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Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Volume 89, Number 3, Fall 2015,
pp. 434-462 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2015.0081>

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Reading and Hearing *The Womans Booke* in Early Modern England

JENNIFER RICHARDS

SUMMARY: This essay takes seriously Thomas Raynalde's advice in *The Womans Booke* that women might read this work aloud. The evidence I use to sketch the scene of reading includes Raynalde's advice to readers in his long prologue, and also the kind of reading practice that his own writing represents. But I also go outside the text, considering what we know about the experience of listening to a book, and emphasizing the link between this practice and rhetorical education. I also examine the evidence left behind by two male readers: William Ward, who marked his copy of the 1565 edition privately, and Edward Poeton of Petworth, who represented instead a semipublic or shared reading: the evaluation of *The Womans Booke* and other books of generation by a Midwife and her Deputy in a fictional dialogue "The Midwives Deputie" (ca. 1630s).

KEYWORDS: Thomas Raynalde, midwifery, history of reading, male and female readers

Most early modern books on generation were written for male practitioners. How could it be otherwise when female illiteracy is supposed to have been so high, and when women were excluded from formal education? Monica Green's *Making Women's Medicine Masculine* (2008) tells the history of "the laboured masculine birth of gynaecology": the shift from an oral tradition of women practitioners in antiquity and the early Middle Ages to a male literate tradition of the later Middle Ages and early modernity.¹ With the advance of learned medicine, she argues, women's exclusion from formal education left them increasingly marginalized as

I would like to thank the organizers of Communicating Reproduction at Cambridge University for inviting this contribution, and especially Lauren Kassell and Peter Murray Jones, who, along with the anonymous reviewers for this journal, shared expert advice and gave generous guidance. I would also like to thank the Wellcome Trust for a small research grant that made possible the archival research.

1. Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 291.

both practitioners and patients.² This argument is echoed by others, and feminist historians have worked hard to defend the knowledge that experienced midwives possessed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus, Doreen Evenden and Helen King argue that access to these books did not matter, and that midwives' illiteracy was not an obstacle to their professional practice.³ Yet, with one important exception scholars have not been inclined to explore in detail the "life" of any single midwifery book among its possible women readers. That exception is Mary Fissell's study of *Aristotle's Masterpiece* (1684). Fissell explores "the traces" this work "left in the historical record" over a period of some three hundred years, until the early twentieth century. Significantly, this includes the recognition that "although a printed book," it also "circulated in spoken words as well as written ones."⁴

This essay follows Fissell's example, exploring—sometimes speculating about—the use of one of the most popular midwifery books of early modern England: Thomas Raynalde's *The birth of mankinde, otherwyse named The Womans Booke* (1545–1654). I use the methods familiar to historians of reading, paying attention to marginal annotation and marks of ownership. However, I attend to other kinds of evidence too, aiming to recover the history of this book's aural reception, taking seriously Raynalde's expectation that it would be read aloud.⁵ A key source of evidence in support of this, discussed in the final section of this essay, is a little known manuscript dialogue by the physician Edward Poeton, "The Midwives Deputie" (ca. 1630s). This dialogue, dedicated to his wife, a practicing midwife, represents two women reading and talking about this and other books on generation. It offers unique insight into what we might call literate

2. Ibid., 145–46, 159.

3. Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6; Helen King, "As if None Understood the Art That Cannot Understand Greek': The Education of Midwives in Seventeenth-Century England," in *The History of Medical Education in Britain*, ed. Vivian Nutton and Roy Porter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 184–98, quotation on 191.

4. Mary E. Fissell, "Making a Masterpiece: The Aristotle Texts in Vernacular Medical Culture," in *Right Living: An Anglo-American Tradition of Self-Help Medicine and Hygiene*, ed. Charles E. Rosenberg (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 59–87, quotations on 60, 67. See also Helen King's study of the uses of the *Gynaeciorum libri* by two Scots, the eighteenth-century man-midwife William Smellie and the nineteenth-century obstetrician James Young Simpson, *Midwifery, Obstetrics and the Rise of Gynaecology: The Uses of a Sixteenth-Century Compendium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See *ibid.*, 42–52, on other professional male book owners and annotators.

5. Thomas Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1545), C8^r–D1^r. All quotations are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

midwifery, and it also suggests that the experience of women could be important to the assessment of the learned tradition, at least it was in the mind of this unlicensed physician.

Thomas Raynalde's work, hereafter referred to as *The Womans Booke*, is, as its longer title suggests, a corrected and augmented version of Eucharius Rösslin's *Der Swangern Frauwen und Hebammen Rosegarten* (1513) (The rose garden for pregnant women and midwives), and the schoolmaster Richard Jonas's English translation, *The byrth of mankind* (1540). Much of this work is conventional. With Rösslin, Raynalde repeats advice from traditional authorities: Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and also Soranus's second-century *Gynecology*. He also includes standard medical theories on birth of the time, for example, that the womb moves within the body and "could be attracted by sweet smells but would recoil from bad ones," and that a woman should be "encouraged to hold her breath whilst pushing to expel the baby."⁶ Galenic isomorphism, the idea that the reproductive organs of a woman are analogous to a man's, albeit buried in the body, is at the heart of his understanding of female anatomy: the vagina is analogous to the penis, the ovaries to testicles, while women are assumed to release semen during orgasm.⁷ Yet, as Elaine Hobby establishes, Raynalde is not uncritical, and he makes much of his departure from some authorities.⁸ He also corrects many medical terms, and some remedies listed by his predecessors.⁹ However, his distinctive contribution—and a reason, no doubt, for the success of the book—is the study of female anatomy referenced to illustrations in book I, the latter taken from Andreas Vesalius's recently published *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basle, 1543). This was the first printing of these graphic illustrations in an English vernacular book.

Probably because of this *The Womans Booke* was phenomenally popular. It saw at least eleven editions from its first printing in 1545 until 1654.¹⁰

6. Introduction to Thomas Reynalde, *The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman's Book Newly Set forth, Corrected, and Augmented. Whose Contents Ye May Read in the Table of the Book, and Most Plainly in the Prologue*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), xx–xxv.

7. For recent discussion of this topic, see Lauren Kassell, "Medical Understandings of the Body, c.1500–1750" in *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present*, ed. Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (London: Routledge, 2013), 57–74. On "The Female Reproductive System," see also Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 26–32.

8. Hobby, introduction to Reynalde, *The Birth of Mankind* (n. 6), xxi, xxiv.

9. *Ibid.*, xix.

10. There were new editions of *The Womans Book* in 1560, 1565, 1572, 1585, 1598, 1604, 1613, 1626, 1634, and 1654. Hobby notes that parts of *The Womans Book* "continued to reappear long after the year of its last edition," introduction to Reynalde, *The Birth of Mankind* (n. 6), xvi. See also D'Arcy Power, *The Birth of Mankind or The Woman's Book: A Bibliographical Study* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1927).

Newer midwifery texts came to be preferred in the course of the seventeenth century, continental books translated into English like Jacques Guillemeau's *Child-Birth; or, The Happy Deliverie of Women* (1612), with a second edition in 1635, and Jakob Ruff's *The Expert Midwife, or an Excellent and most necessary Treatise of the generation and birth of Man* (1637), as well as English works, notably Nicholas Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* (1651), reprinted in 1656, 1662, 1668, 1671, 1672, 1676, 1684, 1693, 1700. Other important treatises include those by Louise Bourgeois, Thomas Chamberlayne, and Jane Sharp. However, none of them can trump the publishing history of *The Womans Booke*, many well-worn copies of which survive in research libraries today.

The survival of so many copies is one reason for my interest in *The Womans Book*. The other reason, though, is its direct address to the woman reader, signaled in its new title but also explained fully and at some length in "A prologue to the women readers." Raynalde is not shy about advertising his book to all women, those who could read independently and those who could not, either because they were illiterate or, one supposes, because they were otherwise employed in the birthing room. There is no reason why we should take this declaration seriously, and most feminist historians do not: King and Evenden find the scene of reading in the birthing room sketched out in Raynalde's prologue "implausible in view of the darkened chamber in which delivery traditionally took place."¹¹ However, I propose as a starting point that we *do* take Raynalde at his word, if only to prompt a fresh search for evidence of this book's reception.

Recovering the history of women's use of an early modern book is a challenge. It is no surprise that historians of reading have, in general, chosen to focus on the material traces that mainly male readers left behind: the manicules, the underlining, the brief marginal comments, as well as those scrawls that suggest a user is practicing his or her handwriting or testing a new pen rather than reading.¹² Of the seventy-nine extant

11. King, "As if None Understood" (n. 3), 187. Evenden, *Midwives* (n. 3), 7. On the popularity of other kinds of bedchamber reading, see Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54–71.

12. On marginalia and reading habits, see Ann Blair, "Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1500–1700," *J. Hist. Ideas* 64, no. 1 (2003): 11–28; Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio, *Book Use, Book Theory 1500–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Library, 2005); William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For a study that applies these ideas and methods to medical literature, namely recipe books, see Elaine Leong, "Medical Recipe Collections in Seventeenth-Century England: Knowledge, Gender and Text" (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 2006).

copies of *The Womans Booke* that I have viewed, twenty-eight (35 percent) are signed. Of these, twenty-four (30 percent) are signed by men.¹³ Very few of these are annotated, but the few that are fit with the paradigm established by historians of reading. Their readers are information-gatherers; they tend to mark for retrieval passages of interest, facilitating consultation. In a copy of the 1598 edition, held by the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, the male reader, who dates his use 1603, focuses attention on two gatherings in the second book, the chapters that deal with difficult deliveries, underlining passages of interest and marking them with a trefoil in the margin.¹⁴ In a copy of another edition (1564?), held at the British Library, a reader has similarly annotated the second book, this time paying attention to passages concerning miscarriage and marking them with “./.” or “X.”¹⁵

However, nine of these copies (11.5 percent of the seventy-nine) are signed by women. Moreover, the short messages some of these women left behind suggest that they saw themselves as this book's rightful users. In one copy of the 1545 edition we find “Katherina Blacknall owens this book.”¹⁶ In another copy, we find “Anne Akehurst her Booke,”¹⁷ while in a third Elizabeth King writes “her scillful boock” under her signature.¹⁸ In a later edition (1585?) we find “Eliz. Stevenson her book had out of Doc-

13. I am including two book plates by Sir Richard Newdigate of Arbury (1709) in Huntington Library copies. I examined seventy-nine surviving copies of this book (1545–1654) at the following libraries: Bodleian Library, Oxford; British Library; Cambridge University Library; Corpus Christi College, Oxford; Edinburgh University Library; Folger Library; Glasgow University Library; Houghton Library, Harvard University; Huntington Library; John Rylands Library, Manchester; Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh; Royal College of Physicians, London; St John's College, Oxford; Wellcome Library, London. (There are ninety-three copies [1545–1634] listed as extant in the *English Short Title Catalogue*, although this is far from a complete list, e.g., the 1654 edition is not recorded.) I have counted signatures dated pre-1800.

14. Raynalde, *The birth of mankinde, otherwyse named The Womans Booke* (London, 1598), Sibbald Library, Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh (SN 2.23).

15. Raynalde, *The Birth of Mankynd, otherwise named the womans book* (London, 1564?), British Library (1177.h.1).

16. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1545), verso of title page, Glasgow University Library (Ah-b 13). There are no other signatures in this book.

17. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankinde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1545), verso of title page, Royal College of Physicians, London (D2/97-3-18). There is one other signature, in the top margin of the title page: “[?]Wertbrook 3/1711.”

18. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankind, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1545), the loose leaves before the title page, Cambridge University Library (SSS.37.4). There is no other signature.

tor John Wintertons study at Grantham July the 3rd 1677.”¹⁹ My favorite, though, is a signature in one 1585 copy. Competing against the signature of Richard Wright in the top margin of the title page of this book is a signature at the bottom of the page in thicker brown ink, then crossed out: “Elizabethe holt is the trew honer [owner] of this booke” (Figure 1).²⁰ Yet, despite such promising numbers, none of these books is annotated, confirming Heidi Brayman Hackel’s view that “the cultural and material practices that discouraged women from annotating their books have also made it difficult for modern scholars to write them into the emerging history of reading.”²¹ It is clear that if we want to recover users who left behind almost no material trace then we need to look for new evidence.

What evidence do we have for the oral and aural reception of *The Womans Booke*? The evidence I use to explore the scene of reading that Raynalde imagines is quite varied. It includes Raynalde’s advice to readers in his long prologue to *The Womans Booke*, and also the kind of reading practice that his own writing represents. But I also reach outside the text, considering what we know about the experience of listening to a book, and emphasizing the importance of rhetorical education, recalling that the history of male *literate* medicine is also oral and aural. I also pause over and compare the readings left behind by two male readers: William Ward, who marked his copy of the 1565 edition privately, and Edward Poeton of Petworth, who represented instead a semipublic discussion of it: the evaluation of *The Womans Booke* and other books of generation by a Midwife and her Deputy in a fictional dialogue “The Midwives Deputy.” As I argue in the conclusion, it is Poeton who brings us closest to Raynalde’s intention, even if, as we will see, *The Womans Booke* comes off

19. Raynalde, *The birth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (1585?), Wellcome Library (EPB 63113/B). There is one undated signature on the fly leaves at the front of the book, “Jo: Hanbury.”

20. Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1585?), title page, Wellcome Library (EPB 5514/B). For a similarly proprietorial signature in *Culpeper’s Directory for Midwives*, see Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 214–15: “Elizabeth Hunt her book *not* his.” I list here the remaining four names: Joan Trender in Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1565?), Wellcome Library (EPB 5512/B) (discussed later in this essay); “1681 Mary Baseton [word unclear] this book,” in Raynalde, *The Birth of Man-kinde, Otherwise Named The Woman’s Booke* (London, 1626), Edinburgh University Library (Df.9.33) (no other signatures); “Philoudelphia heath here [sic] booke” in *The Birth of Man-kinde, Otherwise Named The Woman’s Booke* (London, 1626), Folger Library (STC 21163) (no other signatures); “Jane Sampson” at the end of *The Birth of Mankind, Otherwise called, THE WOMANS BOOK OR A Guide for Women* (London 1654), Royal College of Physicians, London (D2/97-e-32) (no other signatures).

21. Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material* (n. 20), 196.

Figure 1. Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1585?), title page. Wellcome Library, London (EPB 5514/B).

badly in this midcentury dialogue: Poeton's imagined midwives can be heard to complain that it is not practical.

Gendered Reading

This essay is concerned with how women were imagined to have used Raynalde's *The Womans Booke*, and how they may have used it. I am not concerned with this book's theories of generation and whether they were useful, but rather with the question of who had the opportunity to use it and in relation to this, what kind of communication it might have encouraged. I would be remiss, however, to neglect the male reader who is by far the more visible addressee of books of generation. It is the male reader—whether he is a professional medical man or a jack-the-lad—whom the compilers of books of women's secrets try first to manage.

This has long been noted. Gail Kern Paster observed two decades ago that printed anatomists of this period worry continuously about how the knowledge they communicate will be received and used by the male reader.²² Some, like John Banister, the surgeon who compiled *The Historie of Man* (1578), cannot even bring themselves to write about women's bodies, so risqué is the subject. Indeed, Banister may be comfortable telling his intended readers—the London surgeons of his dedicatory preface—about their testicles in minute detail, including reassuring them that if they were unlucky enough to lose one the sexual act would remain just as pleasurable. He may be equally happy to explain that it is the movement “in the acte of venerie, now upward, now downeward” of the “*Praeputium*,” the foreskin, which is the source of the “exceedyng delectation of the Female.”²³ However, he will not write about women's reproductive “instrumentes.” “What they be, and how they serue,” he offers at the start of a chapter on *The generatiue partes*, “so farre as from the begynnyng my purpose hath intended, that is to say, as much as of the Male may commodiously be spoken (for more I thought not good to translate into English) shall now specially be declared.”²⁴ This is a typically convoluted introduction to this topic. In his conclusion to this chapter Banister simply notes that to write about women's bodies is an affront to “*Decorum*.”²⁵

22. Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 186–87.

23. John Banister, *The Historie of Man, sucked from the sappe of the most approved Anathomistes, in this present age* (London, 1578), 2B2^r, 2B4^r.

24. *Ibid.*, 2B1^r.

25. *Ibid.*, 2B4^r.

Similarly, the desire of Banister's self-appointed successor, the physician Helkiah Crooke, not to offend the "Company of Barber-Chyrurgeons" in one of the best known English anatomies of the seventeenth century, *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), is evident from its frontispiece: the arresting image of a partially dissected woman's body displayed in a pose of modesty, with her hands covering her breasts and genitalia.²⁶ It is also apparent in the advice he gives to the reader who opens the fourth book, dealing with "the Naturall Parts belonging to generation, as well in Men as in Women." In the preface, Crooke worries that his lifting of the "veyle of *Nature*" may be misconstrued. He proceeds, however, with the promise that "As much as was possible we haue endeouored ... by honest wordes and circumlocutions to molifie the harshnesse of the Argument." More to the point, the material has been "plotted" so that "he that listeth may separate this Booke from the rest and reserue it priuately vnto himselfe."²⁷

It is not just the modesty of professional medical men that the print-anatomists want to protect. Raynalde's *The Womans Booke* may begin with a long address "to the women readers," but "Almost half" of the prologue, Mary Fissell observes, "is taken up with concerns about his book being read by lascivious or misguided men."²⁸ Raynalde worries that *The Womans Booke* will inspire the wrong kind of table talk. He is concerned that "men it readyng or hearyng shalbe mooued" not just "the moore to abhorre and loothe the company of woomen" but also that "in theyr communycations to ieste, and bourde of wemens pryvitees not wont to be knownen of them: with diuers other such lyke cauylations and reasons."²⁹ He also articulates the fears of midwives who tell "all wemen of theyr acquaintance ... to beleue, that it was nothyng wurth" and "that euery boy and knaue had of these bookes, readyng them as openly as the tales of Roben hood."³⁰ "I counceil & exhorte," he adds, that readers "take not uppon them to talke of any thinges therin contaynyd, but onely where it maye edyfye, and be assurydly wel accepted."³¹

The reason for Raynalde's nervousness is not hard to fathom. *The Womans Booke* includes the uncontroversial, familiar pictures of the birthing

26. Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (London, 1615), title page.

27. Ibid., S3^r. On the changing language for reproduction and the genitals, see Monica H. Green, "From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages," *J. Mediev. Early Mod. Stud.* 30 (2000): 5–39.

28. Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 71.

29. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde* (n. 5), C2^r.

30. Ibid., D1^r.

31. Ibid., C7^r.

stool and malpresentations (Figure 2).³² However, as I have already noted, this modestly sized octavo was also the first English vernacular book to publish Andreas Vesalius's anatomical drawings. These had been printed just two years earlier with Latin commentary in a lavish folio edition, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (Basel, 1543). The Vesalian drawings, unlike the diagrams of the malpresentations, "aim to depict the body accurately,"³³ revealing female reproductive organs, "as thoughe," Raynalde explains in the prologue, "ye were present at the cuttynge open or anathomye of a ded woman."³⁴ It is not unusual to find the pages with the anatomical illustrations cut out, making "it plausible," Elaine Hobby tentatively suggests, "that other early copies of the book which now lack these visual aids had them removed and kept by fascinated early readers."³⁵

Figure 2. Thomas Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1545), Figures III–XII. Wellcome Library, London (EPB/B/7358/B).

32. On these illustrations, see Hobby, introduction to Raynalde, *The Birth of Mankind* (n. 6), and their print history, xxx, and Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine* (n. 1), 151–57.

33. Hobby, introduction to *The Birth of Mankind* (n. 6), xxx.

34. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde* (n. 5), B3^r.

35. Hobby, introduction to *The Birth of Mankind*, xxviii.

The illustrations might cause concern, but so too could the fact that Raynalde has also added his own opinions. He tends to emphasize the pleasure of sexual intercourse and its role in generation. Many of his views run counter to traditional moral advice given to both men and women: for example, his defense of “vehement, and ardent appetyte & lust.” Thus, in a chapter discussing the “whyte slymie, and thyn clere matter” which issues when a woman has “great and feruent desyre to any man ... downe along to the womans pryuye passage moystryng all that parte, as it were with a dewe,” which is interpreted as the woman’s “sede,” Raynalde observes that Aristotle and others have supposed that this “sede ... serueth for no other purpose but onely to excyte, moue, and stere the woman to pleasyr.” To those who reject this “pourpose” as “ydle or slender,” Raynalde has this to say:

if that the god of nature had not instinctyd, and inset in the body of man and woman suche a vehement, and ardent appetyte & lust, the one lawfully to companie with the other: nether man ne woman wold neuer haue been so attentife to the workes of generation and encreasement of posteritie, to the utter dekey in shorte tyme of all mankynde.

He ends this discussion by noting how quickly the pleasure of sex makes women forget the pain of childbirth.³⁶ This is not promising material for table talk.

The nervousness expressed by Raynalde in the prologue is shared by some of his readers. One copy of the 1565 edition held at the Wellcome Library is worthy of notice for two reasons. First, it passed through several hands. There are a number of signatures on the title page: “J.P. [John Paul] Berthon 1790”; “1565 H Meun”; “John Trender 1595 May 23.” Second, there are two further signatures that tell their own story. At the end of the table of contents we find “This is Joan T_____ [surname rubbed out] Booke teste marito [i.e., with my husband as witness] 1595.”³⁷ Another reader added his signature at the end of the prologue: “Liber Arthur Hartford 1687.” Hartford added an instruction that reveals his unease with the contents: “Let noe man touch this book but he that is holy.”³⁸

A similar nervousness is expressed by the physician William Wade or Ward(e); this is likely the William Ward (1534–1609) who served as physician to Elizabeth I and James VI and I.³⁹ His copy of *The Womans Book*

36. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde* (n. 5), G5^{rv}.

37. Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1565?), A8^r, Wellcome Library (EPB 5512/B).

38. *Ibid.*, C2^r.

39. Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwyse named the womans booke* (London, 1565), British Library (235.d7). On the verso of the title page a later annotator writes,

(1565) is annotated for his own private use. Ward underlines and also highlights with manicules several passages about menstruation in the first book. He uses one striking two-fingered manicule to highlight emphatically the advice that a breast-feeding woman should avoid “uenery or mans company.”⁴⁰ Throughout the book he adds recipes in his neat secretary hand to cure a range of conditions from wind to sore legs, and he links the images of the malpresentations to their description in the text, helpfully inserting folio numbers next to the images. But otherwise his investment in this book is personal, recalling the death of his wife; this is suggested on the final page when he adds this moving verse, signing it “WW”:

Decreed hath God the Lord of Life
to take from me my Loving Wife
Why then should I bewaile the fate
of her that is in blessed state.

Then, to the right of this, slightly lower down on the page he adds another verse:

The Turtle [dove] trew his first love[?]
till death them part in twayne:
And having lost his worlds delig[ht]
doth never match agayne. WW. (Figure 3)⁴¹

This verse is a translation of a Latin commonplace that he also records alongside it: “Turtur perpetuo prim[um] sibi seruat Amorem / Amissioq[ue] pari, nescit habere parem.”⁴² The marginalium that really stands out in this copiously annotated book, however, is the instruction on the first page of the table of contents: “This book in any case is not to be lent [to] any bodye”⁴³ (Figure 4).

Yet, despite the worries expressed in the prologue, which Ward picked up on, Raynalde says he wants his work to be lent to women. Although he may address almost half of his prologue to potentially errant male readers, more than half of it is addressed to women readers. He tells us that the desired audience for this book includes good midwives (not the bad ones who would like to ban the book), married women and their loving husbands, but also all English women. Raynalde tells us that Jonas, “a cer-

“This was Dr Ward’s Book, Professor of Physick in this University. The written notes are probably his, & may be of use for ought I know.” On William Ward, see Charles Henry Cooper and Thompson Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, 1861), 2:386–87, and *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28709?docPos=3>, accessed June 3, 2013.

40. Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde* (n. 39), Q1^v.

41. Some letters are lost where the page has been cut.

42. *Ibid.*, T6^r. This would be Ward’s first wife Margaret Fletcher, whom he married in 1568.

43. *Ibid.*, A2^r.

Figure 3. Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwise named the womans booke* (London, 1565), T6r. © British Library Board (235.d7).

Figure 4. Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of mankynde, otherwise named the womans booke* (London, 1565), A2r. © British Library Board (235.d7).

tayne studious and dilygent clarke, at the request, and desyre of dyuers honest and sadde matrones beyng of his acquayntaunce, dyd translate out of Latin in to Englishe a greate part of this booke."⁴⁴ He explains that he took it in hand, correcting some parts of it and renaming it *The Womans Booke* because it treats of matters that "concerne and touche onely woomen."⁴⁵ He also tells us he is offering to an English female readership a book that is widely available elsewhere. Rösslin's book, he observes, had already been translated into Dutch, French, Spanish, and "dyuers other langages," "In the which contries," he adds, "there be few wemen that can reade, but they wyll haue one of these bookes always in redinesse: Where also this and other such bookes be as comunely solde at euery stacionars shop, as any other boke."⁴⁶ On the basis of this he details a scene of reading, highlighting this in the margin with the following print marginalium: "Howe ladies and gentilwomen haue vsed this booke":

And truley (as I haue ben credyibly enformed by dyuers persons wurthy to be beleuyd) there be sith the first settinge furth of this booke, right many honourable Ladies and other Wourshypfull gentyl wemen, which haue not disdaynyd thoftener by the occasyon of this booke to frequent & haunt wemen in theyr labours, carienge with them this booke in theyr handes, and causynge suche part of it as doth chiefly concerne the same pourpose, to be red before the mydwife, and the rest of the wemen then beyng present: wherby oftymes then all haue ben put in remembraunce of that, wher with the labourynge woman hath bene greatly confortd, and alleviatyd of her throngs and trauell.⁴⁷

It is surely significant that Raynalde imagines his book with its cutting-edge information about female anatomy being read aloud within a textual community of women that includes the midwife. Indeed, whatever we may privately think of Raynalde's motives in seeing this commercially successful book into print, or his nervousness about its possible misuse by some male readers, we cannot overlook the fact that he has, in effect, performed his willingness to give up control of its contents to its intended women readers. He has given up control, I suggest, because the act of reading aloud does not imply, simply, dependence on mediated knowledge. It also involves engagement with and discussion of what is heard. Listening and talking are ways knowledge is communicated and generated, including in the masculine tradition of literate medicine.⁴⁸ It seems that Raynalde is aware of what he is doing. "[M]yne advise and utter counsell," he offers,

44. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde* (n. 5), B1^v–B2^r.

45. *Ibid.*, B2^r.

46. *Ibid.*, C8^r.

47. *Ibid.*, C8^v–D1^r.

48. Men and women often added to the margins of books knowledge that had been orally transmitted, supplementing the written word. A copy of *The Breviary of Health* (1557)

“is, that all women in whose handes this lytell booke shall chaunce to come, with all dyligence do force theym selves perfectly to the understandinge of this fyrst boke: well assuryng them that they shall not repente them of theyr small paynes bestowed in that behalfe.”⁴⁹ “Force” is a curious word for Raynalde to choose; it suggests not just that he understood that his recommendation was unconventional, but also that he felt with some urgency that up-to-date learned knowledge about generation should reach women. We know how some of Raynalde’s learned male readers responded: this book is not to be lent to anyone. How hearers—female as well as male—responded is the topic I now want to consider.

Hearing Books

“Hearing” a book was not second best to its silent reading. This point is not often explicitly articulated. Historians of reading are mainly interested in the traces left behind by literate readers like William Ward, and they have tended to take on trust—or at least to leave unchallenged—the view of some educated early modern male readers on the naivety of hearers. In *A dialogue both pleasant and piety-full, against the fever pestilence* (1564) the physician William Bullein gently pokes fun at the simplicity of the servant “Roger” who believes everything that is read to him.⁵⁰ The essayist William Cornwallis is even less generous. He observes at a distance and with fascinated distaste the performance of a ballad singer (“a base Historian”) and “the standers by”: “what strange gestures come from them, what strained stuffe from their Poet, what shift they make to Stand to heare, what extremities he is driuen to for Rime, how they aduenture their purses, he his wits, how well both their paines are recompensed, they with a filthy noise, hee with a base reward.”⁵¹

Hearers can seem naive for a number of reasons. It may be that the ear is distrusted as a conduit of knowledge.⁵² Or, it may be assumed that hearers are illiterate, putting them at a disadvantage when judged alongside a better educated (male) commentator. These views, articulated at the time, shape scholarly discussion now. Thus, Monica Green worries that the shift from an oral culture in the Middle Ages, whereby midwives taught each other, to a literate male tradition, whereby ancient wisdom is

in St John’s College Library, Oxford, which is bound with *The Womans Booke*, has this marginalium on the title page: “excellent medicines that you hear of set down in this Book.”

49. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde* (n. 5), B4^v–B5^r.

50. William Bullein, *A dialogue both pleasant and piety-full, against the fever pestilence* (1564), G1^v–G2^v.

51. William Cornwallis, *Essayes* (London, 1600, 1601), I7^r.

52. *Ibid.*, 2M5^r.

orally transmitted to women by learned physicians and clerics, “left women dependent upon men and the learning that men could gather (or that they chose to transmit),”⁵³ while Helen King responds to the prejudice of one seventeenth-century physician by arguing that midwives didn’t need these books anyway.⁵⁴ Percival Willughby complained in his *Observations in Midwifery* (ca. 1672) that he has met with many midwives “that could not read, with severall that could not write; with many that understood very little of practice, and for such as these bee, it would do no good to speak to them of the anatomizing of the womb, or to tell them of the learned works.”⁵⁵ Willughby, King notes, “paints an interesting picture of the midwife who owns a book primarily in order to show the pictures [of malpresentations] to her clients.” He laments that this kind of reading only encourages “the illiterate to think themselves more knowledgeable than they are.”⁵⁶

Yet, despite such strongly expressed views in the period, we cannot assume, first of all, that hearers—whatever their gender—were “illiterate.” Assumptions about the high levels of illiteracy in early modern England have long been informed by the work David Cressy produced in 1980. Based on a survey of signatures versus marks on official documents, Cressy came to the conclusion that “England was massively illiterate” in the seventeenth century, “despite an epoch of educational expansion and a barrage of sermons.”⁵⁷ Women came off worst of all. Cressy argued that they were “almost universally unable to write their own names for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”⁵⁸ However, his conclusions have since been challenged and a more nuanced view has emerged.⁵⁹

53. Green, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine* (n. 1), 159.

54. See note 3.

55. Percival Willughby, *Observations in Midwifery*, ed. from the original MS by Henry Blenkinsop (1863), introduction by John L. Thornton (Wakefield: S. R. Publishers, 1972), 2. *Observations* existed only in manuscript until 1863. Hilda Smith accepts this “stereotype,” “Gynecology and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Liberating Women’s History*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 97–114, esp. 109–13. See also Steven A. Brody, “The Life and Times of Sir Fielding Gould: Man Midwife and Master Physician,” *Bull. Hist. Med.* 52 (1978): 228–50. For a counterargument, see Evenden, *Midwives* (n. 3), and also David Harley, “Ignorant Midwives—A Persistent Stereotype,” *Soc. Hist. Med. Bull.* 28 (1981): 6–9.

56. King, “‘As if None Understood’” (n. 3), 190; Willughby, *Observations* (n. 55), 12.

57. David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 2.

58. *Ibid.*, 145.

59. Keith Thomas, “The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England,” in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 97–131, quotations on 101–3.

It is not just that reading was taught before writing, or that some children and adults were taught to read only.⁶⁰ There were also many different kinds of literacy, all of which were overlooked by Cressy, who focused on alphabetic literacy. The characterization of the “hand” of one woman recipe-book compiler in the Wellcome Catalogue as “illiterate” leads Wendy Wall to question the cultural assumptions that shape our definitions of literacy. How can a person who could read and write, at least for the purposes of this domestic genre, be illiterate, she asks? This leads her to consider whether we need more terms to describe different kinds of readerly competence: “What do we call someone,” she muses, “who could read italic but not secretary hand?” “who could read books printed in black letter but not in roman font?” or “who could write with charcoal but not with ink?”⁶¹

We might go yet further, arguing that literacy should be extended to include those who *heard* books, whether they could read confidently or not. There was “no one in sixteenth-century England,” Adam Fox explains in *Oral and Literate Culture*, who “lived very far away from someone who could read a manuscript writing or a printed work for them,” making this if not a “literate society” then at the very least “a fundamentally literate environment.”⁶² It is easy to forget, though, that book reception in early modern England was typically aural, making the difference between those who could read fluently and those who could not less important than it is today. Men and women often preferred to hear a book even though they were perfectly able to read it on their own. Lady Anne Clifford, it is well known, “alternated between annotating books when she read ‘by herself’ and dictating marginalia as her servants read books aloud to her.”⁶³ The same is true of practical medical books too: Elaine Leong reminds us that both Grace Mildmay and Lady Margaret Hoby had herbals read to them. Margaret Hoby records under an entry for “Munday the 15 day” (1599): “I hard Mrs. Brutnell Read of the Herball tell supper time.”⁶⁴

60. On the importance of recognizing this especially for “girls and lower-class boys” who usually did not stay long enough at school to receive instruction in writing, see Margaret W. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 67–68.

61. Wendy Wall, “Literacy and the Domestic Arts,” *Huntington Libr. Quart.* 73, no. 3 (2010): 383–412, quotation on 385. See also Thomas, “Meaning of Literacy” (n. 59), 99–100, and for the most far-reaching challenge of all, Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters* (n. 60).

62. Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 36, 37.

63. Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material* (n. 20), 49 and 51.

64. Linda Pollock, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552–1620* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 97, and Margaret Hoby, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599–1605*, ed. J. Moody (Stroud:

There is a second reason, though, why hearing is not second best to silent reading. Books heard in company were also often discussed. In other words, the experience of hearing a book was not passive but inquisitive and social. Reading aloud in a coterie, Roger Chartier explains, “elicited commentary, criticism, debate” while “the frequent but informal discussions among friends could attract others—silent auditors—instructed through listening to the texts being read or the exchange of arguments.”⁶⁵ The same applies to the hearing of sermons.⁶⁶

School and university education—including the study of so-called literate medicine, itself an oral tradition—was also vocal. At the University of Padua medical students were required to read, digest, and discuss the works of the learned tradition. Girolamo Mercuriale explained to his students, “you should not be content to have read something once or twice and to have perceived it, but you should turn your mind to it time to time again, and consult your friends and teachers, examine, and debate.”⁶⁷ In England as well as on the continent students were expected to attend and participate in disputations, an intellectual contest involving at least three speakers, an opponent, a respondent, and a moderator.⁶⁸ A speaker might prepare for a disputation by writing an oration, but the disputation itself was always delivered orally. Anatomy, too, could be as much an auditory as a visual experience, as Cynthia Klestinec reminds us in a study of the new anatomical theater of Renaissance Padua, built around 1594.⁶⁹

This oral culture is reflected in the style of English vernacular works.⁷⁰ When the physician Helkiah Crooke addressed the “Barber-Chyrurgeons,” the “Citizens of the Physitians Commonwealth” as he calls them in a preface to *Mikrokosmographia*,⁷¹ he was well aware that they were used

Sutton, 2001), 29. See also Elaine Leong, “‘Herbals she peruseth’: Reading Medicine in Early Modern England,” *Renaiss. Stud.* 28, no. 4 (2014): 556–78.

65. Roger Chartier, “Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe,” trans. Carol Mossman, in *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 103–20, quotation on 107.

66. Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 63–81.

67. Richard J. Durling, “Girolamo Mercuriale’s *De modo studendi*,” *Osiris* 6 (1990): 181–95, quotation on 195.

68. On disputation, see Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 58–70.

69. Cynthia Klestinec, *Theaters of Anatomy: Students, Teachers, and Traditions of Dissection in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 95–97; and for the culture of talk expected of medical students, see also 114–21.

70. See also Fissell, “Making a Masterpiece” (n. 4), on popular oral contexts for the reception of the information in *Aristotles Masterpiece*, 65–66.

71. Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia* (n. 26), ¶11’.

to hearing the scripted word. He commends the practice, instituted by the College of Physicians, that a doctor of physic should read anatomy lectures to the surgeons "twice a weeke, partly in Latine, and partly also in English," saying that he too had profited from the "readings" of the current incumbent of this post. He also notes that the surgeons have "a laudable custome to procure a Doctor of Physick to read vnto you, and to provide that his Lectures be duly attended by those of [their] society"; and they "haue Anatomies both priuate for [their] profiting & publick for the honor & reputation of [their] Company read in [their] Mother-toong." Crooke explains that it is precedents such as these, along with his observation of so many "worthy Auditors" at lectures, that led him to compile this book.⁷² In a chapter on the "Ear" Crooke explains that one of the many reasons why it is better to hear a book is that "wee haue opportunity to demaund a reason of some doubts from him which speaketh to vs; and thence we receiue more profit then by bare reading, from which profit a certaine delight doth arise." He adds, "Bookes cannot digresse from their discourse for the better explication of a thing, as those may which teach by their voyce."⁷³

This scene of hearing is lively, inquisitive, and challenging, and it is reflected in the composition of *Mikrokosmographia*. Each of its books is divided into two parts, a "History" followed by the so-called "Controuersies," which recall the questions that might be asked at an anatomy. In the case of the fourth and fifth books, which deal with the parts and the acts of generation respectively, topics include the following: "Whether the Testicals be principall parts or no," "Whether the Erection of the yard be a Naturall or an Animall action," "Whether the Menstruall Blood haue any noxious or hurtfull qualitie therein," "How Twinnes, or more Infants are generated."⁷⁴ The answers tend to open rather than resolve debate; Crooke records different viewpoints, pro and contra, so that the reader is given variety rather than certainty. In response to the question "Whether the Menstruall Blood haue any noxious or hurtfull qualitie therein," Crooke begins by acknowledging that "Concerning the Nature of the Menstruall blood, there hath been and yet is so hard hold and so many opinions euen among Physitians them selues, that it were a shame to make mention of all their differences, much more to insist vpon them." But, he adds, "because we would premit nothing that were worthy of [their] knowledge, wee will insist vpon the chiefe heads of the Controuersie." There then follows an account of different views taken from medical,

72. Ibid., ¶2^r.

73. Ibid., 301^v.

74. Ibid., Y1^r, Y4^r, 2B8^v, 2D8^v.

literary, and scriptural authorities: from the understanding of Aristotle, Pliny, et al. that this blood is “vnprofitable excrement” and noxious, to the view of Galen and others that it nourishes the infant in the womb.⁷⁵ In this case, it is clear which view Crooke holds. He sides with Galen and his followers. And yet he cannot restrain his “speculative inclinations”;⁷⁶ he must share all he knows, and thus he treats the reader as a fellow interlocutor who shares his inquisitive instincts.

This scene of the anatomy theater is also reflected in the oral texture of Raynalde’s work. Much has been made of the colloquial language of vernacular books of midwifery,⁷⁷ but nothing has been made of the verbs that Raynalde chooses to represent his written speech act: declare, say, speak, talk. Nor has anything been made of the phrases that point to the imagining of the oral communication of scripted text.⁷⁸ “As I have sayd” is one of Raynalde’s most repeated phrases in this book, whereas I can find only one instance of the following phrase: “as hath ben written sufficientlye in the chapter before.”⁷⁹ Raynalde tends to conclude chapters thus: “we haue sufficiencytly talkyd of the seed bryngers, & stones, with theyr offices”; “I make an ende to talke any more of the nature and course of the Termes.”⁸⁰ Raynalde expects readers to look at the figures—“see,” “perceive,” and “look” are the verbs he uses to refer them to the illustrations—but he also imagines himself speaking about them, and thus, by implication, his readers as listening.

Raynalde does not present his readers/hearers with anatomical controversies, like Crooke a century later. However, he does display an inquisitive mind, asking and answering questions,⁸¹ privileging personal opinion and, in some cases, experience over bookish citation. Thus, he is unapologetic about taking on revered authorities and correcting their errors: “ye shall reade certayne thynges whiche in tymes passyd,” he offers at the start of book I, “haue ben corruptly, neglygently, yea and very falsely writin of.”⁸² In a chapter on menstruation he asserts, “here ye shall note

75. Ibid., 2B8^v–2C1^v.

76. Elizabeth D. Harvey, “Anatomies of Rapture: Clitoral Politics/Medical Blazons,” *Signs* 27, no. 2 (2001): 315–46, quotation on 326.

77. Ibid., 328–29. Harvey is commenting on Jane Sharp’s language in *The Midwives Book, or, The Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered* (London, 1671).

78. On “reception phrases” as evidence of reading aloud, see Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155.

79. Raynalde, *The byrth of mankynde* (n. 5), I6^{r-v}.

80. Ibid., G2^v, 2H4^r.

81. Ibid., I6^v.

82. Ibid., D3^v–D4^r.

that they be greatly disceaused and abused, which call the termes, the womans purgation, or the clensyng of there blud.”⁸³ Later in the same chapter he declares, “much more are to be detestid and abhorred the shamefull lyes & slaunders that Plynie ... and dyuers othermo, haue wrytten, of the uenemous and daungerous infectyue nature of the womans flowers or termes: The which al be but dreames and playne dotage.”⁸⁴ He also explains what he knows about menstruation in relation to his own experience of two women he has had “in cure.”⁸⁵ This sets the tone for the reception of his book.

The scene of reading I have just described is male, tied to the experience of the university. We might well wonder, then, what this means for women, who were excluded from formal education and thus more likely to bring practical rather than “literary” knowledge to the hearing of a midwifery book. Did this leave midwives “dependent on men and the learning that men could gather (or that they chose to transmit),” as Monica Green feared? Perhaps it did. We can see the kind of relationship she argued that literate medicine established represented in an illustration prefacing James Wolveridge’s Anglo-Irish *Speculum Matricis* (1671): here, a physician is advising a heavily pregnant woman. Yet, at the same time, I cannot help but notice the midwife at the center of the picture: she is turned toward the mother-to-be and holding an open book (Figure 5).

Just because Raynalde imagines women reading aloud and discussing his book does not mean that they did so. We come back again to the problem of evidence. That *some* women did have access to the work is suggested by the survival of the few signatures I have found, many from the late seventeenth century, but how they read and talked about this work is necessarily subject to speculation. Raynalde’s literary style and word choice present us with a kind of evidence that women hearers may have been prompted to discuss what they heard, testing it against their “manual” experience, but this is hardly satisfying; it cannot show us what actually happened. It is fortunate, then, that a text does survive in manuscript that dramatizes the kind of engagement I am suggesting could have happened. This is “The Midwives Deputie,” a dialogue by the physician Edward Poeton for his wife, a “sworne midwife.”⁸⁶ King notes that Poeton

83. *Ibid.*, 16^r.

84. *Ibid.* 17^r.

85. *Ibid.*, 2H3^r.

86. Edward Poeton, “The Midwives Deputie. Or A help for such as are not well furnished with knowledg concerning the misteries of the profession. Gathered out of sundry authorized, and authentic Authors. By E. P. of Petworth Licensiate in physick and chyrurgery. And now published for a further help unto such as are desirous to take paynes in the profession. Whereunto is added a booke concerning the ordering of yong children, both for the prevention of sicknesses, as also for the cure of divers diseases,” 2^r, British Library MS Sloane 1954.

Figure 5. James Wolveridge, *Speculum Matricis, or the Expert Midwives Handmaid* (London, 1671), front fly leaf, verso. Wellcome Library, London (EPB/A/53412/A).

offers “a vivid picture of the midwife instructing her deputy in the interpretation of texts.”⁸⁷ One of those texts, we will see, is *The Womans Booke* (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Edward Poeton, “The Midwives Deputie,” 5^r. © British Library Board (MS Sloane 1954).

87. King, “As if None Understood?” (n. 3), 192.

Reading Raynalde: Edward Poeton's "The Midwives Deputie"

Edward Poeton (d. 1644) is an obscure figure. There is no record of him attending university, although he claims to have been "Licentiate in Physick and Chyrurgery." He does, however, describe himself as "a long, (and the last) seruant" to the controversial physician Thomas Bonham in the preface to *The Chyrurgians Closet; or, An Antidotarie Chyrurgicall* (1630).⁸⁸ This work consists of Bonham's manuscripts, bequeathed to Poeton. Following Bonham's death (ca. 1627), Poeton left London, moving to Petworth, Sussex, to set up in practice. He was an insatiable reader and habitual writer. Although *The Chyrurgians Closet* is the only print publication to carry his name, he also left behind four presentation-copy manuscripts in his neat secretary hand.⁸⁹ By far the longest of the four manuscripts is "The Midwives Deputie" (ff. 1–93), dedicated to Ann, Countess of Northumberland (d. 1637). In his dedicatory epistle he explains it was compiled "for the use of my wife ... out of the works of Mr Thomas Raynalde physition (an englishman). Mr James Gwillemaw, Chyrurgion in ordinary to the French King. And Mr Jacob Rueff, a famous Chyrurgion" from Zurich, as well as what he learned from his service to Thomas Bonham.⁹⁰ "The Midwives Deputie" details the virtues and knowledge needed in a midwife, covering ideal character traits and recipes for the ills that affect mother and child. It also notes the role of the midwife at "natural" and "unnatural" births; here Poeton is indebted to Raynalde.

None of this sounds so very unusual; it is clear that this work contains rather conventional advice. What is distinctive about Poeton's treatise is that it is written as a dialogue between two female characters, a Midwife and her Deputy. The form was chosen no doubt to allow Poeton to communicate up-to-date information effectively and entertainingly to women

88. Thomas Bonham, *The Chyrurgians Closet; or, An Antidotarie Chyrurgicall* (London, 1630), a3^r, a5^r. For more information on Poeton, see Ross Dandridge, "Anti-Quack Literature in Early Stuart England" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 2012), 120.

89. These are "The Midwives Deputie"; "The ordering of yong children"; "The urinall cracht in the carriage or a tract averring the impossibilitie of diseases right discerning by a carryed urines bare inspection"; "The Winnowing of white witchcraft, penned by Edward Poeton, of Petworth, uppon his own proper experience and certayne knowledg, and published for a more full cleare and ample discovery of that so hellish and mischeevous a misterye." They are bound together in a single copy in the British Library, titled the "Medical Treatises," MS Sloane 1954. Dandridge, "Anti-Quack Literature" (n. 88), suggests that all of the manuscripts are in Poeton's own hand, basing this judgment on a comparison of the handwriting in this manuscript with Poeton's commonplace book, MS Sloane 1965, and his signature in Bonham's will, 121, n. 13.

90. Ibid., 2^r.

readers, and to display his own knowledge. It takes the basic form of catechistic “question and answer.” The Deputy is learning from the Midwife; at the same time her medical knowledge is being examined by the Midwife. Early on, the Midwife confirms that the traditional female virtues are expected of a trainee, sobriety, modesty, godliness. Unsurprisingly, “talking” is not one of the virtues. “[M]ay it now please you,” the Deputy asks, “to declare unto mee what qualities are required to be in a Midwife,”⁹¹ to which she is told that one of the “negative” virtues is taciturnity and is advised “to beware, that neither scurrilous, nor slanderous words proceed out of her mouthe.” The Deputy’s response is worth citing in full:

Dep: I confess, that generally our meetings, are overladen with loquacity: and many things are often spoken which were better to be concealed then published. I thank the lord that I have learned (with holy David) to pray the Lord to set a watch before my mouthe, and to keep the doore of my lippes that I may not offend with my tongue.⁹²

Literacy is expected of trainee midwives. In chapter 2, the Midwife asks the Deputy to “tell mee what bookes have you read concerning these matters.” She responds simply, “I have read Mr Thomas Raynalde his booke: called the Birth of man, or the Womans booke. I have like wise read Mr James Guillemaw his booke called Childe birth or the happy delyvery of women.”⁹³ Her reading is restricted to the vernacular. When the Midwife presses to know if the Deputy has understood what she has read, she answers thus: “I thank god I understand all that which is written in English, in them.”⁹⁴ When the Midwife then asks if she has read any other books, she responds,

Dep: None other (in english) that I can call to minde: But this I doe well remember, that your husband, once (in my presence) showed a latine booke unto you (concerning this subiect) which hee much commended.

Mid: You say true indeed, I doe well remember such a thing; And in that booke there are sundry signes of conception sett downe, some whereof accorde well with those of Mr Guillemaw.⁹⁵

It is not hard to discern that the physician Poeton—like the Midwife’s fictional husband—is hovering in the background, managing women’s access to gynecological knowledge. This is made explicit in the preface “To all country Midwives, and Midwives Deputies” in the following excerpt:

91. *Ibid.*, 5^v.

92. *Ibid.*, 6^r.

93. *Ibid.*, 9^v.

94. *Ibid.*, 9^v.

95. *Ibid.*, 11^r.

Know this, that I challeng no part therof to be mine, but onely the manner of setting things downe, the matter is other mens. And in the manner I have striven with my self to use the most ordinary words and the playnest phrases, to express the matter by that I coulde devise. And as for all such medicines as are set down in Mr Gwillemaw, and in Mr Rueff, their bookes, in Latine, I have faythfully translated into english so far forth as I coulde finde english wordes to express them by. As for medicines which fall not within the compass of woemens capacitie, to tamper with such indeed, I left untranslated. Now one thing more I entreate you to observe that where you are directed to make use of a physition, that you reiect not my counsell theerin, least had I wist come to late.⁹⁶

Poeton is adapting what he knows to suit “woemens capacitie.” Behind these vernacular books, he suggests, lies a Latin tradition to which only the male physician has access

Yet, for all that I have just said, the Midwife and her Deputy are not depicted as passive recipients of Raynalde’s or anyone else’s teachings. This is a dialogue in the fullest sense. More to the point, it is a dialogue between two women. Poeton’s characters are surprisingly well versed in literate medicine even if they don’t read Latin. “What time is there that is convenient, to purge such woemen as are with childe?” asks the Midwife. To this the Deputy responds, “Hippocrates in his booke of Aphorisms (section. 4. Aphorism. 1. and agayne sect: 5. Aph. 29) sets downe the rule thereof in theis words. Thou shalt purge childebearing woemen, if it be needfull, at the fourth month after conception [etc.].”⁹⁷ Also, the Deputy is not slow to test Hippocratic aphorisms and the advice of male physicians against her experience:

Mid: Many are of opinion that a woman with childe ought not to be let blood for feare of miscarrying: And they grounde this their opinion uppon that warrant of Hippocrates: sect: 5. Apho: 30. whose words are theis. A woman with childe, a veyne being opened, aborteth and is delyvered before due time: and so much the rather, if the foetus be of any bignes.

Depr. Mr Guillemaw allowes it not, but in case of necessitie: and hee reporteth it, that hee once saw a woman with childe, who (for a pluries) was let blood eleven severall times, and yet went out for full time, and was well delyvered. And this much I can speake uppon myne owne knowledge, of a yong gentillwoman, who being with childe, was thence let blood, and did very well after it.⁹⁸

Of course, the knowledge displayed in this dialogue is Poeton’s and it is offered for the benefit of a new female patron as well as his wife.

96. *Ibid.*, 3^r.

97. *Ibid.*, 21^r.

98. *Ibid.*, 22^r.

However, he could have chosen, like Willughby a few decades later, to speak in his own voice, relating his experience to what he has read in books. Or, he could have chosen to structure this dialogue as Thomas Dawkes did in *The Midwife Rightly Instructed* (1736) as a conversation between an inexperienced deputy and a knowledgeable Surgeon:

SURG: I suppose your Tutress recommended to you some Books?

MIDW: Yes, Sir; she recommended to me two; the one she calls *Chamberlain's* Midwifery, the other *Daventer's*.

SURG: And pray, what Light have you gather'd from either or both of them?

MIDW: Why really, Sir, I cannot say that I am much the wiser since I read them?

SURG: Why, They are both reckon'd good Pieces.

MIDW: Yes, Sir, they may be, for ought I know; but they are either of them above my Understanding, and I doubt, above that of my Mistress too.

SURG: True, LUCINA: though there are a great many good things in both of them; yet, it is certain, they are not adapted to the Capacity of Women.⁹⁹

However, he did none of these things. Poeton's decision to depict two women in dialogue about the books they have read means that he has chosen instead to represent a model of literate midwifery. Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of the practical experience of women in the birthing room, and their ability to test bookish advice. The preoccupation of the Midwife and her Deputy with real situations determines how they are represented responding to what they have read. This is the case in chapter 9, which deals with natural and unnatural delivery. The Midwife and Deputy seem to have Raynalde's illustrations of unnatural birth positions in front of them, as well as the other printed midwifery books from which they are also reading and summarizing. These are referenced in the text thus: "Suppose that the childe doe lye cleane cross the womb, with one of his sides bending unto the byrth passage, as you finde it both penned and pourtrayd by Mr Raynalde: figure. the fift."¹⁰⁰ But despite the prominence of Raynalde in this dialogue, his advice is not always accepted. Raynalde is often found wanting and Guillemeau preferred because he provides more practical detail. We see this in the discussion of malpresentation number five (Figure 2):

Dep: Mr Raynalde only adviseth to turne the childe unto the true naturall posture.

99. Thomas Dawkes, *The Midwife Rightly Instructed* (London, 1736), 9. For discussion of Dawkes, see Fissell, "Making a Masterpiece" (n. 4), 71–73. I am grateful to a reviewer for bringing Thomas Dawkes to my attention.

100. Poeton, "The Midwives Deputie" (n. 86), 59°.

Mr Guillemau adviseth, that the woman being duely placed on her bed, that then the midwife (having her hands duely annoynted) shall put up her right hand, to turne the childe, and having founde the shoulder (with the palme of her hand) she shall gently lift it upward, that so the foot or knees may be toward the bottom of the matrix, whilst the head falls and slydes downward: then shall she holde it fast at the orifice of the womb, with her left hand, being put up at the same instant; and by this meanes shall bring the armes close to thighes and sides of the childe, that so the woman may be naturally delyvered.¹⁰¹

The commendation of the detail of Guillemau's book is repeated by both the Midwife and the Deputy many times: "Mr Guillemaw handled this matter far more largely";¹⁰² "I surely counsel that wee are all much bounde to prayse god, for that booke of Mr Guillemaws, which geves us greater light (by far) than any other doth, which I have seen";¹⁰³ "I cannot but highly commend the iudgment of Mr Guillemaw";¹⁰⁴ "Mr Raynalde, (In my minde) as hee speakes very littell heerest, so are his words (to mee) obscure."¹⁰⁵ But the evaluation is not always in Guillemau's favour. It is not that one author is preferred over the others in all cases. On the topic of malpresentation number six, feet first, "being spread abroad at the knees," the Deputy notes, "Mr Raynalde useth few wordes in this matter," but then she adds, "I cannot finde that Mr Guillemau doth make any mention (at all) of this posture of byrth. In regard whereof I humblye crave your further advice." In this case the Midwife turns to Rueff for advice.¹⁰⁶ This is one example of how the Midwife and her Deputy are represented as thoughtful, practical readers.

Poeton's dialogue is the only evidence I have found of *The Womans Booke* being read and discussed by women, and it is a fiction rather than a record. There are other issues too. It does not represent exactly the scene of reading that Raynalde describes; for example, we don't know what room the fictional characters are reading in, while the purpose of the dialogue is the testing of the Deputy. Even so, it does give us a rare glimpse of the possible use of this practical book that provides a stark contrast to the private reading of the learned physician William Ward, as well as to the negative representation by Willughby of ill-informed midwives showing the pictures to clients. I would also argue that it gives us the opportunity to imagine the historical scene of reading that led women to adapt and

101. *Ibid.*, 59^r.

102. *Ibid.*, 61^r.

103. *Ibid.*, 62^r.

104. *Ibid.*, 62^r.

105. *Ibid.*, 62^r–63^r.

106. *Ibid.*, 60^r.

make their own—rather than reject—the masculine learned tradition from the mid-seventeenth century. The first publication of *The Compleat Midwives Practice* (1656) is attributed to Thomas Chamberlayne, but the second edition (1659) was supposedly corrected by four London-based practitioners.¹⁰⁷ It is the preface written and signed by these midwives that interests me, suggestive as it is of the conversations they must have had about rival midwifery books by male physicians, of which Raynalde's *The Womans Booke* is identified as the oldest and least objectionable of those "miserable volumes."¹⁰⁸ These women give advice based on their practical experience and from the books that they have evaluated and approved, including from the case studies of the practicing midwife Louise Bourgeois. It is a pity that Willughby chose to ignore these feisty readers.

Finally, I would also suggest that the implications of this kind of analysis and, more importantly, of this kind of book extend beyond the history of midwifery. *The Womans Booke* offers a new source for the history of women's vernacular reading that is different from the decorous genres—recipe books, herbals, devotional writings, romances—with which we are more familiar, and an opportunity to recognize the companionable education and knowledge of women who were read to.¹⁰⁹ But if nothing else I hope this analysis might simply remind us what we miss in a culture when we can no longer hear its talk, *or* try to imagine that we can.

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107. Evenden, *Midwives* (n. 3), 8–9.

108. *The Compleat Midwives Practice* (London, 1659), A2^r. The initials given on the title page are R. C., I. D., M. S., and T. B.

109. Rebecca Laroche, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts, 1550–1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Leong, "Medical Recipe Collections" (n. 12). See also Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material* (n. 20); Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Edith Snook, *Women, Reading and the Cultural Politics of Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).