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ABSTRACT

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Elizabeth Ashbridge's "Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge" (1774) and Abigail Bailey's "The Memoirs of Abigail Bailey" (1815) are compelling early American women's self-narratives, recovered and critically read only recently. From the emerging criticism on these women's texts, I participate in this recovery by drawing out and challenging two common assumptions—first, that they rely on the conventions of conversion narratives, and second, that the self is constructed relationally. Shifting away from these conventional foundations and instead embracing a model of oppositional selfhood, I argue that Ashbridge and Bailey accept the authority of God in a way that allows them to define a self in opposition to their husbands. By focusing on their violation of critical expectations, I bring to the fore these authors' struggles to assert a unique self as the very concept begins to emerge in eighteenth-century America.

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Introduction: Solitary, Oppositional, Unconventional

Elizabeth Ashbridge's "Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge" (1774) and Abigail Bailey's "The Memoirs of Abigail Bailey" (1815) are compelling early American women's self-narratives, recovered and critically read only recently. They share several characteristics that make them particularly provoking to feminist autobiography studies: both are narrative in form, both find print publication in a time when women are rarely published, and both circulate right around the time the term "autobiography" is coined,[1] but before the act of writing autobiography becomes a more defined and common practice[2]. These narratives also share the more specific classification of spiritual or conversion narrative, a common form of self-writing in eighteenth-century America. But even more interesting than the ways these self-narratives fulfill certain definitions and historical time-lines within autobiography studies is the way that they exceed them. These self-narratives present unique experiences, compelling antagonisms, and ultimately an assertion of self not present in other spiritual or conversion narratives. In other words, these self-narratives are compelling in the ways that they break conventions—both generic and critical.

As its most basic aim, this paper wants to participate in the recovery of these women's self-narratives. Though both have enjoyed modern republication, there have been only a handful of chapters, articles and one book-length study of Ashbridge, and even less criticism on Bailey. Thus the core of this paper provides readings of these

[1] According to Donald J. Winslow and a number of other sources, the term "autobiography" was "first used by a reviewer (possibly William Taylor) in the British Monthly Review (1797) and in 1809 by Robert Southey" (3). See the entry for "autobiography" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. That the term itself constitutes the beginning of the genre is, however, a troubled assertion—that is, some critics disagree with this date; some argue though the term wasn't used, autobiography maintains a long history before this date.
[2] "The late eighteenth century, according to a number of writers, witnessed the beginning of a tradition of autobiography" (Folkenflick 7).

women's texts, presenting new perspectives aimed at broadening our critical understanding of them. In so doing, from the small collection of criticism on these texts, I draw out two general, foundational claims that have been made about these texts—first, that because they were written by women the self described in them is relational, and second, that they are conversion narratives—and provide alternative readings that do not fully accept these claims. Reading against these claims, I argue that these narratives simply *do more* than the conversion self-narratives circulating concurrently and they *do more* than define a relational self. Rather, I read these women as asserting a solitary, oppositional, and unique self in narratives that variously break generic conventions.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the texts themselves, I want to elaborate on their shared critical situation. What is first in need of address is what I may only inadequately name the 'question of autobiography.' I mean by this to simply raise the question of whether the self-narratives of Ashbridge and Bailey constitute autobiography or not. This is a quite complex query that I have chosen not to engage strictly. I use the term "self-narrative" to side-step autobiographical categorizing, but also to emphasize the asserted 'selves' I read in these texts. Both self-narratives have elements that signal the uniqueness, the autonomy, and the independence of the first-person subjects they depict, but I leave unanswered whether they are "truly" autobiography or whether they represent the American autobiography's "beginning." Susan Claire Imbarrato's work on early American self-writing can assist here as a guide for how I am thinking about self-writing in a historical period when no one is yet "clearly" writing autobiography (if such a period is ever defined). Imbarrato's book, *Declarations of Independency*, is interested in the evolution (in the very loosest sense) of American self-writing from religious to secular.

While she does not attempt to track a strict progression of changes, she focuses on representative texts in certain time periods that to her do something new towards the assertion of self. To describe this subtle and elusive act, Imbarrato defines the act of "declaring an independency" as "an intentional assertion of individual expression, a bold act that confidently embraces the risks of moving in new directions" (xix). About Ashbridge and Edwards, Imbarrato argues that their "strong assertions of self which demonstrate a confidence in a first-person observation that distinguishes them from seventeenth-century journals and diaries" (13) is that which signals their value within autobiography studies. That there is a certain 'confidence in the first-person' is the kind of observation about Ashbridge and Bailey's self-narratives that I am interested in—the way these women describe themselves through their behavior, the way they use writing and solitude to define themselves, the way they forge relationships with their interior and with God, the way they write both within and without convention. Following Imbarrato, I want to read these narratives for what they do differently.

Both of these narratives are nearly always classified as conversion narratives and yet both break many of the central conventions of that genre. Considering the conventions of conversion narrative, and more significantly the way these women break them, is important because the self of this genre is often read as less autonomous than a modern autobiographical self. In many ways, conversion narratives automatically run counter to the understanding of autobiography—revealing community, communal experience, and God's will, rather than an individual, unique experience, and an autonomous agent. Conversion narratives are often thought simply to compromise the presence of an autobiographical subject. The self in the typical conversion narrative is

compromised in at least three ways. First, the writer of spiritual self-writing relies entirely on generic imitation—she simply repeats the narrative form used by all members of the religious community. According to Felicity Nussbaum, women's spiritual self-narratives in particular are built solely upon this imitation: "The religious women generally adopted the mode of discourse established by their (male) religious leaders...or found their voices usurped by husbands or fathers who formed their biographies into the expected shape" (151). Second, the writer's relationship to religious community compromises the assertion of self. In addition to their typical form, religious autobiographies tend to be representative of the religious community rather than a unique individual. As Carol Edkins argues: "For instead of individualistic statements of a life uniquely lived...we hear echoed throughout these documents, whether Puritan or Quaker, the religious and spiritual experience of the community at large" (40). Even when a critic finds evidence of an individual self emerging in religious self-writing, as does Barbara Bolz, that self is always only one defined in relation to her community: "In short, these texts do show the individual, but that individual—in the lived life and in the textual life—is inextricably linked to the community within which she lived and worked" (292).

I will argue that both Ashbridge and Bailey, in violating the conventions of imitation and communality, assert in each of their narratives a more defined and unique self. In other words, these are not typical religious autobiographies. These self-narratives challenge, in very simple but notable ways, the expectations for the genre—the narratives are not imitative. Rather they focus on unique circumstances, in both cases, primarily on antagonistic and violent marriages. They are, in other words, not standard conversion stories with standard conversion events. Further, while both narratives do circulate

around a link with an exterior force, it is significantly not a link with the religious community. Instead both Ashbridge and Bailey are distinctly isolated in their narratives from their religious communities, and in most every instance choose this isolation—Ashbridge, for instance, does not discuss her work as a traveling Friend, as most Quaker narratives do; Bailey's religious practice consists almost entirely of secret, private devotions and diary writing. There is indeed an exterior force in both cases—their husbands; however, these women define themselves *against* these force, rather than in relation to them.

The third and final way that the self of conversion narratives is thought to be compromised is through her relationship with and submission to God. Though I find both Ashbridge and Bailey's narratives to be clearly unconventional in terms of generic expectations and their relationship to religious community, it is more difficult to think of their relationship to God as unconventional and self-asserting. At many points, one cannot deny these writers' rhetoric of submission and her seeming relinquishment of autonomy to God. However, one viable way to read this problem is to consider this submission instead as a kind of empowered subjectivity. For instance, Roxanne Harde, one critic who has read Bailey and Ashbridge together, makes the claim that simply "their very submission to God empowers" them (158). Harde wants to read submission to God as enabling an autonomous self, rather than a threat to it. Indeed, I want to make this very same claim. But, for my reading, that submission to God alone does not create an autonomous, empowered subject. Rather, it is the antagonistic forces in their lives, in combination with their relationship to God, which enable them to assert their selves. In both Ashbridge's and Bailey's narratives, while a certain kind of submission to God is

expressed, I'll argue that these relationships with God and with other authoritative institutions actually become the means to, rather than the impediment to, the assertion of self[3]. In Bailey's narrative, for example, God becomes a kind of weapon wielded against her violent and manipulative husband; it is her use of the authority of God that enables her to direct her anger at and define her self in opposition to her husband, Asa. Thus, the self-narratives of Ashbridge and Bailey can be read as violating three major conventions of conversion narrative and, in so doing, working to assert a defined self.

In addition to violating conversion conventions, these texts also break commonly understood conventions within women's self-writing. Ashbridge and Bailey serve as strong counterexamples to a defining characteristic of women's writing as relational. Both narratives are oppositional—certain antagonisms compel these writers to turn inside themselves, to stand and seek alone and in the stark absence of community. Both Ashbridge and Bailey fundamentally define themselves against, not in relation to, various antagonistic forces in their lives and appear to readers as unique selves. As I will show, critical readings of Ashbridge have emerged from what I see as this assumption of relationality. And while no such arguments have yet been made about Bailey, I want to counter relational readings for both. Mechal Sobel's book *Teach me Dreams* provides an apt critical tool to relinquish the dominance of relationality for women's self-narratives in the early American period. First, Sobel's general argument about the period in which both Ashbridge and Bailey write and live is that:

> It was in the hundred-year period between 1740 and 1840, the greater Revolutionary period, that many people in America first came to accept that they had an inner self that controlled their emotions and actions and to believe that they themselves might alter this self. In this period, and as part of this process of

[3] In this, I'll be following the work of Mechal Sobel in this book *Teach me Dreams: The Search for Self in the Revolutionary Era.*

> change, the churches and then the new state encouraged the written reevaluation of life experiences in journals and in autobiographies. (3)

Sobel asserts that something begins to happen in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that brings the recognition of the interior self to the fore, and hence why self-writing in this long period increases and diversifies. Sobel generalizes the way in which these selves begin to emerge, a model highly applicable to both Ashbridge and Bailey's narratives: "Only those who accepted an authority that directed their anger and approved and assisted their own development in opposition to their alien other moved in the direction of creating a more individuated self" (166). Thus, selfhood in this period is not radically autonomous; in fact, the assertion of self only comes through the acceptance of some kind of authority. Hence, Ashbridge's and Bailey's relationship with the authority of God can be thought of not as working against their assertion of selves, but rather as a necessary relation that allows for "directed anger." In addition to the acceptance of authority, this eighteenth-century self is also defined in opposition to an other (with the aid of that accepted authority). For both Ashbridge and Bailey, God is accepted—in, it should be emphasized, a more highly personal, rather than communal way—to "approve and assist" in the assertion of a self defined against another, their husbands. Thus, using Sobel's work as a guide, I argue that Ashbridge and Bailey assert a self in relation to God, and in opposition to their husbands. This perspective, that views early modern selfhood as primarily oppositional, provides an alternative starting point for reading these women's narratives, as it undoes the persistence of the necessarily compromised and relational self conventionally thought to emerge in conversion narratives by women. When we consider these texts with this foundation, the ways these women describe themselves and their experiences as solitary, isolated, and unique emerge centrally in

their texts and we are able to see how they are in fact attempts at the assertion of self in a new or unique way.

Seeking In: Elizabeth Ashbridge's "Some Account" (1774)

While Elizabeth Ashbridge's self-narrative does to some extent conventionally describe her conversion to Quakerism, critics interested in her can agree that something more than this is going on. Acknowledging the purpose of Ashbridge's conversion narrative, Cristine Levenduski, author of a book-length study on Ashbridge, notes that "While her narrative reflects the genre's public function, it stands apart in that the communal voice is neither the first nor the only one we hear. Ashbridge combines a heavy dose of the personal with the public function of her narrative precisely because her story is so remarkable" (63). As a result of her unique life circumstances, Ashbridge's 'personal' voice comes through at the same time as does the public, communal one. Further, for Levenduski, Ashbridge's story is "remarkable"—significantly not standard or imitated. For Roxanne Harde, though Ashbridge's narrative is limited by general patterns of conversion narratives and patriarchal ideologies, Ashbridge nonetheless "works within these circumscriptions to structure a conversion rhetoric that defines herself as the empowered speaking subject" (156). Estelle C. Jelinek, pointing out that Ashbridge violates Quaker narrative form by describing only the time before she becomes a Quaker missionary simply and tellingly exclaims, "And what an extraordinary story she tells!" (64). Plainly, even intuitively, Ashbridge's self-narrative does something more; it is more than a Quaker conversion narrative; it does more than represent the collective; it does more than instruct and edify a religious community. It violates, rather than conforms to,

Quaker narrative convention; it represents a solitary, rather than socially-connected seeker; it compels readers with both religious instruction *and* captivating narrative events. In various ways, it "transgresses the generic limits of spiritual autobiography" (Levenduski 68) to define a solitary self, rather than a self in subordination to God or the religious community.

Ashbridge's conversion narrative depicts the author's struggles throughout tumultuous childhood and adulthood events, culminating in her conversion to Quakerism. It documents the highly personal and isolative process of defining a relationship with Quaker spirituality, a religion in which spiritual knowledge emanates from the interior, the Inner Light. In this way, each narrative event serves as an oppositional force against which Ashbridge comes to define her self. The defining of a solitary self against external forces allows for the eventual climax of the narrative—complete conversion to Quakerism. My reading of this text begins with a fundamental claim, in accordance with Etta M. Madden, that Ashbridge "presents herself as a text being read by others" (1). As such, I argue that Ashbridge is constantly and variously engaged in the misdirection of knowledge about the state of her interior, or the active creation of a misdirecting exterior. When she has moments of religious connection, her religious interior surfaces on the exterior as, for example, a trembling body or uncontrollable tears. Ashbridge actively and variously tries to hide these effects from others. She creates for her readers a strong and absolute interior—the site at which the religious conversion must and inevitably will occur—in opposition to an exterior that misdirects, or hides, or most provocatively, protects self from exterior influence. The persistent protection of her interior state is one

important way in which Ashbridge asserts her self in opposition to, rather than in relation with, external or social forces.

The basic claim I want to make about Ashbridge's narrative is that, in several ways, she asserts a self in opposition to external influence. This reading pushes against the dominant critical argument that Ashbridge's narrative is compelled by a cycle of seeking and subsequent inability to connect socially. Levenduski, one proponent of this reading, argues that Ashbridge "tells us, she sought attachments, and throughout her life these efforts failed" (69). Under her reading, the narrative events, demarcated by Ashbridge's moves through life, signal attempts to find the home and social community she was alienated from at the start: "Without her family, she feels unconnected and detached. Her quest for a sense of belonging and attachment, for a surrogate 'home,' dominates the narrative" (70). Again, Levenduski sees Ashbridge's desire for social community as the impetus for the narrative's progression. In other words, Ashbridge wants, or needs, to be in a community through which she can define herself and seeks this throughout. William J. Scheick argues something quite comparable: "her life in the world commences with and replicates this self-wounding insurrection against thralldom to her father" ("Logonomic" 13). Under this reading, the alienation from her father at the narrative's beginning culminates in the unification with and submission to the Father in conversion, which again, as in Levenduski's reading, emphasizes Ashbridge's seeking places in which to belong. Both of these readings also similarly understand Ashbridge's external connections as the means to her achievement of voice. For example, as Scheick claims, after throughout placing emphasis on servitude: "Ashbridge achieves identity and voice, less from an internal authority than from an external authority [God]" and "*to some*

degree the authority of her voice and identity remains firmly indentured" (*Authorship* 105).

Levenduski and Scheick see Ashbridge as seeking community in the act of submitting to others, ultimately achieving this self-definition and voice, not from her interior, but though an external relation to both God and religious community. However, this argument presumes that Ashbridge ever expresses a desire for connection and belonging and attempts to achieve it. This is not the case. Rather, Ashbridge's attitude upon entering each new social connection is extremely critical and secretive. It is the assertion of a solitary self, not submission to or desire for "belonging," that both repels Ashbridge from religiosity in the beginning of the narrative and brings her to it in the final conversion to Quakerism. As I will show, Ashbridge enters into no social community with a sense of wanting to belong. Rather, through the active creation of an isolated interior and of a misdirecting exterior, Ashbridge remains critical and independent of any association aside from her interior self, and her relationship with God. Further, following Sobel, I will argue that Ashbridge also uses the authority of her developing relationship with God to define herself in opposition, rather than in relation to, most prominently her husband, but also against general antagonistic external forces in her life.

It is worth pausing here to situate the above arguments of Levenduski and Scheick in the wider understanding of relationality in autobiography studies, as I believe this to be a detriment to understanding a text like Ashbridge's. One often held tenet is that women's and men's autobiography maintain entirely different characteristics and traditions. For example, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that "the individualistic concept

of the autobiographical self...raises serious theoretical problems for critics who recognize that the self, self-creation, and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-Western peoples" (34). The result of such a viewpoint is the persistence of opposing definitions of women's and men's autobiography. John Paul Eakin rehearses this understanding: "If female, then relational, collectivist, and, for some reason, non-narrative; if male, then autonomous, individualistic, and narrative" (50). Certainly there is some benefit in employing these distinctions[4]. For instance, insisting that non-narrative texts, like diaries and letters, be considered autobiographical rightly widens the field of study to include a number of women who for various reasons write non-narrative texts. This widening of definition also would then work to bring compelling men's non-narrative texts to critical attention. However, the assumption that all women's autobiographical texts are relational does nothing to add to the richness of the field, but rather can simply lead to gross misreadings. This relational/autonomous opposition seems to persist more strictly along gender lines than the narrative/non-narrative opposition because psychology has "proven"[5] that women across time have "employ[ed] their sense of connectedness to discover and even reconstruct a self/selves" (Coleman 2). Eakin has persuasively deconstructed this gendered opposition by claiming that *all* selfhood is relational, despite gender difference (5), and I am interested in

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[4] Another "reason" for the persistence of this distinction is that the claim for separate traditions has performed necessary and operative in the work of first-wave feminism, helping to bring women's writing to the fore. Leigh Gilmore makes this important acknowledgement, as well as one that demonstrates the effects of such a distinction: "As useful as more monolithic claims about 'men's' and 'women's autobiography have been to feminists during this crucial historical period in the institutionalization of feminism, generalizations about gender and genre in autobiography naturalize how men, women, and the activity of writing are bound together within the changing philosophies of self and history" (13).

[5] My quotation marks putting pressure on the term "proven" are only meant to undercut this one psychological claim, not psychology as a discipline or any other such gross claim.

performing a similar shift to relationality in my reading of Ashbridge and Bailey[6]. So while I argue that the imposition of relationality on Ashbridge's narrative specifically leads both Levenduski and Scheick to misread her as defining her self through connection to community, a certain notion of relationality still plays an important role in Ashbridge's assertion of self. As mentioned above, Sobel's notion of the self's necessary relationship to some authoritative entity would argue, much like Eakin, that all selfhood in this period is to some degree relational. Arguments built on *gendered* relationality, however, can erroneously conclude that there ultimately is no autonomous self in women's self-narratives. This, again, is simply not the case for Ashbridge. Though she does in some way define herself relationally to God, it is that relation, along with various other strategies of solitude, which allow her to assert a solitary self.

From the narrative's first moments, Ashbridge describes her solitary and hidden religious seeking that persists throughout. The entire narrative is marked by Ashbridge's persistent solitude: "As I grew up, I took notice there were several different religious societies, wherefore I often went alone and wept; with desires that I might be directed to the right" (148). In this first description, characteristic of Ashbridge's habit of religious seeking throughout, she plainly establishes this practice as one embarked upon alone. In addition to being marked as a solitary endeavor, this seeking is further hidden from the family with which she at the time resides. For example, upon a relation's attempt to get

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[6] Eakin is not the only one to deflate these oppositions and thus not the only influence in my move to de-gender the relationality/autonomy opposition. For instance, Linda H. Peterson shows the way the assumption of relationality puts arbitrary emphasis on certain elements: "Modern literary criticism assumes that women autobiographers will show a special facility or predilection for domestic themes, for the exploration of matters relating to marriage, children, or housewifery. This assumption, complemented by modern psychological theories of women's 'relational' approach to self-definition, often predisposes critics to foreground those autobiographical episodes in which women writers touch on familial matters or domestic details. Of course such details appear, but no more frequently in women's spiritual accounts than in men's" (85).

her to join the "Holy Catholick Faith," Ashbridge explains to her reader: "...for some time I frequented their place of Worship, but none of my Relations knew what was my motive" (149). Not only did she hide her intentions from her family, she also hid from the group she was associating with, as epitomized by her joining with the Seventh Day Baptists: she attends their services, "but Did not joyn Strictly with them" (154). Clearly, choosing to enter religious societies alone and intentionally hiding her motivations in no way reveals any kind of driving desire for social connection. If such were the case, one would expect Ashbridge to be more transparent in her seeking and motives; that is, to reveal her search to those in her family or those in any given religion she tries. As Imbarrato plainly and quite accurately notes about this solitary habit: "Ashbridge must construct her support system and explore her spiritual landscape alone....Ashbridge thus introduces herself as an earnest, solitary seeker" (18). Her persona is marked with guarded and isolative behavior. This initial point is further assisted by Daniel B. Shea's characterization: "What the narrative enacts...is the writer's committed refusal to accept any voice as her own which she has not encountered as central to her own interiority" (121). Ashbridge's refusal of exterior influence, as Shea points out, gives strength to her own voice. Indeed, as the narrative progresses, Ashbridge suffers tremendously in coming to her Quaker faith, but she remains solitary: "...my Nights and Days were one Continual Scene of Sorrows: I let none know my Desperate Condition" (156). This resolute and stoic solitude lends additional strength to her assertion of self. The narrative is thus marked by Ashbridge's oppositional, rather than relational, relationship to various external forces. Being alone, seeking alone, and hiding her interior state is a pattern that repeats itself in this narrative, rather than the simple desire to belong to a community.

It may be said that the relational argument advanced by Levenduski, Scheick and others is a compelling reading, as it provides a coherent narrative arc; it properly orders the narrative events—each moment of the attempt to bond, or the attempt to fill in the lack of the father, tidily culminates in Ashbridge's eventual conversion and submission to God. However, seeing each narrative event in the opposite way provides a similar coherence to the narrative, not through the attempt to define her self relationally, but rather through her attempt to avoid it. Instead of Ashbridge constantly seeking connection to an *exterior* Other, she instead repeatedly turns *inside* to a connection with and development of a defined interior. Quite simply, these arguments put too much weight on her seeking out, when she is markedly seeking in. In other words, Ashbridge "is the self at the center, the aware and singular self who is known through the conversion narrative, which becomes the active component in her discourse of subjectivity" (Harde 162). The narrative is constituted by Ashbridge's constant and various turning in, constructed in opposition to or hidden from her exterior body and from her social relations.

A prime example featuring the several ways Ashbridge works to assert a solitary self in her narrative is the scene where she is seated by the fire with her husband and company and is suddenly overwhelmed by a Voice and a vision. Preceding this scene, Ashbridge describes attending a nearby Church of England where she "Dislike[s] some of their ways" (156), but that at that time a "fresh Exercise fell upon me, and of such a Sort as I had never heard of any being in the like, & while under it I thought myself alone" (156). Her disassociation from the Church she attends is significant here, and even more so when it is contrasted with the experience she is about to describe—hearing voices and

seeing things. Of this experience, she claims it is unique to her and that when it happens, she feels "alone." Ashbridge describes this fantastic visual and aural experience of hearing a voice like the sound of a trumpet and the vision of a roll of "Black Characters". Hearing and seeing things happens several times to Ashbridge, and is again a certainly isolative experience. Michael G. Ditmore argues that Ashbridge's reports of hearing voices serves in part as evidence of confidence in her own: "...they indicate her belief in the absolute fidelity of such voices, including her own" (24). The report of these experiences contributes to the sense of Ashbridge's assertion of self. After describing this voice and vision, she states: "All this while I sat Speechless; at Last I got up trembling, & threw my self on a Bed: the Company thought my Indisposition proceeded only from a fright at the Thunder, but Alas, it was of another kind..." (156). The disconnect between her interior state and her exterior behavior is noted. While she experiences on the interior a wildly moving and overwhelming experience, she appears to the company as merely "speechless" and "trembling." Ashbridge describes her appearance in terms of both what she sees and what others see of her during this experience in order to reinforce her solitude—the way that this overwhelming visual and aural experience can be seen by her company as merely fright at thunder. Further, she diverts attention from the possibility that others might read her interior through the external sign of her behavior by removing herself from view. Ashbridge indicates her increasing need to hide all outward, visual indication of her interior religious experience. She misdirects others from her religious interior, in order to protect her self from exterior influence and signal her solitary self.

The familiar scene in the garden is yet another significant event on the path to her conversion during which Ashbridge seeks to be alone and to hide exterior signs of her

interior state. Ashbridge recounts being in her Quaker aunt's home and "seeing a Book lying on the Table (& being much for reading) [she] took it up" (158). Her aunt advises Ashbridge of her certain disinterest as the book is a Quaker one, that is, the aunt, "perceive[d] I was not a Quaker" (158). Ashbridge then wonders to herself what Quakers could possibly write about as she knows of no textual religious practice. But despite Ashbridge's initial disinterest she quickly becomes overtaken by the sight of the words on these pages:

> had not read two Pages before my very heart burned within me and Tears issued from my Eyes, which I was Afraid would be seen; therefore with the book (Saml. Crisp's Two Letters) I walked into the garden, sat Down, and the piece being Small, read it through before I went in; but Some Times was forced to Stop to Vent my Tears, my heart as if it were uttering these involuntary Expressions.... (158-159)

The tears Ashbridge sheds become an uncontrollable outward sign of her internal state. As this religious moment surges within her, Ashbridge's immediate concern is yet again that others will see her in her state—when the tears begin, she removes herself to the garden. This is clearly understood as Ashbridge states that upon the tears flowing from her eyes, she is "Afraid [they] would be seen" by others at the house and she thus removes her telling exterior. After the experience is over, she expresses concern for removing the telling physical evidence of her interior experience stating, "After I came a little to my Self again I washed my face least any in the House should perceive I had been Weeping" (159). The tears serve potentially as a visual sign to others of her internal experience. Levenduski argues that while Ashbridge was indeed isolated and alone during this experience:

> ...she came to perceive the truth and to begin her affiliation with the group that would ultimately lead her to prominence and security not when she was completely alone and isolated, but rather when she was in the fold of a family for

> the first time in the years since she left England. Her discovery of religious community came with her renewal of familial ties....(73-74)

However, this scene is clearly marked by her disconnection from the family that surrounds her. Ashbridge is overtly concerned with hiding her self from others. Her religious experiences on the path to Quaker conversion are marked with the clear preference for solitude and hiding. She refuses to expose her interior to those around her and rather is pointedly interested in hiding it.

As Ashbridge approaches her full conversion, her exterior is increasingly "read" by others, though she still attempts to prevent many of those readings. It is significant to note that, within Quaker understanding, "Quaker's physical bodies, like inscribed texts, emanated "truths" as well" (Madden 3). This is to say that in the later moments of the narrative, while Ashbridge still protects her interior, its appearance on the exterior begins to be inescapable. Once she begins regularly attending Quaker meetings, she is still resistant to letting herself be read: "All the while, I never Let any know the Condition I was in, nor did I appear a Friend, & fear'd a Discovery" (160). Now, beyond wiping away her tears, or moving to another room, Ashbridge must take more drastic measures to hide the exterior signs of her internal religious persuasion:

> I loved to go to meetings, but did not like to be seen to go on week days, & therefore to Shun it used to go from my school through the Woods, but notwithstanding all my care the Neighbors that were not friends began to revile me....alas! I could not bear the reproach, & in order to Change their Opinions got into greater Excess in Apparel than I had freedom to Wear for some time before I came Acquainted with Friends. (160)

Ashbridge describes her active engagement in creating a misdirecting exterior. She hides on a path in the woods, but that is not enough. So she alters her dress, dons an "Excess of Apparel," to try to indicate her disassociation from the Quakers, but, significantly, this is

not enough anymore: "I still did not appear like a Friend, but they all believed I was one" (161). She is increasingly unable to conceal her interior state; others can read her exterior as she is no longer able to misdirect them. At the height of this, she must be entirely removed from the sight of others: "I used to Walk much alone in the Wood, where no Eye saw nor Ear heard, & there Lament my miserable Condition, & have gone from Morning till Night and not broke my Fast" (161).

This preference for being alone and revealing herself to no one recurs throughout Ashbridge's rather extensive account of her marriage to Sullivan. Indeed, Ashbridge's second marriage becomes the most prominent external force against which she asserts her self. Also, the marriage serves as the main source of conflict throughout the narrative—the drama of this unhappy marriage features prominently and uniquely in the conversion narrative. From the beginning, Ashbridge emphasizes her distance from and dissatisfaction with Sullivan, stating that she "fell in love with nothing I saw in him" (154), emphasizing her solitude yet again. Levenduski argues of Ashbridge's marriage that "Sullivan prevented his wife from remaining in one place long enough to form relationships and, therefore, forced her to rely only on him for emotional support. Her second marriage thus becomes one more roadblock on her path to belonging" (79). Indeed, Sullivan is controlling and attempts to isolate Ashbridge, particularly from suspected Quaker associations. However, rather than representing a "roadblock" to Ashbridge's belonging and being the only one she can "rely on," her disassociation from all, especially Sullivan, works to assert her self. Ashbridge's marriage becomes the strongest and most dramatic force against which Ashbridge struggles to assert herself. In describing her marriage to Sullivan, she states it was "...like two joyning hands and

going to destruction, & thereupon Concluded if I was not forsaken of heaven to alter my Course of Life" (154). At no point does Ashbridge ever suppose, even when she consents to marry, that this man will provide her any sense of "emotional support." That strong conjunction in the passage just cited rather serves to strengthen her resolution to save only herself, to turn her attention again inside. Her marriage to a faithless and controlling husband compels Ashbridge's *turning in* to herself. She gains the authority necessary for that disassociation through her developing, interior relationship to God.

This authority also allows Ashbridge to righteously expose the abuses she suffered at Sullivan's hand, yet another unconventional element of her conversion narrative. Ashbridge's relationship with God empowers her as a subject. Levenduski, however, sees in relation to the disclosure of her ill-treatment, that "In recounting Sullivan's treatment of her, Ashbridge emphasizes an image of herself that resonates throughout her text: as property or as a commodity to be bought and sold" (83). Alternatively, the image of Ashbridge as a result of this marriage is not of an objectified commodity, but rather a radically subjective actor who, with the authority of God, has strategically crafted a self independent from Sullivan's, or anyone else's, influence and control. While both Ashbridge and Bailey often rely on the rhetoric of submission, this surrender to authority, particularly to the authority of God, is not passive, but strategic. Ashbridge uses the authority of God to direct her anger at and disassociate from Sullivan.

At the height of Ashbridge's social inability to acceptably signal her Quaker religion, Sullivan takes her away. As they are traveling, they stop at a tavern where he insists that she sing and dance, in order to restore her to her former self, or to shake off that "stiff Quaker" (162) in her. Significantly, her husband believes that if he can force

Ashbridge to alter her exterior behavior, then her interior affiliation to Quakerism will be altered. She tells the reader that she "took up the resolution, not to Comply whatever be the Consequence" (162). Here her developed relationship with God grants her the agency to act in opposition to Sullivan. The tavern band plays at Sullivan's insistence, but they soon stop, because Ashbridge simply stands still, refusing to comply. This scene is a great example of the way, by the end of the narrative, Ashbridge can assert herself against and direct her anger towards Sullivan, by virtue of the authoritative power of God. Shortly after this scene in the tavern, in a quite memorable and powerful line, Ashbridge succinctly defines a self in opposition to her marriage: "So I was ready to obey all his Lawfull Commands, but where they Imposed upon my Conscience, I no longer Durst" (165-166). The reader here sees the way in which her social obedience and obligation is defined against the parameters of her "Conscience"—the developed relationship she has now with God grants her the autonomy to assert herself against Sullivan.

In a final moment of Sullivan's challenge to Ashbridge's assertion of an autonomous religious self (and the point near the end of the narrative in which details of the marriage, rather than her conversion, really dominate), Ashbridge mentions that on her path to conversion, the one thing preventing her complete happiness was the "Reformation of [her] husband" (169), which as a result of his taking to drink, seemed an impossible wish. During this time, Ashbridge explains that she simply endured his behavior with the patience granted to her by God, and that only one time she uttered to him "unsavoury expressions" (169). When Sullivan came home, "a little in drink" and found her "at Work by a Candle, came to me, put it out & fetching me a box on the Ear

said, 'you don't Earn your light;' on which unkind Usage...I uttered these Rash Expressions, 'thou art a Vile Man..." (169). Here is another powerful example of the way Ashbridge uses the authority of God to oppose Sullivan. Quite simply, Sullivan here challenges Ashbridge's presentation of a religious self. She opposes him not only through the authority of her own relationship to God, but also through Sullivan's own lack of relationship with God—in other words, she stands on the authoritative moral high-ground. Further, she discloses the truth of this abusive scene by framing it with her wishes that Sullivan would finally come to God and save himself. By using these final narrative moments in such a way, she further relies on the authority of God to righteously define herself apart from him. She adamantly wishes for his "Good End" (170) even after he has left her. The final paragraph expresses Ashbridge's "duty" to say what she could about him that was good, as she was "obliged" to say all the bad things about him. The end of Ashbridge's conversion narrative focuses frankly on the end of her marriage and the demise of her husband. It is significant that, just like Bailey, Ashbridge's story ends when she is free of Sullivan. Using the authority of God, Ashbridge can confess some details of her unhappy marriage, documenting the emergence of her self both in relation to God and opposition to her husband.

Ashbridge's self is asserted in opposition to various external forces, particularly a violent and controlling husband. Her interior is similarly protected from those forces by the misdirection of her exterior and her often solitary behavior. In subtle ways, Ashbridge's conversion narrative does more. Her conversion narrative is marked by peculiarities—she does not describe herself as actively seeking a community to which to belong; she is instead critical of anyone's voice and direction but her own. She does not

choose to document her public Quaker life, as so many narratives in this genre do, but rather transgresses convention to depict the unique and abusive circumstances of her married life. She speaks out, no matter how apologetically, against the domestic abuses she suffered. While many of the events are depicted in a conventional way, Ashbridge's narrative does more than imitate Quaker narratives that have come before her. In various ways, she asserts a more defined self. In her solitary and secretive behavior, in her critical attitude towards external influences and communities, in her intentional misdirection from her interior, and her use of God's authority to define her self in opposition to and to direct her anger towards her violent husband, Ashbridge asserts her self in a unique way.

Seeking a Way Out: "Memoirs of Abigail Bailey" (1815)

Abigail Bailey's "Memoirs of Abigail Bailey" (1815) is a fascinating narrative; engrossing and dramatic, it unflinchingly documents Abigail's violent marriage to Asa Bailey. Her self-narrative, like Ashbridge's, is only "one of a small handful of autobiographies written by women during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (Taves, Introduction 1)[7] and it too can be characterized as a spiritual, or even conversion narrative, as much of it consists of Congregationalist Bailey's musings on the power of God. In addition to its spiritual aspects, the memoirs represent "the first autobiographical account of family violence published in the United States" (Taves 1). It is a revealing portrait of an abusive, volatile, adulterous marriage, whose height of cruelty is Asa Bailey's incestuous abuse of their daughter and whose result is Bailey's long deliberation on and apprehension towards obtaining a divorce. Indeed, these two narrative foci—

[7] I rely on the work of Ann Taves, editor of the republication of Bailey's memoirs, quite a bit for my reading of Bailey as she is the only critic thus far who has written extensively on Bailey.

portrait of an abusive marriage and religious devotional—compete for primacy in the narrative. In spite of, or perhaps merely alongside of, the spiritual elements, the narrative begins when Abigail marries Asa and ends when she becomes divorced from him. In other words, though Abigail's relationship with God is not separate from the narrative of her marriage, what distinguishes this text is the focus on this troubled marriage.

Bailey's narrative shares several similarities with Ashbridge's. As already mentioned, it puts much emphasis on the events of her marriage. Bailey also is always alone, protective of her interior, and enjoys a highly individual relationship with God. In this way, Bailey emerges as a similarly solitary, rather than communal or relational, self. Also, Bailey uses her relationship with God to act as an autonomous agent in her marriage and direct her anger at her husband. But Bailey, facing perhaps an even more dire situation of abuse, also draws on the authority of covenantal marriage and Asa's own authority to assert her agency. Perhaps the biggest distinguishing feature between Ashbridge's and Bailey's narratives is the role of writing itself. Most provocatively, because of her legal disempowerment, Bailey also assumes the authority of writing to define herself in opposition to her husband. For all of these reasons, Bailey's narrative works to assert a unique self. Her narrative challenges relational subjectivity by asserting a solitary self in opposition to her husband, and presents complications to generic conventions in its focus on her marriage.

Bailey's narrative reflects an interesting set of possible generic influences. Roxanne Harde sees Bailey's narrative as relying on the rhetoric of conversion, even though Bailey has already been accepted in the Congregational church before the narrative begins (164). Harde finds the trials Bailey faces in her marriage to Asa as

presenting a test of faith that requires Bailey to reexamine and redefine her relationship with God. Through this process, and relying on the conventions of conversion narrative, Bailey, empowered not compromised by this reevaluated relationship with God, "gains the authority needed to separate herself from her role as wife and to reconvert herself in her relationship with God" (164). Ann Taves sees Bailey as, in addition to the using the Bible to interpret her experiences, also relying "on the Indian captivity narratives popular in New England at the time" (Introduction 16). Taves identifies this other narrative influence most prominently through Bailey's use of the enemy/captive terminology. Similarly to Harde, Taves sees most significantly the edifying and religious practice elements of the narrative's intent: "By maintaining her faith and trust in God throughout her ordeal, she ensured both her own salvation and, through her memoirs, provided an example for others" (Introduction 17). Thus both Harde and Taves place emphasis on the narrative's adherence to conventional and accessible forms, which no doubt influenced the shaping of Bailey's story. But, though these influences cannot be denied, I would like to focus instead on the narrative's violation of those conventions.

First, the introduction makes a point to stress that Bailey has already joined the church: "In the eighteenth year of her age, being of a serious turn of mind, and of an unblemished moral character, she applied to the Rev. Mr. Walker to join herself to his church, and was received Sept. 4, 1763" (55). Thus, like Ashbridge, though it is conventional to write a spiritual self-narrative in this period, Bailey's text breaks that convention immediately in terms of experiences recounted. Further, and more significantly, the narrative progression of the text is driven much more by the events recounted in Bailey's marriage than in her faith. For example, the narrative begins with

the first dated entry of the memoirs as her marriage to Asa at age twenty-two (56). Moreover, the narrative ends when Asa and Bailey part for good: "*Mr. B. and I parted.* I had no expectation, or wish ever to see him again in this life. I petitioned for a bill of divorcement, and readily obtained it" (178). I underline the primacy of the marriage to focus on how this narrative begins to do more; Bailey's narrative moves even beyond Ashbridge in terms of its violation of convention. It might be said that this is first a story of a dramatic marriage, and within that drama emerges a self defined in strong opposition, with the aid of God.

Aside from the various ways that Bailey herself sets up the memoirs to emphasize the drama of the marriage, there is further evidence of this dual topic to be found in the preface written by the editor of the memoirs, Reverend Ethan Smith. Smith first records his belief of the memoir's utility: "On reading the manuscripts, I was of the opinion, that they are richly worthy of being given to the public" (25). Indeed, this is the very familiar introduction to a religious self-narrative—the events of one's life serve only to instruct the community in the trials and triumph of faith. However, as his description progresses, his emphasis and repetition in describing the circumstances out of which Bailey's faith appears creates a kind of equal interest in the religious meanings and the events themselves. Of the events depicted, Smith calls them separately: "uncommon, and interesting events," "such singular providences," "piety, under a series of most pressing trials," and "rare materials" (52). The preface advocates the compelling nature of the memoirs; it indicates there is something *more* here than the familiar course of faith. Biblical lessons are certainly learned within, but within a particularly compelling story: "These things are presented in a detail of events, and unexaggerated facts, which arrest

the attention; and which are singularly calculated to exhibit the detestable nature and consequences of licentiousness and vice" (52). The readers' attention is arrested, and within that interest, religious lessons can be learned. The preface reinforces the interest in the narrative for religious edification, but also in the confession of a scandalous drama.

Because my reading emphasizes the narrative's focus on Bailey's marriage, it is important to pause and consider marriage in Bailey's historical moment. The first indication of what the expectations for marriage were come from Bailey herself, in the very first pages of her memoirs:

> I now left my dear parents—hoping to find in my husband a true hearted and constant friend. My desires and hopes were, that we might live together in peace and friendship; seeking each other's true happiness till death....As, while I lived with my parents, I esteemed it my happiness to be in subjection to them; so now I thought it must be a still greater benefit to be under the aid of a judicious companion, who would rule well his own house. It had been my hope to find a companion of a meek, peaceable temper; a lover of truth; discreet and pleasant. I thought one of the opposite character, would be my greatest disappointment and trial. (56)

Bailey's expectations are for a "judicious" companion who will lead their house well and to whom she can happily subject her self. Taves notes, "Submission, however, did not necessarily mean passive acceptance" ("Self and God" 61). Bailey hopes for a companion with whom she can live in religious truth and seek eternal happiness, thereby emphasizing the religious implications of the relationship. To assure her salvation, Bailey hopes her husband is meek, pleasant, and of peaceful temper—all the characteristics of course not evident in Asa, which as emphasized in that last line above, will be her worst disappointment. Her expectations for a peaceful, religious partnership are immediately dashed, setting up the main conflict of the narrative—religious devotion against the horrid realities of her marriage.

Shortly after Bailey presents the hopes for her marriage, she emphasizes the power of the marriage covenant. Though marriage in Bailey's historical moment was borne of submitting, it was not exactly domineering—marriage was a contract in which both husband and wife had responsibilities to uphold; the subordination of the wife was contingent, in other words, on the husband's upholding his duties in the marriage (Taves, Introduction 12). And when Bailey begins to describe some of the ways Asa violates his end of the deal, she is sure to emphasize her fidelity, in spite of his infidelity: "It was not an enemy; then I could have borne it....But it was the man mine equal, my guide, my friend, my husband!....He has broken his covenant" (73). Asa's breaking of the covenant becomes part of the force with which she can oppose him. Not only does the covenantal nature of marriage in Bailey's view give her the religious authority to eventually break with Asa, but it also has an effect on the legal understanding of marriage:

> The contractual character of the covenant also meant that in New England marriages were not viewed as indissoluble, but could be broken if either party failed to fulfill their responsibilities. Adultery, incestuous marriage (marriage to legally designated relatives), cruelty (wife beating), and desertion were all considered breaches of the marriage covenant and thus, especially in combination, grounds for divorce. (Taves, Introduction 12)

The religious understanding of marriage, as Taves suggests, made divorce a possibility in theory. Because the religious and legal understanding of marriage was not entirely distinct, and as we will see, Bailey cannot access the authority of the legal system, she throughout emphasizes her maintenance of the (religious) covenant, in spite of Asa's violations of it.

Another aspect of eighteenth-century marriage to be considered was the incidence of divorce. Quite simply, as Joan Gunderson points out, in the eighteenth century: "Women did not enter the divorce process lightly and spent years in terrible situations

before seeking a way out" (59). Though the reality of divorce in this time period and the regularity with which women endured such violence remains fairly unclear, Taves pieces together some picture of divorce in Bailey's moment. First she offers that Bailey could have petitioned for divorce *in theory* before the incest began, on basis of cruelty and adultery (Introduction 11); however, as the narrative itself repeats, this was not a desirable option for many reasons. Because "cruelty was grounds for divorce, but only in combination with other grounds" and accusations of adultery had to produce two eye-witnesses (Taves 13), Bailey had a hard time collecting certain legal proof. As she makes clear herself, getting legal proof would necessitate that her daughter Phebe testify against her father. Abigail constantly frets over a contested divorce and simply wants Asa to do the right thing and make a settlement. Taves makes an important point on this: "The fact that she did obtain a divorce in 1793 indicates that her fear was not of divorce per se, but of a contested divorce" (Introduction 15). Thus it is not that Bailey, through the long silence and toleration of the violence, cannot become a sufficient agent to remove herself from the situation, but rather that she attempts to work the systems in which she is variously the less powerful subject to her advantage, and the legal system happens to be one where she cannot make the authority work for her.

To begin thinking about the several ways Bailey asserts a unique self, it should first be noted that there is a strong accord with Ashbridge in Bailey's tendency to seek isolation and silence. Perhaps the most recurrent act Bailey describes in this text is her going off alone, bearing her situation all alone, and only sometimes taking singular refuge in God. Supporting the sense that this narrative divides its attention between faith and focus on the marriage, Bailey describes her solitude in two distinct ways. First, she

often describes her solitude in terms of only having God to sustain her. For instance, when she first has suspicion that Asa is having an affair with a woman who lives in their home, the first transgression described in the narrative, Bailey claims conventionally: "In my distress, my only refuge was in God my Saviour..." (58). Just as often however, Bailey describes her distressed solitude with the stark absence of God's presence: "But I saw no way to put a stop to the evil, under which I was oppressed. And I seemed unable to open my difficulties to any one: I must bear them all alone" (74). Bailey expresses a similar sentiment of isolation, but here solitude does not rely on God. In facing her antagonistic marriage, Bailey becomes a solitary subject; her husband forces her into situations in which she must assert herself, in ways that potentially isolate her further. As she describes her escape back to her family after Asa has tricked her into following him a great distance away, she considers the social implications for her traveling alone: "I thought it was so uncommon to see women riding journies alone, that I should naturally be taken for some base contemptible creature, and people would not think it much matter how I was treated. But in all such fears, I found relief in flying to God my refuge" (153). Here, Bailey's being alone is the result of her actively taking steps to oppose her husband—she chooses a dangerous escape and long arduous journey alone in an attempt to return to and protect her children. As a result of having to proceed this way, she is vulnerable to the perceptions of others. In fear of her bold and unique actions, she relies on God to embolden her strength in opposition to others' perceptions of her. Thus, Bailey's narrative, much like Ashbridge's, is marked by isolating behavior and a strength of an interior will.

Part of the power in being alone that Bailey emphasizes is not only the habit of just being alone, but also taking refuge in the act of writing alone, and often secretly. As Taves notes, "Bailey worked out the religious meaning of her husband's disturbing behavior in the context of her regular private devotions" (Introduction 10). These writing sessions, which served the double purpose of religious practice and protective refuge, create a space where Bailey interprets her faith and her marriage together. In the memoirs, comprised in great part by the ordering of these diary entries, the act of writing itself is emphasized by the start of each entry:

> July, 1773, Alas, I must again resume my lonely pen, and write grievous things against the husband of my youth!...(60)
>
> May 26, 1774, I endeavored to console my afflicted heart with my pen, by writing as follows....(62)

What is interesting here is the way the pen is so prominently described—first that it's lonely, emphasizing Bailey's solitude and second, that the pen consoles, putting a strong emphasis on the act of writing itself as coping mechanism. Though the potential purpose of these writing sessions is to work out a connection between the experiences she faces and her faith, the act of writing, of being alone, and of consoling oneself with the pen is expressed, rather than simply God's good grace. One could easily expect her to say 'I endeavored to console my heart with God, by writing as follows." But the fact that the pen repeatedly features as an agent of aid seems to widen the purpose of writing these devotions—this is not rote religious practice, this writing does something more for Bailey and potentially something unique. As Taves points out: "Given the difficulty which Abigail had in attending church services regularly and her husband's lack of a conversion experience, it is clear that these secret devotions, rather than public worship or family

prayer, were at the heart of Abigail Bailey's religious life" (Introduction 10). Taves emphasizes the very individual practice that marked Bailey's religious devotion—because of the circumstances of her life, including the fact that her husband was not faithful, Bailey's religious practice was highly personal and secret. Writing alone, recording her feelings, negotiating her relationship with God, maintaining a secret practice, having discourse with herself—however this act of private devotion is emphasized, what becomes clear in Bailey's narrative is the prominence and power of writing in the events of her self-narrative. Bailey is simply compelled to write: "Some vent to my private grief I found in writing it...I give vent to the feelings of my broken heart, as follows" (58).

More prominently than Ashbridge, Bailey wields the power of God to direct her anger towards and define herself in opposition to Asa. This reliance on the authority of God to direct anger at an other and to assert the self is seen in the way Bailey describes the sources of her actions and declarations in standing up to Asa. At one point, having "determined, to adopt a new mode of treatment with Mr. B" (77), Bailey records herself telling Asa: "I told him I should no longer be turned off in this manner [by B's angry words]; but should pursue my object with firmness, and with whatever wisdom and ability God might give me" (77). Bailey clearly and actively asserts her will in the first-person—in a plain declaration, she stands up to Asa. Simultaneously, however, Bailey seems to give the power to act over to God. Bailey asserts *both* that she will be firm and that God will give her firmness, separately. In this way, it is both God and Bailey that assert authority in the situation. Though Bailey does here, and in other moments in the text, seem to give up control of her self over to God, I focus on this passage to show that

Bailey's relationship with God doesn't necessarily compromise her autonomy. For instance, Harde argues that Bailey is "able to remove...her husband's control over her by giving up control of her self to God" (167), but there is ample evidence in the text to challenge the notion that she relinquishes control to God. This relation to God is much more nuanced, in other words. Indeed, she subscribes to the authority of God, but remembering Sobel's understanding of the self in this period, authority is necessary to define the self-in-opposition. More than submitting to or sacrificing her autonomy for God, Bailey uses the relationship she has forged with God against Asa, and one way she does so is, as above, invoking God's will while attempting to gain control over a confrontation in the relationship in which she is in other ways the powerless one.

Bailey actively uses the authority she gains from her relationship with God. Clearly exemplifying Sobel's argument about the self, at one point in the narrative, when Asa inquires about Abigail's prayers, she comments that, "It was very evident that the greatest fear he had of me was from my prayers, seeking and obtaining help from God. He had discovered evident fear of this" (105). Here, quite simply, is the recognition of the authority Bailey holds in defining herself against Asa—though Asa has other forms of advantage, like legal power for instance, Bailey again recognizes that her submission to and faith in God gives her, in part, the authority she needs to righteously direct her anger at and to separate herself from her husband. Bailey's faith is a kind of weapon that Asa fears. In another example, near the end of the narrative, God becomes a force through which Bailey can thwart Asa's manipulative designs. In one of his last attempts to regain control over Bailey, Asa sends her children away, fully expecting, after Bailey had traveled so long to reach them that she would abandon the legal proceedings she had

finally taken up against him in order to chase them. But Bailey recognizes this scheme and uses her faith in God to stay and proceed, but also to protect her children: "And I believed God would give me firmness to pursue my object with him; and also, that God would take these children out of his cruel hands, and restore them to me. Mr. B. appeared to feel mortified and in some measure defeated" (174). Once again, God here is a force wielded by Bailey in situations in which her autonomy is threatened. She relies on the authority of God to define herself in opposition to Asa.

Though God is the most prominent source of authority Bailey calls upon to separate herself from Asa, she also relies on the power of the covenant, which has both religious and legal ramifications. As mentioned previously, Bailey thoroughly documents her attempts to uphold the marriage covenant, in spite of Asa's violent behavior. This can be then understood as Bailey's attempt to maintain the authority of that covenant to then, as with God, assert her opposition to him. This is clearly exemplified in the following:

> But I told Mr. B he *knew* he had violated his marriage covenant; and hence had forfeited all legal and just right and authority over me; and I should convince him I well knew it. I told him I was not in any passion. I acted on principle, and from long and mature consideration....he had compelled me to undertake this most undesirable business—of stopping him in his mad career; and that I now felt strength, courage and zeal to pursue my resolution. (78)

Bailey, through the power of the covenant, claims the relinquishment of Asa's authority over her—the power of the marriage covenant is invoked to give Bailey the space to act as an agent. In the final phrase, she emphasizes that it actually Asa who "compels" her to act; it is his violations of the contract that force her to stop him and it is in this action that she speaks autonomously from the first person. She is again using the systems of authority which have her submit to both religious and legal authority in order to gain autonomy in opposition. The construction of the final phrase in the passage cited above

serves as further example of this emerging self—Bailey first claims to be submitted to Asa's own demands as the covenant calls for her to do, but that it was his will to break that covenant. As a result of this, she earns the strength and courage to pursue her resolution, to actively assert her will. Ironically, it is the submission to the authority of the covenant that grants her agency to assert herself. Finally, as in her invocation of the power of the covenant, Bailey uses Asa's own authority over her to assert her self against him: "But, said I, you have done all in your power to bring about such a separation, and to ruin and destroy our family. And I meet it as my duty now to do all in my power to save them from further destruction" (79). Here, again, Bailey points out the ways his actions have created the necessity for separation. She even goes so far as to say she "meets it as her duty", again relying on the rhetoric of submission, to become powerful and an active agent to save her family. In a violent situation, Bailey is in many ways powerless and seeks spaces where she wields certain authority to define herself in opposition to her husband. She becomes a defined self by actively and strategically committing to authoritative power.

Yet another compelling instance of Bailey's relying on the authority of the God and the covenant comes in the letters she writes to Asa and sticks in his clothes after he has agreed to remove himself from their home. Most forcefully, within these letters, Bailey asserts her disconnection from Asa, and her resolve: "But I never desire your return to me. This point is decided!" (93). This command resounds with the assertion of self and active agency, and it only comes after careful arguments from inhabited authoritative positions. Bailey can be so forceful here because she relies on the authority of her relationship with God. She demonstrates in the letters all the ways Asa has violated

his own relationship with God, as well as their covenant. She directs her anger and desire for separation by relying on the authority of her faith and his disregard for that authority: "This solemn testimony against your wickedness, and this last call to repentance, I leave with you. Let me be clear from the blood of your soul" (94). To uphold her faith and relation with God, she must be free from Asa. Thus, by addressing him through the authority of the rules of God and the authority she gains from writing, Bailey works to assert her self.

Though Bailey demonstrates her ability to wield the power of God, the covenant, and Asa's own authority, one place where Bailey is unable to use authority to assert her self is the legal system. But, as Bailey is sure to note throughout, there are many reasons why the legal system is not set up to grant her a position of authority. While she was convinced of the grounds for separation, she acknowledges that proving that in court would be difficult: "It may appear surprising that such wickedness was not checked by legal restraints. But great difficulties attend in such a case. While I was fully convinced of the wickedness, yet I knew not that I could make legal proof. I could not prevail upon this daughter to make known to me her troubles; or to testify against the author of them" (76). She cannot or will not make her abused daughter speak publicly—for Bailey, this disclosure is not (yet) a position of power. Indeed, as the narrative itself wants to emphasize, the legal system is one authoritative system that makes Bailey a passive subject and for that, the narrative highlights her guilt. But, it seems that there was no way for Bailey to gain an authoritative position, and hence her inaction. This recognition is evident in the following, where Asa returns to plead with Bailey that he will change: "Had the way been prepared, by due adjustment of our property, to be sure it would have

been best to have decided the point at once with a firm tone, and told him he must immediately flee and be gone! But no proper settlement was yet made. And I was sensible he had it in the power of his hands to injure and distress us" (100). This highlights how Bailey was unable to access a position of authority within the legal system and her resulting passivity. Bailey can only suppose what her course of action would be, should she have any legal authority on which to rely. But because their matters were not yet settled and because she was aware of her disadvantaged position, Bailey must take a different course. Bailey has to hope Asa will be the one to dissolve the marriage without a long proceeding, because the process itself, though resulting in the separation, puts Bailey in a position through which none of her own control can be asserted. Overall, legal authority is not one that Bailey can wield from her position in an autonomous way, so she doesn't choose it. She tries instead the above means—God, the covenant, Asa's own authority—to urge Asa to pursue a settlement.

Adding another layer of complication to this is Bailey's staunch refusal to disclose her situation to anyone, as this isolating behavior becomes questionable, both legally and religiously throughout the narrative. In the description of events, Bailey is clearly aware of readers' potential dissatisfaction with her choices: "And such were my infirmities, weakness and fears, (my circumstances being very difficult) that I did not dare to hint any thing of my fears to him, or to any creature. This may to some appear strange; but with me it was then a reality" (71). In this reflection on the events, Bailey admits her isolative tendencies were perhaps a mistake. In the only footnote in the entire narrative, editor Smith steps in at this point to say: "The discreet reader will repeatedly wonder that this pious sufferer did not look abroad for help against so vile a son of Belief,

and avail herself of the law of the land, by swearing the peace against him. Her forbearance does indeed seem to have been carried to excess" (72). Smith then gives reasons as to why Bailey would have chosen secrecy and isolation. There is guilt to be laid on Abigail for her silence, solitude and legal inaction: "After all, it will be difficult to resist the conviction which will be excited in the course of these memoirs that Mrs. B did truly err, in not having her husband brought to justice" (72). This admission would seem to depict Bailey as less of an agent, but instead, I think, it actually works to underline Bailey's subtle autonomy in an otherwise powerless situation. As previously noted, she is aware of the limits in certain courses of action, that she for instance would be entirely disempowered in the legal arena. While it is perhaps not ideal, Bailey finds more control in isolation, silence, and relationship with God, at least at this point in the narrative. And while this legal inaction could be read as detracting from Bailey's assertion of self, I argue that in fact this refusal is another way Bailey asserts herself in the situation.

Because in the course of narrative events Bailey does not pursue legal action more immediately, she assumes guilt. And in some way, this guilt becomes at least one reason for writing and publishing the memoirs. She says:

> I ever meant to let all my friends, and the public, by and by, know the uttermost of my trials. But I was led to think it would be well to get my concerns with Mr. B. (as to the property) first settled. I meant that they should understand, (and I supposed they did understand,) that I never designed to live with Mr. B. any more. But I had not been very explicit with them relative to the thing. (125-6)

Reflected here is first the characteristic reserve Bailey has for disclosing her situation—she prefers to settle the situation legally before filling everyone in on the details. It is ironic that throughout she repeatedly refrains from letting others know of her situation, considering the highly public nature and the detail with which the memoirs are

comprised. Also of note is the way that the time for disclosure is the time when the legal proceedings are settled. Among the other reasons for writing this memoir, Bailey desires to take a position of textual authority in lieu of the legal authority she could not inhabit.

Writing itself indeed begins to give Bailey authority and strength, just as God does. As previously noted, the power of writing itself comes through in various ways in this narrative. Although there are times when words fail her, when she laments (for instance) that there are no words to describe her situation, there is a clear moment in the text when words become a powerful tool of disclosure and simultaneously a powerful weapon against Asa. This one instance is when Bailey decides to describe just one scene of Asa's abuse of Phebe. This becomes an intensely powerful description as the rest of the story is at best suggestive of the realities of abuse she and her family suffer. She begins by saying, "Among the many instances of his wickedly correcting her, I shall mention one" (75). She goes on to document a scene too long to fully document here, where Asa reprimands and violently beats Phebe for not immediately coming to him, a miscommunication:

> He seized his horse whip, and said, in a rage, he would make her know that when he called her, she should come to him. He then fell to whipping her without mercy. She cried, and begged, and repeated the assertion, that she did not know he called her to come to him....He continued to whip her, as though he were dealing with an ungovernable brute; striking over her head, hands, and back; nor did he spare her face and eyes, while the poor girl appeared as though she must die. No proper account could he ever be prevailed on to give of this conduct. (75-76)

To reiterate, Bailey generally takes great care to avoid many details of the violence she and her family endures. But here is a strikingly powerful example of the power of writing. Unlike Ashbridge's less detailed account of the violence she suffered at the hands of Sullivan, Bailey does not here apologize for exposing Asa's cruel nature and

thus once again the power of writing is suggested. This plain description of the violence Phebe faced was throughout the events themselves the kind of legal disclosure Bailey feared, but in her memoirs she is able to use unflinchingly the authority of writing to righteously direct her anger at her husband and assert her self in opposition to him.

There are several possible reasons Bailey chose to write this narrative. And one clear one was to protect her name and her actions. There are hints of this within the narrative itself. When Asa convinces Bailey to leave for New York, under the pretense that he will take legal steps for their separation, the community knows about the incest and violence and also knows that Bailey has taken him back in repeatedly (because, as shown above, she had no empowered legal recourse). When the trip extends to over two months, much past the time Asa said they would be gone, Bailey worries that she should have sought her church friends' advice and also Asa suggests to her that people in the community are saying that *she* ought to leave town too:

> They would now see, that I was gone off with Mr. B. and did not return as I promised my family....I well knew that appearances against me, (if I did not soon return) must be exceedingly dark. And as I had professed religion, and had been a great advocate for experimental and practical piety, I thought this appearance of absconding with Mr. B. and leaving my family, would bring a great wound to the cause of Christ. This I knew not how to endure. (126)

Regretting having not told anyone the details of her situation, she recognizes the power she has given away to Asa in defining her—as Asa's threat indicates, there is a fear that she will be perceived just as poorly as he. Not only does her silence as a result of not pursuing legal course threaten her image in the community, it also here potentially damages her relation to God, a source of authority integral to Bailey's selfhood. Thus because Bailey is unable to access an authoritative position in the legal system through

the course of the narrative events, she chooses to wield the authority of the first-person narrative to regain that power lost. As Taves similarly notes:

> Given her church's strict enforcement of its disciplinary standards (undoubtedly one of the reasons why Abigail liked the church) and her fears that her friends, especially her church friends, believed she had been unwise and perhaps even deceitful, the memoirs, as opposed to the diaries, may have been written to justify her actions to them. (Introduction 11)

Taves places emphasis on the writing of the memoirs as religious obligation, an obligation to set herself right in the eyes of her religious community, and certainly it is. As Bailey notes above, the one thing she could not endure was damage to the perception of herself as a pious woman. But I would place more emphasis on her legal disempowerment as compelling her to write.

Divulging the details publicly, something she is unwilling to do in the court of law, is ultimately the power she wields in penning this memoir. Once she has gotten the divorce, just as she wanted, without a considerable process, she is then able to assume the authority of the pen and of the act of writing, to clearly and resoundingly define her self in opposition to a cruel and violent husband. The writing of her story and of herself then becomes the ultimate authority wielded against her husband. Both the creation of the memoirs and the habitual, private diary writing become the master space of authority through which Bailey defines herself. Writing then takes the top of the list of authorities Bailey uses to define herself above, I would contend, even God. And this is then why Bailey's narrative does something more; it is an instance in which the act of writing itself becomes an agency-granting authority.[8]

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[8] This writing to defend oneself—the act of writing as assertion of authority and agency can be more clearly exemplified in slightly later women's self narratives particularly in *The Narrative of K. White* (1809) and the *Memoirs of Elizabeth Fisher* (1810). Stephen C. Arch argues in fact that these two narratives may be among the first autobiographies in America, as these women present themselves as

I want to reemphasize the complications that Bailey and Ashbridge's narratives present. Bailey's, like Ashbridge's, is a narrative that straddles critical divisions. It is really exemplary of no established period, or genre, or convention. Rather, both narratives present challenges to the limits of our systematization. For Bailey, allegiance to available forms—the conversion and captivity narrative—is certainly evident. But while acknowledging those influences, I have been interested in emphasizing how Bailey is also doing more than simply mimicking those forms, and how, haphazardly, she contributes to the development of autobiography. For instance, unlike Ashbridge, Bailey's narrative places much significance and authority on the act of writing itself. Further, in many ways isolated and alone like Ashbridge, Bailey uses systems of communal authority to inhabit a position of power and define herself in opposition to her husband. She demonstrates a self seeking empowerment through the authority of her private devotions to God, her covenantal marriage, her violent and oppressive husband, and most significantly the act of self-reflection and self-writing itself.

One of the reasons to write a self-narrative in the eighteenth century is to fulfill obligation to religious community, to set an example, to instruct others. Though these are certainly reasons both Ashbridge and Bailey write about themselves, these are not the only reasons they are compelled to write. Ashbridge breaks the convention of Quaker spiritual narrative by addressing none of her public life as a preacher; in fact, she does not

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independent and possibly original agents. He says of White's narrative: "Indeed, White's narrative is so insistent about the protagonist's agency, and so willing to find purpose and meaning in isolation—what White calls "my solitary situation" (127)—that it could be considered one of the earliest autobiographies written in the West" (146). Sobel also uses Fisher and White as examples. He claims that Fisher "provides an example of an women [sic] with a powerful male alien other who had no institution to focus her hatred and support her self-development" (186). White, on the other hand, is able to call on the authority of the gender system (through her ability to be mistaken for a man) to empower herself and be defined more autonomously (204). Aside from a minor admission of White's taking solace in God, both narratives lack the religious content that makes Bailey's narrative seem to many to represent a less autonomous self.

discuss at all her involvement in the religious community. As with Bailey, the majority of her narrative documents her violent and tumultuous relationship with her husband. Her narrative ends, like Bailey's, when Ashbridge is finally rid of Sullivan. For Bailey, the reasons for writing abound—to protect her name, to protect herself legally, to save face with her church friends, to save face with God, more provocatively, to expose the truth about her husband, to set the story straight, to define herself assuming the authority of writing. What is missing in Bailey is the necessity to write about herself only as a religious obligation—Bailey seems compelled to record her life narrative because of its extremity, just as she is compelled to seek her diary to take solace in both God and her own self. These narratives present both bold assertions and strong denials of self, in a historical moment where the self is just beginning to be imagined. While these emerging autobiographical selves can be read as utterly compromised, this paper instead imagines them as bold attempts at self-assertion. When these women's self-narratives are examined for the ways they begin to break, rather than align with, generic and critical conventions, we see the ways in which they struggle to assert unique selves as the very concept itself begins to emerge in eighteenth-century America.

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