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ELIZABETH RUSSELL'S TEXTUAL PERFORMANCES OF SELF

by Jessica L. Malay

Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell (b. 1528) was a scholar and courtier whose close association with the powerful Cecils allowed her a great deal of influence in the political arena during the reign of Elizabeth I. Her first husband was Sir Thomas Hoby, a scholar and diplomat. Together they had four children: Edward, a successful courtier under James I; Thomas Posthumous, who was to serve successfully as a representative of the government in regional affairs in East Yorkshire; and two daughters, Anne and Elizabeth, who died in childhood. The couple also extensively renovated Bisham Abbey, transforming it from hastily appropriated abbey buildings, into an impressive Elizabethan house appropriate to their increasing status within the elite. After the death of Sir Thomas Hoby in 1566, Russell energetically promoted and defended the financial and social prospects of her children through steady financial management, astute land purchases and the maintenance of important social connections at court and in the government. She also took an active role in promoting her radical Protestant beliefs, joining with her sisters Anne Cooke Bacon, Katherine Cooke Killigrew, and Mildred Cooke Cecil in championing the evangelical preacher Edward Dering. In 1574 Russell married John, Lord Russell, heir to Francis Russell, second earl of Bedford. She bore three more children during this marriage: two daughters, whom she again named Elizabeth and Anne, and a son Francis, who died as an infant. Russell was widowed a second time in 1584. In an attempt to secure the financial future of her Russell daughters she avidly, though unsuccessfully, pursued the lease of Donington Castle from Queen Elizabeth. She was successful in arranging the marriage of her daughter, Anne Russell to Henry, Lord Herbert, son of the earl of Worcester in 1600. The wedding was attended by Queen Elizabeth along with many important courtiers. Russell was a patron of writers and musicians including John Harington and John Dowland. She also used her influence to advance promising young courtiers, including the diplomat Sir Henry Unton. Russell's literary productions include several translations of religious texts and numerous elegiac poems to husbands, daughters, her father, her sister, and others. Russell also designed several tombs, including her own

impressive monument in Bisham Abbey, Berkshire. Russell died in 1609.

This formidable woman was much admired for her scholarship, displayed through a variety of textual genres. Her texts reveal a complex subjectivity from which emerges a portrait of a woman who was not only searching for prestige, but for identity itself. In this search she utilized genres women of her class found most easily accessible in early modern society. Russell wrote elegies, translations, prefaces, and pastoral entertainments. Through these texts she rehearsed a variety of roles. In the preface to her translation of John Ponet's *A Way of Reconciliation*, Russell describes the work as a "legacie of the spirit" and bequeaths it to her daughter. She portrays the elegies she writes on her husbands' tombs as "duty." Her entertainment at Bisham is presented as a celebration of the queen. All these texts provide a vivid illustration of Russell's textual strategy: the employment of privileged cultural discourses as a means to construct a narrative of self. This self she displays in the venues of a theatricalized culture, where performance, display, illusion, and the visual were potent sources of power and control. Her stages were the spaces of the dead, the open fields surrounding Bisham, and the paratexts of translation.

Elizabeth Russell, born Elizabeth Cooke in 1529, was raised in what has been termed the "female academy" of Gidea Hall in Essex. She was educated under the tutelage of her father, Anthony Cooke, a classical scholar and tutor to Edward VI. From a young age she was instructed in Latin and Greek, as well as modern languages, in her father's staunchly Protestant household. During Mary I's reign her father was exiled to Strasbourg, while Russell stayed behind in England, residing with her sister Mildred, wife of William Cecil, later Lord Burghley, in Wimbledon.¹ She was certainly with Mildred in 1557 when Thomas Hoby recorded in his journal, "At Midsommer cam to Bisham Sir William Cecill ... My Lady Cecill, with her sister, Elizabeth Cooke."²

This Thomas, young brother to Philip Hoby, was to become Russell's first husband, a match which accorded well with the ambitions of all the families concerned and was arranged by William Cecil and Philip Hoby. Philip Hoby (b. 1504/5), son of a Leominster landowner, William Hoby, became a courtier and diplomat through the patronage

¹ Conyer Read, *Mr. Secretary Cecil and Queen Elizabeth* (London 1962) 87.

² Thomas Hoby, *A Booke of the Travaile and Lief of Thomas Hoby*, ed. Edgar Powell. Publications of the Camden Society, Third Series 4 (1902) 126.

of Thomas Cromwell during the reign of Henry VIII. He was gifted in languages, and carved out a successful diplomatic career. After Henry's death he continued to serve in the court of Edward VI, purchasing Bisham Abbey in 1552, an estate which accorded with his greatly enhanced social status. Mary I continued to make use of Philip Hoby during her reign, though his known commitment to Protestantism diminished his position in court. Philip Hoby died in 1558. As he and his wife, Elizabeth Stoner, had no children, Philip named his half-brother Thomas Hoby as heir.

Thomas Hoby was born in 1530 to William Hoby and his second wife, Katherine. William Hoby died two years later leaving his older son Philip to serve as a father to the young Thomas. Thomas matriculated to St. John's College, Cambridge in 1545 and was taught by one of the leading educators of the time, John Cheke, who had also tutored Edward VI. Thomas left Cambridge in 1547 without taking a degree, instead traveling to Strasbourg where he studied classics and theology under Martin Bucer. In 1549 he published an English translation of *The Gratulation of M. Martin Bucer unto the Church of England*. It is evident that Philip intended his brother to become a diplomat, as he supported Thomas's extensive travels in Europe. These experiences led to Thomas's best known literary work, a translation of Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier (Il Cortegiano)* mainly done in Paris in 1552–1553 and published in England in 1561.

On the 27 June 1558 Elizabeth Cooke (later Russell) and Thomas Hoby married. Thomas wrote of the event: "Mondy the xxvii of June, the mariage was made and solemnized betweene me and Elizabeth Cooke, daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, knight."³ After the marriage the young husband records, "the rest of this sommer my wife and I passed at Burleighe," a manor house in Lincolnshire belonging to William Cecil.⁴ The young couple spent the winter in London, amid the ceremony and festivities of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. Russell would certainly have participated in at least some of these festivities, given her close connections with the Cecil household. Russell's association with Elizabeth would span several decades; she outlived the queen by six years.

This association had important implications for the strategies Russell

³ Ibid. 127.

⁴ Ibid. 127.

employed to give voice to a unique subjectivity. She appropriated iconography and discourses modeled and sanctioned by Elizabeth to create texts, monuments, and entertainments. Through these textual and visual performances, the development and assertion of a "self" emerges. However, this subjectivity does not reveal an autonomous, singular identity. Rather, as Lynette McGrath suggests a more "credible model" of the female self of the period is that of the "destabilized subject, unfixed, in process, contesting for power, and itself a site of contestation for power."⁵ This contestation can be clearly seen in the complexity of contesting images and iconography that Russell employs in her texts and visual productions. Through these productions she follows a pattern of expression, described by Patricia Yaeger, where one "gives in to and resists the burden of the sociolect" instead, "drawing the thread of an I out of the tangle of prevailing and forbidding linguistic codes and conventions."⁶ The "I" Russell wished her contemporaries to recognize emerges out of the hegemonic discourses she employs, revealing Russell's negotiation and definition of her identity within culturally acceptable performances and significations.

Identity is often threatened through crisis, requiring a strategy through which a modified cognition of self can be reestablished. This crisis came for Russell on 13 July 1566, with the death of her husband, Thomas Hoby, in Paris where he was serving as ambassador to the French court. Russell's textual response to this event became the means through which she not only reasserted an identity, but also refined her presentation of this self. Russell reveals, through what Pierre Bourdieu terms the "labor of symbolic production," an identity that emerges from "crisis situations when the meaning of the world is no longer clear."⁷ This symbolic production was the creation of a marble tomb in All Saints church, adjoining the Bisham Abbey estate, home of the Hoby family. On a tomb chest lie two recumbent figures representing Thomas Hoby and his brother Philip. The figures are in full armor; their heads resting on their helmets while at their feet are carved hobby hawks. Margaret Whinney notes that the positioning of the figures was unique in England at that time. The style of the figures, different from that

⁵ Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT 2002) 11–12.

⁶ Patricia Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing* (New York 1988) 252–253.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge 1991) 236.

practiced by English sculptors, reveals a French influence. Whinney suggests that they may have been designed in France by Pierre Bontemps.⁸ Certainly, the style of the figures closely resembles the reclining form of Jean d’Humières⁹ carved by Bontemps in 1550, now in the Louvre. Thus the Hoby tomb proclaims visually the artistic innovation and sophistication of Russell, publishing her familiarity with continental movements in the arts. This was a familiarity she promoted later in her prefatory poem for Bartholo Sylva’s *Giardino Cosmografico Coltivato*, a manuscript gift project for Queen Elizabeth designed by Russell, her sisters and others.¹⁰ In addition to the reclining figures, the Hoby tomb has columns of the Doric order and three large heraldic shields. In the shallow arch behind the figures on two panels is a Latin elegy written by Russell. On the tomb chest is an elegy in English by Thomas Sackville.¹¹ Other texts are carved in panels that frame the top of the tomb chest (see fig. 1).

In these texts Russell publishes a depiction of self through what can be described as a classical performance; a discourse she was well versed in due to her extensive classical education. These verses display a subjective narrative of grief and courage, while the central English elegy by Sackville bears witness to Russell’s narrative. Sackville’s status as both a poet and a courtier would have validated and elevated Russell’s own verses in a way that could not be achieved through Russell’s pathos alone.

The repetition of the texts reiterates Russell’s tragedy in different phrases from different places on the tomb. The persona Sackville presents of Russell powerfully introduces the image she most wished to communicate. In English, on the front of the tomb chest, Sackville asserts:

In forein land opprest with heapes of grief,
From part of which when she [Russell] discharged was

⁸ Margaret Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530–1830* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1964) 9.

⁹ Jean d’Humières (d. 1550) served as chamberlain to Francis I and later his son Henri II of France. He also served as lieutenant general in Piedmont and Savoy.

¹⁰ Sylva, Bartholo, *Giardino Cosmografico Coltivato*, Cambridge, MS. CUL Ii.5.37.

¹¹ A manuscript which allows a clear attribution of the English elegy in the center of the tomb chest (beginning “Two worthy Knights”) to Thomas Sackville has recently come to light. See Jessica L. Malay, “Thomas Sackville’s Elegy to Thomas and Philip Hoby: the Rediscovery of a Draft Manuscript,” forthcoming. This manuscript has now been acquired by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. c. 7065, fols. 124–125.

By fall of teares, that faithfull wives do shead;
 The corps, with honour, brought she to this place,
 Perourning here all due unto the dead.
 That doen, this noble tombe she causd to make.

Here Sackville presents a moving image of a grieving widow who surmounts her pain to fulfill her duty to her dead spouse. This image is enlarged and filled with pathos in Russell's highly personalized description of the same scene in the Latin verse on the tablets above the monument:

I take my husband's corpse and children's feeble limbs.
 And so with filling womb I return by land and sea
 To our homeland, lost in sorrow, loving death.¹² (208)

Her imagery amplifies her pain and grief, thus positioning her actions as heroic deeds set against a backdrop of incredible hardship. Thrice more she reiterates with emotive language this episode. Again, in Latin, she speaks:

You have died, a sad corpse in an unknown land.
 And the piteous children burn with feverish flames.
 What shall I do, ay me, immersed in such misfortune!
 I wander about a hapless wife, a hapless mother,
 I weep for you, my own body, husband seized from me.
 Plundered as here I've been, I leave these funereal lands.

On the second of the tablets, again in Latin, she grieves: "O better thus the tomb will hold us joined/ Then my sad house will hold me now alone." (208)

Finally, on the panels surrounding the top of the tomb chest the event is again described in more restrained diction: "Leaving his wife great with child in a strange country/who brought hym honorably home, built this chapel." These panels serve as a frame within which Russell places her narrative, intensifying the tropes of pain in the Latin text:

ELIZABETH, a wife most pleasing once to you,
 Declaims these words replete with pious tears.

¹² Translated in Louise Schleiner, *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* (Bloomington 1994) 208. All Eng. translations of Russell's Greek and Latin tomb inscriptions are Schleiner's; page nos. are given within the text. Tomb inscriptions in English are quoted from the tombs themselves.

I could not keep off death, but this body of death
 So well as I can, I'll always hold in honor.
 O Lord, grant me a husband much like THOMAS
 Or let my fates return me to my THOMAS. (207)

These lamentations reveal a conception of self influenced by what John Donne terms as the “interanimation” of the male and female souls. This concept is also present in Thomas Hoby’s translation of Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*:

Even so of the felowship of male and female, there ariseth a compound preserving mankinde, without which the partes were in decay, and therefore male and female by nature are alwaies together, neither can the one be without the other: right so he ought not to bee called the male, that hath not a female (according to the definition of both the one and the other) nor the female that hath not a male.¹³

By invoking this Neo-Platonic concept, Russell sublimates traditional conceptions of woman as subservient to the male, and instead asserts an equal and necessary role where her virtue does not serve, but animates. She asserts her agency in a relationship where both partners are informed and invigorated by the individual virtues of each. In turn, this sense of the “oneness” of the married pair communicates even more painfully the loss Russell must bear, and the great strength she possesses in bearing it.

Russell’s epitaph to Philip Hoby is more dutiful and less emotional. Yet he too is part of her narrative, providing an important background for the more heroic actions portrayed on the rest of the monument:

You, brother to my THOMAS, most worthy brother,
 Between whom there was one mind, one understanding.
 It was you, you wanted your brother THOMAS to marry me,
 Through your judgment I have been to you a sister.
 Thus to you I owe my husband, thus I owe each child,
 You had given me all of these in tribute. (208)

These lines, in Latin, relate specifically to Sackville’s elegy where Sackville praises Philip as an important ambassador for the crown, gaining honor in three European countries. That such an honorable man with “A deepe discovering Head, a noble Brest” should choose her as

¹³ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier by Count Baldassare Castiglione*, trans. Thomas Hoby (1561; London 1948) 190.

wife for his brother and heir becomes a potent witness for her value. This is a fairly accurate rendering of her courtship. Philip Hoby played an active role in bringing the marriage about. Anthony Cooke, Russell's father, was his close friend, as was William Cecil who was married to Russell's sister, Mildred. Cecil brought Russell to Bisham at Philip's invitation at Midsummer in 1557 thus preparing the way for the marriage. The epitaph to Philip Hoby is certainly a thoughtful and flattering portrayal of the man. Yet, clearly the purpose of this witness to his admirable qualities was to enhance Russell's depiction of herself as one of exceeding virtue.

Certainly, the strongest persona to emerge from the texts inscribed on the Hoby monument is that of Russell as the grieving, heavily pregnant, virtuous wife. The persona portrayed is of one who is culturally sophisticated and of elite connections, who performs the duties expected of her society in a manner that can only be termed courageous. The text's constant reminders of Russell's situation: her pregnancy, the three small children in a foreign land, her transportation of the corpse of her dead husband across frontiers, and finally her ability to bring her dead husband home to rest in the parish church adjacent to the family estate, all proclaim loudly to the exceptional nature of this woman.

These texts also reveal the influence of Elizabeth I on Russell's strategy of representation. In September, 1566 the queen wrote to the new widow:

We hear out of France such singular good reports of your duty well accomplished towards your husband, both living and dead, with other your sober, wise and discreet behavior in that Court and country, that we think it a part of great contentation to us, and commendation of our country, that such a gentlewoman hath given so manifest a testimony of virtue in such hard times of adversity. And, therefore, though we thought very well of you before, yet shall we hereafter make a more assured account of your virtues and gifts.¹⁴

Not surprisingly the terms through which the queen communicates her admiration are replicated on the tomb. A copy of this letter survives in the hand of William Cecil, revealing his interest in the matter. Russell, always desirous of her brother-in-law's approval, would certainly have found his interest in the letter significant. Indeed, it appears likely that

¹⁴ Elizabeth Tudor, "Letter to Elizabeth Hoby," quoted in G. B. Harrison, ed., *Letters of Queen Elizabeth* (London 1935) 48–49. A copy of this letter purporting to be from the original can be found in *T. Baker Collectanea Oxoniensia*, Harley MS 7035, British Lib., London. fol. 161.

her behavior upon the death of her husband did impress Cecil as he not only made a copy of the queen's letter, but he also noted her behavior in his record of the great affairs of state:

Sir Thomas Hobby dyed at Pariss, and the Lady his Wiff, being then with Child, brought his Body afterward into England. She being great with Child, which was born in England, and christened by the Name of Posthumus. [13 July 1566]¹⁵

It is certainly not coincidental that the inscriptions on the tomb, written after Russell received Elizabeth I's letter, make much of Russell's much-praised behavior under adversity. Through textual and visual significations Russell does present a culturally approved definition of the female self. Yet her texts negotiate beyond this determination. The persona she narrates is more than a grieving, virtuous wife. Rather, Russell is powerfully presented as a woman of courage and phenomenal strength whose behavior moved the admiration of not only Elizabeth I, but also two other queens, Catherine de Medici and Marguerite, queen of Navarre, who also took note of Russell's great courage and strength during the events surrounding Thomas Hoby's death.¹⁶ Complementing these textual portrayals of Russell's virtue is the physical space where she published the elegies. The siting of this narrative within the sacred space of a consecrated church completes its validation, while other significations—heraldry, effigies, and the classical architectural forms—also support the portrait of self Russell wished to convey.

Through this spatial act Russell accessed a powerful form of agency that allowed her to actively define herself. Patricia Phillippy notes the “potential of early modern mourning rituals to enable powerful performance of subjectivity for the women who engaged in them.”¹⁷ Certainly in this case the consumer is treated to a well orchestrated and strategic performance of subjectivity. The placement of her texts within the communal space of the church guaranteed the continual reinvigoration of Russell's narrative by a steady stream of consumers that would include at times Queen Elizabeth, James I, and other high status visi-

¹⁵ William Murdin ed., *A Collection of State Papers Relating to Affairs in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth From the Year 1571–1596* (London 1759) 761–762.

¹⁶ *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, 1566–1568*, ed. James Crosby Allan (London 1871) 106.

¹⁷ Patricia Phillippy, *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge 2002) 181.

tors.

Russell's later elegies also served as a performance, promoting Russell's preferred definition of self. Her moving elegy to her two Hoby daughters, Anne and Elizabeth, who died within days of each other, is inscribed on a slab initially placed in front of the tomb of Thomas and Philip Hoby. This elegy poignantly portrays Russell as grieving mother:

There was one mother, one father, one death for two,
And here a single stone conceals two bodies.
Together in one tomb, thus I your mother wanted you,
Whom I, with joy and crying, carried in one womb. (209)

The principle theme here is Russell's maternal grief, which emerges painfully and palpably through the text, as it does in a later epitaph on the death of her Russell son, Francis:

O comfort of a grandfather, a father's happiest desire,
The very marrow of me, sad fate has taken you:
Oh that I, the mother, lay dead, the light denied me,
And he had first fulfilled my final rites. (49)

These lines, written on the tomb of John Russell in Westminster Abbey, powerfully portray the grief of a mother. Both the elegy to the Hoby daughters and this one to her Russell son use images of the body to connect mother to child. Francis is her "marrow;" the two Hoby daughters first existed in her one "womb." The physicality of the imagery conveys Russell's conception of motherhood as a bestower of life, integrating this image into her own identity.

Yet, culturally, this imagery of motherhood was appropriated in ways that moved it beyond a simple definition of domestic physical reproduction. The symbolism surrounding the queen had imbued the concept of motherhood with powerful, quasi-divine connotations. John Aylmer wrote in 1559 that Elizabeth was "a loving Quene and mother to raigne over us."¹⁸ Helen Hackett notes that during the 1560s and 1570s the images of Elizabeth as mother of the nation were commonplace. Nicholas Breton, in his elegy of her, termed Elizabeth "the

¹⁸ Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London 1995) 50; John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects* (London 1559) N4v, Q3v.

blessed mother of all blessed soules.”¹⁹ This figure of regal motherhood was, like Russell’s text, given a symbolic physicality through the imagery it employed. The most potent of these images was that of the pelican plucking blood from her own breast to feed her young. This image appears most famously in the “Pelican Portrait” of Elizabeth by Nicholas Hilliard. Ornaments featuring the Pelican can be found in lists of gifts given to the queen as early as 1573.²⁰ Roy Strong finds a reference to this image in Lyly’s *Euphues and His England* (1580): “This is that good Pelican that to feede hir people spareth not to rend hir owne persone.”²¹ Russell’s use of the term “marrow” from which the young Francis derived the bloody nourishment of life forms a connection between Elizabeth’s iconography of a powerful, self-sacrificing mother figure, and Russell’s own representation of her motherhood. That ideas of motherhood were connected with political influence is shown in a letter from Henry Unton to Robert Cecil expressing his gratitude for Russell’s political intervention on his behalf: “my thankfulness in every point shall be such as my worthy lady Russell hath undertaken for me, of whom I am as respective as of my own mother, for so I have I ever acknowledged her to be.”²² Unton was petitioning Robert Cecil for help in returning him to Elizabeth’s good opinion after a disgrace. That he saw Russell’s help as “motherly” shows that political connotations could be attached to the term in the period. It also reveals that Russell’s presentation of herself through her texts as “mother” was more than simply a trope of domesticity but supported a more political definition.

Indeed, the connotations of power foregrounded through the use of motherhood imagery were joined in Russell’s texts with her constant reminders of her connections to the elite and her role as courtier. This role is performed in all her texts, but most especially in the cycle of elegies published on the tomb of her second husband, John, Lord Russell (1553–1584). He was the son and heir of Francis Russell, second earl of Bedford, privy counselor, diplomat, and one of the most powerful men in England. John Russell grew up in the staunchly Protestant Russell household at Chenies in Buckinghamshire, which boasted a library of 221 volumes, mainly religious in nature. John Russell was

¹⁹ Hackett (n. 18) 9.

²⁰ Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London 1987) 83.

²¹ *Ibid.* 83.

²² Cecil Papers, *Calendar of the MS of the most Honourable the Marquis of Salisbury*, 24 vols. (London 1889) 4.362.

awarded the courtesy title of Lord Russell upon the death of his elder brother, Edward in 1572. He married Elizabeth Hoby on the 23 December 1574. The marriage between the twenty-one-year-old John and the forty-six-year-old Elizabeth was most likely arranged by Lord Russell's father the earl of Bedford, and William Cecil, Elizabeth's brother-in-law. The two were political allies and the marriage was most likely designed to promote even closer personal ties between the two. John Russell was elected to parliament in 1576 and served on a variety of committees, including ones to do with church discipline. He also traveled to Europe and Italy for diplomatic purposes. Along with their two daughters, he and Elizabeth Russell had one son, Francis, who died as an infant.

The marriage between John and Elizabeth Russell effectively promoted and sustained the elite status of each, as well as that of their families. After John Russell's death, Russell's decision to seek the placement of his tomb in Westminster Abbey was a potent bid to signify their elite status visually. Burial in Westminster Abbey after the Reformation was reserved for those courtiers whom Elizabeth chose to honor (fig. 2). Thus the siting of the monument to John Russell within the abbey serves to proclaim the elite connections of John Russell's family, including Russell, her two Russell daughters and her two Hoby sons. The texts participate closely with this symbolism of place providing a powerful medium to enhance other visual significations of status on the tomb, especially those of heraldry, which mapped one's dynastic connections throughout the realm. The texts inscribed on the tomb are in three languages: Latin, Greek, and English. Russell was the first to inscribe a tomb with Greek verse in the abbey.²³ The use of three languages contributed to her identification with the elite, both in birth and in learning.

In a further bid to define herself as elite not only in birth but in character, Russell's texts proclaim the elevated, even divine nature, of the departed husband, John Russell. In Latin she writes, "Indeed so lately heir of an earl, like a flower always," in Greek, "Through his piety, the blessed man partakes of joy,/ Calling the dwellers in heaven his spirit-kindred" (48). On another tablet, in Latin, she tells her daughters,

Alas he has died, the only glory of our home.
Bitter death has ravished that flower in bright nobility,

²³ W. J. Loftie, *A Brief Account of Westminster Abbey* (London 1894) 33.

Distinguished in letters as in piety, your father. (48)

In English again, she declares the high worth of this husband: "In heaven lov'd, and honour'd on the earth" (50). This is the man who chose her as wife.

These texts form a conversation that reveals a clear sub-text. The lamentations of the wife for the death of her husband, her directives to her daughters, and the "Epicedium" by Russell's first son, Edward Hoby, in praise of his step-father, create the effect of a family huddled around the tomb of the departed, deep in the throes of mourning. There is the desolate wife, "my wounded mind is torn by death's pitiless feeding" (49); the stoic stepson, "Who you were, what sort, and how much, your heraldry shows/ Your unstained life teaches, and your woe-ful death proves" (49); and the aggrieved daughters, "Weep now, daughters, now chant out a mourning poem" (48). Russell's texts produce a dramatic scene where the voices of the bereaved family can be "heard" emanating from the words inscribed on the tomb. These words, these voices, again inform her identity. She is the mother of mourning daughters, of an obedient and dignified son, and a dead infant son who was heir to an earl. These texts are replete with all the metaphoric connotations surrounding the concept of "mother" current in her time. She is also the educated woman, writing verse in Latin, Greek, and English. She is the dutiful wife. As with the Hoby tomb her portrayal of herself goes beyond accepted tropes of female mourning. The eloquence of her words depicts a courageous woman in the face of the death of this incomparable second husband: "John was his name," she laments "(ah, was) wretch must I say/ Lord Russel once, now my tear-thirstie clay" (50).

Again, her placement of the elegies upon tombs sited in Westminster Abbey would have guaranteed a steady flow of high status consumers. Westminster Abbey was as much a tourist destination then as it is today. Lady Margaret Hoby, of Hackness (Russell's daughter-in-law, married to Thomas Posthumous Hoby), recorded in her journal on 1 December 1600 a visit to Westminster to "see the monementes,"²⁴ while in February of 1616 Anne Clifford, countess of Dorset "went to the Abbey of Westminster where I saw the Queen of Scots, her Tomb

²⁴ Margaret Hoby, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605*, ed. Joanne Moody (Stroud, Gloucestershire 1998) 127.

and all the other Tombs."²⁵ Indeed, Russell's elegies were well known in her time. John Harington wrote in 1591:

And for that cause [he, Ariosto] preferreth her before Porcia, wife of Brutus, and divers other that dyed voluntarie soone after their husbandes, it was because she wrate some verses in manner of an Epitaph upon her husband after his deceasse. In which kynde that honorable Ladie (widow of the late Lord John Russell) deserveth no lesse commendation, having done as much for two husbandes.²⁶

Harington's gloss makes clear that Russell's elegies were known and approved of amongst the elite, her publication of her preferred narrative of self shown to be successfully communicated to her society. Yet despite what Harington shows to be the general acknowledgement and commendation of her act, Russell reveals an anxiety as to whether she has successfully communicated all she wished to publicly pronounce. This is shown through the statements she makes as she "signs" John Russell's monument. She inscribes it with the caution "I have done what was allowed, I wish more were allowed me" (50). Through this last sentence, in Latin, Russell betrays another element of her self, an ambition to "do more."

While the monuments provided a space where Russell could rehearse and publish a particular narrative of self, the genre also exerted substantive control of subject matter, as illuminative as her treatment of that subject matter might be. These magnificent tombs could not contain Russell's desire for further opportunities to express and promote her identity. Thus she looked to other available avenues for textual and visual communication.

One of these discourses was that of courtly entertainment, made available to Russell on the occasion Queen Elizabeth's visit to Bisham in 1592. The Oxford printer Joseph Barnes published the text of this entertainment along with two others. The title proclaims, "Speeches delivered to her MAJESTIE this last Progresse, at the Right Honourable the Lady RUSSEL's at Bisham,"²⁷ connecting the text directly to

²⁵ Anne Clifford, *The Diaries of Anne Clifford*, ed. D. J. H. Clifford (Stroud, Gloucestershire 1990) 29.

²⁶ John Harington, *Commentary, Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso: Translated Into English Heroical Verse by Sir John Harington 159*, ed. Robert McNulty (Oxford 1972) 434.

²⁷ John Nichols, ed., *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London 1823) 3.130. All references to this entertainment are given within the text.

Russell. While Russell's authorship of this text cannot be certain, Alexandra Johnston draws upon internal evidence within the text to argue persuasively for Russell as author.²⁸ In the contexts of this discussion it is not necessary to conclusively prove that Russell actually penned the lines, but simply to recognize her close involvement in the production of the text, which is quite clear. The text functions in ways similar to other texts authored by Russell. Her presence is often alluded to, revealing a depiction of Russell's identity her other texts consistently promote.

The entertainment begins with the meeting between a wild man and Elizabeth. The wild man, tamed by the queen's perfection, offers to protect her as she nears Bisham Abbey. The action then moves to a conversation between a lustful Pan and two virgins, who identify themselves as daughters of the "farme" (Bisham Abbey). These virgins were certainly Anne and Elizabeth Russell, whom Russell hoped to place at court as maids to Elizabeth. The daughters are portrayed as intelligent, successfully parrying Pan's lascivious advances with their wit, demonstrating a familiarity with classical allusions and gentle comic rhetoric. They display their needlework skills, both through the props they hold in the scene, and the similes they derive from it: "Roses, egletine, harts-ease, wrought with Queenes stitch, and all right" (134). Their chastity and virtue are shown through their easy defeat of Pan's threatening advances. Indeed, the young women are presented through this production as model female courtiers. Castiglione, in his *Book of the Courtier*, describes the perfect woman courtier as possessing:

noblenesse of birth, avoidinge Affectation or curiositie, to have a good grace of nature in all her doinges, to be of good condcyons, wyttie ... a certein sweetnesse in language that may delite, wherby she may gentlie entertein all kinde of men with talke woorth the hearynge and honest, and applyed to the time and place, and to the degree of the person she communed withal.²⁹

Elizabeth would have easily recognized the connection between the portrayal of the Russell daughters and Castiglione's well-known description. As note earlier, Thomas Hoby, Russell's first husband, was the translator of the English edition of this work. It is likely that Russell

²⁸ Alexandra F. Johnston, "The 'Lady of the farme': The context of Lady Russell's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Bisham, 1592," *Early Theatre* 5 (2002) 71–85.

²⁹ Thomas Hoby, *The Book of the Courtier by Count Baldassare Castiglione Done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby, Anno 1561* (London 1928) 189–190.

was involved with the preparation of the text prior to its publication in 1561, given her facility with the Italian language, her work as a translator and Thomas Hoby's protests, no doubt over modest, in his letter to Henry Hastings, of his "small understanding of the tongue."³⁰ Whatever Russell's involvement with the work, she certainly read it. By alluding to it, Russell asserts her own connection to this book and possibly a comparison with the virtuous duchess of Castiglione's text, Lady Elizabeth Gonzaga, who presides over a court residing on her estate. This allusion would also serve to remind Elizabeth of her promised favor to Russell in the 1566 condolence letter on the death of Thomas Hoby, "And so we would have you to rest yourself in quietness with a firm opinion of our especial favor towards you."³¹

Indeed, Russell's presence is asserted throughout the text of this entertainment. The daughters attribute their knowledge of Elizabeth's virtue to the lessons their mother taught them, "What our mother hath often told us, and fame the whole world, cannot be concealed from thee [Pan]; if it be, we wil tell thee; which may hereafter make thee surcease thy suite, for feare of her displeasure; and honour virginitie, by wondering at her virtues" (134). Pan is instructed to "give our mother warning" of Elizabeth's approach, and thus a god is sent to wait upon Russell, signifying her as the head of the Bisham household (134). After a song of Ceres, a mother figure often associated with Elizabeth, the piece ends with a direct reference to Russell and the effect Elizabeth's visit to Bisham will have upon her:

And this muche dare we promise for the Lady of the Farme, that your presence hath added many daies to her life, by the infinite joies shee conceyves in her heart, who presents your Highnesse with this toy and this short praier, poured from her hart, that your daies may increase in happines, your happines have no end till there be no more daies. (136)

In this way the entertainment draws to a conclusion that focuses on Russell. Here even Elizabeth is subordinate, the last speech focusing on Russell's emotive state, her connection to Elizabeth, her ownership of this "toye"—the production just witnessed—and the way in which the queen's visit will affect Russell. Elizabeth—like Thomas Hoby, John Russell, the baby Frances, and the Hoby daughters—becomes the object that allows Russell an opportunity, sanctioned by society, to per-

³⁰ Thomas Hoby, prefatory letter to Henry Hastings, *The Book of the Courtier*, *ibid.* 6.

³¹ Harrison, *Letters of Queen Elizabeth* (n. 14 above) 49.

form her preferred definition of self.

Another text, written in the last year of Russell's life, continues this performance. In the preface and translation of John Ponet's *Way of Reconciliation* one finds that the same tropes and metaphors utilized by Russell to figure her identity in her other texts also appear in this text. She asserts her role as mother with all the connotations such a figuring allowed in her culture:

Most vertuous and woorthilie beloved daughter, Even as from your first birth and cradle I ever was most careful, above any worldly thing, to have you sucke the perfect milke of sincere Religion: So willing to ende as I beganne, I have left to you, as my last Legacie, this Booke.³²

Here through an address to her daughter she reveals salient features of her own identity: her religious convictions, and her strong sense of duty. The final sentences in this preface focuses on the personal, again creating a family tableau of intimacy where the reader is partially excluded through the use of intimate familial names and reference to a family matter for which there is no explanation: "I meant this to you, good daughter, for a New-yeeres gift, but altered by grieffe for your Brothers broken arme. Farewell my good sweet Nanne" (A2v–A3r). Which Hoby brother suffered an accident, the seriousness of it, and Russell's role in the son's recovery is information not deemed necessary for the wider audience. Instead, this cryptic allusion functions to promote, along with her words concerning her daughter's spiritual health, the portrayal of Russell's "motherhood" as one of careful physical and spiritual nurturance of her children.

The text also publishes her elite status, a much-repeated aspect of her identity throughout all her texts. In the first lines, she gives the pedigree of her daughter: "To the right Honorable my most beloved and only daughter, the Lady Anne Herbert, Wife to the Lord Henry Herbert, sonne and heir apparent to Edward, the most noble Earle of Worcester" (A2r). On the title page, in a bold move, Russell ennobles herself, describing herself as "the Right Honorable Lady Elizabeth Russell, Dowager to the Right Honorable, the Lord John Russell, Baron and sonne and heire to Francis, Earle of Bedford." She terms herself a

³² Elizabeth Russell, dedication, John Polet, *A Way of Reconciliation* (London 1605); facs. ed. *Protestant Translators: Anne Lock Prowse and Elizabeth Russell*, ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Patrick Cullen (Burlington, VT 2001) A2r. All subsequent references to this preface are given in the text.

“Dowager” despite the fact that she had no claim to this title, as forcefully asserted by Charles Howard, the earl of Nottingham, during the celebrated Star Chamber matter dealing with her claims to Donington Castle.³³ This was because John Russell died before his father, and thus never became the earl of Bedford. Russell bestows upon herself an identifying marker that her society denied her, circumventing established rules to assert for herself an elevated position within the elite.

Her preface and translation also signal her role as scholar. Her last lines to her daughter in the preface are in Latin, and the text itself is a translation of a Latin text. The act of translation, she makes clear, derives from her relationship with her father, Anthony Cooke, the eminent scholar who published John Ponet's Latin text during his years of exile in Strasbourg. This identification allows Russell to perform another oft-repeated facet of her identity, that of female mourner and protector of her dead—in this case, her father. She asserts that she sought publication of this work:

... fearing lest after my death it should be Printed according to the humors of other, and wrong of the dead, who in his [Anthony Cooke's] life approved my Translation with his owne allowance: Therefore dreading, I say, wrong to him above any other respect, I have by Anticipation prevented the worst.
(A2v)

By positioning her text as a response to a threat to her father's honor she is able to place the publication of her translation within culturally acceptable behavior. Of course one recognizes here Russell's long standing practice of presenting her textual productions as memorials.

Through her translation she comments for a final time on the theological debates she and her sisters, Mildred Cecil, Anne Bacon, and Katherine Killigrew, participated in widely, and at times controversially, during Elizabeth's reign.³⁴ In the text Russell translates, Ponet attempts a mediation in the divisive conflict over the doctrine of the Eucharist. Ponet discusses the common beliefs held by different factions in the debate, proffering these commonalities as the means through which reconciliation could emerge. This translation proclaims

³³Felicity Heal, “Reputation and Honour in Court and Country: Lady Elizabeth Russell and Sir Thomas Hoby,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 6. (1996) 167.

³⁴A discussion of the ways in which these sisters participated in the religious debates of the period can be found in Schleiner (n. 12 above) 30–51.

Russell's life long commitment to the reformist ideology espoused by her father. Anthony Cooke's beliefs were shaped by his relationship with Protestant reformers in the court of Edward VI, as well as his experiences and scholarship as a Marian exile in Strasbourg. His was a radical Protestantism that sought to reduce prelate and royal power in the English church, and replace the traditional liturgy favored by Elizabeth with one that was more iconoclastic.³⁵ In 1605, when Russell published this text, the movement she and her sisters so strongly identified with had long since lost any real power to influence the religious policies of the government. Instead, Russell's publication must be seen as an assertion of her own tenaciously held religious beliefs, rather than as part of a larger political or religious movement.

Stephen Greenblatt argues that Renaissance subjects were cut off "from established forms of identity," and thus was forced "by their relation to power to fashion a new sense of themselves and their world."³⁶ I contend that established forms of identity engulfed Russell, along with other women of the period. Numerous texts, along with social practices, defined a culturally acceptable identity for women of all classes. Many women, like Russell, found this prescription too restrictive. Yet women faced considerable opposition in their attempts to construct and express a self-defined or self-fashioned identity that might challenge culturally imposed conceptions of the female self. In order to circumvent cultural opposition, Russell appropriated acceptable avenues for female textual production, amplifying and modifying these. What develops from this textual strategy is the construction of a narrative of self that does not display a consistent or singular identity, but rather the split or destabilized subjectivity referred to by McGrath and Yeager. Russell's texts chart a negotiation of identity that was simultaneously an acceptance of a culturally defined female identity but also one that was unique and self-constructed.

In the later years of her life Russell designed her own monument—a static tableau that presents the final performance in her narrative of self (fig. 3).³⁷ Here she kneels at a prayer desk, a symbol of her dedication to her religious beliefs. All her children, both the living and the dead, surround her signifying her role as "mother." The daughters who pre-

³⁵ Ibid. 39.

³⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago 1980) 162.

³⁷ This tomb can still be found in All Saints, Bisham, in Berkshire near Bisham Abbey.

deceased her—Elizabeth “Bess” Russell and the two small Hoby daughters, Elizabeth and Anne—are placed close behind their mother under the tomb canopy. The young heir to an earldom, the baby Francis—the child of her “marrow”—lies at Russell’s knees, the fabric of her gown protecting him. Her youngest daughter, Anne Russell, countess of Worcester, kneels outside the canopy in her robes of state and a coronet. The two Hoby sons—Edward Hoby, courtier to King James, and Thomas Hoby, member of the Council of the North—kneel outside the canopy behind their mother. Russell, the central focus of the tomb, is majestic, even regal, in her dress of black and white. Her eyes are open as if perusing her text; she does not sleep like other sculpted figures of her time, but is active and aware. On her head is the coronet of a countess, an honor denied her in life. In her last performance Russell crowns herself. This magnificent tomb solidifies in stone the rich and multiplex conception of identity she performed throughout her life in her many textual and visual productions. If, as Sarah Tarlow suggests, monuments of the period served as a sort of reckoning,³⁸ Elizabeth Russell’s last tomb boldly proclaims that she has counted her worth and is satisfied.

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³⁸ Sarah Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archeology of Mortality* (Oxford 1999) 87.



FIG. 1. The Hoby Monument, All Saint's Bisham, Berkshire (ca. 1567).



FIG. 2 The Tomb of John, Lord Russell, Westminster Abbey (ca. 1585).



FIG. 3: Elizabeth Russell's Monument, All Saint's Bisham, Berkshire (ca. 1610).