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A Rebellious Spirit: A Study of Women in John Foxe's Martyrology  
By: Logan Hughes

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

We certify that we have read this document and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts.

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2021



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## Introduction

From the beginning of the reign of King Henry VIII to the end of the reign of Queen Mary I, two-hundred eighty-four protestants were martyred for their faith, and many more were persecuted for it. Catholic forces sought to uproot Protestant sympathies within England and utilized burning at the stake as their primary punishment for anyone who was brave enough to stand up against the authority of the Catholic Church. This punishment also served to warn other Protestants of the fate they would meet should they choose to rebel. Out of these two-hundred-eighty-four Protestants executed between 1555-1558 fifty-four were women.<sup>1</sup> John Foxe immortalized these Protestant rebels in *The Acts and Monuments* (1563), popularly known as *The Book of Martyrs*.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have studied this text for centuries using it to reveal information about Tudor England more broadly and individual Protestants' stories more specifically. Though there are exceptions, relatively few scholars have focused on the stories of the women in the *Acts and Monuments*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor* (New Jersey: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 79.

<sup>2</sup> John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of These Latter and Perillous Dayes Touching Matters of the Church, Wherein Ar Comprehended and Decribed the Great Persecutions [and] Horrible Troubles, That Haue Bene Wrought and Practised by the Romishe Prelates, Speciallye in This Realme of England and Scotlande, from the Yeare of Our Lorde a Thousande, Vnto the Tyme Nowe Present. Gathered and Collected According to the True Copies [and] Wrytinges Certificatorie, as Wel of the Parties Them Selues That Suffered, as Also out of the Bishops Registers, Which Wer the Doers Therof, by Iohn Foxe.* (London: John Day, 1653). The remainder of this paper will cite the Acts and Monuments online Project created by the Digital Humanities Institute at the University of Sheffield.

<sup>3</sup> Among the exceptions here: Edith Wilks Dolnikowski, "Women's Voices in John Foxe's Acts and Monuments," in *Women Preachers and Prophets Throughout Two Millenia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Kienzle and Pamela Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 199-211. And Ellen Macek, "The Emergence of a Feminine Spirituality in the Book of Martyrs," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* Vol. 19, No1, Spring 1988, pp. 62-80. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2540961>.

This thesis will examine these women's stories in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* with a focus on their roles as mothers and wives. We will see how Foxe portrayed both women who used their roles in society to avoid persecution or execution as well as those who went to their execution without attempting to have done so. These are the two categories of women that will be examined in this thesis. Women who leveraged their position in society to present themselves as submissive to authority and those who refused to submit to authority and remained defiant in the face of persecution and execution.

It might be easy to assume that Foxe used examples of female martyrs to reinforce patriarchal ideals. Though Foxe did include stories that reinforced patriarchal values, and supported early modern English gender roles, this thesis argues that his purpose for their inclusion was more precautionary. Specifically, Foxe provided examples of how women should behave under Roman Catholic persecution to future generations of Protestants. Foxe published during the reign of Queen Elizabeth and while Elizabeth's reign did signal a return to Protestantism, in the 1560's there was nonetheless a very real fear that England might once again fall under the control of Catholicism. This is why the stories of the women in Foxe's martyrology were not meant simply to provide examples of female obedience and submission, but instead, can also be seen as Foxe providing examples of how women should behave in the face of Catholic persecution. We will see that the women in Foxe's martyrology are presented highlighting a range of behaviors, from submissiveness and obedience to strength, bravery, rebelliousness and wit, all in what can be perceived as an attempt by Foxe to ensure that the

martyrs in *The Acts and Monuments* provided a shining example of how future English Protestants were meant to conduct themselves under Catholic persecution.

### **The Historiography of the Acts and Monuments and the Study of the Female Martyrs.**

John Foxe was born in either 1516 or 1517 in Boston, Lincolnshire. His father's first name is not known but he was a successful merchant throughout his life and at one time served as mayor of Boston.<sup>4</sup> Foxe's father died while John was still young and shortly after his death, John's mother married a man named Richard Melton who made his living as a yeoman in the nearby town of Coningsby. It was at Coningsby that Foxe met John Hawarden, the rector of the town, who became a mentor to Foxe. It was most likely through Hawarden's influence that Foxe was encouraged to pursue a university education.<sup>5</sup> Foxe received his bachelor's degree in July 1537 and became a probationary fellow at Magdalen Colleges in July 1538.<sup>6</sup> He then proceeded to his Masters of Arts in July 1543, but also became a dedicated evangelical, which put him in conflict with the requirements of his position in Magdalen. He refused to take the required vow of abstinence, likening the act to an act of castration.<sup>7</sup>

Foxe's religious beliefs also seem to have been shaped by a man named John Wycliffe, whom Foxe learned about during his college education. Wycliffe, a fourteenth century priest, was an outspoken critic of several practices of the Catholic church. Wycliffe criticized the

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<sup>4</sup> Warren Wodden, *John Foxe* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), pp. 4.

<sup>5</sup> We can derive this from a dedication in a later edition of the *Acts and Monuments* to Hawarden that thanks him for helping make his university career possible. Thomas S. Freeman, "Foxe, John (1516/17–1587), martyrologist." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 18 Jun. 2020. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10050>.

<sup>6</sup> Freeman, "Foxe, John (1516/17–1587)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, "Foxe, John (1516/17–1587)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

Catholic church's refusal to allow lay people the right to read and study scripture in the vernacular language.<sup>8</sup> Wycliffe also emphasized the importance of the authority of the individual believer.<sup>9</sup> Both of these beliefs foreshadowed central tenets of sixteenth century Reformation ideology. These tenets would seem to have had a lasting impact on Foxe and helped to shape his presentation of female icons and martyrs, including Katherine Parr, John Marbeck's wife, Anne Askew, and Elizabeth Young.<sup>10</sup> Foxe did not hesitate to praise these and other women for defying gender norms. In the words of Edith Dolnikowski, "(Foxe's) open commendation of women who stepped out of the private sphere of home and family to proclaim their faith, even at risk of ridicule or martyrdom, underscores his conviction that public testimony is a vital component of Christian life, regardless of gender."<sup>11</sup> We can see how Foxe's promotion of women openly discussing and debating religion echoed Wycliffe's emphasis on an individuals' rights to proclaim their faith.

John Bale was another important figure in John Foxe's development. Not only was Bale a mentor to Foxe but he was also an author who went into exile with Foxe and wrote several biographical martyrologies which may have inspired Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Bale's biographies included, *A Brief Chronicle Concerning the Examination and Death of Sir John*

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Hudson and Anthony Kenny. "Wyclif [Wycliffe], John [called Doctor Evangelicus] (d. 1384), theologian, philosopher, and religious reformer." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 12 Dec. 2020. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-30122>.

<sup>9</sup>Hudson and Kenny. "Wyclif [Wycliffe]."

<sup>10</sup> Examples include, Katherine Parr, John Marbeck's wife, Anne Askew, and Elizabeth Young.

<sup>11</sup>Dolnikowski, "Ten Feminine Examples," pp. 199-202.



*Oldcastle (1544), The Examination of William Thorpe, and The Examinations of Anne*

*Askew (1547)*. According to David Loades in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective*,

The work of Bale, his edition of the examinations and death of the Protestant gentlewoman Anne Askew, was the first piece of popular English martyr-writing to stand four-square within the emerging Protestant martyrological tradition, despite the fact that more than 15 years had passed since the of English Protestantism's first martyr, Thomas Hitton<sup>12</sup>

Bale himself was inspired by earlier German, Dutch and Latin martyrologies, which set the stage for the epic martyrologies that would be written in the 1540's and 1550's.<sup>13</sup>

Despite their similarities Bale and Foxe differed in their presentation of female martyrs. As an example, both Foxe and Bale discussed Anne Askew, but told the story differently. Bale editorialized heavily, explaining each and every one of Anne's actions during her examinations. Foxe, however, did not insert comments, instead appearing to let her story tell itself.<sup>14</sup> Though both Bale and Foxe were Protestants, we can speculate upon Wycliffe's influence on Foxe here through examining how his editing of Anne's story emphasized an individual's right to proclaim their faith in God on their own rather than having an authority do it for them. Bale's editing of Anne's story appeared to be focused on fashioning Anne into an ideal feminine role model while Foxe's less invasive editing allowed the reader to experience Anne's individual proclamation of faith.

The historical stage was being set for English martyrologies. As Susannah Brietz Monta stated in *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England*, "During the Reformation era,

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<sup>12</sup> David Loades, *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), pp. 53.

<sup>13</sup> Loades, *John Foxe*, pp. 53.

<sup>14</sup> The differences between these two presentations will be further examined in the Anne Askew section of this thesis.

England witnessed religious persecutions of unprecedented intensity.”<sup>15</sup> Under Henry VIII numerous reformers suffered persecution, and the heresy proceedings that took place in Mary I’s reign against Protestants was one of the most focused acts of religious persecution in England’s history.<sup>16</sup> Queen Elizabeth I’s reign also saw the execution of numerous Catholic subjects.<sup>17</sup> These deaths inspired Catholics and Protestants alike to invest in the martyrological genre to ensure that the names of the martyrs would not be forgotten but also that the names of those that ordered their deaths would not be forgotten either.

The publication of martyrological literature was stifled in the 1530’s under the rule of Henry VIII. David Loades states that, “Tyndale and other reformers had for some years been elevating the authority of the king, presenting themselves as his most loyal subjects, from a happy combination of theological principle and polemical pragmatism.”<sup>18</sup> However the burning of several citizens near the beginning of Henry’s reign had made martyrdom a sensitive subject for the King.<sup>19</sup>

Although Thomas Cromwell had avoided discussion of martyrs in the 1530’s to avoid irritating the king, became the subject of much martyrological discussion in the 1540’s as he,

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<sup>15</sup> Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature*, pp.1.

<sup>17</sup> John Hungerford Pollen, *The English Catholics in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Longmans and Green, 1920), pp. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Loades, *John Foxe*, 56.

<sup>19</sup> William Tyndale, *An exposiicion vppon the v. vi. vii. Chapters of Matthew* (1533, RSTC, 24440), pp. 111.

Robert Barnes, Thomas Garrett, and William Jerome were all executed.<sup>20</sup> After their deaths martyrological writing would begin to emerge more and more within English literature.<sup>21</sup> This was not without its consequences. The number of martyrs and martyrologies both rose at a steady pace in the 1550's and 1560's, each promoting an increase of the other.<sup>22</sup> Stories of martyrs encouraged believers to stand up for their beliefs which in turn created more martyrs.

Foxe's specific contributions to the martyrological genre began in 1552 as he started researching and gathering sources and materials related to those who had suffered at the hands of Catholicism in England.<sup>23</sup> Foxe always maintained that his works would comprise both English and continental martyrs, but his original pool of subjects was comprised almost entirely of English men and women.<sup>24</sup> After the end of Queen Mary's reign, Foxe returned to England determined to memorialize as many of the martyrs as possible. In 1563 the first edition of the *Acts and Monuments* was published by John Day.<sup>25</sup>

Foxe would produce four editions of the *Acts and Monuments* in his lifetime (1563, 1570, 1576, 1583). Foxe constantly found new sources and stories to include in the next edition

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<sup>20</sup> Loades, *John Foxe*, 57.

<sup>21</sup> Loades, *John Foxe*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> William Monter, 'Heresy Executions in Reformation Europe, 1520-1565', in Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (eds), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 57-8.

<sup>23</sup> O. T. Hargrave, 'Bloody Mary's Victims: The Iconography of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs.' *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51, no. 1 (1982): pp. 7-8. Accessed June 10, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/42973872](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42973872).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Freedman, "Foxe, John (1516/17–1587), martyrologist," *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Phillpott, *The Reformation of England's Past: John Foxe and the revision of History in the late sixteenth century* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 61.

and felt compelled to address any criticism laid against the previous editions. The success of his book promoted a widespread national interest in contributing stories and sources for the next edition.<sup>26</sup>

To say that the *Acts and Monuments* was a financial success would be an understatement. In fact, it was such a success that it was the second most popular English text for centuries. O.T. Hargrave states, “next to the Bible no other book enjoyed greater popularity among English Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*.”<sup>27</sup> Foxe was financially compensated for his editions, but his desire to ensure that the Protestant faith had role models and icons as examples for future English protestants can be assumed to be another factor contributing to his desire to publish. Fearing the return of Catholicism to England at any moment, Foxe worked to produce as many stories of martyrs as he could so that if and when Catholicism returned, the English people would be inspired to action by the stories within *The Acts and Monuments*.

While the book had garnered a positive reception upon its release, it was not without its critics. In 1566 Nicholas Harpsfield, who had been the archdeacon of Canterbury under the reign of Queen Mary, published *Dialogi sex, contra summi pontificatus, monasticae vitae, sanctorum, sacrarum imaginum oppugnatores, et pseudomartyres*, under the name Alan Cope.<sup>28</sup> Within this Harpsfield published a 250-page dialogue attacking the credibility and

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<sup>26</sup> Hargrave, “Bloody Mary’s Victims,” pp.7

<sup>27</sup> Hargrave, “Bloody Mary’s Victims,” pp.8

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Harpsfield, Christophe Plantin, and Alan Cope. *Dialogi Sex Contra Summi Pontificatus : Monasticae Vitae, Sanctorum, Sacrarum Imaginum Oppugnatores, Et Pseudomartyres*. Antverpiae: Ex officina Christophori Plantini, 1566.

message of the *Acts and Monuments*. Harpsfield was a devout Catholic who, during his time serving under the archbishop of Canterbury, presided over several heresy trials.<sup>29</sup> Harpsfield is described by Foxe in his martyrology as a fervent persecutor of Protestants. Harpsfield therefore was personally invested in discrediting Foxe's work. Not only had the *Acts and Monuments* painted the Catholic Church in a tyrannical and cruel light but it also described Harpsfield in particular as an instrument of this cruelty.

Harpsfield criticized the first edition of the *Acts and Monuments*, specifically attacking the credibility of Foxe's sources, which prompted Foxe to make dramatic changes in the second edition. Foxe employed the use of Parliamentary rolls, church records, and other official sources to substantiate the stories he had included in the *Acts and Monument's* first edition. The result was a greatly expanded and more carefully documented second edition, thanks, ironically, to a Catholic critique.

Foxe took on all of Harpsfield's criticisms including that of Perotine Massey. Perotine was a martyr Foxe recorded being burned at the Isle of Gurnsey. Perotine's story was a controversial one as Foxe wrote her as being executed at the stake while being pregnant due to the cruelty of the Catholic powers, while Harpsfield, in his account, vilifies her due to her being pregnant out of wedlock and names her as the murderer of the unborn child.<sup>30</sup> Foxe had previously relied on the words of witnesses and Perotine's family in the first edition, but in

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas S. Freeman, "Harpsfield, Nicholas (1519–1575), religious controversialist and historian." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 12 Dec. 2020. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12369>.

<sup>30</sup> Freeman, "Harpsfield Nicholas (1519-1575)," *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

response to Harpsfield, he examined parish records to defend her in the second. Despite Foxe's addressing of Harpsfield's criticisms, these criticisms would live on and become rhetoric within the English Catholic Polemic and historical writing and be echoed by many commentators who sought to discredit the *Acts in Monuments* going forward.<sup>31</sup>

Criticisms of the *Acts and Monuments* continued well after Foxe's lifetime. Perhaps the most notorious critic of John Foxe was Samuel Roffrey Maitland, a nineteenth century Anglican priest, who authored *Six Letters of Fox's Acts and Monuments* in 1837.<sup>32</sup> Foxe was long dead and unable to defend his work, so Maitland's criticisms succeeded in diminishing the historiographical credibility of the *Acts and Monuments*. First, Maitland questioned the credibility of Foxe's work by calling its scope unrealistic and its intent slanted in favor of Puritans.<sup>33</sup> This painted Foxe as someone who had used the stories of suffering martyrs in an opportunistic fashion to advance his own agenda. Maitland viewed the *Acts and Monuments* as tool of Foxe's hatred toward the Catholic church rather than an attempt at honoring the memories of those who had died. Second, he targeted the publishers of the newer editions of *The Acts and Monuments*, specifically the editions published in the 1840's, for perpetuating this propagandistic work and continuing to use the stories of those who had suffered for their own financial gain.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Freeman, "Harpsfield Nicholas (1519-1575)," *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel Roffrey Maitland, *Six Letters on Fox's Acts and Monuments: Addressed to the Editor of the British Magazine and Reprinted from That Work with Notes and Additions*. (London: J.G. and F. Rivington, 1837).

<sup>33</sup> Roffery, *Six Letters to John Foxe's Acts and Monuments*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> Roffery, *Six Letters to John Foxe's Acts and Monuments*, pp. 1-3.

As a “High Church” Anglican, Maitland questioned the credibility of Foxe’s work. The nineteenth century “Anglican” faith and the Catholic faith share many similarities, one of which being their distaste for protestant propaganda, which is how both parties viewed the *Acts and Monuments*. Maitland does have a point in identifying Foxe’s work as being a weapon against the church rather than purely a platform to memorialize martyrs. While Foxe did want to memorialize the stories he placed in the martyrology, Foxe also writes to discredit the Catholic church as well as prepare England to fight back if Catholicism were ever to return to England. Maitland’s criticism of Foxe’s source base, as well as Maitland’s criticism of his intent in publishing the book, echoed Harpsfield’s previous criticism’s. Both men viewed the book as an opiated weapon that was used by Foxe, and those who came after Foxe, to diminish the reputation of the Catholic church.

Even the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, whose editors attempted to be non-partisan, claimed that Foxe, “was too hasty a worker and too violent a partisan to produce anything like a correct or impartial account of the mass of facts with he had to deal.”<sup>35</sup> It follows, “The gross blunders due to carelessness have often been exposed, and there is no doubt that Foxe could only believe evil of the Catholics.”<sup>36</sup> Whether people believed that Foxe had manipulated stories to further his own agenda or that the people who served as his source base were intentionally telling him half-truths, by the first half of the twentieth century Foxe’s book had lost a significant amount of its historiographical credibility.

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<sup>35</sup> Hugh Chisholm, *The Encyclopædia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature, and General Information*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), pp. 791.

<sup>36</sup> Chisholm, *The Encyclopedia Briticanna*, pp. 791.

It took until the 1940's for Foxe's credibility to be restored. This restoration came in part at the hands of J. F. Mozley in his work *John Foxe and His Book*.<sup>37</sup> Mozley identified Foxe's critics, who accused Foxe of bias and dishonesty, as themselves biased and partisan. He described the situation stating, "They look at him through distorting glasses, and then are shocked and indignant to find him crooked."<sup>38</sup> Mozley conceded the critiques of Samuel Roffery, Nicholas Harpsfield and their contemporaries, but also showed that there was much to be learned from *The Acts and Monuments*.<sup>39</sup> Mozley did not claim that everything in Foxe's book should be taken at face value, however instead he stated that, "by aid of a little common sense we can steer pretty safely and comfortably through any awkward or treacherous places that may meet us."<sup>40</sup> By encouraging scholars to read the book critically and historically, rather than purely as a matter of spiritual truth, Mozley helped to reinvigorate the study of the *Acts and Monuments*. This reinvigoration led to the *Acts and Monuments* becoming a credible source for Early Modern English History but also has allowed for the expansion of the study of gender in Early Modern England specifically through its unique presentation of women.

Historians such as Thomas Freeman have shed light on the Marian Protestants but at least one important essay, opted to not focus on the martyrs themselves. Freeman's article "The Good ministrye of godly and vertuouse women": The Elizabethan Martyrologists and the

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<sup>37</sup> J. F. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (New York: Octagon Books, 1940).

<sup>38</sup> Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book*, pp. 236.

<sup>39</sup> For a concise summary of the points Mozley makes which reassert Foxe's credibility as an author and *The Acts and Monuments* as a historical source see Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book*, pp. 236-241.

<sup>40</sup> Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book*, pp. 237.



Female Supporters of the Marian Martyrs”, asserted that due to human fascination with death, martyrs tend to receive the majority of study compared to others that were apart of martyrological stories.<sup>41</sup> Freeman instead focused his study on the women who supported the Marian Martyrs during their time of imprisonment before their execution.<sup>42</sup> There is merit in the observation that people are drawn to histories that involve dramatic death. However, this thesis seeks to suggest that although stories of martyrs are perhaps popular due to their dramatic nature, this does not mean that they are overrepresented in scholarship. There is still much to be learned from *The Acts and Monuments* as this paper will demonstrate through its examination of the women within.

So far, Foxe’s female martyrs have not been the focus of a full-length monograph, but they have been examined in scholarly articles. There are two particular articles that this thesis will concentrate on. First is Roberta Anderson’s “John Foxe’s Seely Poor Women,” which revived appreciation of the book’s female martyrs who, she states, “displayed as much fortitude as men in the face of death.”<sup>43</sup> Second is Megan Hickerson’s “Gospelling Sisters goinge up and downe: John Foxe and Disorderly Women,” which proposed that the *Acts and*

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Freeman, “The Good Ministrye of Godlye and Vertuose Women”: The Elizabethan Martyrologists and the Female Supporters of the Marian Martyrs.” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol 39, No. 1: (January 2000), pp. 8-33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/175867>

<sup>42</sup> Megan Hickerson, “Gospelling Sisters ‘Goinge up and Downe’: John Foxe and Disorderly Women,” *Kings College, University of London, Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXXV, no. 4 (2004): pp. 1038.

<sup>43</sup> Roberta Anderson, “John Foxe’s Seely, Poore Women,” *The Downside Review* 133, no. 467 (201501): pp. 35.

*Monuments* reveals untapped insights into women's roles in the English Reformation, especially in comparison to the Protestant norm of Tudor England.<sup>44</sup>

This thesis shifts focus from Anderson's defense of the courageousness and fortitude of the female Marian martyrs in their lifetimes. I will suggest that Foxe included these female martyrs to cement their legacies as role models for the next generation of English women. In a world where women were taught to be submissive and obedient from birth, here we have a portrayal of women who are defiant, rebellious, and outspoken. Rather than admonishing them for this behavior, Foxe praised them and framed them as role models. While there have been a few scholars that identified Foxe's portrayal as subversive, this thesis will add to this growing perspective by focusing on the female martyrs' roles in an earthly society rather than their spiritual roles.

Hickerson's "Gospelling Sisters" argued that Foxe's description of disorderly women did not subvert patriarchal values but instead reinforced them. Hickerson made the point that in the bond of marriage in an earthly sense, women are subservient to men. However, in a spiritual sense, women are also eternally married to Christ. Therefore, disobedience to an earthly husband out of obedience to their heavenly husband meant that the women in question were not actually behaving rebelliously. This definition of obedience in marriage serves to explain why Foxe was able to portray these women so positively in his work without suffering backlash from his Protestant audience. Hickerson's observations on Foxe's justification of including these women is valuable to the historiography surrounding the *Acts and Monuments*.

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<sup>44</sup> Hickerson, "Gospelling Sisters 'Goinge up and Downe,'" pp. 1035–51.

Her focus on spiritual submission to Christ contextualized the public's positive reaction to the presentation of rebellious and disobedient women. This thesis, however, will focus less on spiritual acts of rebellion and submission and instead concentrate on how Foxe encouraged earthly, not just spiritual, acts of rebellion to his female readers.

I will examine how Foxe's earthly call to action combined spiritual submission and earthly rebellion. Foxe promoted submission to Christ through rebellion against a society that was controlled by Catholicism. By outlining the way Foxe portrayed women who rebelled against the Catholic church in the past, we will see how Foxe is providing early modern English women with examples of how to behave if Catholicism should once again take power in England.

**Women whose position in society saved them from persecution or execution.**

This section will focus on the women in Foxe who were portrayed giving a performance of submission, in order to successfully rebel against the Catholic church. In Foxe's telling these women used their social positions as mothers and wives to leverage their way out of the consequences of their rebellious actions. While it may seem at first glance that Foxe was praising these women for their acts of submission, a thorough evaluation of the text reveals that Foxe can be interpreted as instead praising them for avoiding the consequences of their rebellious actions through their use of their roles in society. Through this Foxe can be construed as fashioning these women into models of intelligent rebellion who promoted resistance.

Fifty-four women were listed in Foxe's martyrology, which comprised a fifth of all martyrs he discussed.<sup>45</sup> Foxe's accounts varied in length. For example, Anne Askew, one of the most famous English martyrs, received a great deal of attention from Foxe. In addition to including the entirety of her account in the *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe also added his own comments, and referred to her story later in the text.<sup>46</sup> Her total entry in the *Acts and Monuments* came to eleven pages. The majority of women in the *Acts and Monuments*, however, received significantly less attention, and some received barely an entry at all. For instance, a woman who is referred to as "Mother Tree" is only listed by name as part of a group, alongside Thomas Dungate and John Forman. "Mother Tree", Dungate, and Forman, were given a total of eighty-three words by Foxe, barely a paragraph, describing when and where they died with no further information about their lives.<sup>47</sup>

It is difficult to gauge why Foxe wrote next to nothing about some women, such as "Mother Tree", but wrote lengthy entries on other women like Anne Askew and Katherine Parr. The strongest factors that contributed to the length of an entry seem to have been social status, which would determine how much of the martyr's life was documented before their trials, and the rebellious nature of their actions and words. Women like Anne Askew and Katherine Parr both held a high social status and their actions taken throughout their story are

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson, "John Foxe's Seely, Poore Women," pp. 7.

<sup>46</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO* (1563 edition, Book Three, Page 737) (The Digital Humanities Institute, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: <http://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe> [Accessed: 07.13.20].

<sup>47</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 1545.

rebellious so they are granted a large amount of space in the martyrology.<sup>48</sup> Agnes Prest, who will be covered in more detail later in this paper, was a poor woman who earned her place in the martyrology through her actions alone.<sup>49</sup> Her outright defiance towards Catholic authority and skill at debating scripture ensured that she received attention in the *Acts and Monuments*. However, her social status as a poor woman meant that her life was not documented until she was arrested, limiting what we know about her and shortening her entry. Finally, we have women like the previously mentioned “Mother Tree”. These were women who held little to no social status and, assumedly, went to their deaths without doing anything rebellious enough to warrant documentation from Foxe.

One of the women who earned her place in the martyrology through her acts of rebellion was John Marbeck’s wife.<sup>50</sup> Foxe recorded her and her husband both as Protestant sympathizers, but only she was arrested as a result of being caught smuggling letters into prisons. At the time of her arrest, Foxe stated that she was a nursing mother who had both a newborn child to care for and several other young children at home. However, Foxe wrote that when the time came to go to London, “not knowing what should become of John, she left child

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<sup>48</sup> Katherine Parr’s status as queen, and Anne Askew’s as the daughter of a wealthy land owner made them both higher on the social ladder than most women in England. Parr’s actions are rebellious, not because she herself spoke against Catholic influence openly in court, but because she was able to convince her husband not to listen to his advisors who harbored Catholic sympathies, affecting all of England through the king. Askew’s actions were more directly rebellious as she personally defied Catholic forces and refused to buckle under torture.

<sup>49</sup> Prest was a commoner who held very little social status. This meant that there is little known about her life until she rebelled against the Catholic church.

<sup>50</sup> Her first name is never mentioned in the *Acts and Monuments*. She is simply referred to as Marbeck’s wife, and therefore will be referred to as such in this paper. Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 1545

and all, and gat her to London.”<sup>51</sup> The act of leaving her family would seem to cast her in a negative light. However, Foxe repeatedly framed submission and obedience as tools in his presentation of Marbeck’s wife’s story. Foxe framed her willingness to go to London, as well as her eventual submission to her jailers in order to secure her release, as a means to an end rather than a genuine act of submission to the Catholic authority.

After being imprisoned, Foxe wrote that Marbeck’s wife approached her jailer, bishop Stephen Gardiner, and asked for leave to go see her husband and children.<sup>52</sup> According to Foxe she succeed by leveraging her social position as a mother. Foxe outlined how she implored the bishop that she needed to return home to her children to provide for them in a way only a mother could. Her youngest child was still breastfeeding and finding a wetnurse would put a great financial burden on the family. If there were no wetnurses available, the child would die. This succeeded and Gardiner granted her release. In this telling Foxe highlighted how Marbeck’s wife used her role as a mother to persuade her captor to allow her to leave by playing upon contemporary maternal ideals. Foxe did this once again when he described how Marbeck’s wife came into conflict with the porter of the prison after the bishop had granted her release. The porter is described as hesitant to grant her freedom because he believed that she would again smuggle letters into and out of the prison.<sup>53</sup> Marbeck’s wife is then once again presented as submissive and obedient by Foxe in her attempt to convince the porter to grant her freedom. She succeeds by telling the porter that he may strip her, “as far as any woman may do with

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<sup>51</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 451.

<sup>52</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 451.

<sup>53</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 453.

honesty.”<sup>54</sup> Although this story may seem as though Foxe is attempting to highlight the benefits of submission to authority, it can also be interpreted as a Foxe demonstrating how women can use their roles as wives and mothers to avoid persecution from an unjust Catholic authority.

As Carole Levin pointed out in “Women in the Book of Martyrs as Models of Behavior,” the lesson is that playing the part of the submissive wife was a useful tool to defy the Catholic authority. Levin states, “She (Marbeck’s wife) has learned how to present herself in a manner that will provide her with what she needs. For women reading these stories, the lesson of playing the submissive role is certainly indicated here.”<sup>55</sup> This story can be read as Foxe including the story of Marbeck’s wife leaving her family to suffer for Christ because it frames how she used her status as a woman and mother to escape an unjust capture. In this narrative Marbeck’s wife defied the stereotypical roles that women were meant to play in England until it became clear that she could use the stereotypical behaviors expected of a woman to avoid persecution and execution. At first glance this may seem like Foxe was presenting a story that was encouraging stereotypical womanly behavior and submission to patriarchal authority, but it can also be viewed as a demonstration of the benefits of a show of submission. Here Foxe provided an example of a woman being rebellious and defying the Catholic church and then using her place in society to avoid persecution and execution. Given Foxe’s anxiety over the possibility of Catholicism returning to England this story can be seen as a demonstration of how to feign submission in order to avoid persecution from an unjust power.

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<sup>54</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 453.

<sup>55</sup> Carole Levin, “Women in The Book of Martyrs as Models of Behavior in Tudor England,” *International Journal of Women’s Studies*, No:4, volume 2, (1981): pp. 205.

Another, and perhaps one of the most well-known, example of Foxe demonstrating a woman using her position within society to avoid persecution from Catholic powers is the story of Katherine Parr.<sup>56</sup> Parr's story is well known due to both her high social status as a queen as well as the rebellious actions against Catholic influence in the church. In the 1540's, nearing the end of Henry VIII's life, Henry was suffering from gout, boils, and mood swings which had left him intolerant of the scriptural debates Katherine attempted to have with him. Henry told Katherine that while she was allowed to read the scriptures for her own benefit and for the purpose of educating her children, she was not meant to study the scriptures for the purposes of theological debate.<sup>57</sup>

This was a change in the dynamic of the relationship between Henry and Katherine. Katherine had always loved reading and writing about biblical topics and ideas.<sup>58</sup> In all other domestic regards, she was an ideal figure of womanly virtue and behavior. Katherine was particularly close to all of Henry's children and took a special interest in overseeing their education. Katherine became so dedicated to her role as a motherly figure that she personally sought out the children's tutors and remained in contact with them via letter writing more so than Henry ever did.<sup>59</sup> She also had a large influence in the passing of the Third Succession Act

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<sup>56</sup> John Foxe, *The acts and monuments of John Foxe*, ed. S. R. Cattley, 5 (1838), 553-561.

<sup>57</sup> Linda Porter, *Katherine the Queen: The Remarkable Life of Katherine Parr, the Last Wife of Henry VIII*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), pp. 247.

<sup>58</sup> Porter, *Katherine the Queen*, pp. 157.

<sup>59</sup> For examples of the letters that she wrote to Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth see Catharine Parr, and Janel M Mueller, *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*. Chicago (IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).



which saw Mary and Elizabeth both placed back in the line of succession to the throne.<sup>60</sup>

However while she conformed to most of the standards that were laid out for her by England's societal expectations of a queen, Foxe described her as unwilling to temper her love for scripture and Henry as unwilling to abide a strong willed woman debating him in biblical matters.

This conflict came to a head when Katherine published her first book *Psalms and Prayers* in 1543. Her Protestant sympathies drew the ire of many members of Henry's court who held deep seated anti-Protestant ideals. Due to their resentment of the queen's religious sympathies, Foxe details how the court hatched a plot to capitalize on Henry's temperament and distaste for domestic debate. Stephen Gardiner, the Bishop of Westchester, and lord chancellor Thomas Wriothesley, gathered enough evidence of Katherine's heretical behaviors to have a warrant for her arrest drawn and issued. When Katherine learned about this plot she immediately took to her bed claiming to be deathly ill.<sup>61</sup> Henry then rushed to her bed side. Here Foxe recounts how Katherine gave a speech that espoused her intense submission to her husband as well as the difference between the male and female genders. She stated,

Since, therefore, God hath appointed such a natural difference between man and woman, and you majesty being so excellent in gifts and ornaments of wisdom, and I a silly poor woman, so much inferior in all respects of nature unto you, how then cometh it now to pass that your majesty, in such diffuse causes of religion, will seem to require my judgment?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Susan E. James, "Katherine [Kateryn, Catherine] [née Katherine Parr] (1512–1548), Queen of England and Ireland, Sixth Consort of Henry VIII." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 14 Nov. 2020. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4893>.

<sup>61</sup> James, "Katherine [Kateryn, Catherine]."

<sup>62</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 560.

She then told Henry that her primary reason for becoming so learned in scripture, as well and engaging with him in theological debate, was to distract him from all his pains and ailments.<sup>63</sup> Henry was won over by this explanation and forgave his wife. Katherine never fell victim to the order for her arrest.

While on the surface this may seem like Foxe is suggesting that women should submit to their husbands, Parr's strategies as described by Foxe challenge this interpretation. If Katherine's purpose in learning scripture was solely to take Henry's mind off his worsening gout, she would not have published books on theological matters. Foxe, having presented Katherine as an intelligent and witty woman throughout the entirety of his telling of the story, then including a quote from her where she refers to herself as a "silly poor woman" might have left his readers confused as to what they were supposed to believe regarding Katherine's character. However, her actions as described by Foxe seek to provide clarity to this confusion. While Foxe records her as verbally stating her submission to the king, Foxe's description of her being an author of religious works, feigning sickness to bring her husband to her bedside, and successfully outmaneuvering the court to avoid her arrest can be interpreted as Foxe attempting to present her as someone intelligent enough to use her social position as a wife to avoid persecution from the court.<sup>64</sup>

Katherine's story in Foxe is also shaped by Foxe's presentation of Henry which is, in Carole Levin's words, "was not entirely pleasant, though Foxe is never explicit in his

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<sup>63</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 561.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony Martiensen, *Queen Katherine Parr* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 98.

disapproval.”<sup>65</sup> Foxe described the court that surrounded Henry as riddled with Catholic sympathies. He framed their words and actions as deceiving and misleading to the King. Coupled with this description of the court, Foxe’s descriptions of Katherine’s actions portrayed her as not outright deceiving her husband to save her own life but instead as her taking a stand against the evil court that was deceiving the king. Rather than framing her as someone who deceived the King only to save her own life, Foxe instead can be interpreted as having presented Katherine as a cunning politician who was attempting to ensure the King was no longer misled by his wicked court.

Whether Katherine’s act of submission towards Henry was a ploy to combat the Catholic influences of the court, or if it was done purely to ensure her own survival, one thing is clear. Foxe did not present Katherine as a submissive character in the *Acts and Monuments*. Katherine lived a life that defied the expectations of women in Early Modern England, even women of a high social status. When her life was threatened, Foxe displayed her as socially aware enough to adjust her behavior temporarily to solidify her influence over her husband, thwart the plot against her life, and further diminish Catholicism’s influence over the king. Given that this story was one of an educated queen who authored books about religion and who debated with her husband about theological ideas, and was also able to influence her husband against his own court, it is difficult to imagine that Foxe included her in an attempt to present an ideal submissive and obedient womanly figure. Instead, this can be seen as Foxe presenting her as an example of a woman using the means she had available to her to combat Catholic influence in England. Katherine, as presented by Foxe, can be considered a model of intelligent rebellion to

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<sup>65</sup> Levin, “Women in The Book of Martyrs,” pp. 198.

the readers of the *Acts and Monuments* rather than an example of submission and obedience.

We can interpret this as Foxe wanting to demonstrate that women could not only use their positions in society to save themselves, but also to lessen the overall influence of Catholicism in England.

This section has outlined how even though some of the women in Foxe's Martyrology at first glance seem to have been portrayed as examples of the benefits of submission and obedience, they can instead be read as rebellious role models. They offered a performance of submission in order to avoid the consequences of their rebellious actions which lead to them surviving their ordeal. Foxe's presentation of these stories can be understood as framing obedience and submission more as tools to be used for a cause than desirable traits that all Early Modern women were to strive to personify at all times. Through the use of these tools in these stories it can be interpreted that Foxe is perhaps not shaping these characters as ideal feminine role models and instead as an example of ideal Protestant behavior under Catholic oppression.

**Women whose positions in society did not save them from persecution or execution.**

Women whose position in society saved them from persecution or execution are the minority in Foxe's book. *The Acts and Monuments* is, after all, a martyrology and the majority of the women presented within died for their beliefs. Women who refused to submit to Catholic authority present an interesting inclusion in Foxe's narrative because they were not only defying the religious authority of the Catholic church, but they were also refusing to submit to patriarchal authority more broadly. If one is to believe that Foxe's goal in the presentation of these women is to present ideal models of womanly behavior to his audience, then these

women do not fit the submissive expectation. These stories as told by Foxe present women acting out in rebellion against societal expectations in the name of their religious beliefs, which complicates the expectation of when women are and are not supposed to conform to these behaviors. These stories also continually reassert Foxe's belief in the individual's right to religious proclamation and his praise of women using their roles in society to their benefit.

As the previous examples have indicated, and the subsequent examples will further indicate, presenting ideal role models of submission and obedience is perhaps not Foxe's primary goal with his presentation of these stories. In Foxe's recounting of these stories some of the characters will attempt to use their positions in society to save themselves and fail and others will refuse to try. This section will demonstrate that Foxe can be read less as using the stories of these women's deaths as examples of the repercussions of women acting rebelliously, and instead be seen as Foxe including these stories to glorify these women and their actions and to encourage his female readers to rebel against Roman Catholic authority should it return to England.

In the following accounts Foxe simultaneously highlighted Catholic cruelty and demonstrated to his readers that although these open acts of rebellions could lead to execution, something the martyrs were not doubt aware of themselves, their sacrifices were necessary in the larger fight against Catholicism. Foxe did not gloss over the gorier details of the martyr's death's as other contemporary authors had; instead, he described the full and painful experience for his readers. David Anderson noted in *Martyrs and Players in Early Modern England* how important this was to Foxe's argument. He states, "Foxe's martyrs generally feel

pain, and often given voice to that feeling, but they do not recant.”<sup>66</sup> The pain that was on display however did not diminish the standing that martyrs held in the eyes of early modern England. Martyrs were typically held in high regard to the faith that they were martyred for. Anderson further notes that, “Martyrs were profoundly precious to their respective churches as adherents who had been given grace to such a degree that they maintained their witness—the meaning of “martyr” in Greek—to the true faith in spite of horrific suffering.”<sup>67</sup> While naturally all the martyrs in the *Acts and Monuments* would have been afraid of meeting their end at the stake, at the same time, becoming a martyr was viewed as a blessing.

The experience of martyrdom was not exclusive to Protestantism. As stated earlier religious persecution took place during Henry’s, Mary’s, and Elizabeth’s reign that affected both Protestants and Catholics. When looking at these martyrs through the lens of gender we begin to see similarities between female martyrs whether they were Catholic or Protestant. For instance, Margaret Clitherow was a Catholic martyr who was killed in the time of Queen Elizabeth.<sup>68</sup> Clitherow was accused and found guilty of the crime of harboring Catholic priests in her home. When faced with the option of a trial by jury she refused to appeal her verdict and instead accepted her fate of being executed by being crushed to death. Historians have speculated that she refused to appeal in order to avoid having her family testify against her and

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<sup>66</sup> David K. Anderson, *Martyrs and Players in Early Modern England: Tragedy, Religion and Violence on Stage* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 34.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson, *Martyrs and Players in Early Modern England*, pp. 35.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethian England* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011), pp. 18. It should be noted that Clitherow is the only martyr in this thesis that is not recorded in the *Acts and Monuments*. However, her status as a martyr in Tudor England, and the similarities to some of the stories within Foxe’s book warrant her inclusion both here and later on in the thesis.

to spare the jury from having her blood on their hands. Peter Lake and Michael Questier proposed that it might have also been an act of self-sacrifice. They summarized the self-sacrifice argument, which was espoused most notably by Katharine Longley a 1970's Catholic scholar, by stating that, "Her death, however, was virtual suicide, the product of the worst kind of extremism."<sup>69</sup> Whether Clitherow wanted to save the souls of the jury or to ensure that her legacy would be one of a heroic martyr, Clitherow is never documented as demonstrating a fear of becoming a martyr. In fact, in this example, martyrdom is seen as an objective rather than a deterrent.

Hickerson explained that Foxe, "embedded patriarchal values in his descriptions of disorderly women who are wholly submissive to their heavenly spouse, their defiance of their earthly husbands signaling their marital subjection."<sup>70</sup> Hickerson drew attention to the idea that submission to a heavenly spouse was more important than submission to an earthly one as far as Foxe was concerned. It is safe to assume that Foxe, like his contemporaries, was a supporter of the gender roles set in place in early modern English culture, yet not all of his stories establish women as submissive and obedient. In fact, in order to be truly submissive to their heavenly spouse, rebellion in an earthly sense was required.

Again, even women who behaved submissively and obediently in order to avoid persecution were presented by Foxe in a way that did not make them ideal role models of the early modern expectation of women. These examples instead encouraged women to take

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<sup>69</sup> Lake and Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow*, pp. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Hickerson, "Gospelling Sisters 'Goinge up and Downe,'" pp. 1035.

action. This in effect made them anti-models of womanly behavior while simultaneously making them ideal models of Protestant behavior. Given Foxe's anxiety of a potential return to Catholicism, the presentation of these women as ideal Protestants instead of ideal women can be interpreted as Foxe presenting these stories as examples of how Protestants, regardless of gender, should conduct themselves under an unjust Catholic rule.

Returning now to the martyrs in *The Acts and Monuments* we come to the story of Perotine Massey, one of three women burned at the Isle of Guernsey.<sup>71</sup> The story of the women at Guernsey was used by Foxe as the ultimate example of Catholic cruelty. Foxe ascribed this cruelty to three main issues. First, Foxe believed that the martyrs were not given the same kind of due process that other martyrs were given. Second, an infant was killed in this execution as Perotine was heavily pregnant and due to give birth around the time of the execution. Third, despite their obedient behavior and willingness to return to the Catholic faith these women were still executed. Foxe summarized his feelings towards this act of cruelty in one of his longer subsection headings, calling this story, "A tragic, lamentable, and pitiful history, full of most cruel and tyrannical murder done by the [pretensed] Catholics."<sup>72</sup> Foxe presented these women as wholly submissive and obedient characters. Despite this they were still executed. Two main objectives can be derived from Foxe's telling of this story: to highlight Catholic cruelty, and to demonstrate, not the dangers of behaving rebelliously, but instead the dangers of behaving submissively and obediently to Catholic authority.

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<sup>71</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2168.

<sup>72</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2168.



Foxe begins this story by detailing how a woman named Vincet Gosset approached Perotine at the latter's house.<sup>73</sup> Vincet then asked Perotine to hold a silver chalice for her until she returned. Perotine recognized the sigil on the cup and correctly assumed that the chalice had been stolen. According to Foxe she then took the chalice and returned it to its rightful owner. Her willingness to submit to the law in this moment is important Foxe's overall presentation of her submissive and obedient character. The justices of the county came and examined the situation and found Vincet Gosset guilty of theft. However, during the ensuing investigation and questioning of neighbors it came to light, according to the bailiffs lieutenant in a letter to the Curates of Guernsey, that Perotine, her sister and her mother had been disobedient to the commandments and ordinances of the church.<sup>74</sup> After their trial the three women were, according to the letter, "condemned and judged this day to be burned, until they be consumed to ashes in the place accustomed, with the confiscation of all their goods, valuables and heritages, to be in the hands of the kind and queen majesties."<sup>75</sup> It is at this point Foxe made his criticism of the length of the trial known. The time between investigation and execution is remarkably shorter in comparison to other martyrs who typically received several sessions of examination.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2166.

<sup>74</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2166.

<sup>75</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2167.

<sup>76</sup> Examples of martyrs that received multiple rounds of examinations include Anne Askew, Agnes Prest, and Elizabeth Young. The stories of these three women will be outlined at later points in this paper. The Guernsey women however only received one and were sent to be executed directly after.

Upon describing the day of the execution, Foxe has a distinct way of reminding the reader of the innocence of all three women. He states, “the time then became come, when these three servants of the holy saints of God, the innocent mother with her two daughters should suffer, in the place where they should consummate their martyrdom.”<sup>77</sup> The wording of this entry is intentional. Foxe called the mother “the innocent mother” and her children are assumed innocent through association. Rather than calling them an innocent trio or a group of innocent women, Foxe made it a point to have the children’s judicial innocence be made apparent through their relationship with their mother.

As children got older their connection to their mother lessened and they were viewed more as individuals. However, there was no mention at this point of Perotine or her sister being married and therefore they were assumed to not be married at this point. This meant that they were still under the authority of their parents. A mother’s role in early modern English society was that of a nurture and educator. As a result, female children, their behaviors and beliefs, were viewed as direct results of their mother’s influence, until a husband had taken said daughter under his authority through marriage. Since neither Perotine or her sister had an immediate husband present, their strongest social bond was the bond they shared with their mother. This maternal passing of judicial judgement came into play not only in the dynamic of Perotine and her mother, but also in the dynamic of Perotine and her own child. Around the time of the investigation and the subsequent order of execution, Perotine is described by Foxe as being heavily pregnant and soon to be giving birth. The child received the same sentence as

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<sup>77</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2170.

its mother, and rather than wait for Perotine to give birth and the child to be given into the care of someone else, Perotine and her child were both sent to be burned.

Foxe had argued for the judicial innocence of Perotine and her sister through their relationship with their mother, but here the executioners judged this child worthy of death because its mother was not “innocent” but apparently a guilty of having sexual relations outside of wedlock. In 1567 theologian Thomas Harding published a work titled *Rejoiner to Jewel* in which he discussed Perotine and her child’s story.<sup>78</sup> Harding wasted no time attacking the character of Perotine. He accused her of being a conspirator in the theft that Vincent was convicted of and of whoredom.<sup>79</sup> Carole Levin Explains Harding’s logic: “If she were not ashamed of being pregnant, she would have used her condition to escape punishment, since by law a pregnant woman could not be executed until her child was born. Since she did not do so, claims Harding, Perotine is herself actually the murderer of the child.”<sup>80</sup> Foxe had judged that Perotine had committed no crimes and therefore should not face any consequences, and argued that this judicial innocence should also be applied to her child. However, Foxe writes that the executioners had unjustly decided that Perotine was in fact guilty and that this judgement should be passed on to her child.

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas Harding, John Fowler, and the English Printing Collection, *A Reioindre to M. Jewels Replie against the Sacrifice of the Masse : In Which the Doctrine of the Answer to the Xvii Article of His Challenge Is Defended, and Further Proued, and Al That His Replie Conteineth against the Sacrifice, Is Clearly Confuted, and Disproued*. Louanii: Apud Ioannem Foulerum, 1567.

<sup>79</sup> Harding Thomas, *Rejoiner to Jewel*, cited in Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book*, 226.

<sup>80</sup> Levin, “Women in The Book of Martyrs,” pp. 202.

The strength of the connection between a mother's guilt or innocence and her child's can be seen in both Perotine's case and in the case of Margaret Clitherow. Clitherow was executed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth for harboring Catholic priests, who was ordered to be crushed – or “pressed” -- to death under the door of her own home as a result of her refusing to appeal her trial.<sup>81</sup> At the time of her execution, Clitherow was pregnant with her fourth child, and just like Perotine, once Clitherow's fate had been decided her child's fate was similarly decided.

Just as in the case of Perotine, there were laws in place that defended pregnant women from execution during their pregnancy when Clitherow was sentenced. However, unlike Perotine, who desperately tried to avoid the death of her and her child, Clitherow accepted her fate and the fate of her child by refusing to appeal her sentence. When she first refused to appeal her decision the Judge who oversaw her case stated, “Good woman, consider well what you do; if you refused to be tried by the country, you make yourself guilty and an accessory to your own death, for we cannot try you but by order of the law.”<sup>82</sup> Clitherow responded by stating, “Gods will be done: I think I may suffer any death for this good cause.”<sup>83</sup> By not trying to save her life, and the life of her child, Clitherow turned herself into a controversial figure in the history of Catholic Martyrdom.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Foxe used Perotine's desperate

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<sup>81</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethian England* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011), pp.18.

<sup>82</sup> John Morris and John Mush, *The Catholics of York under Elizabeth* (London: Burns and Oates, 1891), pp. 414.

<sup>83</sup> Morris and Mush, *The Catholics of York*, pp. 414.

<sup>84</sup> Lake and Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clithrow*, pp. 14-23.

attempts to save the life of her unborn baby to make her into a sympathetic figure. While protestant powers may have sentenced Clitherow and her child to die, not pursuing an appeal ultimately led to her execution. Perotine, however, does everything in her power to save herself and her child but is still sentenced to die. In both of these cases it is clear that despite a child being innocent of a crime, a mother's guilty verdict can be passed from the mother to the child.

This is, in Foxe's eyes, a tragedy. Foxe outlined the details of Perotine's failed attempts at saving herself and her child in what can be perceived as an attempt to overwhelm his readers with the tragedy of Perotine's experience. In a book that celebrates the rebellious actions of women martyrs here we have a female martyr who submits at every possible moment, and for all of her submission and obedience she, her child, and her family are still executed. The sense of dread that is communicated through this story can be seen as a warning to Foxe's readers. Foxe's warning was that even if they submit to Catholic forces they will still be persecuted or killed despite their attempts at appeasing their persecutors.

Foxe stated that a martyr's story should be measured according to the martyrs, "constancy in dying, and the frute that they brought to the amendment of posteritie and increase of the Gospell."<sup>85</sup> While Perotine's death may not have brought an increase to Protestantism by Foxe's definition, Foxe's use of her story can be viewed as an attempt to fashion the story into something than can serve the Protestant cause. Foxe has presented this story as a cautionary tale of the dangers of submission to Catholic authority in what can be

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<sup>85</sup> John Foxe, *The Ecclesiaticall History, containing the Acts and Monuments* (1570, RSTC, 11223) vol. 1, sig l\*, iii, pp. 1217.

perceived as an attempt to warn future generations that submission to Catholicism may not be enough to save them from execution and may led to their death not bringing an increase to the gospel.

In the 1570 edition of *The Acts and Monuments* Foxe responded to Hardwig's criticisms of the 1563 edition. Specifically, Foxe responded to Hardwig's criticisms toward Perotine which placed the blame of the death of her child on her for not utilizing the laws that protected pregnant women. Foxe stated first that Perotine must have been ignorant of these laws, otherwise she would have used them to avoid execution. Second, those who had administered the execution would have been aware of the law and of the pregnancy. Therefore, the Catholic executioners were responsible for going through with the execution despite this knowledge. When the burning began Perotine, who was late into her pregnancy, is said to have given birth in the flames and the surrounding bystanders pulled the child out. The executioner supervising the burning then ordered the child thrown back into the fire to die.

Foxe puts the cruelty of this execution on full display but highlighting Catholic cruelty is only one part of of Foxe's larger goal with this story. Foxe also asserted the agency of women, and their ability to use their roles in society. The story in the first edition can be seen as an attempt to draw pity from Foxe's audience. Upon engaging in dialogue with Hardwig, Foxe suggested that had Perotine been equipped with the knowledge of the law, she would have used her position as a mother to save herself from this situation just as Marbeck's wife had. This further implicated her executioners as cruel, as they did not inform her of the law that would have saved her and her child. Perotine's position as a mother was not used to escape persecution, and this was largely implied by Foxe to be a case of ignorance instead of choice.

Foxe used this to cast Perotine in a victim's light and once again add to the tragedy of her story. In terms of its impact on Foxe's readers it muddles the idea that Foxe is arguing that women who adhere to the societal expectation of submissiveness live and women who behave rebelliously die. The story, as told by Foxe, characterizes Perotine as submissive and obedient. She adheres to the law and reports a crime, and upon being interrogated for not attending the Mass she, her mother and her sister all agree to recant and return to the Catholic fold. The bailiff's lieutenant stated in a letter that, "In the presence of whom they beyng examined of their faith, concernyng the ordinances of the Romish Church, made their answere that they would obey and keepe the ordinances of the Kyng & Queene, & the cōmaudemētes of the Church."<sup>86</sup> Foxe claimed that Perotine agreed to do this in order to spare the life of her unborn child rather than actually wishing to return to the Catholic church, stating, "What was the cause that moved her so willingly to recant as shee did, but partly to save her own life, and especially the poore innocent?"<sup>87</sup> Perotine's willingness to return to the Catholic church only convinced Foxe that she must not have known the laws in place to protect pregnant women.

Foxe presented the decision to return to Catholicism as a decision made out of desperation and that the only reason that Perotine would attempt to have done so would be because she saw no other avenues available to her to protect the life of her child. He drew on her position as a mother as the primary reason why Perotine does not accept her fate as a martyr. Foxe framed the unborn child as the deciding factor in Perotine's decision to attempt to

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<sup>86</sup>Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2128.

<sup>87</sup>Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2133.

submit to Catholicism instead of rebelling. This alleviated the choice to submit from being placed fully on Perotine. Harding also made the argument against Foxe that Perotine does not qualify as a martyr due to her being executed for a judicial crime, but Foxe retorted by stating, “let him consider the cause wherefore she suffered, which was neither for felony, murder, not whoredom, but only for religion.”<sup>88</sup> Despite her attempt to return to Catholicism, Foxe staunchly defined Perotine as a martyr who suffered at the hands of Catholicism and uses her story to embody the full extent of Catholic cruelty.

Throughout his response to Harding, Foxe reiterated that had Perotine been aware of the law that protected pregnant women, she would have undoubtedly used this in her defense instead of a recantation. Foxe displayed Perotine’s willingness to return to Catholicism as a last-ditch attempt by Perotine to use her social position to save the life of her unborn child. He states, “Wherby it is manifest to be vnderstanded, what a motherly affection she had to saue her infāt, if the fathers of the spirituality had not bene so cruell, agaynst all order of law to cast both her and her child away, all this her sayd recantation notwithstanding.”<sup>89</sup> Perotine was denied the ability to use her position as a mother to save herself and her child from execution. She also had no recognizable husband to submit to, meaning that she was unable to use the position of wife to escape execution. Finally, with no other options left, Perotine desperately tried to use her position as a religious believer to save the life of her unborn child by promising to return to the Catholic fold. However even this failed. Foxe did not present her willingness to

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<sup>88</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, 1570 edition, pp. 2172.

<sup>89</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, 1570 edition, pp. 2133.



submit to Catholicism as a viable option for future martyrs to use to avoid execution. Instead, we can read this as Foxe having used Perotine's willingness to recant as a demonstration of the desperate nature of her situation.

Perotine's story allowed Foxe to demonstrate the futility of submission to Catholicism. While the many other women whose stories are told in the martyrology served to inspire readers to rebellion, Perotine's story served as a warning of the dangers of submission to Catholic authorities generally speaking. The inspirational stories combined with this cautionary tale can be seen as an attempt by Foxe to lead his readers to the conclusion that when faced with the prospect of being martyred for their faith death may be unavoidable. Even if one tried to submit and return to Catholicism. This assumption, combined with Foxe's praise of the heroic and rebellious ends of martyrs who did not submit to Catholic oppression, can be seen as Foxe attempting to communicate to his audience that it is better to die piously defiant than to attempt any form of recantation so that their deaths would lead to an increase to the Gospel.<sup>90</sup>

While Foxe highlighted Catholic cruelty, early modern Protestant readers would have been tempted to believe that Perotine was still at fault for her own execution as well as the death of her child because she was pregnant out of wedlock. Therefore, this story might have been interpreted as a cautionary tale against premarital sexual relations. When Foxe came to Perotine's defense in later editions of the *Acts and Monuments*, however, he simultaneously defended her character and assaulted the character of the Catholic forces that condemned her

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<sup>90</sup> Foxe, *The Ecclesiasticall History*, pp. 1217.

to die. The title of this section is “Defense of this Garnesey Story against M Harding”.<sup>91</sup> Foxe throughout his defense refused to believe that Perotine was not wed and must have in fact have had a husband. He stated,

Who was the husbād of this perotine, the Historiographer hath not expressed: I graunt, and what therof? Ergo thereupon, concludeth he, that for shame I durst not. Nay I may marueile rather that he durst for shame vtter such vntydy Argumentes, or so asseuerantly to pronouce of another mans mind & purpose, which is as priuie to him, as then it was to me vnknownen what was her husbandes name.<sup>92</sup>

Foxe’s belief that Perotine must have had a husband connected to his belief that the Guernsey women were not given due process as martyrs. Had they been more thoroughly examined, as in the case of Anne Askew or Elizabeth Young, Foxe argued that Perotine’s husband would have had time to return and come to the defense of his wife and child.

Foxe proceeded to expand on his theory as to the identify of Perotine’s potential husband and father of her child. Yet there are no church documents to suggest that she was married nor that the father of her child is who Foxe theorized it to be. Foxe suggested that it was a man by the name of David Iores, a minister who, theoretically, married Perotine in the time of King Edward at the Church of our Ladies Castle Parish at Guernsey.<sup>93</sup> Foxe’s defense of Perotine demonstrated that Foxe is in favor of gender roles as a rule. His defense of Perotine as having a husband is a careful move to ensure he cannot be accused of glorifying women who have children out of wedlock. However, given the state of early modern England and the ever-imminent threat of the return of Catholicism, Foxe can be theorized as more concerned with

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<sup>91</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2130.

<sup>92</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2130.

<sup>93</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2130.

preparing future Protestants to stand against the Papal authority rather than submit to it. By outlining how Perotine attempted at every point to submit to the Catholic church in order to save her and her child, only to have herself and the child killed regardless, Foxe is reiterating that submission to the Catholic church is insufficient to save someone's life. Should the new queen, Elizabeth I, return England to a Catholic state, Foxe wanted to ensure that the stories in his book would serve as guiding inspiration of how Protestants were meant to resist Catholic oppression not submit to it.

If Foxe's goal in presenting women's stories in the *Acts and Monuments* was to argue that women who adhere to societal expectations live while rebellious women die, then he successfully portrayed Perotine as a character whose story should have ended as the former but instead ended as the latter. Without Foxe's own additions, Perotine's story could have simply been a cautionary tale of what happens to women who have children out of wedlock. His own defense of her character instead fashioned her into an example that runs contrary to the belief that Foxe is merely using the women in his book as an example for ideal womanly behavior.

It is instead more likely that in Foxe's recounting of Perotine's story, as well as the story of Perotine's mother and sister, the focus was instead on the futility of submission and obedience to Catholicism.<sup>94</sup> Foxe highlighted Catholic cruelty, their unwillingness to give the martyrs due process in their examinations, and the Guernsey women's willingness to submit

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<sup>94</sup> Perotine's mother was a widow and therefore had submitted to the societal expectation of marriage and motherhood, and her sister, although there is little detail given to her specifically, also behaved in a similarly submissive manner throughout this ordeal.

throughout this narrative. This story then can be viewed as demonstrating the perils, not of acting in a rebellious manner as a woman in early modern England but instead, of behaving submissively and obediently to Catholic authority.

Another woman whose position in society did not save her from persecution at the hands of the Catholic church was, as Foxe describes, “a godly poore woman whiche suffered at Exter.”<sup>95</sup> This woman, whose name Foxe eventually learned was Agnes Prest, is described by Foxe as a martyr who outright defied her captors and refused any possibility of being released from captivity or spared punishment for her beliefs. Foxe states that Prest had a husband and child but after tolerating their Catholic practices for a time she eventually, “beganne to grow in contempt of her husband and chyl dren, and so taking nothing from them, but euen as shee went, departed from them.”<sup>96</sup> This was a rebellious act that defied the expectations of early modern mothers who, according to Jennifer Heller in *The Mother’s Legacy in Early Modern England*, were “expected to dedicate her life to her children”.<sup>97</sup> Through this one decision Foxe has already portrayed Agnes as someone who does not fit the mold of ideal womanly behavior.

As was the case in many premodern civilizations the church regulated who could end their marriage.<sup>98</sup> England did not have an established civil system for divorce and remarriage

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<sup>95</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1969.

<sup>96</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1969.

<sup>97</sup> Jennifer Heller, *The Mother’s Legacy in Early Modern England* (London, Routledge: Taylor and Francis Groups, 2011), 15.

<sup>98</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England, 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.

until 1857.<sup>99</sup> Excluding marriages that ended in death only about four percent of marriages were officially ended in early modern England.<sup>100</sup> There were cases, such as Prest's, where one partner abandoned the other, but in these cases the marriage was not officially ended. However, despite the impossibility of a legal divorce, there were those who were determined to separate from their spouse one way or another, but this was difficult. Lawrence Stone argues in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, that the bonds of marriage were at their strongest after the Reformation, when the grounds for annulment and separation became stricter, until just before the Restoration in 1660.<sup>101</sup>

The obligation of cohabitation in marriage was so strong that Foxe claimed that Prest was returned to her husband when her associates discovered that she was married.<sup>102</sup> Upon her return Prest was promptly reported to the authorities by her neighbors and tried for heresy and desertion. Foxe named Doctor Theoubleuile as Prest's examiner who, according to Foxe, immediately began the examination by reminding Prest that theology and the word of God are not things that a woman should concern herself with. Theoubleuile is quoted as stating, "Thou art an vnlearned person and a woman: wylt thou meddle with suche high matters, whiche all the Doctours of the world can not define? Wylt thou talke of so hye mysteries? Keepe thy worke, and meddle with that thou hast to doo. It is no womans matters, at cardes and towe to

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<sup>99</sup> Stone, *Broken Lives*, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Stone, *Broken Lives*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1997), 31-2, 37-8.

<sup>102</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1970.

be spoken of.”<sup>103</sup> This onslaught of questions from Theoubleuile can be read as an attempt by Foxe to communicate the aggressive nature of this interrogation.

Foxe then recounts how Theoubleuile further questioned Prest as to why she had left her husband and children. Prest responded by declaring, “where I must either forsake Christ, or my husband, I am contented to sticke onely to Christ my heauenly spouse, and renounce the other.”<sup>104</sup> Foxe framed this as Prest’s primary argument against her captors and it would eventually be credited as the final words spoken before she was burned at the stake. Her male captors found no way to convince Prest to return to her husband and so, according to Foxe, they had the wife of “one Walter Rauley” attempt to reason with her. Undoubtably, they thought, a good and virtuous wife might have better luck in converting a rebellious and heretical one to recant. This plan reportedly backfired however, and after visiting Prest in prison Walter Rauley’s wife is recorded by Foxe as having told her husband that, “in her life shee neuer heard a woman (of such simplicitie to see to) talke so godly, so perfectly, so sincerely, & so earnestly: in so much that if God were not with her, shee could not speake such things.”<sup>105</sup> Foxe also provided his readers with the testimonies of several other visitors to Prest all who, after conversing with her, reported her godly countenance and incredible ability at holding conversation. Foxe’s inclusion of the stories of Prest impressing her visitors with her godly conversation can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate to his readers that by remaining

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<sup>103</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1970.

<sup>104</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1970. This quote very clearly inspired Hickerson’s thesis in her article mentioned previously. Hickerson, “Gospelling Sisters ‘Goinge up and Downe,” pp. 1035–51.

<sup>105</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1971.

defiant in the face of persecution, martyrs have the potential to spread their faith by reaching others through their experience.

According to Foxe, Prest refused to return to her husband and child at every opportunity and instead accepted the fate of being executed for her beliefs. Perhaps the most interesting part of Prest's legacy is that her story so vehemently defied social norms and yet it inspired no criticism from commentators, Catholic or Protestant. Roberta Anderson argues that, "Foxe, by extolling the virtues of a woman who appeared to be breaking all the social rules of obedience, silence and faithfulness to her husband, was inviting criticism from both Catholic and Protestant polemicists, but surprisingly no-one took him to task over the case of Agnes Prest."<sup>106</sup> Despite the lack of comment about Prest's story among historians, her life remains an important example in of Foxe's overall argument. By reinforcing that one can bring increase to the Gospel through their experiences as a martyr, Foxe added another benefit to the list of reasons as to why he believes Protestant women should rebel against Catholic forces.

Prest's story exemplifies Megan Hickerson's argument that Foxe is generally in favor of rebellion against earthly husbands in the name of submission to their heavenly husband. However, while it is true that this is a justification that Foxe used to explain the behavior of women like Prest, who were resisting social norms that applied to both Catholics and Protestants, in this case the sanctity of marriage, Foxe goes beyond simply justifying the actions of certain martyrs. Edith Wilks Dolnikowski explains why Foxe includes examples like Prest. She states, "His open commendation of women who stepped out of the private sphere of home and

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<sup>106</sup> Anderson, "John Foxe's Seely, Poore Women." pp. 35. The man mentioned in the quote, Parsons, was a Catholic polemicists and outspoken critique of Foxe's work during Foxe's lifetime.

family to proclaim their faith, even at the risk of ridicule or martyrdom, underscores his conviction that public testimony is a vital component of Christian life, regardless of gender.”<sup>107</sup> Foxe pushed the narrative of submission to a heavenly husband, but by focusing on the earthly ramifications of these women’s actions and Foxe’s support of their actions, we are able to ascertain a sense of what Foxe wanted to accomplish through the telling of these stories. His approval and support of women like Prest can be considered Foxe attempting to inspire future generations to mimic their earthly acts of rebellion. In Prest’s speech on the pyre before her execution she stated, “God is my father, God is my mother, God is my sister, my brother, my kinsman, God is my frend most faithfull.”<sup>108</sup> Here we see perhaps Foxe’s primary purpose for including this story. He can be seen as attempting to communicate to his readers that public declaration of faith and loyalty to Christ, such as Prest’s, come before any kind of earthly relationship, even family.

Let us now consider another woman in the *Acts and Monuments* who defied the entirely submissive ideal of feminine behavior. Anne Askew was a Protestant martyr who was made famous for many reasons. She was the only women tortured in the tower of London and one of the first women in England to demand a divorce.<sup>109</sup> She demanded the divorce because her husband had thrown her out of their house, and forbade her from seeing her two children,

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<sup>107</sup> Dolnikowski, “Ten Feminine Exemplars for Reform”, pp. 200.

<sup>108</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1576, pp. 1971.

<sup>109</sup> Kimberly Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women’s Writing in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge, 2008), pp. 1



because she was a protestant. Askew's firsthand account of her ordeals was published and titled the *Examinations* in 1563.

Anne Askew's *Examinations* demonstrate the defiance that she showed in the face of persecution. Not only did she demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, but she also demonstrated a razor-sharp wit and a well-versed knowledge of scripture. Askew was imprisoned for heresy and then put through several rounds of examinations in the tower of London. During one of Askew's examinations she was questioned about her knowledge of several passages of scripture. She responded to these questions stating, "Whereupon he asked me, how I tooke those sentenced? I answered that I woulde not throw pearles amonge swine, for accornes were good inough."<sup>110</sup> Upon her persecutors telling her that women should not speak or talk about the word of God, Anne stated, "And then I asked him, how many women he had sene, go into þe pulpit & preach? He saide he neuer saw none. Then I sayde, he ought to finde no faute in poore womē, except they had offended the lawe."<sup>111</sup> This description of her countenance and behavior as told by Foxe can again be seen as him presenting a female martyr not as an ideal woman but as an ideal Protestant resisting Catholic injustice. This story also relates back to story of Perotine. In Perotine's story Foxe reminded his readers of the judicial innocence of Perotine and her child and in Foxe's telling of Askew's story he records her as having used this argument against her captors as well. Foxe's repeatedly points to the fact that neither of these women had broken the law but were still executed by the unjust Catholics.

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<sup>110</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 725.

<sup>111</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 726.

Anne was martyred not in Queen Mary's reign, but in Henry VIII's, in the year 1546. At the time the court was doing all they could to root out Protestant sympathies in the nobility, including Queen Katherine Parr. According to Foxe, the court had Askew tortured in the hopes that she would admit to having received aid from the queen or other members of the privy council so that they could make a case against them in court. Anne gave up the names of servants of Lady Hertford and Lady Denny, who had sent her money while she was imprisoned, but would never admit to having any relation to the queen.<sup>112</sup> This further frustrated her captors. Eventually, after several visits to the rack, Anne was condemned to be burned at the stake. According to Foxe, Anne had to be carried to the platform because the torture had left her unable to walk. On July 1st, 1546, she was burned alongside John Hadlam and John Hemly.<sup>113</sup>

The *Examinations* were reproduced in several works and commented on by many notable figures, two of which were John Foxe and John Bale. In his recounting of Anne Askew's story, Bale went to great lengths to justify Anne's actions. Bale has received much deserved criticism for his intrusive redactions of her examinations. Diane Watt notes that, "His (Bale's) extensive glosses reveal the extent to which he freely interpreted the material available to him to make it fit not only his apocalyptic historiographical scheme but also his assumptions about gender."<sup>114</sup> As an example of Bale's intrusiveness, during Aske's first examination when she told

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<sup>112</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 733.

<sup>113</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 737.

<sup>114</sup> Diane Watt, "Askew [married name Kyme], Anne (c. 1521–1546), writer and Protestant martyr." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 19 Sep. 2020. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-798>. Also see

her examiner that she would not answer his questions because, "I woulde not throw pearles amonge swine, for accornes were good inough."<sup>115</sup> Bale then spends an entire page and a half, double the length of her response, explaining how had she been aware of the seventh chapter of Matthew her argument could have been improved.<sup>116</sup> Bale downplayed Askew's agency and intelligence by presenting her as a much more submissive and weaker character than her original story would have had a reader believe.

Foxe, on the other hand, took a different approach in his presentation of Anne Askew's story. Foxe for the most part allows Anne's story to be recounted to the reader rather than commented upon. He used the usual marginalia that he included across the entirety of the *Acts and Monuments*: mostly points such as expanding upon an abbreviated name or clarifying who was speaking in the moment. Foxe does make the occasional interjection in the story, but his purpose was not to explain Askew's actions or present her in a more appealing way to his protestant readers. Instead, these interjections took on the same functions as his marginalia and provided information to better help his readers understand the story.

For instance, after the recounting of Askew's first examination Foxe introduced the "Write of Boner." He did this because the source of the transcription may be confusing to some, as Anne states that she had no memory of Boner (Edmund Bonner) in a later confession. Foxe

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Patricia Pender, "Reading Bale Reading Anne Askew: Contested Collaboration in the Examinations." *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2010): pp. 507-522. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/763492385?accountid=10141>.

<sup>115</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 725.

<sup>116</sup> John Bale and Anne Askew, *The First Examination of the Worthy Servant of God, Mystresse Anne Askew* (London: Printed by Robert Walde-Graue, 1585.) pp. 7-8.

then clarified how a man can be transcribing Anne's words despite her not having any memory of him stating,

And for as much as mention here is made of the Writ̄g of Boner, which this godly Ann sayd before she had not in memory, therefore I thought in this place to infer the same, both with the whol circumstance of Boner, & with the title therunto prefixed by the register, & also with her owne subscription: to the entent the reader seing the same subscription nether to agre with the time of the title aboue prefixed, nor with the subscription after the writing annexed, he might the better vnderstād therby what credit is to be geuē hereafter to such bishops, and to such registers. The tenor of Boners wriing procedeth thus.<sup>117</sup>

The rest of Anne Askew's story in Foxe's first edition of *The Acts and Monuments* left her narrative alone almost entirely. Foxe took an opposing strategy to Bale's. Instead of molding the sources with commentary to fit a narrative that would have made her a more ideal example of a submissive and obedient woman, Foxe allowed the narrator to speak for herself. Foxe's dedication to the idea that Individuals should be responsible for proclaiming their faith is demonstrated here, especially when contrasted against Bale's interpretation of the *Examinations*. It can be theorized that Foxe wanted Anne's story presented as she wrote it because through her own telling she was already a figure of how to rebel against Catholic authority. While Bale was more concerned with explaining away or justifying her actions to make her a more ideal female role model of submission and obedience, it can be assumed that Foxe wanted Anne's story to highlight bravery, strength, and the responsibility of the individual believer to proclaim their faith, similar to other martyrs in *The Acts and Monuments*.

Foxe's silence allowed Askew's story to be presented as a narrative which demonstrated how women could resist Catholic oppression. Foxe took this a step further in his closing

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<sup>117</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 728.

statement on Askew's story where he stated, "the good Anne Askew ... being compassed in with flames of fire, as a blessed sacrifice unto God ... leaving behind her a singular example of christian constancy for all men to follow."<sup>118</sup> Not just women, but also men were meant to follow the example of this martyr who, despite torture and persecution never wavered in her dedication to Christ. This is Foxe's attempt at solidifying Anne's legacy as an ideal Protestant not an ideal woman.

Prest and Askew were both presented by Foxe as stalwart figures: rebellious personalities that defied all that a woman was meant to be in early modern England. Both were written as witty, unafraid, and disobedient towards the men that were seeking to break them into submission. Defiant to the end, both of these women were not presented as role models of submission or obedience. As indicated by these examples Foxe can be seen as using these stories to ensure that should Catholicism return to power in England, the women of England have figures that inspire them to action against the Catholic church. Coupled with the story of Perotine and the Guernsey women, it is clear that Foxe was trying to impress upon his readers that submission to the Catholic church only leads to tragedy and that faced with this kind of religious oppression and persecution the appropriate response is to rebel. While Perotine, Prest, and Askew all faced the same fate at the pyre, Prest and Askew were portrayed as heroic martyrs who were meant to be seen as ideal models of behavior under Catholic persecution, while Perotine was portrayed as a cautionary tale of the dangers of submitting to Catholicism.

### **The Distinct Case of Elizabeth Young**

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<sup>118</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1563, pp. 728.

Elizabeth Young is an interesting addition to the *Acts and Monuments*: although she suffered for her belief in Protestantism, and she herself did not use her position in society to leverage her way out of the situation, she also was not martyred. This is perhaps the story that most exemplifies that Foxe was not simply arguing that women who submit to societal gender roles live and those who do not die. Instead, Foxe's narrative of Young's experience can be read as him having attempted to use this story to provide his female readers with an example of how to conduct themselves under Catholic oppression. In Foxe's telling Young exemplifies entirely what early modern women were not meant to be. She is depicted as outspoken, educated, opinionated, and refused to submit to the patriarchal powers that threatened her. At the end of her story, rather suffering any kind of consequence for her outright defiance of patriarchal authority, she instead returns home to her family.

If Foxe's intent was to create ideal examples of how Protestant women should behave in a patriarchal society, then Young's presence is disruptive. In the introduction to Young's story Foxe gave the reader his reasoning for including Young's story. He stated,

Wherin how fiercely she was assaulted, how shamefully she was reuiled, how miserably handled, & what answeres she made vnto the aduersaries in her own defense, and finally after all this, how she escaped and passed through þ<sup>e</sup> pikes (beyng yet, as I heare say, alyue) I thought to giue the reader here to see and vnderstand.<sup>119</sup>

The claim that Foxe wanted his readers to understand the story is vague; it does not outline what it is that Foxe wants his readers to understand specifically. However, when the story is examined, what Foxe wanted his audience to take away from this story can be ascertained.

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<sup>119</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2280.

Foxe started the story by detailing Young's capture and arrest in London for distributing Protestant texts. She was then examined by one Dr. Martin. Foxe claims that Martin's goal was not to determine Young's guilt or innocence but instead to make her divulge the names of the people both who provided her with the books to distribute, and who had received books already. Martin attempted to fool Young by telling her that they already have the names of all those involved and that they are simply attempting to determine whether she was willing to cooperate. When Young refused to give up any names however, the charade falls and Dr. Martin launches into an angry tirade against Young, mainly attacking her character. He states, "Doost thou thinke that we will be full aunswered by this examination that thou hast made? Thou rebell whore and traytourly hereticke, thou doost refuse to to sweare vpō the Euangelist before a ludge, I heare say."<sup>120</sup> Foxe then stated that Martin proceeded to threaten Young with the rack in order to force her to divulge the names of her fellow conspirators.

Foxe depicted Young as refusing to be intimidated in the face of these threats. In fact, her bravery in the face of torture was so great that Sir Roger Cholmley, who was present at her fourth examination is recorded as having said, "pound that it is a man in woman's clothes.... I will lay twenty pound that it is a man."<sup>121</sup> Foxe emphasized how her examiners could not believe that a woman could have such little fear in the face of torture. Foxe also drew attention to how these men found it difficult to fathom that a woman should have such great wit, and knowledge of scripture. In a conversation regarding the nature of the Eucharist with the Bishop

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<sup>120</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2309

<sup>121</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2310

of London the bishop informed Young that Christ had proclaimed that, “my fleshe is fleshe in fleshe”, to which Young responded, “who so receiuethe him fleshely, shall have a fleshely resurrection.”<sup>122</sup> Foxe’s emphasis on Young’s wit, religious knowledge, and fearlessness in the fact of persecution can be read as Foxe’s attempt to shape Young into a role model for future generations of protestant women, who would need these traits to stand up against the possible return of Catholicism.

Her captors, particularly the Bishop of London’s Chancellor, were recorded by Foxe as not only baffled by her knowledge of scripture, but also deeply affronted at her ability to partake in biblical conversation and debate. The bishop’s chancellor queried her, “Why thou art a woman of fair years: why shouldst thou meddle with the scriptures? It is necessary for thee to believe and that is enough.”<sup>123</sup> The only way that the bishop’s chancellor could seem to justify Young’s knowledge of scripture to himself is to firstly, assume that a man had taught her all that she knew about scripture, and secondly that she had somehow acquired this knowledge in a wicked way. He accomplished both of these goals in one assumption by asking, “What preist hast thou layne withall, that thou hast so much scripture? Thou art some Priestes woman I thinke, for thou wilt take vpon thee to reason and teach the best Doctor in all the land, thou.”<sup>124</sup> In order for his pride to remain intact at his inability to outwit Young, the bishop’s chancellor had to assume that the knowledge was bestowed upon Young by a man.

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<sup>122</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2310.

<sup>123</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2313.

<sup>124</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2312.



However, in Young's story there is no man present. At no point does Foxe record any dialogue in relation to her husband. However, Foxe does state that she has several children. This brings the question of the identity of the father of these children to the forefront. During her examinations Young is recorded as being called a whore countless times and, as previously mentioned, many of the men who examine her are convinced that she achieved her level of spiritual knowledge by lying out of wedlock with a priest. Levin observed that, "Apparently to Dr. Martin heretical belief and lack of sexual chastity go hand in hand."<sup>125</sup> Foxe made no effort to provide the name of the father of the children and the examiners at no point insinuated that her children were born out of wedlock. Coupled with the previous example of Perotine, where Foxe went to great lengths to explain the absence of her husband, we can assume that Young was most likely a widow and the father of her children passed away at some point before to her imprisonment.

Her children and her status as mother however did prove to be the key to her salvation. After her final examination Foxe states that two of young's women neighbors, who had been caring for her children during her captivity, petitioned for her release.<sup>126</sup> The first neighbor claimed that, "her children were lyke to perish" and the second claimed that she had, "gat her child a nurse and I am threatened to stand to the keepyng of the child."<sup>127</sup> It should be noted however that unlike in the case of Marbeck's Wife, Young was not recorded as using her status as a mother to petition for her own freedom. Instead, it was her neighbors who used this social

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<sup>125</sup> Levin, "Women in The Book of Martyrs," pp. 202.

<sup>126</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2312.

<sup>127</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*, Ed. 1570, pp. 2312.

role as leverage to achieve her release. Whether they did so to free their friend or because they wanted to avoid the responsibility of taking care of her children is not relevant. What is relevant is that Foxe presented these women as being able to successfully leverage Young's social position as a mother to secure her release. Young never returned to another examination because soon after her release Queen Mary's reign came to an end and Queen Elizabeth's would begin, freeing her from the threat of any further persecution.

Young's story is a peculiar one in the *Acts and Monuments*. Foxe never mentioned Young as having attempted to use her status as a mother to her advantage. Although it is eventually used by her neighbors to her benefit, she herself never attempted to use her position in society to rescue herself from persecution. Foxe portrayed Young throughout her whole ordeal a rebellious spirit, constantly engaging in theological discourse and triumphing over her captors in terms of biblical knowledge and wit. This is not uncommon in the *Acts and Monuments*. Foxe presents many women who refuse to behave according to the role's society had laid out for them and some who used these expectations to secure their release and bring an end their persecution. However, Foxe's stories of women who refused to use their position in society to their benefit, typically ended in their martyrdom.<sup>128</sup> The fact that Young survived at the end of her story made it unique.

If Perotine's story can be read as a cautionary tale of the dangers of submission in *The Acts and Monuments*, and if Prest's and Askew's stories were meant to inspire action despite the knowledge that these actions may lead to execution, then Young's story can be seen as

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<sup>128</sup> Some examples of women who refuse to behave submissively or in a stereotypically feminine fashion in the face of torture or execution by the Marian state include, Anne Askew and Perotine Massey.

Foxe providing a hopeful premonition of the future to his readers. Rebellious and defiant, Young seemed to be on the same path as Askew and Prest. However, she was saved by the defeat of Catholicism in Mary's death, and the return of Protestantism in Elizabeth's ascension. This can be seen as Foxe sending a message to his readers with the ending of Young's story. That message can be interpreted as rebellious and defiant women like Young having a place in Elizabeth's England. Women like her would be needed to instigate further rebellion should Elizabeth allow Catholicism return to England.

This story personifies what this paper theorizes Foxe's driving intent to be in the presentation of these women's stories. It was not to present ideal role models of womanly behavior. Foxe never recorded an attempt on Young's part to return to her children and she is portrayed as seemingly content to allow them to be cared for indefinitely by her neighbors. This is the exact opposite of what Tudor England would expect from a mother. As a mother her driving goal throughout this whole experience should have been to return to and care for her children.<sup>129</sup> Instead, we are presented with the story of someone who was willing to leave all earthly things behind, even family, in order to rebel against her Catholic captors. This once again demonstrates that Foxe's motivation was to not encourage his female readers to be submissive and obedient in that face of persecution but instead to provide them with role models that would encourage them to rebel and resist against a corrupt and heretical state no matter the cost. Given the tumultuous circumstances surrounding the throne of England at this time, and that England had been through several generations of rulers swapping between Catholic and Protestant faiths, Foxe was providing the next generation of English Protestants

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<sup>129</sup> Heller, *The Mother's Legacy*, pp. 15.

with examples of how to resist and rebel should England fall under the influence of Catholicism yet again.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis challenges the assumption that the women included in John Foxe's *The Acts and Monuments* are primarily presented to model ideal feminine behavior and instead suggests that they are presented as models of ideal Protestant behavior under Catholic persecution. The first examples outlined in this paper are of women who Foxe presented as having successfully used their roles in society to save them from persecution and execution. They demonstrated that even when Foxe can be read as portraying women in a way that conforms to societal expectations, making them theoretical ideal examples of womanly behavior, their stories as a whole can be interpreted differently. Foxe portrayed John Marbeck's wife and Katherine Parr as having offered a performance of submission to patriarchal authority. Foxe's full telling of the stories, however, demonstrated that these women used their positions as mothers and wives to their advantage and presented themselves not as ideal examples of submission and obedience but instead as women intelligent enough to use their position in society to their advantage. This allowed them to rebel against Catholic authority and avoid the consequences.

The second category of women, women whose positions in society did not save them from persecution, further demonstrated the rebellious nature of Foxe's presentation of these stories. Using the story of the Guernsey women Foxe can be read as having provided a cautionary tale to his readers, but it was not a cautionary tale of the ramifications of defying societal expectations. It provided a cautionary tale of what happens when Protestants submit

to Catholic authority. Perotine and her family attempted at all points to submit to Catholicism according to Foxe. He records them as having obeyed the law and having sworn to return to the Catholic fold, and in return they suffered the most horrific fate in the entirety of the *Acts and Monuments*. Women like Agnes Prest and Anne Askew can be theorized as Foxe's ideal example of Protestant behavior under Catholic persecution. Foxe writes them as not only having defied their captors, but also having outwitted them, and trumping them in their knowledge of scripture and theology. Foxe portrayed Elizabeth Young similarly to Prest and Askew by outlining how she also defied her captors but was spared the consequences of her rebellious actions thanks to her neighbors' use of her status as a mother. When viewing the cautionary tale of Perotine in conjunction with Foxe's praise of Prest, Askew, and Young it can be derived that Foxe is attempting to simultaneously warn against submission to, and encourage resistance against, Catholicism.

The deaths of these women, while horrific, cannot be viewed solely as a warning of what happens to women who act defiantly towards a patriarchal authority; but instead, their deaths can also be viewed as the cementing of their legacies by Foxe as role models for generations to come, making them inspirations to Protestant English women. While a worldly death may be something the readers *The Acts and Monuments* may have feared, these same readers bore witness to the immortalization of these rebellious women as they would now forever be counted among those who were simultaneously unfortunate and blessed enough to die for their faith. While a worldly death may be terrifying, being counted among the holy host of martyrs was something all early modern Protestants would have considered an honor. Finally, as Foxe hoped to achieve, the women of England had examples of how they were to

conduct themselves should Catholicism take control over England once again. Not submissively and obediently, but rebelliously and defiantly.

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