HERESY TRIALS AND ENGLISH WOMEN WRITERS, 1400–1670

This book charts the emergence of women’s writing from the procedures of heresy trials and recovers a tradition of women’s trial narratives from the late Middle Ages to the seventeenth century. Analyzing the interrogations of Margery Kempe, Anne Askew, Marian Protestant women, Margaret Clitherow, and Quakers Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheavers, the book examines the complex dynamics of women’s writing, preaching, and authorship under religious persecution and censorship. Archival sources illuminate not only the literary choices women made, showing how they wrote to justify their teaching even when their authority was questioned, but also their complex relationship with male interrogators. Women’s speech was paradoxically encouraged and constrained, and male editors preserved their writing while shaping it to their own interests. This book challenges conventional distinctions between historical and literary forms while identifying a new tradition of women’s writing across Catholic, Protestant, and sectarian communities and the medieval/early modern divide.

GENELLE GERTZ is Associate Professor of English at Washington and Lee University and teaches courses on medieval and early modern literature.
HERESY TRIALS AND ENGLISH WOMEN WRITERS, 1400–1670

GENELLE GERTZ
Heresy Trials and English Women Writers, 1400–1670
Genelle Gertz

First published 2012
Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cata
g

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Gertz, Genelle.
Heresy trials and English women writers, 1400-1670 / Genelle Gertz.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-01705-4
1. Trials (Heresy) – Great Britain – History. 2. English literature – Women authors – History and criticism. I. Title.
KD371.H47G47 2012
820.9’382736–dc23 2012011808
ISBN 978-1-107-01705-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.
For my parents, Greg and Jeanette, and my son, Owen
Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction: articulating women  page viii

1 Belief papers and the literary genres of heresy trial 1
2 Confessing Margery Kempe, 1413–1438 19
3 Recanting and rewriting Anne Askew, 1540–1546 48
4 Sanctifying ploughmen’s daughters and butchers’ wives: the interrogations of Alice Driver, Elizabeth Young, Agnes Prest, and Margaret Clitherow, 1555–1586 77
5 Exporting inquisition: Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers at Malta, 1659–1663 107
  Conclusion: visionaries, nonconformists, and the history of women’s trial writing 144

Notes 181
Bibliography 227
Index 252
Acknowledgments

Though I could not have known it at the time, this book grew out of a conversation I had with my father, a Baptist minister, when I was in high school. Why couldn't women preach, I asked, when so many women in our church were standing up and testifying? He answered that it was scripturally unsupported, but that he was not opposed to women's speech and in fact wrote his seminary thesis on the practice of lay testimony in church. (When I wrote the second and fifth chapters of this book I discovered that many other clergy, including Baptists, also wrestled with contradictions between textual authority, on the one hand, and women's spiritual gifts, on the other.) To my great surprise, in graduate school I came across seventeenth-century women writers who used the same language I had grown up hearing from the pulpit and pew. The collection of autobiographical writing, Her Own Life, edited by Elspeth Graham and others, inspired me to look even earlier in history to see whether there were also women preachers. Scholarly editions of medieval and sixteenth-century women writers enabled my research, and I am profoundly grateful for the editorial work that many scholars, especially Lynn Staley and Elaine Beilin, did to provide informative editions of early women writers.

I am especially grateful, as well, for the direction that my advisors gave when I started the project that eventually became this book. John Fleming brought his expertise in medieval religious culture to bear and Peter Lake introduced me to Puritan and Catholic historiography while also sharing his uncanny knowledge of the daily lives of churchmen. Nigel Smith understood what I aimed to do from the beginning, and he provided considerable enthusiasm for the project while introducing me to ways of navigating British archives that furthered the depth of my analysis. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Elaine Beilin, and David Wallace also offered crucial advice on my research. After I began my career at Washington and Lee, a short-term fellowship from the Folger Shakespeare Library enabled me to pursue a new area of research on heresy trial procedure. At the Folger,
Acknowledgments

ix

Euan Cameron was instrumental in helping me to understand the differences between English and Continental heresy trials, and Steve Galbraith generously made available several editions of Foxe as I worked my way through English trial accounts. As I explored further in the field of heresy trial, Tom Freeman was especially generous in answering my questions about trial records and pointing me to historical and archival sources. He patiently read several drafts of the manuscript.

Many individuals have given helpful feedback over conversations and conference presentations. Audiences at Sixteenth-Century Studies conferences, the Institute for Historical Research, the Renaissance Society of America, and the Inquisition and Confession Workshop convened by Mary Flannery and Katie Walter at Queen Mary, University of London, responded to my arguments. In particular, Ruth Ahnert, Tom Betteridge, Kim Coles, Megan Hickerson, Victor Houliston, Erica Longfellow, Kathleen Lynch, Susannah Monta, Mark Rankin, Vance Smith, Stefano Villani, Diane Vincent, and Susan Wabuda offered advice and critique. At the last minute, Paul Cavill generously read portions of the manuscript.

Washington and Lee University provided several kinds of support for my research and it is a pleasure to thank numerous people at the university for their assistance. Lenfest and Glenn grants funded many research trips. Student assistants, including Hansen Babington, Micah Fergenson, Robert Modlin, Deborah Null Boston, Christian Roden, and Elizabeth Williams helped with research and organization of materials. Three chairs, Suzanne Keen, Jim Warren and Lesley Wheeler, advised my research program and read my work. Speedy Elizabeth Teaff of Leyburn Library helped with loan requests, and Yolanda Merrill kept watch for relevant publications. I have been especially grateful for conversations with two colleagues, Ed Craun and Holly Pickett. Ed’s mastery of medieval scholarship, love of reformist literature and wide-ranging intellectual interests strengthened the arguments of this book. Holly, whose shared passion for early modern religious literature and culture fueled many fascinating conversations, patiently talked through my ideas for revision and read several chapter drafts. I am grateful, as well, for conversations with colleagues in History, especially David Peterson, and for the friendship of English colleagues Edward Adams, Theresa Braunschneider, Marc Conner, Curtis Jirsa, and Sandy O’Connell.

Staff at the Bodleian Library, the British Library, Cambridge University Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Friends House Library, Guildhall Library, the London Metropolitan Archives, and Norwich Record Office kindly made books and manuscripts available. An early version of parts
of Chapters 2 and 3 was published by University of Notre Dame Press in 2005 as “Stepping into the Pulpit? Women’s Preaching in The Book of Margery Kempe and The Examinations of Anne Askew” in Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages, edited by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton. I thank them for permission to reprint it.

My editor, Linda Bree, deserves special thanks for seeing the potential of this book and for responding quickly and clearly on all matters. I am grateful to Maartje Scheltens, Gillian Dadd and Abigail Jones for helping me through production, and for the two readers who saw the ways I could improve the book’s scope and argumentation. Anna Oxbury deserves praise and thanks for her shrewd copy editing, and I am indebted to Teresa Sinclair for creating the index.

Lastly, I am indebted to the support of my friends and family, most obviously my parents, Greg and Jeanette, and my son, Owen, to whom I have dedicated this book. My parents tirelessly helped with childcare, meals and moral support. Owen made difficult circumstances bearable and surely became the greatest joy I have ever known. My brother, Steve, welcomed me to his Oxford house. J. K. Barret, Jen Waldron and Laura Moran called from afar and kept up our friendship. My neighbors, C. B. and Dolly Hughes, hosted me on countless evenings on their back porch, and Ed and Marlys became adoptive grandparents to Owen. Bill Lipes swept into my life and took me on a wild ride that included races in his 1985 Monte Carlo. I look forward to our future.