

WITCHCRAFT, POLITICS, AND MEMORY IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND*

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ABSTRACT. *This article weaves together two episodes separated by a generation. The inciting event is the trial in 1653 of Anne Bodenham, an elderly cunning woman in Salisbury, who found herself embroiled in a feud in a gentry household, set against the turbulent backdrop of a divided city. Her arrest and examination evoked painful memories of an earlier scandal, the fateful association of the duke of Buckingham with Dr John Lambe, a sorcerer whom Bodenham claimed to have served in the 1620s. These tales, in turn, echoed an even older awareness of the perils of the diabolic, most prominently the pact of Dr Faustus. Together these narrative strands demonstrate how feelings of public disgust at Stuart corruption were revived in the commonwealth era and used as a polemical device by puritan activists. Both stories are rich in gossip, rumour, rhymes, libels, anonymous notes, and the practical uses of printed works, not to mention spells and curses, visions and dreams. As such, this article also shows just how complex a witch-trial could be, and serves as a reminder of the sophistication, ingenuity, and ebullience of seventeenth-century communications and consciousness across the social order.*

I

On a spring morning in 1653 Anne Bodenham, a woman in her eighties, sat in the gaol in Salisbury listening to a godly minister urge her to repent. A day earlier, she had been convicted of conjuring evil spirits, entertaining diabolical imps, and casting harmful spells. Tired and confused, she swayed in mood between terror, despair, defiance, and optimism that a reprieve would be granted. Hope faded with the arrival of the under-sheriff, who instructed her to follow him to the gallows. To this the old woman replied: ‘be you ready, I am ready, in a jolly manner, and forth she went’.¹

Bodenham’s fate was shared by several hundred others in early modern England, all of whom became trapped at a deadly intersection of circumstance. It

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¹ Edmond Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived, or, witchcraft condemn’d in Anne Bodenham* (London, 1653), quotation at p. 35.

is still sometimes assumed that ‘villagers were constantly engaged in contending with, or discussing, witches’, and that popular suspicions and grievances translated simply into prosecutions.² In truth witch-trials were comparatively rare, and the scale of interest has exaggerated their contemporary incidence and importance – one of many errors that continue to befog the subject. The Enlightenment idea that witch-persecution was spawned by ignorance and tyranny endured until after 1900 when witchcraft was rebranded, just as misleadingly, as a proscribed early modern cult.³ Scholarly work in the pre-war period established a more sober basis of fact, but without proper contextualization its significance remained limited.⁴ The 1970s were a conceptual watershed. A fusion of sociology, anthropology, and history made connections between the sixteenth-century rise in accusations and wider social and economic change, laying tracks along which subsequent research would roll.⁵ Since then historians have emphasized the ideological dimension of witch-trials in an age of state-building and confessional strife.⁶ Attention to local factionalism has merged ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches to show witchcraft as an expression of political conflict between parishioners.⁷ Active witch-hunts offer illuminating examples of this.⁸

Historians of witchcraft have also concentrated on belief. Some have explored learned and plebeian ideas and their interaction.⁹ Others have looked to the inner psychic dimension, rejecting methodologies which ‘invest heavily in figurations of what “really” happened ... without first trying to think through what early

² Quotation from Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a regional and comparative study* (London, 1970; 1991 edn), p. 113. Cf. Martin Ingram, ‘From reformation to toleration: popular religious cultures in England’, in Tim Harris, ed., *Popular culture in England, c. 1500–1850* (London, 1995), pp. 106–7.

³ Margaret Murray, *The witch-cult in western Europe* (Oxford, 1921); Montague Summers, *The history of witchcraft and demonology* (London, 1926).

⁴ For example: Wallace Notestein, *A history of witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718* (Washington DC, 1911); G. L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in old and New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1929); C. L’Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and demonism* (London, 1933).

⁵ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic* (London, 1971); Adrian Pollock, ‘Social and economic characteristics of witchcraft accusations in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Kent’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 95 (1979), pp. 37–48.

⁶ H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The European witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1969); Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: the witch-hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981). Cf. Brian P. Levack, ‘State-building and witch hunting in early modern Europe’, in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in early modern Europe: studies in culture and belief* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 96–115.

⁷ Annabel Gregory, ‘Witchcraft, politics and “good neighbourhood” in early seventeenth-century Rye’, *Past and Present*, 133 (1991), pp. 31–66; Malcolm Gaskill, ‘The devil in the shape of a man: witchcraft, conflict and belief in Jacobean England’, *Historical Research*, 71 (1998), pp. 142–71.

⁸ Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: a seventeenth-century English tragedy* (London, 2005); P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *An abundance of witches: the great Scottish witch-hunt* (Stroud, 2005).

⁹ Clive Holmes, ‘Popular culture? witches, magistrates and divines in early modern England’, in Steven L. Kaplan, ed., *Understanding popular culture* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 85–111; James Sharpe, *Instruments of darkness: witchcraft in England, 1550–1750* (London, 1996), chs. 1–3.

modern people thought really happened'.¹⁰ Carlo Ginzburg has inveighed against the 'psychological reductionism and sociological functionalism' of scholars who stress the purpose of accusations at the expense of 'the symbolic dimension of beliefs'.¹¹ 'Thick description' offers a corrective: reconstructing contexts, searching for hidden significance, respecting contemporary perspectives. Consequently, the objective is no longer just to see how politics and religion help us to understand witchcraft, but the reverse: the extraction of obscure strains of meaning from witchcraft and the exchanges it initiated.¹²

Witch-trials cut across the complexity of daily life, exposing the grain of politics, culture, and belief, and channels of communication between them. Messages were fired off in different directions: pleas of innocence, admissions of guilt, petitions for mercy and justice, appraisals of reputation, jeremiads against sin, learned opinions about medicine, law, and reason. To be a true likeness, the portrait of a prosecution needs to be energized and cluttered in this way, and alive to the fact that utterances from on high were not assimilated intact below, or vice versa. It should also acknowledge memory. This article 'thickly describes' how the past was used to shape opinion in the present, and emotive symbols – specifically, images of demonic depravity – culturally embedded in one generation only to resurface in the next. Considering that the meaning of speech and print lay in the dynamic space between explicit words and the implicit knowledge of an audience, the recycling of scandalous news stories – some of them decades old – both complicates and enriches our understanding of public and private political consciousness.¹³

The story of Anne Bodenham is a puzzle, the pieces scattered between the 1620s and 1650s in a range of discourses: subordinate and superordinate, learned and unlearned, traditional and reformist, regional and metropolitan, male and female. This is not a preamble to a postmodernist exercise where each reading of the evidence claims to be as valid as the next. Rather the aim is to produce a coherent narrative which swoops and swerves from assize court to royal court, from the bed of a frenzied adolescent to that of an archbishop, from the Palace of Westminster to the banks of the Thames; and which links theatre to theology, poetry to poisoning, and service to sorcery. Drawing on memories of life under the Stuarts, and the final hours of a woman in Salisbury, this article examines the intricacy of how seventeenth-century people perceived themselves and their

¹⁰ Diane Purkiss, *The witch in history: early modern and twentieth-century representations* (London, 1996), p. 79; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the devil: witchcraft, sexuality and religion in early modern Europe* (London, 1994); Robin Briggs, *Witches and neighbours: the social and cultural context of European witchcraft* (London, 1995), ch. 10.

¹¹ Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: deciphering the witches' sabbath* (London, 1990), p. 5. See also David D. Hall, 'Witchcraft and the limits of interpretation', *New England Quarterly*, 58 (1985), pp. 253–81.

¹² Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York, 1973), pp. 3–30.

¹³ Adam Smyth, "'Reade in one age and understood i' th' next": recycling satire in the mid-seventeenth century', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 69 (2006), pp. 67–82. See also Nigel Smith, *Literature and revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, 1994).

world. It is, therefore, a study of the recovery of mentalities from a crime and its context.¹⁴

II

Most of what we know about Anne Bodenham we owe to Edmond Bower, a legal clerk from Shaftesbury in Dorset – ‘an eye and ear Witness of her Examination and Confession’ – who was inspired to write a pamphlet ‘necessary for all good Christians to Read ... that they be not seduced by such Inticements’.¹⁵ Like many godly writers, he saw in the lives of criminals cautionary tales which could be communicated in print.¹⁶ Superficially, Bodenham was a stereotypical witch: a decrepit, marginal woman, who kept a cat, dispensed herbal remedies, and told fortunes. A derivative, more sensationalist account (attributed to ‘James Bower, Cleric’) asserted that ‘she could transform her self into the shape of a Mastive Dog, a black Lyon, a white Bear, a Woolf, a Bull, and a Cat; and by her Charms and Spels, send either man or woman 40 miles an hour in the Ayr’.¹⁷ In Bower’s version, however, Bodenham was not the usual hapless suspect. The wife of a clothier, she wore spectacles, wrote letters, owned books, and taught children to read. She was proud, astute, and worried about her husband’s welfare. She was sensitive about her status, and took pride in the name ‘*Mistress Bodenham*’ when others might have been content with plain ‘Goodwife’. Most striking was her claim that she had once been maidservant to John Lambe, a notorious physician, astrologer, and wizard.

Bodenham related how she had started out in the service of one of Lambe’s clients, who sent her on errands to the wizard. On one visit Lambe foretold the circumstances of James I’s death – a criminal offence – adding that none of the royal children would die natural deaths. (To recall this in 1653 hinted at the execution of Charles I four years earlier.) Bodenham ‘saw so many curious sights, and pleasant things, that she had a minde to be his Servant, and learn some of the art’. Lambe, playing book-loving Prospero to Anne’s Ariel, took her into his household and tutored her using rare texts.¹⁸ If true these events took place in

¹⁴ In general, see: Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, ‘Introduction: the crime of history’, in idem and idem, eds., *History from crime: selections from Quaderni Storici* (Baltimore, 1994), pp. i–xviii; Malcolm Gaskill, ‘Mentalities from crime: listening to witnesses in early modern England’, in Philippe Chassaing and Jean-Paul Genet, eds., *Droit et société en France et en Grande-Bretagne XII^e–XX^e siècles* (Paris, 2003), pp. 91–101.

¹⁵ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, title page. Bower was probably the son of a Wiltshire landowner, entering the Inns of Court in 1621 though he is not recorded as an assize clerk: George S. Fry and Edward Alexander Fry, eds., *Abstracts of Wiltshire inquisitiones post mortem, Charles I* (London, 1901), pp. 246, 255–6; Edgar Stephens, *The clerks of the counties, 1360–1960* (n.p., 1961), pp. 178–80; H. A. C. Sturgess, ed., *Register of admissions to ... the Middle Temple* (3 vols., London, 1949), 1, p. 112.

¹⁶ See Peter Lake, ‘Deeds against nature: cheap print, Protestantism and murder in early seventeenth-century England’, in Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, eds., *Culture and politics in early Stuart England* (London, 1994), pp. 257–83.

¹⁷ *Doctor Lambs darling: or, strange and terrible news from Salisbury* (London, 1653).

¹⁸ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, p. 27.

about 1624, given that James I died in March 1625 and Lambe was in prison in June 1623. It is unlikely to have been earlier, as Lambe had been locked up since 1608 when he was convicted of witchcraft. Before that he had been held briefly at Worcester Castle until many of the participants in his trial died suddenly, whereupon magistrates petitioned for his removal to London.¹⁹

It cannot be proved that Bodenham was Lambe's servant, or that she even met him. All we can say for sure is that Edmond Bower reported that she had made this claim and, if this much was true, that she recognized how Lambe's name endorsed her magical powers despite, or perhaps because of, his notoriety.²⁰ It is probable that she was an intelligent woman with a taste for knowledge, judged by Bower to be the high road to perdition. Her unnatural pretension was one of many traits held up by him as signs of disobedience in commonwealth and disorder in cosmos.

John Lambe's hubris, too, lay in ambition. In the King's Bench gaol he built a reputation as 'Doctor' Lambe and became close to the king's favourite George Villiers, soon to become duke of Buckingham.²¹ Around 1622, before he left to supervise the disastrous Spanish match, Buckingham accompanied his mother to consult Lambe about the insanity of his brother, John, and their suspicion that sorcery was to blame. Buckingham's custom soon became his patronage.²² In 1623 he quashed Lambe's conviction for the rape of an eleven-year-old girl in gaol. The lord chief justice, Sir James Ley, one of Buckingham's kinsmen and judicial appointments, arranged a meeting with Lambe which wavered between interrogation and consultation. The seventy-seven-year-old prisoner dropped hints about missing royal jewels and the Gunpowder Plot, but apologized that 'his minde is so perplexed and his memorie so weakened' – presumably by incarceration. Ley undermined the evidence for rape, having secured proof that the victim was still a virgin and that her 'lewde & contentious' mother had once falsely accused neighbours of bewitching the girl. The attorney general issued a pardon and Lambe was freed.²³

How intimate an adviser Lambe became to Buckingham is unclear; a letter the duke wrote to the king in 1624 at least *pretends* to deride him.²⁴ The following year, however, Lady Purbeck (whose father, the jurist Sir Edward Coke, had forced her to marry the insane John Villiers) was reputed to have visited Lambe with her lover, Sir Robert Howard. Hearing of this, Buckingham tried

¹⁹ Leba M. Goldstein, 'The life and death of John Lambe', *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 4 (1979), pp. 19–32, esp. pp. 19–20; *Calendar of state papers, domestic (CSPD)*, 1623–1625, p. 90.

²⁰ Purkiss, *Witch in history*, p. 147; Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, p. 27.

²¹ Investigated by the Royal College of Physicians in 1627, Lambe claimed to be licensed by the bishop of Durham: Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 359, 435n.

²² Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: the life and political career of George Villiers* (London, 1981), p. 451. Buckingham's concern can be traced to his wife's alleged bewitchment a year before their marriage in 1620: Barbara Rosen, ed., *Witchcraft in England, 1558–1618* (Amherst, MA, 1991), p. 373.

²³ The National Archives (TNA), SP 14/164/97–98v, 100–1, 106; 14/165/146; 14/167/25; 14/168/22; *CSPD*, 1623–1625, pp. 243, 261, 280. ²⁴ British Library (BL), Harleian MS 6987, fo. 219.

to persuade Lambe to break confidence to prove that Lady Purbeck's infant son was a bastard and so no rival for Buckingham's inheritance.²⁵ Thus the opinion of a witch and rapist came to matter to a pre-eminent courtier. Before long Lambe became a symbol, even a living effigy, of the duke, and as the latter's popularity declined so the former emerged as a malign influence on the nation.

In June 1626, just before the king dissolved parliament for trying to impeach Buckingham, MPs watched 'a terrible storm and strange spectacle upon the Thames by the turbulency of the waters, and a Mist that arose out of the same, which appeared in a round Circle of a good bigness above the waters'. Gossip spread that 'Buckingham's Wizard', by now infamous throughout society, was to blame.²⁶ In 1627 the duke's star waned further. News of his disastrous attempt to relieve besieged Huguenots at La Rochelle caused outcry in the capital, 'it being in every man's Mouth, That a Parliament must be summon'd'.²⁷ Tension over parliamentary subsidies inspired ballads hostile to Lambe, citing not just witchcraft but sexual scandal, including the lewd suggestion that he procured women for Buckingham by natural and magical means.²⁸ Londoners swapped tales of how Buckingham's mother had consulted Lambe (who presciently had shown her an image of a man holding a dagger) and even that she had taken the wizard as a lover. Lady Purbeck was arrested in 1625 on suspicion of adultery and, following the discovery of a wax image of Buckingham, with witchcraft.²⁹ Her reputation in tatters, she fled to a nunnery at Loudun in France, later the scene of a major witch-panic.³⁰

In June 1628 a gang of apprentices and watermen spotted Lambe leaving the Fortune theatre, and threw stones, calling him 'Witch, Devil, the Duke's Conjurer, &c.'. 'A rude multitud' pursued him to Cheapside where 'none would suffer him to come into there houses'; he was beaten and fatally injured by 'the Rage of the People'.³¹ Lambe's death the next day led to scenes of rejoicing; providence, it seemed, was steering England back to stability and righteousness. One Suffolk

²⁵ TNA, SP 14/183/73-4, 79; 14/183/106-106v.

²⁶ John Rushworth, *Historical collections abridg'd and improv'd* (5 vols., London, 1703), 1, p. 391. In a letter to the queen of Bohemia, a courtier described Lambe as a man 'of whom her Majesty has heard so much': *CSPD, 1628-1629*, p. 169.

²⁷ Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., *Diary of John Rous ... 1625 to 1642* (London, 1856), pp. 20, 29.

²⁸ In one satire the duke declares no need of 'Lambes philtres to incite/Chast ladies to give my fowle lust delight': Frederick W. Fairholt, ed., *Poems and songs relating to George Villiers, duke of Buckingham* (London, 1850), p. 30.

²⁹ Goldstein, 'John Lambe', p. 24; Lockyer, *Buckingham*, pp. 285-6; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Wizards: a history* (Stroud, 2004), pp. 142-3; TNA, SP 14/183/73-4, 79; 14/183/106-106v; 14/185/78.

³⁰ S. C. Lomas, ed., 'The memoirs of Sir George Courthop, 1616-1685', *Camden Miscellany, XI* (London, 1907), pp. 105-6.

³¹ Bulstrode Whitelock, *Memorials of the English affairs* (London, 1732), p. 10; Henry Ellis, ed., *The obituary of Richard Smyth* (Camden Society, 1849), p. 3; Thomas Birch, *The court and times of Charles I*, ed. R. F. Williams (2 vols., London, 1848), 1, pp. 364-8; Rushworth, *Historical collections*, 1, pp. 394-5; TNA, SP 16/102/107v.

minister recorded both the Remonstrance against Buckingham and Lambe's lynching in these terms, concluding with a refrain from a popular catch 'The Devill is Dead'.³² Balladeer Martin Parker marked the passing of 'the Devill of our Nation', hated not just for his magic but his greed (his last meal had been half a suckling-pig), connived at by 'men of worthy fashion'. Parker, a former inn-keeper who found inspiration in beer, did not condemn Lambe's murderers; rather he saw the extinction of a man 'That long hath wronged our Nation' as deliverance.³³ A pamphlet was published showing Lambe in ribboned knee-points, striped silks, and deep lace ruff, trying to repel his assailants with the sword he carried to affect gentility.³⁴ It is perhaps no coincidence that a ballad from 1589 about Dr Faustus – another sorcerer ruined by ambition – was reworked this year, and a new edition of Christopher Marlowe's play published.³⁵ It is certainly the case that representations of witchcraft on the stage grew darker from around this time.³⁶

Rumours spread that Buckingham used magic to resist parliament and win royal favour. He was incensed when a notice was posted near to where Lambe had been attacked, asking: 'Who rules the kingdom? – The king. Who rules the king? – The duke. Who rules the duke? The devil', adding darkly: 'Let the duke look to it.' An observer wrote to an acquaintance that Buckingham should heed the people as they 'intend shortly to use him worse than they did the doctor; and if things be not shortly reformed, they will work a reformation themselves'. The duke's reaction was to have the singer, seller, and printer of Martin Parker's ballad imprisoned, while urging the king to take further action.³⁷ But this could not stop the circulation of libels such as: 'Let Charles and George do what they can,/The Duke shall die like Doctor Lambe.' A variant composition shifted blame from the crown – 'J[ames] and C[harles] have done what they can,/And G[eorge] must die as did Doctor Lambe' – stiffening Buckingham's resolve to catch Lambe's killers and quell popular passions.³⁸ In another slur the duke was alleged to have said: 'Though Lambe be dead, I'll stand, and you shall see I'll smile at them that can but bark at me' – a reference to Buckingham's contempt

³² Green, ed., *John Rous*, pp. 16–17. See also Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus triumphatus* (London, 1681), part 1, p. 11.

³³ Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *A Pepsysian garland: black-letter broadside ballads ... 1595–1639* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 278–82; William Chappell, *Popular music of the olden time* (New York, 1965), pp. 291–3, 418–20, 434–9. The tune had been used for a ballad about amorous temptation: Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *The Pepys ballads* (8 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1929–32), II, pp. 191–5.

³⁴ *A briefe description of the notorious life of John Lambe* (Amsterdam [London], 1628).

³⁵ W. Chappell and J. W. Ebsworth, eds., *The Roxburghe ballads* (14 vols., New York, 1969), VI, pt 2, pp. 703–5; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in early modern England* (Oxford, 1999), p. 86; John Bakeless, *The tragical history of Christopher Marlowe* (2 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1942), I, p. 293.

³⁶ R. Trevor Davies, *Four centuries of witch-beliefs* (London, 1947), pp. 111–14, 118.

³⁷ Birch, *Court and times*, I, pp. 367–8; Goldstein, 'John Lambe', p. 30.

³⁸ Rushworth, *Historical collections*, I, p. 395; Green, ed., *John Rous*, p. 26; Alastair Bellany, 'Rayling rymes and vaunting verse: libellous politics in early Stuart England, 1603–1628', in Sharpe and Lake, eds., *Culture and politics*, pp. 288–94, 297–305.

for parliament, whose members, he boasted, 'shall not be able to touch the hair of a dog' without his consent.³⁹

On Buckingham's orders, the privy council expressed displeasure that 'the fury and outrage of divers dissolute and disorderly persons assembled together in greate numbers' had not been contained. When no appropriate action was taken the king threatened to strip the city of its charter, but in the end settled for an amercement.⁴⁰ Buckingham paid less heed to prophecies – even one from his servant troubled by a spectral dream – than to the mood of the people, and might have investigated the rhymes further had the dream not come true.⁴¹ In August 1628 Buckingham was fatally stabbed by an army officer, John Felton, spurred on by the recent Remonstrance. Felton proclaimed this a service to God, king, and country, explaining that 'he had long looked on the Duke as an Evil Instrument in the Common wealth'.⁴² Among the papers of a suspected accomplice was the Lambe–Buckingham rhyme, which had passed along a chain of tradesmen.⁴³ Once again the streets of London erupted in celebration, the crowds chanting: 'The shepherds struck, the sheepe are fled,/For want of Lambe the Wolfe is dead.' There were mock epitaphs, one of which, building on the rumour that the duke's last words had been a curse, went: 'Here lies Leachery, Treachery, Pride,/That swore Gods Wounds, & so he died.'⁴⁴

According to Alastair Bellany, 'libels reflected and created a moral universe in which Buckingham's assassination became both imaginable and desirable'.⁴⁵ Besides his more obvious acts of venality and incompetence, the duke's authority was inextricably linked with Lambe's magic: praises sung of 'Honest Jack' Felton implied that he had triumphed 'In spite of charm/Of witch or wizard'.⁴⁶ There were comparatively few witch-trials in these years; but this did not mean that public consciousness of witchcraft had faded.⁴⁷ Parker's ballad about Lambe's death was illustrated using the same woodcut as for post-1616 editions of

³⁹ Hugh Ross Williamson, *George Villiers, first duke of Buckingham* (London, 1940), p. 222.

⁴⁰ *Acts of the privy council, Sept. 1627–June 1628*, pp. 492, 505; W. H. Overall, *Analytical index to ... the Remembrancia, 1579–1664* (London, 1878), p. 455; Fairholt, ed., *Poems and songs*, p. xv; Goldstein, 'John Lambe', pp. 31–2.

⁴¹ BL, Lansdowne MS 207(b), fos. 130–1. For other omens see: C. R. Cammell, *The great duke of Buckingham* (London, 1939), pp. 298–303; *CSPD, 1623–1625*, pp. 164–5.

⁴² Rushworth, *Historical collections*, I, p. 407; 'The assassination of George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, by John Felton', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 24 (Aug. 1845), p. 141.

⁴³ TNA, SP 16/114/30–1. See also Adam Fox, 'Rumour, news and popular political opinion in Elizabethan and early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 597–620, esp. p. 599.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Andrew McRae, 'Reading libels: an introduction', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 69 (2006), p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, s.v. Lambe, John (d. 1628); Bellany, 'Raylinge rymes', p. 304.

⁴⁶ Fairholt, ed., *Poems and songs*, pp. xxviii, 69–70; Bellany, 'Raylinge rymes', pp. 305–8.

⁴⁷ Note the paucity of indictments at the Home Circuit assizes, c. 1620–40: C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witch hunting and witch trials* (London, 1929), pp. 211–20.

Marlowe's hit tragedy *Doctor Faustus*.⁴⁸ It was a visual reference which many – in London, at least – would have understood.⁴⁹

III

In Anne Bodenham's story, perceptions of the present were shaped by the past. Edmond Bower's account can be read simply as a godly object-lesson, an illustrated peroration on sin, repentance, and redemption. And yet it is a central contention of this article that his religious message was subtly reinforced by the evocation of painful memories of Stuart corruption. Some were vivid; others dormant but easily revived in the highly charged political climate of the 1650s. Bower's audience was familiar not just with the demonic rhetoric that saturated news and debate during the civil war, but with the idea of a literal diabolic influence exerted upon the affairs of state, in the same way that it was thought to threaten life in their own neighbourhoods.⁵⁰ The temporal and the cosmic were interconnected, as were recent history and the burning issues of the day.

England had only recently emerged from civil war, in the aftermath of which the king had been executed, monarchy abolished, and a commonwealth declared. Many problems remained. Cromwell's army, still fighting in Scotland and Ireland, viewed the Rump as a caretaker parliament which had failed to keep its promises. After the battle of Worcester, the army's attention turned to Westminster and pressure for a radical solution mounted. By April 1653 England was in crisis. Many believed the Rump to be corrupt and grew weary of its failure to enact a permanent settlement – an opinion spread by print and word of mouth; and yet the army, an unelected body, was widely disliked as extremist, and in any case had no constitutional legitimacy to justify it taking over from the government. This, then, formed the backdrop to Bodenham's arrest in Salisbury, a city latterly afflicted by military occupation, religious and political strife, plague, harvest failure, and a surge in poverty.⁵¹ Within days of her trial, Cromwell dissolved the Rump and appointed a nominated assembly. To republicans this seemed preferable to risking a restoration of the monarchy. The ghost of Charles I loomed and his exiled son, crowned king of Scotland in 1651, was watching, biding his time.

The accuracy of Bower's account, then, matters less than its political conceptualization. Fictions encode culture as do facts, and form part of the landscape

⁴⁸ The ballad also depicted brawling monks, an image from a pamphlet of the 1620s about diabolical Catholic avarice: Goldstein, 'John Lambe', p. 29; W. G. Day, ed., *The Pepys ballads* (5 vols., Cambridge, 1987), 1, pp. 134–5. The *Faustus* woodcut dates back to 1598: Chappell and Ebsworth, eds., *Roxburghe ballads*, vi, pt 2, p. 708.

⁴⁹ In the thirty years after registration in 1601 at least ten editions of the play were published, including one in 1628: Bakeless, *Marlowe*, 1, p. 293.

⁵⁰ Nathan Johnstone, *The devil and demonism in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), esp. chs. 6–7.

⁵¹ Paul Slack, 'Poverty and politics in Salisbury, 1597–1666', in Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., *Crisis and order in English towns, 1500–1700* (London, 1972), pp. 164–203, esp. pp. 192–3; Elizabeth Crittall, *A history of Wiltshire* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 117–20.

of history, not obstacles spoiling the view. Bodenham's literacy may have enabled her to learn from Lambe, or perhaps this was a fantasy inspired by her reading. Either way her story is a cameo of an information revolution: the expansion of popular printing; cross-pollination of ideas between news and fiction, religion and law; bureaucratization of justice and administration; the writing of letters and diaries, exchange of manuscripts, and circulation of libels in verse and prose. The outcome was a transformation in mentalities, historically traceable through a developing network of oral and literate media.⁵²

Anne Bodenham graduated from domestic service to become a healer, tutor, fortune-teller, and conjuror in her own right. She married Edward Bodenham and settled at Fisherton Anger, an overcrowded suburb of Salisbury known for its mills, brewhouses, and brick-kilns, and as the site of the gaol and house of correction.⁵³ Many came to her for help, including the gentry family of Richard Goddard who lived in the shadow of Salisbury Cathedral.⁵⁴ Anne Styles, Goddard's maidservant, relayed messages between the cathedral close and the witch's home, much as Bodenham had done a generation earlier.

Bodenham's downfall began with the disappearance of a silver spoon in Goddard's house. Anne Styles was sent to the witch, who admitted that because 'the wind did not blow, nor the Sun shine, nor Jupiter appear' she was unable to help. She nevertheless relieved Styles of a shilling and a jug of beer, and predicted her return. Meanwhile at home three guineas had vanished, prompting Goddard's son-in-law, Thomas Mason, to suggest that the maid be sent back. This time Bodenham opened books 'in which there seemed to be severall pictures, and amongst the rest the picture of the Devill, to the Maid's appearance, with his Cloven feet and Claws'. Next the witch rubbed a green glass and held it up to the sun. Later Styles told another servant, Betty Rosewell, how she had seen their household in it, to which Rosewell replied that Bodenham was 'either a Witch, or a woman of God' – a telling equivocation. Further unrest followed. Coins borrowed by Goddard's wife from Sarah Goddard (her daughter or daughter-in-law) turned black, interpreted as a sign that Sarah was plotting to poison her. Bodenham promised to intervene. Anne Styles also began running errands for Thomas Mason, and procured a charm to protect him from a gambling crony with an axe to grind.⁵⁵

Mason was also in dispute with his father-in-law Richard Goddard, and eager to know whether lawsuits he planned against him would be successful. Anne Styles related how Bodenham had drawn a circle on the floor, and 'placed in the Circle an earthen pan of Coles, wherein she threw something, which burning caused a very noysome stinck, and told the Maid she should not be afraid of what she should then see'. As Bodenham said the names of several demons 'suddainly

⁵² Adam Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000).

⁵³ Crittall, *History of Wiltshire*, pp. 180–94, esp. pp. 182, 187.

⁵⁴ On Goddard, see Fry and Fry, eds., *Abstracts*, pp. 186–7, 203–5, 318, 377–80.

⁵⁵ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 1–4.

arose a very high wind, which made the house shake, and presently the back Door of the house flying open, there came five spirits, as the Maid supposed, in the likeness of ragged Boys'. Holding her book, the witch threw crumbs and seeds to the spirits which danced with her cat and dog in the circle. As the wind subsided the spirits vanished, whereupon Bodenham advised Mason to demand £1,500 (plus an annuity of £150) from Goddard.⁵⁶

Fears of poisoning and conspiracy lingered. Bodenham sent Styles to buy arsenic, ostensibly to burn in a protective spell, but really to trick her into procuring poison for Sarah and her sister Anne Goddard, for 'she burnt it not as the Maid could see at all'. On her next visit, Styles claimed to have followed the boy-spirits to a meadow where they gathered herbs to make charms which, Bodenham advised, would poison Sarah and Anne if the user genuflected and said the Creed forward and backwards. When Sarah and Anne were blamed for poison found in Mistress Goddard's ale, they found an apothecary who identified Styles as the purchaser. The maid prepared to flee, carrying a charm marked with 'divers Crosses and Pictures, and other things'. But beforehand she visited Bodenham who transmuted into a cat, the better to trick the maid into making a pact. The witch dipped a pen in blood from Styles's finger, and guided her hand to sign 'a great book'. A spirit closed his hand over theirs, they all said 'Amen', then the spirit gave Styles a piece of silver and two pins which would protect her if she kept their secret.⁵⁷

As Bodenham predicted, Styles was caught near London and fell into convulsions, crying: 'That base and plaguy Witch M[is]tris Boddendam hath bewitched me.' In Salisbury gaol her fits attracted visitors, among them Edmond Bower. Bower also visited Bodenham and asked after her 'spirituall condition, whether she was sensible of her damnable estate by nature, and the guilt she had contracted on herself', to which she replied that she hoped to be saved by her 'good faith in Christ'. Bower knew from Scot's *Discoverie of witchcraft*, a new edition of which had recently been published, that bewitchment might be reversed by confrontation between suspect and victim.⁵⁸ Warning Styles's friends not to scratch Bodenham to draw blood – superstitious counter-magic – Bower commanded the witch to cure the comatose maid. Bodenham's proposal that they pray to Jupiter, 'the best and most fortunatest of all the Planets', Bower steered in 'a lawfull way' towards God. Styles regained consciousness only once the witch was back in gaol, but now seemed converted to a state of grace. Her account of events was awe-inspiring to well-wishers: 'I blesse God the Devill went away from me but even now ... I have been in so sweet a sleep as ever I had in my life'.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5. Spells to summon demons survive, see: Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MSS B.253, fos. 50–5; Cambridge University Library, Add. MSS 3544, pp. 9–11.

⁵⁷ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 5–10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–20; Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of witchcraft* (London, 1584; 1651 edn). The new edition may have been intended as a handbook for magicians: Owen Davies, *Cunning folk: popular magic in English history* (London, 2003), pp. 126–7.

Christ, she said, had cared for her soul in heaven while the devil (in the form of the witch) tortured her body. 'The hour of mercy is now come', she added.⁵⁹

News spread that Bodenham, abandoned by Satan, had become deranged – an ominous counterpoint to the divine mercy shown to Styles. Swapping roles with her victim, the witch raved in her chains, lamenting: 'Oh the Devill, the Devill, the Devill will tear me in pieces.' The next morning she agreed to surrender her library, minus the real prize, a list of confederates and a book of conjuration, which she offered in exchange for her liberty. She also disclosed that the earl of Pembroke's treasure could be found using a charm; the 4th earl, Philip Herbert, an ally of Buckingham, had died in 1650 and was buried in Salisbury Cathedral. Perhaps deliberately, this harked back to the lost jewels with which Dr Lambe had tantalized Lord Chief Justice Ley in 1624.⁶⁰ Bodenham described her earlier life, but became upset when she thought of everyone she had helped, and 'never accounted a Witch but by reason of this wicked Maid'. Bower was the witch, she said, because he took her books and with them her magical power.⁶¹

Three weeks later Bower was summoned to Salisbury where he found Anne Styles in torment. A boy swore he had seen 'a Spirit in the likenesse of a great black man, with no head' scuffling with the maid and demanding her soul. None of this amounted to solid evidence against Bodenham, however, a problem compounded by the fact that her books were less incriminating than had been hoped. Magistrates appointed search-women who found two teats, one 'about the length and bignesse of the Niple of a woman's breast', the implication that Bodenham fed demonic spirits raising the hopes of those who wanted her hanged. Bower took the maid to a room where the witch was held, by then crowded with spectators. On seeing Styles, Bodenham crawled under the bed but was pulled out by the people, one of whom snatched a charm from around her neck. 'Now shee was undone', she wailed, 'her jewell was taken from her ... now there was but no hope but that she should be hanged' – dismissed by Bower as a 'foolish conceit'.⁶²

At Anne Bodenham's trial 'the crowd of spectators made such a noise that the judge could not heare the prisoner, nor the prisoner the judge'. Styles's testimony impressed spectators, but as the sentence was read out her tears made them think again; furthermore, her plea for Bodenham's reprieve was ambiguous: a sign of magnanimity or remorse.⁶³ On the morning of the execution Bower arrived to find Bodenham with a minister who 'comforted her up to bear death Christianly, boldly, and chearfully; and ... promise him she would goe as a true penitent to her place of Execution, and to die as a Lamb' – a crude pun. Bower interrupted

⁵⁹ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 20–3.

⁶⁰ Diane Purkiss goes further, concluding that 'either Bodenham or Bower is copying Lambe': *Witch in history*, p. 151.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–7; *ODNB*, s.v. Philip Herbert (d. 1650).

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 27–32.

⁶³ John Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, ed. James Britten (London, 1881), p. 261; Nathaniel Crouch, *The kingdom of darkness* (London, 1688), p. 16; Henry More, *An antidote to atheisme* (2nd edn, London, 1655), pp. 203–4.

that ‘God would have more honour by her confession of other Witches, then she can have comfort by a few prayers.’ Under pressure Bodenham said something close to what Bower – now, apparently, shaping up as a witchfinder – wanted to hear. ‘Though what she said would not be enough to convict any’, he noted, ‘yet it would be enough to suspect and examine them.’ But by now Bodenham was tired of her confessors. She composed herself, made a will, and resigned herself to death. From her apron she produced a letter to her husband asking him to abandon their house and desiring 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’.⁶⁴

Bodenham requested no prayers be said for her, but when pressed about repentance retorted: ‘I hope for all this to be saved by my Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ ... I am wronged and abused, and so these Rogues and Rascalls shall all know.’ Denied a drink, she became even more truculent. Even as she climbed the ladder, Bower exhorted that she confess her sins but she refused and cursed those who kept her from her death. Her final words were directed neither to Bower, nor to the seething crowd, but to the executioner. Fitting the noose round her neck he begged forgiveness, to which she snapped: ‘Forgive thee? A pox on thee, turn me off.’⁶⁵ According to one ballad she died ‘desperately’, but ‘had a face of Bras as all the people say’.⁶⁶ For Wallace Notestein, ‘there is no finer instance of womanly courage in the annals of witchcraft’.⁶⁷

IV

Anne Bodenham’s story grounded serious ideas in a popular morality tale – idiomatic, immediate, compelling, and true.⁶⁸ Her life represented England’s past sins and future perils; her death, a measure of hope. As Diane Purkiss has argued, Bower made Bodenham into an ‘emblem of everything which parliament and the English Republic oppose: the abuse of power and privilege, social disorder, the sacrilegious “traditional ways” of church-ales and alehouses, disorderly femininity, ungodliness amounting to diabolism’.⁶⁹ And yet he was rarely explicit; rather, trusting his audience and the assumptions he knew he could make, he allowed these secular undertones to support the message which he *did* spell out, namely that Christ removed sin from all who accepted him in their hearts, and by implication that the regime which upheld this open-handed theology should be preserved.⁷⁰ Much of this would not have looked out of place in an Elizabethan or

⁶⁴ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 33–5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

⁶⁶ ‘The Salisbury assizes. Or, the reward of witchcraft’, in Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *Cavalier and puritan: ballads and broadsides illustrating the period of the Great Rebellion, 1640–1660* (New York, 1923), pp. 329–35, at p. 335.

⁶⁷ Notestein, *History of witchcraft*, p. 213.

⁶⁸ See Neil Philip, ed., *Penguin book of English folktales* (London, 1992), pp. 63–8.

⁶⁹ Purkiss, *Witch in history*, p. 148.

⁷⁰ On the relationship between writers and readers, see: Jason Peacey, *Politicians and pamphleteers: propaganda during the English civil wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, 2004), esp. ch. 3; Joad Raymond,

Jacobean witchcraft pamphlet; but it cannot have *meant* the same to readers in an era of unprecedented constitutional uncertainty. Recollections of the Stuarts were stirred, as they were by other godly writers, and questions asked. Might England forget why the monarchy had been abolished? Could the nation slide back to corruption? The arc of memory came in three sections – Bodenham to Dr Lambe, Lambe to the duke of Buckingham, Buckingham to Charles I – fastened together with high politics and low morals, sorcery, and sex.⁷¹

The other, more sensational, pamphlet about Bodenham hinted at a sexual relationship with Dr Lambe, just as rumours about Lambe's appetite for prostitutes had shaded into his alleged intimacy with Buckingham. This chimed in with the popular belief that James I and the duke had been lovers, a rumour that 'endured vividly in the popular political imagination and was invoked throughout the century to criticize the Stuarts'.⁷² The king nicknamed his favourite 'Steenie' after St Stephen, declaring him 'the handsomest bodied man in England'.⁷³ Archbishop Laud's erotic dreams about Buckingham, to whom he was chaplain, add to the intrigue, as does their discussion about 'witches and astrologers' early in 1625. Laud also wrote a memorandum about the duke's fear that resorting to 'not natural medicine' to treat his brother would amount to sorcery.⁷⁴ Buckingham was favourable to Arminianism, an inclination made more heinous to some by the fact that his mother and wife were Catholics. Verses written after the La Rochelle disaster mocked Buckingham's faith, conflating popery and witchcraft:

Could not thy Titles scare them? nor they Lambe's
Protection safeguard from the French rammes?
Could not they mother's masses, nor her crosses,
Nor sorceries, prevent those fatal losses?

Another composition, *A dialogue between the duke and Dr Lambe*, sees Buckingham confess to bewitching the king 'with the charmes and magicke of my mother'; and a polemic from 1629 listed the duke's 'Jesuited tricks': a satanic brew of 'Masses, Murders, Poisons, Treasons, Venery, & Venifices'. He was even said to have poisoned James and Charles. 'Pride lies here, revenge and lust/Sorcerie and averice, all accurst' was a typical epitaph. This was a bad omen for the king, who now stood alone to weather criticism for backsliding in religion, fiscal profligacy, and reckless foreign policy.⁷⁵

Pamphlets and pamphleteering in early modern Britain (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 89–96, 255–72; Peter Lake, *The antichrist's lewd hat: Protestants, papists and players in post-Reformation England* (New Haven, 2002), esp. ch. 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷² Smyth, "'Reade in one age'", p. 79. See also Alastair Bellany, *The politics of court scandal in early modern England: news culture and the Overbury affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 254–61.

⁷³ Quoted in David L. Smith, *A history of the modern British Isles, 1603–1707* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 56–7.

⁷⁴ William Scott and James Bliss, eds., *The works of... William Laud* (7 vols., Oxford, 1847–60), III, pp. 156–7, 170; VII, p. 623.

⁷⁵ Fairholt, ed., *Poems and songs*, pp. 62, 64; Fox, 'Rumour', pp. 613–14; Bellany, 'Rayling rymes', pp. 296, 302–3; Rushworth, *Historical collections*, I, p. 299.

Debates about witchcraft were linked to wider political discourse, with diabolism serving as a metaphor for unnatural empowerment and rebellion.⁷⁶ By the 1630s prosecutions had become very rare indeed, but as symbols of disorder witches were more relevant than ever. Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome's play *The late Lancashire witches* (1634) may have been a merry pageant 'of odd passages and fopperies to provoke laughter', but its depiction of the chaos caused by failing household authority was deadly serious. In August 1634 an older tragicomedy, *Doctor Lambe and the witches*, was adapted to cash in on Heywood and Broome's success, dusting off the memory of a notorious witch in the process.⁷⁷ Audiences were sensitive to these resonances. Thomas Middleton's *The witch*, first performed in 1613, had long been interpreted as a commentary on the divorce of the earl of Essex due to impotency, an affliction attributed to witchcraft.⁷⁸

By this time, criticism of Charles I's government had found expression in an increasingly literate plebeian culture.⁷⁹ Accusations of demonism among the elite were widespread, and could be literal as well as symbolic.⁸⁰ Popular libels created the powerful impression of deep moral corruption at work. It was not surprising to contemporaries that popery might be accompanied by witchcraft, that the sexually lax might favour Arminians, that the enemy of parliaments might poison his rivals. All were recognizable symptoms of the corruption associated with the alien, and especially with popery.⁸¹

By 1640 the situation was explosive, exacerbated by propagandists who salvaged images from previous decades. A pamphlet of 1641 depicted an Anglican ship manned by Laud and Bishop Matthew Wren, and between them 'Dr Lamb'.⁸² The political culture of the civil war era sparked many similar connections. In 1646 the puritan John Geree looked back on Buckingham's patronage of Lambe as 'one of the blackest stains of our corrupt times'.⁸³ Men like Geree recognized that England's future hung in the balance, and therefore that lessons about the

⁷⁶ Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its transformations, c. 1650–c. 1750* (Oxford, 1997); Peter Elmer, 'Towards a politics of witchcraft in early modern England', in Stuart Clark, ed., *Languages of witchcraft: narrative, ideology and meaning in early modern culture* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 101–18.

⁷⁷ Herbert Berry, *Shakespeare's playhouses* (New York, 1987), pp. 124–5, 135–8; Arthur Melville Clark, *Thomas Heywood* (Oxford, 1931), pp. 121–6, esp. p. 125; Alison Findlay, 'Sexual and spiritual politics in the events of 1633–1634 and *The late Lancashire witches*', in Robert Poole, ed., *The Lancashire witches: histories and stories* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 146–65, at p. 150. In general, see Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, misrule and the meaning of witchcraft', *Past and Present*, 87 (1980), pp. 98–127.

⁷⁸ Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, eds., *Three Jacobean witchcraft plays* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 13–20, 85–142, esp. p. 14; Anne Somerset, *Unnatural murder: poison at the court of James I* (London, 1997), pp. 148–58.

⁷⁹ Thomas Cogswell, 'The politics of propaganda: Charles I and the people in the 1620s', *Journal of British Studies*, 29 (1990), pp. 187–215; Richard Cust, 'News and politics in early seventeenth-century England', *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), pp. 60–90. ⁸⁰ Johnstone, *Devil and demonism*, pp. 196–212.

⁸¹ Bellany, 'Rayling rymes', p. 303. Thomas Randolph linked cunning folk with Jesuits, referring to 'all witchcraft brain'd with Doctor Lambe': *Poems* (Oxford, 1638), pp. 53, 56.

⁸² Helen Pierce, 'Anti-episcopacy and graphic satire in England, 1640–1645', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), pp. 809–48, at p. 825; Thomas Stirry, *A rot amongst the bishops* (London, 1641). I am grateful to Dr Pierce for her advice on this point.

⁸³ Quoted in Thomas, *Religion*, p. 597.

sins of the Stuarts remained valuable to remind people of a time and place to which they should not return. The endless recycling of the scandalous tale of Sir Thomas Overbury's murder from 1613 is a case in point.⁸⁴

In Salisbury the arrest of a witch gave Edmond Bower an opportunity to teach this lesson. As in *The late Lancashire witches*, a turbulent household – the Goddards – stood for a divided community – Salisbury – which, in turn, represented a nation on the brink. As a suspected poisoner *and* a victim of possession, the maid Anne Styles demonstrated how the status quo could be undermined. A number of aristocratic conspiracies had involved allegations of poisoning and witchcraft, notably the Overbury murder and Buckingham's rise as court favourite.⁸⁵ Conformity, Bower insisted, began at home. Anne Bodenham's fondness for beer reflected fear of alehouses and contempt for unreformed England with its maypoles, sports, and festive licentiousness. That she was also 'addicted much to Gossiping (as the vulgar call it)', suggests Bower's genteel distaste for the ways of simple folk.⁸⁶ The fact that she came from Fisherton Anger, the sort of West Country downland community where customs were defended (sometimes with middling support), and not from the mainly puritan city, may also have struck a chord.⁸⁷ Fisherton was notoriously unstable in religion: the royalist rector had been ejected in 1650, whereafter the advowson changed hands several times.⁸⁸

Protestant divisions notwithstanding, the greatest danger was still felt to be Catholicism. From her superstitious deeds Bower inferred that Bodenham was 'a woman much addicted to Popery, and to Papistical fancies that she commonly observed'. When asked if she could pray, she replied that she knew many prayers from her book; what kind of book Bower did not dare ask. Instead he rejoiced in the universal accessibility of God's saving grace, the years of theologically exclusive and socially divisive Calvinist government behind him. Whereas a pre-Reformation version might have ended with exorcism and absolution – the triumph of the church – his purpose was to illuminate providence with a Protestant miracle, shaping Anne Styles's penitence into a conversion narrative. 'Oh my madnesse and my folly!', she exclaims, 'Oh wicked Creature that I am, that ever I should sin against so good a God, that hath been so mercifull to me in my torments!'⁸⁹ Even a wicked witch like Bodenham was not beyond redemption, asserted Bower, for 'greatnesse of sin cuts not off mercy, if any have a mind to be saved'.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Bellany, *Politics of court scandal*, ch. 6.

⁸⁵ David Lindley, *The trials of Frances Howard: fact and fiction at the court of King James* (London, 1993), ch. 5; C. L'Estrange Ewen, 'Robert Radcliffe, 5th earl of Sussex: witchcraft accusations', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 22 (1940), pp. 232–8. ⁸⁶ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Purkiss, *Witch in history*, p. 152; David Underdown, *Revel, riot and rebellion: popular politics and culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 88–95. On the suppression of alehouses and revels, see: Paul Slack, ed., *Poverty in early-Stuart Salisbury* (Devizes, 1975), p. 122; Ronald Hutton, *The rise and fall of Merry England: the ritual year, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 159, 202, 230.

⁸⁸ Crittall, *History of Wiltshire*, p. 190.

⁸⁹ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 1, 17–18, 40.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Bodenham's ambition defied patriarchal authority, much as John Lambe had been 'a threat to the order of state, class and masculinity'.⁹¹ Anne Styles's pact with Bodenham (and Satan) mocked her bond of service with the Goddards. Richard Goddard was a legitimate master, Bodenham a woman of base reputation; at home Styles learnt to cook, as the witch's apprentice she learnt poisoning. Styles saw an image of the devil standing atop the house, a symbol of domestic rebellion. When Bodenham spoke of her legacies, Bower reminded her that this was her husband's business. Her reply – if he disobeyed, 'the Devill shall never let him be quiet' – was a challenge to male supremacy bordering on treason. To Bower, cunning women were dangerous because the devil 'promiseth them to be no Inferiors to the greatest in the World'.⁹² Bodenham's arcane texts, planetary calculations, and demonic conjuration were aspirations to a masculine realm of magic; she even boasted superiority to the famous astrologer William Lilly.⁹³ According to legend, after the execution her 'book of shadows' was burnt, signifying not merely the intrinsic wickedness of such a text but the waywardness of its owner.⁹⁴

People made sense of news using what they already knew. Three well-publicized events from the months preceding Bodenham's execution stand out here: the investigation of William Lilly for witchcraft; the execution of six witches at Maidstone; and the death of Lady Eleanor Douglas, a self-proclaimed prophet.⁹⁵ Her words were 'the subject of much discourse, even from the Prince to the Peasant', and, according to the royal chaplain, her prediction of Buckingham's death in 1628 'raised her to the Reputation of a Cunning Woman amongst the ignorant people'. She was gaoled, ridiculed, and her books burned.⁹⁶ Protestantism was a religion of texts, but in the hands of women like Douglas and Bodenham texts were dangerous.⁹⁷ Bower's foil was Anne Styles, an illiterate servant 'ignorant of the Fundamentall grounds of Religion', and her response to the exposure of her sin: 'I am not yet too old to learn, I will learn to read ... though I break my sleeping time to learn.'⁹⁸ Orthodox reading, a cause of dissent, might also nurture conformity; but after 1660 it was not just books of magic that symbolized disorder. As the duke of Newcastle remarked to a

⁹¹ Karin Amundsen, 'The duke's devil and Doctor Lambe's darling: a case study of the male witch in early modern England', *Psi Sigma Historical Journal*, 2 (2004), p. 43.

⁹² Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 23, 34, 37.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8. See E. J. Kent, 'Masculinity and male witches in old and New England, 1593–1680', *History Workshop Journal*, 60 (2005), pp. 69–92, at pp. 72–3.

⁹⁴ Ken Radford, *Tales of witches and sorcery* (London, 1993), pp. 133–4, 136.

⁹⁵ *Lillyes lamentations* (London, 1652), p. 8; *A prodigious & tragicall history of ... six witches at Maidstone* (London, 1652); C. J. Hindle, 'A bibliography of the printed pamphlets and broadsides of Lady Eleanor Douglas', *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions*, 1 (1935–8), pp. 66–98.

⁹⁶ Peter Heylin, *Cyprianus anglicus* (London, 1668), p. 266; Hindle, 'Bibliography', pp. 69, 71.

⁹⁷ Cf. the Cambridgeshire Baptist woman cast into spiritual turmoil in 1654 by exposure to Quaker texts: Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting communities: English villagers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 216.

⁹⁸ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, pp. 39–40.

newly restored Charles II: ‘the Bible in English under every weaver’s and chambermaid’s arms hath done us much hurt’.⁹⁹

V

The tale of the witch and the maid – Lambe and Bodenham in the 1620s, and Bodenham and Styles thirty years later – is important for the history of English witchcraft. In a field where models of social, economic, and religious change remain salient, we still need to challenge assumptions about stereotypes and mechanical dynamics of accusation. Witch-trials were not simple social reflexes; they were intricately plotted human dramas with a large, but often historically invisible, supporting cast. As with most accused witches, Anne Bodenham’s fortunes declined due to accumulated suspicions that she caused harm; and yet the formation of opinion and its outcomes were complex and contingent.¹⁰⁰ Alongside the belief that she used magical powers for malicious ends, her craving for wisdom and status operated as subsidiary, perhaps even subliminal, factors which encouraged others to fear and despise her, and enabled Edmond Bower to make such a compelling parable of her life. Beyond her immediate community there was political discord, crucial to understanding most witch-trials but so often obscure or overlooked. Like all early modern English people, Bodenham existed within a rich context of association and experience, and, as far as possible, that is how she should be understood.

The intellectual context of what at this time was considered to be plausible and demonstrable is also significant. The willingness of the authorities to indulge Anne Styles seems remarkable, especially as forty years earlier a possessed maidservant would most likely have been exposed as a fraud.¹⁰¹ The East Anglian craze of 1645–7 had proved the menace of active witch-hunting and alerted judges to the evidentiary weakness of confessions. And yet at the same time this episode reinforced the idea that witches belonged to networks which could be broken; Bower’s badgering of Bodenham to name her accomplices echoed the witchfinder Matthew Hopkins, as did the pact signed in blood and the forensic attention to detail paid by the search-women.¹⁰² Nor did Hopkins’s purge do much to neutralize a demonically charged public atmosphere, and may have intensified fear given the persistence of constitutional and religious disagreement. ‘Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft’ remained a potent biblical text in the 1650s.¹⁰³

Within a generation, however, witch-trials had all but vanished, and with them faded a culture steeped in symbols, rituals, and encoded meanings. Like other

⁹⁹ Joan Thirsk, *The Restoration* (London, 1976), p. 170.

¹⁰⁰ Bower alluded to many other acts of witchcraft: *Doctor Lamb revived*, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ For sceptical investigations under James I, see: Philip C. Almond, *Demonic possession and exorcism in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 38–42; Brian Levack, ‘Possession, witchcraft and the law in Jacobean England’, *Washington and Lee Law Review*, 52 (1996), pp. 1613–40.

¹⁰² Malcolm Gaskill, ‘Witchcraft and evidence in early modern England’, forthcoming in *Past and Present*.

¹⁰³ I Samuel 15:23.

traditions, demonology lost much of its metaphorical power as belief wavered and formal accusations declined. Reacting against Calvinist enthusiasm, post-Restoration Anglican clergy saw fraudulence in cases of alleged possession, picking up from where James I and his bishops had left off in the 1620s.¹⁰⁴ Occasional village lynchings aside, witchcraft became a subject of fun, ultimately consigned to the realms of romance and fable. Dr John Lambe was largely forgotten, although his famous fictional analogue, Dr Faustus, lingered; but even here stage performances degenerated into melodrama and farce, even into puppet shows where he played the part later taken by Mr Punch.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, invariably the laughter was tinged with fear, and in time the secularity of the modern world would generate new anxieties to reinvigorate the story's meaning. In the twentieth century 'Faustian' came to imply a quest for achievement, enlightenment, and contentment in Western civilization, often at great moral cost and sometimes with cataclysmic consequences.¹⁰⁶

The journey from premodernity to modernity leads into postmodernity. Like all witchcraft cases, Bodenham's tale raises questions about different levels of reality, and therefore about the nature of history. Its principal strength is the way that it contrasts bodies of knowledge, juxtaposes metaphor and observable fact, and pulls together strands of opinion across eras and contexts. It allows us to examine witchcraft as an idea in action, not a corpus of learning but a vague concept in the minds of individuals – a memory, latent but volatile, always starting arguments, never settling them. We also see vividly the interdependence of politics, religion, and culture, and are reminded that early modern experience and consciousness were more lively, varied, and ambiguous than the laconic style of many sources would suggest.

The ramifications, therefore, reach beyond the history of witchcraft to the history of mentalities. However fleetingly, we see the characters as complex sentient beings, thinking and influencing the thoughts of others. And yet the task of defining mentalities and choosing a methodology is difficult. Necessarily it involves contextualization, but this leads to questions about appropriate contexts and anachronism. To assume that we are dealing with prototypes of the modern mind – ourselves relocated to a strange epistemological environment – exports the present backwards when our objective should be the reverse. Too often windows on the past merely reflect our own image.¹⁰⁷ But we should not be over-cautious: banishing hindsight is not necessarily desirable even if it were possible. This article has attempted to show that historians of mentalities *need* to be

¹⁰⁴ David Harley, 'Explaining Salem: Calvinist psychology and the diagnosis of possession', *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 307–33.

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and mentalities in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 3; Bakeless, *Marlowe*, 1, pp. 301–3; E. M. Butler, *The fortunes of Faust* (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 52–68.

¹⁰⁶ Oswald Spengler, *The decline of the West: form and actuality* (London, n.d. [1926]), esp. ch. 9, where landmarks of progress are described as 'all Faustian visions' (p. 380).

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm Gaskill, 'Time's arrows: context and anachronism in the history of mentalities', *Scientia Poetica*, 10 (2006), pp. 237–52.

concerned with the layering of stories over time, including tendentious and competing premodern perceptions of the past and their evolution.¹⁰⁸ It is especially important to consider timespans within our subjects' own lives and the shifts that they themselves experienced.

Reading the cultural clues demonstrates vividly how early modern mentality consisted first in memory, with all its flaws and omissions, and secondly in the deployment of memories along the threads of a finely spun web of communication. In the absence of verbatim records or archives, memory in semi-literate cultures depends upon performance; oral traditions are 'simply memory re-worked'.¹⁰⁹ Edmond Bower, Anne Bodenham, and the people who read their words thought about the past as well as the present, helping themselves to history to make moral points, curry favour, justify actions, and plot a course to the future. That sometimes they made mistakes, changed their minds, and failed to convince, only makes the story more human; like us they were constrained by the boundaries of their lives. So when historians try to make sense of the past, they should acknowledge that their subjects were often trying to do the same. It is vital to see behind our own reflections, through the looking glass, to a point where thinking, remembering, and story-telling can be considered on their own terms. As the White Queen remarked to Alice, 'it's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards'.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Keith Thomas, *The perception of the past in early modern England: the Creighton Trust lecture* (London, n.d. [1983]); Adam Fox, 'Remembering the past in early modern England: oral and written tradition', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1999), pp. 233–56; Daniel Woolf, *The social circulation of the past: English historical culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford, 2003), esp. chs. 8–10.

¹⁰⁹ Jack Goody, 'Memory in oral tradition', in Patricia Fara and Karalyn Patterson, eds., *Memory* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 73–94, quotation at p. 91. See also Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (Cambridge, 1989), ch. 1.

¹¹⁰ Lewis Carroll, *Through the looking-glass* (1872), in Donald J. Gray, ed., *Alice in Wonderland ... authoritative texts* (New York, 1992), p. 150.