

*Textual Inheritance:
A Theory for Agency of Women in English Books of Hours*

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The English laity increasingly sought an individual experience of devotion and a more personal connection with God throughout the later Middle Ages.¹ This growth in personal piety manifested itself in the inception and propagation of the book of hours, a genre of small, portable devotional books that were used especially by the female laity in late medieval Europe.² Books of hours contained at their core the Hours of the Virgin, or psalms and prayers to the Virgin Mary that were said at each of the canonical hours, with elements such as the liturgical calendar, passages from the Gospels, and the Office of the Dead frequently accompanying the Hours.³ Although these elements were often standard in these texts, books of hours were not all identical. Each book differed not only in their level of luxury but also in such elements as vernacular prayer, images, and layout. These variations created a window into the devotional and educational practices of their owners.

Because women in late medieval England grew fonder of books of hours for their daily devotion, scholars in turn favor books of hours as a source for exploring literacy and devotion among the female laity. For instance, Jeremy Goldberg and Patricia Collum use illuminations in the Bolton Hours to examine the transference of literacy from Margaret Blackburn to her three daughters.⁴ Similarly, Nicola McDonald uses a Primer from York to explore the

¹ Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 296.

² The term "Primer" is often used in English when referring to books of hours, while *Horae* is used to describe the Latin. Some scholars, like Marjorie Curry Woods, argue that *Horae* differ from Primers through their lavishness and use of Latin rather than the vernacular. See Marjorie Curry Woods, "Shared Books: Primers, Psalters, and the Adult Acquisition of Literacy Among Devout Laywomen and Women in Order in Late Medieval England," in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: the Holy women of Liege and Their Impact*, edited by Juliette Dor, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 181.

³ Mary C. Erler, "Devotional Literature," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, edited by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 495-496.

⁴ Patricia Collum and P.J.P. Goldberg, "How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in*

role of mothers in catechetical education.⁵ In her article examining women's relationship to book production in late medieval England through books of hours, Marjorie Curry Woods discusses Susan Cavanaugh's study of book ownership in England as evidence of books of hours as the most commonly bequeathed book among women.⁶ These trends in historiography related to books of hours suggest evidence of a textual community, as formulated by Brian Stock in his landmark study *Implications of Literacy*. Stock's investigation of heretical and reformist groups in the eleventh century reveals similarities between their methods of interpreting texts to structure and justify their behavior, calling the groups that practice these methods "textual communities."⁷ These textual communities formed around a central literate person,⁸ who then interpreted a text for the larger textual community.

Although Stock uses the concept of textual community to describe dissenters from Christian orthodoxy, his theory prompted me to develop a variation on the textual community model for more conventional groups, which I call "textual inheritance." In textual inheritance, the commissioner of the book of hours acted as the central agent who passed his or her interpretation down to a larger community of readers. The text itself was the vehicle for the commissioner's interpretation, which was generated through the inclusion of more variable elements of the books of hours, including vernacular prayers, images of saints and Biblical stories, and marginalia. The beneficiaries who received the text formed the community, which built over time through the transmission of the book of hours. Through the book, the commissioner influenced both the devotion and education of the inheritors to the texts. In the case of a female commissioner, she had the ability to impact readers and devotees for generations beyond the traditional purview of her immediate family.

Textual inheritance introduces a new form of agency for elite laywomen in late medieval England. In this paper, I establish textual inheritance as a concept and explore its devotional and educational implications using two

Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy, edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al., 217-236 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

⁵ Nicola McDonald, "A York Primer and Its Alphabet: Reading Women in a Lay Household," in *Medieval Literature in English*, edited by Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 767.

⁶ Woods, "Shared Books," 182; McDonald, "A York Primer," 181.

⁷ Brian Stock, "II. Textual Communities," in *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 88-240.

⁸ Literacy has traditionally been described as the ability of a person to read and write. This description is applicable to Stock's central literate agent, who would most likely be able to read and write in Latin specifically since they most often read and interpreted the Bible.

English books of hours - the "Felbrygg Hours"⁹ and the "Egerton Hours."¹⁰ These books of hours had multiple owners throughout the late Middle Ages and contained didactic and devotional components that impacted recipients through the transmission of the text. Engaging in questions of ownership and use, I conclude that the textual inheritance theory reflected a system of agency that allowed for a commissioner of a book of hours to impact the devotional and educational development of several generations of owners, placing women in a position of modest authority in a sphere that otherwise severely restricted their influence.

Although the commissioner had a certain amount of control over the contents of the book of hours, there were standard components that frequently appeared in these texts. For instance, the Hours of the Virgin, or the "Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary," was at the heart of the book of hours, giving the genre its name. The Little Office was a cycle of short services recited at the canonical hours that imitated the Divine Office typically recited by the clergy.¹¹ Additionally, some books of hours contained a calendar, which could be used every year to determine feast days and would often identify saints venerated by the owner and important family events.¹² Books of hours also commonly included the Office of the Dead, prayed by the living for the deceased in hopes that it would reduce their loved ones' time in Purgatory,¹³ and a variety of Psalms and other prayers, such as the "*Obsecro te*" ("Oh, I beseech you") and "*O intemerata*" ("Oh, Immaculate Virgin").¹⁴

Books of hours are essential in understanding textual inheritance because of their popularity and their role in the daily religious and educational rituals of the laity.¹⁵ They were often a layperson's primary devotional guide and ranged in luxury from simple manuscripts, with little to no adornment, to deluxe codices, encrusted with gems and gold leaf. Early in their popularity, books of hours were common among the elite, particularly high-status women,

⁹ Berkeley, California, Huntington Library, HM 58285.

¹⁰ London, UK, British Library, Egerton 1151.

¹¹ Backhouse, *Books of Hours*, 3; Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5. The Hours were included as part of larger prayer books and Psalters as well, and were most often used by clergy until the mid-thirteenth century. At this time, laypeople started commissioning books of hours without the Psalter which was unwieldy. See Roger Wieck, "Books of Hours," in *The History of the Book in the West: 400 AD - 1455 vol. 1*, edited by Jane Roberts and Pamela Robinson (London: Ashgate, 2010), 324.

¹² Backhouse, *Books of Hours*, 11; Wieck, "Books of Hours," 332.

¹³ Wieck, "Books of Hours," 355.

¹⁴ Backhouse, *Books of Hours*, 12-15; and Wieck, "Books of Hours," 345.

¹⁵ Charity Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 1.

as they could afford the steep cost of the manuscript materials and scribal work.¹⁶ Demand for books of hours increased throughout the later Middle Ages, peaking after the introduction of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁷ Over this period, books of hours progressively permeated medieval lay life and became a part of daily orthodox practice, allowing these texts to become instrumental in the lay understanding of devotion

The amount of scholarship studying books of hours parallels the popularity of the text in the Middle Ages. Their extensive use makes them a crucial resource for scholars attempting to understand lay literacy and social relations in the late medieval period.¹⁸ Nevertheless, as scholars like Michael Clanchy are inclined to note, the book of hours was first and foremost a book of devotion, meant for private piety in the daily lives of their owners.¹⁹ They were intended to provide guidance during devotional observances. Clanchy asserts that this original purpose of a book of hours was maintained in that a person only needed his or her book of hours and its words as a form of worship; hence the frequency that lay libraries only consisted of a single book of hours.²⁰

As indicated by Susan Groag Bell, however, books of hours were "more than simple prayerbooks."²¹ They were used for literate education as well as devotion, and as such have become multidimensional sources for scholars to examine.²² A specific example of this is the Bolton Hours, created in England sometime in the early fifteenth century. It has become a favored book of hours among scholars,²³ such as Patricia Collum, P. J. P. Goldberg, and Nicola

¹⁶ Wieck, "Books of Hours," 329.

¹⁷ Backhouse, *Books of Hours*, 3.

¹⁸ Using the example of Jane Guildford's book of hours, Mary Erler explores the signing of books of hours as an indication of friendship, similar to that of the modern yearbook. See Mary Erler, "The Book of Hours as *Album Amicorum*: Jane Guildford's Book," in *The Social Life of Illumination: Manuscripts, Images, and Communities in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Joyce Coleman, Mark Cruse, and Kathryn A. Smith (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 505-535.

¹⁹ Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours*, 1.

²⁰ Michael Clanchy "Learning to Read in the Middle Ages and the Role of Mothers," in *Studies in the History of Reading*, edited by Greg Brooks and A. K. Pugh (Reading, UK: Centre for Teaching of Reading, 1984), 34.

²¹ Susan Groag Bell, "Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture," *Signs* 7:4 (Summer 1982): 161. Bell's essay offers fascinating insight into women as perpetuators of vernacular literature, arguing that their lack of education in Latin in combination with their desire for piety and to teach their children these morals led to their voracious appetite for vernacular texts. Through this demand in vernacular books, argues Bell, women became instrumental in the entirety of book culture in the late medieval period, going as far as to suggest that women had "a profound influence" in the inception of the Protestant Reformation through the book market.

²² Collum and Goldberg, "Reading Devotional Literature," 236. d

²³ Collum and Goldberg, "Margaret Blackburn," 218-219.

McDonald, who study this manuscript to determine the relationship between literacy and devotional texts.²⁴ What makes the Bolton Hours especially valuable in discussions of female literacy is that evidence suggests that a woman commissioned it, specifically Margaret, the mother of the Blackburn family. Scholars provide different pieces of evidence for this, but the most prevalent are the many illuminations of women worshipping and the image of Saint Anne teaching the Virgin Mary to read. It is notable that the illumination depicts Saint Anne instructing not only the Virgin Mary, but also Mary's two sisters, Mary Salome and Mary Cleopas. These four women likely corresponded to Margaret Blackburn and her three daughters that were alive at the time of the manuscript's patronage.²⁵ Collum and Goldberg believe that this image of Saint Anne indicates this book of hours' use as an educational tool for Margaret Blackburn and her daughters.²⁶

Nicola McDonald claims that many mothers taught all of their children to read with books of hours so that they could learn their prayers, while Susan Groag Bell notes a particular affiliation of these texts with matrilineal, or mother-to-daughter, education.²⁷ Bell further asserts that noblewomen were taught to read with these books of hours at an early age because they were expected to model themselves after Biblical women.²⁸ Once they grew up, however, Bell states that women could use their books to escape Church control through private reading.²⁹ McDonald also believes that after learning from these books of hours, women were actually encouraged to take an interest in textual culture because it could serve the interests of the patriarchal family.³⁰

Scholars remark further upon the inheritance and distribution of books of hours. Specifically, they find that books of hours were the books most commonly owned by women and that they were frequently bequeathed to other women.³¹ These conclusions stem from the work done by Susan Cavanaugh in her dissertation on medieval English book owners. According to Bell, Cavanaugh's work reveals that women were inheriting books more and more in the later Middle Ages. She claims, "by the end of the fifteenth century, then, women had become more frequent possessors of many types of books which they had acquired through inheritance, through outright purchase from

²⁴ See McDonald, "A York Primer;" and Collum and Goldberg, "Margaret Blackburn."

²⁵ Collum and Goldberg, "Margaret Blackburn," 232. McDonald, "A York Primer," 186.

²⁶ Collum and Goldberg, "Margaret Blackburn," 286.

²⁷ McDonald, "A York Primer," 186. Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners," 767.

²⁸ Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners," 752.

²⁹ Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners," 753.

³⁰ McDonald, "A York Primer," 185.

³¹ Woods, "Shared Books," 181.

scribes and book-sellers, and through commission.”³² Cavanaugh’s dissertation is not the only evidence used by scholars in determining the inheritance of books of hours; Collum and Goldberg infer that the female figures in the illuminations that only represent the mother and daughter indicate a matrilineal transmission of this text.³³ There is a clear indication that women were passing their books of hours on to their heirs and heiresses.

I contend that these trends in the historiography of books of hours encourage us to consider a variation on Brian Stock’s “textual community.” Stock argues that when there was growth in literacy, society did not move linearly from a purely oral culture to a purely written culture, but instead became a culture of oral *and* written word. There was a balance between the two that allowed for an interdependent relationship in the period after the year 1000. Eventually, literacy allowed for the basic skills of reading and writing to become tools for analysis and interpretation. Medieval people were able to reevaluate their thoughts within a textual framework, bringing to their attention the relationship between seeming dichotomies (inner vs. outer, spoken word vs. written word, etc.) as well as allowing for the intellectualization of symbols and rituals.

The textual community is at the crux of Stock’s argument as it shows how a text could influence a group, even if members were functionally illiterate. Stock formulates the concept of the textual community through his study of heretical and reformist groups, which rose in number with the increase in literacy in the eleventh centuries. He aims to determine the shared features of their formations to better understand how these groups came about, claiming that these communities were “laboratories of social organization,” which allowed them to experiment in an attempt to make improvements within the group and for society at large.³⁴ Through his work, Stock discovers similarities between the groups’ methods of interpreting texts to structure and justify their behavior.³⁵ Both the heretical and the reformist sects used text to set precedence for their unorthodox work, but the perception of these groups’ alterations depended on the view of the previous tradition.

There were three essential parts to the textual community, the simplest being the community as a whole. The members of the community tended to be educated and of higher status and questioned the traditional symbolism and

³² Bell, “Women Books Owners,” 158.

³³ Collum and Goldberg, “How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters,” 222. See also: Susan Cavanaugh, “Books Privately Owned in England, 1300-1450” (Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1980).

³⁴ Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 88.

³⁵ Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 90.

rituals of the popular communities. There was a sense of belonging to this group that solidified in a common belief, which helped them unite against the outside world. Another element was the text itself. This text, typically the Bible in early heresies and reformist groups, was a more formative part of the heretical textual community, as members saw it text as a step to perfect communion with God. Society outside of the text, meanwhile, was separate from their realm and had what the communities considered lower forms of literacy and spirituality. Finally, the textual community had a central literate person that understood and mastered a text and who reformed the group's behavior in reference to the text. Because their interpretation enacted change in the beliefs and behavior of the rest of the group, this person was the most fundamental part of the textual community, as opposed to the text itself.³⁶ Textual communities created new uses for orality,³⁷ especially when the members moved beyond the text itself by becoming so literate that they no longer needed the physical object but could interpret it from memory. Nonliterate³⁸ were able to connect to and indirectly participate in literate culture through preaching of the text. They understood the importance of the text to the community and how the text could legitimize one set of moral principles over another. Stock argues that this made them even more important in the change through textual communities than the literate central agent.³⁹

In my own theory of transmission and influence, which I call "textual inheritance," the commissioner of the book of hours acted as the central agent whose interpretation was passed on to a larger community of readers. The book of hours, as a physical text, became the vehicle for the commissioner's interpretation. This interpretation was generated through the inclusion of more variable elements of the book of hours, including vernacular prayers, images of saints and Biblical stories, and marginalia, as well as through the format, which dictated the didactic effect of the book of hours. The beneficiaries who received the interpretation through the text formed the community, which built over time through the transmission of the book of hours. Through this

³⁶ Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 90.

³⁷ Brian Stock's work seeks to understand textuality and orality in society. Textuality is essentially the presence of text in a society, which allows for explanations and interpretations through said text, even in a functionally illiterate context. As such, textuality does not automatically mean literacy, as one does not need overtly need text to be literate or need literacy to use a text. Orality, on the other hand, exists in two concepts, one of which meaning oral discourse without the influence of written word. Stock is concerned with the second meaning, where oral discourse relies on text and uses text as a way to establish legitimacy through written precedence. Oral discourse could in this way be codified in text.

³⁸ "Nonliterate" is Brian Stock's term for those who were not literate. He does not use "illiterate" for its historically negative connotation.

³⁹ Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 90-92.

text, the commissioner influenced both the devotion and education of the inheritors to the text.

Textual inheritance differs from Stock's original community by reorienting the roles of the participants. Stock's textual community concentrated on the central interpreter as the metaphorical text, who rendered the material text obsolete. Although their understanding of the original text informed their interpretation, it was their interpretation of the text rather than the text itself that was important to the group. Likewise, their understanding of the text was communicated to the group orally, making the physical presence of the text unnecessary. In textual inheritance, there was a shift in the role of the physical text and the commissioner as interpreter. The commissioner formed the book of hours out of his or her own interpretation of what was most significant to include rather than being informed by the text. The book of hours similarly was the channel through which the central agent's interpretation was communicated to the larger community, diminishing the orality of transmission (Figure 1).

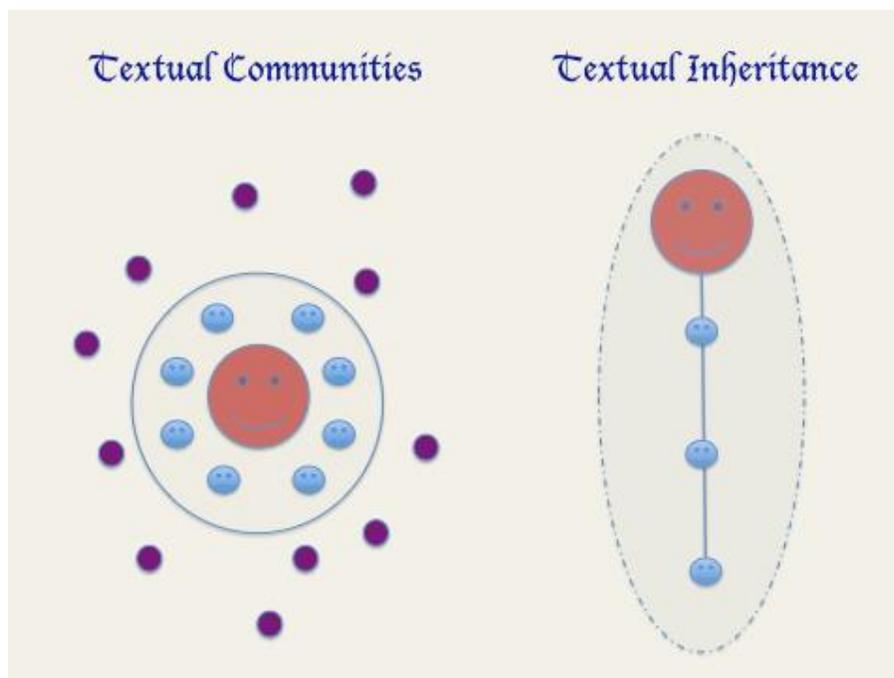


Figure 1 A visual comparison of textual communities and textual inheritance

Textual inheritance relies on the variable elements of a book of hours to reinforce the commissioner's interpretation of devotion and education. Using these elements along with the provenance, I will now explore the concept of textual inheritance. I will focus especially on the commissioner, who in both books of hours examined here, the Felbrygg Hours and the Egerton Hours,

were women. The discoveries from these sources reveal how the interpretation of the commissioner, as formed through her selection of contents, may have influenced the inheritors of the text and what these texts implied in the larger chronological context.

The first book of hours examined here is held in the Huntington Library in Berkeley, California, under the catalog entry HM 58285.⁴⁰ Also known as the Felbrygg Hours, this manuscript was written in England between the years 1390 and 1410. The Felbrygg Hours consists of 64 folios of parchment, with each folio measuring 150 by 215 millimeters (approximately 5.9 inches by 8.5 inches), making the Felbrygg Hours the dimensionally larger of the two works studied here. The Felbrygg Hours is encased in a modern binding of speckled brown leather from the eighteenth century. The pages are ruled for consistency and clarity in the writing, with quires two through seven ruled in brown ink and eight through nine in pale red, excluding folios 63 and 64, which are ruled in a bright red ink.

The script of the Felbrygg Hours is Formal Gothic, although the hand itself changes at least six times within the document. These changes happen especially when there are shifts in the language of the text. The Felbrygg Hours includes two prayers in the vernacular, the first an Old Czech translation of the Elevation prayer to Jesus, and the second in Middle English, opening with "[O] glorious ihesu. O meekest ihesu. O swettest ihesu. I pray the that I may haue true confession."⁴¹ The Middle English prayer continues to ask forgiveness for the failings of the parts of the body.⁴² The Latin text of the Felbrygg Hours, as well as the Middle English prayer, has well-spaced letters and words,⁴³ but the script of the Old Czech prayer is more unclear.⁴⁴ The Old Czech prayer may have indeed been an addition by the original owner of the text, Margaret of Teschen, the daughter of Przemyslaw Noszak. Noszak was a noted Lady of Honor for Anne of Bohemia who was the wife of King Richard II of England.

The provenance of the Felbrygg Hours reveals a series of women who inherited the Hours from Margaret. The first was likely Margaret's daughter, Elizabeth, who married Miles Stapleton. The second owner was Miles Stapleton's second wife, Katherine Stapleton. The inclusion of the deaths of the de la Pole and Cheyne families in the obituary indicate Katherine's possession of the Felbrygg Hours, as she was the daughter of Thomas de la Pole and Anne,

⁴⁰ Huntington Library, HM 58285, f. 62r.

⁴¹ "Oh glorious Jesus, oh meekest Jesus, oh sweetest Jesus, I pray you that I may have true confession."

⁴² Huntington Library, HM 58285, f. 62r.

⁴³ Huntington Library, HM 58285, ff. 58r and 64v.

⁴⁴ Huntington Library, HM 58285, f. 62r.

née Cheyne. Additional owners include an unidentified one from the fifteenth century with a special veneration to Peter of Verona, whose feast day is included on the calendar and who has a prayer included in the text.⁴⁵ Subsequent possessors of the Felbrygg Hours appear to be antiquarians and booksellers.

The Felbrygg Hours includes not only the typical Hours of the Virgin, but also a calendar, Hours of the Cross, and, most interestingly, a suffrage of Saint Anne. Suffrages like this one to Anne consist of four parts: three ejaculations (*antiphon*, *versicle*, and *response*), and a prayer (*oratio*).⁴⁶ While the Hours of the Virgin implore the Virgin Mary for her intercession between the person praying and Jesus for the eternal salvation, suffrages appeal to other, more ordinary saints for temporal help.⁴⁷ Saints like Anne, Mary's mother, were human and approachable, more appropriate for the mundane.⁴⁸ Therefore, Margaret of Teschen and her beneficiaries likely sought Anne's assistance in their household and wifely duties while reciting her suffrage in their daily devotion.

The second book of hours is Egerton 1151 from the Bodleian Library, known hereafter as the Egerton Hours.⁴⁹ This book of hours was written in South or Central England sometime between 1250 and 1275. The Egerton Hours consists of 159 folios of parchment at 160 by 105 millimeters (approximately 6.3 inches by 4.1 inches). It is bound in red leather binding with gilt edges. A single scribe wrote the text in a clear Gothic script, with well-spaced, uniform letters. The text uses some abbreviation, which makes it slightly less conducive to first learning to read, although the abbreviations are fairly clear and may have been understandable to the experienced learner.⁵⁰

The Egerton Hours is the more fully illuminated of the two texts. In addition to several initials decorated in colors and gold and smaller initials in blue with red penwork and gold in blue penwork, there are twelve large historiated initials, each paired with a partial or three-sided colored or gold borders. These borders incorporate animals and hybrids at its major divisions.⁵¹ The first historiated initial is on folio 7, opening the Hours of the Virgin. An image of the Virgin and Child inhabits the space within this initial, and in front of these two, a woman kneels with an open book and looks

⁴⁵ Huntington Library, HM 58285, ff. 7v-8r.

⁴⁶ Wieck, "Books of Hours," 353.

⁴⁷ Wieck, "Books of Hours," 350.

⁴⁸ Wieck, "Books of Hours," 461.

⁴⁹ British Library, Egerton 1151.

⁵⁰ See British Library, Egerton 1151 for examples of the script and abbreviations.

⁵¹ See British Library, Egerton 1151, f. 7r for an example of the historiated initials and borders.

devotedly toward the holy pair in front of her.⁵² Subsequently, an image marks the first letter of the prayers for each Hour of the Virgin and each Hour of the Holy Spirit. Included in these illuminations are laymen, laywomen, and clerics performing the duties of that time of day in combination with the symbolic images of Holy Spirit. There is also an image for the Office of the Dead at the back of the book. This illumination depicts the scene of a funeral service, along with a rabbit, hybrid creatures, and a centaur shooting an arrow.

The most compelling illumination in the Egerton Hours is the first, with a woman worshipping in front of the Virgin and Child with an open book. Such images of female devotion indicate the original use and ownership of the book of hours.⁵³ Likewise, the placement of her image early in the manuscript alongside such influential figures suggests that this woman was likely the commissioner of this book of hours. Further, there are two ownership inscriptions that signify the transmission of the Egerton Hours to a mixed-gender audience. The first is a Mistress Phyllis from the early sixteenth century. She writes, “Mysterys Felys owyth this boke...” and further requests that if one finds her book then he or she take the pain to bring it back to her. The second ownership inscription belongs to Robert Colston of Nottingham.⁵⁴ After Colston, the next known owner was an eighteenth-century London bookseller, Thomas Rodd the Younger, marking the end of transmission to devotees. Even with this limited provenance, it is significant that the Egerton Hours passed through the hands of both men and women when it had been commissioned with a woman’s interpretation of what should be included.

While the exact intentions of the female commissioners of the Febyrgg and Egerton Hours are impossible to know, the impact that their decisions had on the devotional and instructive practices of their benefactors can be inferred from analysis of the content and formatting of the books. For instance, one of the reasons books of hours are so useful as a source is that they provide insight into the educational practices of female commissioners and their inheritors. Women were excluded from English schools in the late medieval period and instead had to learn through a nunnery or a private tutor arranged by their families.⁵⁵ Books of hours presented greater opportunity for these elite women to learn how to read at home with the guidance of their mother or chaplain.

⁵² British Library, Egerton 1151, f. 7r.

⁵³ Adelaide Bennett, “Seeking Patronage: Patrons & Motions in Language, Art, and Historiography,” in *Patronage, Power, and Agency in Medieval Art*, edited by Colum Hourihane (Philadelphia: Penn State Press, 2013), 255.

⁵⁴ British Library, Egerton 1151, f. 159r.

⁵⁵ William J. Courtenay, *Schools & Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 13. This is different than France or Italy, where girls could be formally educated in larger cities.

These women could participate in the “seeing, hearing, saying” reinforcement model of learning by using their books of hours daily, and although they did not necessarily know the Latin, these women would be able to recognize the letters and sounds, helping them understand the written vernacular.⁵⁶

Several factors went into the legibility and the didactic efficacy of a book of hours. For example, the script of the book of hours was crucial in understanding the text. Legibility of a manuscript is determined by the ability to identify the letters in the text; the writing should not be too small, nor should many abbreviations be used. Likewise the space between letters and words should be adequate to distinguish between each character.⁵⁷ The Egerton Hours demonstrates this legibility with its large and consistent letters, highlighting the significance of the commissioner’s choice in script.⁵⁸ Similarly, the formatting was also essential in the educational effect of the books of hours. The layout of the text should have been easy to read, with the use of columns and space between lines and in margins.⁵⁹ The ruling of both the Egerton Hours and the Felbrygg Hours allows for the clear spacing between letters and wide margins for notes and ornamentation. Finally, the units of text inside of the book of hours were short, which made them more conducive to learning. Brevity of text was key in teaching reading, making them like short lessons.⁶⁰ By selecting short passages, the commissioner encouraged learning among her inheritors.

Intellectual elites in the late medieval period demanded literary lessons be in Latin rather than the vernacular. In his fourteenth century chronicle, Henry Knighton expressed concern over the use of vernacular in relation to the scripture. He claimed that women who knew how to read the Gospel were like “‘swine’ trampling the ‘pearl of the gospel’ underfoot.” Ignorant men and women reading signaled the end of the world to chroniclers like Knighton because God “allow[ed] the uninitiated to meddle with His word.”⁶¹ Similarly, the Church became anxious as the use of vernacular increased. It was concerned for its own authority and interpretation of Scripture when the Latin was translated into the vernacular.⁶²

⁵⁶ Woods, “Shared Books,” 186-187.

⁵⁷ Tjamke Snijders, *Manuscript Communication: Visual and Textual Mechanics of Communication in Hagiographical Texts from the Southern Low Countries, 900-1200* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 53.

⁵⁸ See British Library, Egerton 1151.

⁵⁹ Snijders, *Manuscript Communication*, 53.

⁶⁰ Woods, “Shared Books,” 185.

⁶¹ Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women’s Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 114.

⁶² Virginia Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 90.

On a practical level, however, Latin and vernacular languages were mixed in religion. Although Latin was far from a dead language in its use in the university and in the Church, it was still foreign for most of the laity and even lower clergy. People at many levels of society struggled to understand the Latin liturgy.⁶³ Therefore, traditional rituals were still performed in Latin but with vernacular added occasionally to help the laity with comprehension.⁶⁴ This intermixing was reflected in books of hours especially, where the vernacular was used to supplement the larger Latin text. For instance, rubrication, or the use of red ink to bring attention to or demarcate certain text, could give instructions on where and how to pray⁶⁵ The Egerton Hours has such rubrication in French, the language of the English elite, which gives guidance to the reader on how to practice the rituals contained within the book.

Another distinctive vernacular element from these texts is the prayer to Jesus in Old Czech from the Felbrygg Hours.⁶⁶ It is not surprising that these Hours would make use of the Old Czech vernacular. The original owner, Margaret of Teschen, was the daughter of a Lady of Honor of Anne of Bohemia, the wife of Richard II. Not only would she likely want a prayer that she easily understood, but her connection to Queen Anne may indicate a particular inclination to use the vernacular. Anne's father, Emperor Charles IV, tolerated vernacular Bible reading and encouraged the admission of Lollards to the University of Prague.⁶⁷ Anne likewise acted favorably toward the Lollards in England.⁶⁸ Therefore, it makes sense that her lady's daughter would encourage the use of Old Czech and Middle English within her book of hours.

The Old Czech prayer of the Felbrygg Hours stands out especially for being a vernacular prayer in an English book of hours that is not Middle

⁶³ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours*, 87.

⁶⁴ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours*, 88.

⁶⁵ Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours*, 157-158.

⁶⁶ Huntington Library, 62r.

⁶⁷ Bell, "Women Book Owners," 177. Using vernacular translations of the Scripture in England after the mid-fourteenth century created controversy as the Lollard movement, founded by John Wycliffe, caused much discomfort in the Church. Wycliffe encouraged the study of the Bible in the vernacular so that the individual would have access to the Word of God. He mistrusted the Church, and felt that the lay individual was capable of interpreting his or her own devotion. Courtenay says that the theological and ecclesiastical writings of Wycliffe dominated the last few decades of the fourteenth century, making him "a man of his age and a formative influence." At the Council of Clarendon of 1408, Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, enacted church law against John Wycliffe and his teachings. Translation of the Bible in English became strictly forbidden, thus the retention of Latin seemed to stem from the censorship by the Church. Therefore, the use of Middle English prayers in books of hours could have sparked controversy for the laity, whose worship was informed by such texts. See Courtenay, *Schools & Scholars*, 355.

⁶⁸ Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 278.

English or Old French. This Old Czech prayer also hints at a movement away from the cult of the Virgin Mary. Although the Felbrygg Hours was written at the turn of the fifteenth century, this prayer foreshadows a coming trend; as the fifteenth century progressed, books of hours started including more prayers to Jesus and shifting away from a focus on Mary.⁶⁹ Furthermore, with a slow change in the attitude toward Mary, the previous books of hours that had a much greater concentration on Mary might have fallen to disuse.

Perhaps the most eye-catching parts of certain books of hours were the illuminations that often decorated more luxurious manuscripts and served assorted purposes in the text. Illuminated books of hours contained miniatures to demarcate major divisions in the text as well as the individual Hours. Additionally, deluxe manuscripts often included images of the owners and their families as well as their coats-of-arms, mottoes, and devices.⁷⁰ Illustrations were used as a guide for finding prayers, and helped keep the laity mentally active while repeating Latin prayer.⁷¹ Reinburg further posits that illustrations in books of hours allowed for viewers to imagine the direct intercession of the saints and a more direct line to the divine.⁷²

Images of patrons in books of hours showed them either looking at their text or at a devotional character to exemplify the behavior performed when reciting the Hours. They also provided opportunities to demonstrate the devotion of the patron.⁷³ In the Egerton Hours, the illustration of the female commissioner kneeling with a book while gazing at the Virgin Mary is an example of this archetype. She genuflects while staring in wonder at her object of devotion, with her book seemingly mediating her experience as she worships. This image would serve as a reminder to the commissioner herself, as well as her heirs, of the activity in which she is participating, and it would encourage them to follow her pictorial example. In doing so, the illustration reinforces and celebrates the piety of this female commissioner.⁷⁴

Kathryn Smith argues that the images in the book of hours could have further mediated the owner's experience of religious imagery in other areas, such as the stained glass and sculptures in the church.⁷⁵ In this way, the

⁶⁹ Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours*, 6.

⁷⁰ Backhouse, *Books of Hours*, 4.

⁷¹ Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours*, 17; Reinburg, *French Books of Hours*, 114.

⁷² Reinburg, *French Book of Hours*, 127.

⁷³ Nigel Morgan, "Patrons and Their Devotions in the Historiated Initials and Full-Page Miniatures of Thirteenth-Century English Psalters," in *The Illuminated Psalter: Studies in the Content, Purpose, and Placement of Its Images*, edited by Frank O. Büttner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 317.

⁷⁴ British Library, Egerton 1151, f. 7r.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Art, Identity, and Devotion*, 4.

influence of books of hours permeated the devotional sphere. This pervasion of the interpretation of images likely affected the pious book owner in two ways. Firstly, the commissioner of the book plausibly requested an illustration for the text that best expressed their personal devotion. It would follow that they also had similar perceptions of the devotional imagery around them. Personal experience entered into the text while the text entered into personal experience. They flowed into one another, influencing interpretation of each other.⁷⁶ The second method of influence, however, meant that the inheritors received the depiction chosen by the commissioner; therefore having the commissioner's opinion of the correct illuminations determined their own understanding of images outside of the book of hours. This sort of interpretation would be out of Church control, giving significant authority to the commissioner.

With the commissioner having so much influence over the devotional interpretation and literacy of the readers of a book of hours through the contents of the text, it is significant to note instances when women were influencing the devotion of men. Traditionally, men would determine the understanding of a religious text or image for a community, especially when that community incorporated men. The Church at large was an illustration of this patriarchal system of devotion, as the male clergy would be expected to have sole control over the scripture. Even the examples Stock uses demonstrate this male dominance, as the central interpreting figure in each of his heretical and reformist group was male.⁷⁷

There is some medieval precedent for women forming devotional manuals for other women, such as HERRAD of Hohenbourg's creation of *Hortus deliciarum*. Also known as *Garden of Delights*, this text was created for the spiritual guidance of the canonesses at Hohenbourg. The Augustinian Rule of their order included guidelines for the spiritual care of women, but the emphasis on clerical celibacy in the twelfth-century Church prevented reputable priests from frequenting their abbey. HERRAD decided to instead provide pastoral care for her spiritual sisters by collecting texts that she felt were appropriate for their guidance and worship. She compiled the texts into the *Hortus*, giving these women autonomy in their worship while also granting power to HERRAD to influence their devotion.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 29.

⁷⁷ For all of Stock's examples of textual community, see: Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 101-240.

⁷⁸ For an overview of the story of HERRAD and the *Hortus*, see Fiona J. Griffiths, *Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 1-48, 222.

A woman's control over a man's devotion, however, is exceptional in the Middle Ages. Wives were said to convert their husbands to Christianity in literature, but once converted, the wife's authority ceased.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, through books of hours, women gained the agency to impact men's religious practices in the long term. The Egerton Hours is an example of this reversal of the patriarchal system. An unknown woman compiled this book of hours that not only went to Mistress Phyllis in the sixteenth century but also to Robert Colston of Nottingham, before being sent to a London bookseller. Robert's possession of a book of hours commissioned by an anonymous thirteenth-century woman raises questions of how he understood the book of hours. As a man that likely had the opportunity for education outside of the book of hours, did he depend on the text as much as a woman might to learn how to read and to practice devotion? Did the inclusion of feminine figures in the illuminations disconnect him from the book of hours? Was he even aware that a woman created his devotional manual? These questions are likely unanswerable, but they reveal the potential impact of a woman's choices when commissioning her book of hours.

The textual inheritance model explored in this paper reflects a system of agency in which a commissioner of a book of hours had the authority to influence the devotional and educational practices of multiple generations. The choices of this commissioner changed the didactic effectiveness of the text as well as the devotional rituals that became a daily part of the lives of the inheritors. The frequency of these rituals altered the perception of religious worship throughout their lives. Textual inheritance therefore created a community of believers over time that follows the interpretations of the central

⁷⁹ Several scholars have considered the motif of marital conversion in medieval literature. For instance, Keiko Hamaguchi explores the roles women played in conversion through marriage in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*. Jennifer Goodman likewise considers stories of a Christian woman converting her royal pagan groom and the reverse, a pagan princess converted by her Christian lover. In contrast to Hamaguchi and Goodman's work, Michael R. Evans argues that although beautiful women were encouraged to educate themselves and marry men from the east to convert them to Christianity in Pierre Dubois's *De recuperatione Terre Sancte*, Dubois was suggesting that women from the west marry Byzantine Christian men to convert them to Catholicism, as opposed to converting Muslim men to Christianity. See: Michael Evans, "Marriage as a Means of Conversion in Pierre Dubois's *De recuperatione Terre Sancte*," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, edited by Guyda Armstrong and Ian Wood (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 195-202; Jennifer R. Goodman, "Marriage and Conversion in Late Medieval Romance," in *Varieties in Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, edited by James Muldoon (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997), 115-128; and Keiko Hamaguchi, "Marriage and Conversion in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and *The Man of Law's Tale*," in *A Collection of Research Notes on the History of the English Language*, edited by Matsuji Tajima and Nobuko Suematsu (Tokyo: Kaibunsha, 2008), 141-148.

commissioner, whether male or female, and was demonstrated through practice of daily reading and devotion. Through these books of hours, textual inheritance allowed women to occupy a unique place in devotional and educational practices, opening up the opportunity for women to have influence in the devotional sphere while remaining within the confines of orthodoxy.