

New Perspectives on Tudor Cultures

Edited by

Mike Pincombe and Zsolt Almási

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This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-3906-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3906-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Introduction: Perspectives and Cultures ZSOLT ALMÁSI	1
“Be not ye of that sect of Philosophers called Pirhonic?”: Caninius and Pyrrhonian Scepticism in Thomas Elyot’s <i>The Defence of Good Women</i> ZSOLT ALMÁSI	20
Defying Social Decorum in <i>Roister Doister</i> and <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> PAULINE RUBERRY-BLANC	35
Polemical Paeans: Constructing the Queen in Marian Literature 1553-1558 KATE RODDY	54
Turning Princes Into Pages: Images of Cardinal Wolsey in the Satires of John Skelton and Shakespeare’s <i>Henry VIII</i> GAVIN E. SCHWARTZ-LEEPER	78
“But how can I describe the doleful sight”: The Shield of War in Thomas Sackville’s “Induction” EFTERPI MITSI	100
Sir Edward Dyer’s “Hee that his mirth hath loste”: Author as Lutheran Minister CHRIS BUTLER	117
Poetic Form in Surrey’s Verse JON D. ORTEN	139

“Something for the Weekend”: Elizabethan Tournament Texts and an Entertainment for 16–17 November 1577 SUE SIMPSON	158
A Colourful Diet for a Drab Age—Feasting and Fasting in Harrison’s <i>Description of England</i> KINGA FÖLDVÁRY	177
Institutionalized Adoration: Prayers for and about Queen Elizabeth in Thomas Bentley’s <i>The Monument of Matrons</i> (1582) ERZSÉBET STRÓBL	199
The Image of the Invincible Enemy: Locrine and the Huns GABRIELLA REUSS	222
The French Accents of Seneca on the Tudor Stage RICHARD HILLMAN	244
Bibliography	263
Contributors	288
Index	291

INSTITUTIONALIZED ADORATION:
PRAYERS FOR AND ABOUT QUEEN ELIZABETH
IN THOMAS BENTLEY'S *THE MONUMENT
OF MATRONS* (1582)

ERZSÉBET STRÓBL

Introduction

Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrons*, published in 1582,¹ was a collection of meditations and prayers which aimed to provide material for the devotional needs primarily of a female readership. As such, it was the first anthology in which the writings of women were systematically collected, printed, and organized, showing the taste, the value judgement and concerns of the mid-Elizabethans. In the compilation a distinguished place is ascribed to the most prominent woman of the country, Queen Elizabeth. The work is dedicated to her, her arms, motto and iconography are used to adorn the text, and her image appears on the title-pages of the first five books. The second book begins with her translations and contains three of her prayers; the third book consists of prayers written for her, as well as acrostic prayers on her name and a meditation upon good government in the form of a quest and answer between God and the queen; and in the fourth book the first known set of prayers written for her Accession Day, November 17, appears.² The prominence of the role of the queen in the compilation is so outspoken that one cannot fail to realize its importance in such a religious context.

The queen was surrounded by secular ceremony using symbolic figures of praise from the late mid-1570s. This cultural phenomenon

¹ Thomas Bentley, *The Monument of Matrons: Containing seven Severall Lamps of Virginitie* (London: H. Denham, 1582); Thomas Bentley, *The Fift Lampe of Virginitie* (London: Denham, 1582); Thomas Bentley, *The Sixt Lampe of Virginitie* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1582).

² This set contains seventeen prayers, which must be an allusion to the date of the feast.

termed by Roy Strong “the cult of Elizabeth”³ was only slowly emerging and acquiring new meanings and metaphors. Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrons* was printed in the most turbulent years of the cult’s development, when John Lyly wrote plays exploring questions of power, female sovereignty, love and chastity, and the queen’s cult as a virgin goddess was taking form.

Bentley’s *Monument* is among the first texts which attest to the nature of the institutionalized celebration of the queen on her Accession Day in a religious context. The material is diverse, private prayers form the bulk of the work, yet the Hest and the Answer provide themes for Accession Day sermons, and attempt to fashion a godly image of the learned monarch for the loyal English subjects. The impact of this form of celebration reached a much broader audience than the courtly encomium of the queen, thus it was instrumental in establishing the cult as a social phenomenon in all layers of society.

The following paper will investigate the place and role of Bentley’s compilation in the cultural context of the early 1580s. It will argue for the propagandistic purpose of the work that aimed to create a monument not just for women, but for the queen herself. It will treat the three volumes as a form of popular ceremonial representation, similar to those presented to the audiences of queen’s summer progresses. The 1580s marked the end of the first period of Queen Elizabeth’s progresses to the countryside, thus terminating the direct access of the people to their monarch. The portrait of the queen on the title pages of the individual books and her centrality in the first volume of the work served to fashion her popular image in a manner the progresses did.

The paper will also investigate the emergence of the institutionalized ecclesiastical cult of the queen as it was mirrored and presented in Bentley’s work. At a time when the cult of Elizabeth Tudor was established at court using tropes of pagan mythology, the *Monument of Matrons* was a reaction to such secular figures of speech in order to establish a Christianized cult language for the eulogy of the queen in an ecclesiastical context.

Bentley’s compilation will be analyzed from two further points. The manner it justified female authority—an issue that was prevalent in contemporary thought from the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign—with its use of Biblical typology and John Aylmer’s ideas on mixed monarchy. The other aspect crucial to the contextualization of the text is the presence

³ The term became widely used after Roy Strong’s *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

of an undertone of counsel. It will be substantiated that Bentley's compilation can be seen as an advice offered to the queen, stressing the queen's mortality and her final judgement by God. This last part will show how according to Aylmer's theory the author feels justified to offer counsel to his queen as a godly gentleman of the commonweal.

Creating a Monument

The work's title *The Monument* is a prestigious claim to posterity about the aims of the book. The word *monument* derives from the Latin *monumentum* and was used from the thirteenth century for a "sepulchre," and from the fifteenth century as "a written document or record." In the sixteenth century the word acquired the additional meaning of a "structure, or edifice to commemorate a notable person, action or event."⁴ Old monuments were often defaced during the turbulent years of the early Reformation as a result of the iconoclasm of radical Protestants. The importance of preserving those which commemorated the example of godly and "politically correct" individuals was enforced during the early years of Queen Elizabeth's reign in the proclamation of 1560 *Against Brekinge or Defacing of Monumentes of Antiquitie, Beyng Set Up in Churches or Other Publique Places for Memory and not for Supersticion*.⁵ In this context monuments referred to material objects—plaques, statues and edifices—that were usually situated, though not always, within the confines of an ecclesiastical establishment. Thus their iconography and inscriptions reflected and were associated with Christian ideals. The proclamation underlined that the regard for the memory of the deceased was in close relationship with the regard paid to the living descendants. In such a way a monument carried an acute political significance and signalled a correct religious pattern for posterity. As Peter Sherlock observed monuments "pointed to certain virtues in the deceased's life that contributed to a vision of how people ought to live their lives" and fixed "a particular version of the past in stone, [...] to subdue other versions."⁶ Such an attitude is implied if we look at the broader sense in which *monument* was used in the period.

⁴ *OED*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. 2nd ed. by J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner.)

⁵ *A proclamation against brekinge or defacing of monumentes of antiquitie, beyng set up in churches or other publique places for memory and not for supersticion* (London: Rycharde Iugge and Iohn Cawood, 1560).

⁶ Peter Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 4-5.

The word *monument* referring to a written text appeared in one of the most important works of the period, in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perillous Dayes* (1563).⁷ Its second enlarged edition of 1570 was ordered to be placed in every cathedral church in a proclamation of 1571, and in 1576 a third edition came out, only to be followed in 1583 by a version with further expansions which became "the most physically imposing, complicated, and technically demanding English book of its era."⁸ Foxe explains in his "Preface to the Queen" that his intentions were "collecting and setting forth the acts, fame, and memorie of these our martyrs."⁹ Thus he broadens the meaning of *monument* as a material object into an abstract concept, which encompasses written texts too. Bentley, most likely aware of the popularity and intentions of Foxe's work, fashioned his work on similar lines by choosing the same catchword *monument* for his compilation. Apart from a short pamphlet of 1580,¹⁰ Bentley's is the only work using the same expression to describe its content in this period. Furthermore, Bentley's work shows a number of similarities with Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Bentley also collected and set forth a wide range of material "dispersed into severall pamphlets, and in part some things obscured and worn clean out of print" with the aim to preserve and restore them "to their former good and godlie use in the church."¹¹ He also retained the religious connotations of the word *monument*, and its pretention of being all encompassing, that is, the only right interpretation of its material. The size of the book, more than 1500 pages in length, also vied with Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563 edition: 2000 pages) and other prestigious publications as Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587 edition: 3000 pages). Yet while the two latter books arranged their material on a chronological line, Bentley had to find another means to tackle his diverse collection of Biblical quotations, meditations, paraphrases, and prayers, and thus used another grand concept by arranging the contents in seven books entitled *Lamps of Virginitie*.

The layout of the work also proclaimed the work's bid for fame and social status. The title-page of the first five books depicted elaborate

⁷ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of These Latter and Perillous Dayes* (London: Iohn Day, 1563).

⁸ John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Selected Narratives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xli.

⁹ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, B2v.

¹⁰ Abraham Fleming, *A memoriall of the Famous Monuments and Charitable Almesdeedes of the Right Worshipfull Maister William Lambe Esquire* (London: Henrie Denham, 1580).

¹¹ Bentley, *The Monument of Matrons*, B1r.

woodcuts specially designed for the work.¹² An estimate for the price of the work¹³ shows that it was meant for a rich audience, one that was able to afford the “good paper and faire usuall letter, a thing for the aged and feeble sighted reader verie gratefull and much desired”¹⁴ that Bentley boasted of in his preface.

The first four books of *The Monument of Matrons* were printed in one volume by Henry Denham. The First Lamp contained the writings of women from the Bible, the second the writings of contemporary godly women, as Marguerite of Navarre, Queen Elizabeth, Katharine Parr, Lady Jane Dudley (Grey), Elizabeth Tyrwhit, Frances Abergavenny, and the martyr Anne Askew. The Third Lamp was entirely dedicated to the use of the queen, providing material for her private devotion. The fourth book collected prayers for the feast days of the year, among them the set of seventeen prayers for November the Seventeenth, the Queen’s Accession Day.

The Fifth Lamp appeared in a separate volume and was published also by Henry Denham. It contained prayers only for the use of women in their various walks of life.

The last two books were again bound together forming one volume, and were published by a separate printer, Thomas Dawson. This volume had a less elegant format as it used standard patterns for the border designs instead of the individualized margins, and crammed more lines into one single page than Denham had done. The sixth book contained the meditations about the duties of women and the seventh a catalogue of biblical women, good and bad.

Thomas Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrons* was the fruit of a long period of time spent in study, selection, and travel and was the first work by its author: “After manie a yeeres fore travel, in studie much sweet, long watching, and great expences, I have now at length finished [...] these first

¹² John N. King, “Thomas Bentley’s *The Monument of Matrons*, The Earliest Anthology of English Women’s Texts,” in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers & Canons in England, France & Italy*, ed. Pamela J. Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 217-8. For the analysis of the iconography of the engravings see also John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 243-61.

¹³ Counting with an estimate of one half-penny per sheet, which number had been derived from a study of 521 books published between 1550 and 1640, Colin and Jo Atkinson states *The Monument* would have cost 4s 2½d, with binding additional. Colin B. and Jo B. Atkinson, “The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley, Compiler of *The Monument of Matrones* (1582),” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 2 (2000): 326.

¹⁴ Bentley, *Monument of Matrons*, B4v.

fruits of my poore studies”¹⁵ he writes. Yet it seems likely that Bentley relied on the advice and help of others, as he spoke about the “rare gifts, ornaments, and graces of the holie Ghost in the compilers.”¹⁶ While he may be referring to the work of earlier compilers from whom he had borrowed, the book attests to the contribution of other hands. Certainly, the printers of the three volumes contributed to the thematic programme of the work with their fine layout of the books. So while we know very little of the identity of Bentley¹⁷ it seems obvious that his work must be treated as a joint effort of several individuals to create a monument for matrons in early modern England.

It is not easy to categorize the book. It is certainly a devotional work, containing material for private observance and meditation. Yet it is not a regular primer, in the old Catholic sense. Primers, that is, books for private prayer containing the calendar, the life of Christ from the gospels, psalms, and prayers, were immensely popular during the first half of the sixteenth century, and continued the tradition of the manuscript book of hours. There were dozens of editions of primers in Latin, English-Latin, or in English both on the continent and in London until the 1560s. The popularity of this type of prayer book seems to have declined by the 1570s, presumably because of their association with the old, Catholic forms of prayer. *The Monument of Matrons* resembled primers as it was also a prayer book for private use, in spite of Bentley claiming that it was for both public and private devotion. Yet Bentley acknowledged in the introduction that it contained “treatises, though not so portable, yet so delectable, profitable, and readie prepared to lie in your secret chamber or oratorie to use.”¹⁸ While there are obvious thematic similarities between primers and the *Monument of Matrons* Bentley was anxious to disclaim any connection to the primer tradition:

So now least you should gather by anie method [...] that you shell find in this book [...] that I go about nicely, curiously, or strictly to inione you to observe hours, daies, feasts, times, or seasons, or to bind you unlawfullie to an impossibility [...] that you should not mistake me, I saie, and iudge that my purpose is in anie respect to hinder common praier, or interrupt the ministracion of the word and sacraments in church, where and at what time I knowe we ought all to glorifie God together with one hart, spirit, and mouth, and to be no otherwise occupied, either in reading or in praying, than the publike minister is, unlesse we would be deemed mere

¹⁵ Ibid. B4v.

¹⁶ Ibid. B4v.

¹⁷ Atkinson and Atkinson, “Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley,” 323-348.

¹⁸ Bentley, *Monument of Matrones*, B2v.

superstitious, and under the pretense of severall devotion to commit manifest ungodlinesse.¹⁹

Bentley's anxiety of being connected to Catholic devotional practices and offending radical Protestants at court marks him as a sympathizer with radical Protestantism and with persons who claimed an active role in the commonwealth of England.

The Monument of Matrons fits also into the category of being an anthology of English women writers, actually the first within England. With including the works of godly learned women who spent their time "in the studies of noble and approved sciences,"²⁰ and the examples of virtuous Biblical women, *The Monument of Matrons* proves to be a defence of women against the misogynistic arguments that treated them as inferior in mental qualities. The question of women, the so called *querelle des femmes*,²¹ emerged as a separate literary genre in 1405 with Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*, a book that refuted the negative image of women painted by Jean de Meun in his 1265 additions to the *Romance of the Rose*. The debate on the woman question comprised a number of works from catalogues of names of virtuous women to various witch books condemning feminine vices. In the sixteenth century leading humanists, such as Erasmus, Thomas More, Thomas Elyot, Juan Luis Vives, and popular conduct books such as Castiglione's *The Courtier* commented upon the issue. While most of them offered an enlightened view of the virtues of women, the debate remained unresolved and found new soil in England with the rule of Mary I. As Mary restored Catholicism to England, the devout Protestant fraction joined their religious complaints with an onslaught on her sex. One of the major authorities on the question was John Knox, the Scottish reformer, who in 1558 published his *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*.²² Knox built up a bulwark of arguments substantiating his tenet that to serve a woman was against the will of God. In Knox's text the authority of the Bible served as the ultimate justification to all of his claims. It was in the name of God and on behalf of the common weal that Knox called all godly

¹⁹ Ibid. B3r.

²⁰ Ibid. B1r.

²¹ A concise summary of the development of the genre is offered in L. Margaret King and Albert Rabil Jr, "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series," in Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-century Manual*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), ix-xxvii.

²² John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva: J. Poullain and A. Rebul. 1558).

citizens to reject the sovereignty of women in which he saw the suppression of the true religion and the prosecution of the servants of God as an inherent concomitant.

The public refutation of Knox's pamphlet was written by John Aylmer, a Protestant emigrant to the Continent. Aylmer in *An harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes* (1559)²³ saw the main threat of Knox's writing in the fact that it authorized some to call into question the lawfulness of inheriting a kingdom by a woman and that it gave ground to rebellious disturbance which "cracked the dutie of true Obedience."²⁴ As a Protestant he used the same rhetoric based on the Bible as Knox to claim exactly the opposite, that female authority can be justified with God's election that can empower the weakest with his glory. One of the safeguards he offered his readers against the frailty of such power was the concept of the mixed government, in which monarchs ruled with the advice of godly gentlemen:²⁵

The regiment of England is not a mere Monarchy, as some for lack of confidence think, nor a mere Oligarchy, nor democracy, but a rule mixed of all these, wherein each one of these, have or should have like authority. The image, whereof, and not the image, but the thing in deed, is to be seen in the parliament house, wherein you shall find 3 estates. The king or Queen, which representeth the monarch. The noble men, which be the aristocracy. And the Burgesses and Knights, the Democracy [...] If the parliament use their privileges: the King can ordain nothing without them. If he do, it is his fault in usurping it, and their folly in permitting it. [...] It is not she that ruleth but the laws, the executors whereof be her judges, appointed by her, her justices of peace and such officers [...] they have their council at their elbow [...] she maketh no statutes or laws, but the honourable court or Parliament [...] if she judge in capital crimes: what danger were there [...] for the verdict is the 12 men's [...].²⁶

Aylmer's argumentation grants prominent privileges to the godly noblemen of the country, who were not just entitled to but were also ordered to offer advice to their queen.

²³ John Aylmer, *An harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes, against the late blown Blast, concerning the Government of Women, wherin be confuted all such reasons as a stranger of late made in that behalf, with a brief exhortation to Obedienc* (Strasborowe: S.n. [i.e. London, printed by John Day], 1559).

²⁴ Aylmer, *An Harborowe*, Bv.

²⁵ For the ideological basis of the mixed monarchy see A. N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 75-104.

²⁶ Aylmer, *An harborowe*, 3H2v-H3r, L1.

The Monument of Matrons was published by the approbation and allowance of the Bishop of London, who was John Aylmer in 1582. Aylmer's ideas about the elected status of the monarch and about the defence of the intellectual capacities of women all found their way into Bentley's work.

Thus the work's title *The Monument of Matrons* has multiple significances. It establishes an officially sanctified memory to godly women and their intellectual capacities by collecting their writings and serves as positive evidence in the *querelle des femmes*. It also has to be treated as a monument that attempts to reshape memories about the past and fashion an image for contemporaries not just about women in general but about Queen Elizabeth in particular. With the emergence of the queen's courtly, secular cult *The Monument of Matrons* can be interpreted as a monument to celebrate Queen Elizabeth, and to channel her developing cult into a mould acceptable in a Protestant ecclesiastical context. This point becomes even more conspicuous by the fact that very little textual evidence of ecclesiastical veneration survives until the publication of Bentley's work in 1582, in spite of the obvious need for sermons and prayers for the queen's Accession Day celebrations.

Refuting the Pagan elements of the Queen's Cult

The queen's courtly cult was in full swing by the 1570s, when the queen's yearly summer progresses started to include fanciful pageantry and displays of symbolic elements celebrating the queen in terms of pagan cults. These figures found their way into the new courtly language of praise in the drama and poetry of the court. The allusions and references to Greek and Roman gods and goddesses functioned mainly as a demonstration of learning and continuity, yet such discourse, which lacked Christian metaphors, gave rise to an anxiety about idolatry both by godly Protestants and by Catholic exiles. In the following, only the first aspect shall be analyzed, as the fashioning of a Christian cult language as opposed to pagan figures seems to be one of the main driving forces behind the work of Thomas Bentley.

The ritual act of celebrating the queen became manifest in the Accession Day festivities, which developed into an institutional element of the queen's cult. The solemnities for the Accession Day were not introduced officially at a given moment, but developed gradually as a custom of bell-ringing from the mid-1560s onwards into the grand

displays of the mid-1580s.²⁷ From the time of its formal introduction as a church holiday in 1576,²⁸ Thomas Hill's assertion that "To worship the kinge is to worshippe Religion and God"²⁹ was echoed in the churches throughout the country. Thus the ritual of the Seventeenth of November broadened into a religious feast with the first service book for Accession Day being published in 1576.³⁰ It contained the order of the service for the day with a recommendation for the lessons, the Epistle, and the Gospel, all of which were exhorting the obedience to worldly leaders. An enlarged edition of the same service book was printed in 1580³¹ showing a steady demand for devotional material for the feast day. The additions contained three versified prayers in the form of songs, the last one being an acrostic composition on the words *God Save the Queen*. These prayers, printed only two years before *The Monument of Matrons* can be treated as a direct source for the similar matter in the Third Lamp of Bentley's work, although the bulk of the material in Bentley's compilation is without parallel even in later works.

The Seventeenth of November was also celebrated by civic communities and the court. City communities organized festive bonfires, roasting of venison in the open and dramatic shows. At court the day was marked by jousts. Tilting at court was recorded from the very first years of Elizabeth's reign³² but it was not connected to the queen's accession. Roy Strong claims that tilting on Accession Day could have developed in parallel with the popular celebrations around the 1570s, but the "giant public spectacle eclipsing every other form of court festival"³³ started only in the 1580s. The language of the accompanying shows was using the

²⁷ Roy Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting Iconography II: Elizabethan* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), 125-128.

²⁸ Carole Levin, *"The Heart and Stomach of a King": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 29.

²⁹ *The most pleasaunte arte of the interpretation of dreames* (London: T. Marsh, 1576), quoted in Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 16.

³⁰ *A Fourme of Prayer, with Thanks Giuing, to be Used Euery Yeere, the 17. of Nouember, being the Day of the Queenes Maiseties Entrie to her Reign* (London: Richard Juge, 1576).

³¹ *A Fourme of Prayer with Thankes Giuing, to be Used of all the Queenes Maiesties Louing Subiects Euery Yeere, the 17. of Nouember, being the Daye of the her Highnesse Entrie to Her Kingdom* (London: Christopher Barker, 1580).

³² The day of Elizabeth's coronation was celebrated with a tilt, and later the same year a muster was organized for her entertainment. *Progresses, Public Processions, &c. of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. John Nichols (1823) (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 1:63, 69-71.

³³ Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, 130-133.

figures of pagan mythology. The central element of the cult in the 1580s was the celebration of the queen's virginity, and her praise as a divine goddess, a new Diana.

An early example of such courtly language and its accompanying Protestant anxiety about the claims of divinity is Thomas Blenerhasset's *The Revelation of the True Minerva*,³⁴ published in the same year and by one of the same printers of Bentley's *The Monument of Matrons*. It is called a "poetical description of a device"³⁵ by its printer and is a poem that contains partly narration, partly dialogues, and partly songs performed presumably at a festive occasion in front of the queen, perhaps at the Inner Temple revels.³⁶ Its mythological story presents a council of gods who decide upon the persuasion of Pallas to find her sister Minerva. An oracle assures the gods that such a land exists

Where want of warre and quiet peace
Hath cloid the country with increase
 Of gold and goodly grain,
Where *Troynouant*, where *Athens* newe,
 Where noble *Nymphes* do dwell,
Where manie modest *Muses* be,
 Euen such as do excell.
This greatest goddesse there in throne
Of highest dignitie alone
 Doth sit, and beare the sway.³⁷

At the discovery of the English queen she is made Minerva, a goddess "with whom none can compare."³⁸ The words of the show state "Thus shee who once was but a mortall Queene, / And subject sate on fortunes turning wheele, / The greatest goddesse now on earth is seene."³⁹ The printer feels the poetical description of the show idolatrous enough to include an explanation in his introduction explaining the meaning of this figurative cult discourse of the author: "when any one whom the heathen for his worthinesse worshipping as a god is rehearsed, not the man, but the

³⁴ Thomas Blenerhasset, *The Revelation of the True Minerva* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1582).

³⁵ "The Printer to the Reader," in Blenerhasset, *Revelation of the True Minerva*.

³⁶ Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 67.

³⁷ Blenerhasset, *Revelation of the True Minerva*, A3v.

³⁸ *Ibid.* E4v.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Gr.

virtue which made him of so great estimation is to be regarded.”⁴⁰ In the text itself, unlike in the custom of the progress devices, the queen speaks twice in places not explicitly asking for her interference. Her words overtly refute the praises of divinity and immortality found nowhere else in her cult, and thus these passages are suspect of later addition that was included only for the printed pamphlet. The printer’s, and perhaps also the author’s, anxiety can be seen also in the inclusion of citations of the psalms at crucial points of the work that could not have been part of the original dramatic performance. All the quoted lines refer to the Old Testament use of the phrase “god” as alluding to magistrates or wise leaders of the Jewish nation. Thus after the subtitle on the title page “*Who on earth be gods: and by what meanes mortall men may bee made immortal*” closely follows the quotation “God standeth in the congregation of the gods: Hee is Iudge amongst the gods.” The final praise of the queen “Desert hath crowned her with eternitie / [...] Hath set her mowe, from thence shee can not fall/ But liuely lieu on earth eternally: / And haue in heauen heauenly felicitie,”⁴¹ is also quickly followed by the praise of God “Amongst the gods there is none like thee O Lord, / There is none can do as thou doest.”⁴² The queen’s eulogy as a goddess, either Minerva or Diana, was still shockingly new and resulted in a direct refutation in the printed version of the show. A similar tendency is obvious in *The Monument of Matrons* with its insistence on a Protestant interpretation of Elizabeth’s elected status.

In the early 1580s a newly emergent figure in Elizabeth’s cult language was her praise as a virgin queen, a new Diana. As Elizabeth was reaching the age when it became a factual impossibility for her to secure an offspring for the throne, her unmarried status was mystified into a symbol of virtue. Her blazon of chastity appears, for instance, in *The Revelation of the True Minerva*: “most worthie prayse for her virginitie, / Diana neuer half so chaste as she.”⁴³ Such language meant another challenge to the Christian interpretation of the queen’s cult, and Bentley’s preoccupation with redirecting the catchy phrases of the developing cult is obvious in his selection of the title *The Monument of Matrons: Conteining Seven Severall Lamps of Virginitie*. This title establishes an ambiguity over the meaning of the word, as it refers both to the achievement of matrons and to the lamps of virginity. Virginity was reinterpreted by Bentley as a general Christian virtue that can be achieved without regard to one’s marital status,

⁴⁰ Ibid. “The Printer to the Reader.”

⁴¹ Ibid. Gv.

⁴² Ibid. Gv.

⁴³ Ibid. Cr.

and in his introduction he offered the work to virgins, wives, and widows alike. The book's subtitle "Lamps of Virginitie" alludes not to the physical state of virginity, but to a spiritual state of godliness. In the dedication to Queen Elizabeth Bentley interprets Jesus' state of perfection, holiness, and purity as a state of virginity that can be achieved by all Christians: "With deepe sighs and groanes we greatlie long for: that [...] we may live and reigne in the full perfection, holinesse and purity of his [Jesus'] virginity, to blesse, praise and glory thee."⁴⁴ And after the catalogue of famous queens Bentley explains:

[...] for that I might hereby, as much as in me lieth, incourage, prouoke, and allure all godlie women of our time, in some measure, according to their severall giftes giuen them of God, to become euen from their youth more studious imitators, and diligent followers of so godlie and rare examples in their virtuous mothers, that as they either in sex, name, or estate are equall with them: so in learning, wisdom, good industrie, and in all holie studies and virtuous exercises commendable for women, they would dailie endeouour themselues to become like them, that [...] they may shine so together with them on earth, as burning lampes of verie virginity.⁴⁵

The seven lamps of virginity refer also to the Parable of Wise and Foolish Virgins in Matthew 25, and to the seven-branched lampstand in the outer room of the Temple of Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelations. The border illustration of the title-page depicts the five wise virgins awaiting their heavenly bridegroom with burning lamps filled with oil. They express the general attitude of all Christians who are ready to accept God's calling as the virgins of the parable.

The other illustrations of the title-page of *The Monument of Matrons* further define the Christian interpretation of the word virginity. In a central position on the bottom border is a virgin-like figure composed in an emblematic manner. Dressed in antique robes she resembles Sapientia, with her attributes of a book and a torch. Three words further clarify the drawing. Next to the book stands "Pray" signifying divine wisdom, next to the torch of seven branches is "Watch," alluding to spiritual wariness, while "Take Heede" sums up the aim of the book. An Old Testament quotation surrounds the virgin figure, "Hir Lamps of Love are Coles of Fire and a Veye Vehement Flame of the Lorde" (Canti VIII), and transforms the maiden into the Spouse of the Canticles, who in turn can be

⁴⁴ Bentley, *Monument of Matrons*, "A praiser upon the Posie *prefixed*," n.p..

⁴⁵ Ibid. "A breefe catalog of the memorable names of sundrie right famous Queenes, godlie Ladies, and virtuous women of all ages," n.p..

identified with the Church of Christ, that is with all true believers. Around in the border design there are six lamps symmetrically placed, while the seventh lamp appears on the top of the page, right above the royal coat of arms of the queen, connecting virginity visually to the royal virgin, Elizabeth. Thus the discourse of *The Monument of Matrons* stresses not the pagan cult discourse of virginity (associated with Diana, Astraea, or Cynthia), but defines Elizabeth as God's "daughter, his spouse, and virgin most glorious within."⁴⁶ The work's layout and contents point to a conscious design with the purpose of reinterpreting the emergent courtly virginity cult of the queen and balancing it with a correct Protestant understanding of the nature of the virginity of the sovereign.

Fashioning the Image of a Godly Monarch

Bentley's compilation is also a work which offers godly arguments to justify Queen Elizabeth's rule. Bentley reaches back to the typological language of the early reign of the queen, where she was compared to the Biblical models of kingship, to David and Solomon. A similar language of Biblical typology was used in 1575 in the first Christian meditation about the queen's rule, *A commemoration of the most prosperous and peaceable raigne of our gracious and deere soueraigne lady Elizabeth*⁴⁷ by Edward Hake. Hake's book celebrated the queen as a new Moses, Debora, Joshua, David and Solomon.⁴⁸ Bentley enforced this "old-fashioned" praise in the set of prayers for November the Seventeenth.⁴⁹ His references allude to the father of Elizabeth as David, a role Henry VIII adopted in his iconography,⁵⁰ while Elizabeth is Solomon, in whose reign the Temple of Jerusalem was built. She is Moses too, the deliverer of her people from the captivity of the Roman pharaoh:

⁴⁶ Ibid. 727-8.

⁴⁷ Edward Hake, *A commemoration of the most prosperous and peaceable raigne of our gracious and deere soueraigne lady Elizabeth by the grace of God of England, Fraunce and Irelande, Queene &c. Now newly set foorth this. xvii. day of Nouember, beyng the first day of the. xviii. yeere of her Maiesties sayd raigne.* (London: William How, 1575).

⁴⁸ Ibid. C4r.

⁴⁹ The prayers for the 17th of November appear in the fourth book (683-729), and their content varies from simple thanksgiving for the preservation of the queen and the prosperous state of the reign, to asking help in time of conspiracy, and to a final prayer "To be said mentallie or aloud of all true harted Englishmen and women, for the Queenes Majestie, when she rideth by them at anie time," 727-9.

⁵⁰ King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 76-81.

In her time haue been seen the golden yeeres of the reigne of hir father David, and the peacefull kingdom of Salamon to haue been aduanced [...] whilst other lands round about hath warred to the destruction of one another our Moses hath guarded us in Peace [...] prepared hir navie against the danger of theemie, [...] Our Johas, [...] Our Eliza directeth the children of the Prophets in their offices [...] Our Elias gathereth the people to mount Carmel, to behold the wonder of the fire of God [...] Ravish her heart with the flame of the loue of thee and thy house, with Moses to leade, and with Joshua to bring into the land of promise, with Debora to fight the battell; and with Jahel to knocke Sisera of Rome in the temples of his usurped headship, to his utter destruction; with David to bring home the Arke; and with Salomon to finish and consecrate to eternitie thy Temple amongst the people.⁵¹

In the third book the words given into the mouth of Elizabeth reflect a similar attitude:

[...] that I might be [...] thy peoples Joseph, their Moses, their Joshua, their David, their Josias, their Samuel, and their Salomon: finally, to be their Deborah, their Jael, their Hester, their Judith, and their Elizabeth; that is, their rest, staie, and staffe of Maiestie, their shepheard and ringleader in the waie of virtue, holinesse, zeale, and sincere religion.⁵²

Biblical typology is reflected on the title-pages of the individual books too. Queen Elizabeth is depicted on her knees in prayer in the top left corner of the first five books and she is accompanied by various royal or Biblical female characters differing in each book. Their virtue serves as a type with whom the English queen can be associated. This godly company includes Queen Catherine Parr, Margaret of Navarre, Hester, Debora, Judith, Bethsabe, Hulda, Anna and Susanna, altering the focus of the individual books from one to another virtue.

In the prayers for Accession Day Elizabeth is also represented as a Christ-like figure who gathers the “sheepe wandering astraie, in the wilderness”⁵³ and who had been ordained to be a shepherd to her people. In several prayers she is the spouse of Jesus Christ, assuming a role associated with the Church:

Set her as a seal on thine heart, as a signet upon thy arme [...] Let her be a sure wall or foundation, whereupon thou maist build a golden palace, and let her breasts be as towers unassaultable, that she may be meet for thee her

⁵¹ Bentley, *Monument of Matrons*, 695-97.

⁵² *Ibid.* 262.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 685.

spouse to dwell in, and be in thine eies as she that findeth perpetuall peace and quietness.⁵⁴

In these prayers the queen's role is defined in Christian terms, as the good shepherd, but her status is not granted an absolute value as it is derived from God's grace, who elected her as his vessel. The prayers given into the mouth of the queen in the Third Lamp also stress the weakness of the queen. They always start with the tribulations she had to suffer, and continue with the description of her deliverance by God. The emphasis on this elected status again reflects the pamphlet of John Aylmer:

I will giue thanks unto thee [...] to call me to this excellent state and roiall dignitie of a Prince: and as this daie to cloath me with the garments of honour; to set the Crowne of Gladnesse, and diademe of dignity upon mine head; to put the sceptre of righteousness, the globe of glorie, and the sword of thy power into mine hands, and to anoint and consecrate me thine handmaid Queen of this Realme.⁵⁵

Like Aylmer, Bentley deliberately draws the attention to the queen's sex, changes the word *king* to *queen* in the Old Testament quotations, and inserts the feminized phrases of *loving mother*, *tender nurse* to emphasize God's glory and might instead of the queen's achievements. This tendency stands in marked contrast to the political speeches of the queen's reign where both feminine and masculine titles of leadership are used.⁵⁶ The compiler or author of these prayers gave no such powerful position to the queen as she assumed in her speeches composed by herself at a time when her cult was fully developed. The prayers recommended by Bentley for the Seventeenth of November are all primarily thanksgivings to God, and only in the second place a catalogue of the virtues of the queen and the praise of her peaceful reign. Thus all the materials presented to the public about Elizabeth make a clear division between God's mercy and Elizabeth's position. The emphasis on this differentiation is in marked contrast with the emerging courtly and poetical praise of the queen.

A further propagandistic device is the inclusion in the Third Lamp of the "King's Hest, or Gods familiar Speeche to the Queene" and the "The Queenes Vow, or selfe-talke with God." These writings have a tone of authority through paraphrasing the psalms and by referring to the

⁵⁴ Ibid. 722-23.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 261-2.

⁵⁶ See for instance the Queen's *Golden Speech* of 1601. Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 335-344.

theologian Theodore Beza as the author.⁵⁷ It gives the words on government into the mouth of God, and provides an exegesis on the queen's rule. It paints an image of god's justification and Elizabeth's worthiness with the dramatic device of a conversation. It enumerates those arguments for Elizabeth's female sovereignty that were acceptable for Protestants. Such a text could easily serve as a source for all those priests and ministers who were searching for material for their Accession Day sermons. With the introduction of compulsory service on the day, there must have been a demand for treatises about the queen's rule. Another book published only three years later testifies that such need really existed. Edmund Bunny's *Certain Prayers and other godly exercises for the the seventeenth of Nouember* included not just scriptural texts and prayers to be used but attached a practical table (a tree diagram) and an explanation of it to his service book to explain "in what sort we may fruitfully solemnize the blessed reign"⁵⁸ of Queen Elizabeth. From the single tenet of God's love to his people Bunny derived forty-one arguments to justify thanksgiving on Queen's Day and to help ministers with their Christian eulogy of the queen. All the arguments of Bunny appear in Bentley's Hest and Vow, although not in such a systematic manner.

The Protestant Voice of Counsel

The Third Lamp of Virginity, the one which was designed for the use of the queen, is the most intriguing from the point of the queen's cult. It is a combination of both propaganda and counsel. It is conspicuous that, in spite of Bentley promising to collect all the texts available, it does not include the prayers composed by Elizabeth and published at an earlier date in the *Precationes priuatae Regiae E.R.* (1563)⁵⁹ and in the *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (1569).⁶⁰ Furthermore, he leaves out the meditations Elizabeth translated and the three short supplications from the Tower from this lamp and puts them into the second, as if it were not fit for the use by the queen. Thus Elizabeth is deprived of her own voice and the words of others are given into her mouth instead.

⁵⁷ Bentley, *Monument of Matrons*, 306.

⁵⁸ Edmund Bunny, *Certain Prayers and other godly exercises, for the seventeenth of Nouember* (London: Christopher Barker, 1585), sheet inserted after Eii.

⁵⁹ *Precationes priuatae Regiae E.R.* (S.l.: T. Purfoot, 1563).

⁶⁰ *Christian Prayers and Meditations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin* (London: J. Day, 1569).

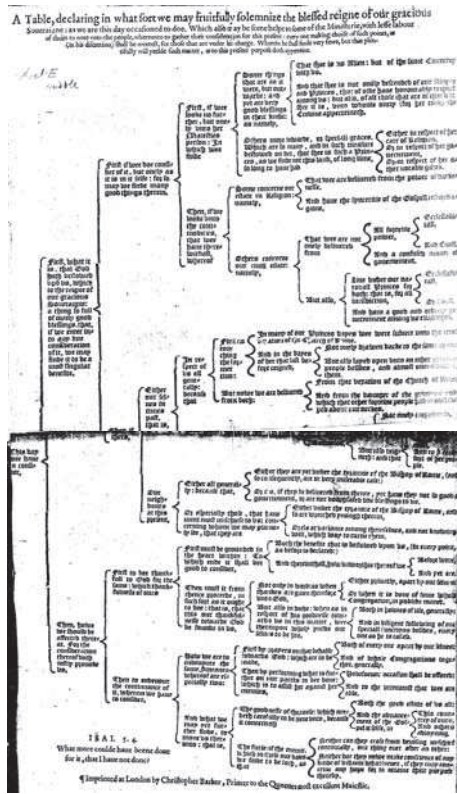


Fig. 2 A Table, declaring in what sort we may fruitfully solemnize the blessed reigne of our gracious Soueraigne: as we are this day occasioned to doe. Which also may be some helpe to some of the Ministerie, with lesse labour of theirs to note unto people, whereunto to gather their consideration for this present: every one making choice of such points, as (in his discretion) shall be meetest, for those that are under his charge. Wherein he shall finde very fewe, but that plentifully will yeelde such matter, as to this present purpose doth appertain.⁶¹

It is remarkable that Bentley includes prayers to be used by a monarch in such a compilation. Looking at the tradition of primers there is no precedent for publishing prayers to be used by the monarch. It is also a haunting question why the public were granted access to such material

⁶¹ Edmund Bunny *Certain Prayers and other godly exercises, for the seuenteenth of Nouember, 1585*, folded plate facing E2v. Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

arranged in a whole separate book (Lamp 3), if it did not concern them. Bentley's attitude can have two explanations. On the one hand, he offered the public an intimate glimpse of their queen in the manner of the summer progresses where the queen enjoyed showing herself to the simple people.⁶² But this seemingly direct view of the queen is misleading, because this section contains no prayers written by the queen, only those written for her by others (presumably by men). Thus the other explanation for the inclusion of Lamp Three in a private devotional work for a female readership was to fashion a godly picture about the queen not only to her subjects, but to the queen herself too. Thus the prayers for the queen were included as a little disguised lecture to the queen on good kingship.

The "King's Hest" and the "Queenes Vow or Self-talk" also have the air of counselling the queen. Elizabeth is lectured by the author in the role of God about kingship, and the same author gives answers in the name of the queen. Thus a godly male voice claims authority over the image-formation of the queen, instead of letting her own prayers speak for themselves. There is further evidence of the male assertive voice of counsel in the seventeen prayers for Accession Day published in the Fourth Lamp.

The prayer paraphrasing Psalm 72, for instance, includes a wish that she "may want neither integrity of counsel, neither wisdom" (714); or elsewhere, the prayer asserts that she governs with counsel (715); or asks God to defend the queen against the dissemblers at court (716) and from those: "Who so hath also a proud looke, and a hautie stomach, cause hir to loath him" (717)—as if he had somebody in mind—; or within one prayer the wish that God should teach the queen his commandments and statutes is articulated three times (717-718).

A voice of warning can be discerned in many references to Elizabeth's death. After the usual wishes for a long life, a peaceful reign, a defence from her enemies, the author asks God in one of the prayers that "after this life ended, make hir partaker of the brightnesse of thine and thy fathers everlasting kingdom" (709). There are six other cases when a similar wish is expressed. One prayer even begs for a virtuous successor to the queen:

After the blissful daies of this thy gracious handmaid our Queene [...] giue peace and concord to thy people, with a virtuous, wise, godlie, and fortunate Prince, whose constant zeal, care, industrie, and endeour

⁶² At Warwick in 1572, for instance, Elizabeth emphasized her visibility when she caused "every part and side of the coache to be openynd, that all her subjects present might behold her." *Progresses*, ed. Nichols, 1:311.

towards the cherishing and advancement of thy truth and glorie, may purchase thy fatherly love [...]. (704)

These references to the queen's mortality are present in *The Christian Prayers and Meditations* which was the prototype to Bentley's work in many ways.⁶³ In *The Christian Prayers* a section is attached which contains the queen's prayers in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin.⁶⁴ The border decoration of this section of the book is markedly different from the rest. Instead of scenes from the Bible, in this section of the book the illustration changes and the stages of a dance of death are depicted. The motifs of death leading away the various representatives of society from the emperor down to the pauper roll down film-like on the side of the text. The series of figures recur three times, twice with male characters and the third time with female figures. Placing the prayers of a queen next to the scenes of the *danse macabre* is a conspicuous allusion to her mortality. Looking at the political scenery of the period,—the petition of the House of Commons (1563), of the House of Lords (1563) and their joint effort (1566) to urge the queen to name a successor after her near fatal attack of smallpox—, these hints can be understood as a direct counsel and as arguments in a political controversy between the monarch and her godly subjects.

Bentley took over the motif of stressing mortality from the 1569 prayer book and remodelled the argument for his own purpose. Not only are there hints at the queen's inevitable death in the prayers, but in the Third Lamp the prayer includes an allusion to the ultimate threat of all death dances: "[...] and he which is todaie a king, tomorowe may be dead: for we be all

⁶³ *Christian Prayers and Meditations* (1569) was popularly called the 'Queen's Prayer Book'. It was a collection of prayers for all occasions that could be used by everybody—and as such served as a source for Bentley's fourth book—, and also included prayers composed by the queen. Furthermore it contained two treatises that were about good and bad government: the "Promises, admonitions and counsels to good kings" and the "Sentences of threatening to euill kinges," a prototype perhaps for the "King's Hest" and the "Queenes Vow or Self-talk."

⁶⁴ Recently their authenticity has been questioned by Steven W. May in his "Queen Elizabeth Prays for the Living and the Dead" (in *Elizabeth I and the Culture of Writing*, ed. Peter Beal, Grace Ioppolo, [London: British Library, 2007], 206), yet the *Collected Works* of Elizabeth I claims a variety of strong evidence to support the queen's authorship (143-4).

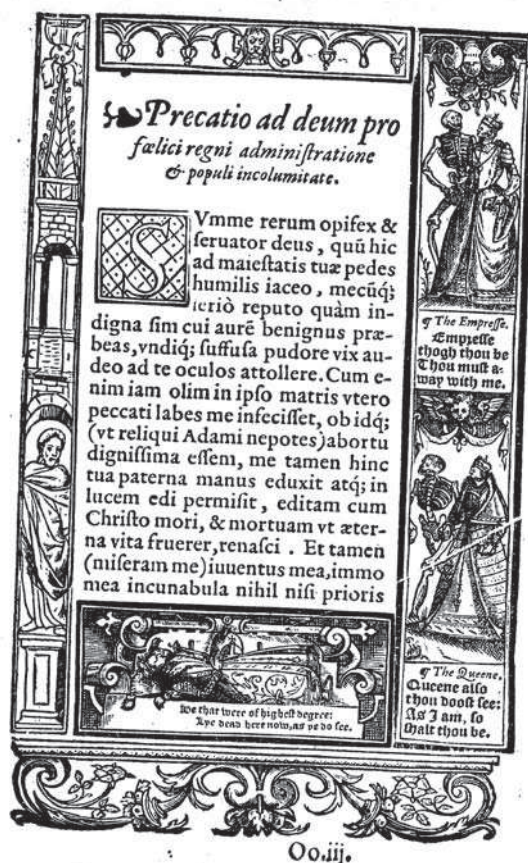


Fig. 3: The *danse macabre* border illustration with feminine characters next to the queen's prayer: *Recatio ad deum pro faelici regni administratione & populi incolumitate* (Prayer to God for the Auspicious Administration of the Kingdom and the Safety of the People) in John Day's *Christian Prayers and Meditations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin* (203r)

mortal, and subject to one and the same corruption."⁶⁵ The death motif is further underlined by the only full scale illustration of the book (besides the title pages) that depicts the death of a queen, of Catherine Parr. The image of her body laid out, and her figure kneeling in heaven in front of God's last judgement confronts the reader three times. The engraving is

⁶⁵ Bentley, *Monument of Matrons*, 275.

first included after “The Queenes Vow or Self-talk,” then after a prayer for the last judgement day, and finally at the end of the fourth book. This insistence on the queen’s mortality is a reaction to the emerging language of secular eulogy which implied tacitly that the queen was never changing and was *semper eadem*. Bentley’s representation stressing the imagery of death was part of a Protestant discourse that tried to balance the emerging pagan tropes of the queen’s cult which resembled her to immortal goddesses.

Conclusions

Bentley’s compilation of prayers and meditations is an intriguing document about the emerging institutionalized cult of the queen in the early 1580s which developed in parallel with the courtly praise of poets and dramatists. The first volume of the work included some pieces composed by the Queen, some designed for the queen, others for the subjects of the queen to be used on Queen’s Day, and furthermore some which offered thoughts on the reign of the queen. This rich material drafts the complex purposes the compiler and his assistants had when forming a written monument about their queen. The size, elegance and richness of the first volume were intentionally heightened to capture the imagination of the same layer of society which witnessed the courtly cult of the queen. *The Monument of Matrons* aimed to balance the new pagan figures of the queen’s praise by reinterpreting the queen’s virginity cult and enforcing the older typological language. It also offered for its readers a source for devotional practices on the feast day of the queen’s accession. Yet there was also a little disguised Protestant voice of assertiveness included within the text which attempted not just to correct the secular cult language of the queen but to shape a godly image of its own.

The Monument of Matrons attests to the existence of an institutional celebration of the queen. This little researched area of study sheds light on a phenomenon which operated independently of courtly eulogy, was informed by Protestant rhetoric, and was available to a broader layer of society than just the court. While it mirrors the Christian anxieties about the pagan tropes of the cult of Queen Elizabeth, *The Monument of Matrons* also offers a Protestant justification of female sovereignty.



Fig. 4: Queen Katherine Parr lying in state and kneeling before God in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrons: Containing seven Severall Lamps of Virginitie* (2Hr).