

**A HANDWRITTEN PRAYER IN THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY'S COPY
OF RICHARD HYRDE'S *INSTRUCTION OF A CHRISTEN WOMAN****

AMONG the holdings in the Folger Shakespeare Library is a copy of the first printed edition of *A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christen Woman*, translated by Richard Hyrde from Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae Christianae*.¹ On page B4v of this book is a handwritten note including a prayer by a reader with the date 1637. The annotation in this particular copy of Hyrde's book is mentioned in A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue* (STC)² and the online *Hamnet: Folger Library Catalogue*,³ and is accessible through *Early English Books Online* (EEBO),⁴ but this prayer has gone relatively unnoticed. In what follows, I provide a transcription of the prayer as well as a discussion relating the note to paleographical and source contexts.

The prayer reads (see Image 1 [not provided in manuscript, due to permission rights]):⁵

12^o: September 1637:⁶

* Forthcoming in *Notes and Queries* (projected 2015).

¹ Washington, DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, STC 24856, Richard Hyrde, *A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christen Woman* (London, 1529); I provide transcriptions from the 1529 edition by folios, as in *Early English Books Online*, Chadwyck-Healey, 2003-12, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>> [hereafter *EEBO*], accessed March 2014. For the original Latin text, see C. Fantazzi and C. Mattheussen (eds), *De institutione feminae Christianae*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1996-8).

² *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640*, 2nd edn, rev. and enlarged by W. A. Jackson and F. S. Ferguson, completed by K. F. Pantzer, 3 vols. (London, 1976-91) [hereafter STC, by no.], 24856.5; early printed books are cited by STC nos., with references to image nos. as in *EEBO* where appropriate.

³ *Hamnet: Folger Library Catalog*, Folger Shakespeare Library, catalogue entry at <<http://shakespeare.folger.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=230588>>, accessed March 2014.

⁴ *EEBO* also contains a record and images for the copy in the British Library (STC 24856).

⁵ Lineation is retained and punctuation as well as capitalization follow the original.

This Booke was made° ~~six~~ one⁷ hundred and
thirteene° yeares agoe°.

O Lord. a thousand yeares are in thy sight but
as yesterday. and a day as a thousand yeares
Our tyme passeth away like a shadow. and
wee bring our dayes to an end like a⁸ tale
that is told.

Lord teach us to number our daye<s>⁹
that wee may apply our hearts
unto Wisedome°.

Amen

It is not surprising to find a seventeenth-century note in a copy of *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, considering the popularity and influence of the treatise throughout the Tudor period.¹⁰ Vives first composed *De institutione feminae Christianae* and dedicated it to Catherine of Aragon in 1523,¹¹ and soon afterward the text was translated into a number of European vernaculars—among them Hyrde’s English version, printed in London in 1529. This translation was continuously printed throughout the sixteenth century, and the book continued to be read

⁶ The *I* in *I637* appears to have been written originally as *i* (with serif to the right), but a descending tale has been added, giving it the appearance of a *j*.

⁷ Originally written as *six*, struck through with three lines, and *one* is written above it.

⁸ The letter *a* is smudged.

⁹ Here the text runs into the binding seem and is obscured; I have offered this conjectural reading based on the source (see below).

¹⁰ See esp. B. S. Travitsky, ‘Reprinting Tudor History: The Case of Catherine of Aragon’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1 (1997), 164-74.

¹¹ See esp. S. D. Kolsky, ‘Making Examples of Women: Juan Luis Vives’ *The Education of Christian Women*’, *Early Modern Culture Online*, iii (2012), 14-38, <<http://journal.uia.no/index.php/EMCO/article/view/41>>, accessed March 2014, with further references there.

throughout the early modern period.¹² In noting the date and time from the printing of the book, the author was most likely responding to the date that Hyrde gives as the end of his preface, just above the handwritten passage as ‘the yere of our lorde. M. D. and .xxiii’, referring to the original date of Vives’ composition.

The inscription was written in dark brown ink, in a mixed secretary hand, presenting two aspects—one more formal for the note about the date, and another more cursive for the prayer.¹³ In the hand’s adherence to early seventeenth-century styles, letter-forms are comparable to those in a series of contemporary, popular writing manuals by Martin Billingsley: *The Pen’s Excellencie or The Secretaries’ Delighte* (1618; STC 3062); *A Newe Booke of Copies containing divers sortes of sundry hands* (1620; STC 3363.8); and *A Coppie Booke Containing varietie of Examples of all the most Curious Hands written* (1637; STC 3061). In comparison to such styles, several distinctive features stand out: a lack of abbreviations; a highly decorated capital *S* for *September*; embellished capital *O* at the start of lines 4 and 6; four different forms of *s* (besides the one in *September*); flourishing descenders on the numeral *1* (in the date) and the capital *L* in the last *Lord* (line 9); and a flourish on the point of capital *A* in *Amen*. The letter *s* presents a particularly significant instance of how this hand uses a variety of forms current in the period, including cursive 8-shaped *s* (as in *thousand*, *sight*, and the first *s* in *passeth*, lines 4, 5, and 6), short *s* (as in *was*, *yeares*, and the second *s* in *passeth*, lines 2, 3, and 6), long *s* with pointed head and exaggerated descender (as in *yesterday* and *shadow*, lines 4 and 5)—with cursive and long forms used interchangeably in initial and medial positions—as well as a 6-shaped *s* used only

¹² For Hyrde’s translation and subsequent printings, see STC 24856-63; and Travitsky, ‘Reprinting Tudor History’.

¹³ On early modern English scripts, see esp. J. F. Preston and L. Yeandle, *English Handwriting, 1450-1650: An Introductory Manual* (Binghamton, NY, 1992); and G. Ioppolo, ‘Early Modern Handwriting’, *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. M. Hattaway, 2 vols. (Malden, MA, 2010), 177-89, with further references there.

terminally and attached to preceding *e* (as in *yeares* and *dayes*, lines 4, 5, and 7). This note thus provides a significant witness of a dated secretary script during the transitional period of the early seventeenth century.

In addition to the handwritten note, the Folger copy of *Instruction of a Christen Woman* also contains signatures by a certain man named *Thomas* on A2r, D2r, and G3v. Thomas's signature does not appear to be in the same hand as the note and prayer, since his letterforms are not precisely comparable with either of the scripts represented on B4v. Yet, in accounting for varying styles of writing under different circumstances—quickly scrawling one's name rather than carefully inscribing a prayer—the issue remains inconclusive.

Much of the inscribed prayer echoes Psalm 89 (90),¹⁴ corresponding to Miles Coverdale's 1535 Bible (STC 2063), in which the psalm is given the heading 'A prayer of Moses the man of God'.¹⁵ Every line of the inscribed prayer, in fact, is adapted from verses in Coverdale's Bible (verbal parallels are indicated in italics):¹⁶

Psalm 89:4: For *a thousande yeares in thy sight are but as yesterdaye* that is past

¹⁴ On the Psalms in early modern England, see, most recently, H. Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge, 2004); L. P. Austern, K. B. McBride, and D. L. Orvis (eds), *Psalms in the Early Modern World* (Farnham, 2011); and C. C. King'oo, *Miserere Mei: The Penitential Psalms in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, 2012).

¹⁵ *Biblia the Bible, that is, the holy Scripture of the Olde and New Testament, faithfully and truly translated out of Douche and Latyn in to Englishe*, image 249; and *The Coverdale Bible 1535*, introduction by S. L. Greenslade (Folkestone, 1975). On Coverdale's Bible, see esp. A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961*, rev edn (London, 1968), no. 18; D. Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature, Volume 1: From Antiquity to 1700* (Cambridge, 1993), 107-13; D. Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, 2003), 173-89; J. Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), *passim*; and J. H. Ferguson, 'Miles Coverdale and the Claims of Paraphrase', Austern, McBride, and Orvis, *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 137-54.

¹⁶ Other than orthographical variants, these same passages remain unrevised in the 1539 Great Bible (STC 2068). Modern Protestant chapter numbering for the Psalms did not change until the publication of the Geneva Bible (1560), followed by the King James Bible (1610). I cite chapters and verse numbers as in Coverdale's Bible.

2 Peter 3:8: one *daye* is with the LORDE *as a thousande yeare*

Psalm 143:4: his *tyme passeth awaye like a shadowe* (cf. Wisdom 2:5)

Psalm 89:9: *we brynge or yeares to an ende*, as it were a *tayle that is tolde*

Psalm 89:12: O *teach us to nombre oure dayes, that we maye applie oure hertes unto wysdome*

The wide circulation of Coverdale's Psalter explains most of these parallels, especially since Coverdale's version (as in the Great Bible) was included in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in 1549 (STC 16267) and in subsequent printings into the twentieth century.¹⁷ I have been unable to find any other instance of this particular prayer, and suggest that it should be read as an original composition of biblical adaptation. In its reliance on the Psalms for the majority of its substance, this prayer speaks to what has been called 'the range of psalmic influence in the early modern period'.¹⁸

While I have no means of identifying a definite author of this prayer, a few observations are possible. First, I would like to direct attention back to the title of the printed book, *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, and suggest that this inscription represents a reader's direct engagement with the book. As the title suggests, this work was written as a conduct book for females, with the purpose of providing the proper behavior and submissive roles of women. More to the point is a passage in chapter five of Hyrde's translation, titled 'Of the lernyng of maydes':¹⁹

¹⁷ *The booke of the common prayer and administracion of the sacramentes and other rites and ceremonies of the Churche: after the vse of the Churche of England*; and B. Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford, 2011). See Norton, *History of the Bible*, 107; Daniell, *Bible in English*, 189; and Austern, McBride, and Orvis, 'Introduction', Austern, McBride, and Orvis, *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 1-33, at 15-17.

¹⁸ Austern, McBride, and Orvis, 'Introduction', *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 3.

¹⁹ For fuller analysis, see V. Wayne, 'Some Sad Sentence: Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman*', *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. M. P. Hannay (Kent, OH, 1985), 15-29.

And whan she shall lerne to wryte, let nat her example be voyde verses, nor wanton or tryflynge songes: but some sad sentence, prudent and chaste, taken out of holy scripture, or the sayenges of philosophers: whiche by often wrytyng she maye fasten better in her memory. (E2r)

As an amalgamation of verses copied from the Bible, the handwritten inscription exhibits the type of practice encouraged in this passage of *Instruction of a Christen Woman*. The prayer, then, should be understood as a direct engagement with the pedagogical book in following its precepts for female scribal activity. In this, it is tempting to suggest that the writer of this prayer was a female reader—though this is only speculation without more substantial evidence. The act of writing in this instance also goes beyond scribal copying to become a form of adaptation; it manifests as an act of authorial creation. Should this inscription be understood as a type of reaction to the book by stepping out of the practices that it establishes? Read in this way, the handwriting becomes an act of confrontation toward the book's precepts, creating a tension between the printed authority and the reader's scribal reaction.

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