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Introduction

> Freedom is a simple productivity application that locks you away from the internet on Mac or Windows computers for up to eight hours at a time.[1]

This marketing blurb for a new piece of computer software proposes a paradox. Imprisonment provides freedom, and constraint leads to productivity. It is true: the software helped me finish this book. Apparently, I am not alone: its website is filled with testimonies from famous authors who regularly make use of the programme to free themselves from online distractions. However, it is also a truism. The idea that social dislocation and physical restraint provide the necessary conditions for expansive and poetic thought has been suggested by figures as diverse as the twelfth-century abbot, Peter of Celle, and the twentieth-century philosopher, Gaston Bachelard.[2] Recently, too, there have been a spate of journalistic articles examining the ways in which people are increasingly seeking forms of self-incarceration in order to make time and space for writing and uninterrupted thought.[3]

There is good evidence for such arguments. Some of history's most influential writers, thinkers, and political figures wrote from prison, including St Paul, Boethius, Marco Polo, Walter Raleigh, John Bunyan, the Marquis de Sade, Oscar Wilde, Lady Constance Lytton, Adolf Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ezra Pound, Antonio Gramsci, Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, and Gerry Adams, to name a few. Many other writers drew on past experiences of incarceration in their writings, such as Primo Levi and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The idea that prison is a kind of crucible for literary production is, however, contentious and

[1] http://macfreedom.com/ [accessed 18 December 2012].
[2] See Peter of Celle, 'On Affliction and Reading', in *Selected Works*, tr. Hugh Feiss (Kalamazoo, MI, 1987), 137–8; Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, tr. Maria Jolas, revised edn (Boston, MA, 1994).
[3] See for example Tony Perottet, 'Why Writers Belong Behind Bars', *New York Times* (22 July 2011), available from www.nytimes.com [accessed 18 December 2012].

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overly idealistic. It ignores that fact that for many prisoners, subjected to particularly harsh or regulated conditions, it was extremely hard to find either the opportunity or the means to write. Accounts of detainees at Guantánamo Bay testify to the fact that, before they were allowed writing materials (which were provided for short periods of time and under strict watch), one of the few means by which prisoners could write was on Styrofoam cups, on which they wrote poems with pebbles or dabs of toothpaste.[4] Nevertheless, the fact that prisoners under the strictest of surveillance still found a way to write goes some way to explaining why periods of prolonged or excessive persecution often result in bodies of new literature – even though they might subsequently be censored, suppressed, or destroyed. The sixteenth century was one such period.

This book argues that the sixteenth century was a watershed in the development of prison literature as a supra-genre in England. In the centuries prior to the Reformation, we find only isolated examples of English literature produced during incarceration. By contrast, the religious and political instability of the Tudor reigns, especially during the period between the late 1520s and Mary I's death in 1558, provided the conditions for prison literature to thrive. England witnessed unprecedented levels of religious persecution during the Reformation: fifty-three Protestants were put to death for heresy in England and Scotland in the period 1527–46, and at least two hundred and eighty-two perished under Mary I.[5] Catholics suffered incarceration and execution during Henry VIII's reign for failure to recognise their king as supreme head of the Church in England. Neither was Edward VI's Protestant reign without its religious casualties: a number of Protestant separatists were burnt for heresy, and certain high-profile Catholics languished in jail for much of the reign. Moreover, the scheming and schisms of Tudor courtly politics led to the arrest and execution of various important Tudor statesmen, including Thomas More, Thomas Cromwell, and Edward Seymour, not to mention two of Henry's wives. Those involved in subverting Mary and Elizabeth's claim to the throne on Edward VI's death were also put to death, including the nine-day queen Jane Grey, her husband Guildford Dudley, and his father John Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland.

These religious and political prisoners, unlike the majority of the detainees during this period, were not only literate but had powerful motivations to write. These motivations were as diverse as the causes for

[4] Marc Falkoff, *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak* (Iowa City, 2007), 3.
[5] See Brad Gregory, 'The Anathema of Compromise: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe', PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1996, 13.

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which individuals were imprisoned. Political careers and, indeed, lives depended on prisoners writing to vindicate themselves, or elicit sympathy and support from influential parties; public figures recognised that their reputations must be maintained, even when facing the scaffold. Religious prisoners were confident that their cause was validated by a stoic endurance of imprisonment and execution. Rather than appealing for freedom, Catholic prisoners' writings reflected their private devotions and prayers; and Protestant prisoners sought to encourage their co-religionists at home and in exile, to teach and guide them on doctrinal issues, and to ensure unity of belief. Unsurprisingly, these circumstances and impulses resulted in works of literature that covered a vast range of genres and forms: from trial narratives to Psalm translations, dialogues, religious polemics, pastoral guidance, poems, love lyrics, humanistic translations, prayers and meditative guides, letters of appeal, letters modelled on St Paul's, marginalia, and graffiti.

In the past the diversity of written outputs, as well as the different reasons for the prisoners' incarceration, has prevented scholars from writing about sixteenth-century prison literature as a coherent body of work. The scholarship that has touched on this topic has tended to constitute case studies on individual texts and authors – most frequently Thomas More, Thomas Wyatt, and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey. The other point of access to incarcerated authors has been through sixteenth-century martyrologies, such as John Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs', although these collected documents are rarely talked about as prison literature per se. This book, by contrast, argues that the imprisonment of the author is a far more important organising principle than other generic headings under which a work might be placed, and that a comprehensive analysis of sixteenth-century prison literature reveals trends that remain hidden in more genre-specific studies of works produced inside and outside the prison walls. To date, the only book-length study to tackle early modern prison literature as a discrete body of work is the special issue of *Huntington Library Quarterly* edited by William H. Sherman and William J. Sheils.[6]

The trends that emerge in prison literature written in the middle years of the sixteenth century are noticeably distinct from the examples we have from the Middle Ages or from other obvious medieval models for martyr writing. Scholarship on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prison

[6] 'Prison Writings in Early Modern England', special issue, ed. William H. Sherman and William J. Sheils, *HLQ*, 72 (2009).

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works – such as Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, James I of Scotland's *The Kingis Quair*, Charles d'Orleans' *English Book*, George Ashby's *A Prisoner's Reflections* – consistently emphasises the influence of Boethius' *Of the Consolation of Philosophy*, which was written by the sixth-century Roman senator while awaiting execution.[7] This dialogue, which represents a fictionalised version of the author in conversation with Lady Philosophy, led to a series of prison writings that were concerned both with self-presentation and self-justification.[8] But although Boethius' dialogue continued to be translated and printed in the sixteenth century,[9] aside from Thomas More's *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, there is a notable lack of Boethian-influenced prison works.[10] Another form of writing we might have expected to influence religious prisoners is the body of medieval devotional literature that taught its readers how to practice a kind of vicarious martyrdom through meditation on Christ's suffering, such as Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*, the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, which is believed to have been written by Bonaventure, Richard Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*, and Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*. These various meditations on the life of Christ enjoyed widespread popularity, and More recommends two of them (*Meditationes* and the *Imitatio Christi*) in his famous polemic, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, which was written while he was still lord chancellor. Unsurprisingly, several of More's Tower works show the influence of this earlier tradition, as do the writings of Recusant prisoners

[7] See, Joanna Summers, *Late-Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* (Oxford, 2004); *The Kingis Quair and other Prison Poems*, ed. Linne R. Mooney and Mary Jo Arn (Kalamazoo, MI, 2005); *Charles D'Orleans in England, 1415–1440*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn (Rochester, NY, 2000); Robert Epstein, 'Prisoners of Reflection: The Fifteenth-Century Poetry of Exile and Imprisonment', *Exemplaria*, 15 (2003), 157–98; A. C. Spearing, 'Prison, Writing, Absence: Representing the Subject in the English Poems of Charles d'Orléans', in *Chaucer to Spenser: A Critical Reader*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Oxford, 1999), 297–311; Julia Boffey, 'Chaucerian Prisoners: The Context of *The Kinges Quair*', in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London, 1991), 279–316; and Diane Marks, 'Poems from Prison: James I of Scotland and Charles d'Orléans', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 15 (1989), 245–58.

[8] Summers, *Late-Medieval Prison Writing*, 22–3.

[9] See *The boke of comfort called in laten Boetius de Consolatione philosophie* (Tavistock, 1525); *Boetius de consolationae philosophiae: The boke of Boecius, called the comforte of philosophye* (London, 1556). Elizabeth I's translation can be found in *Elizabeth I: Translations, 1592–1598*, ed. Janel Mueller and Joshua Scodel (Chicago, IL, 2009), 45–368. Chaucer's English translation was printed by William Caxton in 1478, and was included in editions of Chaucer's works from 1532.

[10] Martin Buzacott also argues that Book 2, metre 4 of Boethius' *De consolatione* is an analogue for Thomas Wyatt's 'Who lyst his welthe and eas Retayne' ('A Boethian Analogue for Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Who List his Wealth"', *Notes & Queries*, 31 (1984), 163–4); however, the passage in question clearly derives from a chorus in Seneca's tragedy *Phaedra*, from which the poem's Latin refrain is also taken.

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More information

later in the sixteenth century and seventeenth century. For such Catholic writers, these works were a bastion against Protestant heresies being imported from the Continent. By contrast, Protestant writers rejected the medieval model of meditative inwardness in favour of new and reconditioned forms that better suited their evangelical agenda, such as the prison letter and trial narrative, which allowed them to minister actively to Protestant communities outside the prison instead of focusing on their own imminent demise. They were not the only group to innovate. In the middle years of the sixteenth century we also see the Psalm paraphrase become a typical form of prison writing, adopted primarily by political prisoners, despite having no explicit association with prison before these decades.

The fact that the flourishing of prison literature in the sixteenth century has not met with sufficient or sustained critical investigation means that the established history of Tudor oppression needs to be rewritten. Geoffrey Elton's work in particular did much to establish the Tudor state as monolith: he argued that Henrician England witnessed a 'revolution in government', characterised by the centralisation of bureaucracy and revenue and a new effective campaign of state propaganda.[11] Whether this revolution of government is seen (as in the case of Whig and Marxist historians) to be an emancipating and progressive move away from the feudal and Catholic power structures, or (as in the case of the 'revisionist' historians) to be a repressive system imposed on the unwilling masses, it is clear that this centralising impetus had a crucial impact on the freedom of speech and on literary production.[12] This corollary has been the basis of new historicist approaches to sixteenth-century literature – which have argued that literary activity was shaped by an essentially repressive framework – as well as James Simpson's groundbreaking volume *Reform and Cultural Revolution*.[13] The latter argues that 'concentrations of power that simplify institutional structures also simplify and centralize cultural practice, by stressing central control, historical novelty, and unity produced from the top down'.[14] However, as other scholars have begun to point out, the idea of a single, centralised literary sphere is not borne out by all the

[11] See especially, G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1953).
[12] See David Loades, 'The Theory and Practice of Censorship in Sixteenth-Century England', in his *Politics, Censorship and the English Reformation* (London, 1991), 96–108.
[13] See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL, 1980; reprinted 2005), 9.
[14] James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution: 1350–1547*, Oxford English Literary History 2 (Oxford, 2002), 558.

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textual evidence. If, along with Thomas Freeman we hail prison literature as one the most 'characteristic cultural forms' in England during this period (which, in terms of volume, is no exaggeration), then we can see that literary innovation was not being produced from the top down.[15] Quite the reverse, the very structures that sought to enforce the centralisation of discursive space – exile, imprisonment, and execution – forced multiple new spheres of literary resistance and dissent into existence.

History has shown that when unreasonable strictures are placed upon freedom of expression, proscribed voices are likely to emerge elsewhere in oppositional sites, or what have been described as 'counter-public spheres'. Most contemporary conceptualisations of the public sphere are based on the ideas expressed in Jürgen Habermas's book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, which presents this sphere as necessarily inclusive: 'a public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all'.[16] This inclusivity, however, has been much criticised in recent years by scholars such as Nancy Fraser, who identifies the ways in which marginalised groups excluded from a universal public sphere form their own spheres or 'counter-publics'.[17] A counter-public sphere is, by definition, a site of resistance: it is an arena for hearing proscribed voices, expressing proscribed ideas, and entertaining an alternative reality to the existing order. Gerard Hauser argues that prisons are one such counter-public sphere, especially when they house political prisoners: for while imprisonment 'removes the activist's voice from the epicentre of evolving events', it also simultaneously 'bestows a perverse imprimatur, since one presumes the state would feel no need to remove the political prisoner from society were he or she unimportant'. As a result, he argues 'the prisoner's messages acquire an aura of authority to direct thought and action against the existing order'.[18] While Hauser's examples are

[15] Thomas Freeman, 'Introduction: The Rise of Prison Literature', in 'Prison Writings in Early Modern England', ed. Sheils and Sherman, 133–46 (133).

[16] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, tr. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 85.

[17] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 109–42. For a related argument about the early modern public sphere (and specifically the post-Reformation public sphere), see, Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England', in their edited *Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007), 1–30.

[18] Gerard A. Hauser, 'Prisoners of Conscience and the Counterpublic Sphere of Prison Writing: The Stones that Start the Avalanche', in *Counterpublics and the State*, ed. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (New York, 2001), 35–58 (38).

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mostly restricted to twentieth-century Polish prison writings, his conclusion also holds true for the sixteenth century – despite the prevailing image of Tudor state control.

The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century narrates the emergence of the prison as an important and influential literary sphere. The chapters that follow not only discuss explicit narratives of opposition and the rallying of dissident communities against the dominant powers, but also the more subtle tricks by which prisoners appropriated the site of the prison for their own agendas. In order to show how the prison might be deemed a counter-public *sphere*, Chapters 2 to 5 are arranged spatially, each one dealing with a wider group of people and a wider geographic area. Following an initial chapter outlining the history and administration of sixteenth-century prisons, Chapter 2 focuses on the individual prisoner and how his or her actions and writings can be interpreted as clandestine tactics used to express autonomy from within disciplinary structures. Chapter 3 examines how writings were employed to create prison communities, both in a structural sense (in terms of forming ties) and in an ideological sense (through the transmission of ideas about community). Chapter 4 addresses how incarcerated writers imagined counter-publics extending beyond the prison, and the organisational structures by which texts were actually transmitted. And finally, Chapter 5 challenges the idea that the print publication of prison writings metaphorically liberated these texts: while it is true that print allowed prisoners' works to circulate to a much wider readership than was possible through manuscript circulation, they became subject to a range of textual shackles, such as paratexts and silent editing. The function of this arrangement is to show the spreading influence of prison literature in this period. Prison writing was not a niche cultural practice. It may have taken place in marginal locations, but the texts emerging from prisons in the middle decades of the sixteenth century had a crucial impact on the literary, religious, and political landscapes in England.

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CHAPTER ONE

The sixteenth-century prison

The title page of the 1539 'Great Bible' – the first royally commissioned Bible in English – provides a powerful piece of propaganda about Henry VIII's spiritual and temporal power over English society (Figure 1). This stratified composition has Henry sitting at the apex handing down Bibles to Thomas Cranmer, on the left, and Thomas Cromwell, on the right. In the middle register Cranmer distributes the volume to the clergy; and, presumably, in the bottom register the newly Englished Bible forms the basis of the priest's exhortations to his congregation. Henry is thus the distributor of God's word on earth, and everyone gives thanks to him proclaiming 'VIVAT REX', and 'GOD SAVE THE KYNGE' – everyone, that is, except for the imprisoned figures in the bottom right-hand corner of the title page. The illustration thus creates an image of centralised authority: it not only celebrates the magnanimity and power of the monarch, it also provides the English people with a warning that only authorised forms of speech and writing are permitted. Dissident elements – those who would not acknowledge Henry's Supremacy or conform to orthodox Christian belief – would be silenced and contained within the prison. In this way, the title page suggests that the Henrician prison was in the service of the monarch, and that it was a successful and suitable means of ensuring control over the public realm.

This image of the prison is, of course, a myth. A large body of literature, including writings of resistance and dissident texts, emanated from the prison in Henry's reign and those that followed. And the penal theory and administration of the sixteenth-century prison was a good deal more complex than this image allows. It is, nevertheless, an important starting point. Firstly, this title page puts prison back in the picture of pre-modern penal history. Michel Foucault's narrative of the emergence of the modern prison in his seminal *Discipline and Punish* has had a significant impact on how the early modern penal system has been studied. Foucault represents the eighteenth century as a crucial turning point in penal legislation, which

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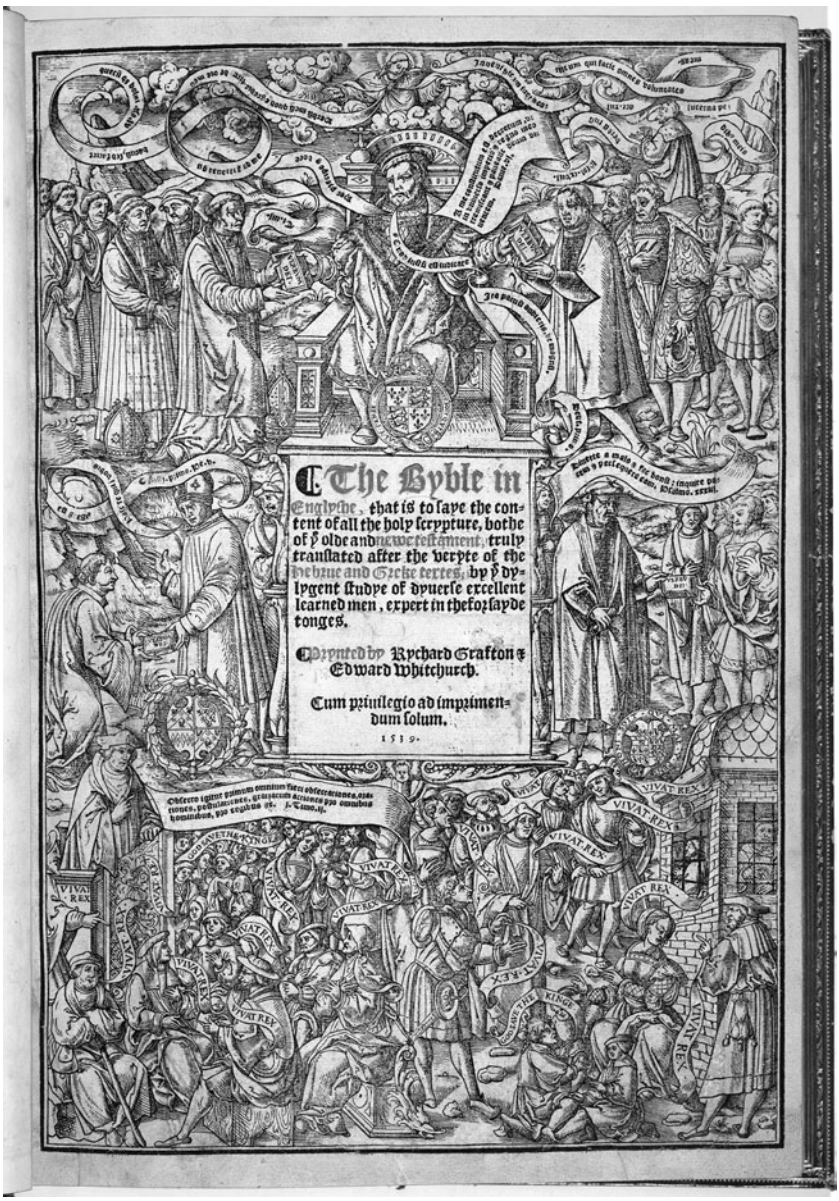

Figure 1 Title page from the 'Great Bible', Miles Coverdale's *The Byble in Englyshe* (London, 1539).

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established prisons as the dominant method of punishment in the modern era. 'At the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared; the totured body was avoided; the theatrical representation of pain was excluded from punishment'.[1] Before the eighteenth century, Foucault claims, pubic inflictions of torture and executions were the state's primary methods of demonstrating its power, and the prison was merely a holding place. However, not only is this picture of the European penal system reductive, it has also diverted eyes away from the pre-modern prison. The popularity of this work explains why the study of prison literature is only now emerging, while interest in the tortured body in Renaissance literary culture has already attracted a number of studies.[2] The second reason that the image of the prison on the title page of the 'Great Bible' is an important point of departure for our understanding of the contemporary prison is that it propagates a myth that utterly misrepresents the administrative reality of these early modern institutions. While this piece of propaganda suggests that incarceration was closely allied with Henry's policy of centralisation, the truth was that the administration of sixteenth-century prisons more accurately resembled the privatised rail system instituted in England during the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher: the system was decentralised, utterly disorganised, and driven by market forces rather than any ideological framework.

The early modern prison system – if it can be called a system at all – might best be described as an 'antipanopticon'.[3] Jeremy Bentham's famous design for the panopticon prison, discussed at length by Foucault, models the idea of centralised power. The cylindrical building, with its central inspection tower, was divided into individual cells that stretched from the tower to the outer walls to allow windows at either end. The occupants of the cells would thus be backlit, isolated from one another by walls, and subject to scrutiny both collectively and individually by an unseen observer. Such a design, as Foucault writes, makes the prisoner an 'object of

[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977; reprinted 1991), 14.

[2] See for example Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore, MD and London, 2002); Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1998), 24–54; Stephen Greenblatt, 'Mutilation and Meaning', in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York, 1997), 221–42; and Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London, 1995), 54–84.

[3] For use of this term, see Michael Collins, 'The Antipanopticon of Etheridge Knight', *PMLA*, 123 (2008), 580–97; and Molly Murray, 'Measured Sentences: Forming Literature in the Early Modern Prison', in 'Prison Writings in Early Modern England', ed. William H. Sherman and William J. Sheils, *HLQ*, special issue, 72 (2009), 147–67 (152).

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