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Reading, writing, and other crimes

Frances E. Dolan

In Salisbury in the 1650s, an eighty-year-old cunning-woman named Anne Bodenham was accused of witchcraft, and ultimately convicted and executed. As an old woman whose work as an occult practitioner eventually exposed her to criminal prosecution, Bodenham was certainly not unique, even as late as the middle of the seventeenth century. Yet, at first glance, Bodenham's story, as narrated in Edmond Bower's pamphlet, *Doctor Lamb Revived, or, Witchcraft Condemn'd in Anne Bodenham, a Servant of His* (1653), distinguishes itself, even among the diverse and sensational discourses of witchcraft, through the emphasis it places on the accused's ability to read and write. Anne Bodenham sometimes wore spectacles, "taught divers young Children to read," and claims to have learned about "white" witchcraft by reading books she found in the notorious Dr. Lamb's rooms. Furthermore, she depended on both reading and writing in her practice of magic: raising spirits "by reading in her Books"; employing written charms; and compelling a young servingmaid to sign her name in blood in a red-bound book that was "worth thousands of other books, and can doe more."¹

Contrary to the widespread assumption, then and now, that early modern English witches were illiterate and untutored, this case (to which I will return later) suggests that some women might have acquired occult knowledge from books. On the one hand, some pamphlet accounts of witchcraft prosecutions disseminated the belief that "this silly sex of women can by no means attaine to that so vile and damned a practise of sorcery, and Witchcraft, in regard of their illiteratenesse and want of learning."² According to this view, while men might follow Dr. Faustus' lead in reading their way into heresy and diabolism, women stumbled into witchcraft only through inarticulate rage. On the other hand, other commentators on the phenomenon of witchcraft, recognized the dangers of women's unregulated access to print. John Stearne, assistant to the witchfinder Matthew Hopkins, for instance, listed those "addicted

to the reading and studie of dangerous books, inticing to the practice of hidden mysteries, of Magick and Inchantments" among those particularly vulnerable to the devil's temptation.³ If witchcraft could be associated with either "illiteratenesse and want of learning," or "the reading and study of dangerous books," then the issue is not whether women could read but whether their ability to do so altered misogynous assumptions and practices such as those that enabled witchcraft prosecutions.

Given the uneven and inadequate evidence regarding early modern literacy, we need not assume that most English women could neither read nor write; yet that assumption has governed most of the scholarship on early modern literacy. David Cressy, who bases his influential study *Literacy and the Social Order* on the analysis of signatures, argues that "women were almost universally unable to write their own names for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," although he acknowledges some variations by class and region. For instance, women's, servants', and apprentices' rates of literacy were higher in London, and some (exceptional) elite women achieved quite high levels of literacy. Yet Cressy stresses throughout his study that "in all sources and in all areas and periods, the literacy of women lagged behind that of men."⁴ Although all scholars of early modern literacy agree that men probably attained higher levels of literacy than women, many have challenged Cressy's definition of literacy as narrow and exclusive, and his methods as likely to underestimate literacy rates, especially among women and laboring men. As Keith Thomas argues, "in early modern England there were so many kinds of written word, such a diversity of scripts, type-faces, and languages, that a simple contrast between 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' fails to register the complexity of the situation."⁵ Refusing that simple distinction makes it possible to see that reconsidering definitional categories may be more important than proving that women belonged in one category rather than the other.

Thomas demonstrates, for instance, that it was easier to read black-letter than roman-type, and easier to read either kind of type than to read script. Thus, many people who could not read handwriting might be able to read print. Since writing was taught separately from and subsequent to reading – after that point in the curriculum at which most girls and many boys (especially those whose labor was needed) left school – many who could read could not write.⁶ For instance, the pamphlet *Blood for Blood, or, Justice Executed for Innocent Blood-Shed* (1670), which recounts Mary Cook's murder of "her own and only beloved Child," depicts Cook as unable to sign her examination (or confession) – she

makes "a cross instead of her name" – but as able to read "Books suitable to her present condition . . . which she seemed diligently to improve her time in."⁷

It certainly is not my purpose here to provide an historical justification for the habit of "equating femininity, consumption, and reading, on the one hand, and masculinity, production, and writing on the other," a habit that Tania Modleski challenges.⁸ As I will show, women's reading might itself be productive: Anne Bodenham, for instance, supported herself by means of the occult arts she learned from books; women readers might also have appropriated what they read in inventive, unpredictable ways that made consumption a kind of production, as Roger Chartier has argued.⁹ Further, many women of various social and economic positions could and did write. Considering reading and writing as separate skills, however, enables us to understand how estimates of literacy based on signature collection might underestimate, even exclude, women. It also operates as a useful reminder that the more we learn about education and literacy, the less we can be sure who possessed which skills and to what extent. I assume rather than seek to prove that many women could read and/or write. My question is: what difference did – and does – their literacy make?

Diverse representations of criminal women, including plays and pamphlet accounts of actual cases, suggest not only that women of widely various social positions could read and/or write, but also that women's literacy figured significantly in the processes of crime and punishment. Stage villainesses, for instance, read and write: Lady Macbeth enters reading a letter, and later writes and reads while sleep-walking; Alice Arden, the adulterous, murderous wife in *Arden of Feversham*, exchanges letters with her lover, and pores over her prayer book when she is feeling remorseful, or wishes to appear so.¹⁰ Representations of crime not only warn that women could use their reading and writing skills to learn and practice witchcraft, plot murder and adultery, or conspire in treason; they also demonstrate that state and church could exploit women's literacy to punish and reform them. Women's writing skills might leave damning evidence of their guilt – thus aiding in their apprehension, condemnation, and punishment; their ability to read and write might help a minister lead them to repentance, then enable them, once contrite, to witness to other sinners more persuasively. The widely different, even contradictory, values assigned to women's literacy in the discourses of crime, even within a single text, suggest that, as Margaret W. Ferguson has argued, "literacy, in theory and in practice, constituted a major site

of social conflict in the early modern period."¹¹ In the conflicts fought out on this site, the stakes for criminal(ized) women such as Anne Bodenham were the highest possible: acquittal or conviction, life or death, salvation or damnation. Yet the advantages that female combatants might gain by seizing control over the written word were unpredictable.

THE BENEFITS OF LITERACY

In English common law, an offender's literacy might enable him both to perpetrate speech crimes and to seek pardon (and avoid execution) for certain felonies. The law held the authors, and in some cases the printers, distributors, or readers, of prohibited works criminally accountable for exercising their writing and reading skills. The hangman publically burned books determined to be libelous or seditious. Yet reading ability also provided a gendered route to pardon; in early modern England, men could avoid execution for certain offenses by means of a legal fiction linking them to the clergy. In the Middle Ages, clerics had the right to be tried in ecclesiastical rather than royal courts for certain offenses. Proving that they were clerics by demonstrating their ability to read Latin, they could escape punishment in secular courts. In practice, this came to mean that those men who could read could achieve formal pardon and escape hanging for certain offenses (such as theft and murder).¹² The high incidence of men successfully claiming benefit of clergy suggests that judges employed flexible definitions of "literacy" and varied their testing methods as it suited them. Perhaps many convicts could read, or could at least recite the brief "neck-verse" (Psalm 51, verse 1) from memory. But benefit of clergy assumed that literacy, even the fiction or ephemeral performance of it, and criminality were curiously incompatible – the latter cancelling the former – for men.

Until 1624, women's ability to read was legally irrelevant. For instance, in Robert Yarrington's *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (1601), two servants who conceal their master's crime meet very different fates when their complicity is discovered. One, a man, receives benefit of clergy and is branded in the thumb, then released. The other, a woman, is not so lucky. "But wretched Rachels sexe denies that grace, / And therefore dooth receive a doome of death / To dye with him whose sinnes she did conceale."¹³ Legal reforms in 1624 and 1691 acknowledged that the claim to clerical status and its benefits had become so obviously a legal

fiction that it might as well be extended to women. The first reform extended benefit of clergy to women accused of stealing goods worth less than ten shillings. Until 1691, when women were granted the privilege on equal terms to men, women accused of stealing goods worth more than ten shillings or of any violent crime could not claim this benefit. Prior to 1691, benefit of clergy was largely restricted to men because, even at the level of legal fiction, it was unimaginable in post-Reformation England that women might be clerics. In this legal fiction, which confers on men the ultimate material benefit for their literacy, the legal system institutionalized until the late seventeenth century its assumption that women's literacy could not cancel out their criminality. Only women's maternity could do that. If a convicted woman pleaded that she was pregnant, and the judge and a jury of matrons chose to believe her, she too might postpone punishment and escape the gallows, temporarily, or in some cases, permanently.¹⁴ She could never achieve formal pardon by this means, however. Like benefit of clergy, benefit of belly could only be claimed once. Both pleas allowed the judge considerable discretion; although the convicted woman was supposed to be visibly pregnant with a "quick" or moving fetus, the plea was sometimes accepted in cases when the pregnancy could not be proved. But the judge's discretion did not extend to accepting the plea from women past child-bearing age. Obviously, an elderly woman such as Anne Bodenham, literate but post-menopausal, and accused of a crime more serious than petty theft, was denied access to either gender-inflected (and, in the case of women, age-biased) means of postponing or avoiding execution. The legal system enacted the assumption that her post-reproductive female body, which could not possibly house a fetus whose life might confer (temporary) value on her own, was not worth saving; her reading ability could not compensate for that lack.

WHAT CRIME IS IT TO WRITE HOME?
WRITING AND/AS EVIDENCE

Although criminal women's reading ability did not confer the same legal benefits that men's did, their writing ability carried equal risks: in court, the prosecution could use handwritten documents to incriminate them. Letters provide tangible evidence in many seventeenth-century trials, although the accused often dispute their authorship of all or part of the correspondence attributed to them. In his *Great Brittaines, Great Deliverance, from the Great Danger of Popish Powder* (1606), William Leigh

warns the conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot (after the event) that "Your owne Letters shall discover the treason, and the writing of your owne hands shall betray the mischief of your owne hearts."¹⁵ Since covert correspondence could prove dangerous if it fell into the wrong hands, those engaged in illicit activities of any kind assiduously destroyed the evidence. One informer against supposed conspirators in the Popish Plot of 1679, Thomas Dangerfield, alias Willoughby, explained that Catholics burned all correspondence "for they were cunning enough to keep no Papers by them of any Importance, as being liable to Searches that were likely to be made there on the least suspicion." If this had not been their habit, he "could have been able to have proved the whole Matter upon them, by their own Hand-writings."¹⁶ In *Malice Defeated* (1680), Elizabeth Cellier's autobiographical account of her trial and acquittal for treason, Cellier explains what made her suspicious of Dangerfield, the chief witness against her, whom she successfully disqualifies.¹⁷ He insisted on receiving a letter in her "own writing": "By this I perceiv'd he was already a Rogue, and endeavouring to get something of my writing, to make ill use of."¹⁸ In the context of suspicion, accusation, and prosecution, one's "own Hand-writings" are taken as such irrefutable evidence that they are the goal of all investigations, the "last word."

As a result, any kind of writing becomes suspicious. In accounts of various legal proceedings associated with the Popish Plot, servants testify to "seeing *Mrs. Cellier* and others often writing," as if this were damning in itself.¹⁹ In another Popish Plot trial, the accused (Edward Fitzharris) was forced to surrender the notes he was consulting as he conducted his own defense; in another, the spectators were reminded that it was forbidden for a "known Roman Catholick" to take "Notes of the Evidence," presumably because these notes might aid the defense or contribute to a pro-Catholic narrative of the trial.²⁰ But Cellier challenges this pervasive assumption that Catholic literacy is transgressive or dangerous in itself. When questioned whether she wrote home while in Newgate, Cellier responds, "Pray my Lord, what Crime is it to write home?"²¹ Throughout her text, Cellier depicts how difficult it is for Newgate inmates to correspond with those outside the prison; yet she insists that their clandestine correspondence is legal. As a Catholic implicated in the byzantine accusations and counter-accusations that constituted the Popish Plot and the Mealtub Plot, Cellier depended on correspondence to monitor the treatment of Catholic prisoners and to connect them to their coreligionists. Smuggling prohibited writing materials in for herself

and other inmates, and scheming to get letters into and out of the prison, Cellier helped to foster a Catholic network in a time of profound crisis. Cellier always wrote on the assumption that her letters would be intercepted and scrutinized. Although prison officials routinely copied her correspondence throughout her stay in Newgate, the copies they produce as evidence cannot prove much other than the existence of this Catholic network which, while suspicious, is not illegal: "but I had Committed no Crime, and therefore nothing but Innocence could be found in my Letters."²²

Although Cellier was acquitted of the treason charges, ultimately the state did hold her criminally accountable for her writing. Because of her claim in *Malice Defeated* that Catholic prisoners were tortured, she was convicted of libel and sentenced to the pillory, where she was brutally treated by the crowd. The "proof" offered by handwriting was also under debate in Cellier's libel trial. Cellier could deny her authorship of *Malice Defeated* because the manuscript in the prosecution's possession was not in her writing, which was "a scrambling ugly hand, far different from the Manuscript."²³ Witnesses for the prosecution undermined this line of defense by testifying that Cellier employed copyists to whom she dictated. Accounts of Cellier's libel trial thus highlight the double-bind of literacy for women. Cellier's authorship of the book is questioned – priests must have ghost-written it – yet her accountability for the book is never in doubt.²⁴ Cellier is acknowledged as an author only to the extent that it will justify her prosecution and conviction.

Accounts of both Cellier's treason and libel trials suggest that she was acutely aware of the dangerous connection between literacy and evidence. Although her abilities to read and write were central to her political activities – she fostered a correspondence network and she was a polemicist – she left scant evidence. Not only did she use fire and dictation to limit the documents that could be connected to her through her "own writing," but she also employed, as her courier to and from Newgate, a servant who could not later testify to the letters' contents. As the servant explains: "I know not, for I cannot read written hand."²⁵ The court accepted the servant's demurral, which both curtailed the testimony she could offer and shielded her from implication. In this case, her status as a servant probably helped to lend credibility to her claim that she could not read script and that she had simply acted as an innocent, ignorant messenger.

In other instances, third parties to correspondence – that is, those who neither wrote nor received the letters in question – could be found guilty

simply for being "privy" to a letter's contents. Domestic tragedies, representations of recent, local crimes, betray a particular interest in this phenomenon. In *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), Anne Sanders is convicted as an accessory to her lover's murder of her husband on the assumption that she was "privie of" a letter from her lover to another conspirator.²⁶ Although Anne denies knowledge of the letter, the audience has seen her consent to both adultery and complicity in the murder. In *Arden of Feversham*, in contrast, the innocent Bradshaw is convicted for the murder of Arden, although he knew nothing about it; he simply carries a letter written by Master Greene to Alice Arden. When he asks Alice Arden to admit whether he was "privy" to the conspirators' intent, she replies wearily, "I dare swear thou knewest not the contents." In Holinshed's account of the case, he also claims that Bradshaw was "never made privy" to the conspirators' schemes; his conviction and execution "proceeded wholly by misunderstanding of the words contained in the letter which he brought from Greene."²⁷ Bradshaw's wrongful conviction, then, reveals the limits of what a document's "hard" evidence can prove. It also points to the risks of literacy. In dramatic and non-dramatic representations of both these famous cases, the defendant's literacy qualifies, even defeats, his or her claim to innocence. If Anne Sanders and Bradshaw had not been able to read, they could not have been convicted and executed.

Contests regarding the veracity, meaning, and ownership of written evidence also occurred outside of the courtroom. In the domestic settings (crowded with spectators) in which most possession cases were observed and diagnosed, exorcised, cured, or exposed as frauds, victims of demonic possession violently fought to control documentation of their condition. When a possessed young woman, Joyce Dovey, saw a man who wished to record his observations of her

with the paper in his hand, shee fell upon him very violently, and would have taken the paper from him, but he contended with her very toughly, and after a long conflict, gave her the repulse, who having kept the paper without tearing, onely a little corner, but not a word torne off, he voluntarily threw it downe on the ground, saying, Devill thou hast not power to take it up, and so took it up himselfe and departed.²⁸

In another case, the possessed, while in a fit, gestures that she wishes to write. When she is given paper and a pen, she spells out the names of those whom she accuses in abbreviated form;

whilst she was writing these words, she was blowne up ready to burst, shrinking with her head, as if she feared blowes: then would she be drawne, as in convul-

sion fits, till she got that writing from them that had it, and either burne it in the fire, or chew it in her mouth, till it could not be discerned. Let any one snatch the paper from her and hide it as private as he could, she would have gone to the party and place, still in torment till she got it, and either burne it, or chewe it, that none could discern one word she had wrote, then immediately she would have ease.²⁹

Beliefs about demonic possession, as recorded in these pamphlets and as disseminated across oral and print cultures in early modern England, assume that the devil (or some other evil spirit) manifests his presence through the possessed's exaggerated *bodily* symptoms and behaviors, but prohibits the *written* documentation of possession. Working through the possessed, the devil seeks out and destroys any such textual evidence, whether an observer or the victim herself produces it. In presenting even the devil as fearing and suppressing documents, such pamphlets demonstrate the extraordinary, inculpatory power attributed to the written word.

Given that women's writing might testify against them, and that legal and popular representations of criminal women associate their reading and writing skills with their disorderly, illegal, or violent acts, I do not intend to "celebrate" these women's acquisition and deployment of literacy. After all, those who determined literacy's moral and social value were largely those who prided themselves on their own alphabetic accomplishments.³⁰ Furthermore, early modern persons did not necessarily need "alphabetic literacy" to achieve professional or social success because written and oral, literate and illiterate cultures interacted and overlapped.³¹ Indeed, representations of crime frequently testify to the startling array of literacies, competencies, and knowledges on which women might draw.

As with so many other cultural changes, the wider distribution of printing and literacy was a mixed blessing for women (and for non-elite men). On the one hand, the most fully literate persons also attained the freest access to privileges and opportunities from which they would otherwise have been excluded. Attending to the particulars of early modern English social order, Cressy demonstrates "how well the ranking based on literacy agreed with the ordering by status and esteem, and also the degree to which literacy was commensurate with alternative rankings by occupation and wealth."³² More generally, Pierre Bourdieu argues that "speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence."³³ Literacy (to whatever degree) provided entrance

into more privileged social domains, and escape from the increasingly stigmatized status of the "illiterate." In literacy, women and lower-class men attained not only a powerful tool for economic advancement, social mobility, and self-assertion, but also "a double-edged sword" which they might wield for "'unlicensed' ends."³⁴ On the other hand, the acquisition of literacy often meant the disciplining as much as the empowerment of the dominated, their induction into an unaccommodating system of social and linguistic distinction which did not operate in their favor and which could use the written word as yet another mechanism of control.³⁵

WITCHCRAFT BY THE BOOK: THE CASE OF ANNE BODENHAM

The events that ended in Anne Bodenham's execution for witchcraft began with a routine visit to a local cunning-woman. A maid, Anne Styles, visited Bodenham at her mistress' request to procure protection against the attempts her mistress, Mrs. Goddard, thought her stepdaughters were making to kill her. Ultimately, Bodenham got caught in the crossfire between mother and stepdaughters; the stepdaughters accused her of attempting to murder them via witchcraft. I have discussed elsewhere the complex, distressed relations between stepmother and stepchildren revealed by this case.³⁶ Here, I wish to explore Edmond Bower's emphasis on reading and writing, and the shifting valuations of women's literacy, in his account of the case in *Doctor Lamb Revived*.³⁷

As soon as Anne Styles approached her, "the Witch put on her Spectacles, and demanding seven shillings of the Maid which, she received, she opened three Books."³⁸ Bodenham puts on a lot more than her spectacles at this moment. She performs her ability to see what her client cannot: both the alphabetic literacy that enables her to comprehend the three books she opens and the occult vision on which cunning-persons depended, a vision into the future and beyond or outside of the natural world. Throughout her encounter with Styles, Bodenham combines these two kinds of vision. By "reading in a book," for instance, she causes apparitions to appear, then disappear (sig. B4); she also consults a "glass" or mirror. Simultaneously donning her glasses and demanding payment, Bodenham announces the market value and usefulness of her double vision. As supernaturally empowered spectator/reader and knowledgeable professional, she has both agency and authority.

In response to Mrs. Goddard's desire for "some Charm, or writing under her own hand, that should keep her from ill, and preserve her from danger, . . . the Witch took Pen Ink and Paper, and wrote some-

thing, and put some yellow powder therein." She advises Styles that her mistress "must never look in it" but should wear it in her bosom by day and place it under her head as she sleeps (sig. B.4v). Anne Bodenham's reliance on writing was not unique among cunning-women or so-called "white" witches, who often depended on written charms and incantations to procure positive effects, such as reversing bewitchments or offering protection.³⁹ In her testimony describing her first encounter with the witch, Anne Styles links Bodenham's literacy to knowledge, knowledge presented simultaneously as valuable and as criminal. In the context of Bodenham's prosecution, Styles testifies that Bodenham's occult knowledge is threatening, transgressive, potentially violent. Yet, from the perspective of a servant who cannot read or write herself, Styles also associates the cunning-woman's sought-after supernatural knowledge and marketable skills with her mastery of the alphabet — which, in itself, is as mysterious to the maid as anything that Anne Bodenham knows.

According to Styles' testimony, on which the prosecution depends, Bodenham exceeds the limits even of a cunning-woman's questionable uses of literacy. Bodenham convinces Styles to sign her name in a book, that is, to make a covenant with the devil. Since Styles cannot write, Bodenham guides the pen dipped into Styles' blood. Styles confesses that "this hand of mine write my name in the Devils book, this finger of mine was pricked, here is yet the hole that was made, and with my blood I wrote my own Damnation" (sig. D). In this confession, Styles gains credibility by claiming to have participated in demonic literacy; yet she also downplays her own complicity by transferring accountability to Bodenham, against whom she testifies.

According to published accounts of witchcraft, many accused women confessed to making such contracts with the devil.⁴⁰ Keith Thomas argues that a diabolical compact or covenant did not figure importantly in witchcraft trials until the seventeenth century: "No reference in a trial to an oral compact with the Devil is recorded before 1612; and not until the investigations of Matthew Hopkins, the professional witch-finder who was active in the late 1640s, was there sworn evidence testifying to a written covenant."⁴¹ Both the timing and the association with Hopkins suggest that the new interest in diabolical compacts corresponded to debates regarding evidence in witchcraft trials. In a climate of uncertainty, a written covenant promised irrefutable evidence of witchcraft. In such a case, the accused's participation in literacy — even if this is testified to (by herself or another) rather than documented — works to damn and incriminate her.

Although Bower's text presents Anne Styles as having signed the contract, she is not tried as a witch, nor is she even called one. Bodenham, playing the role of Mephistophilis, the demonic facilitator, rather than Faust, is the one who stands trial. Bodenham belongs neither in the familiar tradition of Faust, the learned, curious, questing male scholar, doomed yet admirable, nor in the counter-tradition that Phyllis Mack describes, in which women's occult knowledges and practices reinforce rather than transcend constructions of the feminine in terms of the permeable, fluid, submissive, and receptive body.⁴² Nor does Bodenham hold either of the two positions in relation to medical knowledge that Mary Ellen Lamb maps out: Bodenham's participation in a demonized "primarily female oral tradition" does not expose her to prosecution; but neither does her reliance "on a body of written knowledge compiled by male authors" protect her "from charges of witchcraft by validating male authorities."⁴³ Drawing on these various gender-inflected traditions, Anne Bodenham yet stands apart from them as a result of her persistent association with books.

When she describes her successful career as a cunning-woman, Bodenham begins with her studies under Dr. Lamb: ". . . she reading in some of his Books, with his help learnt her Art, by which she said she had gotten many a penny, and done hundreds of people good."⁴⁴ Through her study, Bodenham achieved material advantages: People "alwayes called her Mrs. *Boddenham*" (sig. E.2), and paid her for her skills. Bodenham's account of how she attained her valuable skills simultaneously demystifies and diabolizes this process: "If those that have a desire to it, doe read in books, and when they come to read further then they can understand, then the Devil will appear to them, and shew them what they would know; and they doing what he would have them, they may learn to doe what they desired to do, and he would teach them" (sig. E.4v). Bodenham's confession, which Bower presents as shocking and incriminating, might also be read as inspirational and instructive. She teaches *her* readers to push beyond the obstacles raised by their own ignorance. Depending on the devil as tutor, they "may learn to doe what they desired to do"; they may improve their lives materially, as she did.

Bodenham attributes concrete use-value to her books, and the occult power to which they give her access also translates into cultural capital, which enables her to earn a living and achieve respect in her community. These books accrue further value in *Doctor Lamb Revived* because Edmond Bower himself expresses so much interest in them and goes to such lengths to get hold of them. In response to his interest, Bodenham

offers to let him have her books "if [he] would keep them secret" and "accept of them" (sig. E_v). Bodenham assumes that he wants the books not as evidence against her but as conduits of marketable knowledge. According to Bower, she confides to others that he is himself a witch who will "doe many notable things with her books" (sig. E₂). Her sense of the books' significance confirmed by Bower's acquisitive interest, Bodenham directs her husband to take Bower to their house and "to deliver [him] her Books." Although Bower plans to present the books to the Assize judge as evidence against Bodenham, the books disappoint him because "they were nothing concerning her art" (sig. E_v). He wants the "red book," in which the names are signed in blood (in large part because it would incriminate all the supposed signers). Bodenham promises it to him, teasing him with shifting explanations for its elusiveness – it is hidden where even her husband cannot find it; if he grants her "liberty to goe home" (sig. E_v), she will teach him a charm from the book which will enable him to discover a fortune buried in the garden at Wilton – but she never produces it. In addition to withholding the "red book," Bodenham decides not to bequeath any of her other books to Bower after all.

Despite the fact that Bodenham is in prison under sentence of death throughout these negotiations, that Bower has many, if not all, of Bodenham's books in his possession, and that Bower marshals her words and her books as evidence against her, Bodenham clings to the belief that her books belong to her and that she can bequeath them as she chooses. Bower explains Bodenham's decision to leave the books to a grocer who also visits her this way: "because I did prosecute her, and informed the Judge what she told me, she would not teach me any thing; but because (as she said) Mr. Langley seemed to be a good honest man, she would let him have her books, and teach him her Art" (sigs. E_{4v}–F). Bodenham assumes that even her prurient, harassingly godly visitors will want her books. She also assumes that even as a married woman and a convicted witch she has the right to make a will and distribute her property as she chooses: "And she said, she had made her Will, and given Legacies to many of her friends" (sig. F_v). Bower warns her that "her Husband might choose whether he would let them have" these legacies. In response, Bodenham threatens: "If he doe not, the Devill shall never let him be quiet" (sig. F_v). Having denied throughout any alliance with the devil, Bodenham invokes him at last to help her outwit the legal and social restrictions on a married woman's autonomy; she acts like a witch when reminded that she is a wife.

In addition to scrambling to find someone who will accept and appreciate her books, Bodenham worries over the future of the other source of her expertise as a cunning-woman, her garden. Just as other sorcerers might destroy their books, Prospero by "sinking" and Dr. Faustus by burning, Bodenham directs "that the Women that shrowded her should goe into her Garden, and gather up all her herbs, spoyl all her flowers, and tear up the roots" (sig. F_v). Even in the context of criminal prosecution and impending execution, even in a rather unsympathetic account in which her voice is, at best, mediated, Anne Bodenham is presented as exerting control over her death and over those things she valued in life: the sources of her knowledge and her livelihood, her herbs and her books.

While Anne Bodenham exerts an unusual degree of control over her dying, and especially over her books, she does not perform her literacy on the scaffold, as many convicts did, but rather, according to Bower, appears defiant, undignified, and drunk. Many condemned persons read Bible verses or their own confessions on the scaffold; they might even request that their hands be untied that they might unfold and hold their notes.⁴⁵ In contrast, Anne Bodenham makes no reference to the abilities that played such a crucial role in bringing her to the scaffold. Impious and disorderly, she attempts to "turn her self off" after the noose is on her neck – a shocking, if suicidal self-assertion, where penitent submission is expected – and refuses to forgive the hangman. Her last words are: "Forgive thee? A pox on thee, turn me off" (sig. F_{2v}). No longer wearing her spectacles, Bodenham dies making a spectacle of herself.

READING, WRITING, AND REPENTING

In *Doctor Lamb Revived*, Bower represents reading as exculpatory, as well as incriminating. Although he identifies Anne Bodenham's literacy with her criminality, he construes Anne Styles' inability to read as evidence of her low social class, ignorance, ungodliness, and vulnerability to temptation. Thus, either literacy or illiteracy can lead women to witchcraft. As part of her repentance, Anne Styles promises to learn to read: "I am not yet too old to learn, I will learn to read, sure, if God will be pleased that I shall, though I break my sleeping time to learn" (sig. F_{4v}). Other Protestant advisers on godly conduct such as John Dod and Robert Cleaver, similarly, promote literacy as "a great helpe in the course of this life and a treasure of much greater account then mony."⁴⁶ In depicting

literacy as an important aid to spiritual comfort, repentance, and salvation, Bower contributes to the stigmatization of illiteracy, which sometimes was associated with vagrancy, laziness, godlessness, and irresponsibility.

Bower depicts Bodenham's work as a reading teacher ambiguously. On the one hand, her teaching incriminates her as surely as her addictions to gossip and Popery, her storytelling, and her occult practices (sig. B). On the other hand, her teaching provides a respectable front behind which she conducted her more sinister work; Bower accuses her of "pretending to get her livelyhood by such an employment" (sig. B, emphasis mine). Finally, Bower obviously assumes that those who read his pamphlet will benefit. He even reveals that reading (or misreading) has shaped his own attitudes and practices: He remembers "a Story which I had before read in Mr. Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft*" about the efficacy of bringing accused and accuser into confrontation and imitates this method (sig. D2v).¹⁷

Other accounts of trials and executions dwell on the crucial role that literacy plays in convicts' repentance and proselytizing. For instance, mothers anticipating execution bequeath texts to the children who will survive them.¹⁸ At the end of the play *A Warning for Fair Women*, for instance, the condemned Anne Sanders leaves to each of her children, "a booke / Of holy meditations, *Bradfords* workes" (lines 2702-03). As depicted in *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants* (London, 1692), a pamphlet account of widow Mary Goodenough's murder of her illegitimate newborn, Goodenough laments that she was unable to see her living children before her death and must resort to writing to them. Goodenough depends on literacy despite the limits of her own writing and her children's reading ability, both of which require her to beg assistance. "I am now forced to take this way of Writing, and to beg the help of another Hand, my own Hand being as my Heart is, trembling; and my confused Head incapable of expressing what I desire to impart to, and impress upon you" (sig. Bv). A postscript enjoins the children:

Read this Paper, or get it Read to you by my Neighbour *Thomas Holt*, or Mrs. *Mary Rose*, or such others as will teach you to Understand and Improve, not to Contemn and Neglect it. Read it over, or a good Part of it every Lords Day; be not asham'd of my Dying Confessions or Advice; for they are the best Remains of your Dying Mother, the only Legacy she has to leave you, and if well Improv'd, they will indeed yield you a Goodly Heritage. (p. 14)

The painfully composed letter replaces the mother's body in all its sinfulness and criminality – guilty of fornication, bastardy, and infanticide, ignominiously executed on the public scaffold – as her "best Remains."

The author of *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants* blames Mary Goodenough's neighbors for their failure to offer the struggling mother the charity that might have prevented her desperate crime. S/he suggests that the community can rectify their past errors by taking "care her Children learn to read, learn the Catechism; read to them and press upon them this their Mothers Last Will concerning them. Don't stick at a little charge or trouble to do them good" (sig. A3).¹⁹ This account of a criminal woman depicts documents as an appropriate legacy from mother to child, and reading as a means by which children can become godly, law-abiding subjects.

Rather than urging books on others, a convict might herself refuse to read. A literate Catholic prisoner, for instance, might refuse to read the Bible, thereby defying the Protestant emphasis on Scripture and the authority of a combined church and state. When in custody, Margaret Vincent, a convert to Catholicism who killed her children rather than raise them as Protestants, "proved her selfe to be an obstinate Papist, for there was found about her necke a Crucifixe, with other reliques which she then wore about her: that by the Justice was commanded to be taken away, and an English bible to be delivered her to read, the which she with great stubbornesse threw from her, not willing as once to look there-uppon, nor to heare any divine comforts, delivered thereout for the succour of her Soule" (sig. B). She "refused to looke upon any protestant booke, as Bible, Meditation, Prayer booke and such like, affirming them to be eronious, and dangerous for any Romish Catholique to looke in" (sig. Bv).²⁰ The account of Margaret Vincent's crime and punishment, *A Pitiless Mother* (1616), like *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants*, depicts reading as the means by which murderous mothers might repent, prepare for death, and offer instruction to their surviving children. In laboriously dictating a letter, and urging her children to learn to read, Mary Goodenough enacts her penitence. Conversely, by refusing to read, Margaret Vincent reveals herself to be a hardened sinner. Although both texts depict criminal women's reading as potentially instructive and reforming, they also reveal literacy as a site of struggles with profound consequences for body and soul.

Margaret Vincent's preference for "reliques" over books seems to confirm the rarely-questioned assumption that Catholic religious practice centered on objects, images, and rituals, whereas Protestantism centered on the Word and therefore promoted wider-spread literacy. Based on this assumption, historians still claim that those women who remained Catholic did so because Catholicism was more congenial to

their illiteracy.⁵¹ While this may have been partially true, it does not take into account learned converts. More important, the contrast between Catholic gentlewoman Margaret Vincent's refusal rather than inability to read and Protestant Mary Goodenough's humble, earnest, but unskilled attempts to write a letter complicates any simple association of Catholicism with illiteracy and Protestantism with literacy. Many of the women whose literacy I have discussed here either identified themselves as Catholic or were accused of "papistrie." Perhaps Catholic women were not less likely to be able to read and/or write, but more likely to recognize that they might be incriminated by demonstrating their skills.

The first step in employing gender as a category of analysis with reference to the history of literacy involves challenging narrow, exclusive definitions of literacy, and asking which women could read or write under which conditions rather than assuming that few could at all. As scholars have reconsidered the research protocols that long led them to overlook or ignore evidence of women's reading and writing, they have uncovered that evidence in abundance. Much work remains to be done in the important project of uncovering and assessing evidence of women's roles as producers and consumers of the written word. While the discourses of crime provide further documentation of early modern Englishwomen's literacy, these discourses also open up to question what kind of difference women's literacy made to them or should make in scholars' understanding of them.

Histories of early modern literacy generally chart the progressive spread of reading and writing skills outward from an elite center. In accord with this expansion of literacy, it is widely assumed that by the eighteenth century more women, across a wider range of social, economic, and geographical locations, would have been able to read and/or write than could have done so in the fourteenth century. Certainly, many more women write and publish in the eighteenth century than in the sixteenth. It is difficult to prove, however, that women's relationship to education and literacy steadily *improved*. For instance, while the Reformation promoted literacy, even for women, it abolished an institution that had previously fostered women's education: the convent.⁵² Even if the percentage of women who could read and/or write increased in the course of the early modern period, more is not inevitably better.

Women's increased access to literacy did not necessarily improve their status or expand their rights, although it may have helped lay the groundwork for changes in both these arenas in subsequent centuries. In

published accounts of crime and punishment, literacy accrues value when it facilitates legal and spiritual surveillance and discipline: when it teaches a criminal woman's children *not* to follow her example; when it helps an implicated maid dissociate herself from witchcraft and become more godly; when it fosters a convict's sense of her own humility, inadequacy, and sinfulness; when it provides evidence.⁵³ Such texts criminalize women's literacy, however, when that literacy enables women to plan and enact crimes, to attain and employ occult knowledge, to outwit and defy legal and religious authority.

In relation to literacy, most early modern women could not win. While we might expect to find literacy criminalized in texts about crimes, scholars have argued that women's reading was policed and their writing prohibited or marked as transgressive even when they were not engaged in other criminal activities.⁵⁴ In the extreme case of criminal women, we can see clearly a dual evaluation of literacy – as virtuous when it aided social control and as criminal when it aided self-determination – that must have frustrated and constrained even those women whose literacy did not lead them into print, let alone to the scaffold or pillory. Divided from their own accomplishments and thus against themselves, literate women at every social level encountered in the written word not just a tool for self-expression and self-assertion, not just access to knowledge and work, but also a means to incriminate and expose themselves.

The double-bind to which literacy subjected women corresponds to the double-bind of women's competence more generally. Early modern English culture often required that women in extraordinary circumstances assume responsibility for themselves: most notably, a woman accused of treason had to conduct her own defense; less dramatically, widows or women whose husbands were absent were expected to manage their estates, run households, and defend their rights by bringing suit when necessary. The exceptional circumstances of the civil war, for instance, compelled many royalist women to petition, sue, and strategize to protect or reclaim their property. While early modern culture assumed, even depended on, women's competence, it criminalized particularly visible enactments of that competence as scandalous or sinister.

Although women's literacy did not necessarily alter their status or rights, it did provide an avenue to agency, however criminalized, for some women. Anne Bodenham's literacy enables her not only to find a profession and advance her social status, but to contest the accusations against her, defy the conventions governing accused and convicted

persons, and control the distribution of her possessions. Elizabeth Cellier's literacy enables her to defend herself successfully against treason charges and to publish her own account of the proceedings. But literacy was not a necessary condition for achieving agency, nor was it without costs. Literacy was not even an absolutely necessary material condition for authorship; the first autobiography in English was "written" – in this case, dictated – by a woman who could neither read nor write, Margery Kempe.⁵⁵

As subjects for feminist analysis, literate early modern women do have one distinct advantage: they leave more evidence. If subjects are, in part, discursively constituted – constructed and recognized when they speak and when that speech is registered and regulated – then historians of early modern subjectivity, like the early modern legal system, depend on voluble (and therefore visible) subjects and the written evidence they leave.⁵⁶ Scholars can only study early modern women's speech, and the processes of subject-formation of which it was so crucial a part, in those cases in which we have *records*.⁵⁷ Women did not have to keep such records themselves; the voices of many women, from mystic Margery Kempe to convicted criminals, survive to us through the transcriptions and mediations of male scribes, often employed by church or state. But more, and more reliable, evidence survives regarding the subjectivities of women who kept the records themselves. The ground of my arguments here – discourses of crime and punishment in which "evidence" serves to convict women – tempers my glee in discovering literate women's self-documentation. The evidence I seek is often the incriminating evidence early modern women wisely and busily burned.

I suspect that, like the learned elite of early modern England, I am more likely to recognize literate women as subjects. I most readily attend to those skills on which I depend professionally: the abilities to speak persuasively, to read, interpret, and write. While my focus on those arenas of competence and agency with which I am most familiar may be understandable, such a focus could lead me to overemphasize literacy at the expense of other competencies. My disciplinary privileging of literacy could also foster the assumption that women's literacy inevitably facilitated their self-expression and self-determination. Such assumptions – that literacy was a much more valuable skill than others, or that it offered a reliable avenue to self-assertion – are as restrictive and misleading as the assumption that women could not read or write. To the extent that literacy was a factor in the discursive constitution of gendered, class-inflected subjects to whom voice, consciousness, and agency were attrib-

uted, it operated to subordinate as well as to empower the subjects it helped to construct, thus providing a cautionary reminder that, then as now, the process of subject-formation for women and men was a process of disciplining as much as, or more than, a process of liberation and affirmation.

NOTES

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- 1 Edmond Bower, *Doctor Lamb Revived, or, Witchcraft Condemn'd in Anne Bodenham, a Servant of His . . . By Edmond Bower an eye and ear Witness of her Examination and Confession* (London, 1653), sig. E.v.
- 2 *A Most Certain, Strange, and True Discovery of a Witch* (London, 1643), rpt. in *Reprints of English Books, 1475–1700*, J. A. Foster, ed. (Ingram, PA, np. 1939), p. 2.
- 3 John Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft* (London, 1648), sig. B2.
- 4 David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 145, 128–29. At some points, Cressy seems to hold women accountable for their low levels of literacy: "The truth is that most mothers were useless for the transmission of literacy because most of them were themselves unable to write. Some could read who could not write, but even these could hardly have taken their children much beyond the ABC. Close to ninety percent of the women in seventeenth-century England could not even write their names, so few of them could have made satisfactory teachers" (Cressy, p. 41).
- 5 Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, Gerd Baumann, ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 97–131, esp. p. 99.
- 6 On the dissociation of these two skills, see also Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, chapter 2; and Margaret Spufford, "First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers," *Social History* 4.3 (1979): 407–34, especially 414. This disparity between reading and writing skills obviously compromises signature collection as an index of reading ability. Cressy's research methods, for instance, underestimate all those who could read print but not sign their names (Spufford, "First Steps in Literacy," 414). Furthermore, census-type documents such as the Protestation Oath of 1641–42 on which historians of literacy depend, underestimate women, who were not required

- to take such oaths, and recusants (such as Elizabeth Cellier), whom the oaths were designed to root out. See R. S. Schofield, "The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England," in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Jack Goody, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 310-25, esp. pp. 319-21.
- 7 N. Patridge, *Blood for Blood, or, Justice Executed for Innocent Blood-Shed* (London, 1670), pp. 20, 37.
 - 8 Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 26.
 - 9 Roger Chartier, "Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France," in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Steven L. Kaplan, ed. (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), pp. 229-53.
 - 10 Renaissance drama is full of contests between patriarchs and subordinates regarding the possession of documents: Gloucester grabs Edmund's letter in *King Lear*; York grabs Aumerle's letter in *Richard II*; Arden grabs Michael's letter in *Arden of Faversham*. In each case, the domestic superior (father or master) assumes an inferior has no right to a privately conducted correspondence. In each case, the letter is, in fact, crucial to the subordinates' conspiracy against his father, master, or king's interests. Such texts suggest that, in the family, patriarchal authority depends on monopoly of the written word.
 - 11 Margaret W. Ferguson, "A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers," in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 93-116, esp. p. 115.
 - 12 J. H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 3rd edn (London: Butterworths, 1990), pp. 586-89; J. S. Cockburn, "Trial By the Book?: Fact and Theory in the Criminal Process 1558-1625," in *Legal Records and the Historian*, J. H. Baker, ed. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), pp. 60-79, esp. pp. 76-79; Cynthia B. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 48, 143, 175; and J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London: Longman, 1984), pp. 67, 147.
 - 13 Robert Yarrington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (London, 1601, rpt. in *A Collection of Old English Plays*, A. H. Bullen, ed., 4 vols. (London: Wyman & Sons, 1885), vol. iv, iv.ix, p. 86
 - 14 Almost half of convicted female felons pleaded the belly, and a large percentage of those who did so were successful and may ultimately have secured pardons. J. S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records: Home Circuit Indictments. Introduction* (London: Her Majesty's Stationers Office, 1985), pp. 121-23; and James C. Oldham, "On Pleading the Belly: A History of the Jury of Matrons," *Criminal Justice History* 6 (1985): 1-64, especially 19-20, 32.
 - 15 William Leigh, *Great Britains Great Deliverance* (London, 1606), sig. C2v.
 - 16 *Mr. Tho. Dangersfelds [sic] Particular Narrative, of the Late Popish Design to Charge*

- those of the Presbyterian Party with a Pretended Conspiracy against His Majesties Person, and Government* (London, 1679), sigs. B2v, D.
- 17 Dangerfield had been convicted of theft, but had received benefit of clergy: "He said he was a Clark, and desir'd the benefit of the Book, which was granted; and he read, and was (according to Law) *Burnt in the Hand*" (Cellier, *Malice Defeated: Or a Brief Relation of the Accusation and Deliverance of Elizabeth Cellier* [London, 1680], sigs. K2-K2v). He had also been convicted of other offenses. Although he had been pardoned so that he could inform and testify against Cellier (among others), Cellier proved that the King's pardon did not cover all of his offenses, so he was not qualified as a "good witness" in a treason trial. Her acquittal results directly from her success in blocking Dangerfield's testimony.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, sig. E2.
 - 19 *Mr. Tho. Dangersfelds Particular Narrative*, sig. Q.
 - 20 John H. Langbein, "The Criminal Trial before the Lawyers," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 45.2 (1978): 263-316, especially 309; *The Tryall of Richard Langhorn* (London, 1679), pp. 18-19. According to Langbein, Fitzharris was required to give his notes to his wife.
 - 21 Cellier, *Malice Defeated*, sig. G. *This is a Short Relation of Some of the Cruel Sufferings (For the Truths Sake) of Katharine Evans & Sarah Chevers, In the Inquisition in the Isle of Malta* (London, 1662) similarly depicts female prisoners' strategies to secure writing materials, and to smuggle their own writings out of the prison and into circulation. Conflicts over women's possession of books and writing materials might occur at home as well as in prison. Peter Clark quotes from a lawsuit describing a man who assaulted his wife "when she had been reading and leaving her book in some place . . . he would catch the book out of her hands and tear it in pieces or otherwise fling it away." "The Ownership of Books in England, 1560-1640: The Example of Some Kentish Townsfolk," in *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education*, Lawrence Stone, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 95-111, passage quoted on p. 97.
 - 22 Cellier, *Malice Defeated*, sig. F.
 - 23 *The Tryal of Elizabeth Cellier* (London, 1680), p. 3.
 - 24 *The Tryal and Sentence of Elizabeth Cellier; For Writing, Printing, and Publishing, A Scandalous Libel, Called Malice Defeated* (London, 1680), p. 30.
 - 25 Cellier, *Malice Defeated*, sigs. E2, L.
 - 26 *A Warning For Fair Women* (1599), Charles Dale Cannon, ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), line 2332. See also Arthur Golding's narrative of Sanders' crime and punishment in *A Briefe Discourse* (1573, rpt. 1577), which Cannon reprints.
 - 27 *Arden of Faversham* (1592), Martin White, ed. (London: Ernest Benn, 1982), scene 13, lines 2-9. The quote from Holinshed's chronicle of the case appears on p. 111 of White's edition.
 - 28 James Dalton, *A Strange and True Relation of a Young Woman Possesst with the Devil* (London, 1647), rpt. in *Reprints of English Books*, Foster, ed., pp. 5-6.

- 29 Mary Moore, *Wonderfull News from the North. Or, a True Relation of the Sad and Grievous Torments, Inflicted upon the Bodies of Three Children of Mr. George Muschamp, late of the County of Northumberland, by Witchcraft* (London, 1650), sig. B3.
- 30 Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, p. 1; Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy," pp. 116–17.
- 31 Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 11. On the interconnections between oral and written cultures, see: Roger Chartier, "Texts, Printing, Readings," in *The New Cultural History*, Lynn Hunt, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 154–75, esp. pp. 169–70; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, chapter 1; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), chapter 7; Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy*, chapter 5; Thomas Laqueur, "The Cultural Origins of Popular Literacy in England 1500–1850," *Oxford Review of Education* 2.3 (1976): 255–75, esp. 267–78; Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy," p. 98; and D. R. Woolf, "The 'Common Voice': History, Folklore and Oral Tradition in Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 120 (August 1988): 26–52.
- 32 Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, p. 118.
- 33 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, John B. Thompson, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 55; see also p. 54; Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 2. Similarly, Richard Hoggart argues that literacy is useful not only to those who acquire it, but to the dominant classes and institutions that seek to control them (*The Uses of Literacy: Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture* [Fair Lawn, NJ: Essential Books, 1957]); Natalie Davis argues that if printing could open up new avenues to knowledge, it could also "make possible the establishment of new kinds of control on popular thought" (*Society and Culture*, pp. 224–25); and David Levine challenges historians who assume that prudence, morality, and intelligence belong only to the literate ("Illiteracy and Family Life During the First Industrial Revolution," *Journal of Social History* 14.1 [1980]: 25–41).
- 34 Ferguson, "A Room Not Their Own," p. 115. Cressy also argues that literacy was "a double-edged tool": "If reading could bring enrichment and advantage it could also imperil the soul, damage the mind and subvert the moral bases of society" (Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, p. 8).
- 35 Lawrence Stone argues that increased access to education and literacy contributed to the Revolution of the 1640s, and that contemporaries' perception of a link between literacy and radicalism contributed to greater ambivalence about a literate populace by the end of the century. "The Educational Revolution in England, 1560–1640," *Past and Present* 28 (July 1964): 41–80, esp. 73–80.
- 36 *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), chapter 5.

- 37 As a visitor to Anne Bodenham, Edmond Bower was motivated by curiosity and officiousness rather than by any official role, legal or spiritual, in the proceedings. When he zealously collects evidence and badgers the accused – to the point that, on the day of her execution, the minister attending to her objects – he works on his own initiative and in his own interests.
- 38 Bower, *Doctor Lamb Revived*, sig. Bv. Subsequent citations will refer to this text, cited in full above, and will appear parenthetically.
- 39 In *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), Keith Thomas explains that written charms might even be worn by illiterate people (pp. 182–83). See also Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 68.
- 40 See, for instance, *The Witches of Huntingdon, Their Examinations and Confessions* (London, 1646), which describes how Elizabeth Weed signs a Faust-like covenant with her own blood.
- 41 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 444. On the legal debates regarding admissible proofs of witchcraft, see Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), chapter 6.
- 42 Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 48, see also pp. 75–77.
- 43 Mary Ellen Lamb, "Women Readers in Mary Wroth's *Urania*," in *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*, Naomi J. Miller and Gary Waller, eds. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 210–27, esp. p. 224.
- 44 On Bodenham's notorious mentor, Dr. Lambe, see the *Dictionary of National Biography* and *A Brief Description of the Notorious Life of John Lambe* (Amsterdam, 1628). Lambe was associated with the Duke of Buckingham. When a London crowd attacked him in 1628, they referred to him as "the duke's devil." Lambe's career seems to have inspired a play in the 1630s, *Dr. Lambe and the Witches*, no longer extant. Many years later, Bower still uses Bodenham's association with Lambe to discredit her and increase his pamphlet's sensational value and marketability.
- 45 See the account of Adam Sprackling's execution in *The Bloody Husband* (London, 1653); and the account of Giles Broadway's execution in *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials*, Thomas B. Howell, ed., 33 vols. (London: R. Bagshaw, 1809–26), vol. vi, columns 419–26.
- 46 John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Household Government* (London, 1612), sig. Q4v.
- 47 As a skeptic committed to questioning the existence, let alone prosecution, of witches, Scot did not seek to instruct and encourage witchfinders like Bower. However, in cataloguing and critiquing popular beliefs and practices, Scot also codified them.
- 48 As scholars such as Mary Beth Rose and Wendy Wall have argued, impend-

- ing death often licensed women to write, as it were from beyond the grave. Mary Beth Rose, "Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42.3 (1991): 291-314, especially 312; and Wendy Wall, "Isabella Whitney and the Female Legacy," *ELH* 58.1 (1991): 35-62.
- 49 *Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants* (London: 1692), sig. Bv, Postscript (p. 14), and sig. A 3.
- 50 *A Pitelesse Mother. That Most Unnaturally At One Time, Murthered Two of Her Own Children* (London, 1616). See also *An Account of the Seducing of Ann, the Daughter of Edward Ketchey, of Ludlow, Gent. to the Popish Religion* (London, 1700). Carol Karlsen and Jane Kamensky both discuss a similar phenomenon in relation to witchcraft in colonial New England. "Martha Godwin had no trouble reading Catholic or Quaker books, Cotton Mather explained, or books that argued that witches did not exist. But she could not get near the Bible, books that argued for the existence of witches, or Puritan catechisms for children without falling into what he described as 'hideous Convulsions'" (Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* [New York: Norton, 1987], p. 217). Also see Jane Kamensky, "Words, Witches, and Woman Trouble: Witchcraft, Disorderly Speech, and Gender Boundaries in Puritan New England," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 128.4 (October 1992): 286-307.
- 51 See, for instance, John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975), p. 158.
- 52 On Medieval women's literacy, see also: Rita Copeland, "Why Women Can't Read: Medieval Hermeneutics, Statutory Law, and the Lollard Heresy Trials," in *Representing Women: Law, Literature, and Feminism*, Susan Sage Heinzelman and Zipporah Batshaw Wiseman, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 253-86; Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 19-50, esp. p. 35; Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), chapters 9 and 10; Susan Schibanoff, "Taking the Gold Out of Egypt: The Art of Reading as a Woman," in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 83-106, esp. p. 100; and Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 50-52, 154-61, 214-17.
- 53 Writing often played a role in punishments, as well as crimes. For instance, Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London, 1613) recounts that, for her participation in witchcraft, Margaret Pearson was sentenced to stand in a pillory in the open markets at Clitheroe, Paddiham, Whalley, and Lancaster, on four market days, "with a paper upon [her] head, in great Letters, declaring [her] offence" (sig. U1v). Such punishments obviously assumed that, by transforming the convict into a billboard, the "paper" would simultaneously shame her and edify spectators.
- 54 Even elite women's literacy was policed; they were not free to read whatever they chose. As Mary Ellen Lamb argues, "Renaissance educators represented the chastity of women readers as highly contingent upon the nature of their reading, which was strictly circumscribed to exclude any works, especially chivalric narratives or books of love, that did not advance a woman's spiritual state" (*Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990], chapter 1, esp. p. 9). See also Lamb, "Women Readers in Mary Wroth's *Urania*," pp. 212-14; Caroline Lucas, *Writing for Women: The Example of Woman As Reader in Elizabethan Romance* (Milton Keynes, PA: Open University Press, 1989), esp. chapter 1; and Diane Willen, "Women and Religion in Early Modern England," in *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Public and Private Worlds*, Sherrin Marshall, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 140-65, esp. pp. 144-46. It was not just that there were good and bad texts and hence good and bad readers. A reader might also read the "right" things in the "wrong" way. See Roger Chartier, "Culture as Appropriation," pp. 229-53; and Davis, *Society and Culture*, pp. 191-92, 225-26.
- 55 Women could also outwit literacy as a condition of authorship or readership by dictating a confession and assuring its publication and distribution; or by having others read aloud to them. See my "'Gentlemen, I Have One Thing More to Say': Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680," *Modern Philology* 92.2 (1994): 157-78.
- 56 My conception of subjectivity has also been informed by Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127-86; Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16.1 (1990): 115-50, esp. 115, 191; Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991): 773-97; and Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
- 57 Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity*, p. 69.