Beyond the Text: Finding Anne Askew

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Beyond the Text: Finding Anne Askew

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Master of Arts

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This thesis investigates the identity of the early reformist Tudor martyr Anne Askew. Anne Askew was a noblewoman who was tortured and executed for her reformist religious views at the hands of high ranking officials at the court of Henry VIII. As a result of this ordeal, Anne became a notable figure in the emerging Protestant hagiography of the sixteenth century.

The first chapter discusses a manuscript written by Anne before her execution which narrates her imprisonment and persecution at the hands of Thomas Wriothesley, Sir Richard Rich, and Bishop Stephen Gardiner. Lost to time, Anne’s manuscript exists today as a heavily edited text in the works of Protestant hagiographers and reformists John Bale and John Foxe. While historians have attempted to recover Anne’s manuscript from the framework of her later editors and co-religionists, their voices and texts have become inseparably intertwined. By comparing John Bale’s *Examinations* and John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, the two texts in which Anne’s manuscript appears, it is clear that Anne Askew’s religious ideas can only be investigated through the lens of her editors.

Chapter 2 explores Anne’s Askew’s identity beyond her text. Anne Askew has traditionally been studied from a gendered perspective, portrayed more as an early-modern feminist than a fervent member of the reformist faith. An examination of the events of Anne’s life and an overview of scholarly literature about martyrdom reveals that Anne’s actions were motivated by religion and not solely by her gender. Anne Askew was a wife, mother, and martyr with motives both known and unknown. An investigation of scholarly works about Anne Askew shows that the writing of Anne’s manuscript and her faith are critical to her identity.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband. I could not have completed this project without his love and support. It is also dedicated to my mother and father, who taught me that anything can be accomplished through patience and perseverance.
Acknowledgements

I cannot fully express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor Dr. Dale Hoak. I could not have asked for a more enthusiastic and knowledgeable advisor. This thesis would not have been possible without his unending patience and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Jim Whittenburg and Dr. Gail Bossenga, whose unwavering support on this project was deeply appreciated. To Monica Costlow, who gave me the knowledge and skills I needed to pass my language exam and complete this project, Vielen Dank. Lastly, it is a pleasure to thank Deborah Nickles, colleague and friend, who gave me the motivation I needed to finish what I had begun.
Introduction

Anne Askew was a unique individual executed for her faith during the reign of Henry VIII. She was born to a wealthy Lincolnshire family in 1521, but the details of her early life are not well known. Anne’s life took a fateful turn when she sought to secure a divorce from her husband on the grounds that his adherence to such Catholic traditions as transubstantiation meant their marriage was void in the eyes of God. When she traveled to London to secure her divorce, Anne found herself in the center of a reformist scandal at court. Several high ranking members of the King’s council tortured her in the hope that she would name reformist conspirators and link the scandal directly to Queen Catherine Parr. It is unclear how closely linked Anne was with influential reformists at court, but she refused to divulge any names and was later burned at the stake in 1546. Prior to her execution, Anne wrote an account of her trial and torture, which was published first by the reformist hagiographer John Bale, and later by John Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments*. Anne Askew’s case is significant in the Tudor period because of her torture. Anne was a noblewoman who was already condemned to die, and thus should have been exempt from such a punishment. She is also of interest to scholars because of her manuscript, which was published by Bale and Foxe.

For five centuries the identity of Anne Askew has been understood through various interpretations of the manuscript she left behind. That manuscript, *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, which narrates the trial and torture of this young Henrician martyr in her own words, has been scrutinized and shaped for various purposes by numerous editors and scholars. First published by John Bale in 1547, a year after Askew’s execution, and later by John Foxe in 1563, the text was used to establish the
roots of a Protestant tradition, as well as transmit the various religious and political opinions of Bale and Foxe. These editors attempted to shape Anne Askew's identity using the words set to paper by her own hand. In contrast, recent investigations of the *Examinations* have represented an attempt to retrieve the "real" Anne Askew from within the confines of the altered text. While these attempts to distill Askew's identity from the *Examinations* have lead to a better understanding of who she was and what motivated her actions, they have served to gloss over perhaps the most obvious context for framing Askew's text, that she was one of the first female martyrs of the Tudor period.

That Anne Askew was a passionate and articulate woman is readily evident in the language of her manuscript, as well as in the courage of her conviction in the face of a horrific death at the stake. Much attention has been paid to Askew's voice and prose, which were very uncharacteristic for a gentlewoman in Tudor England. While many historians have looked through the lens of gender to study Anne Askew's story, the question of her place in the framework of Tudor martyrdom remains largely unexplored. Little discussion of the story of Anne Askew focuses on how this woman of extraordinary religious conviction influenced the willingness of other women during the time to die for their faith. It remains unclear why she was chosen specifically by Bale and Foxe to help build the connection between the burgeoning English Protestant tradition and the roots of early Christian martyrs. This thesis will attempt to view Anne Askew not as an early modern feminist author, but as member of a numerically small but influential minority of individuals who gave their lives for their faith. By providing first an examination of Anne's voice as it had been printed by Foxe and Bale, I will then examine how Anne fits into the larger framework of Tudor martyrdom.
In order to fully understand Anne as a writer, woman of faith, and martyr, it is necessary to describe the political and religious climate of England at the time. The Act of Supremacy in 1534 established Henry VIII as the supreme head of the Church of England, but failed to create a unified national religion. Despite this break with Rome, the King was a traditionalist, and remained faithful to orthodox Catholic doctrine and ritual. This created conservative and reformist factions at court who differed on two primary religious issues. The first issue was that of the language of the Bible. Conservatives believed the Bible should remain only in Latin, while reformists wanted the Holy Scripture printed in English.

The second, and perhaps more controversial issue, was that of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The conservatives believed that the bread and wine consecrated during the mass truly became the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Many reformists however, viewed the ritual as merely symbolic, and denied that any such transformation took place. Reformists also sought to remove what they viewed as Catholic pomp and ceremony from the English church. Henry’s own loyalty to traditional Catholic dogma and his refusal to deny such traditional beliefs as transubstantiation kept the divisions between conservatives and reformists alive and thriving during his lifetime.

In the 1530s, blurry lines between conservatives and evangelical reformers resulted in an indistinct definition of what constituted heresy against the English church. Conservatives in the Henrician Church followed the King’s belief in transubstantiation and his demand for members of the clergy not to marry and remain celibate. Reformers challenged everything from transubstantiation to the belief in purgatory and a priest’s right to marry. The passage of the Act of Six Articles in 1539 was an attempt explicitly
to state the doctrinal beliefs of the Church of England. The Act was intended as a “bulwark against the rising tide of heresy.”¹ The Six Articles succeeded in upholding the doctrine of transubstantiation, although not by name. It also upheld communion, private mass, and auricular confession, and the rule that priests cannot marry and that “vows of chastity freely and advisedly made were binding under divine law.”²

Doctrinal division in the Henrician church did not end with the passage of the Six Articles. England did not unite, either politically or religiously, under the “Protestant label” in Henry’s lifetime.³ Although the theological conflict could be witnessed in palaces and parishes throughout England, it was most evident in one place above all others. The majority of evangelical reformers could be found in the city of London.⁴ According to historian Richard Rex, the “attractions of the economic capital of the country, and the political capital…which orbited London through the palaces of Greenwich, Westminster, and Hampton Court, drew in most of the leading Reformers of the first generation.”⁵ This geographical hotbed of reformist activity is significant to Askew’s story, as her journey to London to seek a divorce from her conservative husband was a precursor to her imprisonment and execution.

Anne Askew’s Career

A brief synopsis of the life of Anne Askew, and the circumstances leading to her execution, is needed next to see how she fits into this landscape of religious and doctrinal division. Anne Askew was born in 1521 in Lincolnshire. She was the daughter of Sir William Asycough, a prominent gentleman at the court of King Henry VIII.⁶ Sir William accompanied the King on several campaigns, including one to France in May 1520. According to Derek Wilson, “it was a high honour indeed to be numbered in the royal
retinue on this grand occasion.” Only those who were close to the King had been chosen to accompany him. 7

The Asycoughs were prominent in Lincolnshire, where, according to Wilson, Anne’s father carved out a position of power and authority “greater than that held previously in Lincolnshire by his predecessors.” 8 Anne had two brothers, Francis and Edward, and two sisters, Martha and Jane. Francis would later be knighted and inherit his father’s estate. Edward would become a cup-bearer at the court of Henry VIII. 9 These family ties ensured that Anne Askew would have connections at the court of Henry VIII.

Wilson states that, “In the education of the women of his household, Sir William Asycough showed how enlightened a man he was.” 10 William Asycough allowed his daughters to read the Bible in English, and Anne in particular absorbed and learned Scripture by heart. She became fascinated with reformist religious ideas, and began to read the Bible to servants and townspeople alike.

Sir William had arranged a marriage between his eldest daughter Martha and a Master Thomas Kyme of Friskney. 11 Martha died before the marriage ceremony, so in order to preserve the dowry arrangements that had been made, Anne was promised to Kyme instead. 12

Thomas Kyme was a steadfast religious conservative and Anne Askew an ardent reformist. Anne undoubtedly saw it as her duty to convert her husband, and their marriage resulted in a tense domestic situation for both Kyme and Askew. In 1544 Askew sought a divorce on the grounds that “her marriage was no longer valid in the sight of God.” The bishop’s court at Lincoln ruled against her, but Anne would not be
deterred. She decided to fight the judgment, and took her case to the Court of Chancery in London.13

Once in London, Anne would find the “fellowship, encouragement, and instruction in the faith” she so highly prized.14 John Lascelles, a family friend, introduced her to his circle of evangelicals, and Anne quickly became prominent among them.15 In 1544, however, Anne’s two year period of persecution began when she was arrested on charges of heresy. She was summoned before the quest, “an official heresy hearing in front of a commission,” and questioned about her beliefs.16

During her first examination Anne was interrogated by the bishop of London, Edmund Bonner. He questioned her on her beliefs concerning transubstantiation and the Mass, but Askew skillfully avoided the trap being set for her with her clever use of rhetoric and knowledge of Scripture. For example, when asked by Bonner to clarify her understanding of the statement that “God was not in temples made with handes,” Askew answered only that she “wolde not throwe pearles amonge swine, for acorns were good ynough.”17

It was in this manner that Anne evaded the incriminating questions of her accusers. Askew was set free after this first ordeal for lack of evidence. Her trials were not over, however, as she had made an enemy of the conservative Lord Chancellor, Thomas Wriothesley. Over the course of the next few months, authorities began to take a greater interest in her beliefs and activities. Anne was arrested again on March 10, 1546. At this time she was caught attempting to hide at the house of her brother, Francis, in South Kelsey, and was returned to London for further questioning. It is believed that this
second push to examine Askew came not only from the conservative faction of Henry’s
court, but also from Thomas Kyme.18

The reason for Anne’s second “examination” is linked intrinsically to a plot by
the conservative faction at the court against Katherine Parr. It is thought that the three
men who would become Anne’s chief interrogators, the bishop of Winchester, Stephen
Gardiner, Thomas Wriothesley, and Sir Richard Rich, were desperately seeking a way to
destroy the reformist queen. Bishop of Winchester Stephen Gardiner was a “theologian,
administrator”, and at the time of Anne’s trial and execution, one of Henry VIII’s chief
councilors.19 Thomas Wriothesley was Lord Chancellor at the time of Anne’s execution,
and was known for his ambition in trying to uncover and punish reformists at court.20 Sir
Richard Rich, despite holding no major office in the mid-1540s, still served as an active
member of the privy council and joined both Gardiner and Wriothesley in actively
seeking out and persecuting heretics at court.21 Playing on Henry’s own fears of reformist
ideas percolating at court, Gardiner eventually received permission from the King to
investigate the beliefs of Katherine Parr, and those ladies at court believed to share in her
heretical ideas.22

Word had reached Gardiner, Wriothesley, and Rich, that Anne might have had
ties to reformist sympathizers in the queen’s court. On June 28, 1546 Anne was
arraigned for heresy at the Guildhall. When she again refused to recant her beliefs, Anne
was sentenced to death without a trial and imprisoned in the Tower.23 The next day she
was questioned specifically regarding Katherine, Duchess of Suffolk; Anne, Countess of
Hertford (the future Duchess of Somerset); and Lady Joan Denny.24
When Askew refused to name any noblewoman who might have assisted her at court, she was tortured on the rack. In her own account she stated

"Then they ded put me on the racke, bycause I confessed no ladyes nor gentyllwomen to be of my opynyon, and theron they kepte me a longe tyme. And bycause I laye styll and ded not crye, my lorde Chauncellour and master Ryche, toke peynes to racke me their owne handes, tyll I was nygh dead." 25

Given this account, it had long been thought that Thomas Wriothesley and Richard Rich were the ones who personally tortured Anne Askew. John Bale listed their names as her torturers in his first accounts of her Examinations. John Foxe later listed Thomas Wriothesly and John Baker as the men who put Anne on the rack in various editions of his Acts and Monuments. In Foxe’s 1583 edition of the Acts and Monuments, John Baker’s name appears instead of Richard Rich. Thomas Freeman has demonstrated that “it is impossible to say just who racked Askew” given this discrepancy between Bale’s and Foxe’s account of Askew’s torture. Whether the discrepancy between Richard Rich and John Baker was a result of a lack of information, or the result of confusion on the part of Foxe, one is left wondering who actually put Anne on the rack. 26

It was not only unprecedented for a gentlewoman to be tortured in the course of a religious interrogation; it was also against the law. Anne Askew was a member of the gentry and already condemned to die. These factors should have exempted her from torture on both legal and moral grounds. It is clear that those who did torture her “ventured to exceed the bounds of constitutional law” in their quest to uncover a heresy scandal at court involving Katherine Parr. 27 After this ordeal her legs were broken; too
wounded to walk to the stake under her own power, Anne was executed in Smithfield on July 16, 1546 at the age of 25.28

There are many remarkable dimensions to Anne Askew’s life. Anne knew when traveling to London which political circles to approach in seeking her divorce. After leaving her husband and children and finding fellowship with other reformists in London, she found herself at the center of the political scandal and heresy hunt at court. This court dimension was treated extensively by Foxe in the Acts and Monuments. It served to set the stage for the clash between evangelicals and conservatives, and so must be considered as part of the story of Anne Askew.

Anne Askew found herself at the center of a perceived outbreak of heresy at court. Stephen Gardiner complained to Henry VIII that “heresy had crept into every corner of the court and even into Henry’s privy chamber” in 1543.29 With the king’s authorization and permission, he and Thomas Wriothesley, Richard Rich, and Edmund Bonner actively searched for reformers at court. The target of these searches, according to Foxe, was Queen Katherine Parr, long rumored to have reformist leanings. The conservatives hoped to remove her from the throne. These influential members of the privy council hoped to persecute several women at court, together with their husbands, who were rumored to be in the Queen’s reformist circles. When Anne refused to implicate any women at court, her interrogators were forced to seek the Queen’s removal through other avenues. At one point the conservative faction went as far as drawing up charges against Katherine Parr that Henry did in fact sign, but they were never acted upon. When Wriothesley tried to arrest the Queen with armed men after Anne’s
execution, the King turned him away. The plan to remove Katherine Parr never came to fruition.30

Although this plot represents one aspect of Anne’s story, it is not a part of the larger subject of this thesis. Anne Askew was tortured and executed for heresy by the conservative faction at court. The charges leveled against her were politically motivated, but her interrogators and finally executioners could not use her to achieve their ultimate goal. Since Anne did not provide any names during her torture, one will forever be left wondering what, if any, were her political connections at court. She may have developed connections with several women at court only after her first examination. Unfortunately the question of her political connections is one that will remain unanswered. This thesis will attempt to examine how Anne Askew’s identity was shaped by the early editors of her so-called Examinations.
Chapter 1

Framing the Text: The Motives of Bale and Foxe

The goal of this chapter is to examine the inherent textual problem surrounding the text of the *Examinations* and demonstrate how this problem has influenced current scholarly depictions of Anne Askew. In addition, I will highlight the historiographic trends reflected in current scholarship. To accomplish this goal I begin first with an examination of the original editors of her text.

The narrative of Anne Askew’s life presents a rich and complex textual problem: Anne Askew exists only in a manuscript shaped heavily by its first editors. The differences between Bale’s Askew and Foxe’s Askew are many, as are the differences in their style and prose and the agenda behind their work. It is necessary to understand how each editor structured Askew’s words in order to understand how modern scholarship has approached her text.

John Bale, bishop of Ossory, antiquarian, historian, and writer, was born in Suffolk, on November 21, 1495. A staunch reformist, Bale was outraged at the conservative shift in religious policy during the reign of Henry VIII. In the eyes of Bale, the conservative Church of England was “merely popery without the pope” and Bale turned in his works towards a reformed Church cleansed of Catholic influence. According to Rainer Pineas, Bale’s main objectives in his works were “to establish a tradition for what the Catholics considered a ‘new’ church” and show how the English clergy “are really papists at heart and long for a return to Rome.” He tried to accomplish both of these goals through his publication of Anne Askew’s text.
John Bale published *The first examinacyon of Anne Askew* in 1546 during his period of exile in Germany. Bale left England for the continent after the passage of the Act of Six Articles in 1539. The Act reaffirmed the King's faith in traditional Catholic doctrine and ritual, and so Bale left for the continent in order to find a place where he could freely compose his Protestant writings. *The latter examinacyon of Anne Askew* was published in 1547 upon his return to England. Bale's manuscript represents the only original version of the text to have survived. Bale uses the text to portray Anne Askew as "a gentylwoman verye yonge, daynty, and tender" executed at the hands of "wyllfullye cruell and spyghtfull tyrauntes." Bale contributed heavily to the narrative of Askew's ordeal, adding a preface to each version and stopping the flow of the account constantly to add comments and attacks on Anne's accusers. In his preface to *the first examinacyon*, he compares Anne Askew to the early Christian martyr, Blandina, stating that

"Great was the love, Blandina had to Christ. No lesse was the love of Anne Askewe. Blandina never fainted in torment. No more ded Anne Askew in sprete, whan she was so terribly racked by Wrysleye the chaunceller and Ryche, that the strynges of her armes and eyes were perished." This comparison is crucial to discussions of how Bale shaped the identity of Anne Askew.

Bale promised his readers that he had indeed published the text Askew "sent abroade by her owne hande writynge." Despite Bale's assurance of the authenticity of his source, however, historians still question whether the text was genuine. After all, the number of Bale's words in the text nearly equals that which is purportedly Askew's. Historian Leslie Fairfield has studied the content and prose of the sections of text written
by Bale, and those sections he claims belong to Anne. The style and tone of these sections differ so dramatically that it is almost certain they were written by two different authors. Fairfield cites as the most poignant example of this difference the diction in Askew's description of her torture. Askew recounts plainly and without emotion how,

"Then they ded put me on the racke, bycause I confessed no ladyes nor gentyllwomen to be of my opynon, and theron they kepte me a longe tyme. And bycause I laye styll and ded not crye, my lorde Chauncellour and master Ryche, toke peynes to racke me their owne handes, tyll I was nygh dead."

According to Fairfield, Bale repeatedly exhibited a forceful or even enraged tone throughout his works. It is highly unlikely that he would recount such an outrageous and horrific event so calmly.

Although Fairfield points to two minor discrepancies in Bale’s work, he concludes that on the whole Bale "possessed a first-person narrative...which he published verbatim - so the prickly yet attractive personality of the lady did shine through the typological exegesis." In other words, Fairfield believes that Bale added to Askew’s text but left her identity intact.

In light of Fairfield’s perceptions, historians agree that Bale did indeed publish an authentic manuscript by Anne Askew. This does not mean, however, that the text could not have been revised or that Bale did not make every attempt to portray Anne Askew as a weak and feeble woman in a way that served his political motives. Elaine V. Beilin discussed the conflict of gender in Bale’s use of Askew as a model for evangelical martyrs. Bale viewed Anne as a weak, silent, and feeble woman. In his portrayal of her as a martyr, however, she is seen as “courageous, disputatious, and strong.” Beilin
observes that Bale ignores this paradox “by arguing that Askew’s strength came wholly from God and was a sure sign of the truth of the reformed cause.”\textsuperscript{46} The issue of gender in the interpretations of Anne Askew is an important one that will be discussed later in more detail.

Bale portrays Anne Askew as a weak woman and demonizes the Henrician conservatives through his framing of the text. Bale’s arguments with Anne’s accusers allow him to rebuke the bishops and priests he sees as being “the great Antichristes upholders.”\textsuperscript{47} His comparison of Anne Askew to Blandina serves to put her narrative in the framework of an emerging reformist hagiography, while at the same time portraying her as a quiet, obedient, non-controversial figure.

An examination of Bale’s motives in publishing Askew’s text has led to much historical debate regarding the identity of the “real” Anne Askew. In contrast to Fairfield’s perspective, that Bale’s additions allow the fiery personality of Anne Askew to shine through, Thomas Betteridge has argued that Bale’s additions take the focus off of Anne and transfer it to Bale himself. Betteridge states that by comparing Anne to the early Christian martyr, Blandina, Bale “immediately locates the meaning of [Askew’s] words within a historical perspective.”\textsuperscript{48} He argues that Bale has rendered the text in such a way that without his commentary and framing it has no significance at all. This new text needs both Bale’s historical framework and interpretation to be both valid and important. He also argues that Bale’s framework shifts the focus of the text from Askew’s words “to Bale’s attacks on her questioners.”\textsuperscript{49} This shift in focus overshadows Askew’s clever rhetoric and has the effect of silencing her voice.
Theresa Kemp also points out that Bale’s modifications to Askew’s text turn that text into a staging ground for the conflict between reformist and conservative factions at Henry’s court. Kemp states that “Bale transforms Askew into a mere conduit for a battle between male figures, the Henrician conservative and God.” She echoes Betteridge’s view that “Bale passes over Askew’s potential for skillful rhetorical battle, focusing instead on the more acceptably feminine tactic of silence.”

Good or bad, Bale’s edition represents the staging point for the later publication of Askew’s work in Foxe’s Acts and Monuments. It was Bale’s writing of the account of Anne Askew that “pointed the way which Foxe would take.” Foxe’s edition of the Examinations bears little resemblance to Bale’s, lacking his additions, comparisons, and commentary. The Examinations published in the first edition (1563) of the Acts and Monuments contains what has traditionally been thought to be the “true” version of the original text, unadulterated by Foxe.

According to Thomas Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall, this viewpoint, however, has led to one of the biggest problems in interpreting the Examinations of Anne Askew. Freeman and Wall argue that just as Askew evaded the “framing narrative of confession and condemnation” through witty rhetoric during her interrogations, so the modern reader seeks to “reenact this successful evasion of a male framing narrative by liberating Askew’s words from Bale’s apparatus.” This is a result of Bale’s framework being viewed as something imposed on an otherwise independent text. Freeman and Wall argue that rather than being her silencers or shapers, Bale and Foxe are Askew’s “collaborators” in creating a text to fit the newly developed tradition of reformist, and later, Protestant martyrs.
Instead of viewing Foxe as the editor who liberated Askew’s words from Bale’s imposing narrative structure, Freeman and Wall argue that Foxe was just as influential in shaping the voice we now determine to be Anne Askew’s. They state that the “distinctive light in which Askew’s narrative appears in Foxe’s version is not an effect of Foxe’s editorial restraint or of his commendable non-interference in the transmission of an autonomous female voice.” Rather, the difference in Foxe’s Askew is reflective of his “alternative construction of her words.”  

Through careful examination of the original texts it is evident that Foxe was indeed working from Bale’s publication and did not possess an original copy of the manuscript. That being said, Foxe omits from his version of the *Examinations* not only Bale’s comments but also potentially controversial political criticism as well. The criticism of William Paget, which appears in the 1547 *Latter Examination* by Bale, is absent from Foxe’s narrative.  

Omissions are not the only changes that mark the differences between Foxe’s and Bale’s versions. It is argued that Foxe’s shaping of the text was more stylistic than Bale’s, and designed to “direct the reader toward a different interpretation of Askew’s story.” Foxe breaks up Askew’s paragraphs differently than Bale did, allowing for heightened suspense and tension in the narrative. An example of this occurs when Bonner forces Askew to sign a confession.  

“Then he made a copye, which is now in print, and requyred me to sett therunto my hande. But I refused it. Then my ii. Suertyes ded wyll me in no wyse to stycke therat. For it was no great matter, they sayd. Then with moch a do, at the
last I wrote thus, I Anne Askewe do beleve thys if Gods worde do agre to the
same, and the true catholick churche..."59.

Foxe places the paragraph break between “they sayd” and “then”. According to Freeman
and Wall, this has the effect of highlighting the unwillingness of Askew to sign Bonner’s
confession, while at the same time showcasing her cleverness in dodging a true
confession.60

Foxe also adds small phrases and words that do not appear in Bale’s version of
the text.61 In one example, “The Mass was ydolatrye”62 becomes “The Mass was
superstitious, wicked, and no better than ydolatrye” in Foxe’s version.63 Freeman and
Wall state that “careful readers will note that the line scans well as trochaic octameter.”64
This might have been a technique employed by Foxe to emphasize the intensity of
Askew’s statement regarding the Mass.

Major differences exist between Foxe’s Askew and Bale’s Askew. These
differences can be found in the historical approaches of each of Askew’s original editors.
One of these major differences is how each editor dealt with the issue of Askew’s
troubled marriage. This subject is encompassed in the larger issue of traditional gender
roles for early modern women. Bale openly discusses Askew’s troubled domestic life
and states blatantly of Thomas Kyme that “She coulde not thynke hym worthye of her
marryage whych so spyghtfullye hated God the chefe autor of marryage.”65 Foxe on the
other hand, uneasy with the idea of her troubled marriage, omitted details that would lead
to questions about Askew’s estranged husband.66

The two editors also have a difference of opinion regarding Henry VIII. “Bale
maintains the useful fiction that Henry is a good Protestant who is being deceived by his
popish bishops." On the other hand, Foxe openly criticizes the King "for urging his subjects to be charitable but allowing persecution of the godly." Unlike Bale, Foxe holds the King accountable for Askew’s torture, assuming he had full knowledge of the actions of Rich and Wriothesley. The reason for this difference could be connected to Anne Askew’s father’s relationship with the crown. In light of Sir William Asycough’s relationship with Henry VIII, his daughter might have been reluctant herself to believe that he had full knowledge of her torture.

The impact that traditional interpretations of Bale and Foxe have had on current scholarship can clearly be seen in the work of Elizabeth Mazzola. Her work represents one of the attempts to distill Anne Askew’s identity from what she perceives to be the overshadowing influences of Bale’s text. Mazzola begins by describing the *Examinations* as an autobiographical text, one that recapitulates, rather than explains Askew’s testimony. The problem with this assessment is that Mazzola is using the term “autobiographical text” in a modern context. She states that “readers need to approach Askew not as an object but as a subject of knowledge, as someone who knows something which we do not.”

Mazzola’s analysis rests heavily on the traditional assumptions of the roles Bale and Foxe played in shaping Askew’s text. In her analysis of the *Examinations*, Askew was trying desperately to avoid answering the questions of her examiners. While we know this to be true, Mazzola states that the reason for her unwillingness to respond is so she can avoid giving meaningful answers to questions she does not deem worth answering. In this view, Bale interprets Askew’s meaning for the readers, something Askew avoided doing for her questioners at all costs. Also according to Mazzola,
“Askew’s rhetorical resistance was apparently recognized by Foxe, however, for although in his huge project he combines hearsay, propaganda, oral legends, government records, religious documents, and sermons, his version of the Examinations leaves out Bale’s commentary, as if Foxe had decided to let Askew ‘speak for herself.’”  

Freeman and Wall, however, have shown that this was not the case. Askew was no more allowed to speak without a framework in Foxe’s narrative than she was in Bale’s.

The main problem with Mazzola’s interpretation is that she does not take into account Askew’s motivations in writing the text and troubling to have it smuggled out of prison in the first place. The phrase “autobiographical text” carries with it the assumption that Anne Askew composed the account of her ordeal in an attempt to gain personal recognition. Given the nature of early modern authorship, however, it is more likely that she wrote it to help propagate the beliefs of the Protestant cause. Here it can plainly be seen why Freeman and Wall describe Foxe and Bale as Askew’s collaborators rather than her editors.

The differences in both Bale’s and Foxe’s interpretations of the Examinations are important because they have dictated how modern scholars have framed the study of Anne Askew. The traditional interpretation of Bale as an invasive, misogynistic editor, has led to the search for the Anne Askew believed to exist between the lines of his text: it is assumed that this is the “real” Anne Askew. It is for this reason that current scholarship has in many ways portrayed Anne Askew as one of the first Tudor feminists, as opposed to one of the first Tudor martyrs.
The Interpretations of Anne Askew

Historiographically, Anne Askew has been portrayed either as the strong-willed, fiery woman who with an influential voice defied both church and state or as a resolute, faithful evangelical ready to die for the cause of reform. The former perception, while not fundamentally incorrect, marginalizes Anne Askew as a woman with powerful court connections and influential legal counsel. The latter view seems altogether out of place given the events surrounding Askew’s torture and execution. Askew went to great lengths to avoid being recalled to London in 1546 for a second examination and to write a letter to the King explaining her position. These do not seem like the actions of one willing to die at the hands of her accusers. This latter perception is rooted in both Bale’s and Foxe’s framing of the text. Their portrayal of Askew as a sacrificial lamb lends itself to the interpretation that martyrdom was in fact her goal.

The lens of gender has typically been focused on Anne Askew in order to portray her as a strong female voice in the early modern period. This approach can clearly be seen in the work of historians like Diane Willen and Elaine V. Beilin. Willen states that “gender remained an inescapable, obtrusive reality for Askew’s interrogators, her defenders, and for Askew herself.” She points out that not only do Bale and Foxe manipulate the concept of gender in order to serve their purposes, but Anne Askew does as well. Willen describes how Askew “took on the cloak of weak womanhood to avoid answering questions.” She also cites Askew’s torture as a striking event without precedent. “For the crown to torture a woman on the rack was illegal and to torture a woman of gentry status was all the more remarkable.”
Although gender cannot be ignored in the *Examinations of Anne Askew*, it does not have to be the primary lens through which that text is studied. As many commentators have pointed out, the racking of a woman was illegal, and the fact that Anne Askew was of noble birth made the event even more unbelievable. It is for this reason, it could be argued, that during the time of her torture Askew was in fact being treated more like a male than a female. It is perhaps the only time in her examinations that, despite her pain, she portrayed herself as being on the same social level as her accusers.

Elaine V. Beilin's work represents a comprehensive look at Anne Askew's unique female voice. Beilin describes Askew as a woman who “continually raised her voice in public to bear witness to her faith, and in so doing, defied not only her husband, but the whole hierarchy of Church and State.”76 In this feminist interpretation, Anne Askew comes very close to being depicted as a sixteenth-century female activist. “Her writings movingly document her imprisonment, examinations, and torture, and provide some insight into a woman who recognized the restrictions on her sex, but chose to circumvent them because of her beliefs.”77 This interpretation apparently assumes that Anne’s primary goal in writing was to defend her gender, when in reality it was to defend her faith.

Beilin argues that Anne’s persecutors also viewed her primarily in terms of her gender. “Of course, the Catholic Church and the Reformers differed sharply in their judgments, for to the former she was a sinner, to the latter, a saint; but both saw her primarily in the light of their conception of woman.”78 Again, this seems like an odd interpretation given that Anne was in fact persecuted because of her supposed ties to
Catherine Parr. If, as Beilin and other historians have stated, the racking of Anne Askew was a horrific and unprecedented event, the authorities in fact were viewing Anne Askew not as a woman but as a possible informant, one with information they needed. This “genderless” picture of Askew allowed these men to torture a woman of gentle birth.

The question of what motivated Anne Askew to write out her “examinations” is also one addressed by Beilin. Beilin states that Askew’s motivation was not “the individualism of modern autobiography” but rather “the desire to participate in a larger community, the Reformed Church.” She argues that here we can find Askew’s true identity. But this is in fact a contradiction if Anne Askew’s identity is, as Beilin states elsewhere, first and foremost that of a woman. If Anne’s true identity is to be found in the community of the Reformed Church, then gender becomes an almost irrelevant lens through which to view Askew’s text. In addition, Beilin mentions that another possible reason Askew wrote the text was to “create herself as she desired.”

For Beilin, the “examinations” of Anne Askew represent a “spiritual autobiography” in which Askew is able to “legitimize her own speech” through her use and knowledge of Scripture. This process, both of speaking and writing, is described by Beilin as being extremely personal to Anne Askew. It is described as being a conscious process, one that Askew would have been entirely aware of.

John R. Knott writes of another conscious process at work in the Examinations, that of the role of the representations of martyrdom in shaping Anne Askew’s authorship of her text. Knott argues against Beilin’s theory of a self-conscious autobiography, stating that, “the record [Askew] created is less a deliberate self-portrait, or anything that it makes sense to describe as autobiography in the modern sense of the word, than a
recreation of her effort to witness to God’s truth for the instruction and support of the faithful.”

Here, Anne Askew is addressed in the framework of other early-modern martyr accounts. Knott makes the argument, however, that both Anne’s actions and her writings were dictated by this framework. Knott states that, “Askew’s behavior conforms to patterns familiar from the Bible, [and] accounts of martyrs from the primitive church.” This argument seems puzzling, given that Anne Askew’s ordeal happened prior to that of many of the martyrs Knott references. In any case, most of the models cited by Knott are, in fact, those of men. Askew represents one of the first highly publicized female martyrs of the Tudor period, and for that reason it is impossible to view her account as being entirely modeled on another.

Despite scholars’ interest in Anne Askew in recent years, little has been done to fully examine the place Askew held in the history of early Tudor martyrdom. Anne Askew was a woman executed for her faith, and the impact of her story on other female martyrs of the period has yet to be explored.

Retha M. Wamicke began to lay the groundwork for this exploration in her study of women in the English Reformation. According to Wamicke, “of the sixty or seventy Protestant martyrs in the reign of Henry VIII, only four or five were women.” Obviously Anne Askew represents one of this handful of female martyrs. In contrast however, “one-fifth of the Marian martyrs were females.” Wamicke states that when Bale published the *Examinations* he made the story of Anne Askew available to a much wider audience than would have been aware of other female martyrs in England. It is because of Bale that knowledge of Askew’s martyrdom became widespread. In spite of
this knowledge, however, the place of Anne Askew in the history of early modern martyrdom remains largely ignored.

Contemporary scholarship to a large extent has focused on retrieving the “real” Anne Askew from the textual confines of Bale’s framework. As Freeman and Wall demonstrated, however, Bale’s work does not represent a tainted version of Askew’s text while Foxe offers a pure, untouched narrative. Both Bale and Foxe took an active role in shaping the original text, Anne’s text. Their versions are the only versions of Askew’s manuscript to survive. Freeman and Wall have drawn attention to the survival of a Dutch edition of another English text whose existence can only be inferred. A Dutch martyrrologist named Adriaan van Haemstede published a version of Askew’s text in 1559 which included information not found in Bale’s or Foxe’s editions. Although a Dutch manuscript version of Askew’s text has yet to be found, the additional information found in Haemstede’s version could mean that a copy of Anne’s manuscript was smuggled to the continent after her execution.87

In addition, Bale and Foxe emphasized and omitted details of Anne Askew’s life according to their own political agendas. Scholarship focusing only on the details of Anne’s ordeal stressed by these editors has left important pieces of her life unstudied. Askew’s noble birth, legal connections, attempts to secure a divorce from her conservative husband, and connections to the evangelical faction at court are all important aspects of a narrative that encompasses her life. None of these things, however, are emphasized in the works of Bale or Foxe.

The editors of the Examinations framed Anne’s words. The study of Anne Askew in the context of her gender has framed Anne’s place in Tudor history. Anne Askew has
been studied as a strong-willed woman whose words and actions challenged the male hierarchy of church and state. It is true that her gender made her vulnerable to a male-dominated political hierarchy, but that is not the primary issue. Although the issue of gender cannot be separated entirely from the study of the *Examinations*, it does not have to be the primary context in which that text, and its author, are framed. Anne was executed, not for her gender or fiery spirit, but rather for her faith. Anne Askew was, above all else, one of the first female evangelicals to be executed in the Tudor period.
Chapter 2

The Identity of a Martyr

This chapter will seek to explore Anne Askew's identity as one of the first female evangelicals to be executed in the Tudor period. While the issue of gender cannot be completely removed from the study of Anne Askew's life, she has yet to be considered primarily as an influential martyr of the Tudor period. Anne Askew has been studied extensively through the lens of her gender. It has been used to argue her uniqueness among Tudor women. Her outspoken and witty answers to her accusers during her trial have been touted by both historians and feminists alike as the hallmark of a strong, independent woman willing to die for her cause in an era when these characteristics were associated primarily with men. Little exploration has been undertaken, however, into Anne's influence on later martyrs in the Tudor period, and how her ordeal affected their willingness to die for their faith. This chapter will seek to explore Anne's identity in the larger context of Tudor hagiography, and what influence the account of her death may have had on later Tudor martyrs. First, an overview of how current scholarship has characterized Anne Askew will be provided, followed by an investigation of Anne's identity based on her own text.

The Gender of a Martyr

When examining female martyrdom in the Tudor period one must ask, "What makes a martyr?" and "How was the role and significance of martyrdom shaped by gender?" Modern scholarship has begun to examine these questions, taking into account the role that sixteenth century evangelical martyrs of different genders played in influencing their successors. The primary focus of the study of Anne Askew has never
been her religion or faith; it has almost always been her gender. It is important to remember that Anne’s gender did not solely motivate her actions. Anne Askew traveled to London to seek a divorce, enduring two examinations and torture, and wrote an account of these occurrences for the sake of her faith and religion, not to prove that a woman could stand independently in the male-dominated legal and political spheres.

To better understand the influence Anne Askew may have had on other reformist martyrs, one must consider what led to her eventual notoriety as a saint-like figure of English Protestantism. Brad S. Gregory discusses martyrdom across Christian religious divides, including Catholic, Protestant, and Anabaptist. He maintains that in the grand scheme of the population, comparatively few individuals were executed for their faith, but these individuals had a profound impact on the rest of the population. In short, “martyrs were important in ways vastly disproportionate to their numbers.”

Martyrs not only influenced the rest of the population, but their successor to the stake as well. Anne Askew left a powerful legacy through her manuscript which influenced the godly community, as well as future martyrs of the reformist faith.

Anne Askew’s story contained all the crucial elements to make her an ideal martyr. She not only died a horrific death at the stake, was also tortured. Her torture and execution were seen by reformers as infallible proof of the evil present in the conservative faction at court. Anne’s editors were easily able to adapt her story for their purposes, effortlessly depicting her as a saint-like figure. The question of Anne’s identity, how she viewed herself and how she was viewed by others, is intrinsically linked to her manuscript, and to men like Bale and Foxe who used it for their own political purposes.
There was more to martyrdom than the act of being executed for one’s religious beliefs. Martyrdom “also entails patience, commitment, perseverance, suffering, and trust, each of which is much broader than its role in martyrdom itself.” Anne’s story contains all of these elements. She became the ideal subject for Bale and Foxe; no other women were victims of the same circumstances during Henry VIII’s reign.

No martyr died alone during the sixteenth century, including Anne Askew. As members of a strong community of faith, each reformist martyr had a network of individuals to whom they were bonded through religious conviction. Gregory cites the importance of social relationships with individuals who were willing to die for their faith and face horrific death and torture at the stake. According to Gregory, “Not individualist fanaticism but rather social embeddedness in their respective communities of belief helped to sustain the martyrs’ willingness to die.” This observation aligns perfectly with Anne Askew’s story. It was her friendships with men like John Lascelles that brought her strongly into the community of reformists. It was Anne Askew’s social network from which she drew strength, a sense of community, and the willingness to be put to death for her beliefs.

Gregory also states that, “The sixteenth-century martyrs were not blazing a new trail but seeking to conform as nearly as possible to an ancient one, epitomized by Christ’s crucifixion and enacted by the early Christian martyrs.” This statement applies to later Tudor martyrs, but does not apply fully to Anne. Anne Askew was one of the first reformist martyrs, and certainly one of the first notable women to be executed for her religious beliefs in the Tudor period. Yes, Anne saw herself as strong in her faith and doing the work of the godly, but it was Bale and Foxe who made the strongest
connections between Anne and early Christian martyrs. Anne had few female models of martyrdom to look to in her own time. Rather, it was Anne who provided a model for later Tudor martyrs. It can be argued that Anne Askew did blaze a trail, through the act of writing her manuscript. Gregory’s statement that it took until the 1550s for martyrs to feel it was their spiritual duty to “document the action of God’s grace in his children” also supports this idea.  Anne laid the foundation for such documentation by writing the account of her ordeal in prison. Her manuscript is crucial to her identity. By writing it, she became a model that others who followed in her path felt obligated to imitate.

The events of Anne Askew’s domestic life did not make her an ideal candidate for martyrdom status in England’s reformist communities of the 1540s. It was through the editing of Bale and Foxe that her contemporaries came to view her as a saint-like figure. Modern scholarship has viewed Anne Askew in a somewhat different light. There are three main categories in which scholars have studied the identity of Anne Askew. The first, which likens her to an early-modern feminist, is that of a “weak woman” with a strong will. The second is that of a model for female behavior. The third, and least explored category, defines Anne Askew as a martyr in her own right.

Elaine V. Beilin’s interpretation of Anne Askew falls into the first category. It places primary importance on her identity as a sharp witted woman first, a writer second, and a martyr third. According to Beilin, it is Anne Askew herself, in her writing, who puts a fundamental importance on the role of her gender in the Examinations. Beilin states that “Continually, she [Anne Askew] shapes the interviews with these powerful male officials of church and state so that each concludes with the discomfiture of her interrogators by a “weak” woman."
Helen White’s description of Anne Askew also portrays her as the strong willed, consciously feminine figure deliberately and willfully challenging her male accusers and, by extension, the conservatives at court. White states that one classic type of martyr was “the woman martyr of high spirits and sharp tongue”. She says that Anne Askew is the most noteworthy and significant of these. White’s view, like that of many before her, imposes a modern feminist identity on Anne Askew. Anne was not deterred by the male-dominated legal system when seeking her divorce from her husband, but her actions were motivated by her passion for religious reform, not by a sense of early modern feminist activism. It is more appropriate to view Anne through the lens of her religion and faith than it is through her gender. Bale and Foxe took great pains to use her story for their political means, while writing away or ignoring aspects of Anne’s life that did not align with the practices of a good and godly wife. Anne’s gender has been of primary interest to scholars because of her unique characteristics and strong voice, but it is not the proper context in which to define her identity.

Tessa Watt, in a discussion of Protestant propaganda of the sixteenth century, groups Anne Askew in the same category as Beilin and White, but differs in her opinion of how strongly Askew’s voice can be heard through her text. According to Watt, Anne Askew is “a generic victim of popery, bearing little resemblance to the strong, intelligent woman revealed in her ‘examinacyons’”, and she “became known through the broadside press only as the disembodied representation of a meek and pure Protestant faith.” Watt’s portrayal of Anne Askew emphasizes the fact that she was known through sources other than the works of Bale and Foxe. Watt claims that through ballads and broadsheets, “stubbornness and strength” were “stripped” from Anne, leaving her to be seen again as
the weak and feeble woman at the will of her male oppressors. Watt cites the ballad by an unknown author, ‘I am a Woman poore and Blind’, which is purportedly about Anne Askew, to make these claims.

“I am a Woman poore and blinde
And little knowledge remaines in me,
Long have I sought and faine would I finde,
what herbs in my garden were best to be.

A garden I have which is unknowne,
That God of his goodnes gave unto me:
I meane my owne body wherein I would have sowne
The seede of Christs true veritie.

My spirit within me is vexed sore,
my flesh striveth against the same:
My sorrows do increase daily more and more,
my conscience suffereth most bitter paine.”

It is impossible to know who wrote this ballad, which became popular after Anne’s death. It starkly contrasts other songs about the martyr, which herald the strength of her voice and spiritual conviction.

The second category into which scholars have placed Anne Askew is that of a model for female behavior. In her examination of female martyrs in Tudor England, Megan Hickerson asserts that the 358 Tudor martyrs included in Foxe’s book of martyrs, 48 of whom were women, provided “post-Reformation English women as well as men with ‘prototypes’ of behavior.” As a result, a contrast was created between the traditional “English Protestant discourse” of how women should behave and how they are portrayed in Foxe’s book of martyrs.

According to Hickerson, modern scholars have portrayed Foxe’s female martyrs as promoting “a new Protestant ethic of marriage”. Foxe, unlike his contemporaries,
“was the first English Protestant to celebrate marriage as holier than virginity.”¹⁰⁰ Foxe’s female martyrs were serving as not only purveyors of their religious beliefs, but as “models for ideal female behavior.”¹⁰¹ Through the idea of the “female behavior model,” Hickerson argues that Foxe’s Acts and Monuments constructed two dichotomous categories for women. The first category is that of the mild and chaste wife, and the other category is a “lusting whore, hungry for sex and power.” These two categories represented to early Protestants a vision of two churches, “one of Christ, the other of Antichrist.”¹⁰² Hickerson contends that marriage was viewed in terms of opposites. A wife was viewed in terms of her subordination to her husband. The identity of a woman became inseparable from her identity as a wife. In this way, “the discourse of wifehood began to displace that of womanhood altogether.”¹⁰³

Given this imagery, the true church is a chaste bride and the false church is a whore.¹⁰⁴ The Acts and Monuments created a new social role into which female Martyrs fell, that of brides of Christ. “Foxe’s women martyrs take on the characteristics of the true church, conceived of as the bride of Christ with all that that entails.”¹⁰⁵ This role as brides of Christ, wives of the true church, created a new framework for women in which it was appropriate, even rational for them to rebel against the false church. Like Freeman and Wall, Hickerson accepts the fact that Foxe and Bale manipulated Askew’s text to create an appropriate female martyr who would serve to further their own religious goals.¹⁰⁶ Using this image of the two churches, her editors were able to explain her divorce and abandonment of her children, with the acceptable argument that she was rebelling not against her husband, but against the false church.
Bale faced a significant problem in making Askew into a martyr. Askew could not be portrayed as a chaste virgin, since she was married to Thomas Kyme. Her very act of seeking a divorce would have demonized her in the eyes of many potential readers of her text. As a result, Hickerson states that Bale dealt with this problem by glorifying Anne’s pursuit of a divorce, making her actions part of her faithful devotion to the reformist movement. “Bale explains in his commentary that Anne was married against her will and yet that she ‘demeaned her selfe lyke a Christen wyfe’, having two children with her husband.”

By stating that her actions were those of the godly, Bale is able to both support Askew’s actions and address them in a context that moves beyond her sexuality and gender.

Hickerson’s examination of Foxe’s text describes Anne Askew as a “spectacle,” “the first English, Protestant, female martyr, eulogized in print a decade earlier by his friend and colleague John Bale.” Hickerson credits Bale with developing Anne into the first English Protestant martyr. Bale presents Askew as a “true saint” and “member of the true church.” According to Hickerson, by working hard to prove Anne’s identity as a member of the true church, Bale was at the same time developing a contrasting identity of someone who belonged to the false church.

The details of Askew’s domestic life made her a difficult to herald as a paradigm of female martyrdom. Unlike the early Christian female martyrs, Askew was married with children, “and thus clearly not a virgin.” Askew’s status as a married woman set her apart from other martyrs, and thus made her an unlikely woman to praise for godly chastity and virtue. Hickerson argues that Bale counteracts this, however, “by
reconciling her sexual maturity and her provocative behaviour to her membership of the
body of Christ’s bride, the true church.”

According to Hickerson, Bale crafts an identity for Anne as a member of the true
church and a sacred martyr by citing her willingness to die for her cause. Hickerson
compares Askew to John Oldcastle, a Lollard who plotted to kidnap King Henry V and
was executed for heresy in 1417. Although not Protestant, the Lollards held many of
the same religious beliefs as reformists during Askew’s time. Hickerson asserts that
“Askew, like Oldcastle, attains her sanctity in the manner of pre-Reformation martyrs,
male and virgin, by choosing death over idolatry.” Through the ordeal of her trial and
imprisonment, Askew is transformed “from weak woman to martyr, in the latter
manifestation appearing as a lamb battling wolves, in effect experiencing, through her
imitation of Christ, both his strength and his power.” Askew’s voice, as it is presented
by both Bale and Foxe in the Examinations, is meant to illustrate this strength and power.

Hickerson believes Askew is not falling into the pattern of historical or traditional
Christian martyrs, but “fighting for survival in a manner expected and considered
legitimate by her peers.” Hickerson examines Anne Askew’s own motives and desires
when she composed of her manuscript. What is unique about Anne Askew is that while
she was following a path set by early Christian martyrs, she was simultaneously blazing a
trail for later Tudor martyrs herself. Hickerson discusses why individuals at the time
wanted to read Anne Askew’s manuscript, and maintains that “readers would have been
reading for her confession, not for her gendered subjectivity.”

This observation brings up an interesting point about Anne’s confession. Hickerson regards its written form as a document she was forced to sign, in spite of the
fact that she refused to recant her beliefs and position. Hickerson states that, “The reader of the *Examinations* is assured that while she signed a confession in order to save her life, Askew did not betray her faith.” If Anne’s goal was martyrdom, why would she sign any confession? This question reveals an overlooked dimension of Anne Askew’s story. Anne wrote her manuscript in order to further the reformist movement. She went to great lengths to hide at her brother’s house to avoid arrest prior to her second examination. She signed a confession that could have saved her life. All of these factors suggest that martyrdom was not Anne Askew’s goal. Martyrdom and a kind of hagiographic fame for Anne Askew were the goals of Foxe and Bale, not that of Askew herself. It is impossible to separate Anne Askew’s views and beliefs from those of her editors. Through her actions, one can see Anne’s goal may not have been martyrdom.

The description of Anne Askew as a model for the behavior of female martyrs is based on gender. The element of gender cannot be completely removed from the study of Anne Askew’s identity. Hickerson addresses the question of gender in Bale’s treatment of Anne Askew. According to Hickerson, “Bale successfully established Askew as a Protestant hero. His description of her in many respects defies categorization either as particularly misogynistic or as confined by limitations or expectations of female behaviour or self-expression.”

The third category into which scholars have placed Anne Askew is that of an ardent reformer who wrote an account of her trials to further her religion. As a result of her witty and eloquent prose, Anne Askew is noteworthy to both historians and those interested in her use of language. John Knott describes Anne Askew’s text as published by Bale and Foxe from a literary, but also a gendered, perspective. Knott frequently
mentions Askew in tandem with John Oldcastle. The comparison of the two figures provides the opportunity to describe Anne as not just a woman who was executed for her beliefs under unusual circumstances, but as an influential Tudor martyr. Knott states that Askew demonstrates a “determined reliance upon Scripture and a flair for self-dramatization”, but also opines that this is typical of martyrs whose stories were told by Foxe in the *Acts and Monuments*.121

In addition, Knott also lists three key individuals involved in giving Anne her status as both a weak woman, and a martyr whose cruel and unusual torture served as a bold statement of the wrongs committed by Henry VIII’s conservative church. Those three individuals were Anne herself, John Bale, her first editor, and John Foxe. Knott looks beyond Elaine V. Beilin’s interpretation that Anne was a strong-willed woman, revealed as a passionate individual by her actions and her writing. Knott states that, “the record she created is less a deliberate self-portrait... than a recreation of her effort to witness to God’s truth for the instruction and support of the faithful.”122 Knott explores Anne Askew’s motives at the time of her execution. Anne could not possibly have known the extent to which her narrative would have been used by Foxe and Bale to establish the roots of the new Protestant church. She was writing as a member of the reformed church, performing the work of the godly.

Knott looks at Askew through her text as a witness for her faith. He asserts that her actions were driven by her identity as a member of the godly community, who “saw herself as enabled by grace to play a role for which God had destined her”123. Knott goes on to review the voices of Bale and Foxe themselves when examining Anne’s text. As
discussed in Chapter 1, it is clear that Bale and Foxe each added their own voice and opinions to Anne’s manuscript, albeit Foxe was a much more subtle editor.

Scholars have used different elements of Christian scripture as well in this third approach to the study of Anne Askew’s identity. The thirst to prove oneself an admirable member of the godly community, as well as worthy of entrance into heaven, was of the utmost importance to those who gave their lives in defense of their faith. This desire was no different for Anne Askew. Brad S. Gregory connects Anne Askew’s writings with the movement of Anti-Nicodemism. The term Anti-Nicodemism, as Gregory describes, “stems from the story of the Pharisee Nicodemus in John’s Gospel, who at first visited Jesus by night rather than openly associating with him”). The term took on a particular significance for those practicing a religion not favored by those in power. Protestants, including evangelical reformists in England, used the term to describe those of their faith willing to take part in Catholic ritual and doctrine to avoid charges of heresy. Gregory states that Anti-Nicodemism and martyrdom became linked in the 1540s and 1550s, and “would remain paired for decades to come”.

According to Gregory, a song written by Anne Askew before her execution typifies anti-Nicodemite attitudes:

Lyke as the amred knight
Appoynted to the fielde
With thy world wyll I fight
And faith shall be my shielde.

Faythe is that weapon stronge
Whych wyll not fayle at need
My foes therfor amonge
Therwith wyll I procede.

As it is had in strengthe
And force of Christes waye
It wyll prevayle at lengthe
Though all the devils saye naye

Faythe in the fathers olde
Obtayned ryghtwysnesse
Whych make me verye bolde.
To feare no worldes dystresse.

This song is evidence that Anne herself, not Bale or Foxe her editors, used faith as her foundation. He states that she “linked her faith to that of her predecessors” and was willing to “feare no worldes dystresse”, even death at the stake.127

Only the last of the three categories in which Anne Askew’s identity has been studied emphasizes her faith over her gender. Through her ordeal, described in her manuscript, Anne Askew would have been highly influential to other members of the godly community. Martyrs, including Anne Askew, became “holy fertilizer for Christian truth”128. Gregory illustrates the potential influence of martyrdom on a particular religion, by describing how John Bale viewed martyrs as powerful and highly visible instruments to convert others to the reformist faith.129 Gregory treats Anne Askew as a martyr with influence over future English men and women who would die for their beliefs. This treatment of Askew as a martyr, resting solely on her actions and words and not her gender, is distinctive among the large body of scholarly works.

Suffering extreme physical pain and dying a horrific death by fire did not by themselves guarantee one’s status as a martyr. Without question, it can be said that Anne Askew suffered greatly on the rack before her execution. The fact that Anne was a woman called into question her ability to endure such pain. Gregory draws attention to Bale’s description that only Christ suffering with Anne could have sustained her, a weak
Bale explains Anne’s ability to endure the pain and torment of her execution by saying that she was sustained by Christ and her belief in his saving power. Anne Askew was not a perfect candidate for martyrdom given her self-willed divorce and her open neglect of her role as wife and mother. Still, the circumstances of her shocking ordeal led Bale and Foxe to gloss over such improprieties to publish and distribute her story.

In Foxe’s description of Anne’s death, the injustice of her torture at the hands of her accusers was the main piece of evidence used to prove that she was a martyr of the same caliber and importance as early Christian martyrs. This demonstrates that if Anne had not been tortured prior to her execution, she may not have been treated the same way in print by Bale and Foxe. Although Anne Askew did resolutely refuse to name fellow reformist women of the queen’s privy chamber when put on the rack, she did sign a confession and was found at the home of her brother trying to escape her second examination. These are facts that could have detracted from Anne’s status as a worthy member of the godly community.

It is necessary to consider Anne’s status as a wife and mother when discussing her identity. Thomas Freeman notes that later Marian martyrs faced ridicule for leaving their families and husbands. Anne went against the sacred bonds of marriage and the sacrosanct institution of the family when she sought her divorce from her husband. Given this fact, Bale’s symbolism of martyred women being married to the church gave Marian protestant martyrs a model to imitate when they left their families for their religious beliefs. Anne’s Examination, as edited by Bale, clearly influenced future Tudor martyrs by giving them a model to follow.

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Martyrs’ own attitudes and beliefs about death are also highly relevant when considering their identities. Seymour Byman investigated such attitudes, and the psychological factors underlying a willingness to die. Byman stated that in many cases the willingness to die for one’s faith conflicted with one of the greatest sins one can commit in the Christian religion, suicide. According to Byman, martyrs felt the need to explain and prove that their willingness to die for their faith did not constitute the desire to take their own life. Anne Askew’s manuscript represents a unique piece of evidence because she set down her thoughts and beliefs in writing. In her manuscript, Anne Askew “attempted to suppress any thought that she might be hurrying the process” of death by explicitly stating that she did not wish for death, but neither did she fear God. This statement suggests that Anne Askew viewed herself as a reformer completing the work of the godly.

It is necessary to examine how Anne might have been viewed by those around her, as this too may have influenced how she viewed herself. To her husband, she was a religious zealot, an individual who would inevitably bring ridicule on his household. To her interrogators, she was a heretic, a conspirator with the reformist Queen Katherine Parr. To her editors and co-religionists, she was an instrument which connected their reformist beliefs to a long-established Christian martyrlogical tradition.

Most women at the time of Anne’s execution gained their identity solely from their status as wives and mothers. Anne Askew was divorced from her husband. Having lost her wifely identity as a result, she probably identified herself in terms of her devotion to reformist godly doctrine and theology. She acknowledged her gender only when bound by its social and political limitations. She writes little of her family and not at all
of her children, leaving us to wonder what pain, if any, she felt about leaving her family for her religion. Freeman gives some insight into this question by stating, “Even in today's society, separation from spouse and children is not achieved painlessly; in the sixteenth century, when a woman's identity was rooted in her family role, it must have been wrenching.”

Anne Askew says very little about her family or personal life in her account of her examinations. The only persons mentioned by Askew are those who take a part in her ordeal on her behalf. This absence of any mention of her husband or children is evidence that they were not a primary part of Anne’s identity. Anne Askew, through her passionate writings, illustrated that she saw herself as a reformist first and perhaps a strong-willed woman second. It is impossible to know if Anne Askew felt remorse when forcibly removed from her household and children by her husband. Anne Askew’s identity can be depicted as multi-dimensional, and not solely dominated by her gender.
Conclusion

When studying the motives and actions of individuals in the past, historians are fortunate if they possess literary and material remains left behind by their subjects. In the case of Anne Askew, her extensively edited manuscript is the sole source for the investigation of her beliefs, and hence why she chose to make the ultimate sacrifice for her faith. It is natural, given the nature of the editorial intervention of John Bale and John Foxe, to want to try to find the “real” Anne Askew somewhere in her text. Unfortunately the tenacious, spirited, and articulate woman who was Anne Askew can no more be purely discovered between the lines of Bale’s and Foxe’s wording than one could reach back through the centuries to retrieve her original manuscript.

Although there was uncertainty for a time regarding the true author of the examinations, the findings on this point have been made clear. Anne Askew, without question, is the chief author of the “examinations” found in Bale and Foxe’s martyrologies. The tone and diction of Anne’s characteristically feisty phrasing are clearly not the work of John Bale or John Foxe. It is also now known that both editors, who were Anne’s co-religionists, heavily shaped her text for their own political and religious agendas. Contrary to what was originally thought, John Foxe, the author of the Acts and Monuments and later publisher of Anne’s work, shaped her text just as heavily as Anne’s previous editor, John Bale. It was first thought that because Foxe’s additions to Anne’s text were less intrusive and far more subtle than the obvious additions of John Bale, Foxe allowed Anne to “speak for herself” without forcing his words into her narrative. It has been shown by Freeman and Wall that this is not the case, with Foxe taking as much of an active role in shaping Askew’s text as Bale did.
Through her editors, John Bale and John Foxe, Anne Askew became part of a burgeoning Protestant martyrological tradition in the 1540s. Although it has been sought after by scholars, one must accept the fact that Anne’s authentic voice remains hidden in the original copy of her manuscript. Executed for her religious beliefs, Askew was compared to all the ancient Christian martyrs and so helped to build the foundation for the reform movement in England. Anne Askew will forever remain enshrined in Bale’s *Examinations* and Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*.

The plot of the conservative faction of King Henry VIII’s court against Katherine Parr, although not the central topic of this thesis, is still a central part of Anne’s story. Anne Askew might not have been tortured and executed had it not been for the zealous desire of her interrogators, Stephen Gardiner, Thomas Wriothesley, and Sir Richard Rich, to find evidence of reformist heresy connected to the queen. Using Henry’s fear of heresy to turn him against the queen, these men drew up a warrant for the queen’s arrest, but were not allowed to execute it. Gardiner, Wriothesley, and Sir Richard Rich arrested Anne Askew and examined her a second time, in the hope that she would name Katherine Parr, or those ladies at court close to her, as part of a circle of religious reformers. When Anne refused to provide any names, even under torture, her interrogators thought they had no choice but to execute her, knowing that she would become a martyr for the reformist cause. It was Anne’s own account of her ordeal that ensured her place in Bale’s and Foxe’s martyrologies.

Anne had her own motivations for writing her manuscript, both known and unknown. It is apparent that she wrote her manuscript because of her strong commitment to the reformist faith. It is this manuscript that is critical to her identity. If she had not
written it, she and her story might have been lost to history. Likewise, had she not been a
noblewoman who pursued a divorce from her husband, abandoned her children, and been
tortured during the course of her examinations, she would not have been a noteworthy
figure for Bale and Foxe to immortalize in their martyrologies.

Scholars have depicted Anne Askew in three ways: that of a strong-willed but
weak woman, that of a woman who provided female martyrs with a model of proper
behavior, and that of a reformist martyr deeply committed to her faith. The last, and least
explored of these categories, is a highly relevant context in which to view Anne Askew.
As stated in Chapter 2, Anne sought a divorce from her husband, endured two trials and
the rack, and faced a gruesome and excruciating death on the stake for her religion and
beliefs. To say that Anne Askew was challenging the male-dominated spheres of church
and state to prove the merits of her sex is to impose a modern discourse of feminism on
her. Anne was an ardent reformer, whose identity can only be described as multi-faceted.
Although martyrdom may not have been her ultimate goal, the details of her life,
combined with her manuscript, gave Bale and Foxe the tools to make her a martyr.

Anne Askew had an identity beyond the boundaries of her text. Other women
would follow the same deadly path during the reigns of later Tudor monarchs, and yet
Anne has never been viewed primarily as a female martyr. Instead, historians have
focused on Anne’s determination in standing up to the men who tortured and executed
her for political gain. While Anne’s status as a strong, self-willful member of the
“weaker sex” remains essential to her story, it serves to impose a modern sense of
feminism on a woman who would not have viewed herself, or found her identity, only in
her gender.
Anne Askew wrote the manuscript detailing her ordeal at the hands of conservative accusers because of her religious beliefs and not because of a fundamental desire to achieve martyrdom. Anne fought her conservative oppressors not because they were male and she female, but because her religious beliefs were at odds with theirs. If we seek the “real” Anne Askew, perhaps we should view her as she understood herself, not as a female martyr, but as a witness to what the reformers called True Religion.
Notes

2 Ibid., 154.
3 Ibid., 171.
4 Ibid., 162.
5 Ibid., 163.
7 Ibid., 19.
8 Ibid., 24.
10 Wilson, 35.
11 Watt.
12 Wilson, 160.
13 Ibid., 166.
14 Ibid., 181.
15 Ibid., 182.
16 Watt.
18 Wilson, 202.
22 Wilson, 218.
23 Watt.
25 Bale, 127.
28 Watt.
29 Graves, 5.
30 Ibid., 6.
33 Ibid., 218.
34 Ibid., 227.
36 Ibid., 219.
37 Bale, 7.
38 Ibid., 8.
39 Ibid., 11.
40 Ibid., 7.
41 Ibid., 127.
43 Ibid., 158.
46 Ibid., 31.
47 Bale, 8.
49 Ibid., 275.
51 Ibid., 1033.
52 Fairfield, 160.
53 Freeman and Wall, 1168.
54 Ibid., 1170.
55 Ibid., 1176.
56 Ibid., 1171.
57 Ibid., 1176.
58 Ibid, 1177.
59 Bale, 136.
60 Freeman and Wall, 1177.
61 Ibid., 1178.
62 Bale, 52.
63 Freeman and Wall, 1178.
64 Ibid., 1179.
65 Bale, 93.
66 Freeman and Wall, 1181.
67 Pineas, 220.
68 Freeman and Wall, 1187.
70 Ibid., 159.
71 Ibid., 160.
72 Wilson, 205.
74 Ibid., 144.
75 Ibid., 143.
77 Ibid., 29.
78 Ibid., 29.
79 Ibid, 32.
80 Ibid, 37.
83 Ibid., 56.

85 Ibid., 75.

86 Ibid., 76.

87 Freeman and Wall state that in Haemstede’s martyrology, Bishop Gardiner tells Askew “A woman has no more business with Scripture than a sow has wearing a saddle.” To this Askew replies, “My lord, a sow has as much business wearing a saddle as an ass does wearing a bishop’s miter.” 1170


89 Ibid., 458.

90 Ibid., 461.

91 Ibid., 462.

92 Ibid., 463.


96 Ibid. 94.

97 Bale, 195.


99 Ibid., 7.

100 Ibid., 7.

101 Ibid., 8.

102 Ibid., 8.

103 Ibid., 10.

104 Ibid., 11.

105 Ibid., 12.

106 Ibid., 15.

107 Ibid., 63.

108 Ibid., 66.

109 Ibid., 42.

110 Ibid., 46.

111 Ibid., 46.

112 Ibid., 46.

113 Ibid., 46.


115 Ibid., 47.

116 Ibid., 51.

117 Ibid., 56.

118 Ibid., 56.

119 Ibid., 59.

120 Ibid., 62.

121 Knott, 50.

122 Ibid., 56.

123 Ibid., 57.


125 Ibid., 150.

126 Bale, 149.


128 Ibid., 163.

129 Ibid., 163.
130 Ibid., 323.
133 Freeman, 16.
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