

I

THE MAKING OF AN ASTROLOGER-PHYSICIAN

When Simon Forman was 6 years old he began to have recurring dreams about mountains and hills rolling over him and water swallowing him up. Bruised and battered, he always scaled the heights and crossed the rivers. These dreams lasted until Forman was 9 or 10, and many years later he interpreted them as portents of 'his troubles in his riper years. For the mightie mountaines mighte signifie the great & mightie potentates that he had controversy with afterwards. And the waters mighte signifie the greate counsellors that were houlden againste hime to overthrowe hime.'¹ As he triumphed in his dreams, so he triumphed in his life. His 'first troubles' were with the Wiltshire authorities, particularly the Salisbury sheriff, Giles Estcourt, and later he was hounded by the College of Physicians of London. At the peak of his life, aged 48, having established himself as the self-styled astrologer-physician of Lambeth, residing in a house surrounded by an orchard, Forman sat in his study amidst his books, large and small, old and new, printed and manuscript, bound and unbound, heaps of papers, loose and folded into notebooks, pots of brown and red ink and a clock on the table, bottled potions on a ledge near the hearth, bits of silk and velvet clothing and trinkets held in pawn for his astrological services, and the tools and debris of his life as an astrologer-physician and gentleman of London. He might have worn his purple velvet gown and his eagle stone ring and he certainly held a pen in his hand. He was writing the book of his life, documenting his ancestry, his early life, and the trials that he had foreseen in his childhood dreams. The books and papers in his room and the events of his life were his credentials as a magus.

On any day Forman might have been found putting pen to paper, though the room, its furniture and his attire had only recently become so fine. On this occasion, 23 December 1600, Forman was writing about himself. This was

¹ Ashm. 208, fo. 137.

probably the first time that he had written such a narrative, though he had habitually recorded the minutiae of his life. He had noted everything: the names of the thousands of people who consulted him with medical complaints and questions about missing property, procedures for distilling strong waters, locations of buried treasure, visits to the playhouses, a burning sensation when he urinated. He took notes on and transcribed alchemical and magical, astrological and astronomical, and literary and historical treatises, printed and in manuscript, and he scribbled in the margins of the books he owned. He wrote and rewrote his own treatises on astrological medicine. He wrote constantly. All of this writing was the product of Forman's pursuit of knowledge and his definition of himself as chosen by God to possess this knowledge. He scratched his experiences, his authority, and his name onto the thousands of pages of paper in his study. Almost all of these papers are now preserved, bulging from the over full brass-clasped leather bindings that hold them in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Yet Forman lived with and through his papers, projecting the changing tenor of his voice across three decades as he announced his knowledge, proclaimed his wisdom, charted his life, and concealed his secrets; his life and papers were part of the same enterprise, an enterprise that did not produce a corpus of finished books.

The following three chapters explore Forman's acquisition of arcane knowledge through printed and manuscript books and his own use of print, manuscript, and shifting authorial registers to convey his ideas and practices. I begin not with his ancestors or portentous dreams but with the life-writings from his final decade. Through these he introduces himself as a bookish youth, thirsting for knowledge, then a young man both feckless and righteous, unable to keep hold of the books that he so cherished and defiant of those who confiscated them. He then delved into mystery and silence in his thirties, leaving only a thin trail of details about his study of medicine and the occult arts. Occult books and hermetic knowledge here upstage Forman as the heroes of the story. They are joined by the twin sisters print and manuscript in Chapter 2 which centres on Forman's publication, in print, of a pamphlet advertising a method for calculating longitude, without saying anything more about the method except that it was God-given. No longer feckless, Forman in his early forties has become a righteous, humourless maverick. The longitude episode would be incomplete without details of Forman's secret method, but neither he nor his opponents described it. I have found the secret, or at least the beginnings of it, in Forman's astronomical and magical writings from the 1600s. Finally, Chapter 3 charts Forman's changing authorial voice throughout his treatises, and reflects on his attitude to print and publication in an account of his plans to

print an astrological manual around 1600, plans that were never realized. These were the voices of the man who would become the astrologer-physician of Lambeth, dressed in purple in his cluttered room, duly anxious about his place in histories of medicine, astrology, and magic.

I

Early Life and Learning

Forman's story begins on 23 December 1600 because this is the day that he dated the first and most extensive version of his life. He would write at least five more accounts during the next decade, though writing about oneself was not a commonplace activity. Biography and autobiography became codified genres in the eighteenth century. Before that, writings about the events of one's own or someone else's life took various forms, and historians and literary scholars recently have tackled these nimble species of texts armed with the generic and cumbersome labels life-writing, self-writing, and ego-writing.¹

Forman's accounts of his life have held a place in the history of life-writing in England since James Halliwell edited two of them in the nineteenth century.² The texts which Halliwell edited have been singled out as marking a new spirit, 'amusing and flamboyant', in self-presentation, though Forman does not feature in more recent studies of life-writing.³ Social historians have harvested episodes from Forman's childhood, adolescence, and amorous life, but his possible motives, models, and inspiration for writing these documents remain obscure.⁴ He does not fit the mould of the English seventeenth-century Puritan diarist, tallying up and scrutinizing his acts before God, nor does his self-obsession figure in the history of modern individualism. Forman represents different sorts of life-writings. He wrote about himself in the traditions of physicians and surgeons, astrologers, and alchemists before and after him, noting the importance of timing, the authority of experience, the sanctity

¹ See esp. the introduction to Thomas F. Mayer and D. R. Woolf (eds.), *The Rhetoric of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedèle to Louis XIV* (Ann Arbor, 1995). See also Kaspar von Greyerz, 'Religion in the Life of German and Swiss Autobiographers (Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries)', in von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe 1500–1800* (1984), 223–41; Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Cambridge, 1997).

² *The autobiography and personal diary of Dr Simon Forman*, ed. James Halliwell (1849). These texts are Ashm. 208, fos. 136–42, 1–74.

³ Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (1969), 16.

⁴ Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 1994), 41, 54, 101, 112, 126, 154, 173, 196, 201, 205, 212; Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996), 184, 297; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (1977), 95–6, 167, 547–51.

In Dei nomine Amen

1600 the 23
Sept 17 1600
at 7. hirspe

This is the Booke of the life and generation of Simon the sonne of Vertue the sonne of Richard the sonne of S^r Thomas of Lodes the sonne of S^r Thomas forman of furnifales and of An his wife daughter of S^r Antony Smith at Bourne my year from the nativity of our lord Jesus x^pt 1552 the 30 of Decemb. beinge Saturday and the xxviii day at 45 rete after 9. of the clocke at night, of the Nativall bodie of Marit wife of the said Willm forman aforesaid and daughter of Iohn foster s^rgent by marriage hallom his wife in a village called Quidhampton in the Countie of Wilts. Emate in the valley on the North side of the River Beche Wilton and Sarum. whose parents were well respected and of good reputation and fame and gaunght many children and they disposed Iustly. As said by the said Marit sixe sonnes and too daughters. Viz

Willeme the eldest. Iohn the second which after married wth willeme haunton gentleman whose father was s^r Thomas the aior of Sarum by whom he had noe yth. after his death he married on willeme the second and had noe more yth. This third child of his said Marit and Anarit was Henric that after he be to wif An. the daughter of Thomas Garret and had by her yth a daughter wth name An. the fourth was Rich and who be to wif Giffely parlit the sole aynt of Iohn parlit and he died in childbed and after he be to his second wif Iohn Wazm. by whom he had 3 children Iohn Dorit & Richard

1.1. 'The bocke of the life of and generation of Simon', Ashm. 208, fo. 136. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

of his privileged knowledge, and the need for the record itself to vindicate its author in the eyes of posterity against his enemies.⁵

Forman's life-writings narrate his first forty years, the period for which few papers survive. During these years Forman outfitted himself with the skills and attitudes with which he was equipped when he settled in London in 1591 and embarked on his career as a notorious astrologer-physician. In order to tell the story of Forman's childhood thirst for knowledge, ill-fated possession of books, and study of the occult, I first need to establish the dates and contents of each of the six texts which Forman devoted solely to his own life.

Forman wrote his most extensive account of his life, 'The bocke of the life and generation of Simon . . .' towards the end of his forty-eighth year, not long after he had married and perhaps while anticipating the births of legitimate children.⁶ He began with his ancestry and the visions of mountains and hills noted above, then recounted episodes from his early years, including the death of his father, a fight with a servant when he was an apprentice, his first love, and the details of his schooling and studies. This narrative is in the third person and it reports Forman's life as though he were a character cavorting through a combination of the Bible, the Golden Legend, and an Elizabethan romance.⁷

In 1604 Forman composed a psalm charting his troubles with the College of Physicians that was to be sung to the tune of 'Ye children which doe serve the Lord'.⁸ In September 1605, just after the birth of a daughter, Dority, Forman constructed a family genealogy and wrote a family history, beginning in the year 1028 with a Norman soldier who served in the Roman army against the Hungarians. The soldier pleased the Roman emperor, Conrad, and 'bye reason of his true service forwardnes and faithfullnes and valiantnes, he [the emperor]

⁵ Delany classifies Forman along with William Lilly and Goodwin Wharton as 'déclassé opportunists and adventurers', exploiting 'astrology, necromancy, and kindred arts' in their secular autobiographies: *British Autobiography*, 133. There are parallels between Forman's life-writings and Cardano's, about whom there is an extensive literature. See esp. Anthony Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), ch. 10; Siraisi, *Cardano*, 175–6; Grafton and Siraisi, 'Between the Election and my Hopes: Girolamo Cardano and Medical Astrology', in Grafton and Newman (eds.), *Secrets of Nature*, 69–131. For stories of alchemists in the 17th cent., termed 'transmutation histories', see William Newman, *Gebennical Fire: The Lives of George Starkey, an American Alchemist in the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 3–10; Lawrence Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest* (Princeton, 1998), 93–8.

⁶ Ashm. 208, fos. 136–42. In 1599 Forman married Jean Baker, 'Sir Edward Monninges sisters daughter'. She was then 16, and he sometimes refers to her as Ann, but more often as 'Tronco'.

⁷ Delany, *British Autobiography*, 133–4.

⁸ The pages of this psalm were at some point separated, and are now bound in Ashm. 240, fos. 25–7^v and 802, fos. 131–3^v. For a bowdlerized edn. see James Halliwell, *A brief description of the ancient and modern manuscripts preserved in the Public Library, Plymouth* (1853). Earlier in 1604 Forman had composed a psalm to be sung at his burial: Ashm. 802, fos. 135–40^v. For other psalms on his troubles, see Ashm. 802, fos. 121–7.

called him forman, for that he was for every man, more then for him selfe.⁹ Dority died on New Year's Day 1606, and a son, Clement, was born in October that year. He lived to be an adult, but little is known about him.¹⁰ Around this time Forman also wrote a very brief account of his life, again in the third person, containing the same themes as the version he wrote in 1600, with a few marked differences in detail.¹¹

Around 1603 Forman wrote the text that has become known as his diary. It is renowned for the intimate details that it records.¹² This is not an annual diary in the modern sense, as Halliwell's and Rowse's printed editions imply. It is a series of astrological figures mapping the positions of the planets, beginning with Forman's birth on 31 December 1552, then continuing from 1562 to 1601 with an astrological figure for the first or second day of January of each year. On pages flanking each figure Forman recorded an annual list of the details, or 'accidents', of his life, creating for himself a retrospective version of a luxury horoscope with yearly revolutions. The information is uneven. In general, both sides of a page are devoted to a single year. An exception is the entry for 1567, where Forman covered the events in his life from the age of 15 to 25, the period that is most vividly described in his life-writings. Up to 1581 many entries have the words 'proved true' or 'verified' noted in the margins. After 1581 the entries often contain minute details, followed by a general summary of the year. Forman probably calculated annual nativities for himself from the early 1580s, and perhaps he also, as was conventional, recorded events in an ephemeris, almanac, or one of his notebooks.¹³

Wherever these details were recorded, the diary is the product of Forman's retrospective use of them as the foundation for a series of astrological experiments, hence the notes of verification. He compiled this document in order to study the influences of the motions of the stars and planets on his life and he recycled examples here and in notes on how to read astrological figures. These

⁹ Ashm. 208, fo. 214^v. The genealogy, 'The firste of the Formans', is Ashm. 802, fos. 211–16. The family history, 'Of the name Forman', is Ashm. 208, fos. 214–24; cf. Rowse, *Forman*, 300–2, for a partial transcription of Ashm. 208, fos. 218–23.

¹⁰ Clement wrote to Richard Napier, 20 Aug. 1628, Ashm. 174, fo. 479. For evidence that Clement planned to train as a lawyer, see Traister, *Forman*, pp. xiv–xv.

¹¹ 'The issue of Simon Forman', Ashm. 208, fos. 225–6.

¹² Ashm. 208, fos. 11^v–67.

¹³ For Forman's calculations of his own nativity for 9.45 p.m., 31 Dec. 1552, see Ashm. 206, fos. 76^r–7, 216–25; 208, fo. 12; 195, fos. 69–72; cf. 219, fo. 135, the annual calculation for his 47th year. For notes on Forman's nativity, perhaps in Napier's hand, calculated for 2.00 a.m., 1 Jan. 1553, see Ashm. 205, fo. 286^{r-v}. For Dee's diaries see Ashm. 487 and 488; cf. *The private diary of Dr. John Dee, and the catalogue of his library and manuscripts*, ed. James Halliwell, Camden Society, 19 (1842). *The Diaries of John Dee*, ed. Edward Fenton (Charlbury, 1998) constructs a seamless narrative from many of Dee's life-writings. For interleaved English almanacs see Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist*, 72.

the 31 Decemb.

Simon Forman the son
of Francis and Wilhelme Forman
1552. the post merid at 45 min
post 9. the birth of 52. 30. 31 Decemb

²¹⁸
In the house of St. Mary of
and first of the house of St.



22nd of Nov
20th of Apr
H. de. vil. oc. fun. wd apl
habh - 8th day in Apr. 1606.
If ori. vil. att. yng. first
ap. in def. le. 16th day
in Apr. 1606
Or vit. ori. yng. first. ap. 1606.
habh - 7th day in Apr. 1606.
Or. fast. know. habh. 7th day
in Apr. 1606.
Or. de. vil. ori. know. 20th day
habh - 21st day in Apr. 1606.
Or. vil. di. ori. yng. in Apr.
habh. 3rd day in Apr. 1606.
Or. ori. fast. yng. dimi. lumin.
habh. 2nd day in Apr. 1606.

Mercurius 18
Mars 18
Jupiter 18
Saturnus 18
Venus 18
Sol 18
Luna 18
Coz de 23 50 ob
1592

The whole constellation
habh 40 dignities.
Or. habh 8 dignities
I was married to Ann
the 23 July at 15
post 7 au. merid at London

as significations of months and planets
Or. habh 8 dignities
I was married to Ann
the 23 July at 15
post 7 au. merid at London

There was a ... and a ...
the more est ...
the more est ...

1.2. Simon Forman's nativity, Ashm. 206, fo. 218. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

are organized thematically, and in some cases contain more detail than the diary, evidence perhaps that they were drawn from a parent set of records.¹⁴ For instance, in a section on determining a propitious moment to move into a new house or room, Forman recorded that on 6 April 1590 he ‘entered first my chamber at Mr Dales & tok it absolutely’. While there, he continues, ‘[I] had many privi enimies but I gote reasonable & many fair women cam to me’, and he moved out after two months.¹⁵ In the diary Forman simply noted, ‘I cam to lie at Mr Dalles’.¹⁶ Reading the diary as an astrological experiment also explains the numerous passages which Forman has crossed through, only some of which then appear under different years. Rowse’s and Halliwell’s editions do not include Forman’s omissions and neglect the vagueness of, and frequent contradictions in, Forman’s dating. One reason for Forman’s (mis)dating is that he was interested in astrological influences, and, following standard astrological procedures, he probably worked backwards from an astral configuration to calculate the specific date and time of an event. For the sake of clarity I will continue to refer to this text as Forman’s diary.

These are the six accounts of his life that Forman wrote in his final decade. Three of them focus to some extent on his family and the events, both major and trivial, of his life (two of these are in the third person); one is a psalm describing his conflict with the College of Physicians; and one maps a list of events in his life against the motions of the heavens. Forman does not tell us why he wrote any of these texts. Separately they document the credibility of Forman’s lineage; his divine prerogative to study, heal, and overcome adversity in order to do so; the influences of the heavens on his life, and his ability to read these influences. These accounts allow me to tell the story of how Forman became the astrologer-physician of Lambeth, nemesis of the College of Physicians, and author of thousands of pages of writing.

Forman repeatedly portrayed himself as driven by a passion for learning. He began school just before he turned 8, but this was interrupted with the death of his father in January 1564, when Simon had just turned 11. His mother kept him home and made him look after the sheep, plough fields, and gather wood, but within a year he returned to school and learned to write.¹⁷ Two years later, aged 14, he apprenticed himself to Matthew Commin, a hosier and grocer in Salisbury, on condition that he could continue his studies. Forman borrowed books from a boy who boarded in the house, and studied these in the evenings.¹⁸ He also ‘learned the knowledge of all wares and drugs’ from his master.¹⁹ After five

¹⁴ Ashm. 390.

¹⁵ Ashm. 390, fo. 59^v.

¹⁶ Ashm. 208, fo. 46^v.

¹⁷ Ashm. 208, fos. 137^v–8^r; 208, fos. 15–17.

¹⁸ Ashm. 208, fos. 20^v, 140.

¹⁹ Ashm. 208, fo. 138^v.

to seven years he left Commin (*c.*1572), visited the Isle of Wight, returned to his mother in Quidhampton, and studied under one Anthony Nicholas for eight weeks until himself becoming a schoolmaster.²⁰ In a description of this period he wrote,

This yere I had that gret desier to my bock that when I was at scolle with Antoni Nicolas I wold wepe when he gave us leave to plaie, and when he wold not beate me when I could not saie my lesson. And I wold saie I should never be a good scollar yet he wold not beate me. Yt was hell for me to go to plaie or to goe from my bock, and yet I had noe maintenaunce but did shifte for lerninge & then becam a scolmaster at michelmas my selfe.²¹

In the spring of 1573, at age 20, Forman went to Oxford and became a poor scholar in the service of two Wiltshire gentlemen: Robert Pinckney, who would return to Wiltshire as a cleric, and John Thornborough, who would ultimately become bishop of Worcester.²² Forman's intellectual expectations were not fulfilled. He recalled, 'And this yere with them I began to learn to goe on hunting for deare & hare & all evill & could not imploi my bocke to my desier.'²³ Forman left Oxford in autumn 1574. His disappointment there is the final event in the longest of his life-writings.

In two accounts that continued into the 1580s, the story of Forman's education did not end here. In June 1579 he was committed to prison and stayed there for sixty weeks, and on his release in July 1580 he travelled to London where 'a cosening quen professed her self to be my sister', then on to the Low Countries.²⁴ As he noted in his diary, 'The 4 of September I went over with Henry Jonson into the Lowe countries into Sealand & Holland and we lay at the Hage som fortnight & the 3 of October I cam to London again'. He also recorded going to sea with one Robert Grey in 1582 and being captured by pirates.²⁵ In another account, in the third person, Forman suggested that he made several trips abroad: 'he travailed moch in to the Estern countries to seke for arte and knowledge, and was often at Sea'.²⁶ These texts are William Lilly's primary source of information about Forman, and hence his statement that Forman 'traveled into Holland for a month in 1580, purposely to be instructed in Astrology, and other more occult Sciences, as also in Physick, taking his degree of Doctor beyond Seas' is an overstatement.²⁷ If Forman's records were

²⁰ Ashm. 208, fo. 25^v.

²¹ Ashm. 208, fo. 26^v. This passage is crossed out and a version of it appears in Ashm. 208, fo. 141^v.

²² Ashm. 208, fos. 20^v, 26^v, 27^v. ²³ Ashm. 208, fo. 27^v, crossed out. ²⁴ Ashm. 208, fo. 34^v.

²⁵ Ashm. 208, fos. 34^v, 37^v. ²⁶ Ashm. 208, fo. 225^{r-v}.

²⁷ Lilly, *Life*, 17. These papers are also perhaps the source for an alchemical poem, perhaps in Napier's hand, in which Forman features as the hero: Trinity O.8.1, fos. 95–113.

27 27th 19th of Janu^r at 9 o'c 7 wind in gale...
 28 30th 18th Jan I went to visit Mrs. Gales...
 17 19th 19th Jan I was called to some...
 19 20th 20th Jan I went to...
 20 21st 21st Jan I went to...
 21 22nd 22nd Jan I went to...
 22 23rd 23rd Jan I went to...
 23 24th 24th Jan I went to...
 24 25th 25th Jan I went to...
 25 26th 26th Jan I went to...
 26 27th 27th Jan I went to...
 27 28th 28th Jan I went to...
 28 29th 29th Jan I went to...
 29 30th 30th Jan I went to...
 30 31st 31st Jan I went to...

1.3-4. Simon Forman's 'Diary' for 1596, Ashm. 208, fos. 56'-7. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

1596 the 2 of January ⁹ Am ind at 57
 33 mte p 3. Was beko mei rantes
 Amior 44.



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 o par vit just salt i
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intended to establish his credentials as a man of learning and expertise, they succeeded: Lilly's account was the basis for the Oxford antiquarian Anthony Wood's notes on Forman's life, then Sidney Lee's article on Forman in the *Dictionary of National Biography* which has perpetuated this error.²⁸

Whether or not he travelled abroad in the early 1580s, the young Forman was schooled like many Elizabethans of the lower gentry or merchant class.²⁹ His passion for learning in his early years was eccentric, and it matured into an adult quest for scholarly and arcane texts. Books, lost and found, played a role in the misfortunes that his childhood dreams had foreshown, and Forman thought that his contemporaries deprived him of his books out of jealousy of his learning and success. In 'The issue of Simon Forman' (1606+) he wrote: 'at 20 years he becam a scolmaster again, and begain to studdie astronomy & phisicke magick & philosophie, wherin he profited & prospered mightily, and in chirurgerie and other artes, for the which he suffered moch troble afterwards, and loste all his goods and bocks 3 tymes'.³⁰ Unfortunately Forman did not record the titles of the books that would have surrounded him as he worked in his study in Lambeth, nor how he came to possess them. He may have acquired some texts while he was in Salisbury, but books and manuscripts were readily available in Oxford, and while he was there he bought a pair of fifteenth-century medical treatises bound together. This is one of the nine manuscripts which can today be identified as having belonged to Forman.³¹ In his diary Forman recorded that the plague came to Oxford around 1575, and he 'loste all that ever I had ther, bocks and all'.³² This was the first loss of his books. Later that year or the next, when Forman had moved to Ashgrov, Wiltshire, the parson was brought to inspect his books. This appears to have been at the instigation of a Mr Cox, apparently a former employer whom Forman had offended.³³ It is not clear why these books were considered suspicious and they seem not to have been confiscated. By the summer of 1579 Forman was in trouble with the law in Salisbury, and either just before, or in the process

²⁸ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ii. 98–105 (Forman), 373–4 (John Davies), though Wood did not include Forman in the original edn. of this work; *DNB*. For Wood's notes on Forman's life, see Bodleian, Rawlinson MS D.912, fo. 643. For the impact of Lilly's account in the 18th cent. see e.g. Daniel Lyson, *The environs of London*, i (1792), 301–3.

²⁹ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), ch. 7; Rosemary O'Day, *Education and Society, 1500–1800* (1982).

³⁰ Ashm. 208, fo. 225.

³¹ King's MS 16. The extant books and MSS that Forman owned and copied are listed in the Bibliography.

³² Ashm. 208, fo. 28^v. Forman seems to have left Oxford in 1594, and the inconsistencies in these dates may explain why Forman crossed out the account of the plague in Oxford in 1575, though not why he did not include it under another year.

³³ Ashm. 208, fo. 28^v.

of his being arrested, his goods were spoiled and his books stolen. Thus Forman lost his books a second time and had his first experience of prison, remaining gaoled for more than a year.³⁴ Although Forman recorded that he was released by a warrant signed by the queen and six of her councillors, no official record of the charge against Forman or the royal intervention has been located.

Eight years later Forman lost his books for the third time. In March 1587 he was arrested in Salisbury for bringing a book containing 'bad and fond prayers and devises' to morning prayer. 'Fond' probably meant foolish, and the unorthodox prayers and diagrams or images suggest that this was a book of magic.³⁵ Forman's house was searched and four 'paper books' and three parchment rolls were found and sent to the Privy Council for inspection. Forman denied that the writing in the margins of the book and an inserted page of notes were his.³⁶ He was imprisoned for a few weeks, and in the months following his release he recorded various obscure squabbles, book-buying expeditions, and magical activities.³⁷ Later that year his books, perhaps the ones confiscated on this occasion or 'stolen' on the previous one, were deposited with Sir John Penruddock, a Wiltshire gentleman and lawyer of Gray's Inn whose children Forman had tutored in 1582–4. Forman did not recover them until 1592 by which time many had been lost.³⁸

I will add a fourth episode to the tale of the stolen books. Perhaps because he had learnt that his books could get him into trouble, while living in London Forman kept some of them in a house in Lambeth.³⁹ On 10 March 1598 three men broke into his study there and stole five astrological texts and a gilt-bound Bible.⁴⁰ Forman pursued the culprits for a year, identifying them as three students from Cambridge, William Grange, Thomas Russell, and George Nicolas, the last of whom later moved to the continent and entered a seminary. One of Forman's sources was his friend, George Coney, who had also encountered the wayward students when they first attempted to sell him some books, then stole some of his. According to Coney, who had heard it from a Master Napier (presumably Richard or his brother, Robert, a London merchant), the

³⁴ Ashm. 208, fo. 32^v; 390, fo. 65. Elsewhere these events are dated 1576: Ashm. 802, fo. 113.

³⁵ *OED*.

³⁶ *The Complete State Papers Domestic, 15. 1547–1625* (Brighton, 1978), reel 81 (10 Mar. 1587); Ashm. 208, fo. 42^v; 390, fo. 125.

³⁷ Ashm. 390, fos. 109^v, 159^{r-v}; 208, fo. 42^v.

³⁸ Ashm. 208, fos. 42^v, 48. Rowse mistranscribes Forman's record that he did not recover his books for 14 years as 24 years: *Forman*, 287. On Forman's employment with the Penruddock's see Ashm. 208, fos. 37^v, 39^v. Forman's details, and perhaps his memory, about the dates of the losses and recoveries of his books are here confused; cf. Traister, *Forman*, 17.

³⁹ Traister suggests that Forman commonly kept his books and occult equipment in a separate house in the 1590s: *Forman*, 161.

⁴⁰ Ashm. 390, fo. 61; 195, fos. 9, 72, 95, 151^v; 219, fo. 229^v.

Cambridge men also had shown the books to a Master Gressam, probably Edward Gresham (1565–1613), an astrologer-physician.⁴¹ Forman had lost his books because he did not have a secure place to keep them, because he was arrested for an unnamed offence, because their contents were suspect, and finally because they could be sold on the underground book market. These misfortunes, Forman thought, were signs of God's design for him.

Forman chronicled the impediments to his studies and his triumphs over them through the mid-1580s as evidence of the divine imperative behind his medical and astrological activities. At this point the details in his narrative life-writings become thin, though his diary continues with incidental details through 1602. These narratives establish Forman's credentials as a magus, yet do not document his activities in this role. Where the life-writing dwindles, the other writings increase, tagged with Forman's name and the date and littered with astrological figures, timed to the minute, which allow me to trace his studies, practices, and personal life through the following decades.

Forman's earliest extant, datable writings are some poems from the late 1570s.⁴² His datable medical, astrological, and geomantical texts date from after 1588. Perhaps, as he later claimed, he began to practise medicine in the mid-1570s.⁴³ In 1581, at the age of 29, he cast an astrological figure, the earliest extant record of his mastery of the rudiments of astrology.⁴⁴ This year also

⁴¹ Ashm. 195, fo. 151^r; 219, fo. 54. Coney appears in Forman's notes several times. He asked Forman questions, was imprisoned for trespassing, and Forman considered but decided against raising bail for him. See for instance Ashm. 390, fos. 70^{r-v}; 234, fos. 84^{r-5}, 119^r; 236, fo. 138^r (28 July, 4 and 6 Aug., and 27 Oct. 1596 and 7 June 1600). For his nativity, which provides a lively character sketch see Ashm. 206, fo. 312; this passage is quoted by Rowse, *Forman*, 213. In a magical treatise, Forman notes that he copied some prayers out of a paper book that Coney had brought him: Trinity MS O.9.7, fo. 107^r. In addition to the gilt-bound Bible, which had been a gift to Forman from Anne Young, his first love and the mother of his son, Joshua Walworth, the stolen books included astrological treatises by Alubater, Ricardus Anglicus, and Alcabitius, with John of Saxony's commentary. For Forman's beginning of a translation of the final text in 1601, see Ashm. 206, fos. 1–3. For extant astronomical and astrological texts owned by Forman, see Ashm. 360, iii–v; Trinity, O.8.23, O.9.7; Bodleian, Rawlinson MS C. 269. On Gresham, see *DNB, Missing Persons*.

⁴² For a notebook of poems, including one dated 1578, see Ashm. 208, fos. 250–64. This contains verses for the queen which may relate to Forman's record of giving an oration before her in Wilton in 1574: Ashm. 208, fo. 27^v. She was on progress in Wilton in August of that year: John Dasent (ed.), *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, xi (1897), 280. A magical MS from 1567 has been misattributed to Forman: BL Additional MS 36674, fos. 47^v–58.

⁴³ In Mar. 1584 he told the Censors of the College of Physicians that he had practised medicine for sixteen years (i.e. since 1578): *Annals*, 8 Mar. 1593/4, pp. 84–5. In his 1607 plague tract he said that he had practised for thirty-four years (i.e. since 1573): Ashm. 1436, fo. 139. In his latest account of his life he said that he began studying medical arts when he was 20: Ashm. 208, fo. 225. Elsewhere he specified that he had practised since 1570: Ashm. 363, fo. 132. In a note c.1607–10 he specified that he had practised astrological medicine for thirty years: Ashm. 1491, p. 1275.

⁴⁴ Ashm. 205, fo. 121. It concerned the location of lost goods. For Forman's possible early reading of a number of 15th-cent. introductions to astronomy see Ashm. 360, iii–v. On learning astrology, cf. Michael Hunter and Annabel Gregory (eds.), *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century: Samuel Jeake of Rye 1652–1699* (Oxford, 1988), 4.

marks a point at which Forman's life began to improve; 'this year I began to live again', he noted.⁴⁵ He 'dwelte practising phisick & surgery' in a leased house on the ditch near the skinner in Salisbury.⁴⁶ Perhaps preparing for the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 1583, in 1582 he recorded the configurations of the planets at the moments of changes in the weather, and used these notes towards a general prognostication and perhaps an almanac.⁴⁷ In 1583 he recorded 'profit by my pen', perhaps indicating that he published a prophecy or almanac or was employed as a scribe.⁴⁸ In the summer of the same year he was reported to the ecclesiastical authorities in Salisbury for illicitly practising physic.⁴⁹

Evidence for Forman's involvement in and practice of more explicitly dangerous arts such as alchemy and magic dates from the mid-1580s, though he probably began these activities along with the study of astrology and medicine in the 1570s. Perhaps he became interested in alchemy when he was in Oxford in 1573–4, meeting with, talking to, or borrowing books from scholars at the university such as John Case or the recently arrived Thomas Allen. But Forman did not record such encounters and members of the university have left scant traces of explorations of the occult arts during these decades.⁵⁰ John Thornborough, Forman's master while in Oxford, published an obscure alchemical book in 1621, but he and Forman are equally silent about whether they shared an interest in alchemy while students or had any contact with each other thereafter.⁵¹

Further circumstantial evidence connects Forman with people who were interested in alchemy and astrology in Oxford at a later date. He visited Oxford in 1578, and again in 1590 and 1591, though he did not record whom he saw or what he did while there.⁵² Ashmole told Anthony Wood, the great recorder of people's lives, that Forman had taught astrology to Sir John Davies, who had been taught by Thomas Allen, when Davies moved to London after taking his

⁴⁵ Ashm. 208, fo. 34^v.

⁴⁶ Ashm. 208, fo. 36^v.

⁴⁷ Ashm. 384, fos. 116–87.

⁴⁸ Ashm. 208, fo. 38^v. There are parts of one or more almanacs amongst Forman's papers, Ashm. 384, fos. 187–8; King's MS 16, fos. 146g–k. These may be copied from printed almanacs, though such texts have a low survival rate and no positive match has been made. They may also be fragments of a draft of an almanac which Forman intended to publish; cf. Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500–1800* (1979), 26.

⁴⁹ Ashm. 208, fo. 38^v.

⁵⁰ Feingold, *Mathematicians' Apprenticeship*, III, 157; Feingold, 'The Occult Tradition in the English Universities', in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1984), 73–94, esp. 84–7.

⁵¹ John Thornborough, *Lithotheorikos, sive, nihil, aliquid, omnia, antiquorum sapientum vivis coloribus depicta, philosophico-theologica* (Oxford, 1621). For the suggestion that it is not a coincidence that Forman, like Thornborough, pursued alchemy see William Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (1988), 32, 170–1.

⁵² Ashm. 208, fos. 31^v, 46^v, 47^v.

MA at Oxford in 1581.⁵³ Forman was in Salisbury for most of 1581 and 1582, but he spent the first quarter of 1583 in London, where he ‘spent moch & got nothing’ while he worked ‘in business’ in the service of Mrs Penruddock, whose children he was schooling.⁵⁴ The identities of at least three men called John Davies are often confused. Sir John Davies (1569–1626) is distinguished by his title, John Davies of Hereford (1565?–1618) is known for his poetry, and John Davis (1552–1605) was a prominent navigator.⁵⁵ Whether Forman taught one of these men, he knew at least one John Davies. In 1595 Avis Allen, a married woman with whom Forman was romantically involved, told him that John Davies had spoken ill of him to her husband.⁵⁶ In 1596 Forman dreamt about meeting a John Davies and his brother, and that evening he again discussed Davies with Avis Allen.⁵⁷ Here Forman allows us a whisper of the conversations that his papers muffle and glimpses of his friends and enemies.

Without recording who facilitated or encouraged his study of various arts and sciences, Forman specified that he began to study astronomy, physic, magic and philosophy after he left Oxford in the mid-1570s.⁵⁸ He tells us nothing more about his studies until the end of the decade, when his diary records that he prophesied correctly and ‘the sprites were subject unto me’.⁵⁹ Then the silence lasts another five years, probably masking magical and medical pursuits.

By the mid-1580s Forman was collecting alchemical and related texts and distilling medicines. He went on book-buying expeditions through the 1580s and filled at least two notebooks with copies of texts on the philosophers’ stone.⁶⁰ On 31 December 1584 he completed a transcript of ‘The compound of alchemy’ by George Ripley, the fifteenth-century English alchemist; on 2 February 1585 he completed notes on mercury that he described as ‘following’ the thirteenth-century physician, Arnald of Villanova; and on the first of March he began distilling *aqua vitae*.⁶¹ In August he took notes on several medieval alchemical works, and on the first of October he finished copying and correcting a translation of a text by the late fourteenth-century physician,

⁵³ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ii, 373–4; *Ashmole*, ed. Josten iv, 1809. Wood concluded that this was probably the John Davis who eventually entered the service of the earl of Essex. One John Davis, probably the navigator, skried for Gabriel Harvey: Webster, ‘Alchemical and Paracelsian Medicine’, 312. Davis the navigator was associated with John Dee and might have stolen some of his books: Julian Roberts and Andrew Watson (eds.), *John Dee’s Library Catalogue* (1990), 32, 34.

⁵⁴ Ashm. 208, fos. 37^v, 39^r.

⁵⁵ *DNB*.

⁵⁶ Ashm. 208, fo. 53^v.

⁵⁷ Ashm. 234, fo. 123^v (28 Oct. 1596).

⁵⁸ Ashm. 208, fo. 225.

⁵⁹ Ashm. 208, fo. 32^v.

⁶⁰ Ashm. 390, fos. 157, 159^r. Forman filled twelve notebooks with transcriptions of alchemical texts. These are now bound in Ashm. 1490, 1433, and 208.

⁶¹ Ashm. 1490, fos. 114–36^r; 143^v–9^r; 208, fo. 40^r. See *George Ripley’s Compound of Alchemy*, ed. Stanton J. Linden (Aldershot, 2001). For Villanova see Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, ii, ch. 68; iii, ch. 4.

Bernard of Trier.⁶² In 1585 he copied 'A dialogue between a scholler and master' and took a few notes in English on a printed, Latin text attributed to the great Arabic philosopher and physician, Avicenna.⁶³ He also made notes of a dozen recipes for chemical waters, ranging in attribution from the unknown 'William Fraunces' to the thirteenth-century Franciscan friar and alchemist Roger Bacon; two years later, in May 1587, he noted that he 'began to distill many waters'.⁶⁴ In November 1587 Forman dreamt that he met a boy and a woman who were discussing how to make the philosophers' stone.⁶⁵ In 1587 he began to call angels.⁶⁶ In 1588 he and his 'special friends' embarked on a 'learned matter' when Saturn was inauspiciously placed, and had an argument.⁶⁷

Throughout this period Forman lived in Salisbury. When things went well he made money from practising medicine or tutoring children, when they went poorly he had little money or was imprisoned. He occasionally travelled in the south of England to buy books or flee his enemies and he was often involved in legal cases, sometimes as the plaintiff, sometimes as the defendant. In 1582 he became reacquainted with Anne Young, the A.Y. who fell in love with Forman when he was an apprentice, and though she was now married to John Walworth they became romantically involved, resulting, on 27 March 1585 at 7.10 a.m., in the birth of Forman's first son, Joshua Walworth.⁶⁸ Later that year Forman seems to have been gravely ill, occasioning him to write a poem, 'The argumente between Forman and deathe in his sickness'.⁶⁹ In January 1589 he planned to bring a legal case against someone, in his terms to 'arrest' the person, and when he went to find an officer he was impressed to serve in the 'Portugal voyage'. Two hours later he had left Salisbury and would never again reside there.⁷⁰ Evidently he protested against his conscription and in February he spent two nights in prison in 'Hampton', but was soon released.⁷¹ He returned to Salisbury, within a week travelled to Newbury, then

⁶² Ashm. 1490, fo. 87; fos. 221–36'. On the origin and impact of the texts attributed to Bernard of Trier see Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, iii. 618–27; Newman, *Gehennical Fire*, 103–6 and *passim*. For further English copies see Ashm. 1487, fos. 182–96 and Robert M. Schuler (ed.), *Alchemical Poetry 1575–1700 from Previously Unpublished Manuscripts* (New York, 1995), 446–63.

⁶³ Ashm. 1490, fos. 81–6'. Other versions of the dialogue have not been identified. That Forman was using a printed, Latin text by Avicenna is clear from his reference to 'fo. 458, primus ordo est'. For Avicenna see Nancy Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy: The Canon and Medical Teaching in Italian Universities after 1500* (Princeton, 1987).

⁶⁴ Ashm. 1490, fos. 90–2; 208, fo. 42'. For basic details about Bacon see Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, ii, ch. 61.

⁶⁵ Ashm. 1472, p. 813.

⁶⁶ Ashm. 208, fos. 42', 43'.

⁶⁷ Ashm. 390, fos. 120, 157'; 208, fo. 43'.

⁶⁸ Ashm. 208, fo. 40'. For full details of Walworth's life, including the moment of his conception on 25 June 1584, see Ashm. 206, fos. 102–3; 240, fo. 31.

⁶⁹ Ashm. 208, fos. 232–48. This is dated 4 Sept. 1585.

⁷⁰ Ashm. 390, fo. 117; 208, fo. 45'.

⁷¹ Ashm. 208, fo. 45'.



the beginninge upon you must ad of strength
 yf this matter & drake under suspension
 by the beginninge and you wante the waye waye
 contenting materials ad yfinge with dimision
 of the waye fe must in. Soles alone distinction
 ad yfinge applye Soles persons
 And Earths yfiste ad with 1 word
 For by the waye the yfinge of our must
 yfinge was made ad yfinge that yfinge is
 but in it of by stone before ad yfinge that was
 Nowe is And yfinge at yfinge into 1 word
 And purified Soles ad onto yfinge blisse
 yfinge row: A purgator yfinge be out
 of declaration of 3 stone.

Marginal notes in a smaller hand:
 ...the first ...
 ...the second ...
 ...the third ...
 ...the fourth ...
 ...the fifth ...
 ...the sixth ...
 ...the seventh ...
 ...the eighth ...
 ...the ninth ...
 ...the tenth ...
 ...the eleventh ...
 ...the twelfth ...
 ...the thirteenth ...
 ...the fourteenth ...
 ...the fifteenth ...
 ...the sixteenth ...
 ...the seventeenth ...
 ...the eighteenth ...
 ...the nineteenth ...
 ...the twentieth ...
 ...the twenty-first ...
 ...the twenty-second ...
 ...the twenty-third ...
 ...the twenty-fourth ...
 ...the twenty-fifth ...
 ...the twenty-sixth ...
 ...the twenty-seventh ...
 ...the twenty-eighth ...
 ...the twenty-ninth ...
 ...the thirtieth ...

14728 147
 ...the first ...
 ...the second ...
 ...the third ...
 ...the fourth ...
 ...the fifth ...
 ...the sixth ...
 ...the seventh ...
 ...the eighth ...
 ...the ninth ...
 ...the tenth ...
 ...the eleventh ...
 ...the twelfth ...
 ...the thirteenth ...
 ...the fourteenth ...
 ...the fifteenth ...
 ...the sixteenth ...
 ...the seventeenth ...
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 ...the nineteenth ...
 ...the twentieth ...
 ...the twenty-first ...
 ...the twenty-second ...
 ...the twenty-third ...
 ...the twenty-fourth ...
 ...the twenty-fifth ...
 ...the twenty-sixth ...
 ...the twenty-seventh ...
 ...the twenty-eighth ...
 ...the twenty-ninth ...
 ...the thirtieth ...

14728 147
 ...the first ...
 ...the second ...
 ...the third ...
 ...the fourth ...
 ...the fifth ...
 ...the sixth ...
 ...the seventh ...
 ...the eighth ...
 ...the ninth ...
 ...the tenth ...
 ...the eleventh ...
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 ...the thirteenth ...
 ...the fourteenth ...
 ...the fifteenth ...
 ...the sixteenth ...
 ...the seventeenth ...
 ...the eighteenth ...
 ...the nineteenth ...
 ...the twentieth ...
 ...the twenty-first ...
 ...the twenty-second ...
 ...the twenty-third ...
 ...the twenty-fourth ...
 ...the twenty-fifth ...
 ...the twenty-sixth ...
 ...the twenty-seventh ...
 ...the twenty-eighth ...
 ...the twenty-ninth ...
 ...the thirtieth ...

Marginal note on the right:
 A Subscript ...
 ...the first ...
 ...the second ...
 ...the third ...
 ...the fourth ...
 ...the fifth ...
 ...the sixth ...
 ...the seventh ...
 ...the eighth ...
 ...the ninth ...
 ...the tenth ...
 ...the eleventh ...
 ...the twelfth ...
 ...the thirteenth ...
 ...the fourteenth ...
 ...the fifteenth ...
 ...the sixteenth ...
 ...the seventeenth ...
 ...the eighteenth ...
 ...the nineteenth ...
 ...the twentieth ...
 ...the twenty-first ...
 ...the twenty-second ...
 ...the twenty-third ...
 ...the twenty-fourth ...
 ...the twenty-fifth ...
 ...the twenty-sixth ...
 ...the twenty-seventh ...
 ...the twenty-eighth ...
 ...the twenty-ninth ...
 ...the thirtieth ...

15. Simon Forman's copy of George Ripley's 'The compound of alchemy', Ashm. 1490, fo. 116. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

within a fortnight back to Quidhampton, then back to Newbury almost immediately, and after a month there on to Ash in Surrey and so forth until he moved to London in August.⁷² There he lived in five different rooms in the course of a year.⁷³ He was fleeing his enemies. He did not record their names, but a case of slander in Salisbury in May 1589 reveals a facet of his reputation in his home town.

William Young, Anne Young's father, accused Markes Fareland of slander. Fareland was reputed to have said that he had seen Young's wife, Alice, and his daughter Anne (or Agnes) Walworth in St Thomas's Church with Simon Forman. This was two years earlier, in 1587, on the morning of the funeral of Giles Estcourt, the sheriff who had imprisoned Forman in 1578. Fareland then reported that he had seen Forman and Anne Young go to the aisle of the church containing Estcourt's recently laid tomb and there they 'had their pleasure one of thother and had carnall knowledge eche of others bodie'. Alice, Anne's mother, was present as a 'bawd', and Fareland added a final detail to lend credibility to his story: 'he then saw the said Simon Forman shortly thereupon to go up in the belfry there carring his breeches in his hands'.⁷⁴ Forman and Anne had had previous troubles. In January 1587 their affair was almost discovered, in June 1588 they had an argument, and in November that year the constable came to arrest her.⁷⁵ In May 1589 Forman noted that 'a slander was raised' against him. Two years had passed since the event was reputed to have occurred, and the depositions note that this story had 'blowen abrode into the eares of many' and 'very evell speeches geeven of & by the said Agnys & the said Simon Forman', stressing that it was unclear whether the couple's reputation came before or after Fareland's story.⁷⁶ Thereafter, whether Forman found Salisbury particularly inhospitable or London enticing, he made London his home.

Wherever he was living, Forman continued to collect books and to pursue medicine and magic. In 1590–1 he filled at least another three notebooks with copies of alchemical tracts.⁷⁷ He probably borrowed these treatises from friends with whom he stayed and their neighbours. In June 1590, while staying with a 'Mr Dalles' he copied a long and unusual treatise written by Humfrey

⁷² Ashm. 208, fo. 45^v; 390, fos. 158^v, 160^v.

⁷³ Ashm. 208, fos. 45^v, 46^v; 390, fo. 59^{r-v}.

⁷⁴ Salisbury record office, Bishop of Salisbury deposition books no. 10, fo. 46^{r-v}. For full details of this case see deposition books no. 10, fos. 46^{r-v}, 57; no. 11, fos. 17^{r-v}, 25^v, 26. I am indebted to Martin Ingram for these references.

⁷⁵ Ashm. 208, fos. 42^v, 43^v.

⁷⁶ Ashm. 208, fo. 45^v; Bishop of Salisbury deposition book no. 10, fo. 46^{r-v}.

⁷⁷ In chronological order: Ashm. 1490, fos. 294–325, 181–96, 199–216, 154–7^v, 217–20, 277–89, 165–6, 167–8, 42–5, 28–36; 1433, fos. 10^v, 34. For details of these treatises see Bibliography.

Lock while he was in exile in Russia and dedicated to William Cecil, Lord Burghley.⁷⁸ In June and again in July Forman went to stay with Robert Parkes, a merchant.⁷⁹ In September Forman visited a 'Mr Cumbers' in Lewes, Sussex, who employed him for a year and gave him a house in Wickham, though the details of this arrangement are unclear.⁸⁰ In October Forman copied a fifteenth-century manuscript of a treatise on the transmutation of the five essences by John of Rupescissa (fl. 1345).⁸¹ In December he borrowed an English manuscript translation of Paracelsus' 'De natura rerum' and 'De natura hominis' from one John Fallowfield and he finished copying it in February 1591.⁸² In March he made a transcript of the well-known 'Ordinal of Alchemy' of Thomas Norton (c.1433–1513 or 1514).⁸³ In August Forman went to stay with the merchant Parkes again, and copied Sir Robert Greene's (1467?–1538+) treatise on the philosophers' stone, the work that is known as 'Blomfield's Blossoms' by William Blomfield, Forman's near contemporary, and prophecies found carved in Paris, translated from Portuguese into English the previous month.⁸⁴ In September he began a transcription of the Emerald Tablet, an alchemical treatise attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, with the fourteenth-century commentary by Hortulanus.⁸⁵ During this period Forman participated in a magical society and 'wrote' a book of necromancy, probably meaning that he copied a magical text.⁸⁶

While swarming with detail, Forman's notes are deceptively incomplete. He portrayed himself as a self-sustaining intellectual steeled against his enemies. But he seldom wrote about the people with whom he lived, travelled, worked,

⁷⁸ Ashm. 1490, fos. 291–325; for a study of this text, see Peter Grund, 'In Search of Gold: Towards a Text Edition of an Alchemical Treatise', in Peter J. Lucas and Angela M. Lucas (eds.), *Middle English from Tongue to Text: Selected Papers from the Third International Conference on Middle English* (Frankfurt, 2002), 265–79.

⁷⁹ Ashm. 390, fo. 59^v; 208, fo. 46^v.

⁸⁰ Ashm. 390, fo. 158. This might be Wickham near Newbury.

⁸¹ Ashm. 1490, fos. 181–96.

⁸² Ashm. 1490, fos. 199–220, 'The 7 bookes . . . toching the nature of thinges' and 'Two bockes . . . concerninge the nature of man'. These had been printed together in German in 1573. Charles Webster has identified this text as Karl Sudhoff, *Bibliographia Paracelsica*, i (Berlin, 1894), no. 145. Five years later Forman noted that he rode through William Fallowfield's woods on his way from London to Salisbury, Ashm. 208, fo. 54^v.

⁸³ Ashm. 1490, fos. 277–89. For a critical edn. of this text see *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, ed. John Reidy, Early English Text Society (Oxford, 1975).

⁸⁴ Ashm. 1490, fos. 165–6, 167–8, 106. Blomfield's verses are printed in Elias Ashmole (ed.), *Theatrum chemicum Britannicum* (1652), 305–23. On Blomfield see Robert M. Schuler, 'William Blomfield, Elizabethan Alchemist', *Ambix*, 20 (1973), 75–87.

⁸⁵ Ashm. 1433, ii, fos. 4^v–10^v. The date is recorded in the colophon. A translation of this text was soon issued with Roger Bacon, *The mirror of alchemy* (1597).

⁸⁶ Ashm. 208, fos. 46^v, 47^v. I do not think that Forman was referring to 'De arte geomantic', a manual on geomancy that he wrote in 1589 (Ashm. 354), though Ashm. 366 is an undated geomantical text written on parchment like a magical treatise.

spoke, or called angels. Occasional comments reveal that Forman was not a lone scholar ensconced in his library. A network of people with whom he shared interests and aspirations in the 1580s supported his activities, enabling him to study both printed and manuscript books, practise a variety of 'arts', many either dangerous or, like surgery, officially regulated, and write one, and possibly two or three or more, substantial treatises.⁸⁷ By the age of 38, with a constantly changing address and little money, Forman had invented himself as a medical practitioner, magician, astrologer, and alchemist. This was only the beginning. His studies continued, his aspirations increased, and new enemies opposed him. By 1591 Forman and Robert Parkes, the merchant in whose house he had stayed the previous year, had devised a method for calculating the longitude while at sea. In April Forman rode to London and stayed with the globe maker, Emery Molyneux, in order to teach him this method. In early June Forman was in Oxford and in July he advertised the method in a pamphlet, *The groundes of the longitude*.⁸⁸ This was Forman's first and last foray into print and it signals the beginning of his career in London.

⁸⁷ 'De arte geomantic', 1589 (Ashm. 354) is his earliest dated treatise. He probably wrote 'The groundes of physique and chirurgerie gathered out of the sayinges of dyvers auncient philosofer', c.1589 (Sloane 2550, fos. 1–117^v), though it is undated, see Ch. 3 n. 32. Ashm. 1429 has been misattributed to Forman by Black, probably because it is inscribed, perhaps by Napier, 'September 1611 Docter Formans booke reserved for the use of Clement his sonne'.

⁸⁸ Ashm. 208, fo. 47^v.