

Writing Among the 'Middling Sort'

Victoria E. Burke
University of Ottawa
vburke@uottawa.ca

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1. In early seventeenth-century Coventry Ann Bowyer, the daughter of an urban craftsman, compiled a commonplace book. She signed her name three times in a hand which matches the main hand in the manuscript. This manuscript (Bodleian MS Ashmole 51) is one of very few clues which give us an insight into the life of this young woman, and it is a remarkable window into her contacts with other people, her reading material, and what effect this reading had on her. The only other extant autograph document is an address on a letter to her son, written more than twenty years later. [1] Her taste runs to sententious rhyming couplets and love poetry, but her manuscript records also handwriting exercises, instructions for limning, and the preservation of a local corpse for 77 years. How typical her interests and activities were of the middling classes it is difficult to say; nonetheless her manuscript gives us a picture of how one particular woman interacted with her reading within the context of a manuscript culture. This document offers a valuable piece of evidence for those interested in the history of manuscript transmission of texts, but also in the history of reading more generally. It offers an important site for helping to reconstruct the practice of reading in the early years of the seventeenth century.
2. Recent work on the history of reading forms a distinct trend: the shift has moved from trying to establish what people read to how they read. Historians and other scholars involved in this interdisciplinary exercise tend to focus less on how books were produced and distributed, and more on the way in which they were used -- the actual experience of readers. [2] This raises problems, since we are trying to understand an ephemeral experience, which by its very nature does not leave traces of its actions. As James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor put it, "How are we to make the move from statistics for manuscript or book production to a knowledge of the kinds of people reading those texts, the forms their reading took, and the meanings they ascribed to them?" [3] Roger Chartier has started to answer those questions by arguing for establishing a history of modes of reading, which must outline the specific circumstances which distinguish groups of readers; his approach joins textual criticism, bibliography, and cultural history. [4]
3. David Cressy has demonstrated that literacy rates of women lagged significantly behind those of men. If we take Cressy's figures as accurate (10% female literacy by 1640), [5] then the number of women who could have compiled commonplace books like Bowyer is necessarily tiny. Other historians have suggested higher rates for female literacy, however (J. Paul Hunter estimates 15-20% female literacy in 1600, and 30% in 1675), and most agree that the use of signatures as a measure of literacy does not reflect the fact that in early modern society many more people could read than could write since the two skills were taught separately, often a year or two apart at petty schools. [6] Frances Dolan has been particularly resourceful in her work on women's literacy, discussing the role women's literacy played in the processes of crime and punishment. She accuses Cressy's definition of literacy of being too narrow, and of underestimating the literacy rates of women and labouring men -- Dolan argues for altering definitions of literacy instead of seeing a simple distinction between literate and non-literate. [7] Keith Thomas points out that literacy was not a single-step process: in the hierarchy of literacy, reading the printed word came first (which was usually Gothic type, called 'black letter,' which was easier to read than roman type), then reading and writing written script, and finally the acquisition of Latin. [8] Chartier argues that not all readers read texts in the same way, comparing the unskilled reader who must read aloud to understand the text with a more advanced reader; he also points out that each community of readers has its own opinion about legitimate uses of books and their interpretations. Louise Schleiner's investigation of the phenomenon of female servants reading aloud to their ladies in domestic settings highlights another of Chartier's concerns: the ways in which reading is embodied in gestures, spaces, and habits. [9]
4. The commonplace book -- a site for collections of sententious sayings, often arranged under headings for ease of reference -- is a particularly valuable piece of evidence in this quest to reconstruct the reading practices of an earlier period, and not one often cited as a source by historians. [10] Evidence for reading practices in our period can be found by examining catalogues of private libraries, inventories, and wills (which might contain bequests of books), but these records cannot tell us if the books owned by those people were read by them or whether a wide range of people might have had access to individuals' libraries. More useful are marginalia in printed texts, descriptions of books read in diaries, journals, and letters, printed works by writers which draw on or refer to other writers, visual representations of reading, and even court cases involving reading. The commonplace book can offer the ability to see exactly what individuals read, especially if the lines of verse or prose they have copied into their manuscripts come from identifiable printed texts or manuscript sources. [11]
5. But commonplace books indicate more than simply a person's reading material -- they demonstrate practices of

compilation. Compiling involves not only reading, but the appropriation of ideas and words by the compiler. Passages from authors can be seen as commodities, as cultural capital, which the compiler chooses to add to her repository of knowledge. This framework has particular relevance for women, who are not always considered as participants in literary culture. It is often possible to discern how compilers reacted to their reading material. They include passages from known sources, but omit others. The degree to which personal choice was involved in their selection has to be queried: sometimes a pointing finger in a text has highlighted a couplet as worthy of memory. The reader may not even have been using an edition of the text but instead a dictionary of quotations, in which pithy passages have been predigested for the reader and arranged under appropriate headings. She may have transcribed a known passage meticulously, or her alterations may indicate that she was copying from memory or adapting a quotation to fit a specific purpose. The ways in which women read, interacted with, and appropriated their reading material as they recorded it in their personal manuscripts is an important aspect of manuscript culture, and one which has not yet been studied in a systematic manner. Bowyer's manuscript provides an interesting case study for this type of inquiry, not least because she was a member of the middling classes of early seventeenth-century society.

6. Manuscripts compiled by people in the early seventeenth century took many different forms. At one end of the spectrum were the Latin commonplace books compiled by schoolboys, organized into 'topics' or 'places' under which sententious sayings were recorded. At the other end were the poetical miscellanies compiled for pleasure, which were filled with an apparently random collection of poetry. Bowyer's manuscript falls somewhere in between these two extremes, but since it is dominated by moralistic extracts from printed works it will be considered in the former category. Interest in manuscript commonplace books has recently increased, with the groundbreaking work of Peter Beal and Ann Moss, [12] but women's participation in this phenomenon needs to be addressed. Most women did not know Latin, and did not have access to a grammar school education -- how did they tap into this mode of organizing knowledge? Were women who compiled commonplace books "citizens of a very low order, readers and occasional transcribers, at best, of published compilations of morally edifying sentences and examples in translation"? [13] Perhaps they did not have access to commonplace book culture in its most pervasive form, but Bowyer's manuscript reveals how women could alter those quotations and phrases to make them personally relevant.
7. Bowyer's commonplace book is a 20-leaf quarto, with pages measuring 195 mm by 145 mm (cover: 206 by 162 mm), dating from the first decade of the seventeenth century, in which poems, proverbs, moral exempla, and historical information have been written on the first eight leaves. [14] The writer has inverted the notebook, treating the last page as a new first page, and has written handwriting exercises from folios 19v to 12v. Folios 8v to 12 are blank. It is bound with two other manuscripts in the extensive manuscript collections of her son, Elias Ashmole, Ashmole MS 49 (a copy of John Ward's poem of 1653 chronicling the Army's role in the events from 1642 till the "present Reuolution") and Ashmole MS 50 (a seventeenth-century transcript of a disputation between a horse, a goose, and a sheep ascribed to the fifteenth-century poet John Lydgate). The manuscripts were probably grouped together due to their uniform size since nothing obviously unites them in subject matter, and bound together after Elias Ashmole's time, possibly in the nineteenth century since the binding (marbled board quartered in brown calf) dates from that period. The majority of the entries in Bowyer's book are sententious in nature; there are no headings which might serve to organize the volume into a more typical commonplace book, but most of the entries could be reduced to a one-word theme. Bowyer's manuscript has the greatest affinity with a type of printed commonplace book which can be called a dictionary of quotations. Mary Thomas Crane has pointed out the popularity of aphoristic compilations in prose and verse which appeared in the later years of the sixteenth century: H.C.'s *The Forrest of Fancy* (1579), William Fister's *The Welspring of Wittie Conceits* (1584), Robert Greene's *The Royall Exchange* (1590), and *Politeuphuia Wits Common Wealth* (1597). These were aimed at an audience of urban merchants and the lower ranks of the gentry. [15]
8. Robert Allot's *Englands Parnassus: or the Choycest Flowers of our Moderne Poets*, published by John Bodenham in 1600, with its rhyming couplets or short passages under alphabetically arranged headings, is the dictionary of quotations which most resembles Bowyer's manuscript, though her couplets are more randomly arranged. Fourteen of the passages Bowyer has included in her manuscript appear also in *Englands Parnassus* (a total of 31 lines), raising the possibility that Bowyer worked from the dictionary of quotations rather than the individual authors' printed works. In two cases Bowyer seems to follow readings from *Englands Parnassus* rather than the authors' sources, [16] but in six cases Bowyer's variants match those in the original printed sources rather than *Englands Parnassus*. [17] The main evidence, however, that Bowyer did not transcribe her passages from this dictionary of quotations is that in several cases lines which do not appear in *Englands Parnassus* do appear in her manuscript. For example, she has transcribed four lines from Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597) from "The Lady Jane Grey, to the Lord Gilford Dudley" which also appear in *Englands Parnassus*, but she has also included the two lines which precede it in the Drayton edition and which do not appear in the dictionary of quotations. [18] Bowyer must have been working mainly, though not solely, from original printed sources.
9. While Bowyer may not have known *Englands Parnassus*, she evidently did know another collection of quotations, Timothe Kendall's *Flovvvers of Epigrammes, Ovt of Sundrie the Moste Singular Authours Selected, as well Auncient as Late Writers. Pleasant and Profitable to the Expert Readers of Quicke Capacitie* (1577). On the verso of the first folio, Bowyer has attributed the following two lines to Euripides in the margin: "Who hopes when he is old good frute to mow / Hee must in youth apply him selfe good sede to sow." A version of these lines appears as the last item in Kendall's *Flovvvers of Epigrammes*, headed, "A Saiyng of Adrastus, out of Euripides" (sig. O8v). It is interesting that Bowyer has attributed the lines to Euripides even though she has presumably obtained them from a source at several removes from the original. This method of attribution is similar to that employed elsewhere. "Henry howard Earle of Surrey" (f. 4) does

not refer to a poem by Surrey, but to a poem by Michael Drayton in which Surrey is the speaker ("Henry Howard, Earle of Surrey to the Lady Geraldine," one of Drayton's heroical epistles). "Sr Roger mortimer" (f. 1v) refers to words spoken by this character in "The Two Rogers, Surnamed Mortimer" in *The Mirror for Magistrates*.

10. Ann Bowyer was a daughter of Anthony Bowyer, a draper from Coventry, and his wife Bridget, the only daughter of Robert Fitch, a gentleman, of Ansley in Warwickshire. Bowyer had two brothers, John, the vicar of Napton in Warwickshire, and Anthony, who followed his father's trade in London. [19] She also had two sisters. An unidentified older sister married John Person, a physician in Coventry who died in 1633. A second sister, Bridget, first married John Moyse, citizen and grocer of London, who died in 1618, and by whom she had three sons, John, Erasmus, and Anthony. Bridget died in 1626 at the age of 48, after eight years of marriage to her second husband, James Pagit, Esquire, Controller of the Pipe in the Court of Exchequer. [20] Ann Bowyer must have married Simon Ashmole of Lichfield, a saddler, before the birth of their only child, Elias, on 23 May 1617. Most of the biographical information about Ann comes from her son's manuscripts. In the manuscript notes he intended to turn into an autobiography (Ashmole MS 1136), [21] Ashmole described his mother in the perhaps inflated terms of exemplary biography:

She was a discreet, sober, provident woman, and with great patience endured many afflictions. Her Parents had giuen her exceeding good Breeding, & she was excellent at her Needle; wch (my father being improvident) stood her in great stead. She was competently read in divinity, History and Poetry, and was continually instilling into my Eares, such Religious & Morall Precepts, as my younger years were capable off. Nor did she ever faile to correct my faults, alwaies adding sharpe reproofes & b..... good Lectures to boote. She was much esteemed off by persons of Noate with whome she was acquainted. ss..s..se, she lived in much frendp: among her Neighbours & left a good name behind her. In fine she was truly Religious and Vertuous (f. 19).

Ann's marriage to Simon Ashmole, apparently not a happy one, led her to find work in sewing or needlework. Simon, born in 1589, was brought up to be a saddler, but spent much of his life in the army, in Ireland and on the Continent. He died in 1634. [22] Ann may have had an acquaintance with her social superiors. But most interesting for our purposes is the discussion of her education and reading. If Ashmole's report is not wildly inflated, she was well-read and favoured sententious sayings in speech -- was this a practice she carried over from her younger days with her commonplace book?

11. A further Ashmolean manuscript hints at her character, this time through astrology. William Lilley cast the horoscope of Elias's parents in Ashmole MS 421. Under the third and fourth house (entitled "Relations. / short journys. / Parents") the question of why Elias did not have any siblings appears to be raised. The stars tell him that it was his father's fault. [23]

Lilley infers much about her personality from his calculations:

...So that from hence wee may conjecture that the mother might naturally bee of a Saturnin, sober temperature, not much inclinable to venerious Actions, a carefull prudent person, much assisted by education and wisdom, as is signified by the [symbol for sextile, i.e. 60%] of [symbol for Venus] vnto the [symbol for the moon] wch aspects qualifies the mother with sufficiency of naturall parts (f. 65v).

Simon Ashmole does not fare as well:

The fathers nativity from the sonns...the father, who beeing posited in an earthly signe, is signified to bee very melancholly, humerous, not of many words, or not much uxorious, the Latitude of h. manifests him viz: h or the father to bee of a strang temper, apt to bee angry or male Contented, passionate and violent....wherby I conjecture hee was subject vnto many misfortunes during his life -- As to Children, haueing the same significatr w.th the wife, and in a manner the same position, ther can bee no variation of that judgment, wch hath preceded...(f. 66).

Again we are told that the marriage was not a happy one. Bowyer died of the plague in Lichfield in 1646. She was a member of the middling classes: both her father and later her husband were urban craftsmen. Her manuscript is a testament to the type of education which could be enjoyed by upwardly mobile families who believed in some type of instruction for their female members. It is not clear whether Bowyer attended a school or had private tuition; it is conceivable that she had some handwriting and limning instruction from the evidence in her manuscript.

12. Though Bowyer is the main writer of the manuscript (she has signed her name at three points), at least two other hands appear. One hand, a less confident one, has copied out the following sentence which Bowyer (or possibly a writing master) has written at the top of a page: "Commendations vnto you my Louinge and good sister, these shalbe / to let you to vnderstand that I haue receiuid youre Letter" (f. 17v rev.). The hesitancy and awkwardness of the script and the many mistakes in transcription suggest that Bowyer may have shared her handwriting lessons, perhaps with a younger sibling, as is suggested by the subject matter of the sentence. This shakier hand has also written out a copy of the alphabet on the facing page in the manuscript (f. 18 rev.). Handwriting exercises like this resemble the layout of many printed writing manuals. Often a pithy saying or proverb has been written in the chosen script beside the alphabet. At

least two handwriting exercises in the commonplace book have been obtained from a printed copy-book, *A Booke Containing Divers Sortes of Hands* by John de Beau Chesne and John Baildon, the earliest writing book printed in English (1571). Proverbial phrases advising against quarreling with a mighty man or a rich man (f. 15 rev.) and concerning the ill effects of wine (f. 18v. rev), both appear under exercises for the italic or roman hand in Chesne and Baildon. Among the books owned by the Bowyer family, besides those literary works discussed below, must have been this practical manual. A third hand has copied out several items, including a monumental inscription which describes the miraculous preservation for 77 years of the body of Thomas Grey, Marquis of Dorset, exhumed in 1608, [24] and a detailed list of "Inckes .Or. Colours" (ff. 7v-8), which includes instructions for staining pictures on satin to use as hangings. The presence of these other hands in the manuscript suggests that Bowyer was being educated with her siblings.

13. Bowyer's compilation reflects contemporary tastes in poetry. Most of the writers or works which figure in her manuscript (Timothy Kendall, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Spenser, Chaucer, John Heywood, Drayton, Raleigh, and William Warner) form a part of Francis Meres's encomiastic catalogue in *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasvry Being the Second Part of Wits Common Wealth* of 1598. It may be surprising today to hear William Warner praised as "our English Homer," (his main work, *Albions England*, printed in 1589 and in ever expanding editions until 1612, is an account in rhyming couplets of the history of England from Noah to King James I) but it appears that he was valued by his contemporaries for his enriching of the English tongue, for his heroic poetry, and also for his aphoristic style. Meres writes, "As *Euripides* is the most sententious among the Greek Poets: so is *Warner* among our English Poets." [25] The third hand in the manuscript, possibly that of a brother or sister of Bowyer's, has transcribed Warner's lines which record King Ethelred the Unready's dying speech to his son Edmund Ironside during Danish attacks on England. [26] These events of 1016 do not, from the point of view of the transcriber, merit recording; it is the moralistic advice, devoid of its context, which the compiler notes: "Bee vertuous & asure thy selfe thou canst not then but thriue," begins the quotation (f. 6v).
14. Sometimes Bowyer has transcribed passages faithfully from known printed sources. She has meticulously copied morally edifying extracts from *The Man of Laws Tale*, which relays the beauty and virtue of the emperor's daughter Custance, and from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, which describes a wicked man who ought to be hanged (f. 4v). [27] As compared with the three editions of Chaucer's complete works which appeared during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (John Stow's edition of 1561, and Thomas Speght's of 1598 and 1602), variants occur only on the level of spelling. She may have used the 1602 edition, because three out of the total of five Chaucer passages she has chosen are highlighted in that edition with pointing hands in the margin (a well-established manner of drawing attention to something noteworthy on the printed or written page). [28] The 1561 and 1598 editions do not have these hands in the margin. Bowyer may have been influenced to transcribe the passages on the evil husband, knowledge coming from old books, and nature's power over a person's behaviour by these highlights, although the fact that two of the five are not set apart by a hand suggests that Bowyer made her own decisions about the moral worth of the poetry. One of the passages which does contain a pointing hand in the 1602 edition is the one mentioned above from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* about a wicked husband. The same extract has also been written into John Maxwell's commonplace book, with distinctive Scots spelling. A large portion of Maxwell's manuscript is proverbial, culled mainly from George Pettie's *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* (1576) and John Lyly's *Euphues* (1578). [29] This indicates that this Chaucer passage enjoyed some popularity and that Bowyer was not unique in extracting it. [30]
15. Bowyer has transcribed some passages from Drayton's works so carefully that it is possible to see which edition she used. Fifty-six lines of Drayton's poetry, all in the form of two- to six-line extracts, have been quoted in Bowyer's manuscript, more than any other poet by far (Chaucer is a distant second place with 21 lines). [31] Most of these lines (40) are from *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, first printed in 1597, and based on Ovid's *Heroides*. The *Epistles* consists of verse letters exchanged by lovers from English history, and were the most popular of Drayton's works. [32] An analysis of the variants between Bowyer's excerpts and the printed editions indicates that Bowyer was using either the 1602 or the 1603 edition (the 1603 edition included *The Barons Warres*, Drayton's epic poem chronicling events during the reigns of Edward II and Edward III). [33] She may have owned the single volume which contained both of these works. Most of the passages are severed from their context, and were evidently appreciated for their pithy encapsulation of topics like grief, virtue, hope, vain ambition, and jealousy, such as this example from "The Lady Jane Grey to the Lord Gilford Dudley": "from strongest woe we hardly language wrest / ye depth of grieffe with words are sounded least" (f. 5). Similarly, the eight couplets she has transcribed from *The Barons Warres* have been completely removed from their context, and evidently stand valued for the moral truths they express (e.g. "for when iust heauen to chastice vs is bent/ all things conuert to our due punishment" [f. 7]).
16. Passages from *The Mirror for Magistrates* and Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* have been altered so that the didactic message, taken out of context, is clearer. On folio 2 Bowyer has written: "O craftituning lawers that so your lawes expound / as that your diaption [diapason] of fauer still must sound." In contrast, the published version of *The Mirror for Magistrates* reads: "Alway to his profite where any wurde myght sounde / That way (all were it wrong) the sens we dyd expounnde." [34] The entire story (the first, told by the character Robert Tresilian, Chief Justice of England) deals with the corruption of judges and lawyers. Perhaps Bowyer added the subject of the sentence, lawyers, to her transcription because she chose to copy this passage out of context and wanted the subject of the criticism to be obvious. She similarly lambasts lawyers in another quotation from the same story by Robert Tresilian. Bowyer writes, "Lawers purses of quine [coin] or [are] sildom times found empti / Tearmes offises & ffees fall to them in great plenti" (f. 3v), while the printed version has a first person account of the same phenomenon (lines 48-49). A third time she changes the subject of an extract from this source. She writes, "Lat all learne by exampel past / That blod will haue

bloud ether first or last" (f. 3v). This contrasts with the closing words of the Duke of Gloucester's story which limits this advice to those in positions of power: "Take heed ye princes by examples past, / Blood wyll haue blood, eyther fyrst or last" (lines 202-203). Bowyer has chosen to make these lessons applicable to a wider audience than the original source suggests.

17. A similar phenomenon occurs with several proverbial couplets from Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*. On folio 3 Bowyer has quoted two passages from the May eclogue which read: "Good is no good, but if it be spend: / God giveth good for none other end" and "Sorrowe ne neede be hastened on: / For he will come without calling anone." [35] Bowyer has altered them both slightly, writing: "~~Goodes~~ goodes ar no goodes if the be not spend / god giues them vnto vs for no other eand" and "Sorow & care neuer hasten thou on / for that can com with out caling anone." Bowyer has addressed these passages to the reader, so that God gives good "vnto vs" and so that sorrow should never "hasten thou on." In contrast, Bowyer has altered a couplet from the Februarie eclogue so that it refers to a concept rather than an individual, substituting "age" for "thou": "As lowring wether lookes allwayes downe / so seemeth age like ~~lookes~~ ~~allwayes downe~~ / good friday to frowne" (f. 1v). [36] The change from "thou" to "age" is a significant one, altering the passage from a personal exchange between Cuddie and Thenot to a general comment on old age.
18. Another woman who altered Spenser's words in her writing was Elizabeth Grymeston. Her mother's advice book *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratives* (1604) was dedicated to her son. Printed after her death, this work contains poetry among its prose which is rarely attributed. Her epistle communicates her attitude to borrowing the words of other writers, mentioning the familiar trope of the bee whose honey is none the worse for having been gathered from many flowers, and adding "neither could I euer brooke to set down that haltingly in my broken stile, which I found better expressed by a graver author." As Ruth Hughey and Peter Hereford have discovered, all of the verses she quotes are derived from other sources. Interestingly, all of her quotations are extracts from *Englands Parnassus* except for passages from Robert Southwell and Richard Rowlands. Like Bowyer, she often alters what she transcribes. In the case of lines from Februarie of *The Shepheardes Calender*, she has changed the line "Youth is a bubble" to "Life is a bubble" to follow on from what she has been arguing in her prose. [37]
19. Besides the rhyming extracts of the more typical commonplace books, Bowyer's manuscript contains six lyric poems. After seven pages of pithy extracts from primarily printed sources, a poem on the whims of fortune, love, and time appears in the midst of extracts from Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (f. 5). It follows directly after the Duke of Suffolk's advice to Queen Margaret to let patience heal what fortune hurts. Seven of the ten couplets which follow the poem are taken from "The Lady Jane Grey to the Lord Gilford Dudley" and contemplate the themes of woe and ambition. Five of these couplets are written on the side of the page, evidently as an afterthought, as are two couplets on the preceding page, also from this epistle. The power of time and fortune is again lamented in one of these couplets, tying in with the concerns of the poem.
20. Bowyer appears to have valued poems for the pithy commonplaces contained within them. She has shaped a version of "The Lie," usually attributed to Raleigh, into a series of couplets, and has not separated it from the poems which follow it, as Max Thomas has pointed out. [38] In fact, her fondness for couplets goes against the logic of the content and rhyme scheme of the poem. What are typically six-line stanzas in printed versions and other manuscript versions are condensed into three-line stanzas by Bowyer, but she has left space between every two lines. Bowyer has omitted over half of most versions of the poem, and has compressed the final stanza into two lines, suggesting a space restriction. Though "The Lie" was first printed in 1608, transcripts of the poem appear in manuscripts from the 1590s, and Bowyer's variants indicate that she used a manuscript version of the poem. For example, the half line "that mannage the estate" is unique to the printed version, while at least eight manuscript versions have "that rules affaires of state," as Bowyer has written. [39] "The Lie" was widely circulated in manuscript and inspired significant textual variation on the part of transcribers. Bowyer evidently followed this spirit by omitting over eight stanzas of the poem and significantly altering others.
21. The poem is immediately followed by an excerpt on the happy life of a farmer, who avoids war, high position, and courts of law, which is in turn followed by the first 15 lines of Thomas Churchyard's epitaph on William Somerset, Earl of Worcester. Significantly, Bowyer has copied the introductory section, before Churchyard speaks specifically about Worcester, and she has altered her penultimate line to "& noble hartes" from Churchyard's "And noble Earles." She has turned an elegy on a specific person into a sonnet commenting on man's short life, which no amount of honours will prolong. Significantly as well, she has compressed what is 15 lines in the printed version into 11 lines, so that only the first four lines rhyme appropriately. The rest of the rhymes are embedded in the middle of lines whose meter becomes erratic. Again and again content triumphs over style. The elegy was printed in Churchyard's 1592 collection of poetry entitled *A Feast full of sad cheere*. The elegy on the Earl of Worcester, a prominent patron of the drama, is the first item in the collection, following the dedication to John Stanhope, of the Queen's Privy Chamber. In the portions not transcribed by Bowyer, Churchyard praises Worcester's "bounty." The remaining epitaphs in the volume which again commemorate powerful figures (e.g. Sir James Acroft, controller of Queen Elizabeth's household, and William Holstock, controller of the navy) are followed by poems which describe how none may despise the dead, and which lament Churchyard's lack of favour and appreciation at court. The closing item in the volume is a kind of epilogue, entitled "A Short Prayer":

From fiue extreames God me presarue,
Which common plagues all harts doe hate:

To beg, to borrow, steale, or starue,
Or not esteemd in publike state.

A final couplet on this page in the manuscript has been attributed to Thomas Churchyard in a Folger Shakespeare Library manuscript (MS X.d.177). Addressed to "your grace," it is a complaint about not getting any reward for his rhyme. What is the significance of this girl from the middling classes, someone who surely had no immediate access to courtly circles, including a potentially explosive anti-court poem by Raleigh, a bitter couplet by a patronage seeker, and an elegy which was printed in a volume which scorned a court which did not adequately reward the speaker? Bowyer seems to shy away from this dimension by omitting any explicitly political references in the elegy on Worcester. She copies the first third of the first poem of the Churchyard volume, a generalized statement about death coming to all people, a favourite theme for Bowyer, and leaves it at that. But the rest of this page critiques courtly privilege.

22. Poems on subsequent pages are often surrounded by extracts from printed books, though "Each thing must have a time" (f. 7v), versions of which appeared in Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557) and in *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578), stands alone on a page. In contrast, eight couplets from Drayton's "The Barons Warres" preface a version of Donne's "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" which Bowyer and a second hand have written together. This second hand, possibly a sibling, has taken over in the third stanza. Though many of the excerpts in Bowyer's commonplace book have been traced to printed books, she must have had access to some form of manuscript circulation of verse. Donne's poems were not printed until 1633 and variants in "The Lie" indicate that Bowyer was following a manuscript tradition. That these two poems reached a woman of the middling classes demonstrates that certain extremely popular poems could be very widely circulated indeed.
23. Finally, even more interesting from a feminist perspective are the lines Bowyer has degendered. A passage from *The Knight's Tale* asks why men complain about God or fortune "That yeueth hem full oft in many agise / Well bette than hem selfe can deuise." [40] Bowyer's words are strikingly different: "God giueth vnto vs in sundri wis / far boter then our wits can deuis" (f. 2v). Bowyer has not closely followed any of the printed editions of Chaucer in her transcription. She has modernized several of the words, changing older words like "hem," "yeueth," and "agise" into more contemporary alternatives. She has also changed the focus from the masculine "hem" to the gender-neutral "vs," making the passage more morally relevant to the reader, who may have been simply herself.
24. Similarly, Bowyer has significantly altered the 1598 text of *The Assemblie of Foules*, which reads:

For out of the olde felde, as men saieth
Cometh all this new corne, fro yere to yere
And out of old bookes, in good faieth
Cometh all this newe science, that men lere (sig. Yy4v).

Bowyer has written:

out of oulde felde as men say ~~haue wee~~
haue wee our new corne from day to day
~~but~~ but out of oulde boukes in goud fay
comes our new learning day by day (f. 3v).

Bowyer has altered the rhyme scheme, simplifying the words "saieth" and "faieth" to "say" and "fay," and she has removed the older form of learn, "lere." Again, she has also changed the orientation of the narrative voice from the masculine third person to the genderless first person, making the moral lesson in this passage more direct and more inclusive. With her alterations Bowyer is creating a community which is inclusive of women (our wits, our new learning). She has chosen to use the first person plural (rather than the singular), which both personalizes and expands the reference of both passages. She is placing herself in a shared intellectual enterprise by altering these passages to include all people, including women like herself.

25. The passages attributed to "A B" and "F B" in the margins may refer to Bowyer herself or a family member, but at least one of those ascribed to "F B" has been extracted from Spenser. The words on folio 2 have been taken from the opening of the third canto of Book One of *The Faerie Queene*, which claims that there is nothing under heaven which causes more compassion "Then beautie brought t'vnworthy wretchednesse / Through enuies snares or fortunes freakes vnkind." [41] Bowyer has changed the subject of the passage from beauty to women, writing that nothing is more pitiful "Then women brought to wofull wrechednes / By envious snares & villans touns vnkind." The "fortunes freakes vnkind" of the printed version emphasizes how unjustly Una is being punished at this point in the story, when the Redcrosse Knight has left her, believing her to have been unfaithful to him. Bowyer's "villans tongs vnkind" points to the more generalized situation in which a woman's honour is compromised by gossip, rather than following Spenser's depiction of one woman thwarted by an uncaring fate. Bowyer has expanded this quotation to apply to all women. [42]
26. Bowyer came from an upwardly mobile family of urban craftsmen with links to the gentry. Her parents' interest in educating their family was obviously strong. Bowyer and likely her siblings as well practised their handwriting, with the guidance of printed copy-books, and possibly with some private tuition. They had access to some kind of limning or painting instruction. Their library must have been reasonably extensive; it contained a copy of Chaucer's complete works, Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*, *The Ruines of Time*, and *The Faerie Queene*, *The Mirror for Magistrates*,

Joshua Sylvester's translation of *The Divine Weeks and Works* of Du Bartas, William Warner's *Albions England*, and Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles* and *The Barons Warres*, among other works. The taste reflected in the choice of many of these works is for a stern moral subject matter which yielded short, extractable, memorable lines. But Bowyer and her siblings evidently also had an interest in an English intellectual heritage. *The Faerie Queene*, *Albions England*, *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, and *The Barons Warres* all tell stories about England's development as a nation.

27. Bowyer has rewritten many of her quotations from *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Spenser, and Chaucer, altering the subjects of some passages (to lawyers, women, people in general), the rhyme scheme of others, and the language of many of them. These alterations have made her selections more contemporary, more relevant, and more inclusive of women. She has deleted sections of Raleigh's poem and added lines on a similar anti-court theme to this text which was being continually rewritten and responded to in manuscript form. Commonplace books could be repositories for meticulously copied out poems, proverbs, and moral exempla; they could also permit a large degree of freedom in both the choice of material transcribed and in the way in which it was recorded. Bowyer's book has given us both ends of the spectrum: some of her passages are faithful transcriptions of printed originals (as is the case with her excerpts from *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, which were copied from either the 1602 or 1603 edition), while others depart significantly from printed or manuscript versions.
28. As Arthur Marotti and others have argued, manuscript culture was a flexible one in which notions of authorship and ownership should not be applied in the way we understand them today. [43] We need to recognize that when a poem entered the realm of manuscript circulation it would inevitably be changed as it was reproduced, and that this was not generally seen as negative. Commonplace books could be much more than compilations of received moral precepts; as the case of Ann Bowyer suggests, they could be the means for creative expression in a society which in general did not value women's writing. They could offer the opportunity to appropriate the words of other writers into one's own storehouse of knowledge. Manuscripts like Ashmole 51 can provide us with evidence of women's reading and writing practices. They can tell us not only *what* a particular woman from the early seventeenth century read, but also *how* she read.

Notes

1. "To her very Louing son Mr Eliase Ashmol at Mr Peter Maninering house at Smalwod giue this [written below the address:] carodg [i.e. carriage] payd." (Bodleian Rawlinson MS D. 864, f. 202v); C.H. Josten, ed., *Elias Ashmole (1617-1692): His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work*, vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966) 320. This may have been written on an occasion such as 4 September 1637 when Ashmole went to obtain the permission of Eleanor Manwaring's father for their marriage; Ashmole notes on this date: "The 2d tyme I came to Smalewood" (in Ashmole MS 1136, f. 6v; and Josten, vol.2, 320).

2. Recent work on the history of reading includes: the essays contained in Andrew Bennett, ed., *Readers and Reading* (London: Longman, 1995) and in James Raven, Helen Small, and Noami Tadmor, eds. *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); Jonathan Rose, "Rereading the Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 47-70; David D. Hall, "The History of the Book: New Questions? New Answers?" *Journal of Library History*, 21 (1986): 27-36; Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: Flamingo, 1997); Roger Chartier, ed., *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

Works specifically on the early modern period include: Eugene R. Kintgen, "Reconstructing Elizabethan Reading," *Studies in English Literature* 30 (1990): 1-18; David Cressy, "Literacy in Context: Meaning and Measurement in Early Modern England," *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993) 305-319; Roger Chartier, "Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe," trans. Carol Mossman, *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1989) 103-120; Margaret Spufford, "First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers," *Social History* 4 (1979): 407-435; Evelyn Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1993).

3. James Raven, Helen Small, and Noami Tadmor, "Introduction," in Raven et al. 8.

4. Roger Chartier, "Laborers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader," *Diacritics*, 22.2 (1992): 49-61; rpt in Bennett 132-149.

5. David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 128 and 176. Cressy bases his findings primarily on signed documents: business and court records, probate documents and petitions (62). He uses three types of ecclesiastical records: probated wills, marriage-license records, and ecclesiastical court depositions (105). Though it is not a perfect indicator, R.S. Schofield has called the ability to sign one's name on a document the best available measure of literacy ("The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England," *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968] 319).

6. J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), 72-73. Hunter, Suzanne Hull, and Keith Thomas all argue for larger numbers of women who could read than could write, citing the evidence of the growth in numbers of books dedicated to women readers and the fact that much of the teaching of children to read was done by women (Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* [San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982]: 8-13; and Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition. Wolfson College Lectures 1985*, ed. Gerd Baumann [Oxford: Clarendon, 1986] 103).

7. Frances E. Dolan, "Reading, Writing, and Other Crimes," *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsey Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 143-144.

8. Thomas 100-101.

9. Chartier, "Laborers and Voyagers" 51; Louise Schleiner, *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994) in her chapter, "Women's Household Circles as a Gendered Reading Formation: Whitney, Tyler, and Lanyer" 1-29. Other work on women's reading practices in the early modern period includes: Caroline Lucas, *Writing for Women: The Example of Woman as Reader in Elizabethan Romance* (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1989); Jacqueline Pearson, "Women Reading, Reading Women," *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 80-99; Margaret W. Ferguson, "A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers," *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 93-116. For work on reading in the medieval period see the essays in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), particularly: Carol M. Meale, "'...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch': Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England" 128-158, and Julia Boffey, "Women Authors and Women's Literacy in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England" 159-182.

10. An exception is Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy," *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30-49.

11. On manuscript circulation see Mary Hobbs, *Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellany Manuscripts* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1992); Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995); and H.R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

12. Peter Beal, "Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book," *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, NY: RETS, 1993) 131-47; Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

13. Moss viii.

14. The watermark is a small bunch of grapes with initials on either side of the stem which does not closely match any of those in C.-M. Briquet, *Les Filigranes...a Facsimile of the 1907 Edition*, ed. Allan Stevenson (Amsterdam: Paper Publications Society, 1968) or Edward Heawood, *Watermarks, Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Hilversum, Holland: Paper Publications Society, 1950).

15. Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 167; Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (London: Methuen, 1935) 150-54. William G. Crane discusses these books and their predecessors in *Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: The Formal Basis of Elizabethan Prose Style* (New York: Columbia UP, 1937) 33-48.

16. Charles Crawford, ed., *Englands Parnassus Compiled by Robert Allot, 1600* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), #1455 and 1499.

17. Crawford #98, 688, 691, 1431, 1731, 1811.

18. Crawford #10. *Englands Parnassus* includes lines 97-100 of Jane Grey's epistle, while Bowyer has transcribed lines 97-98, 95-96, and then lines 99-100 of the poem on folio 5.

19. H. Sydney Grazebrook, ed., *The Heraldic Visitations of Staffordshire made by Sir Richard St. George, Norroy, in 1614, and by Sir William Dugdale, Norroy, in the Years 1663 and 1664, Collections for a History of Staffordshire* 5.2 (1884): 13-15, and Josten, vol. 1, pedigree following 306. I am grateful to Victoria Staveley for first identifying Ann Bowyer as the mother of Elias Ashmole.

20. Josten, I, pedigree. The inscription on Bridget's memorial in Tottenham Church has been recorded in H.G. Oldfield and R.R. Dyson, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Tottenham High-Cross, in the*

County of Middlesex (London, 1790) 48; quoted in Josten, vol. 2, 309 and 312.

21. Published in 1717 by Charles Burman as *Memoirs of the Life of that Learned Antiquary, Elias Ashmole, Esq; Drawn up by Himself by Way of Diary. With an Appendix of Original Letters.*

22. Josten, vol. 2, 309.

23. "hear though or natiues mother is signified by the [symbol for the moon] and shee in X with [symbol for Venus]: arguments that shee was capable of bearing children -- yet having 8 in the 5.th a barren sign, and [symbol for cauda draconis, i.e. the lower node of the moon] therein, and [symbol for Mars] significatr of her husband in [symbol for square, i.e. 90%] of [symbol for the sun] -- it is manifest that the defect of much issue was from infirmness of her husband and etc and not from the mother" (f. 65). Josten (vol. 1, 306) provides a table of symbols used by Ashmole.

24. Though this took place in the churchyard of Astley, Warwickshire, it was also described in William Burton, *The Description of Leicester Shire* (London, 1622) sig. G2-G2v.

25. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (1598) (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles, 1938) sig. Nn8r, Oo1v and Oo2v.

26. William Warner, *Albions England. Or Historical Map of the Same Island* (London, 1586) sig. M3v.

27. *The Workes of our Antient and Lerved English Poet, Gefrey Chaucer* (London, 1598) sig. G5v and D6v.

28. Besides these passages from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Man of Laws Tale*, two other Chaucer excerpts from *The Knight's Tale* and *The Assemblie of Foules* are discussed below (both of the latter are attributed erroneously in the margin to "Chauser The Romont on the rose"). The fifth Chaucer extract is a phrase from *The Manciple's Tale* which describes the fears Phebus has about his wife being unfaithful to him: "harde it is to be restraned that / which nature hath ingraft in ain creature" (f. 2). It varies significantly from the 1598 printed text, which suggests that Bowyer might have been transcribing from memory: "But God it wote, there may no man enbrace / As to distraine a thing, which that nature / Hath naturally set in a creature" (sig. Q5).

29. Priscilla Bawcutt, "The Commonplace Book of John Maxwell," *A Day Estivall: Essays on the Music, Poetry and History of Scotland and England and Poems previously unpublished in honour of Helena Mennie Shire*, ed. Alisoun Gardner-Medwin and Janet Hadley Williams (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1990) 59-68, esp. 61. She notes that M.P. Tilley has laid out the evidence for this in *Elizabethan Proverb Lore in Lyly's Euphues and in Pettie's Petite Pallace* (New York, 1926).

30. Extracts from Chaucer appear also in two manuscripts from the first half of the sixteenth century: the Devonshire manuscript (British Library Add. MS 17492) and the Welles manuscript (Bodleian Rawl. C. 813), and in the late medieval Findern manuscript (Cambridge University Library Ff. 1.6); Paul G. Remley, "Mary Shelton and her Tudor Literary Milieu," *Rethinking the Henrician Era: Essays on Early Tudor Texts and Contexts*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1994) 55-58.

31. I am not including poems which have been included in their entirety, like "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" (f. 7) and "The Lie" (f. 6).

32. William J. Hebel, ed., *The Works of Michael Drayton*, V (Oxford: Shakespeare Head, 1961) 97.

33. With the exception of minor differences of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and contractions, Bowyer's version agrees with the 1602 and 1603 editions of the epistles. I have based this analysis on Hebel's listing of variants; his copy text is the 1619 edition, but he has noted variants from the following editions: 1597, 1598, 1599, 1600, 1602, 1603, 1605, 1608, 1610, 1613, [no date], 1630, and 1637.

34. Lily B. Campbell, ed., *The Mirror for Magistrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1938) 77 (lines 83-84).

35. Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender, The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 90 (lines 71-72) and 93 (lines 152-53).

36. Ruth Hughey and Philip Hereford, "Elizabeth Grymeston and her Miscellanea," *The Library*, 4th ser., 15 (1934): 83-85.

37. The lines in *The Shepheardes Calender* (p. 41) are as follows: "And as the lowring Wether looks downe, / So semest thou like good fryday to frowne" (lines 29-30).

38. Max W. Thomas, "The Practice of Poetry in Early Modern England," PhD Diss., U of Pennsylvania, 1993, 154-162.

39. Peter Beal lists 31 extant manuscript versions of the poem in his *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*

vol. 1, part 1 (London: Mansell, 1980) 390-392. I have examined eight: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MSS: Douce f. 5 (ff. 11-12), Eng. poet. d. 3 (f. 2v), Firth e. 4 (pp. 3-5), Rawl. poet. 172 (f. 12v), Rawl. poet. 212 (ff. 88-90), and Tanner 306* (f. 188); British Library, London, MSS: Harl. 2296 (f. 135) and Harl. 6910 (ff. 141v-2).

40. *The Workes of...Chaucer* (1598) sig. B3.

41. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977) 55.

42. Paul Remley (55-58) has argued that Mary Shelton, one of the scribes of the Devonshire manuscript, has made similar alterations to extracts from Chaucer and his contemporaries (e.g. "the cursydness yet and disceyte of women" has become "the faythfulnes yet and prayse of women"; f. 90r). Elizabeth Heale and Helen Baron suggest that the hand which has made these changes is Thomas Howard's and not Shelton's; Elizabeth Heale, "Women and the Courtly Love Lyric: The Devonshire MS (BL Additional 17492)," *Modern Language Review* 90 (1995): 307; and Helen Baron, "Mary (Howard) Fitzroy's Hand in the Devonshire Manuscript," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 45 (1994): 332.

43. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*; Gerald L. Burns, "The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture," *Comparative Literature* 32 (1980): 113-129; Max W. Thomas, "Reading and Writing the Renaissance Commonplace Book: A Question of Authorship?" *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment Journal* 10 (1992): 665-679; reprinted in Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi, eds., *The Construction of Authorship* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1994), 401-415.

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Bowyer. Nancy Ann Bowyer. www.bowyerfamily.org. English: Ms. Bodley 264 is an illuminated manuscript written and illustrated between 1304, when the main part was completed, and ca. 1410, with the addenda. The codex was produced in Tournai, Belgium, on commission from an unknown family, probably a neighbour of the royal court of France (or a neighbour of the royal family), maybe Philip VI of France itself[1].

â†' Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the Roman D'Alexandre*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264: the Manuscript as Monument, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2011 ISBN 978-1-84384-280-4 (p. 182).

â†' Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the Roman D'Alexandre*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264: the Manuscript as Monument, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2011 ISBN 978-1-84384-280-4 (p. 181).

Manuscript Bodley 264. 501. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 756. 108 folios. 'De Signatura Rerum, Liber Harmonicus Theosophicus et Philosophicus. In quo ex ipso aeternitatis abyssu omnium rerum origines conformatio et complementum per 7 Formas omnium proprietatum productivas deducuntur, quomodo angeli, diaboli, mundus externus, et homo creati sunt. de quominis lapsu et restitutione, metallorum generatione et perfectione 502. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 759. 151 folios. 15th Century.

