

Contextualizing Canonical Inclusion: The Case of Early Modern English Female-Authored Non-Canonical Verse

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Abstract

The Early Modern English female-authored text is recently (to be specific since 2000s) introduced to the English literary canons as supplementary material to anthologized literary lists such as the Norton Anthology of English Literature. This recent shift in their inclusion is argued as insufficient to the abundantly abandoned English female-authored publications printed between 1450s until the early 1700s. The process of their inclusion in the literary anthologies of the English Renaissance is seen as integral towards building an equitable representation of this age. Thereby, offering an equitable inclusion of women's literature in this era is the aim of this study. This paper will first offer an in-depth contextualization to the canonization of female-authored texts with a focus mainly on their exclusion from literary canons. Then, the study offers methodized canonized inclusions of Early Modern female-authored texts. By way of concluding the research conducted in this study, this paper provides a detailed sample of a course plan that aims at the inclusion of female-authors during this era in a general mandatory course (for undergraduate students at the School of Foreign Languages at the University of Jordan) titled "English Literature from the Beginning until 1660s." This paper will thus, incorporate a course plan that has been prepared and revised by the researchers from the years 2019-2023 to ensure sampling the inclusion of female-authored texts in this survey course.

Keywords: early modern english literature, canonization, inclusion, equity, women's literature

1. Introduction

1.1 Contextualizing Canonized Exclusion

The English Renaissance, dating from the late fifteenth century to the early seventeenth century, is the age of prosperity, the age where English literature crystallized, flourished, and infused its own identity. This age is known for the famous names that represent it like Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Jonson, et cetera. The age of the English Renaissance, though ruled by many great women,ⁱ brought greatness to many male authors. Female supremacy over England did not mean that the female had the same opportunities as the male. Even though education and publishing is seemingly designed by and geared towards males, many female authors in that period proved competent to compete with male authors in the publishing and writing spheres. However, female authors struggled to maintain their education and to publish their texts in the literary stream; thus, for having the upper hand in literacy, the English literary canon enclosed itself around those who published more and had more education and influence, male authors in specific. The canon embraced and exalted male authors and scholars and, whether intentionally or unintentionally, their female counterparts' efforts were stifled. The literary canon shed light and provided place for mainly male authors; its prejudice prevented the blooming of texts written by female authors for centuries.

During the Renaissance age, numerous female authors found disregarded within the literary canon of the English Renaissance.ⁱⁱ Names such as Margery Kempe, Anne Askew, Elizabeth Cary, Frances Neville, Anne Locke, Elizabeth Grimston, Margaret Seymour, Jane Seymour, Mary Sidney, Margaret Hoby, Margaret Tyler, Anne Dowriche, Rachel Speght, Aemilia Lanyer, Jane Anger, and many others were marginalized in the name of a cohesive universal structure that unifies Renaissance literature and praises the male intellectual property as well as grants it privilege over females (a sample of this is provided in our hypothesis). The patriarchal culture of the literary canon respected male-authorship and dismissed its female authors; for gaining recognition primarily in times of friction and debate and disregarding them as competitors is what we aim to address in this research. With this interpretive approach, we believe that this indifference is due to modern labeling and the popular culture that dominated the literary canon as well as female marginalization during the English Renaissance.ⁱⁱⁱ

1.2 The Importance of Inclusion

The importance of the inclusion of female authors in the English Renaissance canon is not the only issue that female literature from this age faces. To state precisely, female authors encounter another dangerous marginalization, the marginalization from Feminism as a theory and

canon altogether. Even though many scholars agree that female scholars and authors from the beginning of time until the moment when Feminism has been named as a movement (since the 1960s) have in one way or another influenced the development and formation of Feminism, Feminism has managed to exclude the Renaissance female author from its first wave of Feminism.^{iv} While many would argue the influence of those authors on Feminism, Feminism has marginalized the Renaissance female scholar for those scholars could be considered the first English authors who call for equity as feminist theorists and scholars do.

The condition of the female could be read in many of the Renaissance literary texts but the female voice being recognized by female authors had not gained popular attention until the modern era. For example, the financial issues of females were discussed by Speght, Kempe, and many other female authors in the Renaissance, but it was not until Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* that recognition was given to this topic. Many of feminist fundamental issues could be traced and extracted from the literary works of the first published English female authors. The female author of the Renaissance is therefore being marginalized by feminist canonizers. In this instance, the female during the Renaissance has been condemned by marginalization from the mainstream canon and the feminist canon. Though Feminism is the theory that idealizes the marginalized female author and the female essence in the literary mainstream patriarchal chauvinistic canon, the feminist body names Wolfe and others who are modern in comparison with the Renaissance women as the first wave of Feminism, though the label is given by universalists or structuralists who are trying to give a specific species for Feminism and limit it. This, in our opinion, is limiting to every author who identifies with the feminist theory before the modern limiting definition of Feminism. The Renaissance period witnessed a significant and often overlooked influence of both female and male authors on the development of feminist thought.

Double-marginalization gives the female authors of the Renaissance age the power to strike against the limitations of the canon that the female and the male theorists have limited themselves to. The female Renaissance author needs to be located to be given influence and substance, and to be widely studied and taught. Female authors from the Renaissance, though silenced by canons, have to be placed in the English literary canon and the Feminist canon. In this study, we will examine how Renaissance English women writers have been included in modern feminist canons and literary studies. Then, we will address the issue of exclusion of other women authors during this era on the grounds that they do not fit under feminist ideologies. We will then attempt to provide an alternative canon for Renaissance women's verse writings which would provide a thematic approach to canonized and uncanonized women's writings. This study then does not conclude with an answer of whether these women should be included in literary canons or not, for such a battle has been fought since the 1960s, but rather it focuses on how to include those female authors in the English Renaissance canon.

1.3 Relevant Scholarship

The midst of the twentieth century essentially effectuated the study of marginalized literature into being, the study of female-authored literature in particular flourished in the 1960s. This designates a revival of literature written by women that were brought into light to fuel and empower a feminist logic that shows female authors as marginalized when compared to the white "male genius" literary legacy, (Hattaway, 5). Toward the 1970s, a theory of feminism was formulated, and the fame of women studies and the reading of female authored texts from previous ages thrived. As a result, many scholars argued that the Renaissance was the beginning of a movement towards modern theories, such as feminism. As the study of Renaissance female authors was a modern movement, the terms and ideologies of modernism were imposed, whether consciously or unconsciously, on them. Many scholars read the existence of women in the English Renaissance as a phenomenon that is base for feminism. Servadio, for instance, explicates in her *Renaissance Women* that, "[t]he Renaissance also started when women became more learned, women were able to argue, to give their opinion, to rule. ... it could even be argued that in the Renaissance, a "feminine" movement, sprang from the new status of women," (Servadio, 2). Servadio associates women's education and writing with the modern movement of feminist literature.

More essentially, Servadio addresses the Renaissance age as the age that quintessentially brought women into being. She defines this age by identifying its characteristics; as she infers: "The Renaissance was characterized by observation, study, analysis, and an unwillingness to accept attitudes inherited from the past. Indeed, the key factor about the Renaissance was a nascent compulsion to research, to seek the root of everything," (Servadio, 2). She stresses the ages' individualistic ideology; that this age was the beginning of building up an English identity that is separate from the past. The search for roots, bases, and labels and not taking knowledge for granted generated the excellence of the age. In the Renaissance, "The human mind had been allowed to think for itself, breaking through previous conventions. And one of the previous dogmas was about the intellectual inferiority of woman," (Servadio, 2).

Provided that, Servadio found and read feminism in the English Renaissance texts written by female authors. She identifies the amount of literature written by women in this period; she declares: "But women read and women wrote. Over fifty English women published manuscripts between 1524 and 1640, producing eighty-five books, but the large majority created religious works - not poetry in a Renaissance vein. Only Jane Anger used her gifts to answer men's attacks by writing *Protection of Women*," (Servadio, 193). Servadio's statement defies the feminine tradition, as she confirms that women did write and read, and it was not an act for only a few of women. She provides an actual number for the female books that were writing during the English Renaissance, even though this statement we argue is an understatement to the amount of literature written and published.

Servadio's view on the way women lived during the Renaissance focalizes upon the idea of how many women from multifarious social statuses have written and published. Henceforth, she provides a dilention highlighting the modern ideals of women:

How did women live during the Renaissance? Broadly speaking, they were cast into categories: the ideal romantic woman, the brave virago, the courtesan, and the wife. The aristocracy married early in life, the poor late. But the wife was not the vehicle of ideals and ideas, conversation of sexual recreation, and men, then as now, depicted wives as a tiresome duty they owed to society. (Servadio, 8)

Marriage defined women's lives, and therefore, a woman's relationship with a man is what centers her existence rather than her own individuality. Women, then, are seen as social beings, whereas men could embody both individual and social aspects according to Servadio's interpretation of the age.

On the one hand, Rackin's "Misogyny Is Everywhere" uncovers the truth about the existence of female authors in the English Renaissance. He postulates that "Women were everywhere in Shakespeare's England, but the variety of their roles in life and in the scripts of plays too often "goes without saying." If we wanted to look for it, the researchers believe one could find "an interpretive embarrassment of riches "for a revitalized feminist criticism," (Rackin, 71). Rackin views the relativeness of the female author during the English Renaissance is established only through tying her to the feminist tradition rather than the Renaissance that is centered on Shakespeare. On the other hand, Fraser's essay "On the Political and the symbolic: Against the Metaphysics of Textuality," addresses the idea of the exclusion of women from intellectual history and characterizes it as dangerous as it has led to a deviation of literature under the label of women's studies. The phrase "Women's Studies" is the pitfall of women writers because they become included in Women's Studies rather in intellectual history, (Fraser, 12). Women with Women's Studies become excluded not only from writing and publishing but knowledge influence and history of knowledge. Women involved in Women's Studies are not only excluded from writing and publishing, but also from influencing knowledge and contributing to the history of knowledge. Female works are not seen as part of the literary canon, but as gender canons and under gender studies therefore eliminated from literary canons. The danger that is seen here is because of the idea that women's texts can never compete with the hierarchy of literary canons but taken as a marginalized separate entity.

1.4 Hypotheses

As a result of this marginalization and to utilize Sullivan's terminology (2005), women are *forgotten* when it comes to the teaching of the literary canons such as the English Renaissance literary canon. Sullivan's "Memory and Forgetting" has reflected on the idea that literary canons have been highlighting the memory of certain authors over others and those who have been *moved out* of those canons to make space to more authoritative texts have led to the oblivion of those texts. This means that canons allow memory, and that memory means authority and influence. Though memory and recollection are individualistic, canons, thereby, structured memory as social by equaling it to remembering. This is related to the idea that women writers in the English Renaissance need to be globally recognized through universalizing their works and catalyzing the aspect of remembrance by delineating their effect on the English Renaissance canon. If a course is taught on only women authors in the English Renaissance, then those women are automatically placed under the canon of Early Modernism rather than Renaissance canons. Similarly, Ravitch's (2006) *The English Reader* confirms that female authors in the English Renaissance need recognition *by the larger culture* of literature canon, recognition is it the solution. We stress that inclusion in canons is also not enough to bring female-authored texts into the teaching of the English Renaissance. We believe that global fame is necessarily essential to the teaching of those female authors. Just like Ben Jonson, John Donne, John Milton, Ralph Emerson, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Samuel Coleridge, George B. Shaw, John Dryden, Thomas More, William Wordworth, and Alexandar Pope elegiac laments of Shakespeare and call for his canonical worth, the need for elegies that maintained female-authored heritage is what their canonical inclusion requires. Literary canons and the anthologies that continuously re-publish literature from the Renaissance and Early Modern age are sources for those female authors to gain inclusion. In a way, anthologies serve as paratexts to cultures.

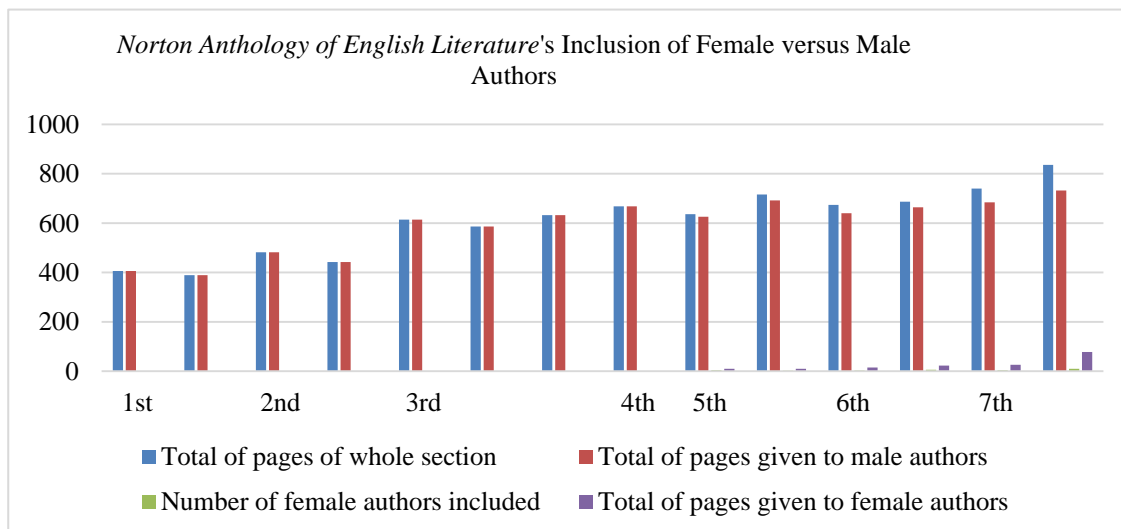


Figure 1. Norton Anthology of English Literature's Inclusion of Female versus Male Authors

The above chart (Figure 1) reveals the total of pages given to female versus male Early Modern authors included in the first volume of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* across its first (1962) to its seven (2004) editions. As reflected in the chart, female authors' inclusion within this anthology is scarce and cannot be equated to their male counterparts. Even their newest editions (the eighth's total of authors is 12 female and 51 male, the ninth edition has 14 female and 56 male, and tenth editions has 6 female and 19 male authors (2009, 2012 and 2018; respectively)), the percentages of female-authored to male-authored inclusions in the last three editions are as follows (The percentages are calculated by using the formula $Percentage=(X/Y)*100$; where X represents the number of authors based on sex and Y represents the total of authors given in each anthology with the exclusion of anonymous authors from 1450s to 1660s): The eighth edition features 19.05% females and 80.95% males, the ninth edition features 20% females and 80% males, and the tenth edition features 24% females and 76% males. This relatively recent inclusion does barely cover a thorough and equitable representation that would work towards the inclusion of the abundant female-authored texts that are published during this era. The gradual inclusion of women only started after their seventh edition (2001) with Queen Elizabeth and Mary Sydney as central to the anthology. Thus, inclusion is necessary to ensure their revival and for them to live the canonical lives of their male-counterparts. The next section will then offer solutions towards a methodized inclusion of Early Modern female-authored texts.

2. Method

The methods utilized in this research is a close-reading and historical contextualization for the relevance of female-authored Early Modern literature through incorporating their works in course plans centered around reading Early Modern literature. Our next section delves into methodizing inclusion of female-authored texts in a course taught at the University of Jordan titled "English Literature from the Beginnings Until 1660." We discuss, here, how the researchers incorporate the female-authored text in this class.

2.1 Subsections

We start our methodizing of canonized inclusion with the importance of the inclusion of female-authored texts in the course syllabus of "English Literature from the Beginning Until 1660." Then, we offer multiple practical methods to include female-authored texts into a course centered around canonized figures in English literature until 1660. Lastly, we confront the exclusion and offer multiple ways for inclusion of female-authored texts. Through dedicating a whole section on practical inclusion of female-authored texts, we conclude our research with our findings.

2.2 Subject Characteristics

The course we choose to re-incorporate inclusion of female-authored texts in has been taught at the University of Jordan (UJ) since the Department of English Language and Literature was founded, 1962. The course is core to the education of students at the School of Foreign Languages (UJ) to today. It is taught as a mandatory course to all the students of the School. It is also a course that the researchers have aimed to develop since 2019 and are still seeking to develop it further until today.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The procedures and measures initiated by the researchers are centered around the following: First and foremost, prioritizing inclusion of female-authored texts from the Early Modern period to be specific. Second, before approaching the period and the female-authored texts, multiple texts are read to historicize voicing female-authors from Old English Literature to Middle English Literature, then lastly, Early Modern literature. With reading works such as *Beowulf* (700-750 AD), to "The Wife's Lament" (960-990 AD), to Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath" (1387-1400 AD), to Anne Askew's *Examinations* (1545), the students learn about the complex history of female voices and how they are incorporated into literature. After that, a thorough study of female-authored literary works is addressed to cover the period from 1550-1660 AD. It is worth noting that his date marks the year through which the course endsdiscovering the aforementioned texts. In this section, students examine works of female-authors who directly published in response to highlight exclusion and demand inclusion in life and in print-culture.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Methodizing Canonical Inclusion

Numerous scholars have highlighted an urgent necessity to address the omission of women from literary canons and its impact on restricting the readership of women's literature during the Renaissance. In this instance, Purkiss in her 2019 review essay for the *Times Literary Supplement*, discussed the partial success of the efforts of feminist scholars in includeing Early Modern women into the renaissance canon. She states: "Women writers of the early modern period have been introduced, and reintroduced, and introduced again, as if the mainstream early modernists were deaf, or very forgetful, elderly uncles. The diligent specialists in early modern women's writing keep finding new ways to frame their introductions in the hope that this time something might stick," (12). Purkiss criticizes the exclusion of women within globalized and credible anthologies such as the *Norton Anthologies* (1970-2021). In Purkiss's view, the literary field of Early Modern women's literature displays a weakness due to the feminist exclusion of women's historical contextualized experience and the insistence of reducing their inclusion to the limiting modern feminist canon. Goodrich and McQuade's 2021 "Beyond Canonicity: The Futute(s) of Early Modern Women Writers," respond to Purkiss by arguing that scholars, such as Purkiss, are also to be blamed for the exclusion of women due to their lack of highlighting and drawing attention to the cultural context and essentially emphasizing upon the "universal desire to publish scholarship that does not ruffle any critical feathers," (7). Approaching from this point, women have been excluded prior to feminism on the bases of their gender, but after feminism, the inaccessibility of women's literature

and the unorganized nature of it led to the inclusion of a few women amongst the studies of both women and the Renaissance age. Bell, in *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship*, states that “by discounting female readers, by determining which poems *should not* be anthologized, and by declaring which questions *should not* be asked,” many Renaissance female authors have been disregarded from literary canons, (Bell, 17). But what scholars such as Bell have done is to locate the women authors during this period under the label proto-feminist, disregarding by that the diverse works and focusing on only those who fit under feminist ideologies. In a way Feminist posed readings of the Renaissance canon have narrowed the literature of females under an umbrella that fits a few names. By this, the feminist canon has argued that there is a separation between what is considered as modern feminist in juxtaposition to the Early Modern female authorship.

There is a need to read female authors within a shared collective literary aim that is separate from the domain of only their gender. Reading women as individuals who wrote separately from other females and males and in isolation from each other is not substantial when it comes to canonical studies, as it focuses on who wrote the text instead of the text itself. A majoritarian number of studies on women's literature in the English Renaissance have concentrated on the worthiness of the teaching or reading of their literature. To achieve global recognition, female-authored texts should inherently necessitate a search for their authority and not be contingent upon the perceived worth or value of either the author or the work itself. Legitimizing authority needs an intellectual influence and form to survive and thrive, and here, the Defense or Apology as a genre would argue an authorial location for women within the borders of the English Renaissance. The reason why we chose the defense or apology over on any other literary genre is that during the English Renaissance defenses/apologies are the main literary form that many women from different social backgrounds veritably used in order to convey their ideas and ideals. Though these apologies are written by female and male authors altogether, one could visibly see that the apologies written on defending women takes a certain form and share a base of content that would allow us to conclude that the style and the shared collective qualities of those texts, within the spectrum of the prosaic and poetic apology, strive for constructing a feminine genre that provides a fulcrum base for the authoritative inclusion in the English Renaissance that encompasses the teaching and reading of women writers within the borders of courses and canons.

In this instance, this line of argument also demonstrates how ideas of love, religion and women's comfort with their departure from society implemented the way in which women's private religious prayers and contemplations, formed the lives of women during the Renaissance. Katherine Parr's "In contemplation of my wretched life" offers an interesting interpretation on the way she thinks and prays, along with the violent vocabulary she uses, thereby indicating that she identifies herself as a strong woman. Moreover, she compares herself to Christ, asserting that she is more violent than him, and contrasts Christ's image of peace and love with a list of her own characteristics that exhibit more violence than his." She says: "I disobedient," (P. 12, L. 3), "I most proud, (L. 5), and "I hard hearted," (17). The language she uses can be interpreted either as a harsh self-criticism or as self-empowerment, as she does not judge herself as wrong for behaving differently from how Christ would act.

Another example on an uncanonized religious poem is Catrin Ferch Gruffydd's "A praise poem of Christ." Here, the author questions her social i her religious obligations and how they do not align with each other, declaring: "... and talking (the thing that is best)/ is not good for us, unless of god in heaven," (P. 35-39, L. 59-60). Her dilemma lies in the need to remain mindful of her social surroundings; she is unable to openly discuss the religious sect she wishes to follow due to societal constraints and her social surroundings. She asserts that only God knows the true sect she follows. She desires the freedom to openly embrace the sect she believes in to truly embody her Christian faith. However, societal criticism suppresses the author's true religion. Personal religious poems would assist in understanding how women read and dealt with religion on a personal base. Excluding such works from religious based canons instantiates how the personal matter needs to be further explored. Knowing how women authors practiced religion on a personal base would allow a comprehensive reading to how religion in the English Renaissance is practiced.

The need to confront the omission of women from the literary canons and its effect on the limitations of the reading of women's literature during the Renaissance is addressed here. Women have been excluded prior to feminism on the bases of their gender. But after feminism, the inaccessibility of women's literature and the unorganized nature of it led to the inclusion of a few women in the studies of both women and the Renaissance age. Bell, in *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship*, declares that “by discounting female readers, by determining which poems *should not* be anthologized, and by declaring which questions *should not* be asked,” many Renaissance female authors have been disregarded from literary canons, (Bell, 17). But what scholars such as Bell have done is to locate the women authors during this period under the label proto-feminist, disregarding by that the diverse works and focusing on only those who fit under feminist ideologies. In a way, feminist interpretations of the Renaissance canon have confined female literature under an umbrella that encompasses only a few names. Through this, the feminist canon has argued that there is a distinction between what is considered modern feminist literature and Early Modern female authorship.

Hence, there are two methods where Renaissance female-authored literature has been approached within literary studies. The first is a feminist approach that brings within its compass two discussions for the female literary tradition: the first point is that there exists a tradition of women's literature in need of recovery; and the second point to consider is that this tradition unveils an evolution for feminism. And because a feminist canon requires literary ancestors who provide a chain of influence in order for feminism to be legitimized as authoritative, a *Judith Shakespeare* incentivized a famed reading of women's literature in a Renaissance England. In this accordance, English Renaissance women were marginalized by feminist critics and Feminism as much as Western Metaphysical Formalism has devalued them; in a way, they were unintentionally suppressed in the name of Virginia Woolf's *Judith Shakespeare*; a woman who

represents those who lived and wrote during the English Renaissance but were not published because of their gender; and if they do publish, they are not given the same value as their male-counterparts, *William Shakespeare* (to echo Woolf's allusion). The stigma of Judith became *a truth universally acknowledged* by feminists and might have been given credible weight that aids in uncanonizing them (to draw on Jane Austen's aphorism).

To include women in a canon not solely based on estimated publishing dates, scholars and anthologies must take substantial and effective steps toward developing methods for their inclusion. Anthologies, such as Stevenson and Davidson's *Early Modern Women Poets* (2001), have managed to gather Renaissance women's literature based on estimated and real dates of publishing, with the inclusion of anonymous-authored texts with a potential rationale that suggests identifying the sex of the authors and claiming them to be women. Though this anthology is very helpful in developing the need to delve into this huge legacy of women's verse in this period, still we believe that this anthology should take a further step in identifying a method through which those texts could be approached in the teaching of women's literature, in general, and Renaissance women's literature, in specific. Providing a form to approach those texts would ease the incorporation of teaching them in syllabi centered around the literature produced during the English Renaissance.

The collected verses, then, ought to be grouped together according to subject matter. Therefore, we propose the following divisions; the first division accentuates gender bias and inequalities based on sex. Although this approach has been followed since the 1960s, there are so many authors who have not been included under a proto-feminist canon. Thus, we draw a line between those who fit as proto-feminists (those who touch on feminist ideologies in their texts admitting to the existence of gender-bias ideologies in the society) and those who could be viewed as mothers of feminism (those who call for change not just pinpoint the issue and yet whose influence on the growth of feminism has been almost forgotten). Both of these perspectives argue that social, economic, and religious biases are imposed on women based on their gender. However, and the attempt to challenge these power discourses is what distinguishes between maternal roles and gender awareness.

Texts, such as Anne Askewe's "The Balade whych Anne Askewe made and sange whan she was in Newgate," would fit into proto-feminist ideology as she calls for a recording of men's abuse and inequalities towards women. Whereas a mother for feminism would do something against her sex's injustice, Askewe refrains from using forceful language against these men and silences herself by saying: "On these men what wyll fall," (P. 16-17, L.52). In contrast with Askewe, Mary Cheke's "Erat quaedam mulier [a reply to John Harington's poem, *Erat quem homo*]" takes an action rather than standing in silence. Cheke states that "men are blind" to women's location in the bible, (P. 21-22, L. 2). She argues that named and identified women are mentioned in the Bible more frequently than men; she provides examples and demonstrates their positive effect on the bible. She chooses to speak of "certaine" women rather than taking silence as her stance, similar to Askewe; Cheke argues that the mentioning of named-women in the bible more than named-men suggests that the number of exemplary people worthy of being mentioned in the bible is more in the female gender rather than the male one, (L.13-14). Consequently, this issue of financial difference between men and women is also highlighted by Anne Wrigglesworth in her "If I had as faire a face as John Williams." Wrigglesworth addresses the differences between women and men, just on the base of their sexual appearance. She wishes that she has the face of a man because men are free to roam wherever they want and still be viewed as "Goodman," (P. 94, L. 3). In addition to freedom, she declares that if she were a man, she would have had "mutch money in my purse," (L. 5). Wrigglesworth's poem could be read as a work that is proto-feminist in the sense that she is aware of gender biases and the inferiority of the female sex when compared to male. Her want to change her sex could be read within the body discourse of feminist studies as Lady Macbeth has in Shakespeare's famous plea for unsexment: "unsex me here," (*Macbeth*: Act I, Scene 5).

With Askewe, Cheke, and Wrigglesworth as proto-feminists, Isabella Whitney could be read as a mother for Early Modern concepts of feminism. In her "I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover" and "The Auchour (though loth to leave the Citie) upon her Friendes procurement, is constrained to departe ...," she calls for women who are strong to defy men. In "Her Unconstant Lover," she refuses to accept the methods through which men's "perpetuall Fame" continues to grow, (P. 49-52, L. 70). This observation underscores the notion that literary works authored by men are afforded greater significance than those by women, thereby ensuring their enduring legacy within a continuum of fame. To instantiate, in "The Auchour," an argument could be made that Whitney's spelling of the word 'author' in the first poem is a play on Aristotle's idea of what authority is, the author and 'auctor' in the literary authoritative canon. She speaks of the problems she is facing with publishing, she expresses: "I whole in body, and in minde,/ but very weaks in Purse:/ Doo make, and writer my Testament/ for feare it wyll be wurse," (P. 53-61, L. 39-42). She articulates the challenges faced by female authors, elucidating that while she possesses the requisite physical and mental faculties for writing, financial constraints hinder her ability to publish. In Whitney's perspective, financial constraints emerge as the primary impediment to the renown of women's literature vis-à-vis that of males. This sentiment has been echoed by numerous feminists, including Virginia Woolf in her essay "Three Guineas," wherein she attributes the limited scope of the literary canon pertaining to women to their economic circumstances.

Like Whitney, Anne Southwell has the potential of being read as a mother for feminism. In her "All married men desire to have good wives," she finds that the acclaimed authoritative way of reading the biblical Adam as head of Eve, led men to exploit women by their desire for women to be at their heels. She critiques the masculine interpretation of Eve's creation from Adam's ribs. She characterizes it a "misterie," (P. 120, L. 9), that has engendered numerous religious prescriptions regarding women's roles as wives and their expected behaviors towards their husbands. More crucially, she argues that whoever wants to be treated better should lead so that others would follow., and advocates for the equitable treatment of men and women. Southwell's poem aligns well with Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, as both criticize the predetermined image of women's weakness based on their relation to Eve. Both women contend that the

foundation of women's inferior status during the English Renaissance stems from Eve's relationship with Adam, and consequently, Eve's impact on subsequent generations of women as the first woman created and their progenitor.

Southwell's poem, "An Elegie written by the Lady A. S. to the Countesse of London derrye supposyenge hir to be dead by hir longe silence," shares similar views on Eve as the man-made downfall image of a woman. Placing Eve as the base of the female nature caused Southwell to reject the accepted story of Adam and Eve. Southwell thereby, expresses that fighting for women's position as equal to man can only be achieved through one way, as she infers: "the onely way, to rouse againe our [women's] witts," (P. 123, L. 97). Southwell then calls for women to act through the use of language as she views silence as death. She speaks of the silence of women and punctuates that it is a sign of death. The imperative for women to engage in writing and publishing arises from the recognition that their absence from these realms may inadvertently empower their male counterparts to devise new methods of subjugating women, as they possess the capacity to construct "blind Gods," (P. 122, L. 79). Thenceforth, Southwell's revolutionary ideas of calling for female claim to equality between both sexes, places her as a potential influential figure on the modern rhetoric of feminism.

Another equally important author that could be seen as more than a proto-feminist is Martha Prynne. In her "The Memorandum of Martha Moulsworth Widdowe," Prynne addresses two main topics that could be considered as feminist. The first topic is women's freedom to get an education, and the second is their freedom to marry whoever they want. She claims that women will surpass men if they are allowed to study at universities. She criticizes women for only asking for freedom in money and place; and she argues that freedom of the mind is more important. Furthermore, she demands an educational-based equality of opportunities between men and women, and for social-based equalities as women should have a real say in whom she wants to spend her life with. Those ideas have influenced many feminists; and therefore, she could be argued to be labeled as a feminist.

This proto-feminist reading of women is the most famous appreciated reading of Renaissance women's literature. Our argument from the previously mentioned female authors is that many of women's literature during the Renaissance is viewed as proto-feminist. Yet, one could distinguish between authors such as Whitney, whose verse is seen as a higher promoter of proto-feminist ideals more than Cheke or Askewe, for example. Therefore, our argument here is that there are two levels of feminist readings that could be given to women at this age: The first is that women during the Renaissance wrote using hints of feminist ideologies, and as a result, could be categorized as proto-feminist. And the second is that women who are taken as surely proto-feminists such as Whitney, Lanyer, Speght, and a few other female authors who are occasionally chosen to be read in Renaissance literary canons, which could also be viewed as feminists or mothers of feminism.

3.2 A Practical Approach to Women's Inclusion

The researchers have been teaching and/or monitoring a course titled "English Literature from the Beginning until 1660" since 2019 to present (2023). This course is mandatory and is taken by every student at the School of Foreign Languages, The University of Jordan, at the undergraduate Bachelor's level. The course's overview and objectives are listed below:

English Literature from the Beginning to 1660s" launches a series of four survey courses on English literature. The chain is interrelated, tracing the development of English literature from the early beginnings until the twentieth century. This course, however, is a historical, political, social, but mostly a literary survey of England from the time of the Celts (around 600 B.C.) to the restoration period in 1660. A selection of the major British writers and their works are discussed so that the general movement of thought in the different eras is introduced. Students are exposed to pioneering English poets, such as the Beowulf-poet and Chaucer. In addition, the course offers a diversity of verse samples to study, such as epic, sonnet, and lyric. Students will learn too about the form and themes of Petrarchan love poems, pastoral poetry, metaphysical poetry, and religious verse. Further, the necessary background of each selected text is given to help students read and understand works of literature in their meaningful socio-cultural and historical contexts.

The syllabus offers a wide array of texts from Old English to Early Modern English literature. It starts by reading *Beowulf* and "The Wife's Lament" as representatives of Old English literature (both anonymously authored). Then, it reads sections from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* with a focus on female characters like the nuns and the Wife of Bath. Lastly, it focuses on the Early Modern age. This era starts by focusing on personal narratives of authors who wrote on the contextual, historical, and political circumstances of writing and authorship during this era. It specifically starts with authors such as Anne Askew who wrote during the religious persecutions that occurred during King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and continued to occur during Queen Mary I's reign over England. After a thorough depiction of the hardships female authors went through to get published during this period, the course plan delves into the impact of Queen Elizabeth I's reign on allowing publishing flexibility to female-authored texts.

Here, a comparative study pairs male and female authors' take on women's publishing rights and struggles during the age. Works are paired as following:

1. Queen Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh (with focus on their poetic exchange "Raleigh to Elizabeth" and "Elizabeth to Raleigh;" where the Queen partakes in a poetic argument that calls for her unsexment as she declares that she is the King of England in her poem.
2. Joseph Swetnam's "The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Inconstant Women," Ester Sowernam's "Ester Hath Hanged Haman," Jane Anger's "Her Protection for Women," and Rachel Speght's "A Muzzle for Melastomus;" where

those authors discuss the value of women's authorship and religion's stance on granting them education in their prosaic texts.

3. And finally, Aemilia Lanyer's "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women" from her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Macbeth* (for in both plays he discusses what he calls "defense" (*As You Like It*, III.3) and "womanly defence" (*Macbeth*, IV.2)), and lastly, John Milton's "Book 9" from his *Paradise Lost*. Here, our focus is on the addressal of the biblical fall in the texts and Eve's role in it according to the authors' perspective. Through studying the texts within their shared context, we center the classes' arguments around discussing and highlighting the female-authored reception of the fall, who is at blame for it, and how the female-author's reception is that of a more compassionate and less condemning depiction of Eve's role in the fall. In contrast, we emphasize the male-authored reception of the fall as more convictive of Eve and almost always equivocal of her to Satan's (or, the Serpent's) role in the biblical fall.

This offers introductory material to depict the seriousness of the gender wars for publication and call for inclusion by female authors at that time. The research found that female inclusion is better incorporated while showing how females fought for their place in the canon. Those females have presented a real struggle to be read and to be taken as literary producers. Their paratextual material; like their titles and dedications, have dictated their call for inclusion.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aimed at re-locating the English Renaissance female author within the English Renaissance canon through studying and categorizing their verse. Numerous alternative methodologies exist for exploring women's prose and verse during the Renaissance. For instance, a comprehensive analysis of religious language and content emerges as a prominent subject that garnered considerable attention among women during this era. The examination of women's perspectives on religious matters during this era contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical context of the English Renaissance. Many women were included as part of the Renaissance canon because of their choice of discussing main-stream religious ideals rather than proto-feminist one. Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* received wide acceptance into the Renaissance canon because of the religiousness of the play. Yet, the religious works produced by women during this period were not uniformly characterized by strict adherence to traditional interpretations of the Bible. Consequently, numerous texts authored by women that challenge religious authorities have been embraced by feminist critics and attained widespread popularity. An example on this is Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. These two methods of inspecting religious literary works have eliminated many women's individualistic religious encounters from being studied more often. The demand for more inclusive-aiming investigation of contextualizing women's canonicity in the Early Modern period of English literature is relatively young as a field and requires further intensive scholarly inquisition.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Mais Al-Shara'h was responsible for the data collection and drafting the manuscript. Dr. Areej Allouzi and Ms. Haneen Amireh were responsible for the study design and revising. Dr. Arene Al-Shara'h was responsible for revising the manuscripts after the reviewers' notes. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ⁱ The female rulers of England during the English Renaissance: Lady Jane Grey in 1553 ruled for nine days, Mary I ruled from 1553 to 1558, and Elizabeth I ruled from 1559 to 1603.

ⁱⁱ Some of the examples on the mention of Renaissance authors as part of Feminism: Neeru Tandon briefly addresses the limiting of Feminism to the history of modern Feminist movement is wrong (in her *Feminism and Gender Discourse: A Revisioning* (2020)).

ⁱⁱⁱ Some of the examples on scholars who have sought the canonization of and the inclusion of female authors' literature during the English Renaissance are the following: Linda Woodbridge, Helen Hackett, Tina Krontiris, Jonathan Goldberg, Kirby Farrell, Arthur F. Kinney, Elizabeth Hageman, Elizabeth Hodgson, Helen Wilcox, Margaret J. M. Ezell, and many other scholars.

^{iv} Those scholars who managed to exclude Renaissance authors from the formation of the feminist body: Estelle Freedman takes an approach to define the open borders of feminism though manages to exclude the effect of feminist ideologies before the 1800s, Susan Magarey defines feminism's beginnings as the late 1800s.