flashes of memory from elementary school came back to me during middle school. I began to ask who I was and how I knew the moment shifted that left me completely alone. What would it mean to be the redress for the brokenness of my family's past? I asked myself questions that I didn't understand, even then. When I couldn't answer, I lived in moments like these. Sad, simple moments.

The little girl in the red dress is me

She has a bright red bow in her hair

And the tiniest hint of a crimp

She longs to belong

But as she runs on the playground

Red dress flapping like a bird

Her devil-may-care attitude

Leaves her swinging too high

—alone

She propels herself into the air
With her own two feet
Relying on wind resistance and gravity
To maintain motion

The other children gather for jump rope
But her clumsiness holds her back
Even when the red dress hides the blood

She remains
last chosen on the blacktop for basketball
after free play

Loss

I always wanted to be a hand-stitched quilt. There's something about the way the pieces fit together and it being okay to call it crazy. I wanted to be an inanimate object: useful, silent but still able to tell a story. Stitched together with real love. I felt so much fear when I fell in love for the first time. I was fifteen, and the year before I had been sexually assaulted in a hotel room on a school trip. I didn't know how to do life anymore. I had distorted pictures of love. I was so ashamed. So I lobbed cannonballs at his esteem. I tried to destroy him before he could destroy me. Then I felt alienated by my own feelings and the walls I'd built up for myself began to grow taller and taller. Shame and fear constricted like a boa leaving me gasping for air until my lungs stopped pumping. That's when darkness took over.

The room was neutral, blacks and whites. It looked like penguins parading to a funeral.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he choked.

“Can we try something?” She leaned in to kiss him. They embraced, kissed, spun around in the moment together to see if the sparks might ignite into flames. They didn’t.

She stood silently for a moment and furrowed her brow as she tried to divine what was behind his blue eyes. Then she turned to face the darkness.

“What did you want to feel?” he asked.

“Fire,” she whispered as tears began to stream down her face, but he couldn’t see.

He didn’t speak. She walked down the long expanse of driveway toward the playground where her car was parked. The sparks were gone, she thought, the coals reduced to ash.

I Don’t Even Know Who I Am

When I went to college I lost even more of my identity. I saw myself slipping away and tried to express myself in negatives. I saw the nots instead of the haves. I hadn’t begun researching my family history or asking questions about my father’s biological family. Who could I have been? So I defined myself by what I was not.

I am not a cookie-cutter, 4.0, baked not fried, isolated, inundated, prim and proper, pressed, postmarked, delivered on time, without regret, over-worked, high-

maintenance, hot-to-trot, trophy trollop, beautiful, seductive, anti-depressant, happy glob, made-up, dressed to impress, hollow-hearted, sallow soul.

There's a calendar in my mind that holds everything together. Classes, lunches, dinners, coffee. My emotions and ideas are floating inside my head. I'm sick, but I can't rest, I can't write. I'd so much rather write than sleep. My papers are terrible. I can't even record complete thoughts. The sentences don't *flow*. What happened to my purpose?

Tilting at Windows

I kept thinking of Dali's "Woman at the Window" and I saw myself through her.

If I sneak along lonely enough / to the edge of the window I might / find that at the ledge
there is an edge / that catches on my scarf as I lean / across to decide whether I might / so
gently glide outside or if it's / best if I simply rest and pull my / torso from outside to stop
the rain / from falling and the fog from falling / fall never lifting leaves me calling / out in
darkness because the sun has / set and I am left again waiting / at the window—at the
window / ever at the window I will wait / at the window for the night to draw / to close
too close to let the daybreak / come again without the darkness in / the window so I sit
half waiting / for the coming of the broken light

The Burn

*I learned how to falsify causes of my emotions. I blamed a lot on 9/11, but I
wasn't a New Yorker. All I could do was write veiled poetry that didn't get to the heart of
the real issues because the poems were focusing on the window dressing. I couldn't
name the assault as what it was. I had to pretend it was other people's heartaches that*

deeply affected me. Instead of embracing selfishness in my own healing, I latched on to people who had lived through tragedy. I lived a twisted hope that I could heal through the hopeless—but so few of them believed in healing.

I saw Art Spiegelman speak once. The only time I ever saw a man chain-smoke inside a building at the University. He haunted me. His visceral illustrations explored the decimation of the Twin Towers in his board book *In the Shadow of No Towers*. My hand was never steady enough to clearly sketch the horrors of the day, but my mind could replay every horror of my own personal experience. I connected with him because his images spoke the pain I would never be honest about. Instead of letting myself feel the real emotions and grief of my assault on an itchy green comforter, I imagined myself a widow, hiding behind the window of a building within visibility of the cloud of darkness that rolled in and left me unable to wonder how it had marked me: it layered the world with darkness.

Ice is the facet of hope that all will be frozen
That the windows and steel won't collapse

Scorched faceplates three blocks south remind us
That the incineration is not final
And it leaves fragments of flesh
On city streets where she and he once walked

Heel, toe, click, click

Heel, toe, click

Pretty Bird

My second abuser used to tell me that he hated my eyes. That they weren't pretty. That my face was off. That I was fat. That I was stupid. That I was incapable of achieving anything. That he loved other women. That he'd rather smoke a joint than look at my face. That I had to bathe because I stank. That I would never amount to anything. That I could never possibly be the only love of anyone. That even my best friend would leave me. And she did. For him.

blue eyes brown / looks for bluer still / wanders far in tattered ropes / fallow bird falls and then / is still

“Have a Nice Day!”

Sometimes I want to hang my head and cry and become a country song. As I stand looking out the plate glass window, I see a man lovingly kiss a woman on the street and my eyes well up with tears. I breathe quickly and exhale, exhale, exhale. Oh, but there is an ache that remains in my tear ducts after I fight back the tears as I stand behind the counter and ask “Can I help you” with a mechanical smile like an overenthused robot. It's always worse behind the counter.

I see a car crash into a pole outside the store and the driver stagger out carrying a fifth of vodka. My heart slides into my shoes and I just stare at the carnage. A man

comes up to the counter. We'll call him Grumpy Joe. Well, Grumpy Joe came up to the counter where I was sleeving CDs (we sold movies and video games, too). He grunted.

"Can I help you?" I ask in my most polite work-tone with my happy-work-face.

"Uh—is there someone else?" Grumpy Joe asks as he scratches his second day old stubble. He uncomfortably adjusts his dirty Dodger's hat.

"No, it's just me right now, is there something you're looking for?" I cap my pen and place it on the counter.

"Well I want to buy a new book." His voice cracks a bit as he pushed the words out of his mouth.

"What kind of books do you like, sir?"

"I like to read about where they blow shit up and murder people."

"Oh," still keeping my happy-work-face on while trying desperately to prevent the oh-my-God-what-did-he-just-say-face from surfacing I responded, "I think we have something in the true crime section that might just work for you."

"Naw, I don't like that true shit. I want that made up stuff. It's more fun."

"Maybe if you told me who your favorite author is I can help you find something that would work."

"I don't know. I liked *The Pelican Brief*. You got something like that?"

"I think we do have a few John Grisham novels. Let me check the cart; I don't even think we've put them out yet."

"No, I don't like John Grisham."

Don't point out who the author is, I keep telling myself, it won't do any good, I keep telling myself. I'm still wearing my work-happy-face although I think my smile is

beginning to fall apart around the edges and so the teeth are starting to look creepy or scared instead of bright and shiny. “Well what about J.D. Robb? I hear good things about that author.”

“Never heard of him. What’s he write?”

“You know, I don’t actually know titles off the top of my head, but we can go to the shelf to check.” At this point we walk over to the far corner of the store where we keep the men’s novels beside the women’s novels. And, no, I’m not kidding. We basically kept the men’s books, with some Catherine Coulter and a few others—you know, the ones with dark covers—next to the women’s books—the ones with bright colors. I made the mistake of continuing to explain to him, “I think J.D. Robb also writes as Nora Roberts and Robb is just her pen name for this other kind of book.”

“Wait, it’s a woman? Oh hell no. I don’t read books women write.”

I’m dangerously close to cursing this man and it’s become very hard for me to keep that happy-work-face on. I tap my right foot. He pulls a Richard Patterson novel off the shelf.

“Excellent choice, sir, I’ll meet you at the register when you’re ready to check out. Let me know if you have any other questions.” I turn around and start to walk to the register but stop short of moving my second foot forward when I hear a grumble behind me.

“Don’t you have any good ideas?”

“Excuse me?”

“You told me to check out that crappy woman author, don’t you have any good ideas instead of her?”

I purse my lips then return my face to robot smile mode and press my right thumb into my left finger as I put my hands together so I wouldn't make a fist. "No, sir, I'm sorry, I don't think I have any good ideas today."

"Well fine, then ring me up this one. I guess it'll be okay."

Seething, I walk up to the counter and tell myself to just keep walking, just keep walking, smile, smile, quit pursing those lips, smile, just keep smiling, won't you just smile, come on lips, just curl into a smile not a snarl. I key in the numbers on the keypad, 3-9-9 then I press the new books button and then subtotal. "That'll be \$4.23 sir."

"I thought these was used books. I thought they was supposed to be cheap."

"The list price is \$7.99, so we take the original price and cut that in half."

He puffs out his chest and gets that crazy look in his eye like he's about to have a staredown with a Tasmanian devil. He pulls out a massive change purse that I wonder where he was hiding. Oh, the fanny pack, right, I didn't notice that. He starts putting his coins on the counter, one quarter after another, then moves on to dimes. Eight quarters and twenty-three dimes later—counted twice—and I push the numbers 4-3-0 and hit the cash button. The drawer slides open and I pull out two pennies and a nickel and place them in his dirty, calloused hand. "Out of four-thirty, seven cents is your change. Do you need a bag?"

He grunts.

I slide the paperback into the plastic sack and place it on the counter. "Have a nice day!"

"I'll have a better one when somebody else is working." As he leaves the bell jingles and I realize that my hands are shaking. I realize there are no customers in the

store so I let myself relax. I sit down on the dirty blue carpet behind the counter and close my eyes and breathe. In, out, relax, rest, it's okay, not everyone is like that, it's okay, there's nothing wrong with getting a little upset but you've got to let it out. Six more hours, just six more hours and you can go home. It's just an eight-hour day at the bookstore. It's Friday, your favorite customers will be in today, it's okay, I keep telling myself. About that time Pete walks in and starts yelling at me.

“What the hell are you doing? Why aren't you working?” He screams, throwing his brown jacket on a carton of LPs and walking towards me. He pulls me up by the shoulders and I push back throwing his right hand off my left arm in a gesture that causes his hand to slam into the wall. I see a dark glow hit his eyes and his face drops a shade and the frown wrinkles on his cheeks come out of hiding. I see his lips start to wrinkle until they form an “o” and he says, in the womanliest way a man can deadpan it, “Oh no you didn't.”

These are the thoughts that went through my mind: A drunk man crashed into a pole and climbed out of the wreckage. Another man died crossing the street just a few blocks north. And I saw an old lady steal books today. Pete is an asshole.

So I punched him.

In that moment a decade and a half of anger bubbled to the surface and I saw myself smiling in the cafeteria watching the sing-a-long about the one-eyed, one-horned, flying, purple people eater. Then Shari started mocking me. And during lunch when we had recess taken away when the stoplight turned red because Roger was yelling at me because I wouldn't let him have my dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets. And when I was excited to take my Rescue Rangers lunch box to school with a thermos of chicken noodle

soup but I spilled it all over my jeans. I saw the man who assaulted me and felt the water beating down on my face in the shower as I scrubbed my face and my arms after he finally left. In that moment, Pete became every single one of those people who hurt me.

I told him to leave. He saw by the fire in my eyes that I would settle for nothing less than his absence. He left. I faked my robot smile for the rest of the day. As Pete walked out the door I smiled, “Have a nice day!”

The Break-Up

I had a dream my second abuser killed me.

We fall to heaps

In separate sheets

And are lulled to sleep

By separate sheep

First white, then black, then grey...

The Weeks Before the Breakdown

The dreams intensified as the time to leave drew to a close. The can opener was the most menacing implement of torture I saw, but the darkness was closing in. Daily activities in my dreams became battles and innocent objects turned into harbingers of death.

I opened the can the wrong way. The worms fell in upon themselves instead of out. Then they attacked me.

I knew I was doing something wrong from the start. The first two can openers just wouldn't work. The dull can openers simply weren't as piercing as they ought to have been. Neither are my eyes, but that's not the point. The point was—is—the worms. What about the worms? I let them out. Oops.

The Breakdown

I began to dissociate from reality, to forget who I was. I looked through the window and saw myself, Dali's woman on the other side. A faceless woman, a woman who was empty and connected to the walls, the windows, the water. Who was she? She is always me.

John punched a hole in the wall. He looked her in the eye and said “better the wall than you.” She went to work. She came home that night and they went to the store and he bought drywall tape and everything he needed to patch the hole. She went to work again the next day. The bell on the door made a noise every time it opened but she didn't hear. Customers asked questions as she shuffled about. She watched her feet move her to the back stoop behind the store and felt the tears tingle down her cheeks as she broke down. She borrowed boxes and storage tubs from the store and called her parents to come help her move out. She'd finally had enough. The carton of eggs in her face hadn't done it the month before, but this time she didn't black out and forget his

rages. This time she saw his anger burn a hole into the wall and suddenly her bruises made so much more sense. She was numb.

The echoes of the blackness taking over kept pacing back and forth in her head and the memory of the pink saran wrap and the duct tape faded into her memory and she filed them away in a filing cabinet in her memory clearly marked: hell.

The Breakdown Revisited

A healed person would have left quickly. I chose to wait it out. I kept seeing myself from the outside of my body. I had completely dissociated my reality from my mind. I think I was walking around in shock.

The golden leaves were fluttering from the trees as the breeze blew on a chill November afternoon. Yellow and orange littered the streets and the trees showed off their skeletons. A whirlwind of leaves brewed in the wake of a silver car.

“You did it again,” she observed, running her fingers across pale pink distinctly fresh marks on his forearm.

“So?” John nonchalantly remarked.

Her soul retreated deeper into her eyes, leaving them glassy. She tuned her eyes to the leaves fluttering past and let her imagined sound of the echo of the leaves spinning fill her ears.

He slammed on the brakes to avoid crushing a cat as it slinked across the street. She made a face as the seat belt caught leaving her halfway between the seat back and the windshield. A lone leaf caught her eye as it paused, suspended in front of the window—and just as quickly it fell and the car again moved forward.

Break

I kept seeing demons in my dreams. I don't know how long it went on.

In my mind I see the empty face in front of me. Knots in my stomach prevent deep breathing, releasing the demons. I press forward, but I'm stuck in the muck. I look down and dark blobs have wrapped around both ankles.

I look up and I see the light fade and brighten, fade and brighten. Structures pass before me and shift as decades rage on. Skyscrapers build up and fall down, build up and fall down.

The darkness blocks the light of the moon as I look up to see the figure leading in even darker clouds. The harbinger of death and doom brews on the horizon.

The scene shifts and I'm on the ocean. The ship grows heavy under pressure from above, the spirits press down and tilt the sails, deep blue sky blends to the waters below and sunlight hides behind a veil of darkness. Waves move and boards splinter; with every dashed board, my hope weakens, my soul weakens. My soul slips out in torn pieces. I see no other living bodies, only empty shells of darkness. How do we repent the damage done when all are gone in the city, save one? I am lost and empty. All I can do is watch as my soul slips away into the sea and I realize that when only one person is left in the rubble of tragedy, the life after rubble is not actually life.

What Happened?

Anger. That was where I was for a while. I twisted my fists when I slept and my left hand would begin to go numb. The connections in my whole body were out of order.

The sequence of these stories might be out of order. Time was all a blur in these moments and the memories may not have come back clearly.

I forgot how to pray for a while. It was somewhere between the numbness and the pain of the guy finding other girls to flaunt in my face. Maybe it was when my left hand started to go numb and I lost my grip on the big book of medieval art at work. Maybe it was when I stayed out all night walking in downtown Louisville with that guy and then sat beneath the underpass until we watched the sunrise. We walked past the cemetery and the coffee shop and the homeless lady with the checkered rolling cart.

I have been so angry I haven't even wanted to talk to God. Desperate to be loved, I have been begging and pleading for this guy to love me. This guy made me feel as dirty on the outside as I felt on the inside so that there was no cognitive dissonance. Shame and Punishment were my constant companions, my true friends who set up residence on my futon. And that was okay for a while. But all he ever did was throw eggs in my hair, tell me my eyes were the color of crap and make me feel like I was in an emotional hurricane. When he threw those eggs I lost it. I didn't know I could see red. I've never been so angry at another human being in my life—not even Pete.

When I saw red it must have been a week after the guys got hold of a roll of pink saran wrap. We were going to see *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* together and one got hold of me and started wrapping and the other started spinning me around. Someone grabbed the duct tape and there I was, standing in the middle of the hall, covered in pink saran wrap and duct tape. One of the others snapped a few pictures then they unwrapped me and we went to the movies.

So when I saw red...it was late in the evening. It must have been when the dryer was running because the back door was open. I wanted to make a cake for work. For my boss's birthday. So it must have been late September. I was having trouble doing something and I asked for help. He threw one egg at my head. And another. Then he grabbed the wooden spoon and started splashing the cake batter in my face. I felt a bubbling sensation in my fingertips and it went up to my elbows then my shoulders and I could feel my whole body beginning to tremble until I felt the tingle in my ears and then it hit the top of my eyes and my sight went red as I watched my right hand connect with his left cheek.

When I came back the internal vibrations were gone and he was holding my arms to my sides. I asked what happened and he told me I just wouldn't stop.

Espresso

It took a lot to believe in my heart the things that I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt to be true. I think truth was squeezed out of me by the snakes of my dreams.

I filled the water up to the line and poured it in the top of the machine. Switching the machine to the espresso setting I waited for the carafe to fill. I poured a little milk into the small silver measuring cup and flipped the setting to steam and watched the temperature on the thermometer rise. The temperature held steady for a while, then when the steam kicked on it rose quickly and exponentially. Before I knew it the froth was bubbling over the top and onto the countertop. Scalded, but it would work. I clicked the machine off and poured the espresso in the red cup, followed it with milk. Mechanically

I unscrewed the cap of the machine, forgetting that I was supposed to wait for it to cool down. A mushroom cloud of steam escaped with a whoosh and moistened the walls and the bottom of the cupboard. I laughed, then took a sip and sat for a long time smiling and staring at the birds in my grandmother's backyard.

Losing my Best Friend to John

A few months after I cut ties with the abuser, my best friend told me she was in love with him. So I did what any great best friend would do: I kissed him to prove that she was wrong. He lied about it. She thought I lied about it. So they both stopped speaking to me and I went to Spain.

It was about two in the afternoon on a Saturday, a month since I kissed John. He had been begging me to meet with him so I agreed to McDonald's a few days before I went to Spain. He pulled up in that dirty old Camaro and rolled down his window next to my Taurus.

"Please tell her nothing happened," he begged.

"I won't do it," I resolved.

"She needs to hear it from you."

"No. You can't make me." I sounded like a five-year-old.

"Fine, have it your way." So did he. Then he peeled out and I never saw him again.

I sat in my car for a long time staring at the birds on the wire. The wind blew and they flew away and I turned the car on and didn't look back. I picked up my cellphone and called a Nice Guy from back home who had been asking me out.

Vision

Somewhere in Spain I finally began to believe I was someone again. I finally began to feel hope rising back up in my lungs. There was passion in my words again.

On a beach in the Mediterranean, I listened to Minus the Bear and wondered how to break off the bad relationship I walked into before I took the trip. I picked the very next nice guy I could find after the abuser walked away with my best friend. He was such a nice guy, but the disconnect between us was growing like static. Sometimes when I close my eyes I see the black and white static come between us and it switches to color bars, like when a TV station has an error.

I want to have a real vision, a revelation of what my life should be like, of how to be at peace in Jesus. Instead, I keep seeing words that have been rehashed. The air feels empty, like a spiritual battle once took place. When I saw my first Cathedral in Madrid, I was overcome by its beauty and its emptiness. This emptiness began to be my revelation, even if it wasn't the revelation I wanted.

I walked around empty for several days, stopping for napolitanas de chocolate at the bakery and café con leche at the café, before wandering off to Complutense to work with the Agape ministry team. I saw Picasso's *Guernica*, Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* and my first Dali in person. It was a woman looking out into the water and the water merged with the window. It was her. Seeing this painting in person, so different from all of the other Dali works I'd seen before, let me feel the breeze from her window in my own hair. The wrinkles in the clouds matched the wrinkles in her dress; the waves

in the water matched the window-dressing. The outside world, magnified by her appearance and the images she took in, clearly reflected her internal state.

So I went to the tattoo parlor and, in my broken Spanish, said, “yo quiero aqui” and pointed to my lip. The dreadlocked lady behind the register pointed to the jewelry and I pointed to the hoop; it looked like an ouroboros. She shook her head no and pointed to the barbell. I tried to ask why, but all I understood was something about healing and better for me. I shrugged, nodded and waited. A guy walked downstairs and asked if I was ready. He turned around and led me back to where he had been. I walked up the stairs in this dark place with a dark-haired, dark-skinned, beautiful man and he led me into a small room. Again, I said “aqui” and pointed to my lip. He questioned, “aqui?” “Si, si, aqui!” I squeaked. As he slid the needle into my lip, I felt the whitehot pain reverberate through my body and the adrenaline speed through my veins. I made no sound or breath until after he slid the barbell through and twisted the ball in place, then I exhaled. He smiled. I smiled. I had made a new meaning for putting a pin into an idea. I would live hope and art and peace.

That night I prayed.

Slapstick’s Ringing in my Ears

I’ve only been back from Spain just over a month, but everything’s back to normal. School’s back in session, work is routine and the nice guy I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt I should drop like a bad habit is my boyfriend. Yeah, I’m doing a pretty good job listening to my gut instincts here. I keep trying to call someone else, but he won’t answer. He’s mad at me. I can’t even blame him. But for all the times he

drunk-dialed me he could at least answer my sober calls now. Ok, so he knows I have a boyfriend. It probably should have been him instead.

It almost was.

Let me back up. After I came back from the airport—angry at everyone for loving me and showing up—I slept for something like 15 hours. That’s what riding on a bus all night from Alicante to Madrid then realizing your bag strap broke and sewing it up with a needle and thread you just happened to have in said bag while waiting on the metro to open then riding the metro to the airport and going through an international flight next to a cranky old man will do to you. Still, I probably could have appreciated that I had 15 people at the airport to greet me. I really just wanted to eat and sleep.

And as soon as I woke up, I called the guy that’s mad at me. The guy with the beautiful black lab puppy. I couldn’t wait to see that cute little dog. So I put on my new army green skirt from Leftie’s with my hot pink shirt and met him at his new apartment. We took the dog to the fountain in Cherokee park, then walked around the park for a while. We held hands. He kissed me. And I ran away like a bat out of hell and went home to read Vonnegut. His books are comfort food for the sardonically inclined. Then I called up my current boyfriend and told him I’d kissed someone else and he immediately asked me back out. I think there’s a lesson here about only wanting what others want, but I don’t want to learn it yet. I don’t think I want to learn anything right now. I just want to say forget it all and check out for a while. Everything’s back in session, so I can just go through the motions. I know how to do life like this. I can keep walking in circles and proverbially eating my own tail. What’s the use of trying so hard when all I do is repeat the same old patterns?

Destroyers

Sometime in 2007 I tried to write again, but it was the year that disappeared in wedding gowns made for marrying the wrong man, working 60 hours a week, and straight A's in all 7 upper level college classes.

I want to go home. I don't want to read e.e. cummings poems anymore. I want to scream and pretend I didn't make these choices. I want to pretend that someone cares about me, that I made good decisions and I'm happy. I thought marriages were supposed to hold up for more than six months. I thought you would still want to spend time with each other after three months. But here it is, I'm finally 21, and nothing sounds exciting.

I just want to go home. Where is it? I think I'm lost, somehow, following a broken compass rose.

I Can't Breathe

Two years after Spain the ouroboros reared its ugly head/tail again and took away my hope. Squeezed it right out of me. But it wouldn't eat me up. It wanted me to eat myself. It wanted me to let go of my first love, the one who always called me the Empyrean to his Aphelion. He kept writing me poetry and I kept writing him poetry back that sometimes I sent but mostly I just wrote in my head and pretended that was enough.

Have you ever felt winded, itching,
grasping at the center of your back
trying to pry off the fear dragging you into the past

shivering in the memory of the tragedy
that, for you, he wrote all of those
words

Passion, desire—just chemicals from a Savage Garden song—screaming:
vodka and a Cherry Cola

His heart hides in black Satin Sheets, floating there
in Silverchair's Neon Ballroom
like shooting stars who lost their spark
instead becoming black holes

His voice echoes: I wonder if empyrean will ever meet aphelion in that vast expanse of
space...or maybe it's all just a race to see if the hole in the galaxy can be escaped

Shards of the broken window
beneath my bloody knuckles
reflecting sunlight

Reminds me that Pollyanna's prism is
a light illusion

The edge of an error—
is where I stopped

The Return

My first love wrote me back, once. It was a response to my heart. The only problem was I was married to someone else. I married the First Nice Guy After My Second Abuser. But by then we were both so blackened by our own shadows that we fled from hope in fear that it might bring to light the shameful things that kept us comfortable in our cocoons of chaos.

“Breathless” by The Corrs was the first music video I saw on the television set that sat on the floor in the second floor apartment on Todd Street. I was getting ready for school and the melody and the happiness did not jive with the breathless silence that I had felt just the night before when the demons pressed on my chest again. It was memory, him, recalling the pain and the fear. Fear spread like a virus, but it started in the heel of my left foot and it sprung up through my marrow and into my skin and permeated my bloodstream. It endured, even when he was gone.

I had gone to see him. His mother let me in, but he was not in his room. His window was open, but as I leaned out of it I saw no trace of him. I walked outside and heard a rustle in the garage and I knew. I left him there, hiding in the garage, while he reeled and believed that we were all murderers because that’s what the fear within him said. I saw smoke leave the window and saw the embers of the cigarette turning to ash in

the darkness. He wanted to make demands of his demons, but he served them Wild Turkey inside his own head.

One night the clouds had broken, so many years before, and we had stared up at the sky from the pavement. We saw the stars and there was hope in his demands for his demons to release him, but they just hid in his heel until it was time to strike.

He saw me as both eclipse and empyrean to his aphelion, the Audrey Hepburn for our grand televised romance. In his head he rose her from the dead and wished for a cheap novel to become his muse. Instead of speaking, we just stared at the sky and he mumbled something about fear and tradition and if peccavi would save us from perdition.

2009 Was Lost in the Hurricane, Ice Storms and Various Sundry Failures

I was three years into a failed marriage. It was over before the honeymoon in both of our hearts. We just wanted to save face and not have to face all of the kind givers of fine china and glassware. Sweet, privileged ladies give the best gifts and have the most frightening judgmental faces. I was afraid of these sweet ladies turning on me. I think he was, too. The rants came more frequently during this phase. There was little peace in the house and a lack of peace tends to produce less tethered texts.

I want simplicity. I want ease. I want the electric bill to be smaller. I want to be able to pack everything I need in my car in one trip. I want to be able to give things away. Beholden to nothing and no one in this lifetime. No debts. I don't want to worry about credit. I wish money didn't exist. I want a farm, sheep. I want to know how to spin yarn, dye it. I want to learn to weave. I want to be able to play all kinds of musical instruments. I want to take an hour a day and learn something new, an hour to play

music. I want to take the time before I have children to learn to play guitar, speak French, and dance ballet so that I can teach my own children. I want to stop lying to myself about goals and aspirations. I want to write that first book, to overcome the hedge-high hurdles, and just write it. I need a story. I need to listen to my own advice, and write something down first, and then flesh out the story as it goes, returning to my piece of paper when I'm at a loss.

I wish I butchered my own hogs, cured my own meat, made my own kitchen table. I want to live with the land, not be tied to my cell phone. I want people to have an appreciation for the country. I want to get the hell out of the city before it drives me crazier than I already am, so I can write without being driven out of whatever sanity I have by concrete and asphalt.

Ancient oaks have been uprooted in favor of steel beams scraping the heavens. Hubs of life have become hubs of the walking dead. We hide Great Grandparents with Alzheimer's in places we call homes, but the beds they sleep in—the remote-controlled ones that squeak mechanically, incessantly—inevitably become the sites of their deaths. We feed them Jell-O and unbuttered, unsalted mashed potatoes because that set of chemicals is better for them and they gum through it all anyway when they leave their dentures on the nightstand. Then Sarah McLachlan sings while a woman narrates images of animal cruelty on a commercial and the audience either changes the channel or cries and laments at how bad it is to send these animals to empty concrete homes where we know they will inevitably die if no one intervenes.

Then the commercial changes and it's a man's voice narrating over images of children with distended bellies in a far-off country. We change the channel again or cry

and lament for these children while screaming for the neighborhood kids to get off the manicured lawn. We ignore the panhandlers, the men and women in boxes behind the supermarket—they must have done something wrong to get into the box, we think. We don't ask what the little kids in another country did, or how their plight is far too similar to children in our own country. We blame parents and grandparents and the war on poverty, but we don't take the grandmother raising her grandkids a meal when we've made too much that will languish in the refrigerator until it grows mold behind the gallon of milk and we finally remember to throw it out.

We throw out rat poison that desiccates the rats, maybe because we believe that we're empty inside and they should also be. Our buildings are collapsing around us until all we have left is a bunch of wrought iron facades. The structure of our educational system has collapsed, like a tissue paper house weighted down with heart-shaped stickers. It looks pretty, but it doesn't hold up well.

Elementary children have learned by example how to lie, cheat and steal, to live *Shameless*. They have stood in line for government assistance when their parents were capable of work; they have stood in line next to people who truly needed transitional assistance in an unfortunate situation. These children, though, know to pass off importunity as truth. They knew how to take a cell phone and *lolomgwtf* before they could spell. Structure. Missing.

We told them violence bad, then turned on illegally obtained HBO in the middle of the day. We said that the stations, not parents, should control what our children watch. Children are desensitized, insensitive, senseless. We said schools should teach our children how to live, and forgot to tell them about the birds and the bees. We forgot to

teach them to swing and slide. We didn't teach them how to tie their shoes, kindergarten did. We gave up our children to a government we pretend is a true democracy even though somewhere, deep down we know it isn't. We're living a lifetime of lies and because we were lied to we lie to our children. They distrust us and we punish them. The only love we show is in leaving a half-eaten bag of Cheetos next to a 24-pack of Coke on the counter.

We left you cold and naked in the middle of a hell you won't ever fix. We're sorry we forgot to raise you, children. We're sorry we forgot to read you stories, buy you books. We thought you'd like more toys. It stopped your screaming at the store faster. We're an instant gratification anti-parenting community.

We wanted time for ourselves. So we gave up the future.

I do not want to see your face in the mirror when you are calling me at 5am

In the darkness of the end of undergraduate work, my former-almost-should-have-been-not-quite-love would phone me in the middle of the night when he was at his most honest and least sober.

I catch myself beside the mirror by the phone
waiting for a sound that doesn't come because—
remember—you called at 5am
every Friday morning that spring
you knew I was waking up
and you were still drunk

it was the only time
you would choose to confess
your love

Side Effects May Vary

Somewhere along the way I followed suit of my former love and drank away the everything-we-wouldn't-name that bogged us down. The drinking didn't make me feel lighter, but it did get me out of it for a little while. Until one day I woke up pregnant.

Every time I pop a Pepto-Bismol tab
my stomach stops churning
and my tongue turns black

Remember not to be afraid—I tell myself—
looking in the mirror the next morning

And my daughter screams, “mommy, what’s wrong?”
Laughing, I reply, “not a thing, baby, not a thing.”

I should have locked the door.

When my daughter was 2 I started having the nightmares again. The demons, the darkness. All the hate and pain of abuse started coming to the surface in the darkest, most frightening hours.

Behind the bars in the sunlit room
I close my eyes to light and darkness shines

red-lined phoenix ambles into dust
the embers flash then begin to gray
from ashes phoenix fails to rise again

burnt past the spark from which the hope is change
at empty shadows my eyes stare
waiting for more dark

But light that lights gray eyes with simple spark
and cause breath that changes death to life
shift out rhythm in the darkness' dance
and slowly shadows overtake my heart

In darkness anger builds from bitter pain
to shield my heart as black as night's defense

A shield, a shield, a shield! I beg my heart
but in its stubborn weakness it relents
the phoenix is not there to overcome

Black shards pierce my chest from within
like a bird, my heart tries to flutter on

I chain the anger with acrylic yarn,
Then with talons let loose the last rows I set apart
and let the wool entrails fall into the ash

Claws spin the wool from anger in my mind
Faster, still, spins the wheel of memory

Blame Laura or April or Summer, Fall
Just one so that I might reject my shame
But it was Spring and I was fourteen—

I—
But—
Stop—
—

I take my stonedark heart from shadows unforgiven
throw it on a new fire
watch as it twists veils into darkened memory

To dust return the guilt of lust and rape

To life rises the outline of the phoenix from the ash
clear as the red morning sun of a
fresh day.

I change my stars.

I tried to heal by being self-motivated and sassy. It didn't work. Then I tried forgiveness. Who knew it would be the key? It was in a dream that I learned I had the choice between fighting out my anger with my fist and walking away. I saw my abuser's face and I knew I wanted to see him bleed, but instead of screaming, running and throwing a punch, I spoke a few calm words of forgiveness and walked away.

poor little girl in a Jones-upkeep world,
I didn't know Marx
but saw golden mansions
next to trailer parks

and learned quickly that Value City purchases
did not a popular youth make
nor could Wal-Mart cosmetics
cover a blemished soul

I let my frustrations brew

until a boiling pot of anger grew
and questions formed in the steam
condensing on my forehead

Purpose, faith, life, love,
home—
to live where birds fly free
and are bold enough to eat snakes.

A New Way of Praying

Selfishness overtook me as I tried to forgive and I let the self-pity and the self-reflective self-obsession circle me around in on myself until I wanted so much for that self to get out of sight. I had forgiven those external to me, but then that left one person to forgive: myself. Forgiving self was a process of identifying the self-inflicted pressures, rooting out my own expectations and learning to breathe again.

I'm desperate for You, O God. I am weary and weak. I am worn out. I am living the desperation of so many of the Psalms. I have gotten drunk, cursed like a sailor, cursed myself, lied to my friends and ignored my family. I sent away the boy I believed could save me, screaming at him to die. Why, God, why? I feel worthless, empty. I am not worth anyone's time. I would rather take selfies with a cardboard cutout of Fabio than have a conversation with you when I get that way. So why do you listen to me? Thank You for Your blessings. Thank You for Your leadership. Help me, heal me. I am

broken. My heart is in pieces on this cold concrete basement floor. The waters have gone down, but the mess remains. You are the Great Physician. You've mended my sprained ankles fourteen times and kept my head safe when I flew out of the passenger door in the Oldsmobile. I need You. I can't do anything without You but I can do anything with You because You strengthen me. I give up my own strength. I've tried to lift my heart from the darkness that is wrapped around it like dead vines, braided thick and tight. I need You. Help me. Heal me. Oh, dear God, heal me! Help me. I need You. Protect my daughter. Keep her little heart beating and safe, not affected by the "normal murmur" of my past. Hedge up protection around us, send angels to watch over and protect us. Help. I can't do this on my own. I can't even mow the grass without getting a sinus infection. I need You.

Fallen Light

Whispers in the owl height branches
making shadows of the trees

As the blood in darkness congeals
mingled with the dirt of lust
in the dithered thickets linger
a phoenix rises from empty ash

Quavering sparrows wait and whisper:
truth is on the rise

Smoke Will Rise

I think I froze for a little while in my unforgiveness of self. Not long, just long enough to live in a few concentric circles before realizing that I didn't have to be a circle anymore. I could be a spiral and break out of the concentricity and butterfly swoosh through a hopeless space.

I'm somewhere waiting between amber resin and embers of bridges I've burnt. The sizzle sparks in my ears and this calm persistence washes over me tinged with waves of regret. I am fighting shadows in the wilderness. The ascetics in the desert had more sense than I do, even as they waited on top of the rocks for birds to feed them. Doubt like a worm drags me through the dirt of self-deactualization. I thought my heart would hold on, but it's pinpricked by porcupine quills.

Can I just wade into the sea like Kate Chopin's heroine? At the sea's foam edge there are so many broken shells that break down. I can see the glass shatter on the waves, and maybe if I take my naked toes into the waters I'll find a broken piece of blue glass on which I could slip and lose my footing.

Instead, I'm just standing on the edge of the Atlantic in Canada for my parents' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, picking up glass on the beach so I can turn the brokenness into new pendants.

Bold Prayer

Father, help. You always know what I need. You know I can only be whole in You. It's at the end of the day when I want to give up that I am constantly reminded of

Your light and your embrace. You return strength to my hands when they don't have the strength to grasp medieval art books. You make me who I am. You make me whole again. You restore to me the joy of my salvation. I need you to get me there every time. Don't let me keep doing this on my own. I am exhausted. The kid won't sleep. Images of that *Seriously, Just Go to Sleep* kid's book are dancing in my head like sugarplum fairies. I wake up tired, with black rings under my eyes. I look like a raccoon. I need You. Over and above everything I've ever known or experienced. I don't know how to do life like this. I am on my own. Where are You? I believe You're there. You've got to be somewhere between the toddler's soiled sheets and my own nightmares. I thought I would be home by now. I don't even know what home is. A house, an apartment, a dorm room on a campus in Mississippi? I thought that meant I would be happily married with several kids, between adoptions and foster parenting, living the picture perfect life of service and family. Here I am, innumerable failed relationships later. The last guy literally climbed out of a window to say goodbye. There are no words for the bizarre reality that is my life. Rewrite my expectations, tear them out, make my heart long for the things you long for and live for the things you live for. Give me peace like a river. Give me hope again. And for Jesus' sake, please potty train this kid and make her sleep through the night. I need You.

Dark Dreams

I still see demons in my dreams, sometimes, but they don't scare me anymore.

You know, it's that false start to the day where you're either about to go to the bathroom—and sometimes you wake up peeing in your bed—or you look at the clock and it's an hour later than when you were supposed to be at work. False starts to the day usually wake you up because you'll have the sensation of falling or jerking and either you'll open your eyes to the ceiling from the vantage point of the floor or in midair with your body facing the carpet below. Those are unpleasant starts. The kind of starts that leave you questioning why.

I had a false start before I picked up and changed my life again. The scene opened on my room, except it couldn't have been my room because I just boxed everything up. The gold mirror developed an image in the lower left corner. Demonic, undoubtedly, more gruesome than any medieval gargoyle. It spoke with no words and I could feel my body lifting up off the bed and being twisted around like a puppet on a string. There was nothing I could do. I opened my mouth but I couldn't scream. I couldn't speak. No air, no sound. Finally, I felt my voice return and one word came out of it: Jesus. With that, I dropped back onto my bed and the face faded away.

Then I woke up with a start. I could breathe again. The air in my lungs felt like air hadn't been moving there for more than a few moments. I breathed out fear and breathed in the light of morning and my ears filled with the chirping of birds.

As I left that house for good that day I closed the door on the memories of the haunted past and set foot on a new adventure. Just me and my daughter. We're running on prayer and air, I joke. And maybe we are.

Visions

One morning, just before I took my first sip of coffee, I sat down at my desk to write and heard a voice say “tolle legge,” an auditory memory of St. Augustine, but the accompanying mental image was a woman in blue with quill in hand. I knew that my memories of the great patron Saint of autobiographical writings had merged with the manuscript images of Christine de Pizan. Pondering on the purpose of the images, I considered the trail of words that stood between Augustine and Christine and me. The tradition sets the standards high, but it is only because we have their words that I can even consider whether my thoughts align, so inwardly I thanked my Creator for the Bibliothèque nationale de France and its digitization projects that preserves her. Empowered, I opened the notebook with the cream-colored paper and set my mind to work.

Waking Up

I don't know if you ever really get rid of all the snakes of fear and squawking parrots of doubt and fires of pain and hate and everything that makes you the worst version of yourself, but I do think your heart begins to heal. My heart is a mix of a dove, an owl and a phoenix. I know that the fire that destroyed it once can also be the base from which it begins again. Not long after peace began to seem farther from me than it had ever been, I closed my eyes and saw an image of a heart that was covered in porcupine quills. I've taken those quills out and written with them.

CHAPTER 3 – COMPLICATIONS OF INTERTWINED LIVES: REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE AUTHORITY IN OPPOSITION TO TRADITIONAL MALE PATRIARCHY IN POST-CIVIL WAR AMERICA

In this chapter I will read the lives of southern women as texts in the absence of written texts. This requires a methodology that incorporates an understanding of the malleability of memory. The lives, then, are subject to the subjectivity of the scholar and the story. If we believe the premise that lives are stories, some with a more traditional narrative arc than others, then it stands to reason that lives can be read in the same way we read stories. Rather than focus on the content of the lives as lived, I am most concerned with the ways in which women frame their lives and texts in light of traditional patriarchal structures and cultural trauma after the Civil War in America, and how their lives are expressed in the differences between beliefs and actions. For the purposes of this study I will compare the lives of two women who were impacted by cultural trauma in the period following the Civil War and whose works likely had a direct impact on Laura Ellen Hunt Short, the character on whom the creative spiritual autobiography in chapter four is based. I seek to discern the ways in which contemporary women's autobiographical texts interpret their realities from a creative perspective and translate that into Laura's text in order to illustrate the inner life as it is affected by the external circumstances and habits of the character. I will look closely at the differences between belief and action on a microcosmic scale in women's autobiographical texts in order to relate them to the cultural macrocosm. First, I will focus on the implications of

the poetics within women's autobiographies, using Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* as the framing text for the section. Then I will consider narrative construction in regard to the relational identity in nineteenth century American female autobiography through the lenses of Smith and Paul John Eakin because the relational aspect directly impacts the autobiographical texts of the creative chapters even when the relationships are not explicitly mentioned. Following that, I will focus on the paratext¹⁰⁹ of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's (1815-1902) *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* in order to provide an American female perspective by a well-known suffragist who was active in the fight for women's rights. Then I will consider the paratext of Lucy Larcom's (1824-1893) *A New England Girlhood*, a poet often cited for her depictions of child labor in the mills, who travelled to Illinois to teach school; her poetry and adventurous spirit I discern as more akin to the southern women in the nineteenth century. By comparing the two women, I seek to show how the framing of the protagonist's experience and growth relates to the broader American culture, and how the differences between the internalized beliefs and lived actions in the north directly affected women who grew up in the shadow of that northern context. This directly relates to how Laura lived her life in the south in the shadow of the north since Kentucky was a liminal state that had families split between north and south for political, social, religious and economic reasons. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with a brief assessment of the implications of these narratives in terms of the structure and subsequent reading of twentieth century autobiographical texts.

¹⁰⁹ See Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* for a discussion of the liminal parts of the text that subsequently inform readings of the text.

I. Implications of Poetics of Women's Autobiography

The autobiography is a distinct piece of literature, and a type that authors including James Olney, Phillipe Lejeune, and especially Paul John Eakin have discussed thoroughly in their respective texts. As I consider the purpose and attitude of the authors in regard to their autobiographies, I am struck by Sidonie Smith's interpretations of the feminine and masculine discourse pertaining to the autobiographical impulse in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*. Smith suggests, "the generic structures of literature and the languages of self-representation and examination constitutive of autobiography as one of them rest on and reinscribe the ideology of gender."¹¹⁰ The narrative constructions of the self-referential "I" result in the teleological inadequacies of the feminine. As women read themselves as texts to become part of the canonical discourse through autobiography, they progress beyond traditional conceptions of femininity and assume what has been a masculine role. They read themselves as they have been traditionally read, "more subjective than objective, more inclusive of others in the life story, not as linear, not as interested in a presentation of the historical context."¹¹¹ While the previous inclinations of the feminine autobiographical act are fragmented, at best, women were able to create texts that both adhered to and departed from the traditional autobiographical structures. However, writing in terms of traditional structures did not mean that female autobiographies became part of the western canon.

The canon in the western academy has retained a decidedly male quality for centuries, but women have been reentering the canon, often as a result of the tireless determination of feminist scholars discovering and analyzing a text for its intrinsic

¹¹⁰ Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 48.

¹¹¹ Corbin 227, synthesizing Domna Stanton, Sidonie Smith and Belle Brodski and Celeste Schenck.

literary value—especially when the text departs from the traditional male standards. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw reminds us, “it has been the feminist scholars, however, who have most searchingly sought to understand what the psychic and social advantages and disadvantages have been for the women who have actually confronted and undertaken to live the lives of ‘ladies.’”¹¹² Consequently, the importance of the life writings of southern women have been critically analyzed to bring out a multiplicity of probing invocations. Questions we should ask as a result of this feminist criticism include: What does it mean for a woman to be representative or unrepresentative? Are the lives of the men in the canon representative or expected to be? Does cultural trauma influence the distinctions in the composition of male and female texts? While the traditional representations of masculinity derive from these texts, the irony lies in that the men composing the texts often demonstrated traditionally non-masculine qualities in order to further expose their own thoughts and feelings in texts.

The autobiographical act is neither androcentric¹¹³ nor gynocentric; the autobiographical act is a human act. According to Smith & Watson’s second edition of *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, there are sixty distinct types of life writings.¹¹⁴ The purposes for each type of life writing become evident within the context and content. While some of the styles may center on death, recovery from trauma, athletic experiences, or overtly indicate a hybridity between the fictionalization of the autobiography, each nuance has a place. The drive to life writing

¹¹² Prenshaw 128.

¹¹³ While early studies were fraught with an inclination towards androcentric biases, this is not the theoretical space of the current discourse of autobiographical studies. Critic James Watkins notes that feminist theorists brought to light the “androcentric biases informing these initial studies,” by Philippe Lejeune, Elizabeth Bruss, and others, in “Contemporary Autobiography and Memoir,” 448.

¹¹⁴ See Smith & Watson, Appendix A, 253-286.

derives from the need to tell one's story, and is often in relation to the stories of others. Human life is lived in relationship and in those spaces one is constantly acquiring—or, in cases of solitary autobiography, rejecting—the needs and interests of others and factoring those into how one addresses the space of truth in his or her own life.

The repression of desires, whether as a direct edict from the broader family or community or as an unspoken law, so often results in the fragmentation of self. It is no surprise, then, that women who live outside of the traditional cultural models, those who tend towards the act of studying and writing out of that study, tend to be viewed in the negative light of anti-feministic discourse. The patriarchal power structures create within the individual a negative discourse that determines the reality and the veracity of the truth. Truth, especially in life writings, is that which the interpreter determines. A religious person might argue that there is one truth and that truth is the man-made structure of religion. A rationalist might assert that truth is what is known through experienced reality. A Christian would accept that there is one truth and this truth illumines the other pieces of the puzzle in order to help the individual discern lies that hang out to truths, thus making them half-truths. Prenshaw, in her final reflections in *Composing Selves: Southern Women and Autobiography*, acknowledges the struggle in autobiography, “always contending with the transformation of self into artifice, always signaling its mixed motives, gaps, indirections and contingent reality in the thrall of language and the inescapable acculturation of the writing self.”¹¹⁵ There is an issue, then, of written truth that appeals to the broader community and written truth that is completely factually honest, communicating the emotions and other pieces in context with the

¹¹⁵ Prenshaw 294.

fractures of self-identification and a multiplicity of consciousnesses that require the author to consider the cultural implications and potential consequences of a text.

One of the approaches to gauging autobiography that adequately internalizes the consciousnesses of the autobiographers' ancestors is to consider the ramifications of cultural trauma and how it affects the lives of women. In the mid-19th century, the Civil War shaded the lives of people on both sides of the dividing line.¹¹⁶ In central Kentucky, where Laura from the following creative chapter lived her entire life, many women had family on both sides of the fight.¹¹⁷ As some men fought for their right to own slaves and cited biblical passages to permit them to do so, other men of similar faith backgrounds cited biblical passages to decry the evils of the institution of slavery. Records of this time period include many erasures, both in the historical and genealogical archives that preserved information about ownership, birth registers and marriage registers. The term "white-washing," just like Mark Twain used to discuss Tom Sawyer's chore relative to the fence, is often mentioned concerning people trying to paint their family histories in a more positive light and change birth or marriage dates to suit the notion that the couple was chaste before marriage.¹¹⁸ In crafting autobiography that incorporates a genealogical tradition, the author must take into account the relative inaccuracies of the source

¹¹⁶ For a comprehensive look on southern women from a historical perspective, see Anne Scott's *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*. For an understanding of the northern perspective in the same time period, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*.

¹¹⁷ The following creative chapter centers on Laura, who had family members serve in both the Union and Confederate armies. Living in central Kentucky, her family was divided along economic and religious lines. Her father, a Southern Baptist Preacher, did not own slaves and did not fight. Other members of her family, however, fought. The slave-holders in her extended family fought for The South while the majority of others fought for The North. The men would sit on the front porches for the rest of their lives discussing the events and arguing over who was right or who served under Col. William Hobson. Extended family surnames of men who served the Union include Arvin, French, Harris, Nelson, and Sullivan.

¹¹⁸ See Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* for the evidence of this in cultural practice. Foote aptly notes, "even such nominally private affairs as marriage engagements and 'falling in love' are matters for the entire town to witness and adjudicate, since it is the town that will be affected by the development of any private and interested relationships," 161.

documents and the very real possibility that such documents have been doctored in order to preserve an ancestor's flawless status in the historical record. In my accompanying creative text, I distinguish family history from family autobiography by reincorporating the flaws present in a person's life to ensure that no ancestor becomes a type—he or she is, and will remain, human.

II. Relational Identity Creation in Nineteenth Century American Female Autobiography

While the term autobiography does not appear until the Enlightenment, the traditional narrative construction of western autobiography directly links its beginnings to Augustine's *Confessions* and, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, includes works that earlier fell under such categories as, "memoir (Madame de Stael, Gluckel of Hameln, or *the life* (Teresa of Avila) or *the book of my life* (Cardano) or *confessions* (Augustine, Rousseau) or *essays of myself* (Montaigne)," later, "*testimonio*, *autoethnography*, and *psychobiography*." ¹¹⁹ I begin with the term autobiography in the same way that Smith and Watson use it, in large part because it "privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life writing," which would have been the standard assumptions about the genre in post-Civil War Southern America. ¹²⁰ Since the traditional model would have been the understanding of the genre in this time period, I assert that the autobiographies of females in the nineteenth century demonstrate an intentional subversion of the male patriarchal

¹¹⁹ See Smith & Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed., 2, 297. I use the term autobiography because of the specificity of the language and in considering the purpose of the genre as it is the "most commonly used term for life writing," although James Olney prefers to use the term life writing.

¹²⁰ Smith & Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2-3.

tradition of autobiography in direct contrast to the canonically accepted male tradition; indeed, the specificity of their purposeful accounts privileges the emotional and physical effects of others on their lives.

In the same way that Paul John Eakin, in his introduction to *American Autobiography*, explains his view that “the pluralist nature of American culture has been decisive in the development of American autobiography,” I suggest that American autobiography is directly linked to family autobiography.¹²¹ This plurality has impacted the individual and resulted in a movement away from solely the individual’s autobiography as the only means of collecting personal stories and evolved into the collective nature of family autobiography as a means of preserving the history of a group of people.¹²² Further, in *How Our Lives Become Stories*, Eakin reminds us that the first person is plural in origin and the autobiography provides only an illusion of autonomy. Even within the context of the individual’s autobiography, the stories of others are necessarily related in order to present perspective on events. Lives do not happen in isolation—and neither do autobiographies. As a result, the lives of others necessarily affect the lives of the autobiographical author and he or she must consider these lives and the characters he or she portrays in his or her text. I agree with Eakin’s belief that “all identity is relational.”¹²³ It is relationship that creates the individual. Parental figures and other relatives, as well as close family friends whose constant presence makes them

¹²¹ Eakin 15.

¹²² In “The Private Alibi: Literacy and Community in the Diaries of Two Nineteenth-Century American Women” from *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, Marilyn Ferris Motz seeks to demonstrate from a study of two diaries that the diary form could be used for the purpose of working out the traditional autobiographical structure to show the universality of the lives of the individual women, an interesting nod to the patriarchy of the day. These diaries are not of women who were by nature itinerant, but were rather firmly located in place, and as such as not part of the focus of this project.

¹²³ Eakin 43.

extended family, affect the individual in terms of personality, emotional reaction, personal habit, and demonstrated character. The lives of women, specifically those who did not hold jobs outside the home, are affected more closely by the family and the community members they encounter.

Women tend towards expectations of relationality in their lives and as such are necessarily focused on rationalizing the purposes of intertextuality in their writings. As women pursue critical understandings of this, and develop their ability to connect with disparate ideas in their creative works, they write in context of their relational communities. The women in the creative chapters of this dissertation produce texts in line with the context of their personal lives, necessarily including the members and incidents in their community that directly affect their lives. While the community context does not come into play as in the creative chapters as much as was my original intention due to the focus on the internal lives of the women, the community and cultural contexts—as provided in the critical chapters—illuminate the frameworks through which these women would have composed autobiographical documents.

In considering the Kentucky woman's autobiography, it is vital to consider the intersections between southern and northern life in what was a Civil War border state. Both have beginnings in the pioneering lifestyle of the women in post-Revolutionary America that resulted in these women seeking to become distinct from the culture and traditions of Europe from which they had so recently separated. Women in this era were concerned with the misalignment of day to day realities between the old world and the new world. Concerning Kentucky women, Craig Thompson Friend claims, "[the] female frontier was defined not by women's shared responsibilities but by women's shared

vulnerability.”¹²⁴ While frontier women struggled with their positions and subsequent vulnerabilities as wives and mothers, they also struggled with their physical surroundings; this coincides with what Susanna Egan explains of Lucy Larcom’s New England autobiography *A New England Girlhood*, “she has had to learn to appreciate her local flora and fauna as distinct from those in English poetry and authentic in their own right; they become a resource for her American writing as the Mississippi is a resource for Twain.”¹²⁵ While Larcom begins her life in New England,¹²⁶ she situates herself with a more adventurous lifestyle in line with the itinerant female minister tradition in America that Elizabeth Ashbridge begins. Egan posits that Larcom’s recounting of her life as she moves west to become a missionary teacher requires that her audience connect her “purpose and enthusiasm for a cause” to the “importance of being an American.”¹²⁷ Women’s autobiography takes into account this essential idea that being American means to fervently seek out a purpose for life just as the texts seek to define the adjustment from the family lifestyles of their English counterparts.

Like Larcom, an American woman in Kentucky had to learn to appreciate the wildflowers, the deer and the raccoons. Larcom discusses the nature of her childhood in Massachusetts in the first chapter of her autobiographical text, “These gray ledges hold me by the roots, as they do the bayberry bushes, the sweet-fern, and the rock-saxifrage.”¹²⁸ Larcom shows her appreciation of the natural world in which she lives, just as women elsewhere also have the opportunity to learn to appreciate the physical space in

¹²⁴ Friend 27.

¹²⁵ Egan 81.

¹²⁶ For a brief summary of Larcom’s life, see what follows beginning on page 124.

¹²⁷ Egan 82.

¹²⁸ Larcom 17.

which she makes her residence. Ideally, following this appreciation, the woman recording her autobiography will begin to appreciate the other external and internal machinations that support her, namely the lives of those around her. As an appreciation for others develops, it is much more likely that the female autobiographer will begin to incorporate the stories of those whose lives were impactful and meaningful into her own story. Valerie Raoul explains, “The female (non)subject is seen as defining herself in relation to others, rather than as autonomous, and a number of analysts of women's autobiographies have echoed Simone de Beauvoir's insights into the positioning of Woman as Other, as secondary to the male One.”¹²⁹ This was still certainly the case during Reconstruction as women had not yet discerned their voices in order to be established as full, voting citizens. In the following creative chapter focusing on Laura, her voice is specifically secondary and she defines herself in relation to others. Her life, in fact, is a rumination on the ways in which she determines to put others above her own well-being and her only defining act is to wear black and remain in mourning. The lifelong mourning period is even an accession of the value of others in relation to her own life as it commemorates the deaths of her father and husband, thereby placing herself as secondary to the males in her life.

It is at the point of incorporating other lives, and looking historically rather than solely at how the current events have shaped the individual's life, that the complications of personal bias and subjectivity surface. Eakin's *Touching the World* suggests in the chapter entitled “Living in History,” “the relation between biographical and historical fields of reference...is in principle not a primary topic of comment—indeed the omission

¹²⁹ Raoul 140. While Raoul is considering female French diarists, her words are applicable to a broader study of autobiography.

of the witness's subjectivity presumably functions as a guarantee of historical objectivity."¹³⁰ In considering this false distinction, we consider the implication of writing historically as a process of removal of personal bias in order to fully illuminate the events and issues of the time period; however, in writing autobiographically, it is expected that there will be some degree of bias because of personal experience.¹³¹ The American autobiographical perspective most often takes into account the lives of those who came before, not always considering the social or cultural contexts from which they came. Historical and autobiographical writings, then, are problematized when writing about family and incorporating the stories of the previous generations into one's own story. Personal and family history, then, develop distinct flavors based on the experiential perspectives of the individuals from the perspective of the culture, from the society norms, to expectations of gender roles, to reading lives through the lenses of various community members. The experience of the author and the experience of those who influenced the author necessarily affect how the text is written and later interpreted. Nevertheless, autobiographies present an important perspective on the historical events that took place during the timeline of the text, and family autobiographies tend to have a more substantial timeline because of the addition of additional generations. The perceptions of the authors become textual interpretations of history beyond the scope of a journal or diary. As we analyze the language the authors use to explain events of their time period and their physical and emotional responses to the events, we can see history through the lens of those who actually experienced it. These perceptions, subjective

¹³⁰ Eakin 139.

¹³¹ For Molly McCarthy's analysis of time in this period in relation to Alvin Bartlett's watch as seen through the lens of his own diary, see her chapter, "The Diary and the Pocket Watch: Rethinking Time in Nineteenth Century America."

though they may be, are not necessarily only present within the structures of the journal or diary. Rather, these perceptions allow us to determine the effects of historical events on the lives of the autobiographers. Autobiographical expressions are thus necessarily subjective and subjected to the scrutiny of the intended audience.

Women construct autobiographies in order to create a self that is suited to the culture of their intended audiences. Forces of social change seek to use the traditional roles of women as known in the traditional marriage plot as a framework to reconstruct gender roles and position the work of social change as more important than work in the home.¹³² The use of the lives of others is critical to specify how women utilize the relationship between themselves and their husbands and children to create their own identity. Paul John Eakin argues in *How Our Lives Become Stories* that, “the definition of autobiography, and its history as well, must be stretched to reflect the kinds of self-writing in which relational identity is characteristically displayed.”¹³³ As women define themselves in relation to those who are closest to them within their families, they place themselves in a position of deference to the historical traditions and heritage of gender. Women certainly had their own identities within the family hierarchy, but a singular identity, separate from wife or mother, was not necessarily present. Women autobiographers can use the frame of the marriage plot to break the convention from the inside by utilizing it to present their own identities outside of the family from within the familiar frame of the family. In doing so they demonstrate an appreciation for the heritage that comes from the family history and traditions without completely

¹³² For a deeper exploration of the feminine forces behind social change, see the body text of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897*.

¹³³ Eakin 43-4.

assimilating into the traditional roles by finding identity only within those specified roles of wife and mother.

III. Coalescence of Factual Truth, Emotion and Authorial Interpretation: Distinctions Between Public and Private Life: Evidence of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Disintegrated Self and Lucy Larcom's Integrated Self

The person that defines the self in an autobiographical construct is necessarily the author and the way in which the author frames the text provides clues to the emotional repercussions the author has as a result of the reflection of the document, both in terms of content and the value of the text as a whole. The ways in which an autobiographer values her own words is consistent with the way in which she values her own life. Paul John Eakin claims, "it is not surprising that the ontological status of self in autobiography has become the focal inquiry for theorists of autobiography."¹³⁴ The creation of the self and how it comes into being in relation to the cultural expectations of the time period provide a point of entry in terms of inquiry. The place where this is initially evident is in the preface of the text as written by the autobiographer. In Lucy Larcom's preface, she discusses her observations of her younger self and admits, "I have to acknowledge her faults and mistakes as my own, while I sometimes feel like reproving her severely for her carelessly performed tasks, her habit of lapsing into listless reveries...and many other faults I have inherited from her."¹³⁵ The preface is the entry point for the audience to develop an understanding, both intellectual and emotional, of how the autobiographer

¹³⁴ Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, 182.

¹³⁵ Larcom 12.

constructs and views her own text. In this instance, Larcom reveals through reflection the prior poor choices and defects of character with which she no longer identifies. The glossing of the prefatory remarks, then, allow the audience to discern the degree of change within the author; this is in part what I seek to do with the glossing of the creative texts of this project. This brief prefatory frame, less formal in nature than the autobiographical text, comes about as a result of the consideration for the concerns of the external influencers, even if the names of the influencers are withheld. The idea comports with Eakin's agreement with Marianne Gullestad and Ian Hacking who read, "the exchange between individuals and the social structures they inhabit as a dialogic, give-and-take process."¹³⁶ The words in the prefaces, then, are vital to the process of communicating meaning and value, both economic and cultural, to the reader.

In order to understand the implications of the nature of language as written in the late nineteenth century, I first consider the place of language in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically the ambivalence to the traditional patriarchy. Northern poet Emily Dickinson writes in her June 1852 letter to her friend Susan Gilbert Dickinson, "Those unions, my dear Susie, by which two lives are one, this sweet and strange adoption wherein we can but look, and are not yet admitted, how it can fill the heart...and we shall not run away from it, but lie still and be happy!" and later expresses, "but to the *wife* Susie, sometimes the *wife forgotten*, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all the others in the world."¹³⁷ While amenable to the idea of marriage, within the same letter Dickinson defines the fears that accompany the traditional social structure that encompasses the

¹³⁶ Eakin, "The Economy of Narrative Identity," 131.

¹³⁷ Dickinson 88.

marriage plot.¹³⁸ Dickinson's own ambivalence towards traditional expectations placed on women by the patriarchal structures was an outright textual admission of an intellectual change. As Sidonie Smith explains in *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, "the unconscious might be understood as the repository of all the experiences and desires that cannot be identified with the symbolic realm and its laws of citationality, those calls to take up normative subject positions."¹³⁹ This understanding, an explanation that the unconscious is the place from whence each of these women drew in regard to the conventional ideas of marriage suggests that all of these women sought to break from the same symbolic realm as they found the impulse to change the status quo.

In considering the changing conventions in association with the culture of the time period in the north, I have looked more closely at the ways in which Lucy Larcom and Elizabeth Cady Stanton frame their autobiographical texts to discern the connections between the broader culture and the inner-workings of their minds in regard to what a traditional feminine autobiography meant and included. Stanton provides an autobiographical account in strict chronological order, beginning with her childhood and progressing through her marriage and experience in motherhood; she also mentions what she did in relation to women's suffrage, although not nearly to the same degree of detail as she does in *The History of Woman Suffrage*, but she provides the background information concerning what was going on in her life as she was composing that text. The overall work is a reflective reminiscence, documenting the events of her life from a later position in life. Stanton's text is more concerned with the traditional structure and

¹³⁸ See also Sarah Wider's "Corresponding Worlds: The Art of Emily Dickinson's Letters," for an analysis of the intersections of poetry and prose in her letters and how it relates to the comparatively unconventional nature of her letters.

¹³⁹ Smith 111.

falls under the patriarchal conventions when considering her personal life, if one is to take the preface to her autobiographical account seriously rather than as an intentional slighting of her own text. Through her language in the preface to frame the text, she demeans herself and her text by underscoring the serious nature of the work that she did.

Larcom, on the other hand, demonstrates an understanding of the traditional conventions of the autobiographical form and seeks to work counter to those for the purposes of encouraging her readers to live their lives to the fullest and in peace, knowing that the choices they make are valuable and worthwhile. Larcom also presents her work in a traditional chronological format, but she consciously weaves poetry and Christian ideals into her text to emphasize particular points of her life for her audience. In the preface, Larcom explains that “the most enjoyable thing about writing is that the relation between writer and reader may be and often does become that of mutual friendship; and friends naturally like to know each other in a neighborly way.”¹⁴⁰ Larcom intends to develop a friendship with her readers and thus establishes her own conventions for why she will speak about her life in a down-to-earth, honest manner. She intends to speak to her audience as she would speak to her friends. In addition to these authorial intentions, the entirety of Larcom’s text provides an indispensable source of knowledge concerning childhood in the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution as she outlines the decade beginning at the age of 11 that she spent working in the mills to help support her family after the death of her father. Larcom, who later traveled west to teach in Illinois before returning to New England, has the adventurous spirit and a serious work ethic that is more often seen in itinerant evangelists and subversive southern women, and as such her

¹⁴⁰ Larcom 7.

preface and work are more in line with the ideals of the southern female autobiographers.¹⁴¹ Larcom explains that she was, “taught to work almost as if it were a religion.”¹⁴² From an early age, she understood that work was a necessity for life.¹⁴³ At the end of her preface, she provides further confirmation of her own personal experience in regard to her experience of learning as she affirms, “To take life as it is sent to us, to live faithfully, looking and striving always towards better life, this was the lesson that came to me from my early teachers.”¹⁴⁴ As a woman, she embraced her tendency toward poetry and incorporated it into her life, not at the expense of work, but in addition to the work she knew she needed to do in order to survive. She learned to push toward a better life, just as the itinerant female evangelists demonstrated in their own culturally subversive lives.

To assess the subversive nature of a female text that incorporates the private life, Judy Simons notes the importance of women’s private accounts in explaining the destruction of Elizabeth Pepys’ diary by her husband Samuel by suggesting, “the fate of this secret text, emblematic of the female private life, amply illustrates the subversive potential of a woman’s diary in a patriarchal world.”¹⁴⁵ The subversive nature of communicating the breadth of the female experience is as applicable to a woman’s diary as it is to a woman’s crafted autobiographical record. Drawing from the same kinds of life experiences, female diarists and autobiographers explain pieces of their individual

¹⁴¹ See the biography of Larcom by Shirley Marchalonis for a full picture of Larcom’s life from an external source. The Marchalonis text is a much more comprehensive and honest portrayal of Larcom than the 1894 text by Daniel Addison.

¹⁴² Larcom 9.

¹⁴³ It is this kind of Protestant work ethic that Max Weber later theorizes in his 1905 *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

¹⁴⁴ Larcom 13.

¹⁴⁵ Simons 252.

lives and simultaneously connect to the universal human experience. Autobiographies, however, are more carefully composed in terms of how the narrative is structured—even when it breaks from traditional structural expectations—and includes the content that the autobiographer considers most important to reveal.

In considering how Larcom notes in the preface that her poetry includes aspects of the autobiographic impulse, Jessica Lewis explains, “Larcom’s verses thus operate on a dual level. They offer an expansive forum in which to express her ‘self,’ and they add an element of music, of beauty and artfulness, to a life often occupied with the quotidian.”¹⁴⁶ Larcom situates herself as a poet in her work and provides the explanatory and poetic preface that is consistent with her beliefs. Larcom notes, however, that she does not “feel so much satisfaction in the older girl who comes between [the young child in the book] and me, although she, too, is enough like me to be my sister...still, she is myself, and I could not be quite happy without her comradeship.”¹⁴⁷ It is in this space of understanding her own self in several parts that connects so well with the creative chapters of this dissertation. As Justy, Laura and Christine consider their lives in parts and reflect on them later—much like Larcom does in her preface, the women are forced to consider how the past experiences integrated into their present lives to shape them as women.

Even in the time of women’s suffragists, the full value of merged private and public lives for women were not appropriately integrated.¹⁴⁸ One of the nineteenth century American women autobiographers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, separates her life

¹⁴⁶ J. Lewis 182.

¹⁴⁷ Larcom 12.

¹⁴⁸ See Nina Baym’s *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* for the texts that helped shape and frame this time period.

even in her autobiographical *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* between her public work and her private life as a mother. This separation suggests the beginning of the admittance of the physical disjointedness of the soul, specifically the mind, will and emotions, in the literary milieu. The cultural pressure, real or received, to keep parts of one's life separated results in, at best, a self-reflective and universally helpful treatise or a disintegrated self, at worst. Stanton, in the 1897 preface to her autobiographical text¹⁴⁹ explains that the "story of her private life" as "wife," "housekeeper," and "mother" has the potential to "amuse and benefit the reader." The word amuse conjures connotations of frivolity and entertainment; rather than framing this as a serious text, she couches it in the language of entertainment thereby alleviating the staid nature of the text. She does not indicate specifically how it might benefit the reader, but the assumption one might draw is that it will provide some emotional or empathetic support for women experiencing similar roles in their private lives. The distinctions she makes between the public and private sphere have afforded her the opportunity to present a specific treatise of her life, but the admission that she has "no especial artistic merit" belies the implications of her text. This admission can be read two ways, either that she wants to be seen on a level playing field with her audience or she wants to intentionally denigrate her

¹⁴⁹ Stanton v. The brief preface in its entirety:

The interest of my family and friends have always manifested in the narration of my early and varied experiences, and their earnest desire to have them in permanent form for the amusement of another generation, moved me to publish this volume. I am fully aware that its contents have no especial artistic merit, being composed partly of extracts from my diary, a few hasty sketches of my travels and people I have met, and my opinions on many social questions.

The story of my private life as the wife of an earnest reformer, as an enthusiastic housekeeper, proud of my skill in every department of domestic economy, and as the mother of seven children, may amuse and benefit the reader.

The incidents of my public career as a leader in the most momentous reform yet launched upon the world—the emancipation of woman—will be found in "The History of Woman Suffrage."

own text. I think the choice of language is a subconscious denigration of her text because she has bought into the patriarchy in her private life by accepting the traditional domestic model of a woman's life, even though in her other texts she elevated her work outside the home as a higher achievement. The act of composing the full autobiography of her private life, in light of the text's ontological and teleological statuses, allow the reader to discern that the self-creation of the inner life is a necessary task for even the woman who discerns her work outside the home as of more value. Stanton assigns value to her private life when she composes it, even if she claims its value is only in its ability to "amuse" or otherwise provide the reader with a different life perspective.

It is by her own admission that Stanton suggests that her "varied experiences" might serve a purpose for the reader, but she maintains that the roles she assumed in her private life must remain separate from her work to gain rights for all women.¹⁵⁰ This assumption of the necessity of separation of roles suggests the promotion of a lived deception that is present even in Christine de Pizan's fourteenth century French texts.¹⁵¹ Even as an advocate for women, Stanton is unable to ascribe meaning to how she grew into her role as a wife and mother in relation to her outside work. This is in stark contrast to the complementarian view that said women, "were eminently suited to rear children," providing no clear opportunity for a sustainable life outside of the home.¹⁵² The idea of the "moral mother," as explained by Ruth Bloch, "played its part in the long-range upgrading of the social status of women," as well as, "provided both ideological

¹⁵⁰ Stanton v.

¹⁵¹ In *Le livre de la cité des dames* and *La trésor de la cité des dames*, Christine routinely advocates for the presence of deception in order to maintain one's social standing and reputation. See chapter 5 for a further discussion of Christine de Pizan and an explanation of how her admitted lived actions demonstrate distinctions from her textually expressed beliefs.

¹⁵² Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," 116.

justification and incentive for the contraction of the female activity into the preoccupations of motherhood.”¹⁵³ Indeed, Stanton becomes part of the effort to improve the social status of women even in her disintegrated state. Sidonie Smith, in her discussion of Stanton in her essay “Resisting the Gaze of Embodiment,” explains, “more often in talking about motherhood she assumes the posture of the experienced grandmother, practical, authoritative, aggressive in her concern for the welfare of children.”¹⁵⁴ Smith explores the representation of Stanton as wife and mother “disturbed and destabilized throughout the text” as she goes on to consider “the narrative of ‘embodied selfhood’ that ends fairly early when the roles have been fulfilled, when the courtship and romance culminate in marriage and childbearing.”¹⁵⁵ Stanton understands the importance of the marriage plot in traditional narratives and thus includes it while she later expresses her dissatisfaction with it. It is because of how she frames her role as wife and mother and separates this from her role in the suffrage movement that the reader can infer her suffrage work to be the portion of her life that she found the most fulfilling.

Fulfillment, essentially the actualization of purpose—often referred to in Christian circles as a calling—is what drives Stanton to create her own narrative. Stanton creates this narrative as she pieces together her life to incorporate the lives of others and thus demonstrates that the individual might adequately create a life that necessarily includes the opinions, beliefs and repercussions of the actions of others to produce an autobiographical text. Ann Gordon notes, “Stanton narrowed in on her response to domesticity as the catalyst for change,” after the novelty of running a household was lost

¹⁵³ Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals in Transition,” 120.

¹⁵⁴ S. Smith 86.

¹⁵⁵ S. Smith 87.

to her, and found the solution to her problem in, “calling a woman’s right’s convention and demanding the vote.”¹⁵⁶ When the daily tasks of life were unfulfilling, Stanton found work that would further the cause of other women and accepted the challenge. While Stanton produces a coherent personal autobiography that includes personal successes and failures, the audience is left to fill in the gaps between truth and the emotions she must have been feeling for which she does not provide adequate authorial interpretation.¹⁵⁷

The preface for Lucy Larcom’s *A New England Girlhood*¹⁵⁸ positions the body of the text with her own specific purpose, audience, rationale, perspective on the genre and understanding of her former self in relation to her current self. It is this sort of assertion of authority and personal glossing that becomes the driving force behind the ways in which the corresponding creative texts connect with the critical texts in this dissertation.¹⁵⁹ Larcom opens the preface by explaining that she composed the text “for the young, at the suggestion of friends.”¹⁶⁰ Larcom does not stop there, but goes on to explain that the text is for “girls of all ages” and “women who have not forgotten their girlhood.”¹⁶¹ In considering this audience, critic Rose Norman posits, “Part of the adult

¹⁵⁶ Gordon 117.

¹⁵⁷ Other autobiographers relevant to the time period include suffragist Abigail Scott Duniway, and itinerant ministers Laura Smith Haviland, Lydia Sexton, Amanda Berry Smith, and Nancy Towle.

¹⁵⁸ In considering this text, critic Joe Lockard asserts that it has received the majority of its attention because of its use of the mill, but in the remainder of his article on Larcom and the poetics of child labor, he only uses Larcom as a representative type rather than an active literary authority, providing a selection of publication data in a footnote, but no representation of the other literary activity of the author.

¹⁵⁹ In addition to the preface, the full text of Larcom’s work discusses in great detail many events of her life, including the moment that she met a woman whom she describes as “a young Quaker woman from Philadelphia, a school-teacher, who came to see for herself how the Lowell girls lived,” with whom she developed a friendship and corresponded until a relative notified Larcom of the friend’s death; Larcom remembers her as she explains, “But she still remains a real person to me; I often recall her features and the tone of her voice. It was as if a beautiful spirit from an invisible world had slipped in among us, and quickly gone back again,” 251. This particular character is akin Ashbridge, a pleasant Quaker teacher from a very similar space, and is further proof of the connectedness of moments and character between the women in the critical and creative chapters.

¹⁶⁰ Larcom 5.

¹⁶¹ Larcom 5.

appeal of this childhood autobiography is its more sophisticated approach to re-creating the past.”¹⁶² Larcom begins the preface, then, by situating the ontological self as beginning in childhood and useful to women only if they have not excluded the past from their present memory. It is this appreciation of Larcom’s own personal history that resonates with the creative chapters of this dissertation. It is no mere coincidence that Larcom regards herself as a vibrant worker of words and demonstrates her ability to connect text and purpose within one document. Norman notes that the body of the work corroborates its ontological status, and confirms, “Larcom focuses her text on her childhood development as it relates to her becoming a poet.”¹⁶³ While I agree that the focus of the text is on the childhood and development, even as Larcom notes, it is my position that the body of the text is more about Larcom’s becoming a whole person rather than a one note poet. There is much more to Larcom’s life and body of work than simply poetry.

Larcom knows that her life can be told through autobiography and provides her understanding of the genre within the preface. Larcom explains, “a complete autobiography would indeed be a picture of the outer and inner universe photographed upon one little life’s consciousness.”¹⁶⁴ Norman agrees and suggests that it “examines issues autobiographers face—the appearance of unwonted egotism, the recognition of past selves as different people, the difficulty of discovering and telling the ‘truth.’”¹⁶⁵ Amy Kort asserts, “Larcom’s *A New England Girlhood* represents a work of strategic

¹⁶² Norman 108.

¹⁶³ Norman 105.

¹⁶⁴ Larcom 5.

¹⁶⁵ Norman 112.

generic negotiation.”¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Larcom does not adhere to the traditional generic form in the same sense that Stanton does in her work. It is through this that Larcom demonstrates a forward-thinking sensibility, drawing from the past in order to create a new present with the full implications of the past at play in her self-reflections on her life and work. Kort stresses, “she takes on the subject of autobiography itself in her introduction, and in the ‘charming’ and seemingly innocuous tale that follows she subtly takes on the task of deconstructing and reconstructing notions of autobiography for her own purposes.”¹⁶⁷ Larcom is aware that she intends to do this and states as much in her introduction without explicitly stating it. She groups like images together without focusing on the narrative continuity between the images, both in her preface and in the autobiographical text. Practiced as a poet prior to constructing this textual version of her life, Larcom reduces the elements of her life down to their essence and draws upon the details without relying on the necessity of traditional narrative.

In considering her own life, Larcom understands that she does not function in a vacuum. Larcom notes, “none of us can think of ourselves as entirely separate beings.”¹⁶⁸ In spite of this, Larcom still seeks to present her life story as distinct as possible while including others. Concerning the body text of Larcom’s work, Tom Allen explains, “Larcom adds further symbolic emphasis to the passing of traditional ways of life when she describes how her family’s church burned down...Larcom experiences the transition from one historical world to another.”¹⁶⁹ The body of Larcom’s text supports what she suggests in the preface—this integration of authorial intention with actual

¹⁶⁶ Kort 26.

¹⁶⁷ Kort 25.

¹⁶⁸ Larcom 6.

¹⁶⁹ Allen 59.

execution in the text presents an integrated self, one capable of incorporating belief of thoughts and belief as it is expressed through actions. Larcom develops an understanding of her former self as it relates to her current self and merges her identities in such a way as to be a cohesive person. She uses the intervening gaps between factual truth, emotional explication (and its absence) and her own authorial interpretation of her own text in order to form a coherent autobiography that links her life to the lives of others through her text. She provides for her audience a lesson that is consistent with her own life and might well be beneficial for the reader in ways that Stanton's text is not. Stanton's text foresees the importance of the American meta-narrative and begins to isolate the inclinations towards liminality that women, like Kentucky-born-and-bred-Laura in the following creative chapter, would begin to address with their own lives.

Kentucky is at once South and Not-South. The heritage of Kentucky is littered with barbed wire and bourbon, ministers and moonshine, good old fashioned baptizings and Klan rally hangings. This is not unique to the South, but the Northern influence confronted the Southern sympathy in the state of Kentucky and there was an atmospheric war waged within communities and even households. While some women were keen to tend to their knitting,¹⁷⁰ others were eager to listen to the stories from the front porches, the stories of both sides of the war. These are the women that grew up to tell their children the stories about both sides, the women who taught their children how to interact

¹⁷⁰ Fosl 36-37. Catherine Fosl explains that Anne Pogue McGinty may have had to chop wood, haul water, milk cows, spin yarn, make clothes, cultivate crops, or hunt or harvest game in the early nineteenth century; rural Kentucky women would have likely still held responsibility for these sorts of tasks, especially during the Civil War when many men were away fighting. This is the culture Laura would have grown up in; it is likely that Laura had to complete a variety of tasks in her youth that could have precluded her from taking the time to listen to such stories as were told on the front porches by men after they returned from the war. However, based on the anecdotal family evidence that has been passed down, I suspect that Laura listened well to the stories and remembered them to pass down to her children and grandchildren.

with people on either side of the American coin. These are the women who raised children that understood a kind of double-consciousness before W.E.B. DuBois had addressed the issue in writing. The pressure to be versed in two worlds, to live differently according to whom one spoke, to determine the manner of address because of facts a person could not change: these are what minority groups have had to face in America since its inception. Laura, the heroine of her own life, was one of these liminal women.

IV. Twentieth Century Implications & Narrative Exclusiveness

Fractures in the structure of society expose the essence of the autobiographical impulse to the public. Lives are built on structures, some kind of framework, so it isn't surprising that the narrative arc is often traditional when it comes to traditional male autobiographies. But what about lives fraught with a traumatic past? The more fractured the life, the more liminal the space in which the author resides, the less likely the autobiographical story is to have a cohesive narrative arc unless the autobiographer has appropriately addressed the personal emotional issues and detached the triggering effects of memory from the experiences of life. If a writer decides to pursue the autobiographical impulse, it may well be as a healing journey, not unlike Suzette Henke's theory of scriptotherapy. Drawing from nineteenth century structures and changes in the structural framework of society, it is not surprising that the twentieth century saw changes in the structure of autobiographical texts.

One figure that stands out among the nineteenth century examples, both for her use of an unusual autobiographical structure and for her experience of major cultural and

personal trauma, is Charlotte Salomon. The autobiographical impulse for Charlotte Salomon, a Jew in Europe during World War II, left her to create gouache paintings overlaid with text that she used to exorcise her own personal demons in a work she called *Leben? oder Theatre? (Life or Theatre? An Autobiographical Play)*. Indeed, her work is prototypical of life writing in graphic novel form, with elements of play and screenwriting. Carolyn Austin notes that critics must admit, “our generic vocabulary is inadequate, as any attempt to categorize Salomon’s work is stymied by its radical mixing of media.”¹⁷¹ As she discerned the reasoning behind the suicidal impulse for the women in her family, she discovered her own identity not as a suicide. Tragically, her life was instead stolen from her in a gas chamber in Auschwitz when she was six months pregnant, after she had finally overcome the emotional trauma and the implications of the epidemic of suicides including that of her own mother.¹⁷² Salomon’s life typifies the fracturing of women affected by both personal trauma, of her family suicides, and cultural trauma, of the Holocaust. Her method of addressing such traumatic pressure from both internal and external forces in turn forced her to present a work that cannot rely on any single prior generic assumption. Salomon recreates her life and the lives of the women who preceded her in images¹⁷³ and text, sealing the fractures with a mixed media approach.

Since wars fracture communities, destroy lives, and leave those remaining to recreate a new structure from the brokenness, the new structure for women is often a non-traditional autobiographical concept. Not all of the new societal structures are built on

¹⁷¹ Austin 104.

¹⁷² Felstiner 6-18.

¹⁷³ For an exploration of the photograph in autobiography, as distinct from the painting, see Timothy Adams’ *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography*.

firm foundations. Some, instead, are built on the anger and depression of cultural trauma. Cultural trauma bleeds into the narrative constructions of the lives that are shaped by it, although it is subtler in some works than others. The trauma is most evident in the self-reflection of autobiographical texts.

As we consider the known pieces of life writing from the nineteenth century and how it affects the twentieth, it is important to recognize that these are only a sampling of the female perspectives of the time period and do not adequately represent the full perspective of women of diverse cultural backgrounds.¹⁷⁴ Smith & Watson indicate in *Reading Autobiography*, “many personal narratives with larger cultural and historical consequences remain to be ‘discovered,’ or compiled from the diaries of ancestors, as Suzanne Bunkers suggests, or interwoven with familial stories, as Jamaica Kinkaid, bell hooks, Michael Ondaatje...have done.”¹⁷⁵ These personal narratives, often written without an intended audience beyond the individual, provide an invaluable record with bias and subjectivity that will help researchers parse the emotion that went into the creation of the narratives. I posit that these writings are fundamentally imbued with emotion, and echo a dearth of understanding concerning how to adequately express cultural traumas, such as the Civil War, while they also reveal a critical perspective that reflects the shared American experience slanted to the personal experience of each woman. While in academic circles authors strive to remove bias from their texts, their past experiences necessarily shape the content they choose to research and thus the texts they choose to write. The problem of the academic is that of experience meeting

¹⁷⁴ Laura Beard explores a diverse selection of female autobiographical writers from the more recent past in *Acts of Narrative Resistance: Women's Autobiographical Writings in the Americas*.

¹⁷⁵ Smith & Watson 228.

expectation. Ultimately, life writing is a reflection of—and on—choices. Grammer suggests, “Autobiographers write, and their readers read, not in search of the already known ending but in search of the beginning and the middle.”¹⁷⁶ The choices of the autobiographer—and even her predecessors—become the focal point for the audience. The female autobiographer, then, presents and processes her own experience of cultural events based on the familial experiences and thus spins the web of stories to reflect the light of each memory on the journey back into the eyes of their audience.

For Grammer, autobiography offers nineteenth century women, including, “[Nancy] Towle, [Lydia] Sexton and their sister evangelists to answer such ‘judges,’” namely those who anonymously presented poems to question the evangelists’ choices, “to insert their voices into the debate about ‘who they were.’”¹⁷⁷ Women were able to discern and revive their own selves for the purpose of presenting their ideologies through the modeling of their own lives. She aptly expresses, “Their struggles to write the self and achieve author(ity) invite us to consider the complex interaction between ideologies of gender, evangelical religion and autobiographical form.”¹⁷⁸ For women who are writing from a non-traditional form or space when their lives do not adhere to traditional structures, it is a more difficult and often fragmented process.

Public documents necessitated an adherence to the social and cultural expectations of the time period. For women in nineteenth century America, that tended to mean that public documents should, as a general rule in rural areas, be positive in regard to the status of the church and speak kindly to others. Certainly authors such as

¹⁷⁶ Grammer, *Some Wild Visions*, 127.

¹⁷⁷ Grammer, “‘Strangers in a Strange Land,’” 69.

¹⁷⁸ Grammer, “‘Strangers in a Strange Land,’” 71.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's works passed over into the hands of rural individuals whose lives were directly tied into the evils of slavery. Stowe's work fell into the hands of Laura Ellen Hunt Short and Laura gravitated towards *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the way that moths move to flames in the night. Laura was drawn to that book and the gravity of it would not let her put it down until it was complete. It was a different kind of public document than Laura had been privy to before and books like this provided Laura an exegesis of the current state of their nation.

As we write private documents, we are most honest with ourselves about the truth in our hearts. We do not gloss over it or glaze over it with dishonesty and veiled allusions. We do not hide from our personal issues and incidents, but we can address them with cogent reflection. Public documents, however, typically come with a filter for parents, grandparents, civic leaders and ruling powers in one's particular home. As one discerns the necessary measures that must be taken to produce a work that will be considered stable and potentially passable in regards to the nature of the public eye, it becomes an interesting predicament that the truth of one's words becomes obscured by the multiplicity of filters that stand in the way of adherence to the reality of what one intends to say. It is by design as autobiographers that words are truth, but in many documents that truth is obscured by deception. In the case of Christine, her words are filtered through a lens that would not get her killed. While she made many strides in what women were allowed to say and spent time crafting her words for presentation editions for royalty, she still obscured details of her personal life and bent towards allegorical texts. In the creative section devoted to her, it is my intention to produce the words that she could not have said given her cultural and political contexts.

Female writers have a strong history of autobiographical writings in America, from private diaries to letters to extensive autobiographical accounts of their struggles. Each story relates the personal experience and often includes the experience of the lives of others within their spheres and families. These women were able to break free from the social constraints and live and write the life that chose them. It is not surprising that many of these women were religious, adhering to a less patriarchal interpretation of the Bible, who saw their value as individuals in God above how men saw them. After accepting freedom in Christ, these women often felt a calling beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother. While the women did not neglect their cultural gender roles, like Stanton, they found fulfillment in bringing women together for the purpose of justice in the form of positive social change.

As women shift from a subjugated position to the role of subversive author of their own lives, they assert an authority that the western canon has historically removed. These women autobiographers in the nineteenth century are not necessarily feminists, although their ideas paved the way for feminism; rather these women are the product of their culture and became the women they desired to be by living full lives regardless of the expectations placed on them by society. Stringent expectations of proper behavior, often unrealistically aligned with the age of a child, require an adherence to historical and cultural norms, but often these expectations do not allow room for evolutionary growth in culture. By using non-traditional autobiographical models, often breaking from the traditional expectations of the genre, these women were able to prove to themselves that they could indeed live by their own sets of rules rather than continue to subjugate themselves to the status quo. By writing their own lives and the influences of the lives of

those around them, early American women became active participants in their own lives with the capabilities to shape the new culture that was forming in their midst while paving the way for later autobiographers who would pick up their stories and blend them into a autogenealogobiography.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Drawing from the Greek roots for genealogy and autobiography, I have sought to create a word that adequately encompasses the work that I have created for the three females in the text. While much of the work tends towards Suzette Henke's idea of scriptotherapy, the additional layering of voices in the same genealogical pattern and tradition necessitate an alternate word. The root words and meanings, *auto*, self; *genea*, generation; *logos*, knowledge; *bios*, life; and *graphein*, to write, form the overall idea of this project. The idea of *genea* plays off of the confluence of meanings of generation, both that of creation and a collective group, as well as is suggestive of *gune*, woman, important as this work focuses specifically on the female tradition. The word, then, means to write from the self one's own knowledge of the generative forces of the past within the present generation for the purpose of creation of a sustainable life.

CHAPTER 4 – LAURA ELLEN HUNT SHORT, “BLACK MA” (1860-1951)

Laura was born in the heat of the summer on August 5, 1860 just over half a year before the Civil War began. She was the second child of Rev. James Franklin and Elizabeth Ellen Wade Hunt. Mandy was only eighteen months older and they were very close. It came as no surprise to their mother when they married brothers. Laura was close to her father and listened well to his words. Mandy was sassier, but she married the preacher—whispers during the wedding suggested that it might have been penance appropriate for her prior verbal transgressions.

Laura was a woman of integrity, a solid person whose nature changed with age and coordinated with her character, but her name was different according to who called after her. Her mother would call her Laura or Laura Ellen if the issue so merited. Her father preferred Elly when she was little and El after her tenth birthday. As he began to call her El, so did the rest of the family. By the time Mandy had children she was Aunt El. After her father and husband passed, she wore black every day and the children started calling her Black Ma. The change of her name reflected her external identity and intellectual growth.

Brief Excerpts from the Community in Regard to Her Names

Laura is a bright young woman. I am so proud to be her father. Her heart for the Lord and for the Word warms me to my bones. She is a picture of faith and works.

Laura Ellen is the most irritable child sometimes. Won't listen when I say hand me a skillet. Just keeps her nose in those books. I could sure use some help in the kitchen what with all these boys. She has got to learn to keep house lest she gets grown but still has the sense of a child.

L, my L. My sweet darling. She's the prettiest thing this side of Hunt Holler. Life without L would not be a life worth the living. I am so proud of her and want so much for her to be my heart, for always.

Aunt El, she weren't mean. She loved us kids all the same. Her tale is my tale. Her daddy was all our preacher. He could hack with the best of 'em. And could her momma cook! I'd rather been there by all those logs in their home as to nary another place. The spring was always clear there outside the window.

Black Ma. It must been my little brother called her Black Ma first. It was because of her clothes, and maybe a little bit her face. There were Sundays she smiled. I remember that smile, wide on her face but never showed her teeth. She lost Jim in '02 and that were a hard hit to the girls Claudie and Clydie especially. But when she lost the Rev. Jim—now that were her father, mind you—four years later—well it hit hard on all of us. We seen pretty soon that her mourning had no end in sight.

Overall, Laura embodies the turn of the century woman whose identity became primarily that of mother due to the external circumstances. While she exhibited a high degree of interest in the academy, texts and education, she never furthered her education in any school more prestigious than that of experience. Finances and location restricted her from pursuing any degree. There were no colleges near enough to her residence to be a possibility until she was in her forties and had already entered into her mourning period and the phase that she spent the rest of her life in as “Black Ma.”

A Child's Prayer

As a child, I learned to pray from watching my parents. My father insisted on prayer at the dinner table. Mandy, me and all the boys had to sit down and bow our heads as our father asked for God's kingdom to come and for His will to be done. He asked for our hearts to be opened to praise and our lips to speak truth into the lives of all the men we would meet. He always asked for healing for whoever in his church that was sick, too. I asked for healing for my future husband—mostly because I wanted him to come back to school so I could see him.

Lord, bless my daddy and my mommy. Bless my brothers. Bless Granny. And please bless our food. And please make this green food go away—sorry mama!—but God, I really don't like it. Oh, and can you make sure that little Jimmy gets better from his cough? Amen.

In the Kitchen with Mama

I took this one down when I was a few years older, thinking it must have been around the time I learned how to bake a cake. Mama insisted on learning to bake cakes only after learning regular meals, but cakes turned out to be my favorite. I know most of my childhood was spent in the kitchen and this, my earliest memory, is peeling potatoes and cutting my finger. It was the one time in my childhood I remember mama taking the time to truly focus on me and not the other children. The rest of the time in the kitchen was uneventful, almost routine for a decade. So little changed on the surface.

When I was about three mama put me in the floor peeling potatoes in the kitchen. I had a tin basin for the peel and a wicker basket for the potatoes. I only cut myself good once. It was a Saturday and mama was turned around giving Mandy a tongue lashing for losing track of Willie and him getting into her Sunday apple pie. My finger slipped and I turned that white potato red. Mama spun on her dress and scooped me up and put the dishrag on my hand that quick. She yelled for papa to bring a clean shirt and had him hold my hand while she ripped that shirt tail to shreds and bandaged my hand up. I don't even remember screaming, but the way daddy told it, mama drowned out my screams with "Rock of Ages." I'm not sure if it were a prayer or a reflex or both.

Walking Home

I used to walk up the holler as often as I could go to visit the Arvins in their little shack a piece from our place. There were apple trees on the way and I could not resist the temptation to climb them for a juicy apple on the way. My little dress mama made did not hold up as well as my sense of adventure.

Cold winds stirred up golden leaves as I walked down Butterfly Holler. I closed my eyes and smiled as I breathed in the last vestiges of autumn. I skipped along the horse worn path from the Arvin place back to Hunt Holler. My gingham dress bounced above my knee, snagging the cuts and tapping the bruises from falling out of the apple tree. The frayed edges of the dress on the left side kept getting stuck in my scab. Must have been where I got caught in the tree on the way down. Mama's threads weren't holding up so well.

Waiting on a Changed World

I wanted my world to change. I wanted everything to be beautiful and different from the life in the kitchen that I had seen. What was on the other side of my kitchen window? I peeled a lot of potatoes in my youth. There was a particular rosebush that bloomed right outside the kitchen window. How it kept coming up, even after Alfie mowed it down, I'll never know. Grace of God, mama used to say. Darn thorny bush, Alfie would say. Then mama would smack his face for saying a bad word. I wonder what it would have been like if I had gone out and been like the rosebush; what would life have been like if I had bloomed instead of wilting here in the countryside?

Alone I sit on the windowsill

To watch past panes at dark,

Alone in piles of potato peels

I wait to fall apart

I had to breathe a fresh fall day

Edging towards the gloom,

Here I pray for life—not sorrow,

Deliverance to bloom.

Time, 1871, Taylor County

How did people keep time? Why would they want to hold time captive in their pockets? These are the questions I asked when I was a small child. I just looked at the

sun or the shadows to tell whether the time is for supper or for breakfast. When we were in church on Sunday morning, Papa just waited until the sun was right over our heads, beads of sweat balling up on every forehead in the summer, and then he finally stopped preaching. Must be why they called it Sunday is what I always thought as a child. When the sun came up, I had to wake my brothers for their chores and milk Gertrude. Mandy was in charge of Alfie. Willie was in charge of feeding the pigs and showing Arvin Ray and Artie May how to do it too. I was always real glad I didn't have to feed the pigs. Took too much time to walk over the cow pasture to the pigs and feed them. Looking back, mama kept them as far downwind as possible without them becoming prey to that one cantankerous Harris boy. It was only a matter of time before he would be gone, but mama didn't know it then. Nobody at home had a clock or a pocketwatch, and you certainly couldn't prognosticate the days on a calendar. None of us could afford a pretty watch like the one I saw at Ms. Claude's shop some time before my birthday.

I eyed the cameo brooch in the display case at Ms. Claude's shop. I had walked down to the store to have the wheat milled for mama. Ms. Claude was watching the mill while I waited at the counter. I heard a tiny click repeat, so my eyes ticked over to the clean white face of an opened pocketwatch in its golden prison. Time. Snap, click. Turtle! I almost screamed, but then I realized it was just the watch in the display case again at Ms. Claude's shop. It was quickly followed by the thud of the milled wheat hitting the wooden counter.

Ms. Claude spit into the brass spittoon behind the counter and then pinched another piece of snuff off from her stash on the counter and sandwiched it between her gum and her cheek.

“How’re ya payin’?”

“Mama said to get you a guinea today or she can get you two ready chickens week after next.”

“Oh, the chickens is fine. Wait, you still got that goose?”

“Yeah, she’s still chasing Willie about the house.”

“How ‘bout that goose? She’d be good for the holidays comin’ up. My son’s comin’ in from Green County.”

“I’ll ask mama.”

“Thanks, El, you’re real sweet.”

I walked out of the shop, wheat in tow, and made it home in time to catch Granny Vicks before she left to run errands and take care of Papaw Vicks. Granny’s rough hands scratched my arms as she wrapped me up in a bear hug. With a wink Granny said, “El, dear, I’ve got a surprise for your birthday.”

I squealed in delight and exclaimed, “What is it Granny?!” But Granny would not budge; she just kept that same sly smile, while I insisted, “Please, please tell me!”

Granny laughed, “Oh, sweetie, you’ll be pleased as punch to get it, I know. Just you wait, and you’ll have it next week. Not every day a girl turns ten.”

I sighed and let Granny’s chin whiskers brush against my cheek as I let Granny give me a kiss. Then I bounced off down the road to Butterfly Hollow to sit in the moss and listen to the stream.

I waited until Granny had gone just far enough ahead of me, then I brushed the dirt off my legs and snuck down behind her. I had a feeling she was going to cousin Claude's shop. I knew that if she cared enough to lace up her walking shoes, step out of Hunt Hollow, ease past Aunt Beth's house and her cows, and fight her way up the last hill before she arrived at the store that there was something important going on. She only had to stop once to rest her knee, and usually she would stop three or four times.

Granny pushed open the screen door and greeted her cousin, "Hey Claudie! You still got that cameo pin?" I planted my feet in the grass beneath the window and pulled myself up by my fingertips to see what I could.

"I surely do. You getting that for El? She was lookin' at it awfully hard when she was in here earlier," Claude replied.

"Yeah, I 'spect I will. She's turnin' ten you know. I think it's about time she has somethin' pretty to take care of."

"Oh, she'll be surely pleased. Want me to wrap it for you?"

Granny nodded. She gathered three Liberty dollars from her apron pocket and slid them across the counter. Claude whistled as she picked them up and dropped them into the cash drawer. She waddled over to the display case and lifted out the open brooch.

Granny interrupted her, "Wait, Claude, I wanted the brooch—"

Claude laughed and said, "No, no, this is the brooch—"

"Well, I'll be," Granny remarked, "is it a watch, too?"

Claude just smiled and wrapped it up into a little brown package. She handed it across the counter to Granny. Granny held it in her hand for a moment, then lifted it up to her ear and paused. She breathed in, *tick*, breathed out, *tick*, and stared, motionless, until she counted ten. A smile shone in her eyes as she nodded to Claude and turned to leave. Granny walked out of the store, her bones creaking as she stepped off the porch and for a moment I thought she would see me, but I sprinted out of sight. Granny's eyes caught on a leaf and I, like a ghostly apparition from the front porch stories, skedaddled home through Butterfly Holler.

Monsters in the Dark

I used to write about my life in the third person as much as I could. Somehow that broke the barrier of reality for me. If I wrote in the third person, then I could pretend that it wasn't really me—I could be an observer of my own life. I stayed in that observer role for a long time. Harriet Beecher Stowe was an observer, telling her story in the third person; I wanted to have her life, her learning, but what could I ever write? Maybe if Jim had lived longer. The hardest things to remember ended up in the third person. Distance was the only way for me to address the reality of the situation.

At night she dreams of broken roses left from revels of angels and rivalries of the fallen. The hordes of monsters in her dreams so often had green eyes, but few had blue. She believed the blue were the good monsters, the kind monsters, but in her heart she knew there was no such thing.

The monsters dance on her chest and press the air out of her lungs. The green-eyed ones pull at her hair, her toes, her fingers. Then a blue-eyed monster in the corner comes in late, sits quietly for a while, then whispers in Laura's ear for her to just be still and silent, too. She doesn't want to listen to the blue-eyed monster, but how could she refute its lies?

Little Laura begs her mother to leave a lamp burning but her mother refuses. "You'll not burn the house down," becomes the standard reply. So instead she holds her breath and waits for night to pass.

When the War Comes

The memory of the war came in waves. Little snippets, really. I heard a bit here, there—on the porches mostly. Husey Bill Sullivan and the other men would sit out there and talk about it. I can't remember when I came to this realization about my mama's family owning slaves. It broke my heart and I couldn't rightly reconcile it. I still can't. Tried to reason it out, think through who my people were and what they did. I came up with more confusion than clarity.

My grandfather owned people. He had a time with whisky and often got himself into trouble with the law. There were rumors he beat his wife when he picked up the bottle and that the supposed death in childbirth of his first wife had more to do with the blows sustained to her head than the baby in her belly. He married his first cousin and my grandmother was born. That's the way of things. I suppose it was better than my great grandfather who married his stepsister. They had grown up together as siblings

from the time he was ten and she was six. There was something amiss about that part of the family. All of that family was gone from our home by the time I was old enough to know anything. I was born a year before the war and my Jim was born the same year it began. After the war came, I'm not sure the fighting ever left.

Granny's Gone

It took a while after Granny's death to help me realize the difference that her life had made in my life; she looked me in the eye when we spoke. It took longer to figure out how to talk to mama after it. Mama took off for a few days, stayed with Granny I later found out, but then she came back and didn't speak a word of it. She just wore black for weeks, maybe months. I remember that now; maybe that's why I have worn black. When words didn't work, the black color of my clothes spoke for me. I wish I had known to comfort mama in her darkness. I was just so mad at her then and avoided addressing the real issues. No one really did, though. Mama kept busy with older family and took so much more time with the boys. I think she expected me and Mandy to just pick up housewifery through observation and no instruction. Mandy was better at that than me, of course, and she was a good hostess and preacher's wife.

We used to speak so clearly when Granny was alive. I don't know what happened to mama after Granny fell. I didn't see her much and papa hurt my head trying to braid my hair. I don't know why mama didn't bring granny to our house, but I guess all the boys were bigger and took up the beds and floors upstairs. Three boys, Mandy and me

and daddy. I think that's when I started really cooking; putting together ingredients that didn't make sense to make dinner. That worked.

after grandmamma

On the heels of losing Granny, we lost Grandmamma, too. Granny was mom's mom; Grandmamma was papa's mom. My heart already ached so much, to lose so much within the course of a year—it just wasn't fair! Even now, I don't believe it's fair. Why did God choose to punish me with so many deaths of those I cared about? They weren't idols. I swear. Butterfly Holler is the road to the cemetery now. That's even the proper legal name now: Mount Washington Cemetery Road.

Grandmamma died when I was eleven. I ran outside into the blackberry patch and sat on thorns as thistles broke into my thighs and I watched the dark blood trickle across the grass. Is there where forgotten dies? In the woods, in the mystery of Butterfly Holler? It was intended as a place of hope, but here she died.

I slid into the stream aside the holler and begged for leeches to pull more blood from my tingling legs. Water splashes in my face and I see my own hands covered in blood and baptismal waters before I fall onto my knees, soaked to the bone. Languished is the only word for what I done. Thought I ought to fade deep into those auburn leaves and wither away.

I climbed back out the bank and walked down the mossy lane back to the house. It'd be dark soon, and mama'd be worried if I didn't hurry.

Slipping into Green River

After the deaths of the two women I held in highest regard in my life, I lost a little bit of my own heart. I jumped into the Green River with Jim. I played with words in my writing. I wrote as if I were talking to myself, commanding myself or narrating my life. When life got lost in the reality of death, there was no frame of reference I had to hold onto.

Focus. Breathe.

Focus. Squint.

Focus.

Jump.

It's colder than you expect. You shiver.

You float back to the surface and your hands grasp for air before your lungs gasp in the darkness. You breathe in deeply and take in the spray off a low wave. The back of your throat tickles and it prickles like fire when you cough to send it back up. Your heart beats in time with the lapping waves.

You feel fingers tap your shoulders. As you turn, one hand grasps your upper right arm and another hand wraps around your back and presses you in.

"Hey, love."

You smile. You giggle. You blush, but it's dark and the moon is waning so no one can see it.

"It's like the sun is shining off you, but I can only feel it. Are you blushing?"

You laugh. It's either that or you cry, so you figure it's best to laugh. "We shouldn't be here," you whisper.

"Oh, Laura, you're safe with me."

"But—"

"Come on, you snuck out to see me and that wasn't safe. I've missed you. Trust me."

You trust him. You let go. You let yourself be overcome. You don't worry about the rules or the risks.

Wading Far in River Green

It wasn't long after we had spent time in the River that life began to grow. I kept writing from outside myself, pretending that it was someone else's life. I could not possibly be the one whose father was a preacher that had committed such a sin. Oh, but I did. I must have edited this one a dozen times over the years. As it is, the timing is hard to piece back together of when I wrote it and when I thought what I thought. I remember some of these things happened that day, but memory has faded and I am not certain about the length of time these moments lasted or whether the order is even right anymore. Does it actually matter whether the chronology is right? It captures the emotions. That's enough.

After James walked into her heart, her mind and her body, she noticed the smells did not retain the same faraway quality they previously possessed. Her stomach retches, so she reminds herself to just keep breathing. At the side of the river, she breathes. She

looks up to the dark clouds and knows a storm is coming. The horizon lifts the red clouds low as the dawn breaks. She saw these nightmares before James passed, and they recurred long after he was gone.

In her nightmares she saw the harbinger's death recur. She looked through the sea of faces that stared back from dark water's snare. She saw black ships grow heavy from pressures above and shadowed spirits drag down the tattered sails until they tilted low. She saw deep sky blend with the waters below, then the pinpricks of starlight try to break through. She saw the ship crush into the deep and was transported herself into the middle of it. She stood, watching boards splinter on every side. The echo in her mind was this: How do we repent the damage done, when all are gone in town save one? She wasn't sure where the voice came from or how it sounded. Something like death, and only one person left. She was the one left to tell the tale. It was like Job, or something purely medieval.

Every time she woke up after such dreams, she felt her stomach twist and her hope fade. Somehow, though, she convinced herself that she wasn't really fading, that she wasn't really falling, that she was actually lifting herself out of this pit. Yet her stomach still twisted, more and more, and she couldn't lift out of it. By the time James was gone, her stomach was so twisted that she could barely eat. The nightmares formed an invisible bubble around her stomach, simultaneously buoying it and weighing it down.

Mama's Boys

When I saw my brothers, there were not men that stood before me. There were very tall boys who still should have been out in the fields running barefoot in the dirt. They all started out around Willowtown, but a few ended up in Saloma. Alfie took care of the Arvin place for a while. A couple went into town and worked. We didn't talk about the brother we lost. Not then, not ever. Not with mama. I think it was worse after grandmamma was gone. Since my sister married a preacher, it became obvious who was not like the others. I was the black spot, but my son became a blacksmith. He made something of himself. Our whole family did.

With a military sense of duty these boys seek out the ways of their grandfathers. A heritage of a Revolutionary Soldier on one side and a cattle farmer who provided beef for the troops on the other, these men who refused to hold slaves passed down their values to their children—and the preacher’s boys were the ones to learn it best without a spoken word. Not too many men had to sit on the porch talking about the Other War for them to know that to be a man in the family meant to be a fighter, and to not hold power over another person if it meant that the other person lost his free will. In absence of war they hunt deer in their home community of Willowtown—oft traversing to the next community of Saloma. They are all hunters, these boys. Alfie loves the dirt. From the age of 3 on, he would run his fingers through it, smear his face and wait. As a child, he pounced on the cat in the front yard before she could pounce on him. Now he smears his face with dirt and waits in the woods for the prey. Mama always said there was Indian in him and that he must get his instincts from the trackers. No one had to teach him how to hunt. Willie was always the businessman, trading hickory nuts for whatever was in someone else’s pail at school. He showed the most promise to become an evangelist. But Papa couldn’t even teach him to preach.

Not a Raven to be Seen

Our father was a minister. His evangelistic ideals ensured that he preached to everyone in our community about how to reach the heathen in our own community—like the Harris clan—as well as in other nations. I distinctly recall a curious incident in which the risers gave out under the choir during a tent revival. Our community was still healing from the War Between the States, even then, and a tragedy would have forced us to scapegoat the Harris clan or one of the other sets of boys who hid out in the deep hollers—and maybe even hanged one wrongfully. But Pa interceded in prayer while Brother D.L. Moody’s voice spoke peace to the crowd. We sure needed peace then.

Blue hair rises
stakes in a big tent
revival by the graveyard

In 1895 my Pa walked out the house
And took us all up the road
Little ones and momma besides

Bulletin said he’s gonna preach
“How the heathen
might be saved”

Chorus of voices then proclaimed

“While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death”—

That’s when the risers fell
Bless her soul, momma cried out
Like a mockingbird

But larks know, true, to listen at the light:
what draws the darkness home

After Habakkuk

After reading Habakkuk, I was taken by the words. I prayed through the whole book and realized that if I was going to read that book of the Bible, I’d better actually do something. I wrote this down as my prayer after the passage. It was going to be important to me to breathe, to wait, to listen and act. Granted, it probably took several more decades before I started living under the reality of the truths I discovered upon this reading of the passage. So much of life is a process.

Father, I will wait
Even though the figs have no blossoms.
Father, I will wait
Even though the grapes are gone.
Father, I will wait

Even though the tobacco has wilted in the barns and don't sell.

And I'm staring at the dying barn

Waiting for a Savior in the dust.

Father, I will wait

Even though the fields are barren.

Father, I will wait

Even though the flocks are gone, like my second son.

Father, I will wait,

Even though my milk cow is empty

And my goats chewed through the ropes

And walked past my fallen smokehouse.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will be joyful in my Jesus.

Who, Sovereign, is my only strength.

My toes will light on heights like deer

And He will rise me up on eagle's wings.

Empty Sacks of Flour

After spending so much time in the kitchen one Sunday for a dinner that never happened, I found myself covered in flour dust. Absolutely covered. White head to toe. I don't even know how there was that much flour and how I could bake so many things and keep it on me. I realized that it was a picture of the truth that from dust we came and to

dust we return. How literal, I thought. I couldn't handle the impermanence of the dust; I wanted to be a book. I wanted to be Harriet again.

We give and give and give but at the end of the day we're dust. We're just mangled clay vessels; our bodies are like old cloth turned into quilts tossed on beds and floors. But our human vessels so akin to sacks of flour desire more. We want light and truth. We want to endure as more than monument. We want to be books: constantly fluctuating intellectual paradoxes wrapped in softbound covers.

Reflections on Secular and Sacred

Harriet's book was always on my heart. This was when I was reading it heavily. My two books I went between were Harriet's book and the Bible. What else would work? There were so few others books in our home. I'd read the ones that the people from Chicago brought, like the Sunday Library's Rev. MacLear's Apostles of Medieval Europe and Mrs. Oliphant's St. Francis, but someone else would always run off with them shortly after I laid my copy down. Lending out books is a dangerous prospect. They so rarely return.

I reckon I've read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* five times now. It's a good copy of the book, though, so it ought to keep a while. It's teaching me again that Christian love can overcome. I wasn't grown when I first laid hands on a copy. I plucked it off daddy's shelf, near where he wrote his sermons. Daddy thought true what it said of women.

Women can make a difference. Even here in Willowtown. I hope my Tom can, too.
He's a lot like Jim.

Or will Tom be a wanderer? Just like the Israelites. Not bound to nothing on this earth. Even with the Israelites, it happened every couple of generations. It's a cycle. From Babel, even. The people lost the ability to speak to each other, so they left and sought community elsewhere. I feel like I've wandered in the wilderness. Have I finally found the land I've been promised?

Blood on the Rose

Three roads diverged in mossy woods
at the edge of butterfly holler
just a piece from the homeplace

Here I wait with streaming tears
for the light to break or dawn to bleed
or anything to quench my dry soul

Spirit cries out, but alone is alone,
and I wait, wait, whisper at the willows:
weep with me, my wilted lilies

Baby on the Knee

I don't remember which brother was crying; it was either Richard Clay or Benjamin Wilton. They were less than two years apart, so it's hard to remember. I was so much older when they came along. I'd already heard about all of the intricacies of the lives of the Harris clan. Joe Harris was an ornery boy from Raywick; everybody knew that he was no good. He never darkened the door of any church I knew of, and you just

didn't do that around here. I'm not sure he ever did much living in a house for that matter, or earned a living of any sort. Mr. Underwood was the county coroner for all my growing up years. I don't think he died until long after papa was gone. Our land butted up next to the Shorts and the McFarlands and I know we were all cousins somehow. The Harris clan was different then, more like warriors than family; there was always something off about that boy Joe. Later some of the Harris family would work for us, but mostly they just worked for themselves living off the land and moving from place to place. They were the closest to gypsies we had in this part of the state.

Mama waited by the fire with the baby crying, sick with hunger. It had been a bad harvest and every soul in Willowtown was struggling. Mama waited, rocking the baby, for daddy to come back in with venison. I snuck out to watch from behind the outhouse so I could see papa.

At the edge of the wood papa waited with shotgun perched for the buck to break the boundary line between Short and Hunt. Crouched in the tall grass papa was immobile until he heard a twist of a twig and then a crack. The rifle rang out and I heard a thump at the same time I heard a doe gallop off. I ran back to where I was so mama wouldn't notice my absence.

I barely got into place before papa ran inside with bloodied hands and told mama that he'd accidentally shot the old murderer Joe. He told her he'd sent the boys out to find Mr. Underwood to confirm that the murderer had indeed been rightfully assessed.

What papa pieced together in the rest of his tale was this: Joe had run from the Harris' land after hanging a poor boy in a tree. He hadn't been seen for days since.

Nobody could prove it was him, but it was mighty suspicious no one had seen neither hide nor hair.

I heard Mr. Underwood's horses, slow as molasses on a December day, and I heard his voice from the edge of the wood saying, "gone."

Old Joe didn't have a proper laying out after that, but papa said we would bury him right. We gave him a cross out at Good Hope and planted a tree over him. Instead of death and shadow he gave up the ghost in his reparations. The Harris clan were a cantankerous bunch and because papa took out Joe, I later learned from the older kids at school that papa prevented a local war.

Letters for the Dead

I didn't write for a long time. Raising children, losing Jim, then two years later losing Papa. It wasn't fair. I was angry. I was often angry. After mama passed, I wrote her a letter. It's like I had forgotten how to write though. The only words I'd read were King James Bible words and the words of the cousins I saw. I hadn't read Harriet or anyone else in a long time.

Dear Mama,

I hope this letter finds thee well in that glorified body. Harsh winters have passed since we last spoke. I know that I will see thee again some sweet day on the streets of gold. Remember what daddy always said, when he was nigh unto the end of his days: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Revelation 12:11. Oh, mama, that I could

hear daddy say those words again! Or that I could hear thee singing in the kitchen preparing pies each Saturday! I hope thine eyes have seen that glory that daddy so often preached—and I hope you are often wrapped up in the embrace of both Our Father and my father. Be sure to share time with Jim. I suspect he resides with Moses as oft as he is able. Love to grandmamma.

Love always,

El

Threads of Light

It seems like there are decades of my life missing in my writing. I stopped recording, stopped trying. I went to church, I cooked, I baked, I visited family and friends. It was all routine. Wake up, black dress, do chores, sit a spell, go to bed. Those were my days. Sundays and Wednesdays were spent in church as much as possible. I went every time the doors were opened. I didn't say much, but I was there. It was all scheduled. Every moment was the same thing. Every day was exactly the same. I was the same as I had been when Jim died. My bones just ached more and my skin sagged more. Now, oh my, now. It was already hard to quilt then. I'd forgotten it needed to be done, and by the time I remembered, the whole contraption had been prey to a leak in the roof.

Needle's rusted out now

Let it sit too long below the window upstairs

So long I'd forgot Mama's quilt was sitting
up next to it for mending
guess that hole's there for good now
My hands don't work like they used to
Can't pick up the babies
On account of my wrist gives out
Just when I need it
I broke granny's trifle dish
Just last Wednesday
Making treats for Jimmy and Mandy's kids
Least tomorrow's Sunday
And I can see Jimmy preach
Out at Good Hope
Best remember to pick flowers
From granny's garden for papa's stone
If my hands can move the earth

Sweet Suzy Down the Street

I had never seen a woman as caring as Suzy. She'd been raised up between Otter Creek and Buffalo, but she ended up near Willowtown when she got married. If memory serves, she met her first husband at a revival. I never did know how he died, but most of their boys were about grown when he left this mortal toil. Suzy stepped in and helped Joe Sullivan out with Charlie and the other boys after their mother Georgia died of breast

cancer. The youngest, Cora, was just three months old when Georgia passed. From what I saw, I suspect that Suzy did it out of pure love for that girl. It had not been long that her boys had lost their father, so it made sense that she would step in. Charlie was seventeen then, and he married my granddaughter Mae three years later. But Suzy, oh, what a woman. She raised baby Cora and the five of seven still in the house just like her own children.

I watch little Suzy from the front porch window when she passes. She walks a lot. Toting them little ones up the road and back down the road, carting a load besides. I know she cooks and cleans and tucks them little ones to bed. She's the widow of a widower, caring for her two children and her late husband's late wife's five. She weren't no tobacco farmer, but she raises them boys up to take care of the farm. She is hope. With her wire rimmed glasses she smiles that crooked, wrinkled face into an image of peace. We're all her family now. I hope sometime she'll drop them little ones by and let me see the life in them for a spell while she walks a bigger piece down the road. Maybe on mill day she'll stop. It's a long walk to the mill, especially with half a dozen pair of tiny feet in tow. The children mighta had to do without, but not with Suzy. She is a Proverbs kind of jewel, a mother on her own in the physical realm who, in desperation, calls on God to complete the task at hand. I know I'll see her at church Sunday, them little ones with their washed faces and combed hair, all of them kids smiling in the pew next to her. I can give pastor my offering to give to her. Oh, yes! When I needed it, the church was there for me, people I never knew taking care to make sure the kids was all

taken care of. Such a praying people there in that church, with the likes of those who answers the cries of the widow. Where else can you go but Good Hope.

I Will Not Be Afraid

I had to move in with my eldest son. His wife, Flora, is a sweet lady, but her girls are not my children, and the way that woman runs her kitchen is not the way I ran mine. I am thankful to still have a place to stay. I am thankful that even when this began my son was a blacksmith and had a big enough place that he could afford to care for me. This was not what I expected for my life.

Lord, teach me to set my life in order. Help me model my life after Yours. How did Jesus live? He must have worked as a carpenter, apprenticed to His earthly father. But how do I live? Here I am, fetching eggs and mending pants. What am I worth? More than a penny for my wares? Am I worth a quilt or a kerchief? A sock or a petticoat? A Victrola? A dozen brand new records? I want the sweetness of sounds in my house—music. I want to hear the echoes of that room in the recording room—is that what you call it? It must be a fine establishment, but here this house isn't even my own. The children aren't my own. The money is barely even mine. I tend the chickens. Flora won't even let me in the kitchen. Move the clouds, Jesus. I'm seeing through glass darkly today.

When I Am Alone

I still dream about Jim. I can't rightly think how long it's been since he's been gone. I woke up this morning and at dawn's edge I saw dewdrops on the window. They shook in the thunder like they had the night before. I had watched them glow for a long time before my eyes went dark.

I thought to go outside, but my eyes closed first. I dreamed of my hair falling back in the woods like it used to when Jim and me would sneak out. First I heard his laugh, then I turned and saw the right corner of his mouth crinkle and he held his arms out for me. I felt his warm body press into mine as he pulled me close; I hold on to these embers when I wake. They are a fire that keeps my heart glowing when my body is so cold.

Claudie and Clydie don't wear matching dresses anymore. Lat's a blacksmith—best in Willowtown, best in the county. As for me, little crows have landed on both sides of my eyes, and now I have to pluck whiskers from my chin. I know there were days when my grannies and cousins sat inside quilting while the men sat on the porch talking, and I learned and played between the groups, but now they've all gone. And here I am, left to teach the grown ones who don't want to learn. Nights are the hardest. Even two decades out.

A Grandmother's Prayer

I need you, Lord. More than the leaves need trees. More than the ewe needs wool. More than a book needs paper. I cannot do this alone. Jim's been gone so long, but still I wake up in the night and reach for his warmth on the empty pillow beside me. Why am I still so weak? Strengthen me. I feel like my heart loses shards every time the past haunts me at night. It chips away at my heart. Is this heart stone or glass? Heal me. Make my heart flesh again. I can feel it turning black. I alone can do nothing, but I can do all things through You who strengthens me.

Transgressions and Oppressions

I had half a mind to go to another church. No one preached like papa did. Then Mandy's husband stopped preaching before this and the man they got after him was not of any account. I was on fire about him preaching on transgressions and oppressions. He had nary a leg to stand on! Why, if I weren't a Christian woman, I would smack his front teeth right out!

The preacher keeps prattling on about transgressions and oppressions. Is it hypocrisy I see more now, or is he really in line with the Lord? Maybe a judgmental spirit has taken to me, but I do not seem to have the ability within myself to break it. I must be transgressed and oppressed and maybe the preacher is, too! I best stop complaining 'fore I begin to be sassing my own self into the grave. I get so angry in my mind, but I never do tell.

Then that new deacon kept tellin' us 'bout this man that's fixin' to come and give the congregation a presentation on a new school. He finally did come. L.C. Kelly was his name and he's been setting up a Mountain Preachers' School. He says God told him to go there after he did his part to set up Campbellsville College. He says God made a difference in his life and he wants to be the hands and feet of Christ. How beautiful are the feet on the mountains of the messengers that bring good news, indeed! I saw my Lattie slip some money into the collection plate that they took up for the school. I'm proud of him. There's a thought on the tip of my mind but I can't rightly fetch it. I just hear streams of water and the wind blowing through the ropes of a little bridge.

La Vigne

French for vineyard. I had a vision of me in a vineyard, but it was faint and it passed quickly. I didn't see much after this.

Broken edges spark up from the dirt
Green glints vacillate left and right
Clouds is moving in

Staring at the shards, I pause

Let the rose drop,

Then I grind the petals deep

My left heel grating through the silk—because there ain't nothing right about it

I breathe in the rain

Until my hair is flat

My green dress clings

And my white shoes sink into the mud.

I wait—

Because I can't say goodbye to what's already gone.

Five Generations

I was already living with Lattie by then. He and Flora were good to me. Charlie and Mae were married and their oldest boy had his little girl in his arms.

I never thought I'd live so long to see life breathing in little ones again. Lattie's already got his girl Mae grown, and her boy's done grown with a little girl his own. My feet and hands shuffle and I can't hold a pencil so good anymore. My mouth twists when I talk and I can't reach out with my left hand like I used to. I cry out from this weak vessel to pray away the shadows that daily conceal my heart. I bear up that shield of faith and refuse the blackness to befall my heart.

A Final Prayer

This is it? Somehow I thought I would have more peace by now. I thought I would not be wearing black by now, but it's been routine for so long nothing else made sense. Why change now? At least this way there's no uncertainty about what my children will choose for burial clothes. The best I can do is pray. The best I can always do is pray. Writing hurts. Life hurts. Pain does not fit into the Kingdom. I know I need healing.

O God, my Father. From desperation to desperation I cry out. My wrists are mangled and I can't hold hardly anything anymore. I can't even hold them together to pray. I just lift my hands to you, Lord. Heal my heart and mend my ways better than I mend the quilts and clothes. Is this body nearly spent? Heal my life and mold me after Your image. Bring me closer to You. I do not know how to live like this now. I need you, Lord. Daddy, I need You. For Thine is the kingdom, power and glory forever. Even if You never said that. Amen.

CHAPTER 5 – THE FEMALE PROFESSIONAL WRITER: THE LIFE OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN

Christine de Pizan¹⁸⁰ sat down at her desk to study and compose poetry for a decade before she began to compose presentation texts for patrons, at which time she became the first female professional writer. Christine, writing for financial survival,¹⁸¹ presented works that situated herself in the intellectual and autobiographical tradition of St. Augustine,¹⁸² even without her late father or husband's voices to affirm or argue against her compositions. She chose to write letters, poetry and prose in her own hand and engage in a scholarly discussion of ideas rather than take in someone else's laundry for a living.¹⁸³ While she did not ever decry the abilities of the women who served their

¹⁸⁰ Earl Jeffrey Richards and Charity Cannon Willard have both produced texts that provide the scholarly foundation for Christine de Pizan's popularity in academia in the past thirty years. Richards' *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan* and Willard's *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* are the ideal texts for developing a thorough understanding of her character and are ideal for introducing her texts to emerging scholars. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee have translated additional texts for a Norton Critical Edition, but I disagree with Brownlee's readings of Christine and do not recommend this or the included arguments as an undergraduate text. Nadia Margolis' *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan* provides a well-researched perspective on Christine's life and works that is appropriate for advanced undergraduate and graduate students who are developing their knowledge of the medieval period. See also Lynn White's *Medieval Technology and Social Change* for an in-depth study on the technological advances that affected life during this time period.

¹⁸¹ See Henri Pirenne's *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* for an in depth exploration of Europe from the time of Rome to approximately two decades after the death of Christine.

¹⁸² 152-153. In book 8, chapter 13 of *Confessions*, Augustine recalls the moment of his conversion. It is during this time that he hears children speaking quietly, "tolle legge, tolle legge," which Chadwick translates as "pick up and read, pick up and read." Christine draws heavily from Augustine in her texts and refers to him often in her major works.

¹⁸³ For an exploration on the variety of women's lives as evidenced through encyclopedic accounts, see Katharina Wilson and Nadia Margolis' *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*. See also Susan Stuard's "Fashion's Captives: Medieval Women in French Historiography" for a perspective on women through a historiographic look through the lens of their clothing.

communities in this way—and even highlights the poorest women as the closest to God in the final section of *La trésor de la cité des dames*—she had not been trained for the tasks of physical labor. Although her body had never been pushed to its physical limits, through education she had strengthened her mind in such a way that when the opportunity presented itself she took up the mantle to care for her household¹⁸⁴ through a career in letters. She composed courtly poetry, including several hundred virelays and lays, ballads and other forms of the early fifteenth century,¹⁸⁵ thereby strengthening her abilities to create and increasing the viability of her *Oeuvres Poétiques*. She composed *La trésor de la cité des dames* in 1405 and it is now her most widely read work in English translation.¹⁸⁶ Christine produced texts as her own scribe in a secretary hand¹⁸⁷ she likely learned from her husband; she focused her education and studies into her quill to produce texts in vernacular French that appealed to a broad European audience while providing her audience with an explication of the beliefs she espoused.

¹⁸⁴ For an understanding of the home in the medieval era, see Tania Bayard's *Medieval Home Companion*. For the religious aspects of food, see Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* and Madeleine P. Cosman's *Fabulous Feasts: Medieval Cookery and Ceremony*.

¹⁸⁵ For a contemporary perspective, see Eustache Deschamps' 1392 *L'Art de dictier et de fere chancons, balades, virelais et rondeaulx* in *Œuvres Complètes De Eustache Deschamps*. Glending Olson provides an examination of Deschamps and Chaucer and the ways in which these authors were thinking about poetry in his article "Deschamps's *Art de Dictier* and Chaucer's Literary Environment." Christine's *L'Epistre a Eustache Morel* is a letter to Eustache Deschamps and several letters and poems between them have been preserved in their works, suggesting that they had at least a literary friendship and were versed in each other's works.

¹⁸⁶ This is due largely to Sarah Lawson's skillful 1985 translation of the work into English. The alternate title of the text translates, *Le livre de trois Vertus, The Book of the Three Virtues*, but the text is best known in translation as *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. To emphasize the connectedness of Christine's two prose volumes that focus on women, *La trésor de la cité des dames* and *Le livre de la cité des dames*, I will use *La trésor de la cité des dames* throughout to refer to the text. The title for the Lawson translation is *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Lawson's introduction considers Christine's life and personal beliefs and how those affected the content of the text in the form of prevailing themes. The introduction was updated and amended for the second edition to add the focus on the Christine scholarship that had been created in the intervening twenty years.

¹⁸⁷ For a critical analysis of the script, see Michelle Brown's section on the secretary hand in *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600*, 106-109.

I. Overview of Significant Works and Critical Responses

A critical album of the autograph¹⁸⁸ manuscripts of Christine's works, collected by Gilbert Ouy, Christine Reno and Ines Villela-Petit, provides an exhaustive list of the extant texts. The first collection of her poetic works, the product of nearly a decade of study, dates from 1399-1402 and is now known as volume one of the *Oeuvres Poétiques*.¹⁸⁹ These poetic works demonstrate an extensive understanding of form and style of the time period. It is evident from the poetic works that Christine drew on her own experiences and the love she had for her husband and family to produce a selection of works that demonstrate her intellectual and emotional prowess; Christine put her grief into words when others could not. Following up her focus on grief with an exploration of the historical and religious aspects of her education, the second collection dates 1403-1405 and includes *Le chemin de long étude*, an allegory that uses Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* as a backdrop, *Mutacion de Fortune*, an allegorical poetic text, and *Epistre a la reine*, a letter to the queen pleading for her to make peace between the Duke of Burgundy and the Duke of Orleans.¹⁹⁰ Christine's allegorical works and dream-visions were stylistically consistent with the contemporary texts of the time period. She drew on the same sources as contemporary male writers, thereby demonstrating her understanding of and access to such classic pieces of literature as those

¹⁸⁸ The autograph manuscripts and the secretary hand, which Christine likely learned from her husband, court secretary, are mentioned by Susan Groag Bell, Charity Cannon Willard and X.

¹⁸⁹ Ouy 186-200. The text includes *Cent balades*, *Vierelays plusieurs*, *Balade retrograde*, *Balade a rimes reprises*, *Balade a responses*, *Autres balades*, *Complainte amoureuse*, *Lay de vers leonimes*, *Autre lay*, *Rondeaux*, *Jeux a vendre*, *Debat des deux amans*, *Epistre au dieu d'amours*, *Dit de la rose*, *Dit de trois jugemens*, *Dit de Poissy*, *L'Epistre Othea*¹⁸⁹, *Epistres Roman de la Rose*, and *Notables moraulz*. An individual poetic work, *Le dit de la pastoure*, dates to 1403 and is preserved in the seventeenth autograph manuscript as a single poetic work, Ouy 374-377.

¹⁹⁰ Ouy 202-212. An edition of the letter to the queen by Eric Hicks and Therese Moreau appears in *Clio*.

by Boethius. This particular text was critical in the medieval period and one's education was not complete without an understanding of who Boethius was and his importance in relation to philosophy and faith. As Christine drew from his texts, she tailored her phrasing to match her own personal beliefs and actions, but more than that this collection shows her technical range and mastery of style.

She was likely working on the completion of that collection around the same time she was commissioned by the Duke of Burgundy to compose her vernacular biography of King Charles V of France, *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*.¹⁹¹ In her first fully prose text, Christine includes biographical insights from a variety of sources, including personal anecdotal evidence, and "a reflective appraisal which discloses attitudes as well as actions."¹⁹² The sixth manuscript, given to Jean, Duke of Berry¹⁹³ between 1406 and 1408, includes her final courtly poetic work, *Le livre de duc des vrais amans*.¹⁹⁴ At this point in her writing career, Christine departs from the courtly poetry and the themes it so often espouses, like idealized love and traditional patriarchal representations of gendered power, and instead focuses on authoritative texts more

¹⁹¹ Ouy 477-515. The text dates 1404-1405 and appears in the twenty-seventh through thirtieth autograph manuscripts. See also Suzanne Solente's two volume edition of the text. For a discussion of French vernacular biography that places this text in context of The Hundred Years' War and the greater vernacular biographical tradition, see chapter 5, "Reinventing Kingship: Christine de Pizan's *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*" in Daisy Delogu's *Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign: The Rise of the French Vernacular Royal Biography*.

¹⁹² Laird 56.

¹⁹³ Jean (1340-1416), son of King John II and brother of Charles V of France, was a well-known patron of artworks and illuminated manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For an exploration of his patronage of art, see Millard Meiss' *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Late Fourteenth Century and Patronage of the Duke*; for a focused look at one of the illuminated manuscripts he collected, see Timothy Husband's *The Art of Illumination: The Limbourg Brothers and the Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry*. The order of these texts is best known because she provided a gift of her latest work at the beginning of the new year to Jean, Duke of Berry.

¹⁹⁴ Ouy 268-278. For a critical edition, see *Le livre du duc des vrais amans* by Thelma Fenster. For an English version, see Alice Kemp-Welch's 1966 translation.

concrete and practical in nature, including works such as *L'Avision* and *La trésor de la cité des dames*.

Christine's transition into prose signaled a shift in her purposes for writing, namely to support her country as it was embroiled in The Hundred Years' War with England. She composed *Le livre de l'avisio de Cristine*, a text both autobiographical and allegorical in nature that addresses contemporary issues of France as well as issues of gender and authority in writing.¹⁹⁵ As she reflected on her life and her adopted country in her work, she began to write in a distinctly individual voice, thereby producing unique texts that drew from previous traditions while situated within her own voice. Her background as an outsider in the French court allowed her the distance she needed to objectively scrutinize and mentally record the attitudes and behaviors with which she did not agree. After careful observation and study, she composed her works in relation to the other works of the time.¹⁹⁶ Within these texts Christine exhibits an appreciation of the works of those who came before her, and she references figures such as Origen, St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great and others in her best known work, *La trésor de la cité des dames*,¹⁹⁷ which dates from 1405-1406.¹⁹⁸ The combination of her autobiographical

¹⁹⁵ Ouy 583-608. The text dates from 1405-1406 and appears in the thirty-ninth and forty-first manuscripts. For a critical edition of the text, see Mary Towner's dissertation *L'avisio-Christine: Introduction and Text*. For a translation, see *The Vision of Christine de Pizan*, translated by Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard. During this time of war, several battles were on the horizon for France that would change the landscape of Christine's life. Christine's text addresses the issues of France and England during this time period and provide her country with the vision of a prophet in the manner in which she presents herself and approaches the sociopolitical issues within the text.

¹⁹⁶ In order to better understand the attitudes, values and cyclical nature of the lives of her audience, see Bridget Henisch's *The Medieval Calendar Year*, a study on "The Labours of the Months," pictorial tradition with which a contemporary audience would have been well acquainted.

¹⁹⁷ Also known as *Le livre des trois Vertus*, Charity Cannon Willard translates the text as *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, Sarah Lawson translates it as *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, and the literal translation is *The Book of the Three Virtues*. For this study I will use *La trésor de la cité des dames* to refer to this work.

¹⁹⁸ Ouy 609-623. The text appears in two manuscripts. Critic Shulamith Shahar provides a negative reading of Christine's work, explaining that the works are "undoubtedly unnecessarily complicated, lacking

work, her proposed methods of peaceful survival in spite of circumstances and these two influential texts serve as a point of entry for critically examining her life and subsequent work.

The patronage system allowed Christine to develop a livelihood in writing that ensured her revolutionary works remained in demand among both genders after her death, even in the English-speaking world. Her text written for Louis de Guyenne in 1406-1407, *Le livre du corps de policie*, draws from the ideas of Augustine, John of Salisbury and Gilles of Rome to produce a text that develops France as a unified body with the prince as the head.¹⁹⁹ As Christine proponed the cause of France in her writings, she established within her audience the awareness that she was able to produce mirrors for princes²⁰⁰ in line with the political affairs of her adopted country. Since she had already produced a mirror for princesses with her *La trésor de la cité des dames*, she departed from discussion of mirrors to a more complete history in 1408 with *Le livre de la cité des dames*, a thorough and subtly revisionist prose history of women.²⁰¹ Christine

in originality, and weighted down with allegory,” 166-170. I disagree with Shahar; Christine’s early work is lighter in nature and becomes more complex as she develops as a writer. When Christine’s works are unoriginal, she is drawing from canonical male writers who preceded her; she also often uses allegory because it was a common form that she could use to propose uncommon ideas. In order for Christine’s audience to understand the works that she composed, she ensured that she provided the audience with the traditional structure on which to base her new framework. Rather than completely break ties with the traditional systems that preceded her, she ensures that her works were in line with them in order to develop an additional layer of understanding for her audience to draw new conclusions on their own based on the evidence and examples she provides.

¹⁹⁹ Ouy 631-662. The text appears in manuscripts forty-five through forty-eight. For a brief explanation of the text, see also 253 in Charity Cannon Willard’s *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*. See also the critical edition of the text prepared by Angus J. Kennedy and the 1521 English translation, *The Body of Polycye*.

²⁰⁰ Mirrors for princes were a medieval genre that included exemplary figures for the prince to follow and suggestions for how he ought to be raised, taught and subsequently believe. Mirrors exist up to the Renaissance. See Rob Meens “Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm” who cites the ca. 700 compilation, *Audacht Morainn*, as the “forerunner of the later ‘mirrors of princes,’” 351-352.

²⁰¹ Ouy 286-292. This appears in the eighth manuscript; the seventh, also given to Jean de Berry in 1408, contains *Une Epistre a la royne de france*, *Une epistre a Eustace mourel*, *Cy commencement proverbs mouraulx*, and *Cy commence le livre de prudence a l’enseignement de bien vivre*, Ouy 280-285.

demonstrated her knowledge of and ability to work with biblical texts in her collection of seven penitential Psalms, *Sept psaumes allegorisés*, likely prepared in 1409 for the King of Navarre.²⁰²

The following year, Christine prepared an instructional text, *Le livre de fais d'armes et de chevalerie*, for Jean sans Peur.²⁰³ *Le livre de fais d'armes et de chevalerie* was the first translated into English about eighty years after her death by William Caxton²⁰⁴ as a manual for British soldiers. The practical instruction she provides in her texts allows them to be read by a broad audience. This instruction manual also appears alongside *Mutacion de Fortune*, the text in which Christine demonstrates an ability to live in the masculine world, in an edition from 1410-1411.²⁰⁵ The thirteenth, *Manuscrit de la Reine*, is clearly designated for the female reigning monarch and includes *Epistres du debat sus le Rommant de la Rose*, *Epistre a Eustace Morel* among a variety of letters, poetry and prose.²⁰⁶

Christine produced her book of peace, *Le livre de paix*, during the Armagnac-Burgundian civil war; the remainder of her works were produced in the shadow of this internal French conflict.²⁰⁷ The text that followed was *L'Epistre de la prison de vie*

²⁰² Ouy 663-685. This appears in the fiftieth and fifty-first manuscripts.

²⁰³ Out 687-703. This appears in the fifty-second manuscript.

²⁰⁴ See *The Boke of the Fayt of Armes and of Chyualrye*, Westminster: W. Caxton, 1490. See also the 1968 Theatrum Orbis Terrarum reproduction under the title *The Fayt of Armes and of Chyualrye*.

²⁰⁵ Ouy 294-306.

²⁰⁶ Ouy 332-343. This manuscript was completed between 1413-1414; it also includes *Chemin de long étude*, *Livre de la pastoure*, *Epistre a la reine*, *Oroison Nostre Seigneur*, *Proverbes moraulx*, *Enseignemens que Christine donne a son rilz*, *Oroison de Nostre Dame*, *XV joyes Nostre Dame*, *Livre de prudence*, *Le livre de la cité des dames*, *Cent balades d'amant et de dame*, and *Lay de dame*. Eustache Morel is better known as Eustache Deschamps. See also footnote 185 in this chapter.

²⁰⁷ Ouy 704-709. This was the fifty-third text and was completed by 1414. See also Charity Cannon Willard's 1958 edition and the updated 2008 edition, which includes the first full English translation of the text, by Karen Green, Constant J. Mews, Janice Pinder and Tanya Van Hemelryck.

humaine, translated as *The Letter of the Prison of Human Life*, which dates to 1418.²⁰⁸

Suzanne Solente suggests that *Les Heures de contemplacion sur la passion de Nostre-Seigneur* was written after *L'Epistre* and before *Le Ditié*, which she refers to as *Poème a la Pucelle*, likely around 1420.²⁰⁹ Her last known work is a poetic homage to Joan of Arc, who was alive in 1429, *Le Ditié de la pucelle*.²¹⁰ It is a fitting final tribute that the last known work by Christine was about Joan of Arc and is the only known text composed during the life of this vibrant young woman that stood for the cause of France in opposition to the English. It is not currently known whether Christine lived to see the death of Joan of Arc, but it is likely she died shortly after, likely around 1430. In all of these texts, the shadow of war is evident along with the author's sense of urgency and desire for peace in the country she chose to make her home.

Throughout these works Christine weaves historical and autobiographical context.²¹¹ In *La trésor de la cité des dames*, Christine provides details of behavior in the court. In addition to a thorough explication of cultural context, she expresses her theology throughout with the actions she highlights as of primary importance for women of all social statuses in her era. In this text, she does not follow a traditional narrative arc because it is an instruction manual for women, but she organizes the material hierarchically, beginning with princesses and working her way down through the social

²⁰⁸ Ouy 712-716. This is the fifty-fourth entry. Solente explains the division of the book into three sections and an overview of the contents of each in "Un traité inédit de Christine de Pisan: *l'Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*," 266.

²⁰⁹ Solente 268.

²¹⁰ Wisman xvii.

²¹¹ For an interpretation of the appearance of laughter in Christine's work, see renowned scholar Liliane Dulac's "Christine de Pizan et le rire, ou comment en parler sérieusement" in *L'Offrande du cœur: Medieval and Early Modern Studies in Honour of Glynnis Cropp*, 1-17.

classes to the poorest of women. It is the manual for life of women and companion piece to her allegorical dream-vision, *Le livre de la cité des dames*.

In each text, she considered her audience and composed her works accordingly. When she wrote for men, the content and context were different than when she wrote for women. *Le livre du corps de policie*²¹² and *Le livre de fais d'armes et de chevalerie*, works intended for male audiences, have sustained appeal with vastly different audiences than have other works like *Le livre de la cité des dames* and *La trésor de la cité des dames*, both dedicated to women in religious service.

Several critics prefer feminist readings of Christine, including Charity Cannon Willard,²¹³ Maureen Quilligan,²¹⁴ Keiko Nowacka,²¹⁵ and Jody Enders.²¹⁶ Rosalind Brown-Grant, in *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defense of Women: Reading Beyond Gender*, add direction to a feminist approach and takes into account the political and social underpinnings of Christine's *Le livre de la cité des dames*. Others, like Kate Forhan take essentially political approaches to her text. The variance in types of discussions and stances that scholars take on Christine suggests that she was able to compose well in multiple generic forms at a high scholarly level in regard to her subjects. In addition to the wave of recent scholarship, other critics have pursued conferences about her work and instituted a Christine society. Christine's work resonates not simply because she was a female writer, but because the words that she produced carried the

²¹² For a reimagining of the body politic image, see Angus J. Kennedy's "The Image of the Body Politic in the *Livre du corps de policie*" in *L'Offrande Du Coeur: Medieval and Early Modern Studies in Honour of Glynnis Cropp*.

²¹³ See Willard's essay, "A Fifteenth-Century View of Women's Role in Medieval Society: Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*," from *The Role of Women in the Middle Ages*.

²¹⁴ See Quilligan's *The Allegory of Female Authority*.

²¹⁵ See Nowacka's essay "Reflections on Christine de Pizan's 'Feminism.'"

²¹⁶ See Ender's essay "The Feminist Mnemonics of Christine de Pizan."

weight of truth. She was able to write in a way that she related to her audience and provided autobiographical information alongside exempla; in doing so she did not make herself an example, but she did provide her audience an entry point into deeper ideas. Scholars including Earl Jeffrey Richards, Christine Reno, Liliane Dulac,²¹⁷ James C. Laidlaw and others have written and inspired extensive studies on Christine. Other scholars, including Jean-Francois Kosta-Théfaine,²¹⁸ look at both Christine and Eustache Deschamps. In considering Christine alongside her male contemporaries, scholars can ascertain the comparative quality of her work. Sarah Lawson's translation began the twentieth century wave of knowledge and scholarship focused on Christine, and Charity Cannon Willard's tireless efforts supported the viability of Christine studies to become an accepted academic endeavor. These scholars have helped to establish the position of Christine in the western canon and her two major texts remain in print in modern translations from Penguin. Rosalind Brown-Grant's translation of *Le livre de la cité des dames* updates the older translation from Earl Jeffrey Richards and has the potential to become the definitive English version of the text. The continued interest in translation and scholarship differentiates Christine's text from other contemporary text and continues to solidify her place as a key late medieval author.

The source material from which one draws in translation is vital to the applicability and viability of the text itself. Gilbert Ouy, Christine Reno and Inés Villela-Petit endeavored to catalog the autograph texts of Christine in *Album Christine de Pizan*, placing the known texts in a format that is accessible to researchers and provides a

²¹⁷ For a study on Christine's texts by Liliane Dulac, see *Une femme de Lettres au Moyen Age*, with a preface by Susan Groag Bell.

²¹⁸ For a study on Christine's poetry, see Kosta-Théfaine's *Le Chant de la douleur dans le poésies de Christine de Pizan (The Song of Suffering in the Poetry of Christine de Pizan)*.

starting point for paleographers and codicologists as the text also includes images from the first page of each text as a sample in the critical edition. There are numerous critical editions for the majority of Christine's extant texts. There are also the extensive bibliographies by Angus J. Kennedy, which was last updated in 2004. The preponderance of Christine scholarship further illustrates the necessity of her addition into the Western canon. As professors have accessibility to her texts in good translations that undergraduates can understand, the likelihood that she will be read and studied increases exponentially.

The medieval portable reader from Viking, completed in 1977, neglects the authorial tenacity of such writers as Christine. The Norton Critical Edition of Christine's works makes it more accessible, but it relies heavily on feminist criticism in its scholarship. The vast majority of these works, however, neglect the importance of faith in her life, the evidence of God in her work, and her thoughts on Christianity as the great equalizer for women. While some critics pick up on portions, including Jean Francois Kosta-Théfaine, the majority pass off what Christine does in calling out to God as a pretense of a *deus ex machina* so that she might skew the field in the sacred world to ensure a political position of authority for women. I believe, however, that Christine negotiates her theology and her life through her life-writings, and I explore this idea in more depth in the following creative chapter. A challenge in creating Christine's theological approach in the creative chapter arose as I considered the voice that was necessary to convey the differences in time period and life philosophy. The project required me to distinguish my own concerns from those which would have certainly been Christine's, and to the effort that I was able to be objective and remove my own bias, I

did so. However, as is with all creative works, I am certain that some of my own beliefs have come through in regard to my interpretation of Christine's theological concerns and I have focused on those most important to me and closest to my own heart.

II. Gender and Authority

Although Christine was born in Italy, her courtly life begins with her presentation to the French authorities in the Louvre.²¹⁹ In discussions of authority, Christine often articulates the moments when gender disparities influence social stature within her work. In *Mutacion de Fortune*, Christine discusses her life experiences that served as part of the catalyst for her later writing; she also discusses her family history and her father's desire for a son. She considers this at length and expresses through poetry in *Mutacion de Fortune*, VI,

& parelle oz croissance
Lors n'avoye cure ne soing
Ne il mén estoit besoing
Fors de jouer selon l'usage
Avec les enfans de mon aage
Mais pour ce que fille fuz née
Ce n'estoit pas chose ordenée
Qu'enrichir deusse n'amender
Des biens mon pere & succeder
Ne poz a l'avoir qui est pris
En la fontaine de grant pris
Plus par coustume que par par droit
Se droit regnoit riens n'y perdroit
La femelle ne que le filz.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Christine was born in Pizzano, Italy on 11 September 1364. Her Italian father, Tommaso da Pizzano moved to Paris, France shortly thereafter to become the Valois court's astrologer and physician. She remained with her mother, the daughter of one of Tommaso's fellow Councilors, in Italy for several years. She and her mother joined him around four or five years later; it is likely she was presented to the royal court at the Louvre when she arrived. For a discussion of Christine's family life, see Nikolai Wandruszka's "The Family Origins of Christine de Pizan." For a broader discussion of medieval family life, see David Herlihy's *Medieval Households*.

²²⁰ For a critical edition of the French text, see Suzanne Solente's *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*. Nadia Margolis translates a portion of the section selected by Charity Cannon Willard in *Writings of*

In this poem, Christine expresses her retrospective awareness that while infants tend to operate in a structure of gender equality, the awareness of gendered constructs converts to gendered societal norms by adulthood. In operating under these gendered norms, it is the men whose interests are most valued. Her understanding and interpretation of this dissonance is evident throughout her poetry.

In the closing poem for *Cent Balades*, Christine further emphasizes her authority as she presents a concluding assertion that the preceding ballads represent her own feelings and should be interpreted as entertainment. Her authorial interpretation suggests a humble attitude, and even though the ballads represent more than mere entertainment, such an assertion indicates an awareness of her audience and a careful maneuvering within the context of her community to maintain the expected decorum while making subversive inroads to change the original system. The final stanza closes thus:

Ne les ay faittes pour merites
Avoir, ne aucun paiement;
Mais en mes pensées eslittes
Les ay, et bien petitement
Souffiroit mon entendement
Les faire dignes de renom,
Non pour tant desrenierement
En escrit y ay mis mon nom.²²¹

Christine de Pizan, "And I thus grew up without fear / Of the injustice all too near: / Among the infant playmates equality / Reigns, whereas adult polity, / Riddled with prejudice, reacts / In the interest of male contracts," 117.

²²¹ *Oeuvres Poétiques*, Tome I, 100. The essence of the text is that this work was completed, not for any payment or other sort of reward, rather for the purpose of making her thoughts and particular choice of words worthy of the page to make a name for herself. The original French full text of the *Cent Balades* can be found in its entirety in the *Oeuvres Poétiques*. Joan Ferrante translates the text, "I did not do them for reward, / Nor for any payment, / But from among my thoughts / I have chosen, and very gently / Breathed into them my understanding / To make them worthy of renown; / Not without good reason, therefore, / I have set my name in writing," 12-15.

The stanza suggests that she desires to not only make a name for herself, but she values her audience and believes that her thoughts and emotions, when recorded carefully, can provide entertainment with a purpose. Christine suggests that she carefully considers the purpose of each word, and in doing so must consider how the text might allow the audience to achieve new intellectual understanding. It is her ability to craft this into any genre she chose that sets her apart and allows us to examine her position of literary authority.

A. Gender and Literary Influences

Christine de Pizan held a place of literary merit even as a single female writer amongst numerous male writers of the time. From Perpetua to Hrotsvitha²²² to Constance to Heloise to Hildegard, female writers exercised authority through the act of writing. According to Peter Dronke, “The 120 years that followed [Hildegard’s death in 1179] saw an astounding proliferation in the writings by religious women, Latin and vernacular, prose and verse.”²²³ Christine was not writing from an ecclesiastical position as the majority of women prior to her wrote, rather she was a lay woman who turned writing into her profession just like contemporary male writers; she was supported by the same patrons and achieved similar status. Since Christine’s work had a patronage similar to her male contemporaries, her work reached a much broader audience than it might have otherwise.

²²² For an understanding of the mystical components of the works of Hrotsvitha and other early medieval women, many of whom suggest a tradition that Christine draws from, see Elizabeth Petroff’s *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*.

²²³ Dronke 202.

Her literary experience was likely shaped by the male authors she followed, including Ovid, Boethius, Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio.²²⁴ Boccaccio's texts and the ways in which they focused on the plague resonated through widely circulated plague narratives.²²⁵ It is almost certain, given her geographical location and active time period, and that she references the *Decameron* in *Le livre de la cité des dames*, that she had familiarity with the narrative structure of the introduction to his *Decameron*.²²⁶ It is likely that after reading his texts that she drew upon knowledge of his structure as she composed her own works. In addition to Boccaccio, she mentions St. Bernard, St. Gregory, St. Badour, St. Elizabeth Queen of Hungary, Chrysostom, Seneca, *Chronicles of*

²²⁴ Margolis 132-137. Christine begins writing in a tradition that sees the house as the sphere for women. She does not, however, speak against works like Dominican cleric Jean Gobi's *Scala celi*, which emphasize, "familial piety, alms giving, and the need to welcome pilgrims and care for the sick, especially lepers," Berlioz 45. It is these texts and other *exempla* that provide portrayals of women with power inside the household that, according to Jacques Berlioz, indicate "the house is a woman's privileged place" and it is within this "arena she enjoys undeniable power and prestige, even though obedience to the husband is the first rule of family life," Berlioz 45. Texts written at this time tended to emphasize the domestic sphere as vital to the lives of women—a domesticity for which women were uniquely suited, such texts claimed. It is important that Christine did not limit herself to the traditions of family life but used the tools she had at her disposal, namely the ability to write, to support her family and serve as head of household following the deaths of her father and husband. In *Exempla*, Marie Anne de Beaulieu follows Berlioz with an incorrect claim that Gobi is unique in the presentation of the defects and positive qualities of women. Gobi classifies "all of the defects of women under the rubric *femina* [that can include female animals] and all of their positive qualities under *mulier* [that only encompasses female humans]," Berlioz 55. While there is no evidence that Christine read Gobi, she did utilize the same genres that Jean de Meun used to wax negatively on women in order to present her ideas about women within the literary conventions of her day.

²²⁵ Plague narratives include a variety of texts from various individuals who experienced life in the fourteenth century. Boccaccio's *Decameron* is one of the most famous, and his introduction provides the framework that many of the surviving texts follow. See John Aberth's *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350: a Brief History with Documents*, Johannes Nohl's *The Black Death: A Chronicle of the Plague*, and Rosemary Horrox's *The Black Death*. For a succinct explanation of the plague and its effects on the poor, see Michel Mollat's chapter "The Black Plague and Social Unrest in the Late Fourteenth Century" from his book *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, 193-210.

²²⁶ Christine mentions specifically the stories of Salerno and Lisbetta in *Le livre de la cité des dames*, 193-202. Christine was certainly aware of Boccaccio's other works and even copied his *De mulieribus claris*. For a discussion of the revisions she makes to *De mulieribus claris*, see Quilligan, 70. Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* was itself modeled after Petrarch's *Mulierum virtutes*. For a discussion of the gender issues in Boccaccio's text, see Constance Jordan's "Boccaccio's In-Famous Women: Gender and Civic Virtue in *De mulieribus claris*" 25-47. Jordan highlights the dissonance between the framework Boccaccio sets forth in his Proem and explains how he often negates the women in his text, leaving the reader with a "doubleness" that serves to heighten its interest. It is no surprise that Christine uses this text and effectively does what Boccaccio explains that he sets out to do in his Proem.

France, St. Basil, St. Augustine, Valerius, John of Salisbury, Origen, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, Pope Leo, Guillaume Machaut²²⁷, Lycurgus, Mary of Egypt, St. Afra, St. Peter, David, Solomon and others. By using these canonical figures, she writes herself very literally into the canon. Her figural canon is not exclusively male, but it is certainly more skewed towards Christian authors. Christine de Pizan drew from the examples of those in whose intellectual footsteps she followed and sought to create an example for her courtly audience through including her own life in her texts.

In an intertextual discussion of Christine's *Le livre de la cité des dames*, Maureen Quilligan claims that, "if the model provided by Dante's dismissal of Semiramis's 'legge' helped lead Christine to place her first, it is Christine's rewrite of Boccaccio which provides the details of her narrative."²²⁸ While Christine concluded the discussion of Semiramis with the note that she would place the first brick, the Empress Nicaula is actually the first woman Christine mentions. Quilligan attempts to place Christine in the thick of feminism, but to do so after the fact is not a position that can be appropriately taken. While Christine's work intellectually paved the way for later feminist scholars, she does not do this with the expectations that later women will take up the mantle and present arguments in these particular works. As a woman, specifically the first to be paid and make a living from her texts, Christine writes from a place of gendered authority.

²²⁷ For a study of the intersections of Guillaume de Machaut and Christine, see Barbara Altmann's "Reopening the Case: Machaut's *Jugement* Poems as a source in Christine de Pizan" in Richards' *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan and Dire par fiction* by Didier Lechat. To understand part of the literary relationship between Machaut and Deschamps, a contemporary author with whom Christine communicated, see Deborah McGrady's chapter "Eustache Deschamps as Machaut's Reader: Staking Out Authority in the Master's Text" in *Controlling Readers: Guillaume de Machaut and his Late Medieval Audience*, 152-169.

²²⁸ For a more complete discussion of Augustine, Dante, Boccaccio and Christine, see the full chapter "Rewriting Tradition" in Quilligan's *The Allegory of Female Authority*, 69-103.

Susan Groag Bell, who spent more than three decades studying and searching for tapestries related to Christine's *Le livre de la cité des dames*, claims that the book itself, "was written specifically to counter the work of Matheolus, a follower of Jean de Meun,²²⁹ who, in his *Lamentations*, laughed a veritable tirade of hatred against women."²³⁰ According to Bell, the text of Matheolus, which is now lost, also proposed that women would not be present in Paradise. The texts of Matheolus were inherently misogynistic²³¹ and ran counter to the desires and purposes of Christine. According to Karma Lochrie, it is *Le livre de la cité des dames* that shifts Christine from "reader of

²²⁹ Jean de Meun composed the *Roman de la Rose*, to which Christine's epistolary response resulted in what is now known as the *Querelle de la Rose*. For Christine's *Dit de la Rose*, see *Oeuvres Poétiques*, book II, 29-48. In regard to Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*, Christine speaks out vehemently because it slandered and otherwise defamed women. Following the recirculation of this misogynistic text in a new form by Jean de Meun and its increasing popularity, Christine began to write letters that are now part of what we know as *La Querelle de la Rose*. She writes to Jean Johannes, secretary to the king, concerning Jean de Meun, "I wish to hold, proclaim, and sustain publicly that, with all due respect, you are entirely in error and without justification giving such accomplished praise to the aforesaid work, which were better called utter frivolity than any profitable book," *Writings of Christine de Pizan* 151. From the outset of her letters, she decries the works of Jean de Meun and presents her case in a structured format. Richards also points out in the introduction to her work that her "unmistakable clarity on the continuity of women's suffering throughout history is an appeal for change, not for the return to some nostalgically idealized past," *The Writings of Christine de Pizan* xxvix. As Christine wrote, she intended for her words to build upon the knowledge of the past with which her audience was familiar in order that they might be open to her perspective on the status of women. As a result of her own experiences with the death of her husband and education in the court, she had seen firsthand the importance of understanding the literature of her contemporaries and how it directly influenced the struggles and suffering of women. The vehement vernacular epistolary responses to *The Romance of the Rose* suggest that she was interested in encouraging the participation of the masses in academic conversations about women. In particular, following the circulation of *The Romance of the Rose*, Christine wrote letters in response to Gontier Col and Jean de Montreuil that became known as *La querelle des femmes* and through doing so became involved in the "first vernacular literary quarrel in the French tradition," Hult 184-5. Christine made a conscious choice to champion a counterargument against *The Romance of the Rose*, a text that, "provided a blueprint for all subsequent accounts of male desire and the psychological dimensions of female response as circumscribed within courtly society," Hult 184-5. In these letters, Christine fights the influence of "male gaze," long before the term was coined in feminist film theory, rejecting the images Jean paints that women are unfaithful, deceptive, vain and loquacious; she did not agree with the negative depiction of women propagated through a new edition of an outmoded text by a contemporary. Rather than ignore the revivification of this text, Christine took umbrage at Jean de Meun's addition of obscenities and its depiction of women. Christine established her own voice and intentionally placed herself in the center of this discourse. See also Andrea Valentini's "Gui de Mori: Misogyne Ou Allie de Christine de Pizan?"

²³⁰ 21. Bell, Susan Groag. *The Lost Tapestries of the City of Ladies: Christine de Pizan's Renaissance Legacy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004. Print.

²³¹ For a discussion of the state of affairs in this era, see R.H. Bloch's *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*.

misogynist texts” to her integration into a “community of female readers” and further invokes through the allegory, “intellectual and spiritual revitalization through the community of queens, classical figures, and martyrs.”²³² She uses the literary conventions at her disposal to fully express her ideals regarding equality of gender through means of the Christian life. It was Christine’s duty, then, to propose the purpose and place of women in the afterlife. It is perhaps because of this that Bell also considers Christine a proto-feminist and an “early Renaissance humanist,” but she moderates her claims with an explanation that Christine anticipated feminism’s early ideals without understanding “the crux of modern feminism...the overthrow of the entire patriarchal edifice.”²³³ Due to the time period in that it predates feminism, it is difficult to perform a feminist²³⁴ or antifeminist reading of Christine; rather the best approach is a critical historical approach that considers who she was, how she lived and how her life was modified and moderated by the lives and politics of those around her.

Christine places the women previously used by men—especially by Boccaccio—in texts in her own city to explicate the changes that she saw as necessary. She weaves²³⁵ a new tale for Semiramis in *Le livre de la cité des dames* without disregarding the character entirely. Her figure would have been easy to ignore given that she is known for

²³² Lochrie 76.

²³³ Bell 23.

²³⁴ Many scholars, including Gloria Fiero and Wendy Pfeffer in *Three Medieval Views of Women*, refer to Christine as an “early-fifteenth-century French feminist,” 14. Domna Stanton includes poems from Christine in her *The Defiant Muse: French Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present: A Bilingual Anthology*, thereby assigning the feminist signifier to her ideology and works. While feminism has often helped preserve female texts through scholarship, it is difficult to label women feminists that were not actively making the choice. Even the idea of proto-feminism suggests an assumption that Christine would necessarily have been a feminist in the twenty-first century sense of the term; historical evidence shows that the issue is considerably more complex.

²³⁵ This directly relates to the processual image of weaving as a metaphor for memory that James Olney discusses in “Memory and the Narrative Imperative,” 874.

her placement in the second circle of Dante's hell as well as mythic traditions that christen her the harlot. Christine emphasizes the courage and vibrancy of Semiramis and only at the end explains that Semiramis does not follow the written law because she lived in a time that people were governed by the laws of Nature rather than the written laws of contemporary society. Christine's explanation of Semiramis' faults provides not only a theological basis for why Semiramis marrying her own son was excusable, but Christine also provides two reasoned points as to why Semiramis may have made these choices.²³⁶ Christine asserts that Semiramis would not have wanted any other woman to wear a crown in her kingdom and she would not have thought any man worthy of her except her own son.²³⁷ This is an example of Christine rewriting histories for her women, solidifying her position of authority as an author who reconstructs canonical history to suit her ideological purposes. In addition to recommending this figure as an exemplar in her history of women, she also considers Semiramis in *Le chemin de long étude*, and praises the widow of Ninus who reigned well, whose ability to conquer and act surpassed even that which her husband accomplished.²³⁸ As Christine also records her own history in her texts, she situates herself as an author and exemplary figure whose story is worth recording; she is an authority who can create and recreate stories about women that have been passed down by generations of men. Christine did not allow her gender or the lack of female predecessors in the field to preclude her from writing; she uses her gender as a means to increase her position of authority in writing about these women. In doing so,

²³⁶ For a more comprehensive comparative study of Semiramis, see Marcelline Block's "'Une femme heroique, pleine de courage et de resolution': Representations of Queen Semiramis in Christine de Pizan and Paul Valery."

²³⁷ See Book 14 of the first book of *Le livre de la cité des dames* for Christine's redressing of Semiramis' tale.

²³⁸ For an excerpt, see Willard's *Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 131-2.

Christine suggests that her point of view as a woman discussing women in *Le livre de la cité des dames* and *Le chemin de long étude* is of more merit than Boccaccio in his *De mulieribus claris*.

B. Education and Language as Formational Authority

Christine's father insisted on a classical education for her, but scholars disagree in regard to the emphasis on Latin.²³⁹ Kevin Brownlee²⁴⁰ provides an antifeminist reading of this moment, an explanation that suggests that her father was not interested in giving her a taste of the father tongue, but instead gave her the mother tongue of French. Based on this, Brownlee concludes that Christine wrote in French because she had to. I posit, however, that she chose to write in French because she knew she could do so effectively and could further bolster the reputation of France. Instead of putting in the time to develop a true mastery of composing in Latin like so many who were brought up in similar courtly positions, she chose to write in vernacular French and thus assist in the increase of the importance of the language, as "French was on its way to attaining equal prestige with Latin."²⁴¹ When the necessity of her writing became evident in her own mind, she wrote in middle French. Much of her work calls out to Latin and Greek authors; many critics assert that she was unfamiliar with Latin, but more recent

²³⁹ Nadia Margolis asserts that Christine could read Latin even if she could not compose Latin poetry like her male contemporaries, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, 3. See Barbara Newman's "More Thoughts on Medieval Women's Intelligence: Denied, Projected, Embodied" for a discussion on the "devotional and homiletic use of Latin literacy among the well-educated nuns," 3. Kevin Brownlee conceives of Christine's choice to write in the vernacular as evidence of an inability to read or understand Latin. Willard, Richards and Dulac assert that Christine had a knowledge of sources that would likely have only been available in Latin because of the content of her texts.

²⁴⁰ See Brownlee's article "Literary genealogy and the problem of the father: Christine de Pizan and Dante," 365-367.

²⁴¹ Margolis 130.

scholarship suggests that she developed at least a reading knowledge of Latin because her understanding of the sources—and the stylistic approach she takes—suggest a deeper study of the texts than the extant versions of the texts she is supposed to have read.

I posit that Christine, rather than relying on the texts in translation, used her reading knowledge of medieval Latin and spoken church Latin, which she would almost certainly have known given her position and the prevalence of the Catholic church, combined with middle French, which has a similar syntactical structure as medieval Latin, in order to create ekphrastic texts that drew on her culture's heritage and helped France assert its own cultural authority. As the greatest nation in the world, France needed to elevate its language beyond Latin as the language of books. Christine's Italian heritage and subsequent knowledge of Dante and the Italian Renaissance would have allowed her to parlay the information she picked up from the *literate vulgare* into her own lived experience in France. While one cannot assume that Christine was aware of all of the minor events that happened in Italy after her family went to Paris, it is certainly a reasonable assumption given the mentions of Dante in her text that she was aware of and excited by his work.

In addition to Dante, Christine also refers to Boethius several times in *Le livre de la cité des dames*, suggesting an awareness of the Latin or at least a paraphrase or translation. It is interesting then, that although Christine discusses the deception in depth, she does not mention what Philosophy says about the deception of Fortune. Boethius, in Philosophy's discussion of Fortune in book 8 can be summed up by expressing that good fortune is a deceiver while bad fortune is an instructor; "she shows by her mutability that

she is inconstant.”²⁴² It is surprising that, while Christine acknowledges the latter aspect of fortune in her *Mutacion de Fortune*, she does not acknowledge the same deception in her *Le livre de la cité des dames* or *La trésor de la cité des dames*. It is unlikely that Christine acknowledged her own deceptive practices as such, or would have consciously related aspects of her life such as her childhood to good fortune in Boethius’ sense of the term. In her practical handbook, Christine advocates deceptive practices for means of survival.

The focus on deception seems to come as a means of survival appears as a result of the fragmentation of her own life.²⁴³ As we consider the fragmentation of Christine’s life and texts, especially as is the case of the physical copy of Harley MS 4431²⁴⁴ in the case of *L’Epistre Othea*²⁴⁵, it becomes clear that although the quires were sewn together in order to present them as a whole piece, they were clearly drawn from separate original places. The case of the *L’Epistre* is extreme, as sections have been attached to the entire section of the manuscript in order to make it fit into the new commissions created for Queen Isabeau’s presentation manuscript. The fragments are pieced together almost

²⁴² 37-8. Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. P.G. Walsh, trans. NY: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.

²⁴³ See Jean-Claude Mühlethaler’s “La Poétique De La Fragmentation Ou De La Bonne Utilisation Des Figures Exemplaires: Enée Dans Le Chemin De Long Estude De Christine De Pizan.” See also Michele J. Denizot-Ghil’s 2000 dissertation “Poetics of Discontinuity in the Lyric Work of Eustache Deschamps;” Denizot-Ghil notes specifically that Deschamps’ work is more fragmented than Christine’s because Deschamps did not create his poetic collection in the same manner that Christine did. While Christine served in a more editorial capacity in the twenty-first century sense than did Deschamps, Christine’s work demonstrates more issues of internal fragmentation while Deschamps’ work demonstrates literal fragmentation.

²⁴⁴ Sandra Hindman’s codicological study of the presentation copy of Christine’s work that was given to Queen Isabeau provides an explanation of the disparity between the sizes of the quires of the particular texts, focusing on the modifications taken to ensure that this particular version of *L’Epistre* met the same physical dimensions as the rest of the included texts.

²⁴⁵ The character of Othea is the first time that Christine establishes a “monologic, authoritative voice within her own text,” according to Rosalind Brown-Grant in her article “Miroir du prince, Miroir d’amour: *L’Epistre Othea* and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. For a full discussion of the treatment of love and how Othea serves as that figure, see 33-38.

seamlessly to ensure that Christine's text appeared as a whole even with its internal imperfections. The text's preservation shows the great care that was taken to ensure that this particular copy with this particular set of illuminations would survive. In order to preserve this copy and have a reason to preserve it, Christine includes it in the Queen's manuscript. She includes this, but she does not include her practical handbook for women's survival, *La trésor de la cité des dames*.

III. Self-Help or Veiled Theology: The Roads Lead to *La trésor de la cité des dames*

Christine does not mention queens as the starting place in *La trésor de la cité des dames*; she begins with princesses. In beginning here, Christine demonstrates her belief that once a woman has been elevated to the status of queen she is no longer capable of the change required to live the kind of Godly life necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven if she has not already begun to undertake the changes before entering such an esteemed position of power.²⁴⁶ It is an apex of social life and no other achievement in the life of a woman can garner the same attention and place that the role of a Queen does. Christine's belief, then, is that in order to enter the kingdom of God, a woman must possess the necessary qualities prior to entering the higher service.

The qualities Christine most values in women include letting God speak to and through them, as she demonstrates in her *L'Avison*; using deception with others in order to survive, as she does in *La trésor de la cité des dames*; and avenging family members when honor is at stake, as she does when praising the virtues of women in *Le livre de la*

²⁴⁶ For a discussion of power in its relation to women in the medieval period, see Kristina E. Gourlay's "A Positive Representation of the Power of Young Women: The Malterer Embroidery Re-examined" in *Young Medieval Women*.

cit des dames. In Christine's *L'Avisi*, she explains, "car pour celle cause croy que dieu saint esperit pere des pouvres et leur vray admenistrateur ma conduite au terme de ta cognoissance / sicomme il scet les pesenteurs de mes perplexitez auxquelles reconfort ne mest presente par les humains de nulle part."²⁴⁷ Through this Christine demonstrates that she believes that the Holy Spirit leads her on an individual basis and understands her on a level that mere humans cannot. Christine has to allow God to speak to her through the Holy Spirit before he can speak to others through her. She ends *L'Avisi* by calling out to Theology and understands that, like St. Jerome said, it is a mirror through which one sees the darkness within one's own life and then make efforts towards purification.²⁴⁸ By understanding Theology, she is then able to present it to others. In *La trsor de la cit des dames*, Christine acclaims the use of deception in nearly every section in regard to the different social classes of women when the expected result of the action is survival. Finally, Christine's *Le livre de la cit des dames* is an account of the women who achieved prominence and power in the necessary societal contexts and leveraged these positions in order to achieve survival. Often these accounts, not unlike hagiography, describe the sheer demonstration of willpower of the women whose lives she acclaims.

In essence, Christine accounted for allegorical representations of Christ as she saw fit in the history of her church and culture. She also saw it fitting and necessary to depart from her contemporaries and others who presented histories of women when the women's lives did not align with the purposes of her texts. Instead of relying solely on

²⁴⁷ 149. Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard translate the section, "Because for that cause, I believe that God the Holy Spirit, the father of the poor and their true administrator, led me to the end of knowing you, just as He knows the weight of my troubles for which comfort is not given me by humans anywhere," 90.

²⁴⁸ Towner 190-193. For a translation see McLeod and Willard 132-134.

the traditions of her elders, she sought to explore the vacillations between the text and practice in the lives of women. *Le livre de la cité des dames* presents a picture of women and relates them to Christianity insofar as it fits in the cultural context of each, even in regard to the secular figure of Semiramis, who predates Christ. David Hult, in a chapter on the *Querelle des Femmes*, notes that she “saw in Christianity a means of overcoming oppression.”²⁴⁹ In her text Christine notes the Christian qualities of women who overcame oppression of all types. Charity Cannon Willard, the preeminent Christine scholar, calls attention to the title of Christine’s *Le livre de la cité des dames* as a direct reference to Augustine’s *City of God*; Willard also confirms the model for the text as Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*.²⁵⁰ Christine even regards Semiramis, who Boccaccio regarded as borderline psychotic, as a woman succumbing to the natural law of her day before the laws of Christ were fully established for humans. It is because of the absence of cultural representations of Christ that Christine does not explain His presence more fully in the lives of mythological and other women prior to the first century anno domini. It is through this representation of women and the cultural expectations of the dominant and prevailing pattern of historical religious structures in the lives of these women that Christine frames her text. In doing so, however, she suggests that all of these women belong within the same city walls, city walls that she believes can be inhabited by Christ. Her words suggest a belief in an afterlife²⁵¹ in which all are welcome, regardless of their status as second class citizens or otherwise chattel property. In accepting and

²⁴⁹ Hult 184-5.

²⁵⁰ 29-30. Willard, Charity Cannon. “Christine de Pizan’s Advice to Women” in *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*.

²⁵¹ For a full discussion of the resurrection in *L’Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, see Josette Wisman’s “The Resurrection According to Christine de Pizan.”

highlighting women who would have made good choices given a fourteenth century legal system, she suggests that all of the women would fit neatly into the same heaven. In the chapter “Somewhere between Destructive Glosses and Chaos: Christine de Pizan and Medieval Theology” Earl Jeffrey Richards explains, “Traditionally the saints were the living stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and Christine adapts this time-honored metaphor for her virtuous women as living stones of the City of Ladies.”²⁵² I agree with Richards’ estimation that the illumination of her and Lady Reason, as they lay the foundation for the city, demonstrates a borrowing of the standard illumination of Psalm 126.

Her theory of the afterlife, then, is that in order to arrive in heaven, one must be a virtuous woman. Her *La trésor de la cité des dames* is a practical handbook on how to become the kind of woman who is worthy of heaven.²⁵³ She saved the best for last, and indicates that the poorest of women have no trouble in achieving heaven because they will be present with the Lord simply because of their poverty. In saying this, she is explicitly calling out the biblical text that explains that the meek shall inherit the earth and the poor in spirit are closest to God.²⁵⁴ Christine is living in a fractured world, one that has just experienced the decimation of anywhere from one quarter to one half of the population of Europe as a result of the first Black Death outbreak (1340s-1360s).

Following this culturally traumatic experience, and the effects of The Hundred Years

²⁵² Richards 45-6. In this chapter from Barbara Altmann and Deborah McGrady’s *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, Richards expounds on the theology and Jean Gerson as the first person to describe Christine as the *femelete* who spent time during an illness focusing her thoughts on God. Richards also compares Christine to Hesiod and calls her a “poet-theologian.”

²⁵³ The idea of a practical handbook is not a new concept, as she was likely familiar with texts like Butlan Ibn’s *Tacuinum Sanitatis: The Medieval Health Handbook*, an eleventh century Arabic text that appears in lavish manuscripts in the fourteenth century.

²⁵⁴ Matthew 5:3-5

War between France and England (1337-1453),²⁵⁵ Christine clearly sat with intellectual knowledge of a rich and vibrant history of Europe and the effects of its current condition.

Fracturing of the body and soul is an issue Christine addresses directly in Book III, section 4 of *Le livre des la cité des dames*. As she considers what happens to the women in this section, she speaks to Lady Justice with the hope that Lady Justice will declare what she knows to be inherently true: God will prevail. Indeed, God does continually prevail for Christine in her texts. She notes that He also prevails for all of the women who help themselves in the text. The women are lauded who are most likely to stand up for their causes, fight for what they believe in, and pursue justice above all else. Her women follow the James 1:27 motto: True and undefiled religion is this: to care for the orphans and widows in their distress. Having been a widow, it must have been this verse that was close to her heart, since she was not cared for when she was in distress, during which time she was preyed on the most. As a result, she overcame those obstacles in order to pursue truth and justice for all women in order that they might be heard and have the agency necessary in order to survive and raise their children.²⁵⁶ In many of her works, including *La trésor de la cité des dames*, she included other historic and typographic figures who encountered a similar plight, those who had suffered the same situations and temptations. Christine considers young widowed princesses and queens specifically and provides examples such as “Queen Jeanne; Queen Blanche; [and] the Duchess of Orleans, former daughter of Charles IV.”²⁵⁷ She uses these examples to show

²⁵⁵ See Book 8 “The European Crisis (1300-1400): The Avignon papacy, the great schism, and The Hundred Years’ War” in Henri Pirenne’s *A History of Europe: From the Invasions to the XVI Century*, 379-500.

²⁵⁶ For an explanation of the typical lives of medieval children, see Nicholas Orme’s *Medieval Children*.

²⁵⁷ *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies* 123.

that even women in power have the ability to serve their people well and these exemplary women stand in stark contrast to Queen Isabeau whose debaucheries Christine saw as destructive to France.

Certainly, her childhood expectations and perceptions of her future life were not met time and time again because of external forces; as a result, she experienced loss and learned how to survive. In 1380, around the age of 15, Christine married a man nine years her senior, Etienne du Castel. Etienne served as a royal notary and secretary in the French court. After a decade of marriage,²⁵⁸ Etienne succumbed to another outbreak of the plague on a mission for the French King to Beauvais. Christine notes in *L'Avison*, "Death struck him down in his prime when he was on the verge of attaining his intellectual peak and acceding to the highest ranks of his office."²⁵⁹ Instead of a long and fulfilling life with a husband whom she loved, she only had a decade with him. In those ten years, she bore three children who survived long enough to be listed in the record; at the age of twenty-five Christine assumed responsibility for the household.²⁶⁰ She further explains, "et noubliant ma foy et bonne amour promise a lui deliberay en sain propos de

²⁵⁸ For a perspective on what typical unions in the medieval period looked like, consider Frances and Joseph Gies' *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages*. See also Noel James Menuge's "Female Wards and Marriages in Romance and Law: A Question of Consent;" Menuge addresses the issue of young women and their ability to question authority, a point, when combined with the issues of gender and authority, might shed light on why Christine felt a close enough kinship with Joan of Arc to write a poem about her after what appears to current scholars a several year absence of new literary content. Christine composed her work to Joan of Arc in 1429, but there are currently no known works written by Christine between 1420 and the 1429 poem on Joan of Arc.

²⁵⁹ Reno 9. For an excerpt from Christine's *Vision* as translated by Christine M. Reno, see *Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 6-24.

²⁶⁰ It is likely that the son Etienne died before this time; she was certainly caring for Jean and Marie, a niece and either her mother or mother-in-law. Since Christine had two older brothers who would have more reasonably cared for her mother, I believe it is her mother-in-law she cared for as the duties would have fallen on her husband given the traditional gendered responsibilities of the time. Charity Canon Willard suggests it was her widowed mother in the introduction to her translation of Christine's *L'Avison*, 3. See Sue Sheridan Walker's "Widow and Ward: The Feudal Law of Child Custody in Medieval England" for an explanation of the function of the law in Western society. See also a brief discussion of Christine de Pizan in Angela Lucas' *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage, and Letters*; the caveat is that Lucas relies heavily on late nineteenth century scholarship.

iamais autre navoir.”²⁶¹ Because of her love for her husband, Christine made the choice not to remarry; McLeod and Willard translate the second half of the line, “I decided in a sound determination never to take another,”²⁶² while Reno aptly declares she “wisely resolved never to have another.”²⁶³ Themes of loss and survival become motifs in Christine’s works. As Christine details her sufferings in her *Vision*, she accedes that, “Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered to be tormented in every part of His body in order to teach us patience, and so Fortune sought to torment my heart with every manner of heavy burden.”²⁶⁴ As she discovered her own flaws and faults through the traumatic experience of losing two vital support people, she was faced with an even greater struggle: financial survival. It would have been an easy time to lose her wits and her faith, but instead of giving up, she leveraged her education and knowledge of the court to survive. While women outside of the court might have returned to their parents’ homes or pursued lives as beggars, she pursued writing courtly poetry for the purpose of sustaining herself and her family.

In addition to these deaths, she also experienced the death of one of her sons. Most scholars have surmised that her son Etienne died before he reached the age of ten. We know that her daughter, Marie, joined the king’s daughter Marie at the convent in Poissy.²⁶⁵ The king even paid the dowry to the convent that Christine herself could not afford to pay at that time. Most scholars believe that Christine followed Marie to Poissy

²⁶¹ *La Vision* 154.

²⁶² McLeod and Willard 95.

²⁶³ Quilligan 10.

²⁶⁴ *Writings of Christine de Pizan* 12.

²⁶⁵ For a perspective on the life that Marie would have had in the convent, see Lina Eckenstein’s *Women Under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500*. For a contrast between the continent and England, see Eileen Power’s *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535*. For a broader look at women in the time period, see also Eileen Power and M.M. Postan’s *Medieval Women*.

and lived out her days there when power changed hands in Paris around 1418.²⁶⁶ Her son Jean, who had been educated in England until it was no longer a safe option after the death of France's king,²⁶⁷ married well and lived a successful life. It is to his mother's credit that he was returned safely to France in a tumultuous political climate. After his education in England, he was able to secure a position similar to that of his father and grandfather. Since he would have been very young when they died, it is likely, then, that Christine was diligent in educating her son and ensuring he be in the right place at the right time in order to receive the appropriate education so that he would attain and retain the right status in order to survive.

Time and again, survival is glorified in Christine's texts. She presents survival as the only option, one which is paramount to all other quests. She even suggests that deception or ruse—two types of lies strongly opposed from a biblical perspective—are appropriate or necessary if survival is at stake. If faced with the necessity of lying or dying, Christine's chosen women in *Le livre de la cité des dames* often choose lying in order to survive and it is something she advocates for all of the women reading *La trésor de la cité des dames*. The idea of the ruse, deception as necessary skill, runs counter to the rest of her teachings. Christine, however, apparently believed that this was a sin that was forgivable and one that would not prevent a woman from entering into her ideal of heaven.

²⁶⁶ The struggle of authority and power between civic and church courts is explored in Helen Carrel's article "Disputing Legal Privilege: Civic Relations with the Church in Late Medieval England," and provides a focused study whose implications are applicable for the greater European community. See also Suzanne Wemple's *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900*, for a perspective on the types of ideologies that formed the foundations upon which Christine's time period built its understanding of the practice.

²⁶⁷ For a thorough study on the Armagnac-Burgundian Feud and the political nature of Christine's texts, see Tracy Adams' *Christine de Pizan and the Fight for France*.

The focus of her *Le livre de la cité des dames*, then, is paradise or heaven, and I posit that it is truly a new heaven because of the physicality of the walls and buildings present within. Christine's heaven is a city that has been laid brick by brick and populated with women of various skills who can come together with great ideas and fellowship together and communicate together. Much like Christine listens to Ladies Reason, Rectitude and Justice, she wants her audience to hear and understand the truths hidden behind the veil of her own literary ruse. Donna Oestreich suggests of Christine's inclusion of these women through this frame of the waking dream-vision, "writer and dreamer, in fact, combine here, and her problem need not be interpreted in any metaphorical sense, as it is in most of the other [author's] dream-visions. It is clearly a gender problem."²⁶⁸ Christine's intentional framing of her texts allows her to hold up her end of the pretense about the true purpose of these two books in particular so that the truth might reach others and her audience might discern possible means of survival through the hidden truths of her deceptions. For Christine, the ends justify the means if life is the ultimate outcome. While she advocates deception as necessary, she never advocates it when it is not essential to life in *La trésor de la cité des dames*. Instead of claiming that lies are necessary to function, she actually explains that it is not appropriate to lie or speak ill of any others. In this, she refers to Ephesians 4:26, "Do not let any unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only that which is uplifting to others." She wants the women she encounters to speak truths to each other insomuch as they are able. The only time deception is appropriate is under penalty of death, essentially. It is not without reason that one is given Divine Grace to sin, in her opinion.

²⁶⁸ Oestreich 255.

While Christine often views God as a wrathful judge, she also views God as an equalizer who can place women in a position alternate than that of subjugation. I suggest that Christine's take on female authorship and autobiography is unique in her time period in large part because of her views on God. She demonstrates her assertion of authorship as she continually opens the passages of her texts with "Je, Christine," a technique unusual in early fifteenth century France. In doing this in her texts, she establishes her name and authorship in a way that she asserts her authority within the authority of the text. Christine opens *Le livre de la cité des dames* with an image of a fountain flowing from an "auteur;" Jennifer Summit explains, "the fountain of authors derives its authority not from originality but from an affiliation with the past that renders individual authors virtually indistinct from one another."²⁶⁹ Christine asserts her own authority in the medieval sense of the term; she addresses Boccaccio's contributions to her ideology and references him in her discussion of important women in *Le livre de la cité des dames*. As Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski claims, the mythological stories in *Cent Balades* and *Mutacion de Fortune*, "were dispersed throughout the collection and...form part of a poetic autobiography."²⁷⁰ It is through the recreation of herself through classical myth and the masculine traditions that preceded her that Christine excelled. Christine places herself into the traditional canon and creates works that, in many ways, break from it. Indeed, through her texts she situated herself as a scholar in the classical tradition, thus using established conventions to reinvent the standards and provide her authority. Boccaccio and Dante are the main secular authors she uses, but even Dante is writing

²⁶⁹ Summit 92. For a discussion of the question "What is a Medieval Author?" see Summit 92-93; to place the question in context with the full breath of what it means for a woman to be an author in the time period, see Summit 91-108.

²⁷⁰ Blumenfeld-Kosinski 10.

about his journey through hell and into heaven.²⁷¹ Not only does Christine use Dante's idea of the separate literary persona, the *auctor* and *actor*, but I assert that Christine might have chosen this form in order to depict the lives of women who have already passed through the journey with a guide to arrive in a comparable *Paradiso*. Rather than remain in the city and write only texts about the history of women, Christine begins providing more practical texts in order that she might provide anyone in her audience with the appropriate guidance for his or her situation so that he or she might be encouraged by a presentation of the truth and become appropriately motivated to pursue the truth, which is God. By encouraging the conversion through good works, she reiterates her own Catholic theology.²⁷² While she does include prayers in her text, she does not rely on the Catholic structures of prayer in composing it. Although it is likely she had access to a copy of a *Book of Hours*, Christine appears to have crafted the prayers in her texts from her own heart and communion with God. Christine's text may well be the first evidence of a paid secular writer elaborating on the necessity of communing with God through prayer.

Rather than stop at prayer, Christine also provides detailed examples for the attitudes within the hearts of women. It is simply not acceptable for a woman to be devoid of the foundational beliefs of Christianity in her inner life, at least not for Christine. She was certainly not an evangelical by any stretch of the imagination, nor do I intend to paint an inaccurate picture of her life or faith, but I do want to position her as a

²⁷¹ For a close reading of Virgil as guide and the passing of leadership to Beatrice in order to observe the ascent of Mary, see Lloyd Howard's "The Eclipse of Virgil and the Ascent of Mary" in *Virgil the Blind Guide: Marking the Way through the Divine Comedy*, 113-159.

²⁷² To see the oppositional views of the female lollards during this time, see Claire Cross's "'Great Reasoners in Scripture': The Activities of Women Lollards 1380-1530" in *Medieval Women*, edited by Derek Baker and Rosalind Hill.

faithful spiritual female writing in a secular world. She attempts to do what other Christians might call as being in the world without being of the world. She asserts that she had intense peace after the tumultuous years of widowhood and legal battles with men who sought to remove from her the last remaining possessions she retained. In overcoming the legal battles, Christine overcame the fears of losing her only hope and life and focused on a more positive outlook to ensure a reasonable livelihood. In experiencing these usual challenges, Christine used her unusual educational background to create her new voice. Margolis claims, “Christine excelled at adding a fresh voice because of her unique situation as a youthful, foreign-born, newly impoverished widow in a field inhabited only by courtly male poets reliving the usual love-gone-bad scenario.”²⁷³ Christine’s unique voice was evident in the historical and practical texts she composed.²⁷⁴

After her foray into the legal world as a widow suffering under the pressure of those who wished to take away her possessions following the death of her husband, she wanted to provide a practical handbook that considered the needs of widows²⁷⁵ and all women at all stages of life that would in effect provide examples and non-examples for women to follow—and if men also wanted to read it, then all the better. She wanted to demonstrate what people could do in order to make their lives better. At the beginning of each new year she gave a copy of her newest texts to Jean, Duke of Berry, and likely would not have done so if she had not believed that men could also profit from her texts.

²⁷³ Margolis 14.

²⁷⁴ Lynn Bloom asserts, “for a professional writer there are no private writings,” 24. Drawing from this perspective, it is precisely the private writings I seek to produce for Christine in absence of more emotionally explicit texts.

²⁷⁵ For a discussion of the widow in the medieval era, see 58-69 for Barbara Hanawalt’s chapter on “Widows” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, edited by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace.

This choice on her part allows us to date the majority of her works, and helps frame the relative dates for other manuscripts in the same family.

In addition to the manuscripts the Duke of Berry enjoyed, it is of note that Christine provided Queen Isabeau with all of her texts except *La trésor de la cité des dames*.²⁷⁶ This absence suggests that Christine did not believe that Queen Isabeau was willing to alter her attitudes and practices. From the practical suggestions made in the book about fleeing the court of an ignoble woman and the methods by which one might be kind and compassionate towards one's less than compassionate lady, it is very likely that she speaks from personal experience. While Christine uses the figures of Ladies Reason, Rectitude and Justice to provide the pretense for the words of advice coming from the mouths of someone else, it is a rhetorical technique and a ruse intended to prevent her expulsion—or worse—from the court. Christine advocates that one should never speak ill of her lady. It is unlikely that there are any lost texts decrying Queen Isabeau, but the pretense that Christine also advocates was likely incorporated into her actions in the Queen's court. I doubt that Christine would have had any desire to be in

²⁷⁶ After Christine composed *La trésor de la cité des dames*, she made the conscious choice not to present it to Queen Isabeau. Given the Queen's position, and the content of the text, it is likely that Christine made this choice so that she would not have to contend with the fallout of such a presentation. The text is arranged hierarchically, first a treatise to princesses, and ends with a section devoted to poor women. Christine saves for last the group whom the Lord loves most, in her opinion. In this way, coupled with biblical narratives that discuss the difficulties for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, it is not surprising that Christine devotes the most text to princesses—because they have the most to address before entering the kingdom of heaven. Poor women, however, she addresses least, not because they have the least agency, but because they have the least to do before successfully entering the kingdom of God. Throughout her text, she instructs women of all social statuses on how to pray. She suggests when and how princesses, both married and widowed, should behave in regard to their religious leaders. She suggests when each should be married, and what should happen if a husband is to pass into the next life and whether or not to consider remarriage. Christine is strongly opposed to remarriage for older women who have kept a close watch on their own estates and are aware of how to run these estates. Her advice, especially that to the baronesses, is equally applicable to women in surrounding countries, even England. The manner of her presentation of the appropriate way for women to live is as equally applicable to her daughter Marie in her lifetime as it is to the character of Bathsheba Everdene in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. There are many parallels between the baroness in Christine's text and Bathsheba in Hardy's.

the court of a woman who was engaging in riotous sexual misbehaviors, or in the court of any woman who allowed it of her subjects. It is quite unlikely that Christine would have written so many warnings against the inability of chivalrous knights to restrain themselves if she had not seen the evidence of that in a practical manner. There are no extant texts that describe these practices in the detail that Christine describes them. It is because of this that I believe Christine speaks from at least observational experience, perhaps even personal lived experience.

The text *La trésor de la cité des dames* was intended for an audience beginning with princesses and, in a hierarchical fashion, presented to those even of the poorer, lower classes. As Christine wrote in order to discuss the manner in which the lives of each were to function in their societies, she intentionally neglected the position of the Queen. This absence suggests that Christine did not believe the Queen was teachable, or because of her fears of the Queen's power, she did not risk directly addressing the Queen's indiscretions. It was very politic of her to suggest that all women be kind to each other, but in practice she herself chose not to be kind to the queen. If she could offer wisdom to the princesses who ranked above her in all respects, then certainly she could have had kind words of wisdom to speak into the Queen's life. This absence suggests that Christine either believed that Queen Isabeau's habits were too ingrained and the Queen was beyond saving, or she was simply acting out of fear and the understanding that Kings and Queens served as conduits of Divine authority. Christine's work hints at the former, but she certainly was aware of the necessity of giving in to the latter for her own self-preservation. In *La trésor de la cité des dames*, Christine acknowledges that it is more difficult for rich women to proceed into the kingdom of heaven, just as Christ

said it in the parable of the rich man in the Bible. It lends credence to the position that Christine took with her acknowledgement of the position of princesses as being able to be saved, but the Queen was not. Since Christine spoke to women so kindly and compassionately and rarely negatively, it is curious that she chose not to speak to the Queen to encourage her kindness to her subjects. She simply could have avoided the direct address of her illicit sexual affairs. Instead, Christine chose to discuss in great depth the lengths women could go to in order to avoid directly addressing similar situations.

Given Christine's propensity for deception when it is potentially salvific in the physical realm, it opens the possibility for a negative unrecorded experience to have taken place following the deaths of her father and husband; such experiences are part of what I seek to create from Christine's perspective in the following creative chapter. This cautionary tale could also be a page taken from the book of Chaucer or Boccaccio, colored with the sensitivities of the Court of Valois. Christine spent enough time reading and studying in Paris to construct the necessary documents that are based on the structure of the previous texts, but break the structure because she writes her works in vernacular French. In doing so, she elevates the language to a more prominent social status because it becomes a language, drawing from the medieval syntactical structure of Latin that will involve into a vibrant modern language. Despite the assertions Christine makes in regard to the political necessity of French as the language of books, I do not think she does this because she did not know or wish to learn and write in any other languages. She primarily fixated on the assertion of the prominence of the language in an authoritative

text so that it would be a way to disseminate the information to the greater population; doing so ensured that her works flourish long after her death.

IV. Liminality of Intellectual Belief and Lived Practice

The liminality between Christine de Pizan's beliefs and her practice is the position to which we must turn our attention in order to understand the tension wherein her lived truths lie. It is within this place of ambiguity, this disorientation that Christine writes. It is through this tension between orthodoxy and orthopraxy that Christine discovered that her methods of creating her own influence were not sufficient for her to be successful; as a result, she instead turned to writing the types of texts that served her logic and intended audience. While she began her career in courtly poetry—because that was the most popularly held genre when she began writing—she actually presented texts that expounded her personal beliefs and theology in such a way as to subtly influence her audience without interfering with their positions in the court. She managed to find the political state in which she was accepted by the court—even by those whose lifestyles distinctly disagreed with the texts that she wrote. As Queen Isabeau's court descended deeper into chaos after the insanity of her husband, Christine fought through her texts to present an image of truth for women to follow.

Christine's life affords the opportunity to discern how the position of power and the wealth of those around her directly affected her ability to be honest and speak truth into the lives of others. Earl Jeffrey Richards notes, "Christine's foremost concern, regardless whether she chose to write in verse or prose, was to tell the truth," further citing Book III, chapter 58 of her biography of Charles V in which she suggests truth is

the purpose of poetry.²⁷⁷ Perhaps if she had been willing or able to speak truth into the life of Queen Isabeau, as she did into the lives of so many others through her writings, the state of affairs in the court could have been different. Christine was not in a position to be direct in conversation with the Queen about her state of affairs; given the choices of the Queen during that time period, the traditional patronage system was not maintained, and if Christine had spoken too candidly in the direction of the Queen, Christine could have been jailed or killed. It is typical of Christine's focus on self-preservation in her texts, because even though Christine did not agree with the Queen's actions, Christine knew that she was not in a position to safely speak to the Queen about the ideal courtly life in which a Queen could serve as an exemplary model for her subjects.

In considering the purpose of Christine's text, we must first consider her audience. In recent years, her most popular text is certainly *La trésor de la cité des dames*, one of the few texts she never shared with Queen Isabeau. The purpose of the text is to present an image of the ideal woman and the reasoning and methods by which a woman of any status is able to arrive. The audience Christine directly addresses, as noted earlier, is any woman at the time of the composition of the text, with the exception of the Queen of France. Christine addresses these women for the purposes of instructing them in their behavior and thus suggests that the pictures these women create for others with their behaviors are vital to demonstrate individual character to the world.

Painting the picture of a city and laying the stories brick by brick allows Christine to turn the city into a metonym of world history. As she considers and creates this image in her text, she figures the purpose of the worlds she inhabits as her characters. The

²⁷⁷ Richards, "Poems of Water Without Salt and Ballades Without Feeling, or Reintroducing History into the Text," 225.

character of Christine is much like the character of Charlotte in Charlotte Salomon's work *Life or Theater?* Just like Charlotte creates a space that allows for a multiplicity of identities from her own voice in the 20th century, Christine has created a space for two Christines, the author and the character.²⁷⁸ It is not surprising that Charlotte in the 20th century would provide a third person for this tier. The author creates a persona and inhabits the one of her choice. In the creative texts that accompany the critical texts, there is an obvious distinction between the two voices in terms of regular text and italicized text. The voice of the nominal character does not necessarily coincide with the author's own thoughts and feelings, although the author's language and tone tend to define the purpose of the author's chosen voice. For Christine, this is more complex because so many of her works are published with enough autobiographical information to provide a history of her life; some facts can be corroborated by other stories, but the particulars of her own life can only be seen through her lens that may only be her version of the facts rather than an objective rendering of her personal history.

Just as Christine presents her own history in her texts, she draws from the proverbial well of history and concerns herself with the manner in which ruse and deceit are present in the character of women. She highlights this in several instances, and alternately agrees or disagrees with it depending on her purpose. I posit that the lack of definitive choice in relation to the treatment of pretense is evidence of Christine's personal struggle with the utilization of pretense in her own life. Christine's adherence to the Catholic life and the life following Christ was connected to following the biblical mandates. Lying is in direct opposition to a direct commandment from God. In lying or

²⁷⁸ For a specific interpretation of Charlotte, see Leah White's "Autobiography, Visual Representations, and the Preservation of Self."

holding up pretense, Christine addresses the issue in her own daily life. As she writes and creates, she considers the mechanisms that encourage her to make good choices and pursue the vibrant theological discussions necessary to consider how she makes her choices. In regard to self-preservation, Christine ultimately chooses deceit as favorable when the alternate is poor social standing or death. It is this choice that marks *La trésor de la cité des dames*, a text that provides an adequate discussion of her faith as expressed in the omission and absence of truth or knowledge in certain situations as would be detrimental to her readers. She directly relates career to life and in doing so allows the hybridity of her story to pass along the shadows of liminality and results in a singular choice. Her choice to pursue and command deceit as an essential substitute for reality runs counter to her other beliefs. This hole in her theory and otherwise practical adherence to biblical mandates is exactly what makes her human; she is more than a type. Christine's disjointed thought processes provides her audience an understanding that she valued the bodily survival of women over a theology that defines lies of any sort as sin. Christine was the first female professional author, but she was not a secular author at the expense of her personal theology and belief system. She integrated her belief system and orthopraxy, not necessarily the church's orthodoxy, into her story.

It is through her own characterization of herself and that of other male contemporaries, such as Eustache Deschamps,²⁷⁹ that she is thus characterized as a "female professional writer," an author with a wide range of capabilities despite the

²⁷⁹ See the text by Deschamps, translated by David Cuzron and Jeffrey Fiskin, edited with an introduction by Ian Laurie and Deborah Sinnreich-Levi for a full picture of who Deschamps was and his relation to Christine. For specifics on the relationship with Christine, see 2, 19, 22, 24. See also 180-181 for the text and translation of a poem written to Christine, "Seule en tes faiz au royaume de France." In this poem, Deschamps records that he knew Christine's father Tommaso and notes that he was a doctor of astronomy to Charles V; he also relates the work that Christine has done to that of Boethius.

politicized limitations of the patronage system.²⁸⁰ As Margolis notes, the patronage system Christine had learned earlier declined, “because Charles VI, though quite cultivated, was prevented by his madness from continuing to subsidize the arts and letters as had his father.”²⁸¹ Consequently, Christine considered a new audience and the genres and voices that others close to the French court might enjoy. Earl Jeffrey Richards, in his twentieth century introduction to *Le livre de la cité des dames*, explains that Christine’s range “shows a technical mastery of the various well-established literary genres of her day and demonstrates an astonishing poetic versatility.”²⁸² By utilizing multiple genres she allowed herself the opportunity to develop her skills in each and, as so many of the images in medieval manuscripts suggest, studied in order that she might produce good texts.

Even the idea of Christine as flawed is an essential truth for the main characters in biblical texts. Biblical stories often show the antihero or the underdog as a vibrant and vital character who is worthy of truth and acceptance of life in a world that otherwise claims the essential falsehood of whitewashed perfection. Abraham, David and other figures in the lineage of Christ had their particular brand of indiscretions, just as Christine does in her orthopraxy unsynchronized with her orthodoxy. Christine was a product of the political system of her time and is it without doubt that the trauma she incurred and the community she experienced directly affected her life.

²⁸⁰ This has been attested to by the majority of Christine scholars. Kate Robin succinctly sums up the idea in her article “Christine de Pizan et L’Echelle de L’Imagination,” explaining, “Christine de Pizan est considérée comme la première femme à vivre de sa plume,” 85.

²⁸¹ Margolis 15.

²⁸² For Richards’ full exposition on this particular work, see page xxi from the *Book of City of Ladies*.

V. Conclusions from Her Life

Christine de Pizan used her position of power, her experience in the French court, her education and her status as a female professional writer to construct texts that expressed her ideologies in such a way as to be heard by both men and women in her culture. In the court, her work was not read specifically by one particular gender. She produced texts that were not offensive to those of either gender—with the exception of the men who sought to smear the character of women in writing. She wrote in vernacular French and, in doing so, bolstered the identity of French as a scholarly language, and contributed to its advancement beyond Latin in terms of the language of national education. She used epistles, poetry and prose to express her belief that women were intellectual equals with men, just as her use of French suggests it was of the same scholarly import as Latin. She recorded her life experiences in her texts and established her scholarly identity as she wrote a life for herself.

Ultimately, Christine is an author in that she is an authority. Not only was she likely her own scribe, but she also often made notes to her illuminators concerning what images to use. She curated her own texts in a way that authors today must do if they are using both images²⁸³ and texts, but she had more authority in that respect than even current authors published by traditional publishing houses. Unlike incunabula, her texts were all written by hand—the original in her own—and copied under what would often

²⁸³ See *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspective* edited by Mary B. Rose for a selection of articles that discuss the traditions of women and their public roles as well as discussions on their spirituality and other aspects of their private lives. For a discussion with images from the time period to further ground the understanding of Christine's work in context, see Michael Evans' "Allegorical Women and Practical Men: The Iconography of the *artes* Reconsidered" in *Medieval Women*, edited by Derek Baker and Rosalind Hill.

have been her supervision. This type of authorial control is important because she is the first secular woman we have record of having done so to this level.

Christine de Pizan is noted as the first female professional writer,²⁸⁴ largely because she achieved this status in the late fourteenth century in terms of paid service to patrons in the court.²⁸⁵ As a result of Christine's experience in the court as a child under the tutelage of her father, she discerned how best to behave. Much of the historical evidence of the life of Christine de Pizan comes from her extant texts. From Christine's texts one can learn a great deal about life under the reigning members of the House of Valois in her lifetime, Charles V and his successor Charles VI, as well as corroborating evidence to support the claims of contemporary writers that Queen Isabeau maintained her court in a riotous manner. Christine did not decry the Queen outright; her lack of address of the Queen in *La trésor de la cité des dames* demonstrates her respect of authority even when the authority does not hold the same values Christine believes women in positions of authority should hold. Instead of elevating Queen Isabeau to the level of an example, she is curiously absent from a text that uses *exempla* to illustrate the guidance with real-life illustrations. Christine was thus able to navigate the complex political realm and maintain a position of authority in her writings such that her success propelled her work into the hands of English translators less than a generation after her death. Christine wisely discerned the needs of her patrons and articulated textual content that she knew that her patrons would approve and appreciate.

²⁸⁴ For a more complete bibliography related to Christine than that what appears at the end of this text, see the bibliography and two supplements from Angus J. Kennedy.

²⁸⁵ For an explanation of patronage of one of Christine's major presentation texts, see Deborah McGrady's "What is a Patron? Benefactors and Authorship in Harley MS 4431, Christine de Pizan's Collected Works," in Marilyn Desmond's *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*. See also Caroline Prud'Homme's "Donnez, Vous Recevez: Les Rapports Entre Écrivains Et Seigneurs À La Fin Du Moyen Age À Travers Le Don Du Livre Et La Dédicace."

While having a patron could not elevate Christine to the level of nobility, continued success in court certainly had a lasting effect on her family, particularly her daughter Marie, who was able to join the convent at Poissy with the king's daughter Marie, and her son Jean, who was educated in England with the Earl of Salisbury's son,²⁸⁶ and later became a notary and secretary. In the French court in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Christine served Queen Isabeau and King Charles VI, until he succumbed to madness, and became versed in the contemporary patronage system.²⁸⁷ Christine, adept in navigating the political sphere even as her works became more politically controversial, found other patrons in court, including Louis, duke of Guyenne, and Marguerite of Burgundy, Charles the Noble, king of Navarre and Jean de Werchin, seneschal of Hainaut.²⁸⁸ As she found patrons, she established herself as a woman who was unwilling to accede inability to support her family in absence of male figures. Her role as a writer for people of position and status helped establish her position as author. I assert that Christine's work is an example of the difference between knowledge and practice in theology, even though she does not explicitly state such, and this liminal space is what defines her as author and human. The following creative chapter attempts to bring language and image to the liminal space and discern how she addressed the dialectic between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The creative chapter remains in Christine's mind, and it addresses seemingly insignificant and obviously meaningful incidents, as well as later-in-life reflections on the incidents. The incidents that I used for Christine are the ones that define her character, not because of the gravity of the individual events,

²⁸⁶ Wisman xiv, *The Epistle of the Prison of Human Life with An Epistle to the Queen of France and Lament on the Evils of the Civil War*.

²⁸⁷ Margolis 15.

²⁸⁸ Margolis 17.

but because of the truth that the moments revealed to her about her own character.

Rather than create poetry in the same style and vein that Christine would create it, I have updated the language, syntax and style to present the essence of her ideas through forms that are more consistent with the twenty-first century. None of the poetic constructions are translations or adaptations of her works, although I do think that translation and subsequent adaptation would be a fruitful venture for a future creative work. Christine's stories are consistently emotional moments, the emotions that I believe she felt but could not directly address in the works of her own time period. She had to consider her patrons, her family, her position and the manner of address for contemporary authority. Rather than isolate herself from the milieu, even though she was the only woman writing in a secular world in this time period, she learned to live within it and enhance the reputation of vernacular French in texts. Christine's efforts opened the door for women outside of religious sects and royal courts to write. These efforts did not come without cost and Christine certainly suffered through the emotional, social and physical repercussions of the deaths of the two men she held most dear and the subsequent life-altering events that she endured with grace and peace.

CHAPTER 6 – CHRISTINE DE PIZAN (1364 – CA. 1430)

18 February 1921

Christine,

You are the true mother of my goodly heritage and perhaps the voice in my head that I hear when I want to give in. I am your daughter, generations on, Laura. Pray tell, how did you manage the changes you undertook? I read your stories and I know that you were a woman of might and power. But why do you so often recommend lying in your *Treasury*? I have been holding on to pretense my whole adult life. Watching my family members whisper about my marriage and my oldest son as they do the math has pierced daggers into my heart. They slander! You tell us not to slander, but they slander! The manner of escape from this prison eludes me. How did you do it?

I think you lost your son—I did too. Did it make your heart ache? Did the daggers pierce yours then, too, as they pierced mine? Even your husband died from sickness, so you know what it's like to lose one so dear. Mine has been gone for too long. I have treasured your book since it came from Chicago with one of the ladies who came down with D.L. Moody and his entourage all those years ago. She looked me in the eye when she put your book in my hand and told me to push through and try to understand it the best I could, because if I did then I would have come upon a woman of the same thread. Indeed, you have been!

My cousin's friend Sally who come to visit told me that 40,000 needleworkers—20,000 of whom were women—went on strike in New York, part of the dressmakers' union. But you didn't have a union when you wrote. You didn't have anyone to tell you to strike if life went wrong. You wrote. Were there guilds then or anything that could have protected you? A woman who walked without the protection of other women or even men. I want to learn from you how to pray, how to write, how to think. I don't know if I ever will, but maybe someday my children or my children's children will learn how to speak, though I could not. You spoke for all of us. Let my children carry on your tradition.

With Hope,

Laura Ellen Hunt Short

1429 – To Write a Life

Je, Christine, look back on my life, and I am reminded of the thoughts I had when writing first came to mind as a reasonable alternative to taking in laundry or some other menial task that requires little thought. While I appreciate the necessity of laundry, and I understand that it often involves a bit of science to remove stains, it is ultimately one of those necessary tasks that has been passed down as an instinct among many women. Given the options of laundry or writing or some sweet fool thing my mother suggested, I knew that there was not even a choice. My father insisted that I study, that I work towards learning the history of my life and the lives of those around me. What else could I do but write?

Once, long ago, I asked myself: what does it mean to write one's life? Take quill to page and rest assured the voice thereon is the voice within? With the Creator I sought conversation to quell these constant questions, but it is within my heart that I hear His voice and I know that it is a duty within me to present my life in such a way as to encourage those I encounter. Here am I, lost and broken as ever. But it is in this broken life that mosaic treasures flow from the glass shards of my broken heart. Though my emotions are in shreds, my mind can mend the threads. Though these threads do not spin on a wheel, they flow from a Divine source and, bearing with my body and my heart, constantly renew all my mind and all that matters.

When my body refracts the Light of truth, or the madness of my mind and the hardness of my heart resurface and defer to dark dreams, or I become awake to new visions beyond the consolations of our earthly fortifications. These are the artifacts I write.

1370 – The Fall

I had climbed my way to the very top of the tree that I had seen my brothers scale so many times before. As I climbed, I was taken by the perspective that it gave me, but I didn't have the word for that then. It wasn't until much later that I realized that the word I wanted was in fact perspective. The greater the perspective, the more intense the distance between my mother and myself. While she waited in the house, and I ran around outside, my father was already gone to Paris to serve the king who would also be my king. I missed my father desperately, even though I did not know him.

Laughing, I race across to the tree. I scurry up the tree I had watched my brothers shimmy up. The bark scratched my thighs all the way up. I watched as the wind blew the trees; they looked as if they were breathing, keeping time with the birds and the sounds of the city in the distance. It was a new perspective, a new idea that I could keep myself up instead of letting my mother down. The winds blew the clouds into dog-shapes and Cathedral-shapes. I held onto my branch for a long time before I finally started to climb back down. As I was climbing, I slipped and I tried to grab the trunk to slow myself down but the only thing that slowed me down was the bark that was cutting my arms. I finally let go and fell on my back. I looked at the blood welling up on my forearms and I watched in shock as it began to drip. I picked myself up and walked back in the direction of the house.

When I walked through the door, my mother began to scold me immediately. She yelled at me, then yelled for one of my brothers to fetch water and cloth so she could wash my cuts and bandage me.

I wasn't allowed to clean the cuts myself, nor was I allowed to leave the house alone for several weeks. When I would lay in the bed at night, I picked at the scabs that had formed and let the pain wash over me. It took some time to embrace the pain, but I could pick.

1372 – The Owl

I was presented to the King at the Louvre when I was eight years old. It was not the preferred palace, but it was beautiful. The object that caught my eye was the second century marble statue of Athena, but I mistook her for Minerva, and her wise owl became a symbol I carried in my heart. What wisdom and understanding, to be a woman sprung from the head of a man, I later thought as my learning increased. I was to be a wise warrior woman, protector, bringer of justice, but how? This was not a question I asked then, although I asked so many others.

Lights all around me. I look up and I see white: a woman and an owl. Oh, wise owl, will you speak to me? Will you tell me why France? Are you wise enough to know why my father left Italy? Why my brothers did not treat me the way father treats me? Wise woman in your armor, what are you protecting yourself from? Owl, do you know? Can you speak to me? Do you know who can?

I heard *who? who?* echo in the distance, but nothing moved, nothing spoke. I looked around but there was no one there. I stood very still for a moment taking in the statue, then I blinked and the whole contingent of people returned to my vision in front of and all around me.

1388 – The Practice of Written Prayer

What if I spoke to God the way I speak to a friend? Would He listen? Would He respond? If I wrote out what I felt and what I wanted, would He help me? These are the questions I asked when I began writing out my life. If Eustache could do it through poetry, why could I not do it in prose? Yes, I wrote poetry first, but that's what bought my family food and kept a roof over our heads. Prose came later publicly, but it was always there in my mind. When I was young, I began to toy intellectually with the idea of a story. The center of my stories then were often my observations. I observed the princesses, especially. First drawn to their pride and beauty, I became enthralled with their moments of ignorance.

I dare not write her name, but I saw a princess in play at dinner first laugh at the smiles of a younger servant. Then, the princess, angered because it was time for dinner and she was scolded, in her wrath took a goblet and threw it at a younger servant. As the younger servant turned a hand to a fist in wrath, an elder servant observed this turn of events. The elder servant's face turned dim and she quite literally threw the younger servant into the hall. I never again saw that younger servant.

As I see the elder servant's burning eyes deep within my memory, I am reminded of the chastisement of young women who have fallen under the spell of a chivalrous man of the court. It is not proper for any woman to fall prey to any man. Yet it has happened throughout history time and again. There once was a wicked princess at court; let me call her Cleopatra. Cleopatra took a liking to one of the male servants and, being unable to do

wrong in the eyes of her similarly inclined mother, drew this servant into her chamber in the most importune time. I cannot speak of her reasoning for this trespass, for gossip suggested variations on several motivations, but the ultimate outcome for each story was consistent so that I am confident I can say without defaming the character in any untrue way. Cleopatra, like a wolf seizing a lone sheep when the sheep was separated from other animals, seized the servant in her chamber and, when he did not do that which she so desired, screamed for the sleeping guards to remove the man from his position. Not only did she remove him from his position, but she removed him from his livelihood, and, so the story goes, his life. In the emptiness of her soul, she could not see the error of her ways. Oh, God! It is a true miracle that you took Cleopatra from her mortal toil at so young an age before she could ever become a Queen of any nation.

I am thankful that You take care of the wolves. But what do I do when I see the sheep, mangy and weak, spreading sickness to the healthy sheep? Not the long sheep like the one the shepherd rescued, but the ones who are masquerading as healthy sheep. Even Boethius does not delve into this realm. Give me a vision.

Visions of the Future

I woke up with the freshest image in my mind. The pale faces of two young women stared back at me when I shuttered my eyes. The one with short brown hair tilted her head to the left and said, "Why are you worried? Do you not know that we should worry about nothing, but pray about everything?" Then the other, clad in a dress as black as night, inclined her head in a similar manner and, reaching her eyes into my soul, sang, "Rock of ages, cleft for me, it is here that I find peace." A resonance struck

within my soul and I knew that these women spoke truth, but where is this truth from?

The words transcended language. But it is not for me to understand these mysteries, even if Lady Reason could rend the fiction from the truth. When their faces evanesced into the sky, I saw a field of sheep being tended. I saw the master with his staff, passing it over each sheep, slowing them down and checking them for any spots. He removed the sick ones, the mangy ones, and separated them from the rest of the flock to be tended separately.

Gold

In my experience at court, I realized that an “I” in France was “ha” in Spain. It was a disappointing realization that the way I sign my works, with I, Christine, was laughable in another language just across the border of my country. It is not so in Italian, but even though that is the language of my birth, it is not the language of my life. In Latin, it is quite different. I began to think about my own manuscripts and the illuminations of others I had read or perused in other languages. I thought about the texts of the lives of Saints and the accompanying illuminations. Clearly, however, the images of the unicorns and the monkeys remind me that Our Father has a vibrant sense of humor. It is beyond even my wildest dreams and recollections. Oh, Father, what in the world were you thinking to give us visions of white, winged horses with horns protruding from their foreheads? Perhaps these white steeds were not from you at all, yet so many call this an image of the Christ. I will not pretend to understand, but I will enjoy and laugh at the pretense of angelic nature in the realm of these texts. It does not seem so appropriate to me to have a monkey in line with the text of a king. These are

quite strange thoughts from our illuminators. I digress; this poem is a meditation on manuscripts and what they become in the wrong hands.

Arches and capitals

Illuminations of lives past

Crowns glisten and blind

Monkeys and unicorns

Treading the fascicle

Ground broken, worn out of

antiphonal memorial

Je, je, je—I become a laugh in Spain

1390 - Crimson

I was sitting alone before daybreak preparing to eat. There was a cool east wind blowing in the garden. As I waited at the table alone, I saw a lone leaf, wading through the wind, bobbing, throwing itself hither and thither. As I watched, pieces fell until it was but broken red dust. I saw that it was my life, if I chose to succumb to the forces around me and not pursue the dreams of writing in my heart.

I can see the veins in the underside of the leaf fade from green to brown to ash. The rest of the leaf falls apart, bit by bit, like brown snowflakes, each kin to the wind of the moment and each taking the memory of the leaf in a different direction, I never knew the wind had such power, to take a piece of you and send it through the Black Forest.

More than just caution, wind takes you to the bitter end, beyond where you thought you might rest. The little leaf loses itself as spring turns to summer and summer to autumn where in its weakness it loses green grip on the tree and the wind picks it up, carrying it in front of me so I could see the loss of life when it separates from the branch. My life has become a chasing after the wind and I see my own soul falling apart with the leaf. How can I pick up again? Is it too late for second spring?

Abba

How should one pray when life breaks? When you are at the depths of your soul, searching for the light but finding only darkness, there is no one prayer that makes sense. I grasped at the prayers of Vespers, Compline, the prayers for the end, the darkness, but that was not enough. I kept the framework, tried to make my words match, but they soon diverged from the traditional prayers and moved into pleas of desperation. Perhaps all pleas of desperation have a similar tone; the theme is certainly similar. I had to write the pieces I knew to be true, in hopes that the truth would align my heart.

God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. I am broken. You know that I am broken. Why have men of so many ages been taken from me? How long, O Lord, how long?! At the appointed time, thou wilt come. But how long? I have studied and I have written and I have worked and I have sought to be who You have intended for me to be! Thou wilt come. But the plague ravaged my family and friends! Thou wilt come. You came for Father and Etienne and my son. Will you take

me, too, in a thousand buboes? Thou hast always loved me. Thou hast never forsaken me. It did not feel that way when the strong men took my furniture. From desperation to desperation I cry out, O Father, heal my heart, mend my ways as I mend my tattered clothing. I keep piecing these blue clothes back together for there is little money to spend. Heal my life and piece me back together after your image. Etienne is gone, Father. My heart turns in a hundred ways and I do not know where it flies. Bring it back together, for you know how I am torn. I know you are true. Fill me with your truth. Give me hope for Jean and Marie. Wisdom. I beg thee. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory—forever.

Widows and Lawyers

I was very angry after being taken to court so many times that I've lost count. I could look back at my records, but I don't want to unintentionally induce a fit of rage. It was such an emotional battle, fighting against men who cared nothing for me, fighting for the only physical objects I had left in this world, fighting to keep my family from destroying themselves. I even once had a man lie and pretend to be the replacement for my lawyer, but he was a charlatan and fraud. The words I used in the moment were not edifying or uplifting to anyone, so I will not use them again. Suffice it to say that I served instead as my own legal counsel and did a much finer job than these frauds.

There is a certain type of man that I desire to see pushed into the pit. I struggle against this kind of man. I went to my lawyer, but upon being told he had passed on into death from a younger man who had taken his stead, I withheld my shock and simply

stood, staring. Judging that the younger man must be speaking the truth, I began to revisit the important details of the case—things I would only tell my lawyer. In my frustrations I spoke too much. He listened intently and then began to comfort me with his words. As he was speaking, I saw a design flash in his eyes and he began making overtures that were not appropriate to his rank or station. As his overtures became more evident that this was not a man of any worth or work, the door opened and my lawyer entered. Angry with the man for wearing his clothes, his eyes narrowed and he hissed for him to leave. It seemed my mouth had gotten me into trouble for speaking too much to this odd fellow without properly sizing him up. I am as angry with myself and my inability to control my emotions in this season as I am with that lying idiot! There are not words to describe the shock and emotions that follow after such strange and small horrors.

Penitent Voices

After addressing the legal issues around my case, I felt tears begin to flow from the corners of my eyes and found the first church that I could find. The priest was tied up in confession with someone else and I knew neither with whom or how long it might take. As I sat there, waiting, meditating on the words that had any meaning for me in the moment, I felt light beat down on my forehead from the rose window, and in that instant, the pride was gone and I was left weeping for who I once was. It was then I picked up myself and went to work on my writing.

Worship. Worthship. Worthy. Washing away. Somewhere here I sing peace and power, blood of sacrifice on age old altars. Always beside me, heretical bystanders say they ache for truth, but I ache for faith that fills worthless worms with ancient splendor. I hide in the darkness of the nave and pace the transept. I step to the rose window while no one else sees. Light there so quickly flits in and flees. I wait for a moment in the shadow of the rose and a starflash of daylight crumbles the undercurrents of captive pride hiding within me and I am left weeping, weeping, worshipping, weeping. I am prostrate until the shadows envelop the cathedral. I hear one word that gives me peace.

Now is time to work.

Defy the Night

The night sky is filled with wonders of light, promises from Abraham until forever. I stayed in the darkness for some time, but I kept looking upward, hoping against hope that the light would begin to shine. But as I looked deeper into the sky, I knew that I could not even bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the bonds of Orion. I imagined Etienne as Orion, gone forever into little pieces of light, small bits illuminating the darkness of my soul. I imagined myself, alone, and allowed myself to understand and believe that there would be no warrior, male or female, who could rescue me from this darkness except Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In a midnight, not a twilight

I find the star I see not so bright

neither so light, nor so fair—
no maiden holds the hand to share
nor does the warrior with his bow
enter, rescue, fight the foe

1400 - Wandering Stars

I began to question when this darkness crept into my heart. It was not here once, but now the spot I see! It has hovered over my whole being. After Etienne died, it was a decade of despair, longing, insurmountable bills. My tables were gone, save one and one small stool that was missed when the last creditors judged me. I have felt so often that his death was my end, but on reflecting I observe that in the twilight of Etienne's life, my darkness was ushered in. It was in this darkness I began to most clearly see the stars and piece together their importance in my life. Here again I fall at the feet of the Father and refuse to faint. What purpose does this pain serve? My passion stands. I have not been broken. Unwittingly, I had been fighting to keep the darkness and was in the process of being devoured by demands of those who sought to remove from me my earthly possessions. I see in dawn that it is not these objects that are of value, but only the thoughts and pleasures of the Father. I now seek a discourse of reason instead of empty rooms.

Wandering stars, for whom darkness is reserved for ever. It is to you I call out in the night. I watch you vacate my vision and walk away from me ever and over again. Regale me with your tales, I pray. I watch the night and see my father in the skies,

recreating darkness within mine own eyes. Yet I see Draco, the many pointed star in all its unholy glory, pretending to be shining for the true light but it is only a representation of the serpent, dark. My father might have called it something else, but he no longer speaks to me. If only I could pray to him as a saint, but I know so little about his heart. I only knew his mind. Oh, Father, if you can speak to my father now, speak of my two children who are left, not so small now. Jean is so smart, and Marie is the image of health. Regret is not the word for how I feel when I consider the changes even I have missed in their lives. But have I been for them what I should have been?

The Third Recourse

I would not have been as concerned for my mother's absence as I remained for so long about that of my father. It was a poetic injustice to have situated myself in such a way that after the loss of my husband and father I had to live out the directive in the prophets to look after those in my family who could not look after themselves. Certainly I was the most educated, so it made sense that they clung to me, and I was charged with the care of my mother. I often wondered if she ate her words when my education proved our salvation, if she realized that her taunts about my desire to work through my education did not affect me in a positive way. Did she know what she was doing, then? Did she care? It was difficult to ascertain the validity of her reactions. Was she internally destroying me and cursing me, or was she internally pleased that I was able to take care of her when the life of her rock turned to dust? My mother was the daughter of an educated man and she married a man just as educated, but she herself never pursued the education that she could have. The conversations she had with my father were never

vital to his course of studies. She remained in the quotidian and continued to violently complain and argue about the issues surrounding the household. Perhaps she felt insecure and could not bring herself to the admission of the guilt that surrounded her for not pursuing the education she had forsaken the opportunity to have. Perhaps she directed the comments at me that she wanted to say to herself. The pressure to be myself, to be more than myself, to be someone else all coalesced into a raging boil in my mind. I came to the end of myself, finally. It was here that I realized that the strivings really had to cease, that none of the truth of my previous hope would be realized in the truth of my present circumstances. I believed in fiction.

Dirt-colored eyes, pale faces

Hidden in the darkness

When faced with truth or lie

I choose the third recourse

My effort: to obtain a fiction and pursue

a necessary evil

between the self-deceptive pages

Of anchored ties in vellum

Soulish unicorns,

Soulless monkeys

Flawed by scribes etching double lines

In dark scriptoriums

Anger bubbles within

Against self, soul, mother

But to despise my inclinations is to forget my cause

In the darkness, I want to die

but in the light, I want to live

I am torn between the two

and my purple heart endures

Red mixed with blue, life with death—

It is the human condition

Patterned after jewels on a tough block cover

1402 - The Letter Only I Can Write On My Heart

In my anger, I would never speak of the frustration I had to another living soul. I did, however, call out to God in my anger several times. Considering the worries and frustrations of my past, I am reminded of how much anger and whine were wrapped up in my words. While I cannot return to the derivative place that my heart lauded for such a time, I am now thankful that I was able to see that particular episode through. In grief, we all experience a death; some of us lose our dreams, some of us lose our hearts, some

of us lose our very sanity—I lost myself for a while. My Etienne wasn't a Saint; I couldn't carry his finger as a relic in a little box. After he was gone, I saw fear and death in new shades of darkness in every face I met. After the Black Death, everyone I saw seemed to carry an echo of the pain and every single person left was shadowed by the darkness of the whole affair. We all looked to Boccaccio; he had the best words. I still look to him, sometimes, but I know him well enough now to know how to remake his words and piece them together differently to make them say what they need to say. The words I piece together are so much more like what God would have us all say about life. I hope I get it right, at least now. There was a time that I got it all wrong, that I longed for the life I once had, but I could not live in that past forever. In truth, life in the French court was so much heavier than the life I have now. I am free, and somehow the words that I have used have not come across so harshly. It is a testament to God and to His power and presence in my words.

Oh God, why have you given me this lot in life? What sins have I committed that were so bad as to necessitate this punishment? But this is it, isn't it? It isn't that I have sinned, because all have sinned, it's that we all deserve death. I have seen death on the faces of the people in the street. They are dead because their mothers are dead or their fathers or their sisters or their villages. Everyone is dead and carrying the death. I carry clove and cardamom with the hope that it will ward off the death. We have had great success in such spiced poultices. My understanding is weak and fades when I pursue my own passions without pursuing the Creator first.

Considerations of Philosophy

Studying had been my habit for some time, and so I began to consider how and why Boethius has writ his work. As I considered what it was for me to do, I began to articulate the methods of philosophy that worked in my favor and would permit me to become the woman I was to become. I combined meditation and critical study to consider my lot in life following such traumatic deaths in my family. As I pulled the threads, I began to have thoughts that were meaningful enough to propel me to a future worth living.

If I sneak along the ledge of my mind, as I often do, I am wont to consider the relative inadequacy of my desires. What does it mean to relinquish control? What does it mean to focus on the Creator rather than the creation? The thread pulls in several directions, but ultimately I know the necessity is to pull one thread in one direction at one time to discern the root cause of the life issues I face. Let me pull the thread: on whom do I focus? My heart has been occupied with worry. Let me ask myself why? My financial situation has degraded to such an extent that I am uncertain how I might develop into the woman I want to become. There is considerable concern for my children, for who they were and who they are to become. The bills mount and rage against my sensibilities. My emotional state is an unnecessary dissenter to the truth, or what I believe to be the truth. Let me consider this further; my emotions lie. If my emotions lie, then I have two choices—to either believe them in their falsehood or reject them and experience their truth. But I believe there is some sort of root to the cause of the emotions that is deeper than the current situation implies. If I consider the root cause

of the emotions, I am left to consider that my expectations for my life have outmoded my reality. I expected to grow old with my husband. I expected to live a long and happy life at home, able to study and work in whatsoever I desired to do. I did not expect to lose my father so early, or to care for so many other people on my own. I was not raised to believe that this was the work of a woman, but here I am. This is my lot in life. I am left to choose how to respond to the threats of the emotions here. Why worry about finances? Can I add a hair to my head or a year to my life by worry? No, of course not. Can I change that situation by worrying? No. Can I bring back the dead? No. Can I change the course of my life? Yes, if it is the will of the Creator. Do I believe that my Creator wants me to survive? Yes. Do I believe He wants me to suffer mercilessly at the hands of evil? No. If I believe these to be the case, then it is my duty to work at removing the hands of evil from my self and, by extension, my family. Then let me consider how I might put this plan into action.

Revelation

It was around the time I completed The Book of the City of Ladies and the other texts into a presentation piece for the Queen that I began to realize the reality of my childhood dreams. I had always heard that God could speak through dreams and visions and various other spiritual and supernatural events through the lives of the Saints, but I did not think that I was anyone special at this point. I knew I could write and I attributed it to God, but it was my memory of childhood that began to finally align in my mind as a mystical sort of affair. I had been having spiritual visions even from the age of four. The evil ones began just before my mother and I joined my father in Paris, but they continued

with some frequency throughout my childhood. In my memory, I could recall the light as it drained from my face. I spoke of none of this, although it certainly followed well in the historical tradition of the authors I had read to present the idea of the dream-vision in which I met the Ladies.

Every night when I slept, from the age of four, I saw three-headed beasts in darkness lie in wait for my innocence to bleed on their altars of fear and fade my soul to pale. I saw the ancient angels' flaming sword wave broadly at the arch. I heard echoing thunder and felt pinpricks tingle on my left side, just between shoulder and neck.

In name of Jesus cast it out, I thought, but could not speak. In name of Jesus! This call I kept in my heart. I begged this ache to fade, for Jesus to restore my broken armor so none could latch onto my soul again.

1404 - Merveille

I dreamt of myself on top of a mountain. It was unlike any mountain I had ever seen or experienced, but I knew it was a mountain. It was as if I were on top of the world, but it was so very cold. I saw bodies moving from ledge to ledge, shifting, waiting, jumping, crouching. It meant little to me at the time, but now I see that I was nearing the peak of my writing career in the French court. At this time, I was unaware how I would feel the world come crashing down or how much the lives of my entire family would change in just a few decades. It was not for the purpose of myself that I had such a dream, but so that I could understand that my son's life was in danger. He was in England during the dream and a war began to brew! Originally I misread my own

dream, and it seems I had until now, these many years later. Now that I recall, I am reminded that I quickly picked up my pen and began writing to England to secure his safe return. The dream was for him, to save him.

White sheets drape the beauty
of the mountain—
sheets of white atop
darkness, seething from below

I watch as a body waits at a new ledge
watching, shifting weight from right to
left foot—slips, steadies

then stands against the struggle

All that Burns

I had so many visions of the fires burning me, burning others. Somehow I began to believe that the fires of hell might have been the refining fires. I could see my feet walking along the fires, stepping from ember to flame, covered in soot but never burning. I think I even saw gold dripping from my feet like sweat. When I think about where I was during this phase of life, I know that there was a shift going on in my mind and my heart. Perhaps I would have been branded heretical even then, but that was much less important to me in that stage. I was writing about war, and then very quickly after I was

writing about peace. I think this was in that phase, in that changing of the internal sergeant at arms. Furiously, I pored over these manuscripts; I was desperately trying to find the common thread that spun in the background. I found half-remembered midnight thoughts of visions and dreams that had shown me the light and shadows of life, but now when I see notes of the most shadowed times in this phase, I realize that I had not fully parted from the darkness that was my ever-present companion. I let the darkness shadow my eyes and my ears, preventing the full truth of the sounds of reality from pouring into my ears, preventing the full truth of the sights of reality from invading my eyes. I was consumed with the idea of war, living in fear, living in darkness.

The fear had been with me for as long as I could remember, a parrot on my shoulder. The parrot mimicked my thoughts, minimizing them, and only served to agitate the ouroboros. At times, it flew away, but it was connected by a thick rope. When I was writing for women, the fear was almost gone—I like to think. I have to ask myself whether I was or am interpreting the truths of these lives, the lies. When I began to shrink away from war, I began to grow towards peace, but that was not yet. The necessary work to pass through the fire, to pass through the darkness and into the light—that was next. But where was the parroting fear? That was here, that was now. It is now, but it is not quite here. I am waiting, I am branching out towards the light yet still growing. I am manipulating time forward, but I am manipulating nothing at all. I am writing in circles. Perhaps there are shadows that still need to be vanquished or peace I need to accept for my own heart to move forward and confront these issues with clarity.

As I recall various visions that have merged in my mind since youth, I cannot help but think of the chaos that the earliest threw me into. I would wince, weep and hide under the pillows and blankets, pretending that the edge of darkness could not haunt me there—even though it was there I was in the blackest darkness possible. In that darkness I saw shades of ancient memory rising up from beneath my bed in dirt-encrusted trunks, ancient evils covered in tattered ropes, falling open to reveal bodies losing flesh—the vile stench filled the room entire. It was here that I first began to cry out to God while simultaneously believing He could not save me from my darkness. This was before Confirmation, before any rites or rituals of the Church that I was privy to remember.

The memory shifts and I remember aching in my bed again, crying over the lies of the men whose work reminded me that being a woman was as worthy an experience as having buboes. I saw my hands covered in buboes and my feet and my stomach and I scratched at my body and screamed, but no words left my mouth, and the ancient evils came out from under my bed again, this time on either side, the pair throwing ropes at each other to tie me down to the bed. I remained immobile for the rest of the night, pushed down by some invisible pressure, waiting for the tightening to stop so I could again resist and break free, but the ropes became tighter and tighter until the darkness overtook me.

Plague

Let us have compassion on the afflicted. It took so many. In a household, maybe one was left. Bodies littered otherwise deserted streets in the worst cities. Black buboes. It took Etienne, maybe both of them. The other children were unaffected. They do act

more like me; and little Etienne was just like his father. My mind refuses to wrap fully around the pieces of this painful past. Voices of the past, of those who we lost, tread darkly around my heart and my house. It is not for me to know the truth of the reality of the situation. Or is it? Even now, I think I should know and understand the purpose of these deaths. I fall under the darkness a bit here again. Why do these shadows rain on my happiness? I think I am so far along in wisdom and in my understanding of truth, then I am reminded of the barbs that these deaths carried into my heart. Are these porcupine quills not yet removed? The wrath of the thorns has torn my heart to pieces and deprived me of the understanding of my own heart. Why, God? My memory was devolving then, and even now I feel as if I am an underdeveloped version of myself. Do we all do this, God? Do we all fall prey to the darkness of the past at various stages, just when we think we've moved forward? God, bring me peace! Let me rest in You.

Whispers of Fortune on howling wind
decry the spinning wheel as it is spent
decades rage against the plague
what took my husband on to God
and my soul half to the grave
pale moon unshaped withdraws its glow
my mind is transported to the time
he bent low 'til I could hear the echo of his voice
speaking peace, hope, rest
replaced by the click, tap of his feet on the floor

around the bed and then I felt the warmth
set my heart and body aglow
but when the morning light resumes
I am left cold, with memory alone

A Mother's Work

This work is from a place of anger and memory of young motherhood, even when I wrote it. In my own heart, I had to let go, to let my old self truly pass away. To turn from the past I had to forgive myself for pushing my children to places of security. What security is there in this mortal toil except the peace that Our Father condescends to bless us with? There is none, truly. When I wrote this, I fought the darkness even in my dreams. I thought I was so far along with my faith, so far ahead of this frustration and this pain, but that was simply not the case. Where I was here, I cried. My son had been in England, and I see clearly now that it was the anger at myself for not being there for him that came back to haunt me in my sleep. The series of dreams surrounding him were less than sufficient for my own heart to follow. I had to pass through the fire all over again, for the original fire had not burned away all the chaff. There was still more chaff to burn. With my daughter in Poissy, and I in Paris, I observed and addressed the deaths or financial demise of all those around me. Again, this time I began to realize that I would soon go elsewhere, to figure a place to go to protection. It was good—I was glad—that my daughter was tucked safely away at Poissy.

In the haze of evening dawn, I fall under a shadow in my heart as I flagellate myself for errors made when sending my children to places of protection. In brokenness I cried and fell into erratic sleep.

It was there I saw a black cloak slip from behind my door where it had been loosely held on by a nail. It climbs through the darkness and seeks to place on me a death mask that is a vicious version of my face.

In the midst of the darkness, I rise, and as I trip over the protecting angel's wings, my own little cherub pouts, "but I'm hungry," and so I rise to meet the morning light.

What Light Withers Here

After reading about the plague of the blood in Egypt and the yeast of the Pharisees, I began to think about what it might have looked like when a foreboding sky and the blood-red waters might have met in the Mediterranean. I saw from the vantage of Italy, and began to think of the literary history that preceded me. In this moment, the inspiration for Dante's Inferno became a clear picture in my mind. As I let my mind wander down the world into the ancient depths of the darkness, I saw the characters begin to flash before my eyes, to move and despise themselves and deride each other in the depths of darkness and blood. At the end, I began to see the light breaking through the blood red illness and darkness of the night and I could see that, indeed, the light would win at the close of the day.

In red and raging waters filtered
sky and sea merge into one

falling low in ancient whispers
parrots murmur subtle lies

they whisper: “you could never give in to temptation,
your heart is bruised, but your face is light, just
do more on your own.”

Fragmented Sorrows

Breaking. I had been breaking for so long. The life I lived was one of fragmentation, especially when I was writing so much. So many different books, so many different thoughts, so many different purposes. As I dove headlong into the work at hand, I was overwhelmed by the lies that welled up in my own soul. The gossipmongers of court surrounded my ears with their lies even though my presence was not near their mouths. It was the feeling of the desperation, the death, the depths, that precluded my own emancipation from the lies. The healing process was eradicating the brokenness, healing the fragmentation. For me, the healing was in the writing. I knew my readers would arrive at alternate conclusions than my original intentions, but there was a bit of excitement in the process. It was in this moment that my sorrows themselves began to fragment and break away for the heart to heal. The wrath of the wrappings degenerated and let my heart forgive those in court who had so offended me with their vocal specifications that my texts were unworthy of their eyes. In order to part from their lies, I had to let go and forgive. Forgive.

In the mornings I begin to heal, but by the twilight—and some days even by midday—I am overwhelmed by the scars on my heart. I ache to do meaningful work. What purpose does my writing serve? There are some who read my words and take them to heart, but rarely the ones whose change of hearts would benefit the lives of entire communities! I write because it is the most reasonable course of action. I write because I have studied my entire life; I have taken in the words of others and now it is my turn to synthesize the preponderance of thoughts and turn them into reasonable texts for the next generation. I write because it is my duty from God. I suspect some will agree with my thoughts, while others will not. God sees all, knows all, is all. He will speak the words when I cannot. It is not for me to say, leastwise once I am gone, whether my readers are right or wrong in their interpretations of God.

Emblazoned

When I closed my eyes, I could hear the murmurs of homes I did not know or understand, the images of moments that were not mine. As I saw ashes swept from a fireplace out of doors that barely held to the house, images of what must have been future buildings that I had never seen built crept into my vision and merged with the sounds of music—Eustache’s music—calling into being these future buildings. But as quickly as these twin buildings went up, they just as quickly came back down. Since I could not make sense of the affair except to write it down, I wrote it down. When little else made sense, the only activity I could hold to was to dip the pen in ink and write until the words were gone. Little has changed in that respect.

Sweep the ashes past
weathered doors hanging
by broken threads
Shadows trespass, feasting on broken memories
festering fear and festooning my heart with grief
A vision slides into view:
Ages hence bricks will fly
From mortar and ash
to scrape and flash
so all will crumble
Sand-built houses
will give away my breath
leaving only the teeth
of the dead

War is Never Over

In exhaustion, I could not fall asleep. Worry had taken hold and pushed my eyelids open, defying my own practice of resting well. This was uncommon, but there were moments that it took over. I have still not figured out what internal or external machinations these nights resulted from. Regardless, it was within these twilight moments that I saw the embodiment of fear and my stomach wrenched and wretched with

coldness. Oh, what depths of darkness fought my peace. Finally, the peace was able to take hold and I wrote the book on it.

Retreat. The edge is crumbling. My vision is fading from the light tonight. I am lying awake in fear. Whites of their eyes have turned to black and horrors of tremors ache in their cheeks fading fast from fear reacting against echoing pangs. We dance beneath the draperies between blue and red where warmth turns to pale flesh and reflects on the darkness inside. Fear has laid hold, indeed.

Whether I'm writing of the *Body Politic* or of *Peace*, I realize that there are places where the war never truly ends. The fight I have is internal, is sickness, maybe, but I am fighting. I will fight. It is in my head and in my heart and I will do all that I can to fight. I will not be bested by the doom.

1414 - Aches, Echoes, Arches

During the tumultuous time in France, I began to see a stone that I knew to be in place of my own heart. I tried to forgive France, but my heart had become hardened to its Queen and her foolishness. So few people were able to communicate reasonably even in letters then, especially ten years after Eustache was gone. I corresponded with Eustache as much as I was able, but in the letters I had to disguise my own thoughts in poetry. In that way I could obscure the reality of the situation lest I be branded heretical or in opposition to the crown. There were so few men of letters worth writing, and so few women who cared for me even as much as they cared for their own interests. I wrote for a people who could never truly know me, even though they read my every word. The hurt

and hate had coalesced into the stone that was my heart. It was then I began to pray about the stone.

Break the fight within my heart; I see a purple stone. Heal your servant's heart, my Lord. It aches me and weighs me down so, turns to blue. At the desperation of a cold bed alone, I can do naught but wait, wait for the yellow of the day to come again. I only beg for you to mend the broken clippings, the drops of blood that have fallen hither and thither. Retrace the steps of my wayward soul and retrieve mislaid pieces. Mold the broken blues, purples, reds and yellows—these ancient shards—like stained glass and shine Light through.

Dreams and Visions

Over the next several days after my prayer, I had a series of moments that became this note. As I meditated on the heart that was no longer stone, I could see it changing more. The fire that I thought was there was not a fire that made any kind of color. Two weeks; it must have taken two weeks for the fullness of light to truly fill my heart. I knew that no darkness could maintain itself in my heart after this. I also knew that I might battle it, but it had nothing with which to tether itself.

When I close my eyes I see the black and purple heart bound up in ancient ropes. Porcupine prickles protrude from every side, preventing the acquiescence of any quill. In deep meditation on Creator not creation, I fix my eyes on healing. Light is healing. I watch as crepuscular rays descend onto the quills. One by one the quills evanesce into

blackness. I watch the ropes burn up and wither away, turning to wisp and ash. Light grows brighter until fire burns up the heart and in its place remains a purple ashen hole. Crepuscular rays grow even brighter and the rays pour into the hole. The light fills it fuller and fuller until the purple is gone and the new heart rests peacefully in its place.

The Letter on My Heart Changes

Some time later, after the lightness had filled my heart, it occurred to me that a peace that passed understanding had taken the place of the darkness. It was not an overnight occurrence, but it began to connect in my mind. Now I see the truth of the situation, that once the darkness was gone, my whole body could be filled with light. When my heart was covered in darkness, I prayed in darkness. When my heart changed, I prayed in light. The words that came from me changed. I spent more time in the Psalms, selecting the Psalter from the shelf as oft as I was able. Furiously writing was no longer necessary for my heart to find peace. I could simply meditate and be. It took habitual changes in my own heart before I could accept this new life fully. New light comes quickly, but old minds process slowly what hearts take in during a simple moment.

Where did this peace come from? I am left near to bewildered by the grace and peace bestowed on my body and my life. The changes in my heart are many, but before could not grant me the serenity I so desired. How is it that now, at this late stage in life, that I am finally accepting of this peace? Is it that I finally accepted Your peace? When did my heart so connect with Yours? I have been the broken vessel for so long that I did not know I could be pieced back together. Inside, my heart was dim; it was not the same

as the mask that I wore in public. I was vibrant, vicious, living vicariously through my own outward expression of smiles and laughter, pretending haughty deliverance from a heartbreaking existence. My heart was in tatters, shredded, but over these many years it has been sewn back together: a golden tapestry. In the center of my heart I can see the table of peace and in the center is no longer the golden calf but the essence of life: love. So this is it all along, to come to the place of assured hope in the peace where only Love abides.

Epithets and Trebuchets

When I closed my eyes, I often saw the past or the future. In this, I saw what I knew was past, but there were women, naked, running around, holding shards of pottery to cover all of the parts that those shards could shield. I knew this vision was not from me, so I tried to wake up, but since I could not, I realized I was stuck in a vessel and I took the vessel and tried to break it—but then I saw the stone heart come near to me again. I fought intensely against this ancient past and the darkness that I knew was coming from my ancestral home. As I fought, I tried to hold the heart together, but I let it break. Very little made sense in the image then, but now I see that it was about letting go of the history of my family and pursuing a new life and history for me and my children. I prayed for them to pursue the right lives, freed from the darkness and demons on the past. It was what I had never prayed before. As I prayed for my children, I saw Our Father piece the heart back together and I knew that their hearts would be whole again. I knew my son would not pass on the same darkness to his children.

Faulty wives in broken vessels parade in my vision at night. The fascination in the line holds true as I see them solid at the border of ancient property. I try to vacate the vacillating farce parading before my eyes, but I cannot wake up. The black line etches long across the dark and at the end breaks into rainbow glass. It shatters, breaking in the siren song.

The song antagonizes the Parthenon, a gray place in the dark. I see a stone heart rise and threaten to break. I see it fall, red and blue, and I try to hold it together in the weather as wind blows, but it slides out of my grasp into crevasses, brown and streaked, with healing power out of dust. Then it is gone. All of it.

I scour the darkness for the sign, but I only see in my mind that fallen heart breaks apart, and I see the Creator piece it back together again, knowing it will beat true this time.

Breaking Temptations

Not long after I heard of Joan of Arc, I began to have thoughts that pushed me to write again. I knew that if I were not careful, I could let myself drown in self-flagellation again. Since that was not an acceptable course of action, instead I chose to fight the darkness again. No matter how many times I fought the darkness, it always tried to trespass on my grounds and turn my life upside down. At night when I lay on my back, I felt it press down on my chest and I awoke with my wrists twisting, but no one was twisting them. I knew that I had to pick up my pen and write before the life was wrenched from my hands from trespassing demons of darkness. As I saw myself in the place of Joan, I knew that I would write of her and proclaim the truth of her life and her fight.

What does it mean if I in empty sorrow vow to ever seek the truth? It is within my bounds to flagellate myself, to lay down my dreams and put away tasks of valor. Night is a lonely place. No soothsayers speak truth into it. And when I lay supine, I feel wronged. I wake to tremors raging within me. My wrists twist beyond my control and the cold tingle of unfamiliar dread presses into my memory a dream of terror of Etienne. Long gone, I still feel him next to me in those dreams that begin so pleasant then vacillate between pure joy and excruciating fear. The fear is so like pain now, but a strange, comfortable pain. I feel it within me and there is peace in the familiarity it has bred. Is this emptiness? What is truth? The dream always breaks to the dark clouds and I am Joan of Arc, fighting demon hordes. My armor is not heavy, but it pains me when the demon arrows glance my gilded breastplate. I unsheathe my sword to reveal a flame, much as I imagine the flaming sword of the guardian cherubim of Eden. I pierce the black chests of hundreds of demons before I see the darkness rise up in attempt to overpower the light. Then light bursts from the sun and flaming swords fly into chests of remaining demons, who disperse into the encroaching blackness. With ancient hands the blackness grasps at my ankles, but light reflects from my gilded armor and hisses when the opposing forces meet.

I am awakened by *amor potest conqueri* as it breathes hope onto my lips.

1430 - Vespers

In my mind, in dreams and visions, all of the works of my hands began, so little taking into account the knowledge of the heart or the internal discourse that swirled in

my innermost being. I know now that there was a spirit of knowledge in me that begged release. Flowing up from the surface it sprang from my fingers through the pen onto paper. I knew the truth: it is this—and only this—that shall remain. The incessant quarrels and instigations of myself and others will not remain. They will eventually pass away. But the consistent truths, the truths that reveal the knowledge of humanity as a wellspring of life connected to the Creator, the written words, these shall remain. This became my prayer so near the end of the works of my hands.

I consider the possibility that the works of my hands will fade into nothingness when I am gone. It is the way of things, though. It is the works of my mind that will remain—but only those works the Lord wills to remain. It is not with me that these words should stay. It never was. As Ezekiel prayed for dry bones to spring to life, so shall I pray for these dry words to spring to life filled with the essence of the Creator within. I think of Joan, youthful and fighting. It is not with me alone that I shall end. I pour into my patrons, my children, and in them have no expectation. Expectations are a danger to our hearts. The more I expected people to treat me as they ought, the less I received such treatment, and the more forlorn I became.

I sought justice, but there was no justice to be found. I sought peace, but found only quarrels. I sought life, but found only death all around me. In my city, in my community, in my home, there was only death. And it occurred to me that I was at the center of it. I had arranged my life incorrectly. When I replaced the I with God, then and only then did all things begin to join. As blessed as I was, I missed out on further blessings still by failing so many tests in my lifetime. My hope is in my children, both

physical and spiritual—my readers—that they will become the guardians of truth in their hearts and lean not on their own understanding of earthly matters, but accede to a power higher than themselves in order that they might breathe life into the dry bones walking about around them. Let us be Light, Life, salt of the earth. Let us never lose our flavor but let us be harbingers of peace. God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me.

Frangere

I asked again what it meant to be broken, for my heart and my mind and the works of my hands. What is broken? Am I? I could feel the sickness that had plagued me a decade prior return and stick to my blood. What it was I could not say, but I knew time was drawing to a close when I began waking up with sweat and blood dripping from my back and I had no memory of the internal fight of my nights.

In the depths of darkest night my sorrow steals the covers
and runs shivers down my spine, heatless breath
turns to icicles of desolation
blood breeds ice in my veins
then light—the dawn breaks
and sweatdrop emptiness
trails down my back
until I wake

Compline

This is how I write; this is how I pray. I ask for Our Father to come. There is little else I know. I pray this every night, now, so that even when I am not able to write anymore—and that day is coming soon—that I will be in a place of peace.

God, come to our assistance; Lord, make haste to help us. We have sinned against You through our own faults, in thought and word and deed, and in what we have left undone. Forgive us and give us new life. To Your glory. I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; for only You, Lord, make me dwell in safety. Amen.

June 1430 - Letters to You

To the children of my children,

I know you are there; I do not know you, but I have seen you in my dreams. I have watched you wade across the darkest nights and throw your eyes to Orion as I have also done. You have watched his bow tear across the sky and have wondered where the night comes from. You have lived in night, as I have. Oh, children of my children, wherever you are, I beseech you: live in the light. Do you know how to find it? I have left my words for you within all of the pages I have ever written. The words are there waiting for you to shine your imagination on them and let the life shine through. You are children of Light! I am a child of Light!

Remember how to pray, my daughters. Thank the Father. He is your Light when you are lonely. You are daughters of Light, not destined to stay in the darkness. The Divine Compass draws your path back to the way. You may cross mountains and rivers

and settle in empty places and wash your clothes in streams beside willows. You may eat well one season and lack for all the next. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord is your ally. He will comfort you, my daughters. You are truly my portion and my reward. You are the treasures I leave to gather the pearls in my words. Gather the stones of remembrance, daughters, and raise them to your hearts so you do not forget the way.

-Je, Christine

CONCLUSION

The critical research that grounds the creative component of this work furthers the resonance of the progression through the deeper life over time in spiritual autobiography. The merging of theoretical frameworks from theorists Paul John Eakin and Sidonie Smith are crucial to develop a more thorough understanding of how women function in and influence their autobiographical concepts and constructs. The authors' framing of their own texts also provides another layer of understanding; further research into the paratextual information and how that affects the framing is necessary to develop a practical interpretive model. The creative work of this dissertation begins to work through that practical aspect and helps move us toward an understanding of how the critical and creative concepts interrelate.

In practically crafting the multiplicity of voices within this text, I have determined that what one thinks is not nearly as important as what one does. One's perception of self means nothing when stacked against how one treats others. Ultimately, it is not the books we read or any other passive or selfish internalization of information that makes meaning in the life of the individual. The marrow of the whole conversation is relationship. How we choose to speak to and love others is essential. Education is vital to learning how to love well, but subsequent actions as a result of education are empty if they do not result in the appropriate treatment of others. Education, even what is learned through autobiographical texts, should edify both the readers and those who come into

contact with the readers. If a reader chooses a text to consider, then reads it, speaks highly of it, but does nothing as a result, then the work has no meaning. In turn, this suggests that the life has no meaning. If a life is to be meaningful, it is much more impactful for an autobiographical work to enact positive change, to impart life-changing knowledge into the reader that simply cannot be ignored. Great autobiographical texts have an impact on the immediate community and the broader community; the texts often communicate universal lessons drawn from the individual autobiographer's experience and thus resonate with later generations.

As widows, Christine de Pizan and Black Ma were subject to the communities around them and the forms of justice that the community supported. Christine had to fight for her justice as creditors breathed down her neck. Black Ma was situated in a family unit that insulated her from the injustices of the broader community. Black Ma was taken in by her children, just as Christine took in her mother-in-law when circumstances necessitated the change in living arrangements. These women understood what it was like to serve and be served. There was give and take, a righteous dignity to their actions. Black Ma and Christine were both readers, and it is this heritage that I unknowingly adopted before I even knew these women existed. Reading is only part of the lifestyle of a learner; the other part is putting into practice that which one learns. What these women have taught me is that it is not my responsibility to learn in isolation, but I am part of a larger community and I must be present to the needs of those around me. What if my daughter is hungry? I feed her. What if my mother needs to have a conversation? I talk to her. What if my grandmother is no longer able to support herself? I will take her in and love her and care for her in the same manner that learning about this

heritage has taught me: I will take her in with no expectations of anything that she can give me in return. I will do it not out of duty, but out of love. I do not believe that Christine took care of anyone in her life out of a singular sense of duty; I believe that because she saw everyone as equal in her faith, and she had experienced destitution as a result of the actions of others, that she sought to overcome those negative choices of humanity and instead be kind and loving for those whom she had the power to care.

Christine used writing as a means to an income, but that was not its only purpose. She wanted her ideas to spread like wildfire because truth supported them. Each individual life is valuable, and Christine took up the banner for women because she had seen and experienced what it was like to be marginalized. Her actions reverberated through an entire nation and her works are still read today. Research on the time period provided the physical evidence of the surroundings she would have experienced. In regard to Christine, it was most difficult to discern a clear image of her bedroom. Manuscripts helped in that respect, but they did not provide sufficient documentary evidence to extrapolate the amount of space and atmosphere of her rooms. In many ways, I had to rely on my personal experiences in Europe and the commentaries of others on Christine.

While Christine's memory is etched into the lives of scholars, Black Ma is only remembered by her community and her descendants. She is remembered by those whose lives she touched. She lived simply; she read books, went to church, raised kids and worked diligently within her home, and when she could no longer care for herself, her children cared for her. It is a typical portrait, but what I have seen is that her typical life had value because of who she was, and how she cared. She taught the values of justice

and mercy as she learned them. Because of her love for Abraham Lincoln, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the ideas it presented,²⁸⁹ she did not teach racism to her children as so many others in the community did. By the time the ideas sputtered down to me, I knew that it was important for me to be consciously fair and loving to everyone regardless of race. I have no knowledge of whether she had African American friends, but I do know that her family did not own slaves. I also know that in the community where she lived desegregation happened in my mother's lifetime. By the time I was in school where Black Ma grew up, I had an African American teacher. Two of my closest friends have adopted African children. Another is African American. These women, who are shattering the perceptions and preconceived notions of Kentucky women,²⁹⁰ brighten my life. Their lives continue to impact me and shape me to become a better person.

It is because of these women, past and present, who fight for the cause of the marginalized that I am who I am. By looking at two different women from my past, one who was a model figure whose life stood out from the rest, and another woman who was essentially an ordinary woman who will be remembered by few, I have been able to discern more clearly who I am and what purpose I have in my writing. Both women were extremely concerned about social justice, even though their actions were different. While Christine wrote about it, Black Ma simply acted on it in her own small ways. In my life, this has translated to a heart that is open to listen to where needs are and how to meet them. I have learned to keep an ear open for any situations where people might feel like

²⁸⁹ See Jane P. Tompkins's "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History" in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, 267-291.

²⁹⁰ Parks Lanier, Jr. discusses the history of "Appalachian Writers," including several female Kentucky authors like Janice Holt Giles, who wrote in the adjacent county to where Laura grew up, in Carolyn Perry and Mary Weak-Baxter's *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, 309-315.

less than people. In seeking to understand those who have been so marginalized or misunderstood by their communities, I have developed a greater compassion for humanity. While this is certainly not the same as what an education in the Humanities will teach you, it has been an important lesson for me to learn.

My personal cultural context, especially that in regard to growing up at a Baptist Bible College, provided me the opportunity to closely observe how religion functioned in a variety of large and small group settings. As I considered how the individuals acted differently when interacting one-on-one in the library, such as a pastoral candidate attempting to steal books—something he never would have attempted if others had been present, I realized that the true character of an individual were most evident when he or she was alone. If we accept that the true character of someone is revealed when he or she is alone, then it stands to reason that the most honest and character-rich writings are the most private writings. Due to the expense of writing materials in the fourteenth century, it is unlikely that women of Christine's stature would have written many private texts. Instead, Christine composed presentation editions of her works and, while she includes much of her autobiographical context, she situates her writing with a specific public cultural moment. She composes her own persona, but even in this she reveals some aspects of her character. Her character is most evident when her words shift from the original writings of the men she bases her work on, quotes or paraphrases, such as the story of Semiramis, with a vibrant new perspective. In considering the impact of education on Christine's vibrant perspective, I became aware of the importance of how my own education informed my ability to analyze and articulate the coalescence of knowledge, belief and action.

It is not for my education that I will be known when I am gone, but it is for the way that I treat other people. These women have taught me my own value and how to see the value in the stay-at-home-mom, the single working mother, the haggard older woman who struggles to walk because she's stooped a little to the left, and even the creditors whose choices placed them in a position of power. The truth about Christine is that she gave her life away to others; she did not earn a living for herself, rather she earned it for her family. Black Ma served in the best ways she could in her church, home and community. The creative chapters are intentionally fractured while following a chronological narrative for the lives of each, but the disparities between the truth and fictions in each are necessary to negotiate a story that can be understood in light of the expanse of the project.

The framing critical chapters allow a deeper understanding of the three major time periods and the intersections of actual reality with the fictive nature of the imagined reality in the creative chapters. In considering the similarities between Elizabeth Ashbridge and Justy, we note that the negative reactions to religious structures are very similar and the outpouring of that frustration and anger tends to result in seeking to control a situation whereby one instead becomes a victim. The consequence of unresolved anger for each of these women is one poor choice that affects every other choice and consequence. The initial choice of how to act when presented with an interesting prospect determines how the rest of life will flow. While Elizabeth and Justy took circuitous paths, they still had an ending in a space that was suited to their personalities and skills learned from both good and bad experiences.

In order to compose the creative sections, it was necessary for me to first order the situations chronologically and anchor them completely in the facts that I knew. From that, I had to rearrange the vignettes to form the most cohesive narrative arc. The problem with life is that the exposition subtly gives way to a still subtle climax. The conflict for each of the women is with self and as each woman fights against herself, she aligns herself more coherently with God and biblical principles. While Augustine arranged his autobiographical events to form a conventional narrative arc, I have not attempted to create arcs that follow along conventional paths because of the unconventional nature of the women. I hesitated in this type of construction because the best way for the audience to remember a story is for it to have a clearly defined beginning, middle and end. While the women in this dissertation could be placed into these parameters in regard to the physical and even intellectual aspects of their lives, the spiritual aspect leaves room for distinctly different parameters. The spiritual nature of the lives of each is cyclical and each repeats the process of discovery of an internal issue, and either directly addresses the issue in the moment or pushes the issue to the side in order to avoid it; eventually the characters tie up the loose ends or have deceived themselves into believing the issues are no longer issues. This self-deception does not indicate that the issues have dissolved, rather it indicates that the women have chosen not to address certain aspects of their lives. The spiritual life is a cyclical process, less clear and less structured than the conventional narrative arc. The spiritual stories are not as clearly defined and the evidence of change or a lack of change appears in the actions of the characters. The unconventional narrative vignettes disallow the creation of a formulaic spiritual model; this is intentional. Reading the moments during which others ascertain

spiritual formation subsequently allow us to identify those moments in our own lives. We carry the stories with us long after we have read the work. Abstract facts do not remain, but moments, stories stay with us. Our memories are lined with stories and the most cohesive—and troubling—moments of the narrative remain.

For me, the crux of this project has become what I refer to as an *autogenealogobiography*. The first part of that, *auto*, focuses on the self. To write about the self for the purpose of discovering who you are is a process that takes on many forms. Some choose self-writing in order to present a mythic model of identity or to discern the necessity of the name and the function of their ideologies. The purpose of writing of the self, by the self, for the self, is a means of finding truth, in every sense of the word for the author. One author's truth will not be another author's truth. One person's memory is not going to be the same as another's—even of the same event. It is here in this space of unique identity and set of memories that the self-writer composes. It is here that the author discovers who she is and frames it for others.

In terms of genealogy, we are always looking at the history of family and understanding where we came from. We can look at *genea* as generation, suggestive of biological genealogy or adopted genealogy. In terms of biology, there are commonalities, but there is also choice in terms of adoption. We are grafted into the family through adoption. As a female writer, I am grafted into Christine's literary tradition. As a woman, I am biologically descended from Laura and possess some of her genetic traits, both in terms of appearance and in place since we were raised in the same state in very similar close-knit communities. I use generation in two senses of the term, both in the sense that authors generate the work of their hands and that they are part of a

specific group of people that share a set of experiences. The creative works I have composed recover the shared physical experiences of life that directly feed into the spiritual experiences of the women involved. As they consider the works of their hands and the trauma and other issues that press down on them from their position as women in their particular time periods, they must face the issues and all choose to seek communion with the Divine as a means of understanding the world and fully living in peace. What these women, these *gune* of which the root word is also suggestive, show is that it is possible to live a life of peace even when circumstances do not align with expectations. In fact, the fewer expectations these women had for the people and places in their lives, the more at peace they became. As their lives progressed, they focused less on the survivalist instincts of the traditional models of life and more on thriving in order that they might enjoy every part of their lives. Enjoying their lives does not mean that they did not struggle with anger or bitterness, but they were able to work through those emotions and the triggers, of traumas both personal and cultural, so that they could be active members of their families and communities.

The goal for each of the women was presenting *logos*, the Truth in the Word of God in the expression of faith for each, or the logic of living in a more secular context. By reading the word, by understanding its purposes and applications for life, the women are able to exegete in order to express this *logos* fully to their surrounding communities. It does not preclude itself from the necessity of peace in their homes and lives. These three women were able to use their life experiences and subsequent understanding to portray the beauty that could come from the brokenness of their lives. Rather than live subject to the broken systems that surrounded them, they pushed forward and enjoyed life

regardless of their circumstances. It is within this space that the women spoke the Word of God from their own lives. It is only through relationship with God that the women experience *logos* in a meaningful way. Religious understanding of truth does not positively affect the women at a young age. Religion and religious structures serve to support a patriarchy rather than free women to experience life the way that the Creator intends. However, as vibrant, writing women, these women bear the fruit of the spirit in their own lives. They develop peace, patience, kindness, gentleness—traits they did not demonstrate in the early portions of their stories. As they develop a relationship with God, they develop a particular peace that can only come from knowing *logos* as it comes directly from the Creator.

In considering the Creator, it is essential to consider *bios*, life. The evidence of life is present throughout each of the creative chapters, demonstrating the necessity of the dynamic quality of life as opposed to its potentiality for unchanging comfort. As these women move forward, they are truly living and often embody qualities drawn from the lives of those around them. Rather than stop moving, they progress forward and keep going to new levels of understanding and that traditional patriarchal religious structures do not allow them to have. They influence others through their boldness in their life choices, especially when the choices result in alignment of beliefs and actions. They have abundant life that results in the overflow of fullness to their families. For Christine, this looks like protecting her children through ensuring they have hopeful futures. For Laura, this looks like taking care of their physical needs in making them quilts and meals. For Justy, this looks like taking care of her daughter's intellectual needs by ensuring that she has a quality education.

Graphein, to write, is the heart of it all. If not for the drive to write, none of this project would make sense. It is necessary and vital for the women to compose their lives, to present their unique stories that relate more to the universal. Each of the three lives demonstrate a similar progression in the original writings and later glossings; they begin with a very similar nature and become more at peace as they age and are able to look back at their experiences through logical, objective lenses. *Graphein* is a vital necessity for these women to become who they are intended to become. Without the work it takes to record their thoughts, it would not be possible to go back and reconsider the progression and understand how they have changed. An understanding of how one has changed over time affords a deeper understanding of the true importance of change. It also demonstrates that the ways in which women consider life is very similar even when the cultural and social circumstances are different.

Christine, living in a very difficult cultural and social framework, coined a term from the Greek: *antypgraphe*, “one who records,” which Margolis explains as “a sort of stenographer in the corner or on the margins through which the poet pretends simply to record what her characters or allegorical figures say, while actually countering where necessary.”²⁹¹ It is through this particular voice that Christine couches her true beliefs. The dialogues in Christine’s work allow her to be the *antypgraphe*, *auctor*, and *actor*. Christine draws from the philosophical dialogues that precede her to create works using multiple voices and anticipates the further complexity of multi-voiced texts that will come after her. Christine’s works, especially the prose texts, demonstrate the dissonances in her own life as a result of traumatic cultural and social occurrences.

²⁹¹ Margolis, *An Introduction to Christine de Pizan*, 29.

The point at which the cultural and social circumstances of various time periods stand at odds are when cultural trauma raises points of hegemonic discord, thus creating veritable avalanches of dissonance within lives and subsequent texts. The notion of *autogenealogobiography* allows one to discuss cultural trauma within a framework that is intentionally formatted with brokenness and a multiplicity of voices, and allows women to write toward developing an understanding of how to function in her own community when major issues are difficult to put into language. Cultural trauma accentuates the atrocities of the macrocosm within the microcosms of life in an affected culture. All it is, all it does, bleeds into the broader metanarrative while also affecting lives at the individual level. It is a both/and issue rather than an either/or. The tragedy of the individuals within a particular cultural trauma, such as the death of one innocent life within a war, is compounded by the deaths of innocents and soldiers on both sides, thereby affecting the broader cultures in a myriad of ways. Cultural trauma enshrouds the lives of those who knew the individuals and also the broader community. It is this shadow that covers, instead of illuminates, the meanings of texts composed in the wake of such trauma. Christine's work is shrouded by the trauma of the Black Death; Laura's by the Civil War; Justy's by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The danger inherent in cultural trauma is that its resonances are not easy to identify. In terms of truly individualized personal trauma, except in cases of amnesia, blackouts or other forms of selective memory, a root is relatively easy to discern.

For spiritual autobiographers, such as Elizabeth Ashbridge, the trauma is often linked to demonic oppression or temptation as a result of a poor choice. Cultural trauma affects subsequent cultural events on a macrocosmic level and its reverberations are

evident within the slice of life in brief vignettes. Even brief vignettes, textual still life images, comply to some degree with the recalcitrations of the traumatic memoric impulse. Rather than remain at the edge of the memory, trauma infiltrates and recasts it.

Ashbridge and Christine overcome moments of personal trauma through recording individual moments as necessary, but they do not contain the shadow—they simply recast their lives in the wake of it. These reverberations are clearly evident within the discourse as numerous pieces of their lives are intentionally absent in their autobiographical texts. It is important to note that the bulk of biographical information that remains for both of these women is only what each left behind in autobiographical texts. This allows a reframing of life without the necessity of corroboration from external sources. The truth of the major facts included line up with traditional history, but the nuances of the individual lives do not necessarily line up with factual truth; it is perceived truth that each passes off as her own actual lived truth.

For female spiritual autobiographers, desperation as a result of trauma results in the act of self re-creation in autobiographical modes. The re-creation is necessary to regain a textual fluidity of self. The lack of re-creation, as evident in the life of Laura, is best exemplified by her choice to remain in black dresses for half a century. What could be a poetic act was actually an unwillingness to pursue the re-creative process. An absence of the willingness to pursue the passions and emotions necessary to overcome the shadows of cultural trauma in the Civil War, as compounded by the advent of personal trauma—in the death of two male figures closest to her, her father and husband, the men who represented spiritual authority and radical anti-traditionalist actions, respectively—resulted in a psychological break in her ability to move forward and

reconsider her life in a new way. Her life became repetition and each day began by refitting herself with mourning in her black dress.

The branches of loss extend forward in time as each successive generation absorbs the learned behavior of an unwillingness to part with expectation when reality does not match it. Two generations removed, and the entire branch must be braced by an additional support to become a functional part of society. Individual traumas are then repeated by future generations and then hidden because the original was never discussed—must like the third man Laura lost: her son. The oral tradition does not include him, but documentary evidence includes census data that proves his existence. Records of him as an adult do not exist, and, given other family lore, suggest that he did not move away or otherwise become a functioning member of society. This hidden loss is one of the individual traumas the black dress both obscures and symbolizes.

For me, the creation of self is an on-going process. Throughout this project I have written through variations of voices for myself, settling on those presented here for the purposes of defining myself in relation to my own experiences rather than the experiences of others. While others directly affect me and my own choices, ultimately, it is my individual story woven into the lives of others—not just those who are biologically related to me—that define me. As I considered the absence of the lives of others in my story, it became evident that the process of self-creation focuses more on the individual than the collective in the first half of life. This is a project I will return to in order to determine the resonances of the archaeology of the project. As Indiana Jones chose the cup of Christ, the simplest object in the room guarded by the Templar in *The Last Crusade*, I hope I have also chosen simply. I have attempted to cut the stories and poems

down to their essence, to excavate the core of meaning surrounding the objects, events and people within my own life to determine my own identity. This process has been exhaustive in every sense of the word, and is not one that stops simply because the project has come to a close. Rather, the skills that I learned as a result of this project will be ongoing. It is necessary to continue to question why I do what I do and the root causes of the emotions in my life and how my own personal past and my genealogical past directly affect the ways in which I have been taught and subsequently think. It is my intention that as a result of this project my internalized beliefs and lived actions align and that I inspire others to seek their own alignment in order to live a more fulfilled life.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Justy Engle

ADDRESS: 300 Meadowbrook DR Apt A3
Campbellsville, KY 42718

DOB: Louisville, Kentucky – 13 September 1986

EDUCATION:

2016 **University of Louisville** – Louisville, KY

- ABD in Humanities Ph.D. program, projected graduation August 2016

2013 **Delta State University** – Cleveland, MS

- 9 graduate hours in Education

2009 **University of Louisville** – Louisville, KY

- Medieval-Renaissance Studies Certificate
- Completed M.A. portion of Accelerated B.A./M.A. in Humanities
- 18 graduate hours in English

2008 **University of Louisville** – Louisville, KY

- B.A., English & Humanities – concentration in Disciplinary studies, Latin minor
- Honors Program, Honors Scholar
- Provost's Hallmark Scholarship Recipient
- Completed B.A. portion of Accelerated B.A./M.A. in Humanities

2004 **Bell County High School** – Pineville, KY

- Salutatorian

WORK EXPERIENCE

2015-present Campbellsville University – Campbellsville, KY

Instructor in English

Teach 5 English courses each semester, both in person and online; courses taught include English 090 – Writing Skills, English 110 – Basic English, English 111 – Freshman Composition I, English 364 – Adolescent Literature; serve on committees.

2014-2015 Middlesboro High School – Middlesboro, KY

Secondary Mathematics Teacher

Taught 5 Algebra 2 math classes and one response to intervention class;
Academic Team Arts & Humanities Study Group Coordinator

2013-2014 Perry County Central High School – Hazard, KY

Secondary Mathematics Teacher

Taught 5 core content math classes and one response to intervention class;
Academic Team coach

2007-2013 Ekstrom Library, University of Louisville – Louisville, KY

Media Supervisor – Library Technician

Hired, trained, scheduled and supervised 20-30 student assistants, revised departmental policies and procedures, resolved higher level patron issues, determined patron status, assisted Faculty in location of materials, set-up of classrooms and Chao auditorium, assigned, supervised and reviewed projects completed by student assistants; processed new materials, used Voyager Circulation and Cataloging to view and edit records, modified and used queries in MS Access for monthly statistics and identification of problems as needed, maintained Information Kiosk PowerPoint remotely using UltraVNC Viewer (formerly used LANdesk), coordinated with Circulation Dept. for ILL video requests, completed annual performance evaluations on each student, created Public Services Student Assistant Training Modules

- Spring 2010 – Search Committee – Library Specialist, Circulation
- Fall 2009-present – Chair, Rewards and Recognition Committee
- Summer 2009 – University-wide Staff Outstanding Performance Awards Committee

- Fall 2008 - Spring 2009 – Search Committee – Teaching & Reference Librarian, Humanities

2010 The Learning House, Inc. – Louisville, KY

Peer Reviewer, Contract

Peer reviewed three courses; reviewed content and format of course, created assignment keys for each lesson by providing feedback and sample student answers, created rubrics for longer written assignments

2006-2007 The Learning House, Inc. – Louisville, KY

Content Development Specialist Intern

Communicated with writers to develop content, edited course documents in Word, Excel and PowerPoint, incorporated media into developing and existing courses

2004-2006 Ekstrom Library, University of Louisville – Louisville, KY

Media Assistant 2

Assisted patrons in finding and using library materials, re-shelved periodicals, microform and videos, processed new materials, used Voyager Circulation and Cataloging to view and edit records, sent overdue notices to patrons, completed other projects as assigned

2005-2006 Book and Music Exchange – Louisville, KY

Salesperson

Stocked shelves, purchased stock for the store, answered customer inquiries regarding movies, books, music and video games

2001-2004 Brooks Memorial Library, Clear Creek Bible College – Pineville, KY

Circulation Desk Attendant

Circulated materials, assisted patrons in locating materials, transferred materials to microform, re-shelved books, videos and other materials

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES

- 2014-present **Kentucky Philological Association** – Executive Board, Secretary
- 2009-2014 **Kentucky Philological Association** – Executive Board, Webmaster
- 2011-2012 **Association of Humanities Academics** – President
- 2007-2009 **Eta Sigma Phi National Honor Society for the Classics** – Zeta Lambda chapter, 2008-2009 Vice President; 2007-2008 Sergeant at Arms; 2006-2007 member

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Campbellsville University, Instructor of English

Fall 2016

ENG 090	Writing Skills
ENG 111	Freshman Composition I
ENG 112	Freshman Composition II, online
ENG 210	Literary Studies, 2 sections

Spring 2016

ENG 110	Basic English
ENG 111	Freshman Composition I, 2 sections
ENG 111	Freshman Composition I, online
ENG 364	Adolescent Literature

Fall 2015

ENG 090	Writing Skills, 2 sections
ENG 111	Freshman Composition I, 2 sections
ENG 111	Freshman Composition I, online

Middlesboro High School, Secondary Mathematics Teacher

August 2014-May 2015

Algebra 2, Response to Intervention

Perry County Central High School, Secondary Mathematics Teacher

August 2013-June 2014

Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Transitional Math 12, Response to Intervention

Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Adjunct Faculty

Fall 2011

CGES 1310 English Composition I, online course
CGES 4310 Fine Arts/Humanities, online course

Spring 2012

CGES 1322 English Composition II, online course

University of Louisville, Guest Lecturer

-Instructed 4 sessions of Carmen Hardin's Latin classes in use of Library Resources and other relevant web resources (Fall 2008, Spring 2009, Fall 2009, Spring 2010)

-Instructed 2 sessions of Carmen Hardin's Latin classes in use of Incunabula (Current Periodicals and Microforms underutilized resource)

-Instructed 2 sessions of Carmen Hardin's Latin classes, "Introduction to Manuscript Research," highlighting Pzena Collection in Rare Books in Ekstrom Library

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

2016, June 6-10 – Lenoir-Rhyne University

Appalachian College Association – Teaching and Learning Institute

2013, February 8 – University of Louisville

Axton Series – Master Class (creative writing) led by Hannah Tinti

2011, April 4-5 – University of South Carolina

“Understanding the Medieval Book: A Seminar with Christopher de Hamel”

2008, Fall – University of Louisville, Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning

“SuccessfUL Supervisor Learning Series”

EXHIBIT EXPERIENCE

2010, July 23 – August 21 **Indiana Landmarks: 50 Years of Preservation in Southern Indiana** – Carnegie Center for Art & History in New Albany, IN

Intern to the curator for the duration of the exhibit. Prepped materials for exhibition, coordinated with speakers for related programming. Installed the exhibit. Edited copy text. Worked with local preservation specialists to determine importance of objects to be included in the exhibit.

2010, March – April **Civil War Era Songsheets** – Museum Methods II Project
Researched at Filson Historical Society and UofL's Music Library. Coordinated with Exhibits Committee at UofL's Ekstrom Library to display 9 enlarged songsheets, 11 original songsheets, maps, books and images in conjunction with the "Louisville, the Ohio Valley, and the Civil War" symposium. Edited copy text. Installed and de-installed exhibit.

CONFERENCES

2016, March 4 – Kentucky Philological Association – Western Kentucky University – Bowling Green, KY – presented paper:

"Bringing Light to Life: American Women's Autobiography"

2014, March 8 – Kentucky Philological Association – Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Newtown Campus – Lexington, KY – presented paper:

"Three Lives: The Female Experience in the Medieval, Post-Civil War and Post-Postmodern Eras"

2013, March 1 – Kentucky Philological Association – Centre College – Danville, KY

Presented paper:

"Art, Life, Madness: A Comparative Exploration of Frida Kahlo and Charlotte Salomon"

Panel Chair: Voice and Conclusion in Female Cinema

2012, March 2 – Kentucky Philological Association – Morehead State University – Morehead, KY - presented paper:

"Nietzsche and Philosophy in *Battlestar Galactica*"

2011, March 5 – Kentucky Philological Association – Kentucky State University – Frankfort, KY - presented paper:

"Mary Magdalene: Exploring Identity through Coptic and Medieval Texts and Images"

2011, January 27-29 – Newberry Center for Renaissance Studies Graduate Student Conference – Newberry Library – Chicago, IL - presented paper:

“The Influence of the Views of the Plague: The First Black Death Outbreak (1340s-1360s)”

2010, August – Comics and Popular Arts Conference – Dragon*Con – Atlanta, GA

Presented paper:

“Shade, Madness, Dreams and Screams: The Realization of the Abstraction of the American Metanarrative”

Commented on paper:

Richard Scott Nokes (Troy University) – “My Favorite Thunder God is 4’ Tall: Norse Mythology and *Stargate*”

2010, March 6 – Kentucky Philological Association – Eastern Kentucky University – Richmond, KY

Presented paper:

“Identity and Technology: Harryette Mullen as Proud Black Southern Woman Language Poet in [time parameter indefinable]”

Panel Chair: Dead Things

2009, March 7 – Kentucky Philological Association – Kentucky Wesleyan College – Owensboro, KY

“‘Leaf’ It Alone or Explore the Manuscript?: A Step by Step Guide to Getting Yourself in Over Your Head”

2009, March 6 – Graduate Research Symposium – University of Louisville – Louisville, KY

“Perpetuating the Concept of the Eternal Return: The Paradox of Law and its Exception in a Post 9/11 *Battlestar Galactica*”

REFERENCES

Dr. Blake Beattie

University of Louisville
History Department
Louisville KY 40292

blake.beattie@louisville.edu

(502) 852-4191

Dr. Beattie has been a professor at the University of Louisville since 1994. He specializes in the history of later medieval Europe. I first studied The Black Death with him in his course in 2009. He currently serves as the chair of my doctoral committee.

Dr. Sarah Stafford-Sims

Campbellsville University
Division of Humanities, Chair
UPO 838
Campbellsville KY 42718

sjstafford@campbellsville.edu

(270) 789-5053

Dr. Stafford-Sims is the Chair of the Humanities Division and teaches in the English Department at Campbellsville University. She specializes in 19th century British literature and world literature. We have worked together since Fall 2015.

Dr. Denzil Edge

Louisville KY

dedge@denziledge.com

(502) 417-5652

Dr. Edge was a professor, administrator and researcher at the University of Louisville. He was the President/CEO of The Learning House, Inc. (www.learninghouse.com) from 2000-2007. He is a board member of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) and Co-Executive Director of USDLA Publications. I worked for him at TLH beginning in 2006.

Trish Blair

University of Louisville
Art Library
Louisville KY 40292

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(502) 852-0063

Ms. Blair was the Media Coordinator for the Media Resources Department and served as my direct supervisor from 2004-2013.