“Instruments of Seduction”: A Tale of Two Women

Sandra F. VanBurkleo

Ann Hibbens and Anne Hutchinson had much in common. Both hailed from the Puritan hotbed of Lincolnshire, England, where they had married successful merchants before emigrating to New Boston, in 1630 and 1634 respectively. Within a few years, both women stood in the dock, charged with committing crimes against the community and entertaining diabolical religious ideas. And both women lost their contests with government. At issue were Puritan teachings about “godly relations” between husband and wife, minister and church member, and magistrate and subject. In trials of Hibbens, Hutchinson (1), and other “headstrong” women, judicial decisions about whether or not to allow important procedural and substantive freedoms partly depended upon which aspect of Calvinism’s two-sided vision of woman held sway at particular moments in the proceeding. On one side, women were potential Saints equal to men in God’s eyes; on the other side, they were Eve-like temptresses, peculiarly susceptible to Satanic temptation. In addition, Puritan responses to fallen or treacherous women in courtrooms lay bare the essential masculin-
mitled public speeches by women only when they supported “subjection.” And, while Puritans expanded women’s sphere to include family governance and church membership, they had qualms about female voices in public spaces. Scholars and preachers hoped to preserve “an inequality in the degree of ... Authority” so that, when push came to shove, husbands might retain “a Superiority.” Puritan historian Edward Johnson averred that only “sily women laden with diverse lusts and pha ntastical madness” pursued rhetoric and theology. After the Antinomian crisis, John Cotton similarly proscribed female oratory unless women had in mind “singing forth the praises of the Lord” or confessing crime. Speech “by way of teaching” or “propounding questions ... under pretence of a desire to learn,” he said, usurped male prerogatives and unsettled the polity.

On one side, women were potential Saints equal to men in God’s eyes; on the other side, they were Eve-like temptresses, peculiarly susceptible to Satanic temptation.

Hutchinson’s moment in the sun was fleeting: in mid-1636, the political tides began to turn against the Vane faction. Pretending friendship, Charles began to turn against the Puritans—his allies in Bay Colony meetinghouses. His jeremiad revealed, among other things, the ongoing vitality of associations between Woman and the Anti-Christ. Wheelwright said Christians welcomed battles between “Gods people and those that are not”; everyone knew “that the whore [or false church] must be burnt.... [I]t is not shaving of her head and paring her nayles and changing her payntment, that will serve ... but this whore must be burnt.”

Fearing rebellion, the General Court confiscated firearms from suspected Wheelwright supporters, who in turn circulated a remonstrance (signed by Wheelwright’s friends) threatening an appeal to royal courts. Four months later, Winthrop won the governorship and Vane fled to London. In March, 1637, magistrates commenced proceedings against Wheelwright, Hutchinson, and other minor players in the drama. Convicted of sedition, Wheelwright was exiled, though he returned after a decent interval to preach at Harvard. Significantly, the evidence used against him was a matter of public record (i.e., the contents of a sermon and written, signed remonstrance); magistrates extended a long list of procedural rights at trial—among them, the right to offer witnesses and testimony in self-defense, and the right to be silent.

His sister-in-law fared less well. In September, at an open meeting in Newport, a church-state synod examined Hutchinson, in keeping with English procedure, for evidence of sedition, heresy, blasphemy, and other crimes against authority. Unlike her kinsman, she had never occupied a pulpit, and had neither inspired nor signed petitions. Her crimes—the sowing of rebellious seeds among women, for example—occurred entirely behind the walls of a frame house.

Gradually, however, Hutchinson lost ground. The focus began to shift from specific theological points to “natural” relations between the sexes, and especially to Hutchinson’s alleged violations of the Fifth Commandment and usurpations of male prerogatives. More than once, magistrates reminded her that men need not “discourse” with women—that men need not hear what women said as to “facts” or “truth” in commonwealth” and “spoken divers things ... prejudicial to the honour of the churches and ministers thereof.” She had “maintained a meeting and an assembly” in her home—“a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God” nor “fitting” for her sex. Despite criticism, she had persisted; the court hoped to “understand how things are” and “reduce” her (i.e., force her to acknowledge error). Failing that, she would be condemned for “obstinance.”

For a time, Hutchinson prevailed, ably challenging the court’s question-able use of evidence taken privately, the curious absence of a criminal charge, the judges’ related refusal to let her examine Wilson’s notebooks in advance of trial, and their refusal to administer oaths to witnesses (which they technically did not have to do, so long as the proceeding still could be termed a magisterial examination and not a trial). Familiar with Biblical law and common law procedure, she saw clearly how weak the governor’s case really was. Winthrop, after all, had no hard evidence of sedition—by definition a crime involving public acts—and flimsy evidence of heresy, some of which tended to implicate John Cotton. She had not signed the Wheelwright petition, had criticized ministers at home, and had spoken with Wilson as one speaks with “friends.” As she put it, Puritans respected private exchanges and “matter(s) of conscience.” Nobody came forward to secure liberties for Hutchinson; but, because she managed to assert rights claims accurately and persuasively, the magistrates acceded to her procedural demands.
self-defense. Winthrop also gained important leverage in the control of Hutchinson’s body (e.g., ordering her to stop speaking, to sit while standing, to stand while sitting). A woman could never “call a company together” to preach, he said, nor offer testimony without judicial dispensation. Why had Hutchinson failed to teach young women to “love their husbands and not to make them clash?” Why had she not learned the lesson herself? Surely her teacher, that “the fear of man, is a snare.” Domestic sabotage weakened all of political society: as one minister later explained, God chose not to create church and state “at one stroke,” but to lay “foundations both of State and Church, in a family,” the “Mother Hive” from which church and state “saw the light.” To attack this “little commonwealth” was to assault political government. For this reason, the court declared Wilson’s notebooks a lawful source of evidence: when women attacked the pility at its foundation, confidences “counted for nothing,” and private utterances could support charges of sedition (or other “public” crimes). In addition, magistrates imposed banishment instead of censure, against the letter of Bay Colony law.

Because she had been demonized, Hutchinson’s decision to tell the truth and be done with it returned to haunt her. She freely described her gift of prophecy, her doctrinal positions, and the content of divine messages; she claimed a God-given ability to distinguish between true and false voices. Sensing an opportunity to gather public evidence of heresy, magistrates asked her to say exactly how God communicated with her. “By an immediate voice,” she replied truthfully. For good measure, she reminded her accusers that, because Jesus alone controlled God’s law as interpreted by the clergy. If guilty and unrepentant, she would be excommunicated as well as exiled. Hutchinson was too weak to attend opening sessions, where elders presented yet more evidence “taken from her owne Mouth” over the winter by seeming friends and at least one ex-disciple. As earlier, she had no knowledge of the evidence to be used against her. Because she claimed to be ruled by conscience, Cotton found biblical authority to exile her for perjury, blasphemy, and spiritual “seduction.” The writ of excommunication ordered her to leave the parish “as a Leper”; because she “dispised and contemned the Holy Ordinances,” she should not “benefit by them.”

On another day, in another court, recantation might have saved her from severe punishment; but this was not such a day. At one particularly delicate moment, a critic determined to portray Hutchinson as a viper in society’s bosom abruptly interjected more talk about “that foule, groce, filthy, and abominable opinion held by Familists, of the Communitie of Woemen.” Would she dispense altogether with patriarchal marriages? Cotton reminded parishioners that, while Hutchinson had done “much good,” she was “but a Woman and many unsound and daynerous principles are held by her.” Did she not threaten the “very foundation of Religion” with the “filthie Sinne of the Communitie of Woemen and all promiscuoujs and filthie cominge togetheer of men and Woenen without Distinction or Relation of marriage?” He even accused her of marital infidelity on the ground that Familism always led there.

At closing sessions some days later, Wilson presented a longer list of errors, some compiled by embittered ex-disciples over the winter. Weakened by pregnancy and long detention, Hutchinson said little; in any case, theology had ceased to be the issue. She had been reconstituted as the “whore of Babylon,” charged with violations of Puritan rational ideology, and tarred with Familism, the heresy for which Quakers could be hanged in Massachusetts Bay. One of the elders summarized charges: “[Y]ou have stept out of your place,” he said, “you have rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer, and a Magistrate than a Subject.” Wilson called her a “daynerous Instrument of the Divell.” Said others, the “Misgovernment of this Woman’s tongue” by her husband and other natural rulers portended grave “Disorder.” When members objected again to punishment for conscience, Cotton found biblical authority to exile her for perjury, blasphemy, and spiritual “seduction.” The writ of excommunication ordered her to leave the parish “as a Leper”; because she “dispised and contemned the Holy Ordinances,” she should not “benefit by them.”

Hutchinson walked out of church, followed by family members and her friend Mary Dyer (executed in 1660 for Quakerism). In March, 1638, she joined William Hutchinson in Rhode Island, where she experienced what Winthrop soberly termed a “monstrous birth”—in his view, providential evidence of grotesque theology, a “confession” that cast additional doubt upon the woman’s own words. The governor noted, too, that Dyer’s
“familiarity with the devill” earlier had produced a stillborn “monstrous” child, which Hutchinson and Dyer had labored to conceal; both women were unnatural, poisonous, perhaps demoniac. Indeed, Winthrop wondered whether or not his old nemesis had been a witch all along. In 1639, church elders (including Ann Hibbens’ husband, William) visited Rhode Island to check on the progress of censured members. Hutchinson slammed the door in their faces. She wanted no part of their church, for she was an ecstatic “spouse of Christ.” Disconcerted visitors pronounced her a “Harlot,” begging the church to “cut her off” once and for all. Wilson gladly obliged.

The tale’s end fit neatly into the narrative Winthrop later constructed to justify Hutchinson’s exile. In the early 1640’s, she moved to New York to find “peace.” There, Indians killed the entire Hutchinson family except one child. Surely her assailants had been godly messengers: “I never heard that the Indians … did ever before this, commit the like outrage,” wrote Winthrop. God had made of “this wofull woman” a “heavie example of their cruelty,” and confirmed the diabolical nature of her theology.

Meanwhile, Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic had closed ranks, ruling out female ministries and antinomian experimentation. John Brinsley’s 1645 sermon in Yarmouth, England, contained a typical announcement of the Puritan decision against woman preachers: “Sure we are,” he said, “that … Women may not teach in publick. And were there no other Reason for it, this Puritan decision against woman preaching, with a heaven and earth together, an inversion of the course and order of nature” (5).

Ann Hibbens, by contrast, did not claim to be a prophet. No sooner had she sailed into Boston harbor than she developed a reputation for “natural crabbenedness of … temper” and squabbling with neighbors (6). But serious trouble awaited 1640, when she locked horns with a joiner (or carpenter) who raised his price after building a fancy bedstead. Hibbens not only disputed the worker’s claim and investigated prices charged by other joiners, but also interrogated laborers in neighboring towns and rejected the mediating efforts of another craftsman. Says historian Jane Kamensky, Hibbens “spoke as a woman trying to participate in a rational society with a developing economy; prices, value, and collusion, not inspiration and revelation, were her province.” But, after the Hutchinson debacle, wives did business and exhibited a “restless tongue” at some peril. While Puritans despised hustling and gouging, they also hated scolds; in Hibbens’ case, they punished the “medium, not the message” (7).

In the autumn of 1640, the First Church commenced a magisterial examination of Hibbens, initially to ferret out evidence of “lying” about her fellows (a felony in Massachusetts); they probably sought evidence as well of scolding (a sex-specific crime punished with a dunking). The trigger had been her seemingly arrogant rejection of a male mediator and related decision to singlehandedly undertake a market survey on horseback. Judges charged Hibbens with laying “infamy, disgrace, and reproach” on the carpenter (“our Brother”). As with Hutchinson, charges multiplied to include neglect of “natural” relations between women and their male “heads.”

As in Hutchinson’s case, Hibbens refused to submit to false authority; Unlike her forebear, she preferred to withhold speech whenever the court demanded testimony, to stand when the court bade her sit, and to smile maddeningly at her accusers. Finally driven to distraction, the magistrates condemned her arrogance and especially her “carriage … so proud and contemptuous and irreverent … when the church is dealing with her.” Through a “Brother,” Hibbens sardonically told her accusers that she dared not respond to queries in church because God required silence of women.

Also as with Hutchinson, Hibbens’s accusers fastened upon ungodly relations—her unwomanly violations of “the rule of the Apostle in usurping authority over him whom God hath made her head and husband,” and her anti-Christian decision to take “the power and authority which God hath given to him out of his hands.” William had accepted the joiner’s price; Ann’s insistence that she could “manage it better than her husband” constituted a “plan breach of the rule of Christ,” and by implication an indictment of Hibbens’ husband for failing to govern his wife. Judges toyed with the possibility that her ability to rile up the neighborhood evidenced witchcraft; but, in 1640, they settled for admonition and (when she refuse to disavow “lusts and covetous tempers”) excommunication. The pastor stated that Hibbens merited damnation for “slandering and raising up an evil report of … Brethren,” for the “sowing of discord,” and for refusing to remain at home. She had, after all, dashed “with a restless and discontented spirit … from person to person from house to house, and from place to place.” She had rejected governance by the “wise … head” of her husband, usurped his prerogatives, and “grieved his spirit.” Has she not behaved “as if he was a nobody,” rejected “the way of obedience,” and encouraged “unquietness of the family”? With Hutchinson, Hibbens had little time for “due submission.” Unlike her predecessor, she celebrated the commercial spirit and ignored theology—impulse which profoundly troubled her interrogators.

Hibbens vanished from public view until 1654 when her well-respected husband died. One historian thinks that, without his protection, she no longer could fend off the “full weight of her neighbors’ hatred” (8). In 1655, the General Court convicted her of witchcraft, but magistrates refused the verdict and ordered a new trial, where jurors again condemned her. In mid-1656, Massachusetts executed
Hibbens as a witch, for being “turbulent in her passion, and discontented,” and possessed of a “strange carriage.” Years later, a witness to the spectacle told Puritan minister Increase Mather that she had been hanged “for having more wit than her neighbors.” She had “guessed that two of her persecutors, whom she saw talking in the street, were talking of her; which, proving true, cost her life.”

The trials of Hutchinson and Hibbens—and analogous ordeals to which colonial magistrates subjected other female spiritist and malcontents—lay bare the extent to which gender shaped access to important freedoms, particularly when women threatened to destabilize the “Yoke-fellowship” that governed Puritan families. A reputation for self-sovereignty clearly diminished a woman’s liberty prospects. The die was cast when Hutchinson rose to defend herself as God’s instrument, immune to the odds and to extract confessions or damning testimony, because they acted from and upon the domestic “Hive.” Ann Hibbens’s mocking silence bought her a one-way ticket to the gallows; Hutchinson’s eleventh-hour recantations at the church trial (which might have saved her, had critics not identified her with Satan) ultimately were used against her, as evidence of bizarre theology and lying at the civil trial. For women accused of treachery, public displays of courage, honesty, erudition, and physical autonomy were altogether foolhardy.

Sandra F. VanBurkleo, Associate Professor of History at Wayne State University in Detroit, is completing a book, “Belonging to the World”: Women’s Rights and American Constitutional Culture. She teaches and writes in the field of American legal and constitutional history.

Endnotes


Bibliography


Shades of Seduction #2 book. Read reviews from world’s largest community for readers. THE MANY SHADES OF PASSION AND LUST You won't be the same after you...Â When She writes of two people making love is art in motion; it's beautiful, unique, and pure. In this collection, you will encounter beautiful images, pure language, unique outlooks and different experiences. With each one you read, you will find your senses, desires, and mind awakening! 2.5D Seduction Manga: "I have no interest in real women! My wife, Lilliel, is a 2D girl!" But something unexpected appears in front of Okumura, the president of the Manga Research Club A real Lilliel? An exciting cosplay love comedy begins!!Â “I have no interest in real women! My wife, Lilliel, is a 2D girl!” But something unexpected appears in front of Okumura, the president of the Manga Research Club A real Lilliel? An exciting cosplay love comedy begins!!

"Instruments of Seduction": A Tale of Two Women (pp. 8-18). Sandra F. VanBurkleo. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25163009. Reuniting for our Woman’s Day photo shoot, Heather and Greta get on like a house on fire, with Greta having had a unique insight into what Heather endured all those years ago. "You got off lightly," Heather teases, having recently watched the final product. "You were a lot cleaner than I was, let me tell you!" “That’s the thing,” Greta agrees, “what I went through filming was zero compared to what Heather went through, absolutely zero. But it did help me understand better what something like that would be like.” Most of the filming took place over two weeks on a farm in Bethells Beach on the West Coast of Auckland and Heather visited the set a couple of times. Heather says it was odd watching the filming of some of the scenes, but not as disturbing as you’d expect. Be the first to create a discussion for Chained - The Seduction of Two Women. Details. Movie: Chained - The Seduction of Two Women. Country: South Korea. Release Date: Apr 11, 2017.