

# «Be unto me as a precious ointment»: Lady Grace Mildmay, Sixteenth-Century Female Practitioner

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## SUMMARY

1.—Introduction. 2.—Establishing Female Textual Communities. 3.—Autobiography and Transmission of Knowledge. 4.—An Education in Medicine. 5.—Medicinal Meditations. 6.—Meditative Medical Theory/Medical Practice. 7.—Female Matrix of Knowledge.

## ABSTRACT

Lady Grace Mildmay's manuscripts represent an unusual presentation of three interrelated areas of family, devotion, and medicine. By examining her autobiography, meditations, and medical papers, I draw together literary analysis and discourses of female devotional and social practices with that of medical discourses to illustrate the ways in which women practitioners may have acquired and disseminated medical knowledge, and interacted with their patients, as well as how Lady Mildmay, and presumably other landed women practitioners, formed a textual community of women who administered medical treatment to lay people in late sixteenth-century England.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The papers of Lady Grace Mildmay (1552-1620), which include an autobiography, meditations, and medical documents, are an extraordinary collection of manuscripts which give invaluable evidence of the long-

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suspected participation of women as «non-professional» practitioners of medicine in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century England. Her papers also give us a unique insight into the devotional experiences of a Protestant woman in the period when Protestantism was coming into its own. Lady Grace Mildmay's papers, then, provide a complex view of the connection between what may seem to be three disparate areas of inquiry: devotional, medical, and literacy practices of a landed and elite, but not courtly, Elizabethan woman. Drawing together social and medical history with literary analysis, I want to argue that this collection of papers, which Mildmay self-consciously organized and presented to her daughter and three granddaughters, indicates the way in which female textual communities functioned in relationship to the transmission of literacy, devotional practices, and medical knowledges. In the case of landed women like Mildmay, these three discourses were interrelated. Her papers suggest an extraordinary knowledge of what she calls «physic» (medicine), while her meditations show the ways in which this knowledge informed her devotional practice. Further, these manuscripts convene to implicate Lady Grace Mildmay's own role in the spread of Protestantism at least to her daughter and grandchildren through her medical, maternal, and devotional practices. That is to say, her papers reveal a method of the transference of medical and devotional knowledge and practice among women seldom documented at such length. One need only observe the ways in which devotional and medical readings took place side by side in Lady Grace Mildmay's educational routine and daily life, how images of medicine and physic are imbricated in her meditations, and how her medical papers align illness with impediments of the soul, to understand the close relationship these discourses had in her life.

In recent decades, scholars have begun to focus on less «traditional» medical practitioners, variously known as empirics, charlatans, unlicensed or non-professional practitioners, and healers (1). Even though historians

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(1) See KLAIRMONT-LINGO, Alison. Empirics and Charlatans in Early Modern France: the Genesis of the Classification of the «Other» in Medical Practice. *Journal of Social History*, 1986, 19 (4), 583-603. Midwives are often cast in a separate, although clearly related, enterprise to female practitioners. There have been quite a few studies conducted on early modern midwifery, and while a few of these studies address the dual role of women as midwives as well as healers or

have long been aware that women practiced and administered medicinal treatments in early modern England, it is only in the last decade or so that scholarship has begun to not only realize but interrogate more thoroughly the role of women in the provision of medical care. Evidence for the roles that women played as healers and administrators of medical services in the early modern period are not easily found in traditional documentary locations. The accounts of women practicing medicine or surgery found in women's autobiographies, for example, are often not very informative because the authors often gloss over the particulars (2). Lady Margaret Hoby, for example, mentions dressing wounds, distilling «aqua vitae», attending several women in childbirth, and even performing an operation. Lady Anne Halkett also writes of dressing wounds and making medications, while Lady Fanshawe writes of her how her mother tended the wounds of the poor (3). But these women do not go into any

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general practitioners, generally these two were thought of by the European culture (and modern-day scholars); midwives were managed and «regulated» in ways female practitioners weren't, even if in practice they were not separate. For an overview of the dual and separate role of midwives, see GREEN, Monica. Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1989, 14, 434-473. Following are a few of the texts which address and explore the role of midwives in early modern Europe: PERKINS, Wendy. Midwives vs. Doctors: The Case of Louise Bourgeois. *Seventeenth Century Studies*, 1998, 3 (2), 135-157; KELLAR, Eve. Mrs. Jane Sharp: Midwifery and the Critique of Medical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century England. In: *Women's Writing: The Elizabethan to Victorian Period*, Oxfordshire, 1995, vol. 2, pp. 101-111; BICKS, Caroline. Manhandling Midwives: Home Birth and Domestic Invasions in Early Modern England. In: *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Southwest Symposium*, 1996, vol. 4, pp. 1-14; MARLAND, Hilary. *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe*, London, New York, Routledge, 1993.

- (2) For the a discussion of the problems involved in documenting women's medical practice see, GREEN, Monica. Documenting Medieval Women's Medical Practice. In: Luis García-Ballester et al. (eds.), *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 322-352; PELLING, Margaret. Healing the Sick Poor: Social Policy and Disability in Norwich, 1550-1640. *Medical History*, 1985, 29 (2), 115-137; BENEDEK, Thomas G. The Roles of Medieval Women in the Healing Arts. In: Douglas Raddcliff-Umstead (ed.), *Roles and Images of Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Pittsburgh, University of Pennsylvania, 1975.
- (3) For women's autobiographies and diaries that refer to practices, see: *The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford*, SACKVILLE-WEST, Victoria (ed.), London, William Heinemann

depth about who or how they attended these people. In sharp contrast to most sources, Lady Grace Mildmay's elaborate medical papers include descriptions of patients' symptoms, illnesses and their resolutions, as well as of herbal remedies and particularly medicinal (chemical) recipes along with their preparation and application instructions. Mildmay's use of «chemical» remedies as well as herbal remedies might suggest that she followed both the medical philosophies of the Galenic school of medicine and the Paracelsian philosophy of medicine. Mildmay's potential combining of these two medical thoughts is indicative of a relatively common practice in Mildmay's time (4). The sheer range of her observations are unusual in that she ruminates on both symptoms and causes of various diseases and ailments, rather than on just the symptoms alone, as so often was the case. Further, these observations, coupled with the range of herbals and chemical recipes and medicines she used, suggest that her practice was in many respects akin to that of university-trained physicians.

The papers of Lady Grace Mildmay consist of 85 folios of autobiographical material, and 250 folios of medical papers which include herbal remedies and descriptions of symptoms. The original volume of «Lady Mildmay's meditations», which contains her autobiographical and spiritual writings, is currently located in the Northampton Central Library, in the Northamptonshire Studies Collection; her medical papers (W/A, misc., vols 32, 33) are located in the Northampton Record Office in The Westmorland and Apethorpe collection. After Lady Grace Mildmay's

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Ltd., 1923; *Memoirs of Lady Ann Fanshaw*, London, John Land the Bodley Head, 1907; *The Autobiography of Lady Halkett*, NICHOLS, J.G. (ed.), New York, N.Y., Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968, p. 109; *Diary of Lady Hoby*, Dorothy Meades (ed.), Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930, pp. 63, 72, 86, 100, 101, 184; *The Autobiography of Alice Thornton*, Durham C. Jackson (ed.), Andrew and Company, 1875. These women make mention in their autobiographies and diaries of attending births and/or the sick, but they do not discuss those they attend in any detail. There is much more evidence of women working professionally as midwives in part because in England midwives were licensed through ecclesiastic authority, though many no doubt practiced without this licensing.

- (4) For more on chemical physicians and Paracelsus, see DEBUS, Allen G. *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, New York, Science History Publications, 1977.

husband Anthony died in 1617, she undertook to write her autobiography and spiritual meditations which she intended to pass on to her daughter and granddaughters; these are bound together in a single volume. Her medical papers appear in two separate volumes. One of the volumes is devoted to herbal remedies and personal observations of disease origins, the other to descriptions of chemical medicines and their preparation and administration. I use for this essay Linda Pollock's collection of Mildmay's work, *With Faith and Physic: the Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620* (5). Pollock transcribes and reproduces for the first time approximately 10 per cent of Lady Grace Mildmay's meditations, about 40 per cent of her medical papers, and her entire autobiography (6). Pollock's 1993 edition signals the growing interest in, as well as the wider distribution and use of, documentary evidence such as this.

## 2. ESTABLISHING FEMALE TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES

Recent scholarship in the history of medicine has shown us that women played an important role in the healing arts in medieval and early modern Europe. Outside of major cities, even in well populated

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- (5) POLLOCK, Linda. *With Faith and Physic: the Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993. I am greatly indebted to Pollock for making readily available a full version of Mildmay's autobiography, and selected meditations and medical recipes and notes.
- (6) Before Pollock's work, WARNICKE, Retha M., published an essay, *Lady Mildmay's Journal: A Study in Autobiography and Meditation in Reformation England*. *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 1989, 1, 55-68, which draws upon Lady Grace Mildmay's autobiography and meditations to bring attention to the importance of Mildmay's writings to the understanding of noblewomen's educational experiences and Protestant devotional practices. Warnicke, however, only quotes short excerpts. See also WEIGALL, Rachel. *An Elizabethan Gentlewoman: The Journal of Lady Grace Mildmay circa 1560-1617*, Unpublished. *Quarterly Review*, 1911, 215, 119-38, for the first published (albeit inaccurate according to POLLOCK, note 5, p. 159) version of Mildmay's autobiography. There are also excerpts of Mildmay's autobiography in TRAVITSKY, Betty. *The Paradise of Women*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1981, pp. 83-85. For the most recent published annotated version of Mildmay's autobiography, see MARTIN, Randall. *The Autobiography of Grace, Lady Mildmay. Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Reforme*, 1994, 1, 33-81. This particular version is unaware of POLLOCK, note 5.

rural areas, trained physicians were in short supply and cost prohibitive for the average patient. While autobiographies of women such as Lady Hoby, Alice Thornton, and others suggest that landed women may have occasionally tended to the medical needs of their families and communities, they were not necessarily «medical practitioners» (7). Nonetheless, these women undoubtedly exchanged information about health issues, but there is not much that is known about the ways in which they acquired or disseminated their knowledge, or indeed the way they may have practiced their art. This is in part due to a dearth of documentary evidence (8). In light of this absence, the manuscripts of Lady Grace Mildmay are particularly valuable to our understanding of the role of sixteenth-century «non-professional» women practitioners in early modern English culture.

A man could enter into the practice of physic through university training. Women, not surprisingly, were not allowed to pursue traditional forms of medical education, but most likely learned about anatomy, herbals, treatments, and childbirth practices from other women: mothers and/or other female family members who also had responsibility for the care and education of their children and sometimes their friends and relations. Occasionally women would enter the medical profession through their deceased husband's practice. Women could become episcopally licensed physicians in the same manner that midwives were episcopally licensed, although both of these practices were uncommon (9). Evidence of lower class female practitioners has to be sought in less traditional locations. Receipt books and parish records describe examples of women who «cured» lame legs, hands, among other practices. While the status of these women as physics is unknown, their practice is

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(7) I am drawing on the definition of «medical practitioner» as «any individual whose occupation is basically concerned with the care of the sick» (p. 166), from PELLING, Margaret; WEBSTER, Charles. *Medical Practitioners*. In: Charles Webster (ed.), *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 165-235.

(8) See note 2.

(9) See NAGY, Doreen G. *Women's Role in Stuart Medicine: A Case Study of Popular Practitioners*. In: *Popular Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England*, Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Press, 1988, pp. 54-55.

incontrovertible (10). Gentlewomen like Lady Hoby, Anne Clifford, and Alice Thornton, like Lady Grace Mildmay, prepared and administered remedies to people in their neighborhood parish, as well as their families (11). These landed women in particular had the means to prepare medicines and herbal remedies and administer health care to local folk, families, and relations, as is evidenced by information we have from their various diaries and autobiographies.

Female non-professional medical practitioners were not necessarily in conflict with their male official counter-parts, in part because there was not a sufficient number of physicians to treat the amount of sick; this was especially true in the rural areas where populations were more spread out and the concentration of physicians was quite low (12). Further, upperclass women such as Lady Grace Mildmay practiced physic out of charity—they did not charge for their services, and therefore posed little economic threat to professional physicians. Certainly those women who functioned as paid practitioners charged significantly less than a physician, and were also more readily available. Mildmay would then not be unusual in her practice; however, the fact and depth of her medical manuscripts marks her as quite remarkable, especially in the quantity and range of chemical remedies. Because Mildmay was a landed Lady, she had greater access to herbs and chemicals with which she made her many remedies. Her treatments and medicinal practices most likely surpassed those who did not have access to the range of herbs and medicines that she did.

Scholars have argued that the Reformation in England took place more or less from the «top» downward, a product of multiple political acts over the course of thirty years or so (1529-1559) (13). The impact

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(10) NAGY, note 9, pp. 58-59.

(11) See note 3.

(12) See PELLING, note 2.

(13) I am thinking, for example, of HAIGH, Christopher. *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors*, Oxford, Clarendon Press; New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, essays found in HAIGH, Christopher (ed.). *The English Reformation Revised*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1987, and O'DAY, Rosemary (ed.). *The Debate on the English Reformation*, London, New York, Methuen, 1986.

of the Protestant movement on the «lower» classes was a gradual one as well, as is evidenced by such things as the production of medieval cycle dramas into the mid-sixteenth century (14); but it is not easy to document the kind of domestic impact the movement had. Protestant devotional practice drew on long established methods of private meditation and prayer, which emphasized the desire to transcend the sinful self and gain access to the experience of grace through Christ. While the Catholic tradition was interested in the physical imaginings of Christ and his life and passion, Protestants emphasized the word, and therefore the scriptures were desired inspiration in meditation. Lady Grace Mildmay's meditations, although coming from an elite landed Lady, are an insight into the integration and domestic practice of Protestantism in that they intimately display the character and nature of her (Protestant) devotional practice (15).

Because of the confluence of Humanism, the Reformation, and Protestant notions of the importance of literacy to salvation, there was increased opportunity for female education and literacy in England. However, this did not necessarily mean a remarkably higher literacy rate. Women in the landed classes would have had some literacy skills; these upper class women were often taught to read, but not necessarily to write. Further, there were multiple ways in which women could participate in the transference of knowledge: through oral transmission, through written texts orally disseminated, through knowledge orally disseminated and textually preserved, and through shared texts. I would define the community of women who shared devotional, medical, and other kinds knowledges, as a female «textual community» (16). The

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(14) For example, the final performances of several town cycles, Newcastle, Norwich, York, Wakefield, and Coventry, occurred between 1565-1575, just on the eve of the opening of The Theater in London in 1576.

(15) For more on the significance of female meditation to Protestantism, see chapter 5, LEWALSKI, Barbara Kiefer. *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, Princeton, N. J. Princeton University Press, 1979; HAMBRICK-STOWE, Charles. *Practice of Piety*, Chapel Hill, Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

(16) I take the basic notion of a textual community from Brian Stock who argues that «what was essential to a textual community was not a written version of a text, although that was sometimes present, but an individual, who, having mastered it,



core model for this community is based on the role women played in the education of their children and other family members, as well as the transference of knowledge between women in a range of subjects, from religion to politics, childbirth to finance. Lady Grace Mildmay's papers present a model of a female textual community in which women transfer information and skills. This textual community is borne out in the opening pages of Lady Grace Mildmay's autobiography, and throughout the course of her papers.

### 3. *AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE*

In the Introduction to her autobiography, Lady Grace Mildmay sets up what she articulates as «the best course to set ourselves in from the beginning unto the end of our lives» (17); what Mildmay focuses on is the importance of knowledge to the practice of a wise and virtuous life. By placing knowledge of five fields at the opening of her Introduction, Mildmay suggests a certain relationship to the transmission and acquisition of knowledges, specifically for women. Also imbedded in this prescription is the discourse of medical (and philosophical) notions of conception. She begins with the first type of knowledge; that is, the knowledge of the Bible which should be read with «diligence and humility», and to the end that «our heart, soul, spirits and whole inner man may first be seasoned with it and receive the true stamp and lively impression thereof» (18). The image of the «inner man» receiving the «true stamp»

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then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action» (p. 90). Stock is most specifically interested in the role the rise of literacy had in the «formation of heretical and reformist religious groups» in the middle ages (p. 88), and how these groups functioned as textual communities. I modify Stocks' notion of textual community, which does not take into account gender, to be particular to women's textual practices in the medieval and early modern periods. This female textual community, I want to argue, existed in relationship to female devotional communities and female «medical» and birth communities. See STOCK, Brian. *Textual Communities. In: The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 88-240.

(17) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 24.

(18) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 23.

and «lively impression» suggests the Aristotelian notion of conception in which man provides the form (in this case the stamp or impression), and woman the matter (in this case the inner man provides the «matter» with his soul). And of course, as man is to woman, God is to man.

The next kind of knowledge she argues for is the «expert knowledge of the histories contained in the book of *Acts and Monuments* of the church» (19); the history that is found in Fox's *Acts and Monuments* is a Protestant history, which is to say that it recounts historic and religious events in Protestant terms as leading naturally to Protestantism. The history is set up as a natural extension of the Bible and Biblical history. Mildmay then moves from Protestant history to knowledge of «the chronicles of the land» or national history, pointing toward the imitation of «true and faithful subjects». This, of course, is suggestive of the true and faithful subjects of God and Christ, and the dangers of subversive subjects, infidels. Naturally following out of this is the necessity to be instructed in the «statutes and laws of this land» and finally, to be educated in the philosophers. As I have noted, Mildmay explicitly directs this prescription for education and the accumulation of knowledge to her daughter and her children in the paragraph immediately following the outline:

«All these things coming into my mind, I thought good to set them down unto my daughter and her children, as familiar talk and communication with them, I being dead, as if I were alive. And I do therewithal heartily pray them to accept thereof and of the whole book of my meditations which hath been the exercise of my mind from my youth until this day» (20).

Here, Mildmay articulates the importance of women in the education of their children. She also suggests the means by which information and knowledge can get passed from generation to generation: through the literate production of a text such as an autobiography, and through «familiar talk and communication». The text and the «familiar talk» are an indication of the means by which knowledge gets transmitted between

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(19) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 23.

(20) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 24.

women; here Mildmay desires to bring the two, formal and «familiar», together. Mildmay also reenacts in this self-conscious production and passing on of her papers that which she experienced in her education as a child until she was fifteen, and that is the regular instruction in the scriptures and other holy books, in chaste and virtuous behavior, and in herbals and surgery.

In the first section of her autobiography, «Childhood», Mildmay again refers to the role of women in the education of children while also defining a female textual community through which the transmission of knowledge occurs:

«I had experience of a gentlewoman (niece unto my father and) brought up by my mother from her childhood, whom afterwards she trusted to be governor over her own children. She proved very religious, wise and chaste, and all good virtue that might be in a woman were constantly settled in her. For, from her youth, she made good use of all things that ever she did read ... and set her mind down in writing either by letters indited or otherwise as well as most men could have done» (21).

Mildmay first establishes the familial link of her governess, Mistress Hamblyn, to her family: she was both niece to her father, and brought up by Mildmay's own mother. Mildmay next indicates Hamblyn's literacy abilities by alluding to the «good use» she made of things she read, and by describing how she could articulate herself in her words, presumably either through dictation, or in her own hand. Her use of the word «indited» in this context suggests that she may have dictated her thoughts to someone, where «indite», according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, means «to utter, suggest, or inspire a form of words which is to be repeated or written down; dictate» (def. 1). Many men and women even in the upper classes who could read and even write might choose to dictate. But «indited» also suggests simply to write or «to put into written words, write, pen; to inscribe, set down, or enter in writing» (def. 4) or a «style of composing, literary style; also the thing indited,

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(21) POLLOCK, note 5, pp. 25-26.

a composition; esp. a poem» (def. 2) (22). By noting that Hamblyn's skills are equal to «most men», Mildmay suggests that she is clearly aware of the apparent gap between men's and women's literacy abilities.

The female textual community is further illustrated in Mildmay's daughter's introduction to her medical papers. In this introduction, Lady Mary Fane describes her commitment to passing on the knowledge of her mother, turning her private writings into a text that could be more widely disseminated. By editing and putting into a volume her mother's writings, Lady Fane shows one way in which women practiced the transmission of knowledge. She writes:

«The treasure of this my worthy mother's mind commit to my hands as well as all her worldly inheritances and goods, I was as desirous and careful to commend the first to her posterity's view and imitation as I shall be careful to transfer unto them in time the latter; that the one by the other may be in them the more resplendent, which made me undertake this delightful pains, to deliver to them in one volume what was scatteringly and confusedly left to me in divers books and more than 2,000 papers» (23).

Lady Fane first shows how texts, «treasures», are handed down from mother to daughter. She articulates that she is aware of this as a method of preserving her mother's valuable knowledge. Further, she links the process of editing and transferring her mother's medical knowledge with the female event and metaphorical image of childbirth, where «delightful pains to deliver them» evoke the experience of childbirth.

#### 4. AN EDUCATION IN MEDICINE

As we get a sense of Hamblyn's literacy skills, we also are told of her skills in «physic». Thus we are introduced to Mildmay's own particular entry point into medical practice as well a potential paradigm or model

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(22) *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, vol.1, p. 1419.

(23) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 110.

for the transmission of medical knowledge along with other education. Mildmay writes thus:

«She had (also) good knowledge in physic and surgery ... And when she did see me idly disposed, she would set me to cipher with my pen and to cast up and prove great sums and accounts, and sometime set me to write a supposed letter to this or that body concerning such and such things, and other times set me to read in Dr Turner's herbal and in Bartholomew Vigoe [a work of surgery], and other times set me to sing psalms and sometimes set me to some curious work (for she was an excellent workwoman in all kinds of needlework, and most curiously she would perform it)» (24).

Here, fitting calmly among lessons in math and accounting, rhetoric, the Bible, and needlework, is the study of herbal remedies and surgery, a study in which we can assume Grace's sisters Ursula and Olive also participated. It is not clear from Mildmay's papers whether this kind of education in medicine was definitively standard among gentlewomen. However, the fact that she doesn't identify Hamblyn's medical knowledge and ability as unusual, coupled with the evidence found in autobiographies and diaries that gentlewomen regularly practiced some level of the healing arts (25), suggests that it may well have been commonplace in young women's education. Mildmay's mother, Lady Anne Sharington, was responsible for Hamblyn's own upbringing, and it could be presumed that what Hamblyn taught Grace and her sisters was at least in part the product of her own education under Grace's mother Anne. If Anne Sharington were to have participated in the transmission of medical knowledge (and even if she had not done so explicitly), then Mildmay's papers represent a revealing example of a matrix of female literacy and female textual community in which there exists a mother (Lady Anne Sharington), cousin (Mistress Hamblyn), sister (Olive and Ursula), Grace, and the reader or audience of the text: Lady Grace Mildmay's daughter Mary and her three daughters. This is clearly a matrilineal practice. In any case, readings in «physic», herbals, and surgery was clearly common practice in her own household.

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(24) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 26.

(25) See note 3.

When Grace married Anthony Mildmay at the young age of fifteen, she left her home at Lacock Abbey to reside with his at Apethorpe. Anthony Mildmay spent much time away from his wife in the service of the Queen; he was, as Lady Grace Mildmay writes «more willing to travel to get experience of the world than to marry too soon» (26). This desire to travel continued into their marriage, and Lady Mildmay writes of this and how she spent her time in his absence:

«My husband was much from me in all that time and I spent the best part of my youth in solitariness, shunning all opportunities to run into company least I might be enticed and drawn away by some evil suggestions to stain mine unspotted garment and so be robbed of mine innocency» (27).

While she writes of isolation from others, she also sets up her daily practice or schedule which includes, as did the studies of her childhood, readings in the Bible, playing the lute and singing psalms, working at her «own invention» drawing or in needlepoint, and working with medical texts:

«Also every day I spent some time in the herbal and books of physic and ministering to one or other by the directions of the best physicians of mine acquaintance, and ever God gave a blessing thereunto» (28).

What is different in this description of her studies is the inclusion of the *practice* of physic (medicine), the «ministering to one or another», and the seemingly personal instruction from physicians themselves, as suggested by her following the directions of «the best physicians of mine acquaintance» (29). One physician lays claim to have encountered Lady Grace Mildmay; Richard Banister, who seems to have been an eye doctor as well as a surgeon, wrote the following in regards to the admonishing of female surgeons:

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(26) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 32.

(27) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 34.

(28) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 35.

(29) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 35.

«I would not be accounted to cry out of all women without exception, that are addicted to surgery; for I have known some, whose worth and wisdom might be paralleled with principal men; whose cures were attended with due care, and ended with true charity: as the right religious and virtuous lady, the Lady Mildmay, of Apethorpe in the county of Northampton, who had herself good judgment in many things; yet when the poor came home to her for help (for on such people she did plant her practice) in cases of physic, she would use the approbations of a physician; in surgery, the aid of a surgeon and for the eyes, the assistance of myself» (30).

What is not clear from her account is how often Mildmay is referring to actual encounters and consultations with physicians, or if her «consultations» are with texts by renowned physicians, for she could be acquainted with a text as much as with an individual. It is likely that it is some combination of both. What is clear from these statements is that she worked regularly and diligently for free in the administration of medicines to the sick poor, and she worked presumably with humble deference to paid University-trained practitioners. We also know from her medical papers that her work was sometimes a follow though or in concordance with certain doctor's treatments, although surely not all could have been. For example she writes: «Now followeth several courses of physic practised by the advice of several physicians upon several patients for the headache. If giddiness or other grief in the head have been occasioned by staying corrupt fluxes, then must rectifying with opening things be given» (31).

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(30) BANISTER, Richard. Letter to the Reader. In: *A Treatise of One Hundred and Thirtene Diseases of the Eyes*, London, 1622; facsimile edition, *The English Experience*, vol. 279, New York, 1971, as cited in POLLOCK, note 5, p. 109.

(31) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 124. Another location in which Mildmay refers to her indebtedness to physicians is in the cases of «infirmities of the face ... being most visible, justly deserveth the more diligent search of cure». The recounts of the doctors prescriptions by and large are shorter, and the recipes or administrations are not followed up as in the case of Lady Grace Mildmay's other descriptions (of presumably her own versions?) in which Mildmay focuses on the very particular courses and nuances of the remedy and disease as well as symptoms and results. It is also interesting that of those remedies produced in Pollock's text, those formulated most specifically after «several physicians» are of the most «superficial»—of the face.

Mildmay's work as a medical practitioner was a natural outcome of her devout religious teachings, and as an act of charity and of «goodly works». I want to suggest it was not only a means to be virtuous in her charity and industrious in her life, but it was also a mechanism for coping with the absence of a husband who was often abroad in service of the Queen, and in part for the absence of a child to tend for (32). One might also argue that this was one way in which a woman might exert a level of independence and control over a certain aspect of her life. Further, her interest in acting with «good judgement» in her devotional and domestic life she carried with her in her medical practices. She writes in her medical papers in describing her goal in medical care: «It is [a] dangerous thing to wear and distract the humours in the body by extreme purges of extreme cordials. Whereby humours are stirred and made to fly up to the head, heart and spirits» (33).

##### 5. *MEDICINAL MEDITATIONS*

Pollock writes in her Epilogue «rather than that Protestantism obstructed or eased her foray into science, it appears that her medical practices supplied her with metaphors for her spiritual meditations» (34). As such, Lady Grace Mildmay's meditations serve as a hinge between her practice of physic and her devotional practices, giving us brief glimpses into the ways she integrated these two significant areas in her life's work. Further, the healing power of faith and Christ gets expressed in meditations that specifically refer, both literally and metaphorically, to healing gestures, herbs and spices, and administrations. As in the case with her autobiography, there are also occasions where early modern medical notions of the body make themselves known both literally and metaphorically. The way in which these medical metaphors are embedded into Mildmay's religious discourse suggests that Mildmay saw her work

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(32) Lady Grace Mildmay desired but did not conceive a child for the first fifteen years of her marriage, which put the birth of her first and only surviving child at about age 30. Interestingly she mentions Mary's birth, but only briefly, and without details.

(33) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 110.

(34) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 148.



as a natural extension of God's work beyond that of just doing charitable and good works and leading an industrious life. For example, she describes Christ's relationship to her as nurturing, refreshing, sustaining, and, of course, healing:

«I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat O friends, drink, and make you merry, O welbeloved. Oh let my welbeloved kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, let him indue me with his love, and with the savour of his good ointments. Let his holy name be unto me as a precious ointment poured out» (35).

Here Mildmay uses the image of gathering herbs and the consumption of wine, milk and honey to describe a kind of celebration in which Christ serves a salvific function: «Let his holy name be unto me a precious ointment poured out».

Mildmay's very sensual account of herself in her meditation of the «spouse of Christ» also suggests the use of herbals:

«... My beloved is as a bundle of myrrh unto me, he shall lie between my breasts. My beloved is as a cluster of camphor unto me. His lips are like lilies, dropping down pure myrrh. His mouth is as sweet things and he is wholly delectable» (36).

Here Christ «is as» a bundle of myrrh that Mildmay lays on her breast in apparent «healing» of her heart. She continues on with this metaphor, once again folding in her own involvement in the service of healing:

«Let me be so open unto my welbeloved that my hands may drop down myrrh and my fingers pure myrrh upon the handles of the bars ... Oh, let my welbeloved lay his left hand under my head and with his right hand let him embrace me ... Oh, fountain of the gardens ... Oh, well of living waters and springs of Lebanon» (37).

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(35) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 75.

(36) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 79.

(37) POLLOCK, note 5, pp. 74-75.

Here, the «welbeloved» is Christ, who Mildmay both lays upon and is embraced by. The «fountain of the gardens» and the «living waters and springs of Lebanon» is an allusion to John 4.7-26 in which Christ gives a woman of Samaritan a drink from a well that will «become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life». «Eternal life» and the medicinal administration here become conflated. In being open to God, Mildmay herself can be the healer, as evidenced by the line «Let me be so open unto my welbeloved that my hands may drop down myrrh and my fingers pure myrrh upon the handles of the bars». In this respect, Mildmay could be seen as a figure who, like Christ, delivers life-giving medicines.

The image of healing and refreshing, life-giving waters gets repeated with some frequency, and as she describes the life-giving waters, Mildmay implements images of medical notions of the body— notions that were theoretically grounded in the Hippocratic and Galenic theory of the four humors, in which the balance of these humors was maintained through application of their opposite qualities (38). For example, a cold application would be used to remove heat, and purging would be used for the removal of excess. A common image in Mildmay's text is one in which in the body purges itself from excess fluids, and is «purified» through this purging (39). Mildmay writes thus:

«... the well of living waters floweth out unto us and the springs of Lebanon runneth swiftly unto us throughout all our parts; from our head unto our feet, so that no part is left unwashed or unrefreshed. And, the worth and operation of all the bleeding wounds of our

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(38) For a recent comprehensive discussion of medieval application of humoral theory, see CADDEN, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages. Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

(39) For more about the relationship of the humors to the (particularly) female body, see for example, MACLEAN, Ian. *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982; JACQUART, Danielle; THOMASSET, Claude. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988; and PORTER, Roy. *Disease, Medicine and Society in England 1550-1860*, London, 1987. There are of course many works that take up this subject, especially in relationship to medical notions of the female body.

saviour Jesus Christ issued forth, unto us, the sap of life, even the most pure and precious balm wherewith we are embalmed and thoroughly healed» (40).

Here again, Mildmay uses the image of Christ as healer, as well as the image of living waters and springs, to signify eternal life. Christ's blood here is equated with those waters, and with the salvific ointment of the previous passage. Further, it is the purging of this blood that brings about this «thorough» healing, and is suggestive of the earthly practice of bloodletting. The analogue of Mildmay's «precious balm» of her meditations appears in her medical papers as «a most precious and excellent balm» which serves, unlike her other medicines which each have a particular use, as a kind of heal-all for her patients of all ages and both sexes, regardless of the ailment.

Finally, she writes in her meditation on «God's power in the creation» of God's gift of medicine:

«The innumerable varieties and multitudes of the good creatures of God here below as souls, fishes, beasts, plants, trees, fruits, spices, precious balms natural, natural baths which boil like a furnace, ordained for health. All sorts of precious gums for medicine, sweet odours, gold, silver, pearl, precious stones with infinite other things unmentioned. All which do declare unto us, the mighty power of God and his love unto man. And especially (which is above them all) that God hath given man wisdom and knowledge to use them and to avoid the abuse of them and to make choice betwixt the good and the evil of them».

In this passage, God's creation is seen in light of its healing potential. «Spices, precious balms natural, natural bath which boil like a furnace, ordained for health, make up a large portion of the list of «good creatures of God below». Mildmay notes the «precious gums for medicine» along with other «precious ... things unmentioned», have ostensibly medicinal qualities. Further, she notes that above these things God has given us «wisdom and knowledge» to avoid their abuse. That is, he has given us the ability to be physicks, and choose the right treatment.

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(40) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 77.

6. *MEDITATIVE MEDICAL THEORY/ MEDICAL PRACTICE*

As with her meditations and educational and religious philosophies, Lady Grace Mildmay's medical practices are lucidly and clearly detailed. Mildmay's medical papers do more than just provide recipes for ailments and proper dosage and administration of remedies, although they do this as well. She also names her patients by names, gives their (brief) medical histories, ruminates about their various symptoms, and describes the way ailments manifest themselves, be it a headache, «falling sickness», acne, or even «melancholy». The particularity with which Mildmay describes her experiences with the sick that she treated, and the means by which she appears to have instructed them, suggests a level of practice and devotion not documented elsewhere.

Further, just as medicinal images were a part of Lady Grace Mildmay's devotional practice, so religion was a part of her medical practice. This close relationship suggests that through her medical practice she generated and interest in and a transmission of the Protestant ideals and practices she expresses in her meditations and autobiography. For example, in describing the proper course for falling sickness for a young woman, Mildmay links proper spiritual care with «physic», and the eventual curing of one 25 year-old maid. She writes:

«I take it that this course of physic aforesaid hath this operation: to mollify all hardness, to moisten all dryness and to set the head, heart and spiritual parts free from all convulsions. For the balm oil and the parts working together in continuance of time, maketh nature strong to retains the good and to cast out the evil, which else would overcome nature» (41).

In this passage, it is the religious admonitions and administrations as much as the balm oil that will cure the disease, for «good» must «cast out the evil» (just as hot must cold, and wet the dry). Mildmay also connects sickness specifically to original sin, suggesting that through her healing medical practices she metaphorically «saves» people from sin. She writes thus:

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(41) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 113.

«So that they who minister physic must take care and consideration of all humours and all parts, that will truly cure any one. And as they are tied thereunto by the coherence of nature so are they tied to the observation of infinite accidents which will arise in the administration, hanging over man's head since he let in sickness by sin» (42).

Here Mildmay first lays out the general responsibility of all physics in the careful managing of humors, the balance of which was thought to help maintain spiritual, moral, and physical health (43). She then expresses the relationship between man's original sin and the «infinite accidents» which reverberates in several of her remedy recipes and application instructions, and the physic's duty to cure them of both sin and illness.

Certain recipes, for example, are to be delivered «in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ». (It should be noted that, of those excerpted, the remedies performed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are always for the «feeble» or ailing of mind, and the young.) Of those that specifically request the use of this administration, one is for an older woman who suffers «of frenzy and madness». The recipe reads: «First let her take 3 days together this purge following. Take of diasabestian 6 ounces, mixed with 12 grains of diagyrdian dissolved in a draught of clear posset ale in the morning fasting and fast 4 hours after it. Then drink a draught of thin broth warm, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ» (44). Another is a course of treatment for melancholy for a Mr. Waters in which he is to be purged (through consumption of glisters and cordials), plastered (with ointments and an emplaster of mellicote for the spleen), and finally bled:

«And in this course of physic, in the time which seemeth most convenient to those that ministreth it, let the cephalita vein be opened in the left arm and take about 8 ounces. Note when the blood is melancholy adust, black and thick the orifice must be made the wider, else the thin will come away and leave the rest of the blood more thickened.

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(42) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 111.

(43) See for example PORTER, note 39, p.25.

(44) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 119.

And also with the like choice let leeches be applied unto the fundament. Let the patient's hair be cut as close as possible and wear next upon it a cap of lead beaten very thin and pricked full of holes. And let this course be repeated over again so often until he be well, all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ» (45).

There are several images of note in this passage. One has to do with the fact that this bloodletting is clearly to be performed by someone other than Mildmay. Also, there is a Biblical cadence to this description, «let leeches be applied ... let the patient's hair be cut». And finally, these things are performed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Given the evidence of her meditations and autobiography, it is not at all surprising that Lady Grace Mildmay includes in her remedies the specific direction to perform administrations of certain remedies in the «name of the Lord». Yet, compared to other documentary evidence of this nature, it is not a given that the elements and practice of «physic» were always as aligned, at least metaphorically, with those of religious practice as Mildmay's collected works suggest.

## 7. FEMALE MATRIX OF KNOWLEDGE

What we find in Lady Grace Mildmay's collected papers is a portrait of a woman intensely devoted to God and meditational practices, ardently dedicated to the conscientious practice of medicine, and firmly committed to her family and their education. Across these various texts, and in their compilation, Mildmay also shows an acute sense of the importance of the transmission of knowledge, be it Godly, goodly, or medicinal. And, although she claims to have been quite solitary, her papers illustrate the ways in which women imparted knowledge to each other, and in her family's case, medical knowledge in particular. By examining the specific ways Mildmay transmitted medical and religious knowledge that she received from her mother and mistress to her daughter and her granddaughters, we can get a fuller understanding of the complex matrix of female textual communities, practitioners and Protestants in

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(45) POLLOCK, note 5, p. 123.

general. Further, understanding how women's textual communities were variously produced and established will not only give us new paradigms for understanding women's roles in the education of their daughters, but it will also give us a means to talk about a textual discourse that appears to work, as the women themselves did, separately from men.