The Early Modern Englishwoman:
A Facsimile Library of Essential Works

Series I

Printed Writings, 1500–1640: Part 4

Volume 1

Elizabeth Evelinge, III

Selected and Introduced by
Claire Walker

General Editors
Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott

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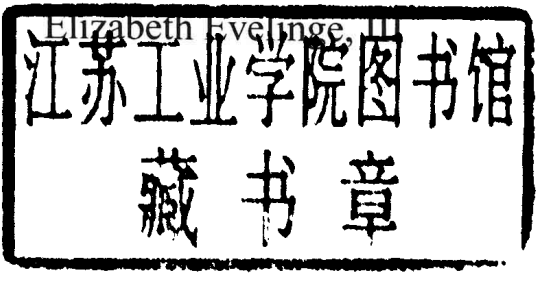

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PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITORS

Until very recently, scholars of the early modern period have assumed that there were no Judith Shakespeares in early modern England. Much of the energy of the current generation of scholars has been devoted to constructing a history of early modern England that takes into account what women actually wrote, what women actually read, and what women actually did. In so doing, contemporary scholars have revised the traditional representation of early modern women as constructed both in their own time and in ours. The study of early modern women has thus become one of the most important – indeed perhaps the most important – means for the rewriting of early modern history.

The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works is one of the developments of this energetic reappraisal of the period. As the names on our advisory board and our list of editors testify, it has been the beneficiary of scholarship in the field, and we hope it will also be an essential part of that scholarship's continuing momentum.

The Early Modern Englishwoman is designed to make available a comprehensive and focused collection of writings in English from 1500 to 1750, both by women and for and about them. The three series of *Printed Writings* (1500–1640, 1641–1700, and 1701–1750) provide a comprehensive if not entirely complete collection of the separately published writings by women. In reprinting these writings we intend to remedy one of the major obstacles to the advancement of feminist criticism of the early modern period, namely the limited availability of the very texts upon which the field is based. The volumes in the facsimile library reproduce carefully chosen copies of these texts, incorporating significant variants (usually in the appendices). Each text is preceded by a short introduction providing an overview of the

life and work of a writer along with a survey of important scholarship. These works, we strongly believe, deserve a large readership – of historians, literary critics, feminist critics, and non-specialist readers.

The Early Modern Englishwoman also includes separate facsimile series of *Essential Works for the Study of Early Modern Women* and of *Manuscript Writings*. These facsimile series are complemented by *The Early Modern Englishwoman 1500–1750: Contemporary Editions*. Also under our general editorship, this series includes both old-spelling and modernized editions of works by and about women and gender in early modern England.

New York City
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The English Poor Clare monastery in Gravelines was founded in 1609 by the English gentlewoman, Mary Ward (perhaps best-known for later beginning a new religious order, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary). Despite the wishes of the first abbess, Mary Gough (professed 1596, d.1613), to follow the absolute poverty of St Colette of Corbie's fifteenth-century reform of the Poor Clares, the Gravelines community was compelled to adopt the rule of St Clare promulgated by Pope Urban VIII in 1263, which allowed ownership of property and goods and dowries. The house was subject to the authority of the bishop of St Omers and to the spiritual jurisdiction of the Jesuits, although there were controversial moves towards governance by the Franciscan order during Mary Gough's tenure (Gravelines Chronicle, fo. 30). Despite a precarious financial grounding, the cloister proved immensely popular, professing 65 women between 1610 and 1625 (Hunnybun, pp. 35–60).

Catharine Bentley, traditionally believed to be translator of *The Admirable Life, of S. Catharine of Bologna*, bound in our reproduction with *The Rvle of the Holy Virgin S. Clare*, entered the new convent in 1609 and in November 1610, at the age of 18, she was one of the first eight women who made their vows. The daughter of staunch Derbyshire recusants, Edward and Catharine Bentley, Catharine was joined by her older sister Ann (described as 'very low and little') who was professed in 1611 (Gravelines Chronicle, fos 17, 20, 25–8; Hunnybun, pp. 38–9). Elizabeth Evelinge, now more widely believed to have been the translator, joined the house nearly a decade later when it was flourishing numerically. Little is known of her family, but she made her monastic profession in July 1620 aged 23, alongside her younger sister, Rose. Their sister, Mary, was professed the following year (Hunnybun, pp. 52, 56).

The Evelinges joined the community only a few years before ongoing dissension over jurisdiction rent it apart. In 1626 the

Franciscan commissary, Joseph Bergaigne, deposed Abbess Elizabeth Tyldesley in favour of Margaret Radcliffe, who had recently returned from governing the English Franciscan convent in Brussels. His action divided the nuns between those loyal to the former abbess and those who supported his intervention. The latter faction effected a filiation to Aire in 1629, thereby resolving the issue that had damaged the cloister's reputation and fortunes in the intervening years (Walker, pp. 43–4). Aire's founders included Bentley, who became a 'discreet' (one of the council advising the abbess), and Evelinge who was also a discreet as well as portress at the new cloister. (Evelinge's sisters were part of the group, but Ann Bentley remained at Gravelines.) Both women proceeded to high office with Bentley having tenure as the vicaress (deputy to the abbess) and Evelinge as novice mistress and then 25 years as abbess (Aire Register 'no. 22', 'no. 30').

There are certain parallels between the experience of the English Poor Clares at Gravelines and that of Caterina Vigri (Catharine of Bologna, subject of *The Admirable Life*) in the Corpus Domini cloister at Ferrara. Catharine joined the house in the midst of a battle over its transformation from an informal lay community nominally adhering to the monastic rule of St Augustine to a formally established monastery of Poor Clares. Fiercely loyal to her beleaguered mother superior, Lucia Mascheroni, who was resisting the Clarisse reforms imposed by a lay patron, Verde Pio da Carpi, she nonetheless felt drawn towards Franciscan piety. Indeed she belonged to a group of sisters urging reform beyond that proposed by Carpi who sought the Urbanist version of St Clare's rule for her protégées in Ferrara (McLaughlin, pp. 261–81). The dispute at Corpus Domini and the anguish it carved into the psyche of the young Catharine formed the basis for her treatise, *The Seven Spiritual Weapons*, which makes up part of *The Admirable Life*.

Although Catharine shunned the spotlight of leadership in Ferrara, she was finally persuaded to become abbess of a filiation to Bologna in 1456, where she remained in office, despite growing ill health, until her death in 1463. There were efforts to secure her canonisation from the late sixteenth century. Although official sanctity took over a century to achieve, it is evident from the title of this biography and other works about her that Catharine was deemed a saint by many people long

before she received papal approval. The English translation of Paleotti's life promoted her from 'blessed' to 'saint' decades before she formally attained that status.

Catharine Bentley and Elizabeth Evelinge

The title page of *The Admirable Life* (which, as also in this present volume, was bound with *The Rvle of the Holy Virgin S.* Clare) states unequivocally that the work has been translated by 'Sister Magdalen of S. Augustine, of the Order of Poore Clares in Gravelinge'. Yet, Sister Magdalen of St Augustine, or Catharine Bentley as she was known before becoming a nun, would not seem the most likely candidate for the work, as the editors of two previous volumes in this series attributed to the same monastic translator have argued. Instead, it has been almost universally accepted that the translation emanated from the pen of another Poor Clare, Sister Catharine Magdalen, the religious name of Elizabeth Evelinge. The evidence for Evelinge's contribution is compelling. First and foremost, Luke Wadding, the Irish Franciscan who methodically compiled a dictionary of Franciscan authors, *Scriptores Ordinis Minorum*, recorded her as the translator of the three works. As Antony Allison notes in 'Franciscan Books in English, 1559–1640', Wadding's accuracy is so great in areas where one can check his assertions that those impossible to clarify can be taken as more likely accurate than not (p. 23). Secondly, there is the seemingly incontrovertible evidence provided by the two women's obituaries. While Catharine Bentley is praised for good performance of the offices of choir mistress, portress and vicaress, for her charity and devotion, and for patiently suffering many years of infirmity, there is no mention of scholarship in any form (Aire Register, 'no. 22'). Elizabeth Evelinge, however, is noted for 'many choice monuments of her laborious industry and great abilities admirable in human learninge', and 'a more polish'd way of writing above her Sex' (Aire Register, 'no. 30'; Hunnybun, p. 52).

Despite the overwhelming evidence in favour of Evelinge over Bentley as the translator of *The Admirable Life*, there has been no compelling explanation thus far for the incorrect attribution in the two

volumes whose translators are noted. Luke Wadding did not point out the 'mistake' in *Scriptores Ordinis Minorum*, and therefore provides no clue. Antony Allison was reluctant even to attribute the works to one nun or the other, citing conflicting evidence and concluding that it was unlikely the translator's true identity would be discovered (Allison, pp. 48–9). Frans Korsten surmised the publication of *The Admirable Life* in 1621 would have occurred when Evelinge was only 23 and barely professed, thus 'it was thought more appropriate to use the name of a senior colleague' (p. x). There is something to this point. Humility was a virtue dear to all professed religious, but particularly so in the Poor Clare order. Talented women often felt compelled to disavow their achievements, fearing that their acclaimed mysticism, leadership or artistic skills might prove a hindrance to eternal salvation. At Gravelines there seems to have been a strong cult of humility instigated by Abbess Mary Gough. A chronicle of the Gravelines foundation emphasizes the centrality of humility in the convent's early days (Gravelines Chronicle, fols. 26, 29–30, 34–9). It is possible that a culture of self-abnegation, coupled with Evelinge's professional youth (convent hierarchies were constructed in accordance with age of religious profession), encouraged her to relinquish authorial title to her translation – and that this same imperative persuaded her to preserve her anonymity in the two subsequent translations.

The problem remains, however, that a name was attached to two of the works. Why did 'Sister Magdalen of S. Augustine' appear on the title page of *The Admirable Life* and *The History of the Angelicall Virgin Glorious S. Clare* (1635), when *The Declarations and Ordinances Made Upon the Rule of Our Holy Mother S. Clare* (1622) remained anonymous? Anonymity was commonplace in post-Reformation recusant scholarship, particularly in books destined for clandestine smuggling back into England. Antony Allison has argued that Franciscan writers generally revealed their identity, occasionally through initials, but often using their religious name, or a combination of part of this and their natal name (Allison, pp. 24–5). The variety in nomenclature might go part of the way to explaining the confusion over the translator of the three Poor Clare texts. It is possible that there was some kind of play on the religious women's names when it came to attribution. Both shared 'Magdalen' as part of their religious name,

and 'Catharine' was common also – as Bentley's baptismal name and Evelinge's professed appellation. Interestingly, the first translated item published was about another 'Catharine'. Do a combination of humility and a play with words and meaning lie behind the attribution in *The Admirable Life*? There is an interesting hint at this in Elizabeth Evelinge's Aire obituary. The final sentence notes that she was

> a rare mierour of profound humility, admerable patience and resignation to the devin will and havinge before her death embalmed her preshous memory in ye fragrancy of all sortes of vertious ... accomplishmentes adorning A Religious Proefesion ... (Aire Register, 'no. 30').

Apart from the reference to humility, the mention of embalming and 'fragrancy' are surely direct allusions to Catharine of Bologna. The discovery of the Poor Clare abbess's incorrupt body a few days after her death was presaged by a fragrant odour. While the author of the obituary was not necessarily implying that Sister Catharine of St Magdalen was likely to emulate her Italian predecessor to the same extent, there appears to be a conscious effort to connect the two abbesses – perhaps as translator and subject in a final effort to bestow correct authorial attribution. An examination of the translated text does reveal some curious correspondences between the two women.

The Admirable Life, of S. Catharine of Bologna

The Admirable Life was one of several biographies of Catharine of Bologna (Caterina Vigri). The first and most commonly cited was penned by Catharine's fellow nun and friend, Illuminata Bembo, not long after her death. An early brief version survives in MS 2894 in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels, while the longer *Specchio de Illuminatione* was published in the eighteenth century (Van Ortray, pp. 386–416; Vegri, pp. 4–7). Bembo's work provided the basis for many other accounts of the saint's life. The most influential one in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was Sabadino degli Arienti's lengthy entry on her in *Gynevera de le Clare Donne*, written in 1472, which acknowledges his debt to Bembo. Other accounts include Catharine's treatise, the *Spiritual Weapons*, and draw upon both Bembo and Arienti

for biographical details. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, efforts to have her canonized led to further editions of the Poor Clare's life and writings, the most widely known of which was Grassetti's, *Vita della Beata Caterina da Bologna*, which went through several reprints, both as a stand-alone biography, and in conjunction with the *Spiritual Weapons*. Preceding her 1712 canonisation and in its aftermath several more accounts appeared, including in 1787 the first printed version of Bembo's vita (Vegri, pp. 7–15). Dionisio Paleotti's anonymous *Vita de la Beata Caterina da Bologna de l'Ordine de S. Clara del Corpo di Christo* was first published in Bologna in 1502. Paleotti was the Franciscan confessor at Corpus Domini, and his biography was based on Arienti's earlier work (Vegri, pp. 10–11). It was translated into both Latin and French in the sixteenth century, and the English translation was made from one of these editions, commonly assumed to be the French text (Allison, p. 64, n.72).

The Admirable Life contains three parts. Paleotti's biography comprises the first (pp. 83–150). As recounted there, Catharine was born in 1413 to Giovanni Vigri and Benvenuta Mammolini (see Vegri, pp. 16–40 for the confusion over the identity of Caterina's father). Giovanni Vigri came from an influential Ferrarese family who enjoyed the patronage of the ruling d'Este dynasty. He was employed by Niccolò III d'Este at Ferrara, thus this was where Catharine spent her early life. Indeed she became the companion at court of Niccolò's daughter, before Margherita d'Este's marriage in 1427. Catharine's entrance in 1426 at the age of 13 into the cloister of Corpus Domini in Ferrara (Paleotti incorrectly states she entered in 1424 aged 11 [p. 87]) marked the beginning of an extraordinary spiritual, artistic, literary and administrative career. She was noted for her closeness to God from the outset, and this deep spiritual relationship assisted her through the early years of disunity at Corpus Domini and encouraged her sisters to insist that she govern the new cloister in Bologna.

The second section details a range of miracles attributed to Catharine after her death (pp. 151–92). Already deemed saintly in life, she secured enduring veneration both within her monastery and beyond its walls when her incorrupt body was discovered shortly after her interment. It was thereafter kept on display in the enclosure and occasionally brought to the grate in the chapel where visitors could

pray before it. Corporeal preservation was miraculous in itself, but the future saint, her odour and relics were able to perform a range of healing miracles in the years that followed and they are related in considerable detail in the text.

Finally, the largest part, titled 'The Admirable Instructions of S. Catharine of Bologna', is a selection of Catharine's writings, principally her treatise, *Spiritual Weapons* (pp. 193–394). Written in 1438 the work was ostensibly for her novices: she was novice mistress at the time. Yet amidst the advice about how to conquer the self and reject temptation, there is a strong autobiographical strain. This emerges clearly in the seventh weapon, or arrow – the 'authority of the holy scripture' – where, adopting the anonymity of the third person, she explains the tests and temptations of the spiritual life. In addition to the strain of communal dissent, she underwent personal crises of faith, including doubts about central Catholic doctrines. According to the *Spiritual Weapons*, Catharine resolved all dilemmas mystically in a series of visions and dreams, and the rich imagery they invoke colours the final chapter of her work, and feeds into the healing dreams and visions which characterize her posthumous miracles. These images were also to find form in her work as an illustrator and artist.

Whereas Catharine's contemporaries praised her sanctity, modern scholars focus primarily on her literary, artistic and musical skills. Gabriella Zarri has described her as 'a prototype of Renaissance culture and learning' (Zarri, p. 82). As abbess, Catherine encouraged her nuns to read, supervising their education and ensuring that the house at Bologna had an excellent library. She preached to them in chapter and wrote them instructional works. Patricia Ranft has noted that Catharine emphasized the importance of the Word of God, believing that salvation came through reading the scriptures (Ranft, pp. 102–3). As noted, the seventh arrow in her *Spiritual Weapons* focuses on their importance. The Word translated into her artwork too. Illuminata Bembo reported that 'Gladly, in the books and in many places of the monastery of Ferrara [Catharine] painted the Divine Word' (cited in Ranft, p. 102). The saint's vision of Christ as the Incarnate Word is most evident in her Redeemer painting in which the inscribed book over Christ connects him with the scriptures. Above him, two windows depicting the Annunciation emphasize the Incarnate Word – God's son taking

human form to redeem humanity. Other works continue the theme in illustrations of the Eucharist and the infant Jesus as the Word made Flesh (Wood, pp. 130–6). Vigri's several versions of the Madonna and Child reinforce her spiritual devotion to the Incarnation. While this particular choice of subject might be attributed to her gender and the devotional proclivities of her nuns (and late medieval devotion generally), Catharine's concentration on the Incarnate Word says much about her firm belief that women were capable of reading, interpreting and instructing others in the path to salvation.

However, despite her obvious literary and artistic talents and her use of them for the benefit of her sisters, Catharine retained the Poor Clare quality of profound humility. She told her novices constantly that treating one another charitably and as equals was essential. She also belittled her own achievements, writing at the outset of the *Spiritual weapons* that it was 'by the help of God, composed by me poore little dogge, yelping under the table of the most excellent, and most deare handmaids and espouses of Jesus the Immaculate lambe in the monastery of Corpus Christi, in the Citty of Ferrara' (*The Admirable Life*, p. 194). It was this combination of deep humility and self-abnegation, together with her talents as leader and teacher, and her miraculous bodily preservation and posthumous miracles that secured both her canonisation and continuing scholarly interest.

Catharine's life evidently resonated with the interests and needs of seventeenth-century English Poor Clares. The purpose of Sister Magdalen of St Augustine's 1621 translation, printed with *The Rvle of the Holy Virgin S. Clare*, is not made clear in an epistle to the reader or in any dedication. This text, which precedes *The Admirable Life* in the 1621 volume, was translated by a layman, William Cape, possibly with the help of an English friar, Christopher Davenport (in religion, Franciscus a Sancta Clara). It had first been published in 1618 as part of *The Chronicle and Institution of the Order of the Seraphicall Father S. Francis* (*STC* 11314.2), dedicated to the Poor Clares of Gravelines by Davenport. An extract of the *Rule of… S. Clare* from the 1618 work was published by itself in 1621 (*STC* 5350.4). The version printed with *The Admirable Life* (as it is, also, in this present volume) is a further edition of this 1621 text (Allison and Rogers, 2: 28–9; Allison, pp. 27, 44–7). The connection between the *Rule of… S. Clare* and Christopher

Davenport, reputedly at the centre of the 1626 dispute at Gravelines, which split the community and resulted in the Aire foundation, adds weight to the suggestion that the translation of *The Admirable Life*, a work of Franciscan devotional imperatives, contributed to, or at the very least reflected, rising anxiety over Franciscan governance (Gravelines Chronicle, fo. 145). Later translations of St Clare's life, and the papal pronouncements on the Rule of St Clare delivered to St Colette, together with *The Admirable Life*, suggest that the translator wanted to instil Clarissan precepts into her community, and through publication to advertise them beyond the enclosure walls. Indeed, Korsten points out that the emphasis on stringent poverty in the epistle 'To the Reader' in *The History of ... S. Clare* asserts the Aire community's strict Franciscan orientation as opposed to the more moderate Gravelines position (Korsten, p. xii).

The translation of Catharine's life and *Spiritual Weapons*, with their exemplary advice about how to survive the temptations and conflicts of cloistered life, aimed to assist the troubled English Poor Clares in their time of need. Whether designed to further the Franciscan cause within the cloister or simply to offer solace, the translation of this text occurred because of the dissension in the house. Moreover, it is possible that Caterina Vigri represented so compelling a model of Poor Clare spirituality that Elizabeth Evelinge, whose piety and talents mirrored those of her subject, deemed herself a similarly 'poore little dogge', too humble to ascribe her intellectual achievements to herself.

There are copies of the 1621 edition at Heythrop College, London; Syon Abbey Special Collection, University of Exeter Library; and the Sepulchrine Convent, New Hall Chelmsford. A decision was taken by the editors of 'The Early Modern Englishwoman' to use the Heythrop College copy for this current edition: the printing is fairly good, and there are minimal mistakes and printing errors. In the marginalia on 202 read 'wh[ic]h cros sinners'; 216.19 corrival should read 'co-rival'; 234.19 should be 'if you doest cast'; 242.4 'is' should be 'it'; 482.5 'hard' should be 'heard'; 260.18 'he' should be 'she'; 268.17 'Religions' should read 'Religious'; 299.6 'of' should be 'off'; 351.11 'adominable' should read 'abominable'; 355.16 'with' should read 'which'; 370.2 'of' should read 'off'; 378.15 'could' should read 'cold'.

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